

Essay

Pakistan Once Again- With Terror, Lies and Bomb

Sheel Kant Sharma

For the past many years there has been a systematic drive by the Pakistani establishment to somehow recover lost ground. Ground that it has lost during the past two decades, since 9/11 in particular and the exposure of the hideout in Abbottabad of Osama Bin Laden and his killing by US Navy Seals in May 2011. Pakistan's duplicity was exposed worldwide because it constantly maintained from 2001 onward that Osama Bin Laden was not in Pakistan and that his whereabouts were not known to the government in Islamabad. That combination of deceit denial and duplicity has been laid bare by assertions of successive US presidents from George Bush junior to Donald Trump as well as top generals and cabinet members in the US. The US has come to this bipartisan assessment even as it has been pouring more than 35 billion dollars into Pakistan under diverse heads over this period - to secure the latter's cooperation in fighting the Taliban. The US, however, received nothing but 'lies and deceit', as President Trump exclaimed two years back.

Pakistan: Epicenter of Global Terror

That Pakistan has been an epicenter of global terror networks is illustrated today by its role of honour on the gray list of FATF. The state in Pakistan has tried its best to wriggle out of the severe injunctions of FATF, the latest trick being a tame jail sentence pronounced by a Lahore court in Pakistan to Hafiz Saeed. It's a different matter of course that Saeed is still treated like a VIP in Pakistan. Pakistan has made some gains in its path to economic recovery with the help from IMF, and some funds being released by US to ameliorate severe economic slump. There has been unflinching economic and political backing from China on multiple forums including the FATF. Political support from a couple of Islamic nations such as Turkey and Malaysia has also been forthcoming. These supporters of Pakistan have

Dr Sheel Kant Sharma is Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi. A career diplomat, he was Ambassador of India to Austria and Permanent Representative to the UN Office in Vienna and IAEA, Indian Governor to IAEA Board of Governors (2004–2008), and Secretary General SAARC (2008–2011).

also been at it to pull Pakistan out of global terror infamy. They have also diplomatically pushed the Pakistani line that it is the victim of terrorism and has paid great costs in fighting terrorism. It is apparently not obvious to Pakistan's backers why a vast majority of FATF member states are not convinced by Pakistan's narrative and demand time bound action on part of Pakistan to show it is seriously committed to blocking activities of terror outfits based and supported in Pakistan. Pakistan still remains on the gray list of FATF with the threat of blacklisting unless it takes action by June 2020 on the 27 points given by FATF. This demonstrates Pakistan's dismal record in doing what it trumpets to its friends and gullible supporters about fighting terrorism.

It will be recalled that until last year Pakistan was resisting strongly, with China's firm support, the UN Security Council action placing Massod Azhar on global terrorist list. After considerable effort by India and members of the UN Security Council in furnishing copious facts about the involvement of Masud Azhar in terrorist activities, China too allowed the UN Security Council to proceed with the listing. Now just after a year, the same Masood Azhar is reported missing in Pakistan and the government says it has no knowledge about his whereabouts. To the gullible one only needs recalling that until the US Seals located and killed Osama Bin Laden in 2011 the Pakistan government had repeated the same lie about Bin Laden too.

Pakistanis see the present juncture as propitious for propaganda binge because of the situation in Afghanistan. They know that the US is determined to get out of Afghanistan and needs, quite naturally, Pakistan's cooperation in achieving its goal. So the Pakistani PR machine is in full swing to influence opinion in key sectors of public and parliaments in the West. Domestic public opinion in the US and UK as reflected in the English language publications has also been sensitive to urgency for US president to withdraw from Afghanistan. The Paris based International Crisis Group (ICG) seems to have played a substantial role in the just concluded Munich Security Conference. While ICG succeeded in including Kashmir, in the annual report of this year's Munich Security Conference, as one of the ten conflicts to watch this year, the Pakistani role in supporting acts of terrorism in Kashmir has been glossed over. While the annual report makes a note about the ambivalent role played by Pakistan in Western counterterrorism effort, it also mentions that Pakistan would become the lynchpin for efforts to prevent international terror groups from regaining strength. This misplaced hope in Pakistan's noisy promises about fighting terror flies in the face of bitter experience so far.

