

IDSA

Policy Brief

Return the Favour with a Thousand Cuts: India's Pakistan Policy

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S*ummary*

The current policy is based on the premise that Pakistan is unlikely to change its policy of sponsoring terrorism given the vested interests of the Pakistan Army. This led to the conclusion that unless India hurts the principal architect of Pakistan's Kashmir policy, that is, the Army, terrorism would continue unabated, with only minor adjustments to tailor violence in response to the severity of Indian and international reactions. There is little doubt within the Indian policy making elite that the Pakistan Army remains the bulwark of an anti-India policy and more so the policy on Kashmir. It was also clear that the planning, preparation, facilitation and execution of terrorism in J&K could not be accomplished without the active support and involvement of the Pakistan Army. Under these circumstances, it was reasoned that India needed to create the requisite leverages against the Pakistan Army in order curb terrorism.

During the last couple of years, India has recalibrated its policy towards Pakistan by adopting a two-pronged approach. One prong consists of not holding formal talks until Pakistan stops using terrorism as an instrument of state policy against India.¹ And the second prong involves retaining the right of retaliation against those elements and locations along the Line of Control (LoC) that are complicit in perpetrating cross border terrorism.² In essence, India's aim has been to gain leverage over Pakistan by striking it where it hurts the most.

This policy has been critiqued in recent weeks. Some critics have ascribed “political motives” to the policy and described the military measures along the LoC as “disproportionate bombardment”. Others have questioned the “political purpose of force application.” And some others have highlighted the potential for “conflict escalation” as a result of the rapid increase in ceasefire violations.³

But what the critics ignore is the fact that the genesis of the existing policy lay in the repeated failures of past endeavours of successive governments to stop Pakistan from employing terrorism as an instrument of state policy through bilateral talks alone. They also seem to suggest that talks and terrorism can co-exist and argue that India must lower the escalation in firing along the LoC even if that allows Pakistan to regain leverage.

This brief assesses the options that were available to India and the basis for adopting the current proactive approach in light of the limitations of the previous policy. It also suggests additional measures to enhance the effectiveness of the current policy.

India's Previous Approach to Cross Border Terrorism

India's struggle against Pakistan-sponsored cross border terrorism in J&K began almost three decades ago. The broad identifiable policy adopted by India for most of these three decades centred around stopping infiltration from across the LoC and negotiating a mutually acceptable political settlement. The above external prong of India's policy was accompanied domestically by an attempt to reduce terrorist

¹ P. Ram Mohan, “No talks, till Pakistan stops backing terror says Rajnath Singh”, *The Hindu*, September 18, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/no-talks-till-pakistan-stops-backing-terror-says-rajnath/article19705926.ece>, accessed on March 17, 2018.

² “Indian army strikes again demolishes Pakistani posts sheltering terrorists across LoC”, *Financial Times*, May 23, 2017, <http://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/india-retaliates-against-pakistan-army-says-punitive-fire-assaults-being-undertaken-across-loc/681717/>, accessed on March 17, 2018.

³ Happymon Jacob, “The strategy of conflict”, *The Hindu*, March 16, 2018, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-strategy-of-conflict/article23264085.ece?homepage=true>, accessed on March 17, 2018; Prakash Menon, “The toll of revenge”, *The Indian Express*, March 7, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/pakistan-ceasefire-violation-line-of-control-jammu-and-kashmir-5088543/>, accessed on March 17, 2018; and Happymon Jacob, “The unquiet front”, *The Indian Express*, February 8, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-unquiet-front-5055338/>, accessed on March 17, 2018.

violence within J&K and reinvigorate the political process and state administrative machinery with a view to limiting the adverse impact of violence.

This policy did indeed meet with some success. J&K witnessed a series of popular elections, arguably with appreciable levels of support for the re-establishment of the political process.⁴ This has been accompanied by a substantial drop in violence levels over the years, with 2012 representing the lowest point, although there has been a marginal upsurge during the last four years (See Table). The state machinery has been successful in establishing its writ. However, despite these successes at the domestic level, the Pakistan factor, both at the diplomatic and military levels, has proved largely intractable, with only limited gains accruing in terms of desultory and superficial action by Pakistan against terrorist groups operating from its soil. Its recent decision to add United Nations proscribed groups to its domestic list of terror entities and freezing of their assets is a case in point.⁵ Immediately, thereafter, this measure was diluted by the failure to build strong legal cases against terrorist leaders, despite their obvious and vocal support for terrorism, which prevented their prosecution.

