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DEALING WITH PAKISTAN: INDIA'S RESPONSE TO URI ATTACK

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a speech at a public event on September 24th, said that India would never forget the Uri attack and would make all efforts to isolate Islamabad globally. The PM talked about Pakistan's internal vulnerabilities, its struggle against poverty and unemployment. The speech does highlight India's strategic restraint as a responsible growing power and its focus on growth and well-being of the masses.

On September 18th, in a major terrorist operation conducted by Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists, 19 Indian soldiers died near the Line of Control in a highly guarded army camp in an Indian Army brigade headquarters in Uri. Once again, the repeat of a similar sequence of events is being witnessed - terrorist act conducted from the Pakistani soil, Indian government finds the proof of the attack being conducted from Islamabad and Pakistan government in a state of denial and accusation. Pakistan Prime Minister,

Nawaz Sharif, said that India is behaving in an 'irresponsible manner' by blaming Pakistan without any evidence.

Terrorist acts conducted from the Pakistani soil against India are not new and the follow-up of events is also familiar. The Uri attack has generated tremendous anger within India and the much expected unanimous opinion in India is that India cannot let this go and it needs to respond to Pakistan's acts of terror on the Indian soil. The global condemnations of the terrorist attack in Uri and the support for India have rendered Pakistan's attempts to internationalize the current unrest in Kashmir ineffective. Islamabad, till now, has managed to use 'denial' somewhat successfully over the past decades. It was rather 'surprising' for Pakistani military leadership to receive widespread international criticism for Uri. Nawaz Sharif, in his attempt to balance adverse international reaction to the



attack, said that incident in Uri is a reaction to the unrest in Kashmir.

India has been blunt in exposing Pakistan after the Uri attack and, exercising its right of reply during the General Debate of the 71st session UN General Assembly on September 21st, the Indian representative said:

“The terrorist attack is part of a trail of continuous flow of terrorists trained and armed by our neighbor and tasked to carry out terrorist attacks in my country.What we see in Pakistan... is a terrorist state, which channelizes billions of dollars, much of it diverted from international aid, to training, financing and supporting terrorist groups as militant proxies against its neighbours.”

External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, at the UN General Assembly on September 26th, called for global isolation of Pakistan (reported by NDTV) and said, *“Here are nations that still speak the language of terrorism, that nurture it, peddle it, and export it. To shelter terrorists has become their calling card. We must identify these nations and hold them to account. These nations, in which UN declared terrorists roam freely, lead processions and deliver their poisonous sermons of hate with impunity, are as culpable as the very terrorists they harbour. Such countries should have no place in the comity of nations.”*

Pakistan has struggled with its insecurities from the time of its creation. Its deep identity crisis and the dominant military lobby never

allowed the perceived threat perceptions to settle down and for it to function as a normal state. The threat of Indian domination was propounded and maintained from the very beginning. Pakistan’s prime objective as a state has been to stay at par with India. Since it has been unable to do so, ‘undermining’ India’s growth became the focus of Pakistan’s national strategy.

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 the military build-up. All four 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. Pakistan exercised the covert option in the 1965 war and also during Kargil in 1999. 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.

It has been most confident of the ‘sub-conventional approach’ which, in its own mind, is shielded by its nuclear weapons and its excessive

reliance on 'first use' doctrine. Pakistan has relied on nuclear weapons and terrorism as a state policy tool and is likely to continue to do so as it has failed to build other strengths or overcome its fundamental challenges. Its most daunting challenges include economic stresses it is facing, with a struggling GDP growth and declining FDI. Rising extremism and raging insurgency has been difficult for the military to control. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been launching repeated terrorist attacks, despite the military's claim that it has managed to hit insurgent factions on the borders with the ongoing major operation – Zarb-e-Azb.

Being crippled with inherent problems of extremism, unemployment and low growth, Pakistan significantly lags behind India on most of the parameters of national security. Its reliance on terrorism (and nuclear weapons) to wield its power emerges from its weaknesses within. It has failed to develop any fundamental strength and support its youth. The youth in Pakistan seem to be trapped in the culture of violence, terrorism, unemployment and very importantly, an identity crisis.

Despite the inherent weaknesses of the state, the policy makers in Islamabad seem to be convinced that they can continue their acts of terrorism without fear of Indian retaliation. Although Pakistan does not use direct threat of use of nuclear weapons, the reality is that it relies

on nuclear weapons to thwart any possible Indian retaliation for its acts of terror.

India's strategy option would be to exploit the strategic space above terrorism but below the nuclear threshold. India's profile has grown significantly on the global platform and it has the support of major states. New Delhi is far ahead of Pakistan in terms of its resources, growth, capability and more importantly, credibility as a responsible state at the global level. India, with more than 7% growth, is on its way to become an economic giant and certainly does not desire to engage in a conventional war with Pakistan. But this does not in any way signal India's inability to respond militarily. New Delhi has far more on stake as compared to Pakistan, which relies on undermining India's achievements to uplift its image amongst its own people and at the global platform. Pakistan tried hard to internationalize the Kashmir issue accusing India of human rights violations, while it has been engaged in a full-fledged insurgency in Baluchistan and FATA since 1940s. The suppression of minorities within the Pakistani state did not change even after the dismemberment of the nation in 1971. Pakistan surely is not ready for any change and is not likely to alter its strategic calculus towards New Delhi.

Sustained actions to strengthen India's response to Pakistan's acts of terror could be the following:

- Any form of India's engagement with Pakistan has to be strictly conditional. The message has to be loud and clear to Pakistan that any economic or diplomatic engagement cannot exist along with the cross border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan.
- Islamabad's posture of deniability cannot be accepted by India and the international community. Pakistan needs to take the responsibility of the terror acts conducted from its soil.
- Diplomatic blitzkrieg needs to be launched against Pakistan to isolate it at the global level. India, post Uri attack, has been extremely vocal in its appeal to the international community.
- Pakistan's all weather friend and ally, China, needs to be persuaded to convince Pakistan to alter its strategic calculus. Beijing has so far maintained silence on Pakistan's acts of terror and its all-out support to Pakistan has strengthened Pakistan's will to conduct terrorism against India.
- India's conventional military capability build-up and modernization has to be kept up to deter Pakistan.

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