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**HOW A CHANGE IN INDIAN STRATEGY CALLED THE
NUCLEAR BLUFF OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF
PAKISTAN AND COUNTERED CROSS BORDER
TERRORISM IN THE KASHMIR VALLEY**

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Introduction

As highlighted in a paper titled '*Democracy as a conflict-resolution model for terrorism: a case study of India and Pakistan*', researched and published under the auspices of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies in Sri Lanka, 'starting from its independence in 1947, India has experienced terrorism of various hues: religious, ethnic, ideological, cross-border, etc'. Be it the Ultras movement in the North Eastern States since early years of independence, naxalism in the eastern states of India since 1968 (unresolved to-date), Insurgency in Punjab in the early eighties as well as the ongoing Pakistan sponsored militancy in the Kashmir Valley and across the country since the early nineties etc are all illustrative of India's ill-fated tryst with terrorism.

The Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism is however different from the internal insurgencies being grappled with by the country. Firstly, it has an international dimension since it is sponsored by another sovereign nation against India and secondly these acts are controlled, conducted committed under a nuclear threat environment involving two nuclear weapon armed neighbours. While as a responsible nation, India's stated Nuclear Doctrine clearly elucidates a declared '*no first use policy*', Pakistan's Nuclear doctrine on the other hand has no such clause and professes a much '*lower threshold*' for employment of nuclear weapons in a conflict between the two nations.

Cross Border Terrorism.

Against the Nuclear backdrop, the Pakistani establishment has been following a policy of '*bleeding India with a thousand cuts*' by waging a proxy-war against India (a strategy akin to the US support to Taliban against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan). Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism has resulted in significant attacks on the very soul and fabric of the Indian nation. Amongst numerous terror attacks over the decades, the 1993 Mumbai Bomb Blasts, attacks on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi on 13 Dec 2001 (three months after the catastrophic 9/11 attacks on the twin

towers) and the Sep 2008 attacks on Taj Hotel in Mumbai are indeed testimony to the scale and extent of terror being faced by the country. Statistical data on number of lives of civilian and security personal lost between 1994 and 2019 stands at almost 3600.

Indian Strategy to Counter Pakistan Sponsored Terrorism – Up till Oct 2016.

The Indian strategy to deal with the Pakistan sponsored cross border terrorism up till Oct 2016 was based on diplomacy and negotiation at one end of the spectrum to coercion/compliance through mobilisation of forces, preparation for war and posturing at the other end. The '*strategy of deterrence through denial*' clearly did not have its desired results and was perceived as inaction or rather absence of kinetic action by the Indian state post incident after incident of terror, continued to bolster Pakistan's confidence and belief in the success of its strategy of '*bleeding India with a thousand cuts*' under the umbrella of '*nuclear deterrence*'. Despite being a nuclear armed state with advantage in conventional forces over Pakistan, over the years India steadily lost credibility of having the political will to be able to change the existing narrative. After each terror attack, irrespective of its scale and magnitude, India would respond in a predictive manner upscaling international diplomacy against Pakistan, terminating bilateral relations and supporting international economic penalties on Pakistan through the Financial Action Task Force; the aim being isolation of Pakistan in the comity of nations as a harbinger of international terrorism.

It is not to say that the Indian strategy to tackle the issue has not been effective; there have been significant gains over the years viz failure of Pakistan to internationalise the Kashmir issue, a severe dent to its international image and increasingly being viewed as a state which sponsors and breeds international terror, a state on the verge of being blacklisted by the FATF already causing severe economic penalties to its economy and hardships to the Pakistani populace as well as reduction of military support by its traditional ally, the United States of America. ***However, these gains accrue after extended, consistent and protracted efforts and do not serve as 'deterrence' enough for the Pakistani establishment or its state sponsored terror outfits to discontinue waging their proxy war against India.***

A Change in Indian Strategy – 2016 to 2019

Two incidents of Pakistani sponsored terror acts changed the ‘*narrative*’ and ‘*status quo*’ of the strategic interaction between the two countries. The first occurred during the period Sep-Oct 2016 when post an attack on an Army Camp on 18 Sep 2016 by four fidayeen from the Jaish-e-Mohammad Terror group, the Indian Army undertook surgical strikes in PoK to neutralize terrorists and terror camps and launch pads. ***This was the first publicised and declared display of proactive and kinetic action by the Indian Armed Forces against terror groups in the western sector as well as demonstration of the political will of the Indian government to force the Pakistani establishment to rethink their strategy of cross border terrorism under the garb of nuclear sabre rattling.***