Violence in J&K: 2013-2017

Year	Incidents of Violence	SF Killed	Civilians Killed	Terrorists Killed
2013	170	53	15	67
2014	222	47	28	110
2015	208	39	17	108
2016	322	82	15	150
2017	342	80	37* (*Up to December 10, of which 12 have been killed along the LoC in Pakistan's ceasefire violations ⁶)	213

Source: Annual Report, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Lok Sabha Questions⁷

⁴ The last assembly elections in 2014 witnessed an electoral turnout of 65.52 per cent. See "Statistical Report on General Election 2014 to Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir", *Election Commission of India*, New Delhi, http://eci.nic.in/eci_main/StatisticalReports/AE2014/Stat-Report-J&K-2014.pdf, accessed on March 17, 2018.

⁵ Mubashir Zaidi, "Pakistan issues notice against donations to terror groups", *The Hindu*, January 6, 2018, www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-issues-notice-against-donations-to-terror-groups/article22387315.ece, accessed on March 21, 2018.

⁶ "Unstarred question number 629, *Lok Sabha*, December 19, 2017, <http://164.100.47.190/loksabhaquestions/annex/13/AU679.pdf>, accessed on March 19, 2018.

⁷ "Unstarred question number 581: Lok Sabha", *Ministry of Home Affairs*, February 6, 2018, <https://mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2018-pdfs/ls-06022018-English/581.pdf>, accessed on March 17, 2018, Unstarred question Number 621, December 19, 2017, <http://mha1.nic.in/par2013/par2017-pdfs/ls-19122017/621.pdf>, accessed on March 19, 2018 and "Annual Report 2016-2017", *Ministry of Home Affairs*, https://mha.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mha/files/anual_report_18082017.pdf, accessed on March 17, 2018, p. 6.

This failure to deal with the external Pakistan factor is mainly a function of the Pakistan Army's unwillingness to resolve the Kashmir issue. The Army has emerged as the self-designated custodian of Pakistan's destiny, unity and ideology. It has sustained its grip on power and influence because of the widespread perception and propaganda that India is an existential threat. India's role in the humiliating division of Pakistan in 1971 and its establishment of control over the Siachen Glacier since 1984 have remained key elements in the Army's narrative. However, the most evocative factor remains J&K's accession to India, which is anathema for Pakistan both from a religious and territorial perspective. The institutionalised investment made to sustain the rhetoric of India as an existential threat, however artificial it may be, remains too high a cost to pay for the Pakistan Army to settle Kashmir. In the absence of such a settlement, the policy of sustaining terrorism, given existing deterrence at the strategic level, ensures suitable leverage against India at an acceptable cost as well as the retention of domestic influence for the army.

The inability or unwillingness to respond robustly to Pakistan's persistent use of terrorism has led to repeated characterisations of India as a soft state. Over a period of time, this sentiment strengthened leading to demands for a different approach.

Options Available to India

India had two options to deal with Pakistan's continued use of terrorism in J&K. One approach was "more of the same" of what had been practised since the late 1980s. This implied continued talks with Pakistan despite occasional terrorist strikes interrupted by short lulls marked by "no-talk" statements aimed at assuaging public sentiment. Simultaneously, a posture of offensive-defence would be maintained along the LoC, which would limit infiltration and retain moral ascendancy against the Pakistan Army. Such a course of action would be sustained in the hope that Pakistan would eventually realise the folly of employing terrorism as state policy, given its domestic blowback effect, as well as growing international aversion. That would in turn lead to a political settlement acceptable to both countries.

The second policy option available to India was based on the premise that Pakistan is unlikely to change its policy of sponsoring terrorism given the vested interests of the Pakistan Army. This led to the conclusion that unless India could hurt the principal architect of Pakistan's Kashmir policy, that is, the Army, terrorism would continue unabated, with only minor adjustments to tailor violence in response to the severity of Indian and international reactions. There is little doubt within the Indian policy making elite that the Pakistan Army remains the bulwark of an anti-India policy and more so the policy on Kashmir. It was also clear that the planning, preparation, facilitation and execution of terrorism in J&K could not be accomplished without the active support and involvement of the Pakistan Army. Under these

circumstances, it was reasoned that India needed to create the requisite leverages against the Pakistan Army in order curb terrorism.

