

Pressuring Pakistan

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“Would you tell me which way to go?”, said Alice.

“That depends on where you want to go”, said the Cheshire cat.

“I want to go anywhere”, said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go”, said the Cheshire cat.

—Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

The quest for imposing compellence on Pakistan has bedevilled Indian policy makers for decades. Despite enjoying the advantages of physical size, military superiority, political stability and economic strength, diplomatic profile, India hasn’t quite been able to leverage its dominant position to pressure Pakistan into backing down from its relentless confrontation, unremitting hostility and inimical actions against India.

The reason for India’s failure lies in the fact that India’s Pakistan policy has gone round and round in circles without focussing on addressing the fundamental problem, which is that until and unless India alters the strategic calculus of the Pakistani state and ‘deep state’, anything it does – talks, gestures, CBMs – will be only an ad hoc or tactical response to a strategic and long-term problem. If the objective is lasting peace and not the sort of elusive or illusive peace that temporarily descends, then forcing Pakistan to change its strategic calculus on India will be sine qua non.

Therefore, before we ask the question what can India do to pressure Pakistan, India must answer the question what does it want to do with Pakistan. What sort of a Pakistan does India want on its border? Does India even want a Pakistan? Is a strong,

stable, prosperous Pakistan actually in India's interest, something that Indian policy makers have repeated ad nauseam even though many of them don't really subscribe to it? Or is a weak, unstable, poor Pakistan serve India's interests better? Based on how India answers the above questions, the Indian policy will have to be framed.

Ad-hocism that has characterised, informed and guided India's Pakistan policy over the last 70 years certainly accords flexibility to respond to the ever-changing scenario in Pakistan, but it doesn't address the unchanging scenario of Pakistan unreconciled to India's reality and constantly wanting to do whatever it can to damage India. What India needs is a consistent, coherent and comprehensive policy on Pakistan, a policy that doesn't change with seasons or governments, or even on the caprices of individuals or for that matter on considerations of domestic politics. Needless to say, any such policy will be long term (measured not in weeks, months or even years, but in decades) and despite the inevitable set-backs and reverses, will have to be pursued until it attains its objective.

Assuming the policy objective is to degrade Pakistan's ability to stand up and confront India by not only making it horrendously expensive for Pakistan but also forcing the Pakistani 'deep state' to psychologically disintegrate and end its "fighting to the end" ideology, India will have to bring into play all elements of its national power. Of course, this will be a big challenge, not so much in terms of India's ability to right-size Pakistan, but more in terms of India fixing Pakistan without getting distracted or getting dragged in so much that it loses sight of the other strategic imperatives and initiatives that hold more importance and promise than Pakistan. Because when viewed in terms of the big picture, Pakistan is only a nuisance, not the determiner of India's destiny.

In the face of constant provocations from Pakistan, much of the focus, at least in public discourse, has centred on the kinetic aspects of retaliation. These include not just forays across the Line of Control – Surgical Strikes, for example – but also through 'fire assaults' and cross-border firing targeting Pakistan army posts, supply lines and infrastructure. All these measures are of course necessary, but they aren't sufficient. While there is certainly a case to escalate these operations along the LoC, and increase the punishment being administered through these actions, it will still not be enough to change the strategic calculus of the Pakistan army. After all, civilian casualties are nothing more than collateral damage in the Pakistan army's calculations, a cost that has to be borne in the pursuit of the strategic agenda vis-à-vis India. Even so, beyond a point, Pakistan will find it difficult to bear these costs. At that point, they will either sue for peace, as they did in 2003 when they negotiated a ceasefire along the LoC, or else they will try to escalate and pay India back in the same

India must activate Pakistan's eastern front to stretch the Pakistani Army.

coin. The challenge for Indian forces will be to control this escalation dominance. This cannot be done if India remains in a reactive mode. In other words, if in response to use of Anti-Tank Guided Missiles against Indian posts, India also responds similarly, then it means it has lost the plot because it firmly casts India in a reactive mode. In other words, India must go up the escalation ladder – both horizontally and vertically – and deploy munitions pro-actively rather than reactively.

