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### **IS PAK BEING PRESSURIZED TO CHANGE ITS APPROACH TOWARDS INDIA?**

**BY**

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There have suddenly been multiple overtures from Pak to India, seeking to mend fences and recommence dialogue. These have flowed from Imran Khan and the spokesperson of their army, quoting their army chief. During the ground-breaking ceremony of the Kartarpur corridor on the Pak side, in the presence of two Indian Union Ministers, Imran Khan made a statement seeking dialogue. He has repeatedly been stating that India would be hesitant till the elections of May 2019.

In an article in The Dawn on 08 Dec, Irfan Husain a noted columnist of Pak stated, 'Pakistan has more to gain by a resolution of our problems than India does. Our economy is in the doldrums and is barely capable of supporting our huge defence forces. Trade with India would provide a boost to our finances. This is probably the reason the establishment (army) is supportive of this government's effort to normalise ties.' He added 'Today, more than ever, Pakistan is isolated as it has tried to garner support from friends. Even China recommends bilateral talks to sort out the matter.' He ends by stating that even the Soviet Union collapsed largely due to its efforts to match American military spending, hinting the same could be Pak's fate.

Imran Khan in an interview to Washington Post on a question on the Mumbai Terror attacks acknowledged that it was perpetuated by the LeT. He

stated, 'I have asked our government to find out the status of the case. Resolving that case is in our interest because it was an act of terrorism.' He also added that he wants something to be done about the bombers of Mumbai.

When Nawaz stated that the nation is heading for international isolation because of its support to terror groups, the army ensured his removal. When he stated that the attackers for Mumbai were launched from Pakistan, a sedition case was filed against him. It is clearly a changed environment in Pakistan. Pressures are mounting from all directions for it to take steps to resolve its relations with India.

India's increased interaction with Saudi Arabia, especially at a time when the nation faces its worst diplomatic crises would not have been without a reason. India would have requested the Saudi's to impose terms on Pak, as it continues to approach them for aid. Easily, the terms would have been on acting against the Mumbai perpetrators and to pull back from supporting terror groups in Kashmir, especially as May 2019 draws close.

The nation is on a borrowing spree as its economy remains in tatters. The Pak stock market is falling by the day, adding to its economic concerns. Support from Saudi Arabia and China would be insufficient. China is unwilling to provide cash but is willing to invest. This is because China remains aware of the problems likely to be faced by Pak to repay. No economic power is expected to pump in good money knowing it may not be returned easily.

Simultaneously, India has moved forward on its military modernization program. Its signing of the S 400, operationalising of the Arihant, enhancing its artillery fire power has Pak worried. Pak has sought some artillery from China to plug the gap, however it is unlikely to be enough. This has increased the conventional military gap between the two. The US has also blocked the flow of funds and is enhancing pressure on Pak to act against the Taliban, pushing it to the negotiating table.

Imran Khan tried to sound tough when he claimed that Pak would no longer be a hired gun for the US. He is stating that there are no safe havens for the Taliban in their country continues to sound hollow. For Trump to write to Imran seeking his assistance in bringing the Taliban into discussions is evident that the US is aware of where they are based and the truth behind Imran's words.

Pak has been forced to approach the IMF for loans just to survive. The IMF has delayed its interaction till mid Jan, thus pushing Pak deeper into economic crises. The IMF would work in cohorts with the US to force Pak to accept tough terms. Most important would be its binding on Pak to limit its

defence expenditure. While the IMF would insist on Pak meeting the terms and conditions of the FATF, which is right as its ability to repay would drop if it moves into the Black List, it would be other terms, spoken but not listed officially. The IMF has already cancelled the USD 250 Million emergency loan as no agreement could be reached.

Pak is also aware that unless it satisfies the terms and conditions laid down by India, there would never be any forward movement. To meet the first step Imran has demanded action against Mumbai attackers. In a few weeks there would be forward movement on this case, aiming to partially satisfy Indian demands. It would then test the waters to see Indian reactions.

The second condition of stopping cross border terrorism is even more difficult. To convince the heavily radicalised Pak army, especially since India's increased counter actions along the LoC has hurt them, of changing its stated policy is likely to take time. No army chief can officially announce a sudden backing down. What they could consider is slowly reduce the pushing in of terrorists. However, since there is no demand on Pak to stop supporting the Khalistan movement, this is the step which it would adopt, aiming to increase pressure on India, through the demand for Khalistan.

These actions and announcements would not have been made in isolation by Imran. Pak would be forced to realize by nations it considers as its allies that enmity with India would only push it the Soviet way and no nation would continue pumping in funds only to finance its increasing military expenditure. Further, it would only gain stability by coming to terms with India. Enmity with India would only increase its isolationism and weaken its economic structure, pushing it deeper into debt.

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