



THE FUTURE OF INDO PAK RELATIONS AND TERRORISM AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE ASIAN REGION

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While South Asia has never been so actively engaged with the outside world, it remains woefully disengaged internally. The central relationship of the region, between India and Pakistan, continues to be oppressed by the weight of the past. History, ideology, and domestic politics have fostered divisiveness. And the geopolitics has sharpened the fault lines. Old disputes like Kashmir lurk in the background and overlap with the new ones, raising the ever present potential for conflict.

The problem is India and Pakistan relate to each other but only negatively. They have known no other way. Each has been engaged in weakening the other. And they have done so by arms competition and use of proxies that has created an enabling environment for forces of destabilization like insurgencies, terrorism, and local and transnational religious extremism.

Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rise to power, tensions have risen to new heights. Modi has pursued a hardline policy designed to put internal and external pressure on Pakistan to force a change in its stance towards the jihadists and support for the Kashmir cause. The policy found kinship in Washington's own priorities in the region: containment of China, the war in Afghanistan, and the broader war on terrorism. India was a natural balancer against China and Pakistan's alliance with China, and what Washington saw as an unhelpful role in Afghanistan placed Pakistan on the wrong side.

Yet Pakistan was also an important ally for Washington, and Modi arguably set about disrupting this relationship by smearing Pakistan as a menace to both the United States and India. He wanted Washington's South Asia policy to rest on the centrality of India. It worked up to a point, but at a cost to the Afghanistan war where Pakistan's support was crucial and would only come in the context of friendly ties between the United States and Pakistan.

Adopting a hardline stance towards Pakistan also helps India in Kashmir. India knows that the success of the Kashmir insurgency depends on two factors – its strength and Pakistan's support to Kashmiris. So the Indian strategy is twofold: crush the insurgency with

extreme measures, and put Pakistan on the defensive and off balance. The ultimate aim is to make Pakistan irrelevant to the Kashmiri struggle and force the population to bend to the Indian will.

Pakistan policy also brings votes. The truth is Modi has not been able to bring the promised revolution in the Indian economy so far, and keeping an alternative issue alive where he can gain electoral support is a good political maneuver. He has done that by whipping up nationalism that specifically targets Pakistan, successfully portrayed as the enemy number one, and with his crackdown in Kashmir. That may have played some part in his success to expand his victory at the Center to the states. The BJP as of now looks to be in a good position to win the 2019 elections.

Imbued with an overwhelming confidence in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), its geostrategic value, and reliance on its military strength to which has been added tactical nuclear weapons capability, Pakistan has not been unnerved. Its recent border closure with Afghanistan, aimed at hitting India as much as Afghanistan, shows a newfound assertiveness.

On the jihadist front too, Pakistan is unmoved. And India has been no help. Its policies are making it harder for Pakistan to act against the jihadists whose public status among the right-wing elements goes up with the rise in India's hostility. Besides, Pakistan may be reluctant to act to avoid the appearance of having caved in under Indian pressure.

Pakistan is also responding at the strategic level by becoming the focus of an emerging geopolitical alignment in the region, the implications of which both New Delhi and Washington may slowly be waking up to. There is an "alliance" in the making between China, Russia and Pakistan, to which Iran may join if it comes under pressure from Trump. So, geopolitically speaking, Pakistan's value could arguably rise given its relevance to the Taliban, ISIS and Afghanistan, and growing friendship with China.

Let me start with the proposition that terrorism has had an adverse impact on relations between India and Pakistan – and for two reasons. First is the cross border movement of terrorists (who say they are motivated by oppression of fellow Muslims) from Pakistan to India. Second is the proxy war that is emerging between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan as the former seeks to limit the power of militant groups with an anti-Indian agenda (such as the Taliban) and the latter has reacted to this by supporting the anti-Indian activities of the Taliban in order to limit Indian influence. A second basic proposition is that the international

anti-terrorist agenda has always had much greater popular support in India than in Pakistan. Besides the lack of popular support for anti-terrorist activities, which is widely characterized in Pakistan as anti-Islamic, the Pakistani government has always had a somewhat Janus-faced policy toward terrorism since the Musharraf dictatorship decided to back the global war on terrorism in the wake of 9/11. A recent PEW public opinion study in 25 countries, for example, shows that a large majority of the Indian population has a favorable view of US foreign policy and the US. Only two countries had a higher ranking. This favorable Indian perception of the US is in marked contrast to the unfavorable view of the US in Pakistan, a fact that has forced the new democratically elected government in Islamabad to adopt a very cautious policy toward militant Islam and the activities of the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Besides the lack of popular backing for the war on terrorism, Pakistan had several tactical reasons to be wary of backing it. Taliban control of Afghanistan suited Pakistan's foreign policy interest in denying India influence in Afghanistan, recalling that the royal governments of Afghanistan had historically had good relations with India. Moreover, the Taliban might be able to provide Pakistan strategic depth against the historic enemy, a country several times larger, more populous, and more prosperous. Pakistan is a relatively long country that could be cut in two by Indian military action. Afghanistan would offer convenient strategic depth to meet this challenge. Finally, Taliban control might result in Afghan recognition of the Durand Line that separates Afghanistan from Pakistan. It was a boundary drawn by the British over a century ago as part of a larger effort to separate Czarist Russian and Imperial British spheres of influence. Every Afghan government, including the present one, has denied the legitimacy of this colonial era boundary. The dispute is a standing invitation for Pakistan Pashtuns to separate themselves from Pakistan. In fact, there was historically a strong separatist movement among Pakistan's Pashtun population, though it is much less vibrant now than before. However, there is a contest for shaping the identity of the Pashtun on both sides of the border. President Karzai (a Pashtun himself) and the Awami Party in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province, which won the most recent assembly elections there, are pushing for a secular definition. The Taliban area seeking to give Pashtun nationalism a religious definition and Pakistan has historically supported an enhanced Islamic identity in part to undermine the separatist movement there.

