



“The Post-Balakot Challenge”

(This editorial is based on the article [“The Post-Balakot Challenge”](#) which appeared in the “Indian Express” on 11th March 2019. The article talks about India’s marked departure from its traditional response to Pakistan based terrorism)

In the aftermath of recent Pulwama attack and the events set in motion by it, the nation has witnessed an increased demand to reshape India-Pakistan relations.

The ties between India-Pakistan are not only linked to India’s external interest but also address nation’s politics and social equation.

The domestic environment could well be understood through the prevalent reflexes of political parties, absence of serious discussion on Pakistani reality, and focusing on the politicisation of the entire episode.

However amidst all the charged up emotional response from national media houses and people, root cause of the problem, that is tackling terrorism has gone unnoticed.

Pakistan as a Terror Launch Pad

- Pakistan has always refused any involvement in the region’s instability due to terrorism or it acting as a safe haven to terrorism.
- However it continues to remain a safe haven for terrorist organisations such as Jaish-e-Mohammad, Jammāt-ud-dawa which continues to operate in Pakistan unabatedly.
- Terrorist outfits have launched multiple attacks on Indian soil ranging from 2001 parliament attack, 26/11 Mumbai attack, and Uri attack in 2016 to the latest Pulwama attack in February 2019.
- This attitude of shirking away from its responsibility has changed with Indian government building international pressure on Pakistani dispensation and providing proofs to both international community as well as Pakistani government wherever required.
- International community too believes that Pakistan does harbour terrorist groups that act against India irrespective of whether the state facilitates them or not.

India’s Traditional Response

- India’s most preferred and usual response has always been one of defence.
- Outraged Indian sentiment has often been cooled down through sheer diplomacy and political management.
- India has resorted to composite dialogue to promote cooperation, address outstanding issues and handle humanitarian concerns.
- Indian conventional military considerations are belittled by Pakistan’s nuclear threat overhang, paralysing any efforts towards military escalation.
- Indian government has never considered the terrorism problem as a strategic challenge and has looked at it from the cross border infiltration angle.
- Steps such as withdrawing Pakistan’s status of most favoured nation, denial of visas to sports teams and the decision to use all the waters of the eastern rivers under the Indus Water Treaty

have done little to no change in Pakistani stand.

Entering a New Phase

- The post – Uri attack surgical strikes had marked a major shift in India’s response to Pakistani terror.
- Indian military action in Pakistan controlled territory to destroy terrorist launch pad was seen as a major strategic win as it provided Pakistan an opportunity to deny them and therefore, limiting any possibility of military escalation.
- It comes at the cost of **erosion of Pakistan’s nuclear overhang doctrine**, with India downplaying any threat from its nuclear capable neighbour.
- Air force strikes in Balakot are even a one step further in India’s resolve to eliminate any foreign based terror camp as it not only crossed LOC but entered Pakistan mainland (**the area falls about 50 km from the LoC and 81 km away from Uri, Jammu and Kashmir**).
- India called these strikes as non-military pre-emptive strike, with no intention on hitting military establishment and causing any civilian casualties.
- Indian strikes marked not only the first intentional crossing by the IAF since the 1971 war between the two countries, but the first-ever use of conventional airpower by one nuclear-armed state against the territory of another nuclear-armed state.

Challenges

- Despite the breaking away from its traditional past there is no clarity if the new approach has been clearly defined with fully understanding the ramifications of engaging with a nuclear power.
- India **should not understate the possibility of full blown conventional war**, and should exercise logical constraint in escalating things on military scale.
- Instant Pakistani retaliation through counter air strikes challenges the **potency of such measures**.
- Despite getting a favourable all round response from global world, India’s giant neighbour China has maintained its silence on terrorism with emphasising the importance of nation’s sovereignty.
- Pakistan often under international pressure takes **short term steps such as banning terrorist outfits** however these organisations continue to operate under different names and continue getting foreign funding.

Way Forward

- India in order to end cross border terrorism has to start considering the issue as a strategic challenge and use all elements of national power in sustained manner over a long period.
- India should continue its recent **policy of active engagement** as all the previous measures however effective in bringing down Indian anger have done little in moderating Pakistani thinking or action.
- **India should insist on complete eradication of terrorist launch pads** and banning of terrorist outfits used for perpetrating crime and attacks on India from Pakistani soil before resuming any dialogue.
- India should build **international pressure and ensure a crack down on the funding** of these institutions.
- India should be clear about its position towards terrorism and should **project the same to international community** emphasising India’s drying patience towards Pakistani terrorist misadventure.
- There is a **need to ensure a serious rethinking of India-Pakistan relationship** which should look forward to India’s interest and at the same time avoid any war-like aggression which is disastrous for India.