One aspect of the kinetic option that has not been sufficiently appreciated or even exploited is that by heating up Pakistan's eastern front, India can greatly increase the predicament of the Pakistan army which is already stretched because of its commitments on both the western border areas as well as in other security commitments in the interior of the country where it is conducting anti-terror operations. Ever since the wave of terrorism that hit Pakistan from around 2007, India has not added to Pakistan's difficulties by re-activating its eastern front. This meant that the Pakistanis could pull out troops deployed on the Indian border and redeploy them in other parts. Even after 26/11 terror attacks, India showed remarkable restraint by not ratcheting up the pressure on the eastern front and catching the Pakistan army in a bind at a time when it was focussed on operations in the western borderlands. This policy of restraint has to end and India needs to do everything possible to ply the pressure on the Pakistan army by stretching it thin along all fronts and making it very difficult to turnover troops. What is more, because the Pakistan army will have to redeploy troops on the Indian front, it will create gaps in the security grid on the western front which will catch Pakistan in a bind if there is a resurgence in Taliban activity. While India has no love lost for the Taliban, the fact of the matter remains that as far as India is concerned, it makes very little difference whether we confront the Taliban in Mufti or the Taliban in Khaki (Pakistan Army).

Be that as it may, in using the kinetic options, it is important that the government not look for costless options, especially in terms of casualties. The fact of the matter is that the scandalous neglect of the armed forces has compromised on building their capabilities to a level where such options are not going to be available, at least not for the foreseeable future. This means that as a country, India will have to adopt a two pronged approach: one, fill the gaps that currently exist and double down on building up the capabilities that give the armed forces the required edge to limit the costs of kinetic operations; two, invest in the necessary infrastructure that protect the troops in the frontlines. But in the meantime, the politicians have to be prepared to absorb setbacks and reverses. For example, if the cross-border forays become a new

normal, then the ruling class will have to be prepared that not all such operations will be as resoundingly successful as the 'surgical strikes'. The trouble is that if the ruling dispensation gloats about its successes to score political points, then it will also have to be prepared to take the fall for any setbacks, something they want to avoid because of the political costs it entails. Unless the Pakistan policy is divorced from domestic politics – easier said than done – this factor will continue to hobble the aggressive or muscular policy of the government towards Pakistan.

Breaking the Sino-Pak nexus must be a diplomatic priority for India.

For the purposes of pressuring Pakistan, the kinetic option is only one among a menu of options available. In fact, the kinetic option is in many ways more tactical than strategic. Unless the kinetic option is backed by the non-kinetic options – diplomatic, economic, political, cultural – which means bringing into play other elements of national power, the efficacy of the military option alone will work only up to a point.

One of the most neglected instruments in India's arsenal has been the economic pressure that can be brought to bear on Pakistan. The fact that Pakistan has always been economically vulnerable has never been sufficiently exploited by India to ratchet up the pressure on that country. The thinking in Indian policy circles has always been somewhat defeatist when it comes to squeezing Pakistan economically. If in the past, policy wonks thought that the US will always bail Pakistan out, today the thinking is that the Chinese will rescue Pakistan through their cheque book diplomacy. While it is true that the Chinese will not abandon Pakistan anytime soon, and they will try and bail out Pakistan from their economic difficulties, they will at the same time extract their pound of flesh, something that eventually will drive a wedge in the Sino-Pak relationship. In fact, breaking the Sino-Pak nexus has to be one of the diplomatic priorities for India. If anything, this will be one of the defining strategic challenges for Indian policy makers in the years ahead. It is of course entirely possible that the Sino-Pak nexus will unravel because of the inbuilt contradictions that exist in the relationship – the Chinese attitude towards Islam, the overbearing and arrogant nature of the Chinese who deal with the Pakistanis, the cultural differences (food habits, social attitudes etc.), the one-sided nature of economic relationship, the creeping interference of Chinese in Pakistan's policy making as well as politics, the economic costs of Chinese investments which will start biting the Pakistanis when the payback time comes, etc. The important thing is that instead of sitting on the side-line, waiting for these contradictions to come to the fore, India needs to do whatever it can to assist the process.

