

India has no Pak policy

The recent attack on the CRPF bus in Pulwama has highlighted the involvement of Pak in terrorist attacks in the valley. The JeM and HuM continue to flourish, their leaders enjoy all freedom and are assets of the deep state. While India blames China for supporting Pak by not declaring Masood Azar as a global terrorist, even its declaration would do nothing to change the scenario. Despite huge bounties on their heads, terrorist leaders roam freely in Pakistan, give speeches and collect funds. Nominating Masood Azar as a global terrorist, apart from satisfying Indian demands, would imply nothing.

Despite all actions taken by Indian government's over the years, Pak's approach remains unchanged. Every government has attempted to change the narrative with Pak, either attempting talks or adopting the hard approach, nothing seems to have worked. Policies have varied from seeking to isolate it internationally, cancelling sporting events, surgical strikes and back channel diplomacy. India even attempted to nominate Pak as a state sponsor of terror, but to no avail. There have also been governments which did nothing, other than ignoring Pak.

This is because India has failed to read Pak's geopolitical importance, its desperation for survival and hence been unable to counter it. Geopolitically Pak is the gateway to central Asia and its minerals including oil and gas deposits. It also borders Afghanistan which remains the

'graveyard of empires.' Even Taliban, expected to be the major power to run the country, post the withdrawal of the US may be unable to do so, unless it draws in all ethnic communities, which remain at loggerheads with others.

Hence, Pak would always be wooed by all major powers. While they may suspend all aid to it, as the US has done, but they cannot afford to dump it aside. In the present environment, the US needs Pak to continue its engagement with the Taliban, while Russia needs it for almost the same reasons, as the rising presence of the ISIS in Afghanistan remains worrisome.

China has huge investments in the country and its possession of Gwadar enables an access to the Arabian Sea and the Gulf region. Come what may, China would never dump Pakistan. Added to this is the nuclear factor and the permanent fear of Pak nukes falling into jihadist hands. These issues would ensure the survival of the country as it exists at present.

India-Pak dispute is basically Kashmir. Pak does not desire Kashmir due to similarity in religion nor because it has any special love for its population. It was initially irked by it joining India, which it felt was an affront. Subsequently, it realised that all sources of water which it needs flows from Kashmir. The loss of East Pakistan in 1971 further angered Pak and brought forth a desire for revenge.

Pak army is aware that it neither has the capability nor the wherewithal to grab Kashmir by force. Hence, it has adopted the present

approach. It hopes to cause the same hurt to India, which it was caused when it surrendered in East Pakistan in 1971.

The treatment of the population of POK is atrocious, to say the least. They remain directly under the control of the Pak army and its resources are exploited by the country. Protests are subdued with force. Militant training camps in the region do not house Kashmiri terrorists, but Punjabi. Retaliation from India is suffered by the POK population.

The deprivation of rights to the residents of POK has been mentioned in multiple international reports. These issues should have been exploited by the Indian government via a social media campaign to change the narrative in the valley. Nothing has been done over the years. On the contrary, Pak social media campaign has painted India as the aggressor and suppressor of the rights of Kashmiri's. Similarly, Pak has changed the demography of POK, while it portrays India attempting the same in Kashmir.

The launching of the surgical strike and its continued celebration by the government was an attempt to use a tactical operation for strategic gains. This failed because Pak suppressed its conduct while its control over its media ensured that its countrymen remained unaware of the reality. If Pak is to be impacted, then the only option is to conduct an operation, where its public is made aware of the Indian government's resolve. Hence, it must be visible to the Pak public and the world. However, such an operation

would invite a riposte and India should be prepared for the same.

The lowering of the Indian defence budget over the years has reduced the conventional gap between India and Pak and given Pak the confidence to continue with its Kashmir policy. The enhancement of Pak's nuclear capabilities has added to its confidence as it has regularly used the same as a deterrent. If India is to push Pak to change, then the capabilities of its forces must be considered on priority. A strong conventional force would be a deterrent. The government needs to reconsider the defence budget.

In Kashmir, Pak for years has sowed the seeds of anger and discontent, though mostly false propaganda and the employment of Imams who preach jihad. Thus, presently there are more local militants (though poorly trained, but motivated) than foreign. Funding is still done by Pak employing its proxies, including the Hurriyat.

With regular stoking of the flames of militancy, it is now almost on a self-driven mode. Control exists on the Pak side and are fuelled by the deep state. No attempts have been taken by any government to counter this in Kashmir, including booking Imams who preach hatred.

State governments over the years alongside the centre should have been actively involved in countering the anti-India narrative being pushed by Pak, but for securing their vote banks have ignored it. This has led to inciting of youth and

distancing the region from the rest of the country.

In summary, India has lacked a cohesive Pak strategy. It has vastly varied between governments. Even countering Pak's false propaganda in the valley has been haphazard and unplanned. Pak on the other hand has followed its anti-India strategy to the hilt, ensuring that no government nor political leader has the power to change it. Nawaz, who attempted to do so remains behind bars.

It is never too late to change. India must have a cohesive strategy against Pak. Its approach must be a combination of multiple agencies, economic, social, military and diplomatic. The same should be followed by successive governments. While India grows in power its ability to influence the world increases. It can only force a change if it has the will, determination and conventional military might.