

NEED FOR POLICY FOR INDIA'S RESPONSE AGAINST CROSS BORDER TERRORIST ATTACKS

Pakistan has been waging an intense proxy war against India since 1989 in the form of sponsoring cross border terrorism and providing open support to militancy in J&K. The ground reality in Pakistan is that the Pak Army is the main power centre having a decisive and a dominant say in the country's policies concerning national security, India and Afghanistan. Pakistan's intelligence agency the ISI is under the defacto control of the Army as all important appointments including the Head of ISI are held by serving Army officers. The Pak Army and the ISI have been nurturing and patronising terrorist groups in Pakistan like Jaish-E-Mohammad, Laskar-E-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen. Such groups are considered as strategic assets to be employed for launching terrorist attacks primarily against India and Afghanistan.

During the three decades of the proxy war, a large number of major terrorist attacks have been launched by the terrorist groups based in Pakistan with the active and collusive support of Pak Army. The recent suicidal vehicle borne IED terrorist attack of 14 February 2019 on a CRPF convoy near Pulwama causing 45 fatal casualties is one of such major terrorist attacks. A few aspects that emerge from these terrorist attacks is that, firstly the attacks besides J&K, have taken place in Punjab and in the hinterland as far in depth as New Delhi and Mumbai. Secondly, these attacks under no circumstances could have been launched or executed without the active support of Pak Army and the ISI. Thirdly, expect for the response to the December 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament which resulted in the full scale mobilisation of the Indian Armed Forces as part of Operation Parakaram and the response to the September 2016 Uri attack in the form of surgical strikes on terrorist camps across the LOC, no appropriate response was there for any of the other terrorist attacks.

The restraint exercised by the Political Leadership of India has emboldened the Pak Army to continue with its strategy of using terrorist attacks for furthering its Kashmir policy and on number of occasions derailing the peace talks between both the countries. Pakistan has raised the cost for India of fighting the proxy war as India had to raise a large counter insurgency force, namely the Rashtriya Rifles and erect a fence along the entire LOC as a counter infiltration measure. The time has now come to review this policy of restraint and adopt a policy of credible and effective response which must serve the purpose of deterrence for any future terrorist attacks and raising the cost for Pakistan. The policy for ensuring credible response should encompass the political, diplomatic, economic, strategic and military spheres. The political, diplomatic and economic measures that are adopted must be an on-going affair. These could broadly be in terms of eliciting support of major world powers and friendly countries to get Pakistan declared a state sponsor of terrorism, imposition of UN sanctions similar to what was done in the case of Iran and to ensure Pakistan's diplomatic isolation in South Asia. As first step the Indian Govt on its own must declare Pakistan a terrorist state. Further on, India must leverage her economic/trade ties and strategic relationships with countries that have influence over Pakistan namely, USA, China, Saudi Arabia and UAE for putting pressure on Pakistan to stop cross border terrorism. In the economic sphere all measures need to be taken to further cripple the economy of Pakistan which is already in dire strait.

The options in the strategic sphere available are undertaking covert operations in Pakistan to target the top leadership of the terrorist groups involved in terrorist attacks against Indian assets/interests, covert support to insurgency in Balochistan for its

eventual cessation from Pakistan, creating conditions for insurgency in Sindh Province by taking advantage of the dissatisfaction of the people of Sindh with the Pak Govt, being an upper riparian state India could make use of water as a weapon by posing a credible threat of abrogation of the Indus Water Treaty being the life line of Pakistan.

There are viable options for military response short of war. The area for such a military response should preferably be in the LOC Sector since invariably it is from here that the terrorist groups are launched and the ramifications will be minimal being a disputed area. The options for military response short of war that must be considered are precision air strikes using stand-off ammunition, surgical strikes by special forces, employment of Brahmos and Prithvi SSMs with conventional war heads and capture of selected areas across the LOC. The employment of Brahmos and Prithvi SSMs even with conventional war heads no doubt is liable to raise concerns of escalation. However, just because of this concern the employment of these SSMs need not be ruled out in view of their tremendous destructive/psychological effect and keeping in view their long ranges which will make it difficult for their identification especially when firing along with artillery. The inherent advantage of precision air strikes as a punitive action is that these can be launched within a short time to send a strong message across that there will be a very high cost to pay for such acts. It will be possible to manage the escalation in such situations. As can be seen all these four options are bold, packing a tremendous punch and capable of delivering results out of proportion. Therefore the element of calculated risk of escalation present should be taken and these options exercised as a calibrated response.

There are also military options for the areas opposite the IB in Jammu and Punjab regions. These are offensive actions for capture of shallow objectives just across the IB. Another option is that of coercive policy by employing our naval/amphibious capability for posing a threat of a naval blockade in the Arabian Sea off the Karachi and Gwadar Ports which are the only ports of Pakistan and along with this posing a brigade level Amphibious threat on the Makran Coast of Pakistan.

The main inhibiting factor in decision making by the Political Leadership for a credible military response has been the perceived nuclear threat from Pakistan as the Pak Army leadership could coerce its civilian govt for use of low yield tactical nuclear weapons as deterrence against the military response by India. As regards nuclear threat one needs to know that a nuclear weapon is a political weapon and is for deterrence. This belief has stood the test of time both during and post cold war. If at all a nuclear weapon is to be ever used in the India-Pakistan context it has to be a full spectrum war and then too as a means of last resort. The nuclear bluff of Pakistan has to be called in the context of the scenario of military response short of war.

Deterrence for terrorist attacks by terrorist groups based in Pakistan or having Pak support can only be achieved when it is clear that there will be an effective and credible military response in all eventualities and that no terrorist attack either on Indian soil or Indian assets/interests anywhere in the world will go unpunished. Therefore the military response needs to be exercised at the place and time of our choosing but it must under no circumstances be delayed. Lastly one has to understand that a nation has to fight its own war and no other nation how so ever friendly will fight your war.

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