However, the elements described above cannot be the basis for Pakistani establishment for the anti-India tirade that it has launched and to sweep it's culpability

under an anti-India campaign. Pakistan's nemesis in this century is of its own making. All its dogged attempts to drag India into picture somehow had so far failed to elicit wider audience interest. But this is the primary leitmotif that Pakistan has insisted on inserting in its talking points with all its interlocutors whether in official or track II interactions. Successive governments in Islamabad have stuck to it, no matter what its leaders might say after they leave office.

A particularly stark evidence of this compulsive strain in Pakistani psyche can be seen, for instance, in the accounts given by well-known and reputed US author Steve Coll in his book, "Directorate S". Coll's account dates from the beginning of the US war on terror and rests on material accessed in US Archives from 2001 onwards. It reveals how even in the immediate somber aftermath of 9/11 attacks the then president of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf was obsessed with India in his meetings with all US interlocutors. Musharraf and his cabinet colleagues¹ dragged India even while they were seriously trying to persuade US to negotiate with Taliban, and advancing arguments in Taliban's defence as well as stoutly discounting Taliban role in supporting Bin Laden in committing the 9/11 mass attack. Their offers of cooperation in working with US were laced² with anti-India venom and on condition that India should not be allowed to draw advantage³. Has nothing changed in these two past decades?

...the present bloody impasse in Afghanistan remains because Pakistan is at the core of most problems.

Pakistan even today is insisting on the same pitch. The train of events since then has only proved that the present bloody impasse in Afghanistan remains because Pakistan is at the core of most problems. Pakistani spokespersons compulsively drag India in their narratives be that about Afghanistan or about FATF or their diverse roguish adventures. The South Asia geographical construct is their licence to invoke India and launch a tirade whenever they find it suits them, no matter even if that strains credulity.

Farce at IISS

Pakistan's former generals and diplomats are becoming more trenchant today in projecting image of a responsible power. The IISS in London has been receptive to Pakistani persuasion for some years now. It lays welcome mats for articulation of hallowed claims about Pakistan's great role as a country martyred on the one hand to great games during and after Cold War (never mind facts that this was always on its own choice) and in bearing the burden on the other hand of stability in South Asia (never mind that it spawns most dreadful brand of terror laced with nuclear blackmail). In this train of avowedly open

dialogue, discourse and workshops, one event at the IISS on 6 February 2020 had Pakistan's retired general Khalid Kidwai.

He was welcomed to expound on a topic IISS offered him: "South Asian Strategic Stability: Deterrence Nuclear Weapons and Arms Control". This topic was silent on the impact on South Asia of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Khalid Kidwai has been credited in the past in the West for making the case for contingenciesⁱ when Pakistan will have to resort to first use of its nuclear weapons against India - even though India has steadfastly held no-first-use as integral to its nuclear doctrine. In this latest spiel Kidwai expostulates on his take on how Pakistan took steps from time to time over the past half century not to allow South Asian strategic stability to be disturbed to Pakistan's disadvantage. This is familiar old wine in new bottle – clamor for all round parity with India at all costs. To make his case he insists on discarding everything of Indian policy which may run counter regardless of whether other powers have come to accord it recognition. So, he rejects India's no-first-use policy.

Kidwai advanced Pakistani account of what he calls seven cases from past fifty years when such strategic stability was disturbed. He casts his net wider this time to present so called strategic stability as something beyond the domain of nuclear weapons and mentions not just conventional and nuclear balance as its determinant but 'many elements of national power and strategy'. The entire presentation is riven with contradictions and inconsistencies. Yet no one in the Q & A session at IISS seems to have pointed to them. Leaving aside for the moment, his historical foray since 1971, it is important to dissect his talk when he expands the so called full spectrum deterrence thus:

Pakistan has ensured seamless integration between nuclear strategy and conventional military strategy...

of nuclear weapons and mentions not just conventional and nuclear balance as its determinant but 'many elements of national power and strategy'. The entire presentation is riven with contradictions and inconsistencies. Yet no one in the Q & A session at IISS seems to have pointed to them. Leaving aside for the moment, his historical foray

"Pakistan has ensured seamless integration between nuclear strategy and conventional military strategy, in order to achieve the desired outcomes in the realms of peacetime deterrence, pre-war deterrence, as also in intra-war deterrence, if the adversary, having drawn the wrong conclusions, challenges the very foundations of the deterrence theory."

