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**S**ECTION III  
Prism on Pakistan

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# Exploiting Pakistan's Internal Faultlines: Where Lies the Problem?

Sushant Sareen

For decades, one of the most intractable security challenges confronting India has been the impunity with which Pakistan has used asymmetric warfare to bleed India and pin it down by keeping it embroiled in 'dirty' little wars fought on the Indian soil. To give the Pakistani devils their due, by and large, they have calibrated their proxy war to ensure that India isn't provoked to a point where it will be forced to retaliate through conventional war to either punish or even end Pakistan's export of terror. Even on the rare occasions when India has threatened war, it has ultimately backed down. The reason is simple: a cost-benefit analysis of choosing between a war of words (which India has mastered) and waging actual war (even a limited conflict, which may not remain limited) weighs in favour of the former. Bean-counters in the civilian bureaucracy estimate that any conventional conflict will extract a much higher price compared to rolling with the terrorist blows delivered by Pakistan.

The way many in the civilian bureaucracy and political establishment see it, as long as Pakistani terrorism doesn't pose an imminent danger

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Sushant Sareen is Senior Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi.

to India's territorial integrity and/or its existence, war is not an ideal option. Add to this the fact that if the objective of a conventional response is limited to being punitive and doesn't aim to either restructure Pakistan, much less occupy it—the primary aim is to raise costs to a point that Pakistan is forced to shut down its jihad factory—it isn't entirely clear if this objective will be attained by the instrumentality of a limited conflict. Hence, the mother of all questions: if conventional conflict (limited or all-out) is not the default options, and rolling with the blows is increasingly becoming politically unsustainable and unpalatable, then should India take a leaf out of the Pakistani play-book and pay it back in the same coin? In other words, should India wage an asymmetric war to counter Pakistan's asymmetric war?

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The debate in India on exploiting Pakistan's internal fault-lines is as old as Pakistan's use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. But in recent years it has acquired a new salience, and perhaps also some urgency. Part of the reason is, of course, that the cup of India's patience is filling up very fast. Part of the reason is also that there is a government in power that isn't chary of taking risks—the surgical strikes is an example. This means that some of the things that weren't on the table in the past are no longer summarily dismissed by the top echelons in government. The fact that none other than the current Prime Minister has, in a very carefully worded manner, hinted at some of Pakistan's fault-lines—Balochistan, the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Indus Waters Treaty—has not only put a cat among the pigeons across the Radcliffe line, but has also created a sense that the game that Pakistan has been playing is one that two can play. And yet, strangely enough, despite all the signalling to the contrary, the invisible (or is it psychological?) wall of resistance and reluctance to play the game of asymmetric war continues and hasn't quite been demolished.

Although Pakistan's use of sub-conventional or proxy or asymmetric war against India started from the day that country was born—Kashmir tribal invasion in 1947-48, instigating and supporting insurgencies and

separatism in the north-east in the 1950s and 1960s, the Punjab terrorism in the 1980s, Kashmir since the late 1980s and from the turn of the century, Islamist terrorism in rest of India—from around the 1980s, India's response has been characterised by what seems to be a defensive mindset. Instead of crafting a robust response to pay back better than it gets, India has preferred whining and whinging before rest of the world in the hope that other countries will do for India what India doesn't want to do to protect itself. Apparently, the thinking is that on the international stage it serves India better to play the responsible country in the face of ceaseless provocations from Pakistan. By unleashing asymmetric war on Pakistan, India will lose all the diplomatic gains and brownie points (for whatever they are worth, which really isn't much in terms of either isolating Pakistan, giving it a pariah status or even ending its export of terrorism into India), it has earned by showing restraint because then it will be weighed on the same scale as Pakistan.

The defensive attitude is compounded by the outcome of the absence of covert capabilities that will allow India to prosecute asymmetric warfare. Shockingly, not only has India neglected building these capabilities but also it has dismantled whatever capabilities it had. For at least 20 years, the constant refrain of top officials is that these capabilities don't exist. Worse, despite all these years passing, these capabilities have still not been built. Reason? The only time India wakes up to the need for developing such capabilities is in the aftermath of a big terror attack. But then the powers that be realise that they have an empty arsenal and can't hit back immediately because building capabilities takes a long time. A few weeks, or at best a few months later, its back to business as usual and no effort is made to even start process of building these capabilities, that is until the next attack takes place, when the whole cycle repeats itself. Had India applied its mind, energy, and resources to building cover capabilities in the early 1990s, by now it would have had a formidable and fearsome capability. Even now, if the Indian state applies itself to this task, India will be able to possess instruments for asymmetric war in a matter of a few years. But if India keeps complaining that it will take too much time, and does nothing because it will all take too long, then it will end up wasting

all the time it could have used productively so that when the next attack happened, it had something to hit back with. Of course, if this time is wasted in helplessly wringing hands, then another quarter century later India will find itself pretty much where it finds itself today in terms of paying Pakistan back in the same coin.

Apart from the failure to develop covert capabilities, what is even more scandalous is the fact that whatever capabilities India had were dismantled by a series of prime ministers who lived in a woolly-headed world of their own, almost as though they were not running a country like India which lived in a dangerous neighbourhood, but rather that they were living in some utopian world which normally exists only in the heads of some deracinated JNU professors and students. Not surprisingly, India had the misfortune of a former Prime Minister like Morarji Desai who tried his utmost to demolish the R&AW because he considered 'intelligence to be immoral!' Another former Prime Minister wasn't able to get rid of his partition hangover and ensured that the Indian intelligence agencies were pared of whatever capabilities they had in Pakistan. A third Prime Minister who thought running the country was akin to giving academic lectures, got his National Security Advisor to order the intelligence agencies to put their hands in their pockets (i.e. do nothing) on Balochistan!

