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Prevailing Unrest in Pakistan and Prospects of Tackling the Resultant Threats to India's Internal Security

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India and Pakistan have had a chequered history of perpetual dissonance since August 15, 1947. This tension continues even to this day, regardless of the fact that both nations had undergone a painful partition and had constantly been victims of organised terror. This horror continues to haunt both nations. History tells us that both nations have been involved in perpetual discord over Kashmir. But to compound an already tricky situation, Pakistan has been found to be facing innumerable security disquiets from within.

Situation in Pakistan

Pakistan, as of date, faces tremendous security threats from inside as well as from external terrorist outfits, the fiercest being the Afghanistan-based Taliban. To compound it, with the Taliban enjoying free access into Pakistan and India sharing its border with Pakistan, the situation becomes murkier for India by virtue of enhancing the chances of infiltration by the Taliban-backed terror outfits. In addition, there are a number of terror outfits operating at the behest of Pakistan, i.e., Al-Qaeda, Lashkar-e-Omar, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Sipah-e-Sahaba, Jaishul-Adl, Al Badr Mujahideen, Harkatul Mujahideen, etc.

However, despite Pakistan's crumbling economy and wide-ranging internal discords, the patronage available to the internationally declared terrorist outfits is one of the best in the world. Pakistan, recently, in a meeting of its National Security Committee, exhibited a sense of urgency in putting an end to all the terrorist outfits and their activities.¹ In this meeting, a historic decision was taken to put an immediate end to all terrorist activities. All this paints a rosy picture. It can be seen that though Pakistan is trying to showcase its seriousness in dealing firmly with the issue, the ground realities are far from being realistic. This bears significance, especially considering the fact that Pakistan is still offering protection to terrorists like Sayed Salahuddin and Masood Azhar. Recently, the dichotomy between the words and deeds of Pakistan came to light when Syed Salahuddin, under the full protection of Pakistani forces, was noticed offering prayers at the funeral service of recently killed terrorist Basheer Ahmed Peer, alias Imtiyaz Alam.² This brings Pakistani hypocrisy to the fore beyond any imagination.

In addition, the free access accorded to the Taliban dispensation of Afghanistan into Pakistani territory also becomes a serious concern for the security of India. In fact, the Taliban's return to power in 2021 has empowered Tahreek-e-Taliban, also called the Pakistani Taliban. This outfit ended a ceasefire with the Pakistani government in late 2022 and eventually started attacking the Pakistani establishment.³ Hence, this free access to the Taliban into Pakistani territory becomes a cause for serious concern for the security of India against terrorist infiltrations.

To add another dimension to the problem, Pakistan is, of late, experiencing an enhanced cosiness with China, which is natural, especially considering Pakistan's stakes in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)⁴ and Chinese financial support⁵ to Pakistan. To prove this point, on February 22, 2023, China approved a loan of US \$700 million to support the crumbling Pakistan economy.⁶ This closeness of Pakistan to China, read in conjunction with recent Chinese intrusions into Indian territory, assumes worrying postures with regard to India's border security concerns. Though India is well prepared to deal with terrorist infiltrations and has the potential to eventually guard against the terror attacks on the one hand as well as handle the two-front war threat on the other, there is every need to safeguard against any Pakistani misadventure at the behest of China, thereby further complicating India's security equations. Therefore, it is felt that putting financial pressure on China through sanctions in conjunction with other friendly countries merits consideration. The USA did it twice in the past with Iran, besides imposing recent restrictions on the supply of US dollar-denominated banknotes to the Russian government against the supplies made by Russia to various nations, thereby putting the whole supply chain into a financial quandary.⁷

Strategy to tackle the terrorist activities

India has already embarked on testing and validating its military SOPs in conjunction with the militaries of friendly nations. The Indian military contingent, comprising of 200 personnel from the Army and 38 personnel from the Indian Air Force, actively participated in the recently conducted multinational Exercise Peaceful Mission-2021 held under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).⁸

The conclusion of a multinational treaty among member nations to actively assist each other in tackling the terror strikes is expected to go a long way in helping the terror-hit nations. Moreover, the SOPs for tackling the terror strikes that form part of the curriculum of such joint exercises, suiting the terrain and requirements peculiar to the respective member countries, and the takeaways therefrom being shared, have the potential to address the terror menace more effectively. This is expected to find favourable consideration, especially because all the participating member nations have been victims of organised terrorist activities at some point in time or another and therefore share a common concern.

