

Policy Options on Pakistan: What India Should Not Do

(Article 2784 – January 20th 2009)

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Operation Parakram, India's muscle flexing in the aftermath of terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 failed to coerce Pakistan in putting an end to anti-India terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Following the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, the diplomatic pressure unleashed by New Delhi, including its contradictory statements on the extradition of Mumbai suspects from Pakistan, has been criticized for having achieved nothing concrete. All of New Delhi's efforts to get Pakistan deliver against terrorists operating from its soil seem to have evaporated in the war of words between the two governments. Pakistan, for its part, has maintained that any suspects involved in the Mumbai attacks, if found, would be tried according to Pakistani law. With general elections due in April-May, New Delhi is left with no short-term and/or quick options in terms of dealing with Pakistan; however, India should not waste any more time in getting its long-term strategic objectives right.

To begin with, New Delhi requires a policy overhaul vis-a-vis Pakistan. There will be no change in the fact that Pakistan will be India's neighbour for as long as the two nations exist. Meanwhile, New Delhi's objective of addressing terrorism in South Asia, in particular against itself, gets deflected in the rhetoric and blame game against Pakistan each time there is a terrorist attack. The difference this time, at the most, is that there is an international recognition/consensus that most leads on terrorism lead to Pakistan. How subsequent governments in New Delhi will utilize this international recognition to get Islamabad to deliver against terrorism originating from its territory will lay the future contours of India-Pakistan relations as well as security in the region. From a long-term grand strategic point of view, India's policy should adopt certain important strategies including strengthening internal security,

upgrading intelligence, toughening existing anti-terror laws etcetera. There are, however, other things that India must *not* do.

First, New Delhi must not indulge in pointless and unproductive sabre-rattling. Pakistan's nuclear capability has undoubtedly put an end to any kind of military escalation between the two countries. Clearly, overt military action with a nuclear shadow is no option. Pakistan understands this as well. War mongering achieves nothing other than a possible undoing of the bilateral peace process. Second, alleged statements from the Indian government such as "summoning the ISI chief" made Pakistan more hostile; moreover, India cannot and should not use its big power leverage in a manner that offends any country in the region, including Pakistan. Importantly, such behaviour adds to the "hegemon" image that India has in the region wherein it is surrounded by smaller countries. Third, New Delhi should not let any people-to-people contact at various levels be the first casualty in times of crisis. The Indian cricket team's tour of Pakistan in January has been called off and the traffic of people including artists, writers, and journalists has also come to a halt. The idea to promote people-to-people contacts between the hostile neighbours was primarily to reduce distrust. Incidents such as removing books by Pakistani authors from the Oxford bookstore in Churchgate in Mumbai only reflect immature conduct considering that India calls itself a secular, democratic nation.

Fourth, New Delhi should not shy away from working the verdict in Jammu and Kashmir's 2008 Assembly elections to its advantage. The high electorate turnout, irrespective of the call for boycott from the separatists, is the right time for the central and state government to develop political and economic stability in J&K. At the same time, New Delhi should continue its dialogue with Islamabad vis-a-vis Kashmir that includes promoting cross-LoC trade. While the peace process is significant for normalizing relations between India and Pakistan, tapping the J&K election verdict through tangible economic, political and social development in the state would nullify the so-called root cause theory of Kashmir being the sore point for anti-India terrorism/jihad. This gains more significance in the wake of the recent chorus, especially from the US and the UK, that resolving Kashmir would not only end terrorism originating from Pakistan but would also enable Pakistan to commit "sincerely" to fighting the Taliban/al Qaeda factions on the Pak-Afghan borders. This is a flawed argument and New Delhi should not let

Islamabad help gain any more international focus on Kashmir being the gateway to Afghanistan, for there is no guarantee that an independent or "azad" Kashmir would eventually put an end to anti-India terrorism. That said, however, India should do all that it can to make the best use of the popular mandate in J&K.

Lastly, New Delhi should not try to leapfrog its way to the global forum without making deft diplomatic inroads and opening channels of communications in its immediate and extended neighbourhood including Iran, Afghanistan, the GCC, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, not to forget Pakistan.