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How Pakistan's announcement of new envoy to the United States exposes Islamabad's deep terror links

Sardar Masood Khan 'is a dangerous radical with a long history of working with Islamists'. His appointment evidences an increasingly dangerous Pakistani regime, which is working to co-opt and support Islamists all around the world

Christine Fair | November 22, 2021 09:50:58 IST



File image of Masood Khan (in white). Image Courtesy: National Institute of Health, Pakistan

Pakistan's incoming envoy to Washington DC is a long-standing supporter of Islamist terrorism. His appointment signals the dangerous intentions of the Pakistani regime and

foreshadows more aggressive outreach to Islamist terrorists in South Asia and beyond.

Among the small coterie of South Asian analysts who have been critical of America's unending pandering to Pakistan despite Pakistan's demonstrable role in undermining virtually every single American national security in the region **since 9/11 and beyond**, several have criticised this choice arguing that Sardar Masood Khan **"is a dangerous radical with a long history of working with Islamists"** whose appointment evidences **"an increasingly dangerous Pakistani regime**, which is working to co-opt and support Islamists all around the world, including in the United States".

Pakistan is still celebrating its success in defeating the United States after twenty years of benefiting from American largesse under the guise of being a partner in Afghanistan while using every means possible to aid the Taliban and their murderous allies culminating in the American withdrawal. Perhaps giddy on one of the few victories the Pakistan army can celebrate (apart from its defeat of Pakistani democracy), perhaps Pakistan believes it can revivify its violently revisionist agenda vis-à-vis Kashmir and the rest of India. Managing Pakistan's relationship with the United States has always been one of the most important objectives of the Pakistani deep state. While Pakistan may think this is the best way to capitalise upon its victory in Afghanistan, foisting a terrorist enthusiast upon Washington is unlikely to produce the results it expects.

Who is Sardar Masood Khan?

He is a retired career diplomat who hails from Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK). In 2016, Pakistan's former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, appointed him to assume the 27th president of so-called "Azad Kashmir", that part of Kashmir which Pakistan has **controlled** since it snatched the territory in what became the first Kashmir war of 1947-48. Prior to retirement, he served twice as Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations in both Geneva (2005-08) and New York (2012-15) and as ambassador to China (2008-12). After retirement, he headed the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad (formerly known as the Pakistan Institute for Strategic Studies, or PISS), a government-funded organisation charged with disseminating briefs that align with or are dictated by the uniformed men that matter, before assuming his appointment as president of POK. I am sad to report that I could find no evidence that he was involved in the think-tank jointly launched by Beijing and Islamabad, which would focus solely upon research and development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The initiative was astutely **named** the Research and Development International (RANDI). RANDI, according to *The Daily Times*, was to serve as an "information corridor" to promote perspectives, data and information for policymakers, students, specialists, scholars and companies of both countries".

Pakistan's Ejaz Haider, a prominent pro-army interlocutor in various media platforms, has criticised this selection on several grounds, including the fact that he has already **retired** from his foreign service career. Haider **likened it** to "an army chief accepting command of a battalion, post-retirement". Oddly, at least two service chiefs have done just that when they accepted the post of emissary to Washington after retirement: Former Army chief General (Retd) Jehangir Karamat, who served in Washington between August 2004 and June 2006, and Air Chief Marshal Zulfikar Ali Khan who served from July 1989 to September 1990. This is in addition to a long **list** of lower-ranking retired army generals who have assumed the post. He won't be the first or last person to be roused from retirement for this enviable post.

Given his ambassadorial posting to China, his pro-China views should not come as any

surprise. In October 2001, he opined that “the **withdrawal** of US troops from Afghanistan and fragile peace in the region demand extension of CPEC route to Afghanistan”. Equally of note, Pakistan’s emissaries to the United Nations in New York and Geneva, prioritise raising Pakistan’s myriad mendacious claims to Kashmir at every opportunity. Given his service in both posts as well as his appointment to the presidency of POK, his relentless caviling about purported Indian perfidy in Kashmir should not be surprising either. Notably, upon leaving his post as appointed president, he lugubriously lamented Pakistan’s inability to “**to turn the Kashmir cause into an international civil rights movement**”, which he fallaciously attributed to “India’s colonial and irredentist **occupation** of the territory since August 2019 needs to be broken through”.

A Controversial Past and Present

His selection has furrowed eyebrows in Washington and New Delhi alike. For good reason. As intimated above, he has been a relentless interlocutor for Pakistan’s claims to Kashmir, despite their complete **lack of legal or historical legitimacy**. **Necessarily, he has trotted out the tiresome calls for a plebiscite**, on the (all too often correct) assumption that anyone has actually bothered reading the **United Nations Security Council Resolution** on the matter. Washington has long grown tired of Pakistan’s flogging this long-dead horse and has increasingly moved towards India’s position, with the exception of a few predictable voices of ignorant persons in Congress, **swayed by the efforts of Pakistan’s extensive lobbying enterprises**.

