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Pakistan's Terror Game

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Coming on the heels of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore last month, the attack on Pathankot Air Force Station in Indian Punjab by Islamist militants on January 2nd is seen by many as an attempt to derail the nascent peace process between the two countries. This is a serious misunderstanding of this particular attack and such thinking obfuscates adequate appreciation of how Pakistan employs its jihadi assets to prosecute its varied strategic interests in the region. Rather than being a spontaneous response to recent developments, the attack on the Pathankot Air Base is the latest manifestation of a Pakistani national security strategy that addresses its own internal challenges while also pursuing its revisionist agenda against India.

Why Pakistan Uses Militants

This attack was not meant to spoil a peace process for the simple reason that there can be no meaningful peace process with Pakistan. Prior to the partition of the sub-continent in

1947 key Muslim political leaders argued that Muslims were a separate, but equal nation and required their own state because they could not live with dignity and security under a Hindu majority state. Leaders such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah were able to garner adequate support for the “Two Nation Theory” such that the British agreed to create two new states when they decolonized the sub-continent. Pakistan believed that it was entitled to the territory of Kashmir because it was a Muslim majority state in British India. However, as the Indian Independence Act of 1947 makes clear Pakistan was never entitled to the territory. In fact, Kashmir and the hundreds of other so-called Princely States were allowed to choose the dominions they would like to join.

Most of the princely states made their choices prior to partition in August 1947. Three did not. One was the enormous, princely state of Hyderabad which accounted for much of southern India's land mass, with a Muslim sovereign who governed a Hindu majority. The sovereign opted for independence and staged an increasingly sanguinary rebellion to retain his sinecure. India forcibly annexed it in a police action. The second hold out was Junagarh with a Muslim sovereign and a Hindu majority population. He opted for Pakistan even though the territory was well within India's borders and even though most of his subjects were Hindu. India forcibly annexed Junagarh as well.

The third holdout was Kashmir. The Hindu sovereign, Hari Singh, presided over a Muslim majority. His territory abutted both Pakistan and India. He wanted independence and even signed a stand-still agreement with Pakistan to preclude it from invading. However, fearing that Kashmir would remain independent or join India, the nascent state of Pakistan dispatched militants to forcibly seize the state. Singh's own militia forces were unable to stop the advance and sought

India's help. India agreed to defend Kashmir provided that Singh accede to India. Singh signed the instrument of accession and India began air lifting troops in defense of what had become sovereign Indian territory. When this first "Indo-Pak" war ended in 1948, Pakistan controlled about one third of Kashmir while India controlled the rest. Pakistan initiated wars again in 1965 and 1999 to secure more territory but failed to make permanent gains in both cases.

In 1948, the United Nations Security Council passed its 47th resolution calling for a plebiscite to be held to discern the desires of the Kashmiri people. But before any plebiscite can be held, the UN outlined specific conditions that both Pakistan and India were required to fulfill. Pakistan must first evacuate all Pakistani personnel from Kashmir. Conditional upon Pakistan withdrawing its forces, India was required to withdraw the majority of its forces, retaining only a defensive contingent. Only then, upon fulfillment of both of these conditions, the resolution called for a plebiscite to be held under international auspices. Pakistan never demilitarized nonetheless Pakistanis, including senior political and military leaders, continue to call for a plebiscite in accordance with the resolution while ignoring the Pakistani actions that were required to enable it.

Pakistan has sustained a low intensity conflict in Kashmir to wrest the territory from India since 1947. Pakistan's claims to Kashmir are predicated on ideological concerns rather than security concerns. Without Kashmir, Pakistan is incomplete per the jalebi-like logic of the so-called Two Nation Theory. For Pakistan to concede Kashmir and forge an enduring peace with India, Pakistan and its citizenry must evolve their interpretation of the Two Nation Theory. For generations raised on Pakistan's intertwined narratives of Islam and nationhood, particularly those in the military, this

is a price too high to pay. In fact, during a recent visit to Washington D.C., Pakistan's army chief Raheel Sharif made it clear that "surrendering" Kashmir was something he would never be prepared to do. Since the military exercises de facto control over Pakistan's foreign policy—not politicians and elected officials such as Prime Ministers—no peace process is currently possible. In fact, if Pakistan wanted peace it could have peace. India has no interest in Pakistani territory as India is a territorially status quo power notwithstanding some Hindu nationalists' assertion of the bizarre geopolitical notion of an undivided India, known as "Akhand Bharat".

