



Centre for Air Power Studies

Report

CAPS National Seminar on

ASSESSING THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CONTOURS OF PAKISTAN AND INDIA–PAKISTAN RELATIONS

(Organised by the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) on November 7, 2024, at Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi)

Welcome Remarks: Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd), Director General, CAPS

In his welcome remarks, Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani examined the complex factors influencing international relations, noting how destiny, geography, religion, and public faith can shape these dynamics. He observed that in India's neighbourhood, while some states have grown stable over the decades, others have shown traits of anarchy. While some states have militaries, other militaries have states. He said that relations between India and Pakistan have been at a pause since the 2016 Pathankot attack and India's abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 2019. The DG emphasised how the J&K's recent elections underscore the strength of democracy within India. On Pakistan, he noted its use of geography to gain favour with external actors and argued that the Pakistani Army primarily directs the trajectory of Indo-Pakistan relations. He remarked that Pakistan's identity crisis stems from religion and military dominance. The speaker pointed to recent developments, including the 26th Constitutional Amendment and an Army Act extending military tenures and granting additional powers to the military. He concluded that these moves indicate General Munir's intent to consolidate power, signalling potentially troubled times ahead.

Inaugural Address- Delivered by Shri Rajinder Khanna, Former Additional National Security Adviser (NSA), Government of India

Session I – “The Quandary of a Crisis State”

Chair: Amb G Parthasarathy, Chancellor, Central University of Jammu and the former High Commissioner to Pakistan and Australia. He briefly introduced the panellists.

Speaker 1: Mr Tilak Devasher, Member of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)–*Simmering Fault Lines in Pakistan*

Mr Devasher argued that Pakistan's foundation on religious ideology, rather than a unified national identity, has led to a fragmented society and a culture of intolerance, stalling the development of a cohesive political identity. This reliance on religion, set by the early Muslim League, paved the way for authoritarianism, political exclusion, and persistent instability, including military rule and weak civilian governance. He highlighted Balochistan's separatist movement, driven by socio-economic neglect and ethnic discrimination. Despite its rich



Centre for Air Power Studies

resources, the region remains impoverished, with residents feeling exploited as the resources benefit other areas. The state's harsh response, marked by disappearances and extrajudicial killings, has intensified Baloch grievances and even sparked activism among Baloch women. Mr Devasher also warned of growing security challenges from groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). The speaker concluded that Pakistan's past support for non-state actors has backfired, as they now target the state, exacerbating regional security concerns for Pakistan and its neighbours, especially India and Afghanistan.

Speaker 2: Dr Shalini Chawla, Distinguished Fellow at the CAPS–*Pakistan's Strategic Balancing*

Dr Shalini Chawla analysed Pakistan's internal and external challenges, focusing on its management of domestic fault lines and strategic balancing in foreign policy. She outlined "4 Rs" as core concerns: *Reviving ties with the United States*, strained during Imran Khan's tenure; *Retaining momentum with China*, despite occasional strains; *Regaining trust from Saudi Arabia*, following criticism over the Kashmir issue; and *Reconditioning bonhomie with Russia* while balancing them with ties to the US and China. Dr Chawla highlighted Pakistan's tensions with Afghanistan, particularly with the assertive Taliban, and noted the impact of Middle Eastern instability on Pakistan due to its stakes in energy and also given the fact that a large number of Pakistanis work in the Gulf. A critical concern, she argued, is Pakistan's declining strategic relevance, driven by the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific and India's rising power. Pakistan's traditional geopolitical importance, military strength, and role as an "Islamic protector" are now challenged by economic dependence and internal instability. The speaker concluded by stating that despite these pressures, Pakistan tries to leverage its nuclear status and strategic location to sustain international support, positioning itself as "too important to fail." She added that Pakistan's strategic positioning vis-à-vis India is unlikely to change, as the drivers will remain unchanged.

Question and Answer Session

In the question and answer session, the following points were discussed:

1. **Pashtun Dynamics and Taliban Relations:** Pakistan expected strategic gains with the coming back of the Taliban in August 2021, such as sidelining India and the recognition of the Durand Line, but these expectations have not been fulfilled.
2. **Rising Terrorism Concerns:** Terrorism-related fatalities remain high in Pakistan, and terrorism in India, particularly in J&K, is also increasing. The potential for non-military approaches to address terrorism was acknowledged.
3. **Paradox of Pakistan's Military Strength:** Despite internal crises, Pakistan's military development and strategic alliances with countries like Turkey and Ukraine, along with its nuclear capability, have provided it with a level of stability, allowing it to maintain resilience.
4. **Environmental Vulnerabilities:** Pakistan faces severe environmental challenges, like floods, droughts and water insecurity. However, these issues are often deprioritised by the government, which focuses more on political survival than long-term planning.



Centre for Air Power Studies

5. **Diplomatic Limitations:** Due to economic and internal struggles, Pakistan's ability to engage in sustained diplomatic relations, even within non-traditional areas, remains limited.
6. **India's Growing Capability to Address Pakistan's Challenges:** While Pakistan faces multifaceted crises, India's capabilities in addressing these challenges have strengthened over time.

