

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR INDIA TO CHANGE THE CHARACTER OF PAK?

By

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Background

Over the years, despite a collection of ceasefire agreements, violations along the LoC continue to rise. These increased from 152 in 2015 to 820 in 2017. Infiltrating militants killed in 2015 were 30 and in 2017 they were 59. Foiled attempts rose from 18 in 2015 to 33 in 2017 and Indian army soldiers killed in J and K rose from 33 in 2015 to 61 in 2017, which includes 31 along the LoC. This clearly indicates aggressiveness on both sides is on the rise. Indian retaliation would have resulted in many more casualties on Pak side, however, since their army is afraid to release even basic data, fearing loss of face and morale, a clear comparison is not possible.

Every time a soldier loses his life along the Line of Control (LoC), India's heart bleeds. The family loses a son, husband and brother. It would be the same feeling across the border in Pakistan. Villages, which dot the LoC, residents of whom seek to make a living on their meagre fields along the border are hounded by small arms and artillery fire at regular intervals. These innocent villagers too suffer regular casualties. There appears to be no end to tensions and hatred.

Unresolved issues over time

Seventy years is a long time for two nations to have unresolved disputes despite four wars, especially if they have originated from the same stock, have a common history and a near similar culture. However, the two-

nation theory of partition, based on religion has ensured that the subcontinent is tense and may possibly remain so for eternity. Both nations possess nuclear weapons, thus limiting options for an all-out war.

In recent times, there have been multiple attempts to discuss peace, however each has been cast aside by a terror strike. The best option was post 1971, when India held 93,000 prisoners, but it missed the moment. Even then there was no guarantee that peace would have reigned over the years. In this environment, is there any option for the future or would both nations continue losing valuable young lives?

Increasing hostility

Both have always blamed the other for violating the sanctity of the LoC. India would always retaliate with enhanced firepower unless Pak reigns in its state sponsored terror outfits, causing turmoil in the valley. India would desire a peaceful LoC, which is easy to monitor, while for Pak, an active LoC, enables infiltration. Pak feels that Indian conventional military might is a threat to its survivability and one of its options is to tie down the Indian army by employing cheap and readily available cattle fodder militants. It has always feared that India seeks to break it into smaller states.

The main problem between the two nations is the status of Kashmir. Pak has always considered Kashmir to be an integral part of it, solely on religious grounds, while India considers the legality of the accession document. There has been no serious discussion on the issue because of differing perceptions on both sides and Pak's support to terror groups. For Pak, they are freedom fighters, while for India they are terrorists. Both nations have attempted to commence dialogue, under multiple

formats, including track II, however each has been left midway due to terror incidents.

Pak military remains a stumbling block

The Pak military, the stumbling block to peace, has an interest in maintaining India as an enemy. The budget, strength and capability of the Pak military is solely to ensure the security and sanctity of its eastern borders. While it is now employed against anti-Pak terror groups and the Baluchistan freedom struggle, that involvement is miniscule as compared to its deployment along its borders with India. It has no major enemies, other than India, provided if it stops support to the Taliban and Haqqani network.

It is the strength deployed against India and reserves, which has given it the power to dominate internal politics, conduct coups when it desires and subdue the nation. If there was peace between the two nations, the military strength could be considered for reduction, which would impact its standing. Thus, it has never endorsed nor permitted the polity to seek peace. Historically, it has never forgiven India for the crushing 1971 defeat. Further, it has attempted to annex Kashmir by stoking internal fires, which have further enhanced hatred between the two nations.

India, on the other hand, being a democracy, where if national security is assured, would easily reduce its military capability, spending more on social security schemes. It would enable the nation to concentrate on enhancing its international role and securing its eastern borders. Not only the armed forces, but multiple other security agencies could be cut to size, a major saving for the government.

Over the years, within the population, there has been a feeling of intense hatred generated between the two nations. It may be less on the Indian side, but due to increased Islamization, it is far deeper on the Pak side. Even sporting events between the two nations, now rarely held, are almost a do or die game, a mini battle zone. Economically and diplomatically, the two countries are vastly apart.

Increasing disparity between nations

India is a growing power, seeking a seat in the UN Security Council and is sought after for economic and military cooperation. Pak, which was for a long time, a close US ally, is now almost alone, with only Chinese backing. Its economy is in shambles and its dependence on China is complete. It has suffered prolonged periods of military rule, while India has remained a vibrant democracy.