So why does Pakistan continue with its use of terrorism? It's remarkably easy to explain. First, it's inexpensive. Compared to Pakistan's defense budget of some \$7 billion, operating militant groups such Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is mungphalis. Second, it requires no commitment of Pakistani troops to combat. Third, it provides the cover of plausible deniability. Fourth, Pakistan never suffers any material consequences for its jihad habit because of its ever-expanding nuclear arsenal, inclusive of tactical nuclear weapons. These weapons deter India from undertaking military action and ensure that the international community, always afraid of Pakistan failing, stays engaged politically and financially. These are weapons of coercion—or blackmail by another name.

Finally, and most importantly, Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacks in India immediately prompt international calls for "India and Pakistan" to resolve all outstanding disputes peacefully. This may be the most important outcome yet, given the low cost of this strategy. When the international community imposes this false equivalency over the two states, Pakistan's version of history is vindicated. Along

similar lines, when India reaches out an olive branch to Pakistan and agrees to discuss “outstanding disputes,” India invariably plays into Pakistan’s hands by allowing Pakistan to claim that even India recognizes the legitimate nature of Pakistan’s claims. As long as Pakistan continues to garner these benefits while incurring virtually no costs, these attacks will continue.

An Attack That Was Long in the Making

Following initial reports of the attack, Pakistan’s media, notoriously under intense pressure from the military, immediately went into damage control, **mocking** their Indian counterparts for jumping to the conclusion that the attackers were from Pakistan. Major news outlets in Pakistan suggested that the attack was an Indian “false flag” operation, a quotidian conspiracy theory that contends that India actually attacks itself to defame Pakistan, Muslims or some other sinister domestic agenda.

Later, the United Jihad Council (UJC), a coalition of Kashmir militant groups with close ties to Pakistan’s military, claimed responsibility for the attack. This too may be an effort to foster the illusion that the attack was about the so-called “Kashmir dispute.”

Increasingly, evidence suggests that the attack was perpetrated by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which is not a member of the UJC. JeM is a Deobandi Islamist terrorist groups with close ties to the Deobandi Afghan Taliban, anti-Shia groups such as the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi/Sipah-e-Sahaba-

e-Pakistan, and al Qaeda. If JeM conducted this attack, it would underscore a serious development in terrorism in South Asia.

JeM was founded when Pakistan's ISI allegedly worked with several Deobandi terrorists associated with Harkat-ul-Mujahideen to hijack Indian Airlines flight 814 in late 1999, which departed Kathmandu in Nepal for New Delhi. The plane eventually landed in Kandahar, the base of Afghanistan's Taliban, where terrorists agreed to free the surviving passengers upon the release of three Pakistani terrorists incarcerated in India: Mushtaq Ahmed Zargar, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh and Maulana Masood Azhar.

Indian officials delivered these terrorists to Kandahar where they were refused asylum by the Taliban and given 10 hours to leave the country. The three terrorists and the hijackers received safe-haven in Pakistan. Omar Sheikh later became notorious for the killing of Daniel Pearl three years later in Pakistan. Azhar became famous when he announced the formation of JeM in Karachi only a few days after his departure from Kandahar.

Pakistan raised JeM with Azhar as its leader to up the ante in Kashmir and to serve as a competitor to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which the ISI also raised and deployed to Kashmir in the early 1990s to escalate violence. While LeT pioneered the "high risk mission," JeM pioneered the use of suicide attacks in Kashmir in April 2000 in Badami Bagh.

JeM's coherence was short-lived: The organization split in late 2001 when its leadership disagreed on whether the organization should stay loyal to the Pakistani state or begin attacking it to punish it for helping to bring down the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Taliban shared JeM's Deobandi ideological orientations and represented the only regime that

enforced the version of sharia they all espoused. Many Deobandi militants that Pakistan's deep state had nurtured were furious that their patrons in uniform had seemingly turned their back on the Afghan Taliban. However, despite the pressure from his confederates to defect, Masood Azhar remained loyal to the state and reported the developments to the ISI and, as such, he remained a high value asset to the ISI. The new organization launched from the remnants of JeM under the name of Jamaat ul Furqan began a series of deadly suicide attacks and were the fundament for what would emerge as the Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP or Pakistani Taliban).