Technically, protecting the country's borders from terrorist infiltration calls for a multi-pronged approach that involves a judicious blend of hard and soft power options, i.e., a mix of diplomatic, military, intelligence, and law enforcement activities. However, with a view to tackling it broadly militarily, the responsible agencies are already addressing the issue in the most professional

manner. Yet, there are some strategies that India may consider adopting and reinforcing so as to protect against terrorist infiltration via the Pakistan border.

It would be worthwhile to consider enlarging the cadre strength of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), and particularly the Border Security Force (BSF), to strengthen border security through the deployment of a larger number of battalions specially trained in counter infiltration ground defence operations. These forces can be trained by the Special Forces of the Indian Army to conduct specialised operations to neutralise the terror outfits in case they have somehow been able to infiltrate. The long experience of the BSF in adherence to SOPs for preventing infiltration combined with objective training by Special Forces in combating the infiltrators and the use of advanced surveillance systems, e.g., drones, sensors, cameras, etc., would act as a force multiplier in the operations to enhance the punch of the armour.

The Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and Information Bureau (IB) are professionally trained external and internal intelligence agencies, respectively, working on the ground under a single umbrella despite being established under two different organisations. While R&AW functions under the Cabinet Secretariat, the IB serves under the Ministry of Home Affairs. These agencies are experienced in gathering, researching, and analysing all types of intelligence and are, therefore, catalysts in apprehending the likely terror strikes. The sharing of intel between the working echelons of these agencies is taking place to a large extent. Still, the process needs to be made smoother and more regular and go down even to the operative levels of the armed forces, the BSF and other agencies involved in preventing the infiltration and likely terror strikes. There should also be provisions for assigning and fixing clear-cut responsibilities at all levels, so as to deter a likely intelligence failure.

This apart, the experience and SOPs followed by similar intelligence agencies in developed countries, e.g., the CIA, KGB, Mossad, etc., may also be shared with the Indian intelligence agencies through regular specialised cross-training consequent upon inter-governmental agreements to this effect to be concluded during interactions of the highest Indian leadership with these developed nations at international forums or during mutual visits. Furthermore, enhancing the scope of intelligence gathering with deeper penetration of homegrown intelligence assets into enemy strongholds using state-of-the-art equipment is more likely to benefit the collection and collation of inputs and would be the catalyst to counter the planning by terrorist organisations and various terror networks involved within the country.

The updation of the latest technologies of intelligence gathering is regularly taking place in the respective intelligence agencies and working fine with regard to passive and active reconnaissance. Passive reconnaissance aims at obtaining information without directly engaging with the target through all the information available in the public domain, e.g. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, etc. It is ideal for getting background information about the target. Active reconnaissance requires interacting with the target face-to-face in innocuous ways and luring the target to share input on specific weaknesses that may be ascertained from intel.⁹ These updates are in place, yet the intelligence gathering technologies need to be regularly updated, streamlined, and strengthened from time to time so as to keep pace with the latest advancements in the field of information and communication technologies.

Increasing military cooperation with the countries, especially those sharing a border with Pakistan, would be useful to a great extent in creating a well-coordinated environment for preventing cross-border infiltration and tackling terrorism. It seems possible to accomplish it through active liaison with international agencies. One such agency is the Terrorism Prevention Branch of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.¹⁰

As stated above, a multinational treaty between affected neighboring nations to actively assist each other in tackling the terror strikes would be highly useful in helping the member nations. SCO is a platform with the potential to ensure this aim. Furthermore, special joint military training on handling terror strikes may be considered at appropriate levels to form part of the curriculum of joint military exercises relevant to the terrain and environmental requirements peculiar to the respective member countries. The takeaways from these efforts need to be shared among all the stakeholders.

It would be worthwhile to consider the formulation and implementation of counter-terrorism strategies that are tailor-made to suit the specific threat situations¹¹ posed by terrorist groups operating in the region and tackle them with a combination of military, law enforcement, and intelligence efforts. This is likely to be handled better by enhancing community engagement with the population living around the border areas, which may be useful in building trust and cooperation and, in short, confidence building measures (CBMs).¹² Coupled with a system of providing personal protection and suitable rewards, this may help in creating an unofficial force of committed citizens with a shared sense of responsibility for border security. This is in force in Jammu and Kashmir in the form of the Special Police Officers (SPO) scheme, whereby influential local people are designated as SPOs and help the local police and security forces. This would facilitate prompt reporting of suspicious activities and addressing them in time, besides creating reliable ground-based sources of intelligence gathering.

