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INDIAN SHIFT FROM REACTIVE TO PROACTIVE DOCTRINE

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There was yet another terrorist attack on the Indian security forces on 14 Feb 2019 in the troubled Jammu and Kashmir. The objectives of the proxy war waged by the Pakistan continue to be undiluted in its scope and dimensions. The vehicle bound suicide bomber terror attack has, surely, enhanced the ante to next level by increasing the insecurities and concomitant need to deploy larger forces for the area protection and military movements. The terror model appears to be similar to what was witnessed during OP PAWAN by the IPKF in Sri Lanka and a daily spectacle in Afghanistan and Syrian theatres.

There is a commonality of jihad as the central fabric of the rebellious defiance as the expression of political Islam in multiple corners of the world. In case of South Asia, it is getting clearer by the day that US would be vacating the strategic space soon to the benefit of Taliban in Afghanistan. In that, Pakistan with their known complicity with Taliban is expected to replicate Afghan model as she had done in 1990 to give a boost to the insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Accordingly, it is unlikely to be the last such episode, hence a warning bell of Afghan connect to the Indian security. Therefore, unless the Pakistan is tamed well in time it will be too late to manage the security situation in the region. Hence, need to review our strategy which is primarily defensive in its construct.

The conduct of Pulwama attack with its professional planning & preparation, resources and time & place of its execution does not take much of analysis that its perpetrators were not riff- raff local, amateurs. It has clear foot prints of the Pakistani army and claimed by the JEM as their handiwork, an old pattern seen earlier also. Pakistan has portrayed it as an act of indigenous defiance, there by denying their involvement and consequent international criticism. It appears to be an act to provoke India into escalating the military ante, thereby facilitating Pakistan to play as victim of Indian hegemony, if it so happens.

In all probability it was designed to provide an excuse for Pakistan not to provide military support to the US in their Afghan commitment with their national security under threat on their Eastern borders. Pakistan is unlikely to act against Taliban looking at their interests in the post US draw down scenario. So, the timings, location and dimension of attack are all chosen for its tactical import all the way to serve Pakistani political purposes. It is a master stroke by Pakistan and shows their acumen to exploit their military geography and religious afflictions for their national interests.

As far as India is concerned, there is an unprecedented public emotional outburst to avenge the Pakistani misdeeds with electoral implications given the timings of the episode. Apropos, India retaliated at time and place of her choosing at Balakot on 26 Feb calling it a non-military strike as the target of IAF happened to be a militant camp and not a Pakistani military establishment. The operation achieved total surprise wherein the intended target was effectively engaged without any loss. The selection of the target was most appropriate given the diplomatic sensitivities regarding such trans-border intrusions. It had full justification and a kind of political checkmate leaving little scope for Pakistan government and the military establishment to play victim as probably intended by tactically timed Pulwama episode.

Pakistan in such a situation had a choice to accept the Indian air strike as a *fait accompli*, or escalate the ante by military retaliation. They possibly could not have kept quiet as it would amount to loss of face and acceptance of moral defeat, besides a signal of treachery with the terror outfits nurtured by them as their strategic assets all these years. On the other hand, retaliation by Pakistan had a moral dilemma as there were no non-military targets inside India and if they strike the military targets the onus of escalating the confrontation lies with them.

Nevertheless, Pakistan did retaliate as a compulsion of internal political dynamics to assuage the obvious public emotional outburst. It turned out to be a short aerial fight close to the LC with Pakistani aircrafts firing a missile on Indian defences with no worthwhile damage to life and property. Release of captured Indian pilot within 60 hours as a peace overture by the political hierarchy of Pakistan indicated attempts of no further escalation of the military ante by them. India also on their part has certainly increased the diplomatic and economic pressure on Pakistan, but no further military operations have been launched so far.

However, the military options continue to be talked about by Indian polity as part of coercive diplomacy in case Pakistan doesn't mend their

ways and resort to any military misadventure. Whereas, there seem to be no change in the Pakistani intentions as indicated by continuation of militant activities inside J&K, firing across LC by Pakistani troops, besides reported continued patronage to the JEM chief Azhar Masood by Pakistani establishment. There are reports of preventive detention of few JEM cadres which seem to be a cosmetic exercise to show case sincerity of Pakistan, albeit for PR purposes as has been the case number of times earlier.

The international community appears to be going along India to force Pakistan to stop abetting terrorism emanating from their soil. In that, the US, France, UK and Russia are likely to move a motion in the UNSC to declare JEM chief Azhar Masood as a global terrorist. China, while talking of need to exercise restraint both by India as well as Pakistan to de-escalate the war like situation, has not indicated their stance on this issue so far. Therefore, political and diplomatic ambiguity continues with military overtones as of now in the region.

The pre-emptive air strike by India deep inside Pakistan has conveyed Indian political will to cross the international borders and hit the terror establishments, if required in the national interests. The significance of this action can be assessed by the seriousness of Indian establishment as such options were talked about earlier, but not implemented since last 30 years of militancy. It also displayed a high degree of synergy between diplomacy and military alongside other government agencies under decisive higher political direction. In that, the diplomacy created space for the military to launch operation in the backdrop of international acceptance of their actions. The military showed their resolve and professional capability to execute the assigned tasks effectively and with full confidence.

Pakistan on other hand has been exposed once again due to their obsession for denial of events and indulging in misinformation to mislead the world as well as their own public. Pakistan surely is on back foot due

to their economic condition, diplomatic isolation and ever increasing dissent of their civil society against army directed national policies. Pakistan is also under watch of rest of the civilized world who has politico-economic leverages to create problems for them if good sense does not prevail upon them. The political bluff of using non state actors sans any accountability by Pakistan seem to be getting exposed.

It is time Pakistan sees reason and show more political maturity by mending their ways so as to usher in political harmony in the region for their own national interests. India has literally put them on notice to either roll up their terror sanctuaries, or else face the consequences. India seems to have taken steps to switch from reactive to pro active doctrine by increasing the politico-economic and military pressures on Pakistan. It has to be equally complemented with sincere political initiatives in Kashmir to bring back the section of aggrieved society into the national main stream. Time is ripe to take advantage of favourable diplomatic traction and public opinion, lest we lose the window of opportunity.

Disclaimer: Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.