Even though JeM and its leader Masood Azhar are explicitly proscribed by the United States and the United Nations Security Council, among other entities, Pakistan persisted in its support for the organization and its leader, who freely operated in his home town of Bahawalpur in Southern Punjab. In fact, despite being technically proscribed by Pakistan, the organization actually expanded its stronghold. This was not an accident. Since at least 2011, Pakistan's intelligence agency had been rehabilitating JeM as a part of its internal security management strategy. By 2013, one of the authors learned during fieldwork in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, that Pakistan had resolved to take the Pakistani Taliban seriously and begin launching military offensives against them in Pakistan's tribal areas. After months of warning, Pakistan's military formally commenced a selective campaign against those militants in the tribal areas attacking it in June 2014 under the operational name of Zarb-e-Azb. Prior to the onset of these operations, Pakistan's military and intelligence agencies sought to persuade elements of the TTP to abandon the fight against Pakistan by either rejoining the fight in Afghanistan to help the Taliban or to rejoin the JeM to kill Indians. Those members of the TTP

who could not be so rehabilitated to fight the external enemies and remained committed to fighting Pakistan were deemed enemy combatants who must be eliminated.

Revivifying JeM was a cornerstone of Pakistan's strategy of managing its own internal security challenges. Officials with the United Nations office tasked with monitoring these groups told one of the authors that JeM activists have long been poised for infiltration into India. Thus, the only thing surprising about this JeM attack is that it didn't happen sooner given the imperatives of recuperating this group as a means of diverting TTP terrorists away from targeting Pakistanis towards targeting Indians. Thus denervating JeM is not only a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy of nuclear blackmail to achieve ideological objectives in Kashmir, it is a critical part of Pakistan's internal security strategy to rehabilitate TTP militants. The JeM is Pakistan's own "ghar vapasi" program for bringing errant terrorists back into the fold.

Pakistan's Regional Strategy

While most commentators on this attack focus upon the contested disposition of Kashmir this is a narrow vision of Pakistan's continued strategy of employing Islamist terrorists under its nuclear umbrella as part of a broader national security posture that arches across the countries of South Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka as well as throughout India. In fact, it remains a goal of Pakistan-backed militant groups to operate outside of Kashmir. In the wake of the Pathankot attack, Indian

intelligence has warned of the possibility that militants are planning to carry out similar attacks targeting Indian air bases in the Eastern part of the country. Attacks on targets in the Eastern part of India would less likely be carried out by infiltrators from Pakistan than Bangladesh, where Pakistan-based militants have been recruiting and organizing for years.

Members of the Pakistani Punjab-based militant organizations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba have been arrested in Bangladesh, and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) has had close ties with JeM, which has operated in Bangladesh for years. In the past year, two Pakistani diplomats were expelled from Bangladesh for allegedly operating as ISI liaisons with jihadi militant groups, and Pakistani militants are regularly arrested in raids on jihadi militant groups in Bangladesh. Pakistan's militant groups such as LeT and JeM have cultivated bases in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Nepal in effort to encircle India with bases from which persons can be recruited or launched for operations within India. Ultimately, Pakistan's Islamists believe that they can coerce Bangladesh into rescinding its independence gained after a hard fought war in 1971. Hafiz Saeed posted on Twitter on the 2013 anniversary of Bangladesh's liberation that “#WeWillNeverForget #1971 – History has not ended yet, will be rewritten,” and last March told a crowd of supporters that “the implementation of Sharia will make Pakistan a model state attracting even Bangladesh to rejoin Pakistan.”

Pakistan's interests with regards to India are not exclusive to wresting all of Kashmir; rather, Pakistan has arrogated to itself the retardation of India's projection of power in South Asia and beyond. As is well-known, Pakistan's obsession with controlling events in Afghanistan by backing a Islamist

militants such as the Taliban are due in considerable measure to Pakistan's interest in denying India access to Afghanistan and stemming India's larger ability to compete with it in Central Asia. Pakistan's ISI continues to encourage groups such as the Jalaluddin Haqqani Network and LeT to attack to Indian assets and personnel in Afghanistan.

