

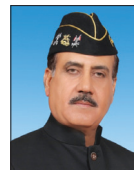


# ISSUE BRIEF

No. 146

July 2018

## India–Pakistan Relations: Time to Challenge the Status Quo



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### Backdrop

How does one describe the Indo-Pak relations? A complex amalgam of historical legacy, a love and hate relationship, wired in deep mistrust and strategic miscalculations. Having fought three wars and a Pakistani misadventure in Kargil in 1999, the two sides are still locked in a never-ending proxy war unleashed by Pakistan, which is increasingly beginning to threaten the sanity and stability of Pakistan itself.

Pakistan's hubris and misadventures have resulted in it being boxed into a corner, from where there seems no other way out, unless enlightened leadership takes charge, an increasingly difficult prospect, keeping in view Pakistan's internal dynamics. Despite causing the loss of its Eastern Wing in 1971, the Pakistan Army refuses to see reason and continues to play a high-stakes game, both on its Eastern and Western frontiers, where the only loser is likely to be Pakistan itself.

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### *Key Points*

1. India has, over the last seven decades, shown immense patience and maturity in dealing with Pakistan's continued aggressive stance and proxy war.
2. There is an impasse in Indo-Pak relations with a hot LC and continued terrorist infiltration. The time to challenge the status quo is now through a comprehensive policy, rather than piecemeal reactions.
3. India being a mature and stronger power should take the initiative as part of this comprehensive plan.
4. The preferred option has to be a quest for peace, but it requires two to tango, the ball being in Pakistan's court.
5. Among the initiatives should be included a defence dialogue between the two Armies, with an aim to do some plain speaking and establishing confidence-building measures.
6. The above initiative should be backed by a preparation to take the hard option if Pakistan refuses to see reason. This requires enhancing our defence capability with a requisite defence budget.
7. It's also time to call Pakistan's nuclear bluff, under whose umbrella it continues with its proxy war strategy against India.
8. This approach would make it clear to Pakistan that India means business, the choice being Pakistan's to make.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an independent think-tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic in outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

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neighbour. Not only India, but also the rest of the world has turned a blind eye to the evil machinations of Pakistan, thus encouraging it further on the disastrous path.

It seems incredulous that despite Pakistan's involvement with all shades of jihadis and terrorists, often hurting American lives and interests the most, they have been given such a long rope. As one American General told me during our interaction: "We are hoping that Pakistan will see reason and change tack." This hope has been belied, and we may be seeing a different, tougher approach by the United States.

The demonstration of nuclear capability by Pakistan in 1998, combined with its opaque doctrine has made the situation more complex and dangerous. In fact, Pakistan has turned the nuclear deterrence on its head and has felt emboldened to pursue a high-risk proxy war against India.

The present situation on the line of control (LC) is witnessing a regular exchange of fire with casualties on both sides, mainly civilians caught in the crossfire. In fact, Pakistan Army is trying every trick up its sleeve to keep Kashmir on the boil with a continuous infiltration of terrorists trying to create mayhem, though with increasingly diminishing returns.

In fact, there is an impasse in the Indo-Pak relations, with attitudes hardening on the Indian side. Should we allow such an impasse to continue? India, being a mature and stronger power with great power aspirations, should take the initiative to break this impasse, one way or the other. The preferred option has to be a soft option for establishing peace, but it requires two to Tango, the ball being clearly in Pakistan's court to reciprocate India's quest for peace, a difficult but not impossible proposition. Of course, if this does not work, there may be little choice left with India, but to exercise the hard option, which India has so far refrained from using, despite continuous provocations. Not many nations would have shown so much patience.

This paper will develop the above two options—the basic hypothesis being that the present status quo is detrimental to India and cannot be allowed to continue beyond a point.

### The Soft Option: Talking Peace

India has reached out to Pakistan on numerous occasions, without finding worthwhile reciprocity. Mostly, this outreach has been with the elected government of the day, scuttled by the Pakistan Army and the deep state. There have been bilateral summits and declarations between the two sides, recent ones being:

- The Lahore Declaration of February 1999, dealing with strategic nuclear governance and control;
- The Agra summit between President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in July 2001, which proved a bridge too far;
- India–Pakistan joint statement on PM Narendra Modi–Nawaz Sharif talks in Russia, in July 2015.

Above notwithstanding, relations remain frosty, with lack of trust on both sides. The main driver of strategic and foreign affairs, the Pakistan Army, has not endorsed peace with India. The Agra Summit came quite close to offering a reasonable way forward on contentious issues, but the opportunity was missed due to internal dynamics on the Indian side.

The present impasse may be defined by the following contours:

- The surgical strikes by India in September 2016 have not had the desired effect on Pakistan and the 'No War No Peace' situation continues on the LC. In hindsight, the strikes may be termed a tactical success, but without any operational/strategic payoffs.
- Although all Track I dialogue remains suspended, Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) link remains operational.