Thus, the two nations, which gained independence together are vastly different in every way and sworn enemies. Hatred continues to increase, and tensions are on the rise along the LoC. It is therefore likely that the possibility of peace is remote and talks, even if held, may not yield results.

Compelling Pak to change

Is there any manner by which India can push Pak to change and ultimately bring forth an era of peace and development?

Attacks across the LoC, including cross border and surgical strikes have limited impact, as their nation is unaware of their army's true losses. Despite losses, Pak would continue to be volatile and equally active, because

if it displays caution, it would impact their morale and become a national loss of face. The Pak army always denies Indian claims of surgical and cross border strikes and with its internal hold and power, there is no authority to even question or counter its claims. Thus, there is no impact on the nation at large.

Therefore, striking deep may be an option. While India possess the capability, as also the will to do so, however, economic constraints in the long term and possession of nuclear weapons by Pak may deride this option. The very threat of a strong conventional military retaliation by India, calling the Pak nuclear bluff, ensures that Pak does not venture beyond the present limits of supporting terror strikes in the valley. Thus, military option alone is not the answer.

International pressure is presently building on Pak to act not specifically against the Taliban and Haqqani network but also against other terror groups. Pak would be seeking a way out, as it knows that unless it terror groups on its side, it would be unable to fulfil its planned strategy for Kashmir and Afghanistan and remain a bystander in the region.

The groups have now gained almost an independent status, with the ability to create own funds and draw in supporters. The banning of a host of groups by the Pak government recently had no impact, as the very next day, they were conducting a well-attended rally in Peshawar. Further Pak fears, more now than post 9/11, when it changed sides, that the groups could turn inwards, converting Pak into another Afghanistan.

International pressure did bring about a change post 9/11, but that pressure was backed by a strong military threat, when Musharraf was told to act or the 'nation would be bombed into stone age'. This time, such

pressure, solely due to Chinese backing is unlikely. Hence, Pak may act, but it would be controlled and limited, not the level the US desires. It still hopes that China would fill in the financial and military gaps where the US withdraws.

China factor

Chinese investments in Pak is a major influencing factor. The repayment of five billion dollars a year to China is way beyond the capability of Pak. Hence, it would, following the path of Sri Lanka and Myanmar in the region, be willing to sacrifice assets to China in lieu, the commencement of which would be the new naval base being established adjacent to Gwadar. However, the Chinese would desire security of their investments and hence may possibly remain the only nation, with sufficient influence over Pak, to compel it to act. This could only come about if the Chinese realize that non-compliance by Pak could be detrimental to Chinese interests. This message needs to flow from the US. Flowing from India would have limited impact, as India-China relations remain on a sticky wicket.

Non-military options for India

One non-military option for India is to push Pakistan into a conventional arms race, forcing it to increase its arms spending beyond its financial capabilities. While this may impact Pak, but would only push it closer into China's arms. It may be ideal in the mid to long term, not in the short term.

The second option would be creating and supporting anti-Pak factions, independence movements and groups challenging the Pak state. This would bleed the Pak army, threaten the CPEC, push its economy to the limits and

create an atmosphere of uncertainty within Pak. The only benefit for India as against the present status of Pak is that these groups will not exist on Indian soil, hence blowback is unlikely. It may compel Pak to increase terror strikes within India, for which we need to be prepared.

The third option, is to consider Pakistan as a pinprick on our side, handle the terrorists it launches, be offensive along the LoC, accept casualties and continue to grow economically and diplomatically. Simultaneously, leave no stone unturned to continue exerting pressure on Pak to change. If militancy in the valley is controlled, restricted to a few districts, permits the state to maintain control over the region, then it should be accepted as a near normal scenario. The situation should be such as to permit development to continue.

The final option would be to inculcate all the three to ensure Pak is pressured to act in some manner. It cannot ever stop support, as many within its own establishment have close links with terror groups. Most important would be to ensure that militancy remains confined into a small region and within the capability of the army to control.

Conclusion

Indo-Pak enmity has been in vogue for over seven decades and is likely to increase, rather than subside. India, should aim to use multiple options to enhance pressure on Pak compelling it to change its approach. Simultaneously, we should be prepared that peace is still distant and talks anytime in the near future would not yield results. In the long term, once Chinese investments are threatened, it would ensure Pak regains control over its terror groups. Calls for talks from any quarter, internal or external, are meaningless until the deep state is impacted and requests it.

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