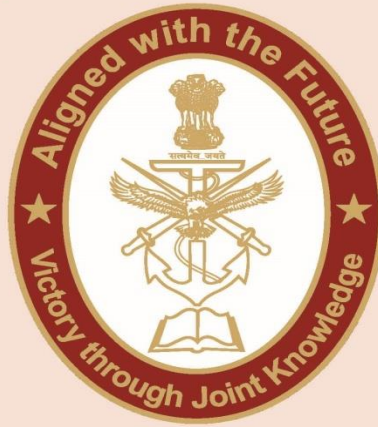


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LoC CEASEFIRE - A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE OR A TACTICAL INITIATIVE BY PAKISTAN



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The reiteration or renewal of sustaining the agreed upon Ceasefire by the two DGMO's on 24/25 Feb is definitely a positive step, cooling temperatures along the LoC, is always a first indication of hope for relative peace . The agreement has definitely surprised many, coming at a time when least expected, two years after the precision air strikes by the Indian Air Force at the Jaish training camp at Jabba Top (Balakote). India reported 5100 ceasefire violations (CFVs) by Pakistan and Pakistan reported 3003 CFVs by India along the Loc in the Year 2020, an unprecedented spike since November 2003, when the Ceasefire came into effect.

The key question is whether the renewed ceasefire will last, if so for how long as also will it lead to '**addressing each other's core issues and concerns**' as the joint statement specifies. A major factor in the way forward will be to analyse Pakistan's compulsions in renewing the Ceasefire, to analyse whether it is a '**Tactical Initiative or a strategic Imperative**' or possibly both, specially so as it comes after Pakistan's stance of NO talks till the Status of Jammu and Kashmir is restored. The 05 August 2019 abrogation of Article 370 and 35A as applicable to J&K, was

the first time that an Indian government surprised the Pakistani dispensation on Kashmir, creating a decision dilemma. Indian government had been responding to the moves made by Pakistan till now. As Pakistan failed to garner the requisite diplomatic support from the international community, it attempted to up the ante in Kashmir valley, hoping that an increase in violence levels will highlight the 'Kashmir Issue' an aim it could achieve only by supporting terrorists to infiltrate from across the LoC. To infiltrate terrorists in reasonable numbers is feasible only under covering fire, as Indian army strengthened the 'Counter Infiltration' grid. The fact that there have been no CFVs along the LoC East of Zojila in the snow bound areas of Drass, Kargil and Batalik are indicative of the causative factor behind the CFVs.

Pakistan failed to raise the violence levels in Kashmir as the people witnessed relative peace, the best environment in many decades leading to a successful conduct of the District Development Elections in end 2020. The silent majority in Kashmir reaped the benefits albeit limited on account of restrictions imposed by the pandemic. Indian army also raised the costs for the Pakistan army along the LoC of CFVs by effective and immediate retaliation, punishing the army posts initiating the CFVs. It is no secret that the Pakistan army is heavily committed not only along its Eastern Flank with India, but also in the West along the borders with Afghanistan and Iran, in addition to the internal security duties battling various insurgencies and terrorist organisations. The Army is also responsible for protecting Chinese interests and assets along the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The Pakistan army is overstretched, the first indication of softening of Pakistan's stance was Gen Qamar Bajwa's 02 Feb address to the graduates at the PAF, where he stated "***We stand firmly committed to the idea of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence. It is time to extend the hand of peace in all directions. Pakistan and India must also resolve the longstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir in a dignified and peaceful manner***". It needs no reiteration that the Pakistan army drives the 'India Policy', hence the softening of stance after the precision air strikes by Indian Air Force at Balakote and India's 05 Aug 2019 abrogation of Article 370 is a first.

There are both internal and external factors which have contributed to the will to renew and sustain the Nov 2003 cease fire. Pakistan economic situation is well known, a debt ridden nation will have to seek international support, which is not easily forthcoming as Pakistan is perceived as the epicentre of terrorism. Geopolitical and Geostrategy also dictate a change in Pakistan's behaviour as it no longer enjoys the frontline state status. Trump administration's 'Doha Accord' is under review by the Biden administration, as it perceives that the process was never Afghan led, driven or owned, as per the will of Afghan people. The accord was US led, Pakistan driven and Haqqani owned and hence is bound to fail. The US has called the Haqqani Network 'a veritable arm of the ISI (Pakistan)'. Pakistan has lost its strategic value as an ally of the US in its Global War On Terrorism, a notion it had exploited for decades facilitating the required logistics to support the Multi National forces in Afghanistan. It needs to be seen as to how Pakistan under pressure from the FATF is going to address India's concerns with regard terrorism. There are contradictory signals emanating from the Pakistan establishment. Moeed W. Yusuf, Pakistan national security Advisor to Prime Minister Imran Khan tweeted on 25 Feb evening "*I have seen claims by Indian media that attribute today's ceasefire announcement between Pakistani and Indian DGMOs to back-channel diplomacy between me and the Indian NSA. This is baseless. No such talks have taken place between me and Mr. Doval*", this after it was widely believed that back channels initiated at Moeed Yusuf's behest were mainly responsible for the agreement. The contradictions came even as the joint statement was being made public, obviously for domestic compulsions so as not to be seen as weak vis-a vis India.

On the other hand India, a risen, responsible, resurgent nation is seen as a global leader. India is also respected for assistance provided in combatting the pandemic by providing the vaccine not only to the neighborhood but also to the world. India has also demonstrated an unprecedented resolve and resilience along the LAC, challenging China's aggressive behaviour with an equitable and proportional deployment, forcing China to accept the Indian stated position of 'Status Quo Ante' on either side of Pangong Tso, the position along other areas too is under positive discussion for

disengagement. India is repositioning itself as a global leader in the emerging post covid world order.

The US, UN and many other nations have fully supported the renewed ceasefire agreement, as the daily duels along the LoC are perceived as a trigger for a spiral between the two nuclear armed nations. India and Pakistan now need to talk at political, diplomatic and military level to seek a reasonable resolution ensuring relative peace. As Pakistan army drives the India Policy, the Indian military could for once lead the talks of course under the political directions. It is easier for military professionals to do some straight, no nonsense talking, which may result in peace even if it is fragile and temporary. The first ever meeting of the two DGMOs to sustain the Ceasefire In December 2013, was led by the author who was the DGMO then. The meeting was cordial, candid and constructive and ensured a sustained ceasefire for over six months.

In a post Covid world over both India and Pakistan will benefit from peace along the LoC as it will give a chance to ' Addressing each other's core issues and concerns' imperative for long term peace, stability and development.

CERTIFICATE

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