The more problematic issue is his pro-active support for Islamist terrorist organisations such as **Hizb-ul Mujahideen**, which the **Trump administration designated as a terrorist outfit in 2017**, which also meant that its senior-most leader, Syed Salahuddin, is a “**Specially Designated Global Terrorist**”. Khan bemoaned the move arguing that the terrorist outfit has been “**struggling for the freedom of Indian-occupied Kashmir, adding that their struggle is not linked to any form of terrorist activity across the border**”. He furthered, “**Ignoring the genocide of Kashmiris by Indian army and declaring freedom fighters as terrorists is a criminal departure from international humanitarian and democratic norms by the US.**” For the record, the data belie his claims. According to a database on global terrorism maintained by the University of Maryland, there have been 244 successful terrorist attacks by the group between 1990 and 2019, using the most rigorous coding criteria. **In these attacks, 356 people were killed and 633 injured.**

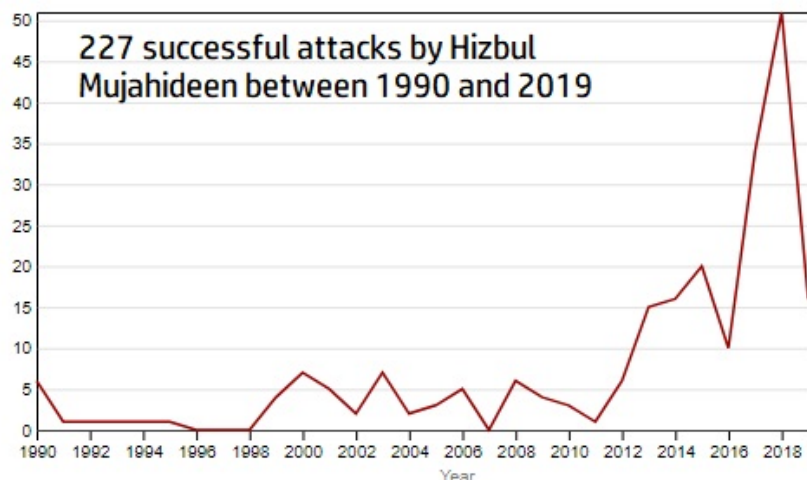


Figure 1: Attacks by Hizbul Mujahideen (1990-2019)

Source: University of Maryland, START, Global Terrorism Database, accessed 20 November 2021.

As Sam Westrop has detailed, he has supported — and likely still supports — numerous Islamist terrorist organisations and terrorist leaders, including Fazlur Rehman Khalil who founded the Deobandi Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM). The United States designated this group a terrorist organisation in 1997 and later, in 2014, designated Khalil himself as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. Khalil is known to have “maintained a close relationship with al-Qaeda, including with Osama bin Laden prior to his death. Khalil was a key member of Osama’s International Islamic Front and a cosignatory of Osama’s first fatwa issued in 1998 calling for attacks against the United States.”

Delhi, for its part, finds him to be a noxious provocateur for his various criticisms — with varying degrees of validity and absurdity — of the conduct of India’s armed forces in Kashmir; his ceaseless hailing of Burhan Wani, a slain popular terrorist leader associated with Hizbul Mujahideen as a hero; and his comparisons of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s regime to that of Hitler’s fascist Nazi regime. The notion of continuously cleaning up after his diplomatic micturitions on Delhi’s own policy priorities as it continues to forge ties with Washington amid numerous serious disagreements is no doubt unpalatable and rightly so.

Given the relentless efforts of the ISI, Pakistan’s notorious intelligence agency, to both stir up problems in and pertaining to the Punjab and Kashmir, his appointment is likely a harbinger of more reckless Pakistani shenanigans aiming to cause problems for India at home or abroad. Given that relations between India and Pakistan on the one hand and between the United States and Pakistan on the other are at their local nadirs, it’s easy to question the sobriety of the Generals’ selection of Khan to this important post.

Will The Panga Pay Off?

Pakistan will not likely reap the benefits it expects should Khan assume this post early next year for several reasons. First, Khan himself makes a mockery of Pakistan’s own policies towards that portion of Kashmir it mismanages. Even Aijaz Haider has noted that for all of its hollering about Indian malfeasance in Kashmir, Pakistan’s own record with respect to the Kashmiris it governs is shambolic. International organisations such as Human Rights Watch agree.

Second, should Pakistan insist upon playing this one-note, sad song, on its Kashmir kazoo in Washington, he will find few takers. Americans are exhausted with the endless Pakistani terrorist hijinx and its never-ending dalliance with Islamist evil-doers. Washington hasn’t been terribly subtle about this fact. Prime Minister Imran Khan continues to whine that President Joe Biden hasn’t yet called him. While Biden has said very little about Pakistan since he followed through his predecessor’s disastrous plan to hand Afghanistan over to Pakistan, President Biden fully understands how Pakistan’s behaviour undermined American efforts along given that he was the Vice President for eight years, during which vocal Pakistan critics like Bruce Riedell advised the Obama White House. Moreover, most of the men and women who have served in Afghanistan know full well who was behind the Taliban: Pakistan’s military. One day, those men and women will be generals and they will not have the soft spot for Pakistan’s men in uniform that many current American generals mysteriously harbour.

Given this silence buttressed by widespread antipathy for Pakistan across much of the US government, one might expect more probity from the deep state security managers in Rawalpindi and Abpaara. Alas, I suspect that Pakistan is so accustomed to farming terrorists and setting them loose in its region and then offering its terrorist-catching expertise at a premium, that it anticipates once again being Washington’s duplicitous, but well-

compensated, partner in managing the crises in Afghanistan it nurtured in the first place. And, as it has happened repeatedly since 1954, Washington will fall for the ruse and continue subsidising Pakistan's most lucrative business: Terrorist farming.

The writer is the author of 'Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War' and 'In Their Own Words: Understanding the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba'. Views expressed are personal.

Updated Date: November 23, 2021 15:59:04 IST

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