Increasing the already mounting diplomatic pressure on Pakistan may be considered by India so as to take action against terrorist groups harboured and operating within Pakistani boundaries.¹³ One of the viable options may be to have the potential to impose sanctions, international denunciation, and diplomatic isolation on the adversary. Pakistan, as of now, enjoys the support of China, and therefore expecting China to help tame Pakistan is a definite impossibility. India, in conjunction with other countries like Russia and the USA, may consider putting financial pressure on China through sanctions in a similar way that the USA did with Iran and through payment restrictions in US dollars, stalling the payments to Russia for supplies made to various countries.

Conclusion

It can safely be opined that India presently stands highly vulnerable against prevailing uncertainty and unrest in Pakistan as far as its national security concerns are concerned, especially considering the fact that the protection of our borders from terrorist infiltration is a complex and challenging mission. However, notwithstanding the above, we have reasons to believe that India is handling the matter well with a high degree of professionalism and a matching sense of commitment.

This is also relevant to state here that by implementing a combination of some of the above-stated strategies, India stands a better prospect of significantly minimising the risk of terrorist attacks in the face of constant infiltrations. All these factors taken together, along with the high standards of the Indian armed forces and paramilitary forces' preparedness and a track record of efficiently tackling external threats, make India undoubtedly well equipped with the capability to tackle the challenges posed to its national security by the current politico-security situation prevailing in Pakistan.

Notes:

- ¹ "Shehbaz Sharif's National Security Council Meeting Ends | Inside Important Details | Breaking News," YouTube Video, 1:45, 'BOL News,' April 7, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bd9pORl01s>. Accessed on April 08, 2023.
- ² "In a rare appearance, Salahuddin offers funeral prayers for assassinated close aide in Pakistan," *The Hindu*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/in-a-rare-appearance-salahuddin-offers-funeral-prayers-for-assassinated-close-aide-in-pakistan/article66541934.ece>. Accessed on April 08, 2023.
- ³ "The Taliban in Afghanistan," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 19, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/taliban-afghanistan>. Accessed on April 08, 2023.
- ⁴ "Delay in CPEC projects sowing frustration in Pakistan, China: Report," *Economic Times*, May 7, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/delay-in-cpec-projects-sowing-frustration-in-pakistan-china-report/articleshow/91402698.cms?from=mdr>. Accessed on March 29, 2023.
- ⁵ "With China's funding, is Pakistan also headed for Sri Lanka-like financial crisis?," *Live Mint*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/with-china-s-funding-is-pakistan-also-headed-for-sri-lanka-like-financial-crisis-11677596938532.html>. Accessed on March 29, 2023.
- ⁶ "Pakistan To Get \$700 Million Loan From China: Finance Minister," *NDTV*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pak-minister-says-china-approved-700-million-loan-to-pakistan-3804970>. Accessed on April 17, 2023.
- ⁷ "New US Restrictions Impact Russia-Related Imports and Exports, US Dollar-Denominated Banknotes," *Skadden*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.skadden.com/insights/publications/2022/03/new-us-restrictions-impact-russia-related-imports>. Accessed on April 17, 2023.
- ⁸ "Peace Mission-2021: India takes part in SCO joint military exercise in Russia," *India Today*, September 15, 2021, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/peace-mission-2021-indian-army-sco-joint-military-exercise-russia-1853099-2021-09-15>. Accessed on March 29, 2023.
- ⁹ "Intelligence Gathering - The Foundation of a Good Penetration Test," *Core Security*, <https://www.coresecurity.com/blog/intelligence-gathering-foundation-good-penetration-test>. Accessed on March 30, 2023.
- ¹⁰ "Strengthening International Cooperation in Criminal Matters," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/terrorism/news-and-events/strengthening-international-cooperation.html>. Accessed on March 30, 2023.
- ¹¹ Paul Staniland, "Improving India's Counterterrorism Policy after Mumbai," *Combating Terrorism Centre*, April 2009, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/improving-indias-counterterrorism-policy-after-mumbai/>. Accessed on March 30, 2023.
- ¹² Om Shankar Jha, "Community participation in border management Challenges and Options" *Journal of Defence Studies*, IDSA, https://www.idsa.in/system/files/jds_3_3_osjha.pdf. Accessed on March 30, 2023.
- ¹³ "Pakistan: Friend Or Foe In The Fight Against Terrorism?," U.S. Government Publishing Office, July 12, 2016, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-114hhrg20742/html/CHRG-114hhrg20742.htm>. Accessed on March 30, 2023.