Increasing the economic pressure is one way of doing this. Pakistan's external economy has always been in a mess. The country stays afloat on the basis of four things – cotton and cotton textiles, rice, leather and remittances. In all these areas India is a competitor. Efforts can be made to enhance India's exports in these areas by undercutting the Pakistani exports. This will not only deprive Pakistan of foreign exchange but also add to economic distress in the Pakistani domestic economy. Further fiscal pressure can be put by raising India's own defence expenditure to a point that Pakistan finds it difficult to match. If it enters into a competition, it bankrupts itself; if it doesn't compete, the power differential increases to a point that Pakistan will have to start backing off from confronting India. Of course, merely raising defence spending but not building the capabilities of the armed forces in terms of modern and lethal equipment – something that India has been doing for decades – isn't going to impress the adversary very much. But this is a separate issue, beyond the scope of this article.

India can use its economic and diplomatic heft in multilateral financial institutions like IMF and World Bank by not only voting against but also mustering up support of other countries to vote against any funding for Pakistan. In the past, India made the blunder of allowing the European Union to violate its WTO commitments by giving trade concessions to Pakistan. With the trade concessions up for renewal, India should intervene and lean on the EU to desist from extending these concessions. Even otherwise, India should bring its considerable diplomatic influence to impress upon donor countries the need to stop funding Pakistan until and unless it acts against the jihad industry operating inside Pakistan. In this India can cooperate and coordinate with the US which has already started turning the screws on Pakistan. At the same time, India can leverage its own market to pressure MNCs against investing in or getting involved in projects inside Pakistan, especially in Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

While there is a lot of talk of using the covert option to payback Pakistan in the same coin, this is an option that should ideally be exercised not as a kneejerk reaction but as part of a strategic plan. But that strategic plan requires clarity of purpose. Merely a tit-for-tat kind of covert action is at best a tactical option. It might bring some temporary relief but doesn't really change the strategic calculus of the enemy. In fact, the Pakistanis have used the temporary relief to crush the dissidents inside their territory, and as soon as they think they have a handle over the situation, re-started their cover war against India which invariably has failed to use the interregnum to clean up the mess at home. It is also important to remember that the covert action doesn't remain covert for long and India

will have to prepare for handling the diplomatic, political and security fallout when things come out of the closet. Of course, India can continue to maintain plausible deniability by insisting that it only provides 'diplomatic, political and moral support' to the Pakistani dissidents.

Finally, all efforts must be made to constrict the space available to Pakistan in the neighbourhood. India just cannot afford the sort of inertia, even lethargy, that has dogged initiatives like the Chabahar port or the under-sea pipeline projects which would tie Iran into a symbiotic relationship with India and help in encircling Pakistan. Diplomatically, a lot can be done by getting into closer coordination with SAARC countries to deny space to Pakistan. India must also shake off some of its reluctance on getting into an even closer relationship with the US to coordinate on a common objective – fixing Pakistan. At the same time, it would be a mistake to allow the drift in relations with Russia and let it get closer to Pakistan. If this means doing a diplomatic tightrope walk to manage the contradictions in relations with US, Iran and Russia, then this is precisely what the job of diplomats is. India can also explore the possibility of strangulating Pakistan's remittance economy by working closely with some of the Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and UAE. This will hurt the Pakistan economy like nothing else will.

Last but not the least, even as India makes the case around the world that Pakistan is a terrorist state, it must put its money where its mouth is. There is no earthly reason why the government allowed a private members bill on declaring countries as terror sponsoring state to fall. If indeed India is serious about sending a firm message that it cannot be business as usual with Pakistan, then declaring Pakistan as a terrorist state is unavoidable. We cannot expect the US and other countries to label Pakistan as a terrorist state while we merrily conduct mushairas, mombatti marches and play cricket matches with the Pakistanis. Admittedly, India declaring Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism will not have the same import or impact as the US doing the same, but even so it will send a clear and unambiguous message that India's cup of patience with Pakistan has run over. Equally important, it will help in forging a consistent policy on Pakistan, one that will not change either with changing seasons or with changing governments. From a policy driven by individuals to an institutional driven policy that will stay the course is something that will help in setting a clear direction on how India will deal with Pakistan.

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