So, nuclear weapons and conventional forces are in a seamless integration? So, the lessons drawn from the entire seventy five year history of the nuclear age are thrown out of window. That nuclear weapons are not instruments of warfare but of deterrence is turned

ⁱ Kidwai as former head of the Strategic Plans Division of Pakistan had listed circumstances under which Pakistan would respond to conventional Indian attack with nukes.

on its head by this exponent of Pakistani strategy. Obviously, there is no nuclear threshold in his narrative now.

The ICJ opinion of 1996 had outlawed use of nuclear weapons except for deterrence in the situation of threat to very existence of a state. Kidwai has no use of that ICJ opinion. What foundations of deterrence theory are espoused by Pakistan? That all means are all the time at Pakistan's disposal for use under its full spectrum deterrence and the sole adversary against whom this whole plethora of 'deterrence' is unraveled must take note. Those who in the exalted analysis of India- Pakistan stability allow for this crazy disposition of Pakistani generals may be as facts-of-life if not fair game⁴, how are they helping the situation? The only other nuclear armed state among the Nine which talks in such glaring terms about using nuclear bombs is North Korea. But while North Korea is a pariah and subject to severe sanctions the Pakistani generals think this is their time once more to walk tall.

The real sinister message is not hard to get – the message is that terrorism against India will remain an instrument of Pakistani state policy and any attempt by India to do anything responding to cross border terrorism from Pakistan or to inhibit it at source – as was done for example after Pulwama terror bombing last February - will be reason for Pakistan to use nuclear weapons against India. India understands this well and has assiduously sought to explain it to all the major powers. This is the reason Indian policy gets pushed to the limit every time there is a new act of Pakistan sponsored perpetrating of terror attacks.

But does the global community understand this deliberate aggressive policy of compellence cloaked in the garb of full spectrum deterrence? That term incidentally is a copycat lifting from the cold war years when the erstwhile Soviet Union used to accuse the US and NATO of seeking full spectrum dominance.

Coming to Kidwai's sense of historic foray, he begins with post 1971 period and blames India's Pokharan test in 1974 as behind Pakistan's quest for nuclear bomb. This flies in the face of copious reports and personal narratives of Pakistani leaders of their nuclear ambitions and the penchant for an Islamic bomb. Late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's famous exhortation in 1972 to even 'eat grass' to build a bomb is too well known. It provided the title of a book by Feroz Hassan Khan⁵, "Eating Grass : The Making of The Pakistani Bomb". Then Kidwai jumps to 1987 January and the Brasstacks military exercise done by India. He proclaims that it was the revelation of Pakistan's nuclear bomb that deterred alleged Indian aggressive disposition of forces. If that was indeed so, the question is why did Pakistan have to go through the elaborate motions of amassing its own troops too on the border. The fact is that such an amassing of troops arose out of plain misjudgment of intention

behind Indian exercise and was unwarranted. The subsequent disengagement which was negotiated amicably demonstrated that Kidwai's historical narrative is counterfactual. To be sure, this flouting of facts ex post facto has been the bane of India-Pakistan relations: that every past episode has to be recalled and painted only in contentious terms. And yet Pakistan bemoans the absence of dialogue.

