



Understanding the Key Drivers of Pakistan's Strategy Against India

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India and Pakistan bilateral talks have been once again deferred following the attack on Pathankot air base on January 2 that lasted nearly 80 hours and further exacerbated a stressed bilateral relationship. The Pathankot attack brought out linkages to Pakistan and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) founder leader Masood Azhar's involvement in the attack. JeM has reemerged as a lethal anti-India jihadi organization and Masood Azhar, who was pushed into hibernation under pressure from the West, has been receiving state patronage and now has the backing of ISI. JeM has been banned in Pakistan since 2002, but it continues to operate openly in parts of Pakistan, and has been training thousands of young fighters from South Punjab and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan has claimed that it has placed Masood Azhar in 'protective custody' and there is no law under which Masood could be arrested. Pakistani media (*DAWN*) reported that Pakistani establishment has asked for more evidence from India and Azhar will face legal action if his 'involvement in Pathankot is proved beyond doubt'. It may be recalled that Pakistan used a similar refrain for Hafiz Saeed, who was the mastermind behind the

Mumbai attack in 2008, and the investigations for which have been endless!

The sequence of events which led to the Pathankot attack were not surprising and this is not for the first time when efforts to move towards normalization of relationship through dialogue have been diluted by terror strikes on the Indian soil. We have watched this pattern repeatedly over the years now. Last year the Ufa meeting between the heads of the two countries was followed by attacks in Udhampur and Gurdaspur.

Question that needs to be answered is, who would actually benefit in Pakistan with the disruption of talks or by impeding normalization of relationship with India?

India has faced terrorism emanating from the Pakistani soil for more than five decades. The intensity and the tactics of the attacks have undergone a change but Pakistan's support to the non state actors (which it treats as its *strategic assets*) conducting terrorist strikes on the Indian soil, and Pakistan's denial, remain unchanged. The Peshawar school massacre on December 16, 2014, which killed 132 children, created tremendous unrest in Pakistan. The incident, which was supposed to be the worst in the history of Pakistan since 1971, should have been an eye opener. Pakistan did take some

measures by establishing military courts, but certainly measures to change its overall strategy and support to terrorism were not adopted.

The question is, do we understand the Pakistani state? Why is Pakistan not ready to change its policy of supporting terror outfits despite being a victim of terrorism itself? Why does the state still support terrorism to serve their strategic interests? Another question that needs to be answered is, who would actually benefit in Pakistan with the disruption of talks or by impeding normalization of relationship with India?

Looking into the history and study of Pakistan's behavioral pattern, three drivers of Pakistan's posturing towards India could be identified:

- Threat Perceptions
- Dominant Military Lobby
- Identity Crisis

Threat Perceptions

Threat perceptions form the base of the strategic culture in Pakistan. Its threat perceptions have driven its strategy and actions against India. The very fact that Pakistan was carved out of India on the basis of Muslim separatism, has been one of the critical factors contributing towards its insecurity. From the time of its creation, Pakistan has suffered a deep sense of insecurity owing to its geography, smaller size, having a (perceived) hegemonic neighbor India, etc. The roots of Pakistan's threat perception can be traced in two broad factors.

Geography: Pakistan's geography posed severe security challenges in the minds of the leadership. After the partition, Pakistan was uncomfortable not only with the size but also with the share of resources it received. Jinnah was extremely dissatisfied with the small size of the country which he termed as 'moth-eaten'. Kashmir became an important factor for Pakistan due to a number of reasons, but one of the critical concerns for Pakistan, highlighted by Akbar Khan in his famous work *Raiders in Kashmir*, was that with J&K state as an integral part of India, Pakistan's "security would be jeopardized if the Indian troops came to be stationed along Kashmir's western borders".

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On the other side, on the western front, Pakistan faced constant threat due to the lingering issue of Durand Line. No Afghan regime, including the Rabbani government, has ever accepted the legitimacy of the border drawn by the British in 1893. Pakistan has faced constant problems and has remained under pressure due to demands to incorporate the Pashtun areas east of the Durand Line into Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to face deadly insurgency from its tribal areas bordering Afghanistan which started in as early as 1940s.

Two Nation Theory: The 'two nation theory' which forms the basis of creation of Pakistan avows that the Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations and, for Muslims to spend their lives peacefully and freely according to the glorious teaching of Islam, an autonomous homeland for Muslims, in the Muslim majority areas of British India, was a necessity. Without going into the historical details of the creation of Pakistan, it would not be incorrect to state that the two nation theory evolved from the

basic fear that in a democracy dominated by the Hindu majority, Muslims will not be able to freely exercise their rights and practice the preachings of Islam. The theory defines that Hindus and Muslims are two distinct nations which could not exist as one state.

The two nation theory invariably had perilous consequences on the political, social and economic evolution of Pakistan. The theory allowed perpetual threat of existence within the masses of Pakistan, which never settled down and was obviously, consciously and unconsciously, aggravated by multiple other forces/factors. Pakistanis have constantly lived under constant (perceived) fear of being taken over by India, which has contributed in building up a relationship of mistrust and suspicion between the two nations. This allowed the unchallenged growth of the military institution, which was seen as the sole savior of the state.

Another important ramification is that the two nation theory unambiguously stated - Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist together. This basically exhibited the religious intolerance in the mindset

of the Muslim elite. It led the Pakistani leadership to deny the rights of the other ethnic groups within Pakistan. This underlying intolerance resulted in interminable insurgencies in Pakistan and, most importantly, the division of Pakistan in 1971.