- A Track II dialogue continues but this is neither outcome-oriented nor taken very seriously by either side.
- India has reiterated its stance that dialogue with Pakistan is a non-starter, till it continues with its efforts to infiltrate terrorists across the LC and supports other terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir/other parts of India.
- There has been some signalling by Pakistan, but not serious enough for India to respond. The Pakistan Army Chief, General Bajwa, has said on more than one occasion that the way to peace and prosperity in Pakistan is through cooperation with India. But his words have not been matched by complementary actions on the ground.
- Owing to the pressure on/across the LC, the Pak DGMO has sought a ceasefire, though without any cessation of infiltration attempts.
- The 23rd Track II dialogue held recently in Kathmandu, did note some thaw in a group of Indian journalists being invited to 7 Division Headquarters at Mirānshāh, North Waziristan, an unthinkable proposition till now<sup>1</sup>.
- For the first time, India and Pakistan are taking part in a multination counterterror exercise in Russia to be held in September 2018 under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation<sup>2</sup>. Of course, the irony would not be lost, of Pakistan, one of the main sponsors of terrorism, participating in a counter-terror exercise!
- There have been some misgivings in Pakistan about the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative of China, though it is an overall robust relationship.
- And lastly, this is election season both in Pakistan in 2018 and India in 2018/19, so major initiatives will have to await the new governments, especially in India. On the contrary, the election season can raise the rhetoric from either side.

### *The Way Forward to Peace between India and Pakistan*

If North and South Korea can talk peace, if Trump and Kim Jong-un can meet, why cannot India and Pakistan?

The key to this, of course, lies with the Pakistan Army, since its full subordination to civilian leadership in Pakistan is unlikely for the foreseeable future.

So far, the Pakistan Army has used the Kashmir issue not only to try and change the status quo with India but also to cement its predominant role domestically, as the ultimate guarantor and protector of Pakistan. Surely a realisation must dawn, sooner than later, that Pakistan is hurting itself more than it hurts India. It is not difficult for Pakistan to see the writing on the wall. There is no way that Pakistan can match India economically and militarily, and therefore, changing the status quo in Kashmir is well beyond its capabilities.

Ashley Tellis, writing for 'Carnegie Endowment for International Peace' on September 20, 2017 says: "Great Power mediation is not an alternative for peace either, since the United States lacks the means to alter Pakistan's strategic calculus and China lacks the desire<sup>3</sup>." This line of thinking itself dims the chances of peace. For too long, the United States has mollicoddled Pakistan and turned a blind eye to its active support for terrorism and terrorist activity emanating from its soil. It is time to call Pakistan's bluff and put the requisite pressure to make Pakistan's Army stop its support for terrorism directed at India, as also against Afghanistan. President Trump has shown his willingness to take hard decisions and this is one such issue whose time has come.

China, of course, sees strategic gains in tying down India through Pakistan. However, as India-China dialogue matures, India must seek a change in China's support for Pakistan, especially Pakistan's support for terrorism directed against India. Support for China's OBOR initiative can be linked to this.

The way forward is to develop a comprehensive approach to deal with Pakistan. Piecemeal attempts have not worked so far. Therefore, the recommended approach is a soft option, through dialogue and if that does not work, use a hard option, for which we should remain prepared. The choice should clearly be for Pakistan to make.

There are many initiatives that India can take vis-à-vis Pakistan and many have been tried earlier. A new initiative will be to commence defence cooperation and dialogue between the armed forces. Despite the contradictions, there is the commonality of the uniform and this has been seen to work, whenever the two forces have worked together, as in UN Peacekeeping Missions. Way back in 2009, as Directorate General of Perspective Planning, one had put up a proposal to the Vice Chief of Indian Army to seek government approval to lead a delegation to Pakistan, to commence a dialogue and carry an invitation for the Pakistan Army Chief to visit India. Of course, the proposal did not make it beyond the offices of the Indian Army, but I am convinced the time is now ripe to take such an initiative. We have to realise that the dialogue with civil counterparts has proved counterproductive; even the United States relies more on the military-to-military dialogue, clearly recognising the pivotal position of the Pakistan Army in strategic affairs.

The contours of such a dialogue, leading to cooperation between the two defence forces should start with small steps to enhance confidence-building measures (CBMs) between the two armies. The supposedly good rapport between the two National Security Advisors can also be used to trigger this process. India, so far, has not optimised the value of 'defence cooperation', except in a superficial manner. The results are there to see in the Indo-Nepal relations, where despite a very close relationship between the two armies, this was not used in any meaningful manner to arrest the deterioration. The same also holds true of most of our other neighbours. It is time India gets over its reservations in optimising the role of the defence forces in furthering our foreign

policy and security objectives. A question that arises is how the two countries will reconcile their differing stance on Kashmir. Any pragmatic assessment of the issue points to the only way forward that is, freezing the current situation and gradually opening the frontiers for greater people-to-people and economic cooperation; this was the main theme at the Agra Summit too. Despite India's stance, the present status may be acceptable, though, for Pakistan, it will mean a climb down from an unachievable position, a fact clearly understood by Musharraf at the Agra Summit. The army-to-army dialogue should clearly help disabuse Pakistan of its unachievable, dangerous dreams.