The reality is different. Pakistan before 1971 had mistakenly assessed its military strength as superior to India's. Since that illusion was shattered by the 1971 war and consequent new geopolitical reality in the subcontinent, it has been a relentless Pakistani quest to reach parity with India. That parity overtly comprised conventional forces till the 1998 nuclear tests – and was so purveyed to credulous Americans during the Afghanistan war in the nineteen eighties. It also led to the famous Pressler Amendment, the essential burden of which was to provide Pakistan conventional arms in order to dissuade it from acquiring nuclear weapons. Of course, true to its track record, Pakistan succeeded in deception and acquired both American F-16s and its own nuclear weapon. In the past twenty years since 1998 tests that quest has been glorified by openly flaunting of mounting stockpiles of nuclear weapons too and diverse delivery systems of missiles. In pursuit of this unrealistic ambition it howls before its friends and benefactors in the international community about big India and bemoans on the one hand the disparity in not only military but other indices of national power but stakes claims on the other hand to be India's equal in every way.

It's nuclear and missile capability was meant to create grounds for scare mongering about a nuclear flashpoint. It pursued cross-border terrorism in Punjab and then in Kashmir under the threat of a nuclear blackmail. So, all that Kidwai now does is flaunt new justification for building a clandestine bomb in 1987 by rewording history of 1987 Brasstacks.

The facts are that Pakistan got its bomb design from China and its weapon was even tested at Lop Nur in 1990⁶ so that it could maintain the charade of a peaceful nuclear programme. That was also borne out in May 1998 by the speed with which the tit for tat nuclear tests were conducted by Pakistan within an incredibly short time. There are accountsⁱⁱ of failed parleys too during that intervening period after Indian tests between US and Pakistani leadership. However, the incredible speed of Pakistani preparations of civil and other construction work to put into effect those tests demonstrates that Pakistan was already set to conduct those tests and was merely waiting for India to lead so that it could apportion all blame on India. Furthermore, if Pakistan felt, as Kidwai argues, that 1974 Indian test compelled it to pursue its own nuclear weapon, what was the need to have waited till May 1998? And there lies the truth that Pakistan was simply hedging and placing a cloak

ii Strobe Talbott narrates in some detail how Pakistani interlocutors were incensed by US advice to eschew tit for tat tests.

over its clandestine acquisition⁷ to avoid global diplomatic and legal retribution. That it had acquired the weapon during the nineteen eighties was most inconvenient to US to admit until the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Sure enough the US Congress witnessed this US admission at the highest level in 1990 when President George Bush refused to give a certification to the Congress that Pakistan was not in possession of a nuclear weapon.

As has been subsequently uncovered in full detail, in copious books⁸ and reports, the father of Pakistani bomb was even clandestinely running an international nuclear Walmart under Pakistan government's auspices and flogging his enterprise to a number of countries eager to obtain the bomb. Malaysia, among other countries, was also part of Abdul Qadeer Khan's dragnet and this might also be a factor integral to Malaysian backing of Pakistan.

Kidwai's story telling for the past two decades is bereft of factual basis. He conveniently misses to mention the Kargil⁹ misadventure of the spring of 1999. After 9/11 and the commencement of the US war on terror, it was Musharraf's deal with the US that in return for extending logistical and all other support for the US war in Afghanistan US would restrain India and this restraint in his mind covered response even to the utmost provocation by Pakistani terror machine. The attack on Indian parliament in December 2001 was to exploit this US predicament. The troop mobilization by the government of PM Vajpeyee was an example of the most serious signaling which was felt necessary to stop Pakistan's tendency for misadventure. President Musharraf's speech to his countrymen on 12 January 2002 was an admission of the existence of this terror machine in Pakistan and his determination to stop and dismantle terrorist actions from Pakistani soil. Even in spite of such solemn assertion and when the troops of both sides were facing each other at the border, there were further attacks in summer of 2002 which demonstrated Pakistani brinkmanship. Late PM Vajpeyee did say ruefully while laying down office in 2004 that the 2001-02 should have been, *aar paar ki ladai*, i.e, the battle should have been carried through.