Dominant Military Lobby

There is no doubt that the Army in Pakistan is a most organised and professional force, the power of which does not flow only from the barrel of the gun but from its deep involvement in all important facets of the country. The Pakistan Army's strong political role stems from the national security paradigm of the state. The military institution in Pakistan has managed to create and sustain an autonomous structure, financial freedom and flexibility for itself. The Army (and the ISI) in Pakistan undertook the responsibility of not only guarding the nation's territories but also controlling the national policies, managing the economy, influencing the society, and most importantly, guarding the ideological boundaries of the state.

Pakistan has waged four wars against India and the development of the Pakistan army over the decades is strongly linked to its consistent rivalry with India. Pakistan's national politics and decision making related to defence and other core areas is largely dominated by the military. The prime reason for the military's dominating position in the defence decision-making lies in its special position in the power politics of Pakistan, and the exaggerated threat perceptions (from India), which provide legitimacy for high defence spending. The military in Pakistan has been actively involved in identifying and managing internal threats within Pakistan. Military's role in Pakistan extends to various forms of nation-building activities and thus, justifies the military being allocated a large defence budget.

Even with a democratic regime in power, strategic decision-making remains the domain of the military and the ISI. Three critical areas where military has never allowed civilian interference are: defence spending; nuclear

weapons; and foreign policy vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan.

Identity Crisis

Pakistan has been in existence now for more than six decades, but the state has not been able to define its identity till date. Pakistan has been a nation of contradictions: it has shared an ambiguous relationship with Islam, tried to embrace western notions of modernity, at the same time, tried retaining an orthodox Islamic identity; has an over powering and ambitious army which has ruled the nation for more than 30 years directly, and nearly an equal period with a civilian façade in front, but it has still struggled periodically to go back to a democratic order controlled by a fractured political leadership and has suffered a deep national identity crisis. Lack

of identity has encouraged rise of ethnicity and pluralism within the Pakistani society. Born as a result of demand for a separate Muslim homeland, Pakistan eventually stood as the savior of Islam and in the process the military led state adopted policies based on religion which have had severe repercussions for the state. Religion has been used in Pakistan for nation building, and also strategic

security.

Jinnah talked about a secular state where Muslim culture and social norms could be promoted. But Pakistan, over the decades, completely drifted away from Jinnah's spirit. Pakistan never inherited a uniform vision and there were contesting ideas, and the birth of the nation itself suffered lack of consensus and clarity on the issue of Islam. In the coming years, Pakistan hardly ever became a beneficiary of committed and visionary leadership. The state was driven differently by different regimes following different objectives.

It took the policy makers close to a decade to formalise the constitution of Pakistan, which dissolved Jinnah's spirit of secular Islam. There was confusion about the interpretation of Islam which had severe political, social, economic, educational and even military ramifications. The persistent confusion and lack of consensus gave

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the political and military leadership enough space to exploit the factor of religion to serve their own interests. Pakistan experienced different interpretations of Islam- varying from Jinnah's dream of a secular Islamic state, to Bhutto's Islamic socialism, adoption of Zia's radical Islam and Musharraf's enlightened moderation.

Pakistan's Strategic Culture and Strategy Against India

Pakistan's strategic culture has been driven by its threat perceptions, identity crisis and dominant military lobby. The strategic culture has been dominated by a militarized approach towards foreign policy, reliance on external assistance, offensive posturing, belief in suppression of any opposition against the governing authorities, and use of religion in formulating state policies towards security and non-security issues. These attributes of Pakistan's strategic culture shaped its foreign policy options. Islamabad's strategy against India and its policies are driven by primarily these three factors which are interconnected and impact each other directly and indirectly.

Pakistan has opted for a three dimensional approach in its strategy towards India:

1. *Conventional Level:* Pakistan has tried hard to attain parity with India in terms of its military build-up. In this pursuit, it did seek alliance with the United States, starting in the 1950s, and with China, which has been Pakistan's most consistent partner in the military and nuclear force build-up. It has fought four wars with India, out of which three wars have been initiated by Pakistan.
2. *Sub-Conventional Level:* Pakistan opted for the

covert war option in as early as 1947, when it launched its first aggression in the name of tribal revolt. All the three wars initiated by Pakistan have been started in a covert manner. It has relied on the strategy of terrorism for more than six decades.

3. *Nuclear Level:* For more than two decades, Pakistan has relied on nuclear weapons to conduct its grand strategy (of indirect approach) against India. Nuclear weapons are perceived as providing a foolproof guarantee of its sovereignty and survivability. After the acquisition of nuclear weapons, Pakistan obviously is more confident of its strategy of "offensive-defense".

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For India, a critical imperative is to evaluate Pakistan's strategy and to probingly ask the question — have we worked out a viable and effective strategy to defeat Pakistan's covert-war strategy?

Pakistan has continued to adopt a posture of denial for its covert actions conducted along with the anti-India militant groups which the ISI has nurtured for decades now. For India, a critical imperative is to evaluate Pakistan's strategy and to probingly ask the question — have we worked out a viable and effective strategy to defeat Pakistan's covert-war strategy? Even though the Pakistani leadership denies such acts, eventually the government of Pakistan has to be accountable for the terrorist incidents against India emanating from their soil. Pakistan needs to demonstrate its position on terrorism through actions and not just statements.



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