Contours of the Existing Policy

As a result, the last couple of years have witnessed an evolution in India's approach towards Pakistan and its employment of terrorism as an instrument of policy. The new approach closely reflects the second option discussed above. There are three clear elements in this approach. First, the security forces will neutralise terrorists not only inside India but also target the perpetrators of terrorism across the LoC. Given that the government was convinced of the Pakistan Army's complicity, actions were undertaken along the LoC to punish the posts that were an integral element of Pakistan's terrorist actions against India.

It was expected that there would be Pakistani military retaliation to the same, which could raise the existing threshold of weapons and quantum of force employed along the LoC. However, the decision itself was premised on sound fundamentals. One, India possessed the ability to gain a military advantage over Pakistan along the LoC, irrespective of the level of escalation, something that had been accomplished in the past as well prior to the ceasefire in 2003. Two, there existed an understanding of the escalation ladder and adequate measures were taken to cater for the same. This understanding included the limits beyond which Pakistan was unlikely to go, despite disproportionate punishment by India. Most important, the option of a conventional war as an escalatory step by Pakistan was calculated as unlikely, given its repeated failures in 1965, 1971 and 1999 as well as the conventional superiority enjoyed by India. Pakistan's experience of force application against India through four wars and beyond indicates that the calibrated use of terrorism, supported by strategic deterrence, limits India's conventional military options and thereby allows Pakistan to retain the strategic advantage of bleeding India. It therefore has no reason to take a retrograde step towards the failed model of waging a conventional war against India.

The first element of the current policy was not formulated in isolation. It was accompanied by a declaratory information regime aimed at making public the fundamentals of India's response across the LoC, along with comparative casualties on both sides. This approach is unlike that adopted by the Pakistan Army, which has chosen to hide its own casualties. Inputs based on intercepts suggest that a substantially higher proportion of casualties had been incurred by the Pakistan Army during these cross-LoC actions.⁸ The information component of conflict is a critical

⁸ "Indian Army killed 138 Pak soldiers in 2017: Reports", *The Quint*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/indian-army-killed-138-pak-soldiers-in-2017-sources>, accessed on March 19, 2018. According to inputs, the Pakistan Army suffered 138 personnel killed, as compared with 28 soldiers of the Indian Army who lost their lives.

factor in shaping perceptions. In this case, the decision to go public helped assuage public sentiment within India. It limited the concern that the country was a passive victim of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The ownership of surgical strikes was an example of this approach, as were cross LoC fire assaults on Pakistan Army posts. As a result, there was public acknowledgement of a robust counter-strategy of bleeding the Pakistan Army through a thousand cuts. The Pakistan Army could no longer get away with employing terrorists as cannon fodder, as punitive action was being initiated against it by India, unlike in the past. For once, strikes across the LoC were not necessarily reactive, but under changing circumstances these were also pre-emptive and punitive. The vulnerability and cost paid by the Pakistan Army was also brought to the notice of Pakistanis, thus denting the tales of one-sided superiority that had been peddled for long.

Second, other than discrete back channel processes, after the initial attempts at initiating talks, there was no attempt at formally offering talks to Pakistan.⁹ This was aimed at drawing the line between Pakistan's desire to hold talks and simultaneously employ terrorism. In effect, India rejected negotiations under the shadow of a gun. Further, doubts regarding the Pakistan Army's sincerity in seeking a solution were reinforced by its repeated sabotage of peace initiatives. This did not merely occur in the aftermath of Vajpayee's Lahore bus diplomacy in the form of Kargil, but also happened after Modi's late December 2015 visit to Pakistan in the form of the Pathankot attack in early January 2016.¹⁰

Third, India has made a concerted attempt to expose Pakistan's complicity in employing terrorism as state policy.¹¹ For instance, the Delhi declaration with 10 ASEAN countries issued in January 2018 mentioned the "cross border movement of terrorists" in an obvious reference to Pakistan, which was a departure from the 2012 statement.¹² Earlier, the 2017 BRICS statement included the LeT and JeM as terrorist groups of concern.¹³ These efforts were supplemented by Pakistan's inability

⁹ "India confirms reports of NSA-Level meet with Pakistan in Bangkok", *The Quint*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.thequint.com/news/politics/india-pakistan-nsa-meet-kulbhushan-jadhav>, accessed on March 19, 2018.

¹⁰ Rahul Bedi and Philip Sherwell, "Indian air base raid and consular attack aimed at sabotaging talks with Pakistan, analysts say", *The Telegraph*, January 4, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/12080725/Indian-air-base-raid-and-consulate-attack-aimed-at-sabotaging-talks-with-Pakistan-analysts-say.html>, accessed on March 21, 2018.