Session II – “India's Position and Response to Pakistan”

Chair: Prof Amitabh Mattoo, Dean, School of International Studies, Professor and Chair, CIPOD, School of International Studies, JNU

The session's chair noted that even as the conflict between India and Pakistan is easy to describe, it is difficult to understand. He referenced terms frequently used by scholars of International Relations, such as 'enduring rivalries' and 'sustained conflict', to capture the essence of the India-Pakistan relationship. Their relationship, unfortunately, is and has been shaped by history, memory, prejudice, identity, betrayal, trust, sovereignty, etc., noted the speaker, following which he briefly introduced the panellists for this session. According to Prof Mattoo, India's policy towards Pakistan has historically been influenced by three key actors: in the Western paradigm, by liberal institutions, realists, and constructivists; and in the Desi paradigm, by subedars, saudagars, and sufis.

Speaker 1:– Lt Gen Syed Ata Hasnain PVSM UYSM AVSM SM VSM (Retd), Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir, Member, National Disaster Management Authority – *Assessing Pakistan's Proxy War and Obsession for Kashmir*

The speaker began with how Pakistan's obsession with Kashmir stems from retaining relevance to the world and to put pressure on India diplomatically. He said that although there has been a surge in violence in Jammu, Kashmir still remains the centre of gravity. It is for this reason nobody should talk of total peace, as all factors of turbulence are present in lesser quantum. However, presently, terrorist networks are partially neutralised, infiltration is under control and recruitment has drastically reduced. The speaker invoked the old adage that “absence of violence is not peace”. The speaker then outlined six key questions and shed light on them extensively. First, what is the state of proxy war conditions in Jammu and Kashmir? Second, has separatism actually taken a downward turn? To this, the speaker notably suggested that India should use its nationalist Islamic clergy to reduce the separatist sentiment. Third, is Pakistan's capability compromised by its economic weakness? Fourth, is the handling of PoK a demotivator for separatists? Fifth, what are the key factors amplifying Pakistan's proxy aim, and lastly, how should India cement its success from the 2024 J&K elections?

Speaker 2: Air Marshal D Choudhury PVSM AVSM VM VSM (Retd), Former Commandant, National Defence College – *India's Military Options with Pakistan*



Centre for Air Power Studies

The speaker began by recounting the history of India's wars, noting that a majority were fought with Pakistan, and while India may have won in these wars, the same could not be said for its strategic outcomes. He further highlighted that Kashmir presents a viable alternative to take ultimate revenge for Pakistan. The speaker notably brought out that the biggest challenge for India, which no other country faces, is a threat across the entire range: nonconventional, conventional, sub-conventional, no-war-no-peace and grey zone. As for the aerial threat to India, the speaker said that the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) is a well-trained force with Western exposure, is constantly upgrading its inventory, jointly producing aircraft with China, and conducting air exercises with the US, Egypt, Turkey, etc. Moreover, post-Balakot strike, the Indian Air Force had adopted a defensive posture due to the PAF's AMRAAM advantage. Accordingly, the speaker laid out a few military options for India: exploit the full spectrum below the threshold; leverage punitive air power; expand offensive air defence capability; greater speed of mobilisation and multi-front operations; salience of high-altitude military operations; stretch the PAF thin; win the perception war, and proactive planning, among others.

Speaker 3: Ambassador TCA Raghavan, Former High Commissioner to Pakistan and former Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs – *India's Diplomatic Position on Pakistan*

The speaker emphasised the need for a clear approach to managing India's difficult relationship with Pakistan, whose identity is linked strongly to its stance on Kashmir. He noted India's past effective strategies, such as the 2001 military mobilisation, diplomatic pressure after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and surgical strikes, while observing that Indo-Pak relations have been in a severe downturn since 2016, worsening after 2019. This prolonged standoff, despite internal upheaval in Pakistan, is the longest downswing in their relations. The speaker highlighted a renewed 2021 ceasefire along the LoC, suggesting this prompts questions about Pakistan's motives to do so amid low diplomatic engagement. The Kartarpur Corridor opening was acknowledged as a positive step. He urged that a nuanced, less securitised Indian policy toward Pakistan to leverage India's strengths would help the situation. He noted that the role of domestic considerations in foreign policy is critical. In his conclusion, the speaker highlighted that SAARC's stagnation does not sit well with India's neighbours, and how India will never have a normal relationship with Pakistan, especially given the complex South Asian relations. Furthermore, India should prioritise its national interests.

Question and Answer Session

The following questions were discussed in the second session:

- 1) **Relative stability along the LOC and in the Kashmir Valley** was highlighted, raising a key question for India to consider: why did Pakistan not attempt to disrupt the elections in J&K? However, there has been a surge in violence post-elections.
- 2) **India continues to highly depend on threat assessments from the US** and not have its own. Second critical question raised was, what are the naval, nuclear and conventional threats Pakistan presents to India? These were discussed and it was emphasised that this need serious consideration in India's policy making.



Centre for Air Power Studies

- 3) The issue of **limitations of using nationalistic Islamic clergy in Kashmir** and why has this approach not been employed earlier was raised. Resistance towards this approach has been a barrier and this needs to change.
- 4) With the Modi 3.0 administration taking charge this year, and Modi's instinctiveness to make peace, **is this the right time for a dialogue with Pakistan?**
This question received mixed responses, with some supporting engagement and others leaning towards continuation of our policy of non-engagement.
- 5) **Financial constraints on the terror outfits in the Valley** play a significant role in limiting Pakistan's capacity to conduct a major terror attack. However, it's India's credible deterrence which has been a major factor in countering Pakistan's strategy against India.