

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

Pakistan

August (1-15) 2016

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FORTNIGHTLY REPORT ON PAKISTAN

August 1-15, 2016

This report is based on the reading of Pakistani media during the last two weeks.

India-Pakistan Relations

Pakistani establishment's support to anti-India jihadi and terrorist outfits is well-known and documented. Historically, Pakistan has never missed an opportunity to take advantage of any untoward development in Kashmir. Having termed the Hizb militant Burhan Muzaffar Wani a martyr, Pakistan has not only accused India of state terrorism, it has also instructed its envoys in key capitals and multilateral international institutions to sell this narrative and project India in a negative light. This has caused further tension in an already strained India-Pakistan relationship.

As if this was not enough, Pakistan let loose indigenous terrorist outfits to protest during Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to Islamabad for the SAARC conference. It was natural for Mr Singh to raise the issues concerning security and stability of the South Asian region. However, Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhury Nisar Ali Khan countered by accusing India of perpetrating state terrorism in Kashmir and decided not to attend the lunch he was hosting in the most inappropriate manner possible forcing Minister Singh to abruptly end his visit and rush back to India.

After such impolite move, Sartaj Aziz, Nawaz Sharif's Advisor on Foreign Affairs, came up with a feeler for foreign secretary level dialogue with India. In a press conference in Islamabad, he indicated that Pakistan's foreign secretary would soon write a letter to his Indian counterpart for holding talks on Kashmir. India responded positively but emphasised on resolution of issues related to terrorism first if the talks were to be meaningful. This is in line with Indian stance that for talks to be meaningful and result-oriented Pakistan has to take concrete steps to address Indian concerns on terrorism. However, there was no let-up in Pakistani sponsorship of terror as the situation in Kashmir indicated.

The Panama Paper Controversy

There is no respite for top PML-N leadership on the issue of Panama leaks. Opposition parties left no stone unturned to bring Nawaz family under scanner by establishing an independent inquiry commission. While Nawaz must be feeling relieved that they were not coming together on their plans to agitate on a combined platform against his government's hesitation to oblige the opposition over the issue, even separate rallies and sit-ins by Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri are going to worry him a lot. The PPP has announced to hold a separate rally in September but it has so far kept itself away from both Imran and Qadri.

Imran Khan in his Tehreek-e-Ehtesab Rally severely criticised the PML-N leadership and argued that the Ehtesab (accountability) rally was only a trailer and he would mobilise people on the streets till Nawaz agrees for the probe on Panama-gate, rather than set up a judicial commission, as Nawaz is suggesting, to probe all such past cases, including Panama-gate. There is no doubt that Nawaz government, despite being cornered, is not taking adequate measures to address the concerns of the opposition. However, there is no popular appetite for dharnas and rallies at the moment as can be seen from Imran's thinly attended meetings these days. A lot would depend on the popular response to the upcoming rally by PPP in the coming month. At the moment, it is obvious that the party is divided over its strategy and the top leadership (Zardari and Khurshid Ahmed Shah) are soft on Nawaz, while Aitzaz Ahshan and to certain extent, Bilawal, are quite combative over the issue.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The media, both English and vernacular, is busy advertising the success of \$46 billion CPEC and there is a strong sense of optimism about it in both civilian and military corridors of power. Right from the beginning, Pakistan has been propagating the project as a solution to all the economic and developmental problems it is facing for years. Recent reports in the media suggested that there was a substantial rise in the number of Chinese visitors to Pakistan, which has gone up 37 folds in the first half of 2016. The media would say that these visitors

not only come as tourists, but also as businessmen having an interest in investing in the projects associated with the CPEC. Pakistan has already raised a special security division, composed of 9,000 soldiers from the army and 6,000 personnel from the paramilitary forces, to protect both Chinese nationals and the CPEC projects. Besides, Punjab government has decided to appoint at least 5,000 officials for the security of foreigners (read Chinese engineers working in the province). All these efforts show that Pakistan is relying too much on the success of CPEC to get out of the economic mess it is in.

The Karachi Operation

Pakistan Rangers, a para-military force, has been conducting operations in the port city Karachi against the terrorists and criminal elements since the beginning of the Operation Zarb-e-Azb (June 2014). The Rangers had been given special powers to raid and arrest those involved in terrorist and criminal activities. Under the garb of these operations, Pakistan military took it as an opportunity to target the MQM, a dominant political party in urban Sindh, especially in Karachi. This has fueled tensions among the political stakeholders on the one hand and led to civil-military tension on the other. The PPP-led government in Sindh did not want to grant extension to Rangers and sought to attach certain conditions with it. The tension between the provincial and central governments came to the fore when the Interior Ministry notified Rangers' stay in Sindh with special powers in Karachi whereas the provincial government notified immediately afterwards that the Rangers would need the provincial Chief Secretary's nod for raids on any provincial government office.

The Afghan Theatre

Amid tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan over fencing the official crossing points, Pakistan along with China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan launched a Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCM) to counter terrorism in the region. The armed forces of these countries met in Urumqi (China) on August 3, 2016 to devise a multilateral mechanism to counter the threats posed by terrorism. This is an interesting development because at least two neighbouring countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan) have been regularly

accusing each other of sheltering the terrorist groups operating in the other country. Given the history of state-sponsored terrorism in the region, the success of such initiatives would depend on the sincerity of the governments concerned to address the central issue of terrorism which is worrying the region as a whole.

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