It seems the first officially acknowledged and publicised retaliatory action by the Indian Government and the Indian Armed Forces did not convince the Pakistani establishment and their proxies about a significant change in the Indian strategy of responding to cross border terrorism. Whilst attacks on army bases with a few casualties on the Indian side continued since initiation of the surgical strikes by the Indian Army in Sep 2016 with the Indian side continuing to display restraint, a Jaish-e-Mohammad suicide bomber undertook a major attack in Pulwama on 14 Feb 2019 by crashing his car packed with 300kg of explosives into a convoy of Central Reserve Police Forces (CRPF), killing more than 40 Indian paramilitary personnel and injuring at least 70, broke the camel’s back. The Indian establishment responded to the terror attack by undertaking unprecedented air strikes on terror camps inside Pakistan Occupied Kashmir on 26 Feb 2019 displaying a tectonic shift in strategy and taking the Pakistani side by complete surprise by the swift and kinetic response. ***Commencing with the retaliatory surgical strikes by the Indian Army post terror attack on the Army Camp in Uri in Sep 2016 and then by using air power against terror launch pads across the line of control, the Indian State has displayed the will to change the ‘rules of business’ in this long drawn conflict and at the same time called the bluff of underlying ‘nuclear threats’ by Pakistan while covertly fuelling terror in India. THE RESULT: A SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN TERROR ATTACKS IN INDIA SINCE FEB 2019.***

Strategic Principles

The aforementioned strategic interplay between India and Pakistan illustrate and elucidate adoption of a number of principles discussed in the capsule on '*Development of Strategic Thought*'. A brief description of some of these principles is enumerated in the succeeding paragraphs.

Deterrence and its two forms: by Denial or by Punishment. India's initial strategy of '*Deterrence by Denial*' followed by a radical shift to '*Deterrence by Punishment*' are clearly evident in the recent strategic interaction between the two countries. By shifting to a strategy of '*Deterrence by Punishment*', the Indian side has established credibility to its political will and perceived capabilities of its Armed Forces. Up until the potential, force and technology could be delivered at the point of interest and the same could be demonstrated, India's comprehensive nuclear and military power had limited effect in providing '*credible deterrence*' to its adversary and refrain it from engaging in a proxy war against the country.

First and Second Strike Capability. The nuclear threat umbrella looming over the adversarial interaction between the two countries, clearly highlighted and brought the concept of '*nuclear deterrence*' to the fore. With the comparison of forces in the conventional domain not being overly tilted in favour of India, the Pakistani establishment took advantage of not proclaiming a '*no first use policy*' and repeatedly indicating a '*lower nuclear threshold*' in its nuclear doctrine to prevent an attempt at conventional retribution from the Indian side against its proxy war. Whilst the Indian side has a universally declared '*no first use policy*' with a *second strike capability (and development of nuclear triad underway)*, the Pakistan establishment on the other hand has been vocal in the use of tactical nuclear weapons against any attack in the sector of limited geographical conflict.

Strategic Culture. The change in strategy employed by the Indian side to alter the '*status quo*' and introduce '*deterrence by punishment*', is a clear indication of a healthy and vibrant '*strategic culture*' in the Indian Government steered by the National Security Council Secretariat headed by the country's National Security Advisor. The new strategy indicates a thorough focus on various aspects of strategic

thinking with respect to perception of values and phobias, analysis of strengths & vulnerabilities (including capabilities), offense-defense inclination, targeting inclination (counter-force vs. counter-value), utilisation of HUMINT-TECHINT, utilisation of suitable weapons, weapons design and last but not the least military innovation; both as a self-assessment and of the adversary.

Net Assessment. The evolving strategy in dealing with the proxy war waged by Pakistan and its state sponsored terrorist organisations, indicates that the '*strategic culture*' described above has a strong foundation of '*net assessment*' for strategy formulation. The employment of a coherent narrative based on a RED vs BLUE dynamic interaction by linking strategic planning with intelligence gathering is testimony of a well-established Net Assessment organisation feeding the National Security apparatus of the country with well thought out diagnoses, inputs to support strategic planning as well as for competitive strategies. While the success of the operations are indicative of accurate Net Assessment on the Indian side, the lack of appreciation of the Indian positive kinetic action represent a corresponding failure of Net Assessment on the adversary's side.