While building covert capabilities can take years, even decades, dismantling them can be done virtually overnight. In India, there appears to be an misplaced sense that asymmetric war can be turned on and off like a tap. Interestingly, while India is adept at turning off the tap, it isn't so hot in turning on the tap. What is more, India's proclivity to turn off the tap and junk its assets has robbed it of the credibility among people who could become assets. The reputation of the Indian state and its track record of not sticking with its friends is rather abysmal. People who were either ideologically aligned to India, or swore by India, or even staked all on India's say so have been left in the lurch, thrown to the wolves or dropped like hot potatoes so many times either because they had outlived their usefulness, or because supporting them had become counterproductive, or even because government policy had changed. Compare India's track record with that of Pakistan which (to once again give the devil his due)

has gone out on a limb to protect their assets even when the odds are heavily loaded against doing so. As a result, years later when the same used asset becomes handy once again, they have people in place to do their bidding.

The international criminal and terrorist Dawood Ibrahim has served Pakistan well and despite being designated as a terrorist by the United Nations, the Pakistanis have kept him under their protection. The Taliban are another example. The Pakistanis took on the entire world but didn't abandon the Taliban, or the Haqqani network. Politically, the example of Tridev Roy, the erstwhile Chakma king is emblematic of the Pakistani approach. Even after having lost East Pakistan, they harboured the collaborator, and until his death almost 50 years after the 1971 war, he was given the status of a minister with all the paraphernalia. India, on the other hand, used the Ikhwanis in Jammu and Kashmir, and when the liberals and the double-speaking Kashmiri politicians started a campaign against them, the Indian state simply junked their allies and allowed many of them to be killed by their rivals. Even if the Ikhwanis were no longer tenable, they should not have been rubbished the way they were. There are also examples of how shabbily India treated its friends in Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa simply because some clueless policymaker in Delhi thought that it would not go down well with some Pakistani leader whom India was trying to engage. Every time India doesn't stick with its friends makes it so much more difficult when next time India wants to bring its assets into play to operationalise an asymmetric strategy.

There is also the problem of adopting a bean-counting approach while developing covert assets. It is so much easier to pay some money to some guy to plant a bomb here or kill a guy there. But these kinds of operations don't really add up to much. A far more productive operation is one that is rooted in something fundamental, for eg. religion, ethnicity, linguistic identity, sectarian or theological school of thought, etc. This means building up a political movement that can later transform into some kind of armed militancy. Even if it stays political, it is a potent tool. But building such a movement requires infinite patience, and lots of money. But if there is a transactional approach of the general store variety, then

such a movement is impossible to build. In East Pakistan, an Indian military intervention could never have been successful had the Bangladeshi freedom fighters and Bangladeshi people not decided to throw Pakistan out. Of course, if someone is in the business of seeking quick fix solutions, then there is only a limited success that will be possible.

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Perhaps, the single biggest obstacle because of which India hasn't quite been able to craft an effective asymmetric warfare strategy against Pakistan is lack of clarity. In short, India hasn't quite been able to decide what sort of a Pakistan it wants on its border. Does India even want a Pakistan on its border? This is a fundamental question that India hasn't answered so far. More than the diffidence or pusillanimity that has informed India's response to Pakistan's dare, it is the failure to decide what India wants that has prevented the sort of focus that is required to build instruments that will help India achieve its strategic objective.

Small wonder then that the moment there is a big terror strike, there is outrage in India and the overwhelming sense in the country is to do and wish the worst for Pakistan. But once the anger wears off, the thinking changes. Because India hasn't decided what sort of end state it has in mind regarding Pakistan, whatever is done against Pakistan is not just half-hearted, but is also a half-measure. Not surprisingly then, because of a lack of clarity what India gets is (to paraphrase the Hindi saying) 'half partridge, half quail'. When India is clear about the objective—Bangladesh for instance—India is able to craft a policy response that enables the achievement of the objective. When there is lack of clarity, India flails and flounders. The reason is simple: each of the fault-lines that India would seek to exploit have consequences, repercussions, and implications. What is more, the level of intervention required changes depending on the fault-line being exploited and the purpose which is sought to be achieved. Also, it is important to keep in mind the limitations—financial, geographical, logistical, military, and a range of other things—that will impinge on whatever India wants to do. And then there is of course the entire issue

of the diplomatic fallout of an offensive asymmetric war—Iran won't be happy with India stoking the fires in Balochistan, India could get sucked in to the undeclared sectarian war between Saudi Arabia and Iran if it tries to use sectarianism as a tool, and so on and so forth. Finally, India will have to factor in the possibility of blowback of whatever fault-line it seeks to exploit. For instance, if India was to play some game in Karachi with the Mohajirs, it could become an issue especially in the Gangetic plain where most Mohajirs have their origins and many still have close relatives. Similarly, sectarianism in Pakistan could also impact the Muslims in India.

While the fault-lines of Pakistan are fairly well-known—economic, sectarian, ethnic, linguistic, regional, theological, etc.—what India needs to first do is to get clarity about its objectives. Alongside, India needs to give up its diffidence and defensiveness and forge a narrative of taking the war 'to the enemy'. Moreover, India needs to change the way it does business, not just in terms of how it protects assets but equally importantly how it invests in these assets. Only after this is done, can India realistically be hopeful of an asymmetric strategy that pays back the Pakistanis in their own coin.