The November 2008 attacks in Mumbai were the ultimate provocation which might have gone dangerously overboard but for massive diplomatic interventions, including by Pakistan's best friend China, to instill some sense in the jihadi adventurists. **Such is the hold on Pakistani establishment of the jihadi mindset that even 12 years after the Mumbai attacks there has been no conviction of those who perpetrated those attacks. And this for Kidwai is Pakistani responsibility for stability in South Asia.** All his long narrative at the IISS about what Pakistani state can and will do in future under whatever deterrence spiel is to frighten the outside world once again about a nuclear flash point in South Asia.

The googly by Pakistan's present leadership about turning a page on its past involvement with terrorism is nothing new. It has been standard practice in the past too whenever the establishment was exposed beyond denials, like in 2007 December when Benazir Bhutto was killed in Lahore and a commission to investigate her killing was launched to save face. Rahman Malik as then Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani's de facto home minister would categorically affirm in spring of 2008 his government's solemn commitment against any terrorism emanating from Pakistan -- even while the ISI handlers would be charting the diabolical plot for 26 November 2008. What is one to make of the dangerous plots on the one hand and the ongoing visit, on the other hand, of Pakistan foreign minister Quraishi in Rajasthan precisely around the time the terrorist bloodbath was unleashed in Mumbai.

It is the obstinate policy of the terror state in Pakistan that gets further encouragement when an established think tank like IISS facilitates speakers like Kidwai

A state which is capable of such lack of coherence at such high levels (unless it was subterfuge) is extolled about its professional competence by Kidwai. He also takes a side swipe by lecturing India on how professional planning should be or should have been done for an attack such as that on Balakot. In recent months the Pakistani expatriates have been commandeered to unleash anti-India campaigns within UK and violent demonstrations against the Indian High Commission in London. The inability of the UK foreign office to safeguard the sanctity of a diplomatic mission despite full knowledge about the antecedents of the trouble makers is reminiscent of the cold war when Pakistanis were the darling of the West. They have since left a disturbing legacy. **The Pakistani columnist Khaled Ahmed recently wrote that it was in UK that radicalization of Islamist extremists by early settlers has been under way in mosques that go back to 1950s.** Surely, the British government would be aware of it. Unless propitiating Pakistani PR men is once again popular, particularly with the politics of Labour in Britain, there is no reason for courting the same discredited constituency of Mirpuris and other Pakistanis from PoK by responsible leaders of the Labour Party. Pakistan is fervently engaged in rousing anti -India sentiment to drown the bitter memories of terror strikes in UK and Europe whose roots were traced to Pakistan.

It is the obstinate policy of the terror state in Pakistan that gets further encouragement when an established think tank like IISS facilitates speakers like Kidwai. They exploit the occasion to brazen out Pakistan's role as epicenter of terrorism by brandishing use of nuclear weapons anywhere, anytime against India and take pride in calling it full spectrum deterrence. The past thirty years since the end of cold war have shown ample

proof of who is behind turmoil and set to destabilize South Asia - it is a no brainer to say that it is Pakistan.

References

1. Coll, Steve. Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan. New York: Penguin Books, 2018. p.55-56
2. Haqqani, Husain. India Vs Pakistan: Why Can't We Just Be Friends? Juggernaut, 2016. p.85
3. Ibid p. 56 "India, he said at one point, is 'not trying to help you so much as they are trying to fix us as terrorists' "
4. Hagerty, Devin T. Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence Stability in South Asia. Springer Nature Switzerland AG , 2019.
5. Khan, Feroz Hassan. Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012.
6. Small, Andrew. The China-Pakistan Nexus: Asia's New Geopolitics . United Kingdom , C. Hurst & Co. (PUBLISHERS) Ltd, 2015, p. 41
7. Marker, Jamsheed. Quiet Diplomacy: Memoirs of an Ambassador of Pakistan. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010. , as quoted by Haqqani Hussain, ibid, p. 79.
8. Frantz, Douglas, and Catherine Collins. The Man from Pakistan: The True Story of the World's Most Dangerous. New York: , Twelve Hachette Book Group, 2007.
9. Reidel, Bruce. "American Diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit." Center for the Advanced Study of India. University of Pennsylvania, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.473.251&rep=rep1&type=pdf> , pp. 130-43