Intelligence Cycle. The successful execution of the two operations, viz surgical strikes of Sep 16 followed by precision air strikes of Feb 19 are indicative of a highly effective intelligence organisation with the ability to '*observe*' and '*explain*' reality as well as '*predict*' future. Utilisation of all available int collection techniques, accurate processing of information, thorough analysis and comprehensible dissemination of assessments facilitated in providing requisite inputs to the strategic community to arrive at an implementable strategic plan. Further, effective Strategic communication following the successful culmination of operations, sent a message to the adversary of the existence of a robust intelligence framework and their own vulnerabilities.

Intelligence Surprise. Thorough planning of the operation with adherence to stringent norms of INFO-SECURITY created a complete '*Intelligence Surprise*' for the Pakistan establishment who failed to appreciate India's response to the repeated terror attacks on Indian soil; indicative of a complete failure of its own '*Intelligence Cycle*'. The confusion and information chaos that prevailed

in Pakistan post realisation of the pre-dawn attacks on the terror training camps in PoK, with dissemination of conflicting narratives from various agencies is testimony of infliction of a successful '*Intelligence Surprise*' by India on its adversary.

National Security Policy. The presence of or absence of a '*National Security Policy*' governs the strategic behaviour and culture of a state. In the extant case, both nations **have not** declared or published a National Security Policy (unlike in the USA) and therefore statecraft, especially in large governments and establishments can become incoherent and laborious, as in the case of the two countries as well as undermine effective deterrence due to the non-promulgation of '*casus belli*'. Further in the Pakistani establishment, since statecraft is highly dominated by the military, strategic planning tends to be military centric with the inability to fully harness the potential of other pillars of strategy formulation viz diplomacy and negotiation. On the other hand, non-articulation of a National Security Policy affords the state flexibility of action and keeps the adversary guessing with respect to each other's strategy.

Offset or Relevance Gap. India had been grappling with Cross Border Terrorism since the early nineteen nineties. The Indian Strategy of '*deterrence by denial*' was clearly not having its desired effects creating an exponentially increasing '*Offset*' and '*Relevance Gap*' between the actual reality on ground in the fight against cross border terrorism and the strategy being pursued. Even though the Indian Strategic community was well aware of this relevance gap between reality and strategy; however, travails of democracy and other political compulsions prevented the establishment in altering the strategy to reduce the offset. On the other hand, the adversary, realising the inability of the Indian establishment to alter its strategy even while being aware of the offset, used this strategic paralysis to its significant advantage in its proxy war against India.

Operational Boundaries. The decision to cross the threshold of entering an area of conflict or dispute, requires demarcation of very specific and constrictive operational boundaries. These operational boundaries are extremely critical to the success of the strategy as an operational overreach can have

disastrous consequences on the desired end state. The two precise operations conducted by the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force in PoK to destroy specific targets with minimum civilian casualties or collateral damage are indicative of adherence to strict operational boundaries in both missions. Crossing the threshold of the laid down boundaries along with disproportionate loss of civilian lives or damage to civic or community infrastructure would have been counter productive to the legitimacy of the mission and could have alternately resulted in uncontrolled escalation, bringing both nations to the brink of war and not to mention negative international reaction.

‘The Architect’s Parable’– The Idea of the Middle. The Military Commanders of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force, were instrumental in linking the strategy emanating from the strategic planners at the highest level and the executors of the mission at the tactical level. Playing the role of effective constructors and contractors, the Military planners could successfully realise the vision of the architects of the new strategy of *‘deterrence by punishment’*, resulting in an unprecedented display of political will and resolve in dealing with a proxy war run by a State with non-state actors.

Conclusion

The interplay between India and Pakistan between the period 2016 to 2019 is indeed a fascinating and absorbing illustration of strategic interaction between two adversaries under the backdrop of a nuclear umbrella. The aforementioned interplay provides students of strategy an insight into the delicate nuances of strategic statecraft between two nuclear powered adversaries and intrinsically highlights all the principles of strategy and strategic thought. The unprecedented precision strikes against terrorists and terror training camps in PoK has upset the applecart of strategic balance in the context of the two countries and deflated the strategic assessment bubble of the Pakistani establishment which thus far had been patting its back on the unequivocal military success of its strategy of ‘bleeding India with a thousand cuts’. *For Pakistan, it is time to revisit the drawing board.*