¹¹ Elizabeth Roche, "BRICS declaration names Pakistan-based terror groups in diplomatic victory for India", *livemint*, September 4, 2018, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/qGrkGqzoC99RAme9nmjpdP/Brics-2017-Nations-voice-concern-over-terror-groups-includ.html>, accessed on March 19, 2018.

¹² "Delhi Declaration of the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations", *Ministry of External Affairs*, January 25, 2018, <http://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29386/Delhi+Declaration+of+the+ASEANIndia+Commemorative+Summit+to+mark+the+25th+Anniversary+of+ASEANIndia+Dialogue+Relations>, accessed on March 21, 2018.

¹³ Sutirtho Patranobis, "Brics 2017: Summit declaration names Lashkar, Jaish as terror concerns", *Hindustan Times*, September 05, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-win-for->

to rein in terrorist groups, which have preached the message of hate, collected funds and undertaken strikes with impunity from within Pakistan. This was recently acknowledged by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an independent regulatory body which guides anti-money laundering (AML) and countering terrorist finance (CFT) procedures. The FATF's identification of Pakistan as a country with a poor implementation record that required monitoring is a case in point. Worse, unlike in the case of other countries, this identification was related more to Pakistan's refusal to curb terror funding rather than procedural lapses. Such a public humiliation reinforced the growing distrust among the international community about Pakistan and its double-speak on countering terrorism.¹⁴

Reinforcing the Existing Policy

The success of the existing policy is evident from Pakistan Army's targeting of civilian areas across the LoC, in a desperate bid to put pressure on India and stall the ongoing punitive military actions. In order to obviate this challenge and further strengthen the current policy, four additional measures could be undertaken. First, it is in India's interest to remain focused on a single threat, even as other potential adversaries are managed and threats or misunderstandings mitigated. There is therefore a need to introspect the strategic advantage of repeated references to threats on multiple fronts. While preparation for an adverse situation is inherent to national security management, a distinction must be made between competitors and adversaries. Further, it must remain a conscious endeavour to eliminate the potential and possibility of addressing challenges on multiple fronts, rather than being forced to prepare for them. Not doing so would lead to existing resources being spread far too thin to have a substantive impact on any front.

Second, the internal situation in Kashmir can function both as a catalyst and dampener for Pakistan's ability to create instability. It remains imperative that the initiative to nominate an interlocutor is strengthened and taken forward to especially address the youth of the state. An increase in local recruitment remains a cause for concern and deserves urgent attention.

Third, the viability of Special Forces operations is based on their capability development and ambiguity of employment. While taking ownership of operations like the surgical strikes may have been an information campaign masterstroke, any further dissemination of operational information can adversely impact future options. Special Forces operations must also be supplemented by special operations. These should be developed on the basis of capabilities that extend beyond the armed

[india-brics-statement-names-let-jaish-as-terror-concerns-clubs-them-with-islamic-state/story-Yage9hN02IWLnwXt9twFeK.html](https://www.dawn.com/news/1391593), accessed on March 21, 2018.

¹⁴ "Alone at FATF", *Dawn*, February 25, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1391593>, accessed on March 19, 2018.

forces and exploit the complete sub-conventional spectrum available. Terrorist group leadership is one set of targets that must remain within the operational spectrum of such capacity development.

Fourth, one of the regrettable fallouts of Pakistan's ceasefire violations has been its targeting of villages along the LoC, which could increase further if the Indian Army were to persist with the policy of hitting Pakistan Army posts. Civilian suffering can be obviated by relocating villages in the direct line of fire of the Pakistan Army (mostly on the Pakistani side of mother ridge within 500 to 1500 meters of the LoC) by acquiring this land at generous terms and facilitating the resettlement of the villagers. Further, the creation of family bunkers along the IB sector in J&K may also have to be considered, given past experience of ceasefire violations by the Pakistan Army and its indiscriminate targeting of villages. These steps would help sustain the current policy without adversely affecting the local population.

Any shift in policy, especially one that addresses an area as sensitive and critical as India's approach towards Pakistan, is likely to remain emotive. There are bound to be differences of opinions, as evident from the critiques of the policy. However, any policy adopted must not merely aim at limiting the costs of terrorism emanating from Pakistan but must also provide an opportunity to create necessary leverages that can be employed to curb the Pakistan Army's addiction to cross border terrorism.

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