While the peace process is ongoing, India should continue with its tough stance on the LC, repaying any infringement by Pakistan with interest. Similarly, there should be no slackening in the counter terrorist operations in the hinterland along with an intense campaign to win 'Hearts and Minds', notwithstanding that earlier efforts did not yield the desired results. This will also give a clear signal to Pakistan, that India has offered its hand of friendship from a position of strength, with a genuine desire to give peace a chance.

### **The Hard Option: A Necessary Backup**

In the realm of National Security and Foreign Policy, a singular position may be a recipe for failure. Hence, while pursuing the peace process with Pakistan, India should be prepared for adopting the hard option if all else fails and Pakistan refuses to see reason.

The present state of the armed forces may be summed up as a minimum acceptable state of operational preparedness, certainly not the optimum. The first step, therefore, is to enhance the defence budget to give a boost to defence preparedness and achieve a state which enables India to adopt the hard option against Pakistan, while moving from dissuasion to deterrence capability against China, within a period of 3-5 years. This will also convey a clear signal to Pakistan to either choose peace or be prepared to face the consequences of its continued support to terrorism

against India. The buildup of capabilities should be focused to complement the proposed military strategy and operational plans. Integration of the defence forces and the Ministry of Defence should also be part of this plan, while laying the framework for integrated theatre commands. The Defence Planning Committee has its task cut out on this score.

### **Jus Ad Bellum**

Latin for 'right to war' is a set of criteria that is to be considered for engaging in a war. This includes legitimacy, last resort, right intention and so forth. In practice, however, this justification has come to be viewed as 'right of the strong' as exemplified by actions in Serbia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Crimea and Syria. As far as India is concerned, adequate justification exists for responding to Pakistan's proxy war; we have a very strong case for taking an appropriate hard action against Pakistan to convey the intent to defend ourselves, as also punish the perpetrators.

### **Outline Concept**

The basis of the concept is a clear enunciation of political will to convey to Pakistan and the rest of the world that terrorist/other violent acts against India will no longer remain a 'cost-free option'. This can be conveyed through a strong declaratory policy, without any ambiguity and more importantly, followed up by strong action.

All elements of national power should be included to create varied response options on the escalatory ladder. The options should be war-gamed and rehearsed and a lead agency nominated, so that the chosen option can be put into effect on short notice.

We should be prepared for any escalation, while ensuring that control of the escalatory ladder rests with us, with the onus of escalation resting on Pakistan, with attendant costs. Despite misgivings, some well founded, it is necessary and also possible to maintain an effective control on the escalatory ladder. Pakistan's trigger happiness and high bluff have to be called sometimes. The results may not be as alarming

as are stated and usually become a fig leaf for our lack of response.

### **Response Options**

There are both non-military instruments as well as military instruments of response. The military options cover both overt and covert capabilities and range from the low end to medium intensity, to high-end options involving the combined might of the armed forces.

It is not the aim of this paper to go into details of the available military responses, suffice it to reiterate that the armed forces of India are mandated to protect the nation through 'deterrence' and where deterrence fails, by use of force as may be necessary. The political leadership must show the will and empower the armed forces with the requisite resources to fulfil their mandate.

### **The Nuclear Backdrop**

Pakistan perceives that its nuclear capability is a strategic equaliser to balance the extant power asymmetry and to deter India from waging a full-scale conventional war, even as Pakistan continues to pursue its proxy war against India. This presumption of Pakistan is flawed and akin to a dangerous gamble and bluff. Deterrence is a matter of perception and Pakistan has been deliberately trying to project an image of irrationality. This can only work if we fall prey to this thesis and not call Pakistan's bluff.

Development of tactical nuclear weapons by Pakistan is another dimension to their strategy, which is clearly negated by India's nuclear doctrine of 'massive retaliation'. It can only succeed if we deter ourselves or show lack of resolve. Therefore, there exists adequate space, on an escalatory continuum to respond to Pakistan's provocations, using a range of capabilities and options at our disposal. The ball clearly is in India's court.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, India has shown immense patience in dealing with Pakistan, even to the extent of being labelled a soft state. Pakistan has refused to see the writing on the wall and continues with its low-cost,

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high-risk proxy war against India. The ongoing impasse is bleeding both nations, more so Pakistan. India must resolve to end the status quo through a renewed peace initiative, also utilising the Indian Army to lead a defence dialogue to establish CBMs and defence cooperation. This must be backed by a

comprehensive plan to cut Pakistan to size if it refuses to see reason, using the might of the armed forces, for which clear directions and budgetary support must be provided. Hopefully, the seriousness of our intent may spur Pakistan to grasp our hand of friendship before it is too late.

### Notes

1. Ashok Mehta, "Can India-Pak Improve Ties?," *DNA*, June 12, 2018.
2. "India, Pakistan to Carry Out Military Drills as Part of Multi-Nation Exercise," *Times of India*, April 29, 2018.
3. Ashley Tellis, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace," September 20, 2017.

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*The contents of this Issue Brief are based on the analysis of material accessed from open sources and are the personal views of the author. It may not be quoted as representing the views or policy of the Government of India or Integrated Headquarters of MoD (Army).*



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