The world is again now focused on Afghanistan because of the renewed Taliban activities in the southern Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and the increased danger that Taliban bases will serve as centers for international terrorist activity. Taliban activities are supported by sympathizers in Pakistan. What is particularly worrying is the porous nature of the Afghan-Pakistan border and the movement of militants to safe havens across the Durand Line in the mountainous regions of northwestern Pakistan. A 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) representing the view of 16 agencies of the US government, concurred that al-Qaeda has re-established a safe haven along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. The growing number of US and NATO troop deaths as a result of Taliban attacks is nudging the US to take a more unilateral approach to the issue of cross border activities, moving beyond “hot pursuit” to unilateral targeting Taliban/al-Qaeda centers in the border region of Pakistan when there is actionable intelligence. The danger of this policy, of course, is that it risks further alienating the Pashtun population and complicates the secular democratic government in Islamabad as it seeks to restore law and order in the troubled border regions. The better policy might be to build up Pakistani counter-terrorism capacity along with a regional approach to terrorism.

Terrorism in South Asia is a regional problem, as is becoming increasingly clear by the demonstrated links among Islamic terrorist groups whose tentacles reach across state boundaries. Transforming regional security perceptions among the Afghans, Pakistanis and Indians will be a monumental challenge, but constitutes the only way to stabilize and secure Afghanistan so that it does not again become a terrorist sanctuary. The US in particular will have to focus on promoting regional cooperation among all three countries and defusing conflict between New Delhi and Islamabad, on the one hand, and Kabul and Islamabad on the other. More specifically, the US will have to consider other initiatives that reduce Pakistani fears of Indian hegemony and how the US can improve its own ties to New Delhi without setting off alarm bells in Islamabad. China, which is also trying to improve its relations with India and also faces the growing menace of terrorism that has roots in South Asia, confronts a similar dilemma as it reformulates its South Asia policy. The task of calming Pakistani fears of a dominant India is complicated by India’s economic prosperity and Pakistan’s recent virtual economic collapse. India as the larger and stronger party will need to take the initiative.

Indian policy toward Pakistan, while complicated by Kashmir and the cross border terrorist menace, has shifted somewhat over the past decade as the country has become a more self-confident player on the world scene. More specifically, India's preferred strategy seems aimed at reconciliation and stability, thus allowing it to play its "predestined" role as a global power. This policy is favored by the major national political actor (e.g. the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party). However, given the reality of instability in Pakistan and to guard against its future irresponsible behavior, India is also working on a parallel strategy of containing, or even bypassing Pakistan, a policy that some of India's most important strategic thinkers have supported for years. The other dilemma with Indian policy on this regard is its historic policy of keeping "outside" powers "outside" South Asia, though, at least with the US, this policy seems to have softened somewhat, given the American support for the Indian position during the 1999 Kargil crisis and the American push to make India an exception to its own nuclear non-proliferation laws and international protocols on the subject, an exception required because India is not a signatory to the 1970 Nuclear Non-proliferation accord – and it possesses nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them (as does Pakistan). It may thus be willing to permit the US as a good faith interlocutor on Indo-Pakistani relations. It would not provide a similar opening to the Chinese.

Kashmir does remain a major stumbling block. It generates terrorist cross border activity from Pakistan, often with government backing. Terrorism makes any Indian move towards an innovative solution impossible politically, and it will take innovative thinking to get over the present impasse. General Musharraf had made a radical departure from Pakistan's stated position on Kashmir by suggesting that it would give up its territorial claim over Kashmir (and by extension the traditional demand for a plebiscite) in exchange for demilitarization and some forms of all Kashmir managerial functions. India never responded meaningfully to these out-of-the-box proposals. If the present Pakistani government were to raise them again, the chances are better for a positive Indian response. The problem is that a democratic government in Pakistan must be alert to any move that suggests that it is giving up Pakistan's historic demand for Kashmir. It must of course do so to get traction with India, but the challenge is to put this effort in a larger bilateral context that makes Kashmir more of a joint undertaking without transfer of sovereignty, a difficult proposition to sell.

Democracy and economic growth are probably the best long term cures for terrorism, and may be the best hope of preventing Pakistan from becoming a failed state. Closer

economic ties between India and Pakistan would go a long way to achieve a better economic situation in Pakistan.

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