Pakistan-backed terrorist groups have attacked the Indian embassy in Kabul twice in 2008 and 2009 and several consulates including those in Herat and Kandahar in 2014, Jalalabad in 2013 and most recently in the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif. In addition to other attacks on Indian personnel working in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's larger goal of preventing India's rise requires analysts to stop viewing these groups beyond the buzz word of Kashmir and endeavor to understand the larger context in which they function as a force multiplier in Pakistan's broader national security strategy. Allowing jihadi militant groups to operate semi-autonomously and nominally dedicated to jihad in Kashmir provides the Pakistani state plausible deniability, and masks the militants' full role in the region.

An Action Plan

In an ideal world, India and the United States—among other interested parties—would be able to cooperate to contain the various threats that Pakistan poses through uses of military, economic, diplomatic and political tools of national power.

However, India lacks the offensive capabilities to decisively defeat Pakistan in a short war and has been reticent to invest in the requisite military modernization and personnel policies required to decisively defeat Pakistan. The United States for its part seems unable to find any other policy approach to Pakistan that does not involve handsome

emoluments in hopes of securing even marginal cooperation with Pakistan. The sad truth is that both countries are blackmailed by Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and are loathe to move away from status quo policies.

This does not mean that there is nothing that can be done.

One of the simplest things that the United States and its international partners can do is change the way it talks about Pakistan and its terrorist clients attacking India. Americans and Indians who advocate engaging Pakistan at all costs, need to understand that what Pakistan craves is attention to its joint causes of Kashmir and standing up to a hegemonic India. When the international community predictably calls for both sides to settle their outstanding disputes peacefully, they unwittingly reward Pakistan while punishing India by imposing a false equivalency across the two. If the international community instead called for Pakistan to accept the status quo – a reality even Pakistan's former Army Chief Gen. Musharraf had come to accept, and stop using terrorism and nuclear coercion as tools of foreign policy, Pakistan would be deprived of the benefits it seeks even if it does not incur costs for its behavior. Until the time comes when the international community is prepared to punish Pakistan for transgressing international norms, refusing to reward it is a good place to start.

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Tags Pakistan, Terror, India, JeM, Modi, Sharif, Shareef, Pathankot, Christine Fair, Seth Oldmixon, Muslim, Kashmir, Akhand Bharat, LeT, UJC, Deobandi, TTP, JMB, Musharraf

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**Satish**

A day ago

A balanced piece tracing the history of Indo-Pak conflict and the role of terrorism as an instrument of Pakistani state policy but it misses one key point: the pecuniary interests of the Pakistan Army. Peace with India would be

the end of the gravy train. As a matter of fact in an unguarded moment Pervez Musharraf actually stated on record that the low intensity warfare with India will continue even if the Kashmir dispute is settled.



krishna 4 days ago

The China factor also comes into the dynamic of Indo-Pak relationship. The West and China need to be more stern with Pakistan politically, financially and also diplomatically. It's not going to happen in the near future.



Puru Kesar 4 days ago

Great Piece....



TIPU SULTAN 5 days ago

THIS BITCH/BASTARD IS SITTING IN LAP OF RAW AND DIRTY INDIANS WHO KNOW BALLZ ABOUT GROUND REALITY AND ZERO KNOWLEGE OF PAK-INDIAN CONFLICT CANT SEE WAT INDIAN FORCES R DOING IN KASHMIR KILLING MILLIONS OF PPL EVERY YEAR IN KASHMIR.THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO PROB;LEM IN BALOCHISTAN MERELY 1200 PPL POWERED BY RAW R WORKING MOST OF THEM R KILLED/ARRESTED



vardhan 5 days ago

pakistan is never loyal to anyone be it to USA, Afganistan, India and it will never be, given the situation only way to permanent peace is to further divide Pakistan; help Baloochi people and annex baloochistan from Pakistan, c



SP 5 days ago

Have great respect for Ms Fair. Her extensive knowledge on the complicated subject is amazing.

As an Indian I feel helpless and sad with a neighbouring country like Pakistan.

Pakistan is not only creating huge problems for her neighbours but also for her own people by pursuing its present policies.



Ranjha 6 days ago

Haramkhor saale madarchod pakistani