
Pulwama terrorist attack: By overplaying its terrorist-card, Pakistan has invited strong Indian retribution

The ghastly terrorist attack in Pulwama in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) on 14 February that killed 44 personnel of the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and injured scores of others appears to have scaled the brink of India's forbearance with neighbouring Pakistan. The string of terrorist attacks launched in recent years by terrorist outfits Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), which are sheltered on Pakistani territory by the Pakistani military establishment, has inflamed passions in India. As the bodies of the 44 victims arrived at homes across the vast country, tears were accompanied by outrage and indignation. The pitch of the invariable and persuasive demand that Pakistan be made to pay a steep price for the loss of lives was shrill and loud. Such reactions signified that public opinion in India, which had progressively inched towards the tipping point following the Mumbai terrorist attacks carried out by the LeT in 2008 and the Pathankot and Uri attacks by the JeM in January and September 2016, respectively, had now firmly turned the corner. This has put the Indian government under acute pressure to shed the restraint exercised by it thus far and respond more forcefully than it has done in the past to incessant Pakistani provocation through its terrorist proxies.

Kanwal Sibal, India's former Foreign Secretary, accurately echoed the public sentiment when he wrote, *"For long we have said in official and non-official forums that India will be compelled to respond robustly if it suffered another large scale terrorist attack with Pakistani connivance. Presumably, all possible options to deal with such an eventuality have been discussed over time and contingency plans prepared. The prime minister's unusually strong statements would suggest a condign response to the Pulwama attack. A telling response is required, particularly now when the forces behind Pulwama are gaining strength in our neighbourhood... If we fail to respond strongly to the Pulwama attack now, we will face a worse situation in the future"*.

The 14 February suicide bombing occurred in the Lethpora area of south Kashmir's Awantipora town in Pulwama district, and was the most lethal single attack against Indian security forces in J&K since the Pakistan-backed insurgency began in the late 1980s. Adil Ahmad Dar alias Waqaas, a school dropout from Gundibagh village in Pulwama who had been enticed last year to join the JeM when he was barely out of his teens, drove an explosive-packed vehicle into a bus that formed part of a 78 vehicle convoy of CRPF vehicles which was en route from Jammu to Srinagar transporting over 2,500 CRPF personnel. The highway had opened for traffic after several days of closure due to heavy snowfall and landslides.

The JeM claimed responsibility for the attack and released a recorded video message of the suicide bomber Adil Ahmad Dar. Sitting in front of a stash of weapons and holding an AK-47 rifle, Dar says that he had been *"assigned"* the task of carrying out the attack in Pulwama and that by the time the video was released he would be in Jannat (Heaven). He exhorts people to join the JeM while saying that *"there are thousands like me"*. He claims that the JeM had carried out the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814 in 1999, the suicide attack on the Army headquarters in Srinagar in 2000, the attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in 2001, and the attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot in 2016.

Media reports suggest that the attack was ordered by JeM's founder and leader Maulana Masood Azhar to avenge the death of his nephew Usman Haider, a JeM sniper who was killed by Indian security forces in October last year. Azhar sent his trusted JeM commander Abdul Rasheed Ghazi alias Kamran, along with two other top commanders, to J&K in the first week of December last year. They formulated and masterminded the Pulwama attack and timed it to occur around the 9 February death anniversary of Afzal Guru, the mastermind of the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, who was a close associate of Azhar. Ghazi, a Pakistani national and an Afghan war veteran, was an expert in improvised explosive devices. He reportedly trained Adil Ahmad Dar. Ghazi was killed by Indian forces near Pulwama on 18 February.

Brief background of Jaish-e-Mohammad

As brought out in EFSAS Study Paper on the '[Misuse of Nepal's territory by Pakistan's Intelligence Agencies to foment Terrorism](#)', the JeM was founded by Maulana Masood Azhar in Pakistan in 2000, soon after his release by the Indian government in December 1999 in exchange for the hostages of the hijacked flight IC 814. Azhar had entered India through Bangladesh in the early 1990s using a forged Portuguese passport and after spending some time in Saharanpur had travelled on to J&K to fulfil the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) mandated task of bridging the differences between Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Harkat-ul-Jihad al Islami, two Pakistan-sponsored terrorists outfits active in J&K at that time. He had succeeded in merging the two outfits into Harkat-ul-Ansar, whose general secretary he became.

Azhar was arrested by Indian security forces in February 1994 in Anantnag in J&K and remained incarcerated until his release in 1999. Police officers who questioned him during this period have disclosed that Azhar provided invaluable intelligence on the functioning of terrorist groups in Pakistan and their relationship with Pakistan's ISI. Azhar often said that he was important for Pakistan and the ISI, and that the ISI would ensure that he went back to Pakistan.

Following its establishment in 2000, JeM carried out a series of high profile terrorist attacks in J&K. While a suicide car bomb attack on the Army headquarters in Srinagar in May 2000 failed when the bomber panicked after being accosted by troops, a similar attack on the J&K legislature in Srinagar in September 2001 killed 39 people. The most serious attack undertaken by JeM, that on the Indian Parliament in December 2001, almost led to an all-out war between India and Pakistan with the Indian government mobilizing the army. The standoff continued for nine months.

The United States (US) invasion of Afghanistan and the Pakistan government's decision to extend support to the US did not go down well with the JeM, which had close ideological ties with the ousted Afghan Taliban. Following an assassination attempt by JeM on General Pervez Musharraf, the then military ruler of Pakistan, and the beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl by the group, the JeM was declared a terrorist organization by the Musharraf regime in 2002. The outfit maintained a lower profile thereafter.

Azhar emerged from years of seclusion in his base at Bahawalpur in Pakistan's Punjab province to address a rally of his jihadi supporters at Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan Administered J&K, on 26 January 2014 and called for the resumption of jihad against India. He said, "*There are 313 fidayeen in this gathering and if a call is given, the number will go up to 3,000*". Since then, the JeM has carried out several brazen and lethal terrorist assaults in India, including the 2016 attacks on the Indian Army facilities at Pathankot and Uri, and the most recent Pulwama attack. Some security analysts view the re-emergence of the JeM as a strategic bid by Pakistan to turn international scrutiny away from the LeT and its leader Hafiz Saeed, who has a \$10 million US government bounty on his head.

A respected scholar who specializes in the Pakistani political-military complex, Dr. Christine Fair, believes that Pakistan's refurbishing of the JeM *"is not only about prosecuting regional strategies, but it is also a critical component of domestic security strategy"*. She elaborated that the JeM was a Deobandi Islamist organization with close links to the Deobandi Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban, the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and the Al Qaeda. Dr. Fair contended that from about 2011 the ISI started to resurrect the JeM under Azhar's leadership *"to rehabilitate those assets who had defected to the Pakistani Taliban"*. JeM, therefore, is *"Pakistan's programme for bringing errant terrorists back into the fold of 'good terrorists',"* and for carrying on its permanent war against India. Dr. Fair concludes that *"enervating the Jaish is a cornerstone of Pakistan's strategy of managing its own internal security challenges as well as a cornerstone of its policy of nuclear blackmail to achieve ideological objectives in Kashmir"*.

A campus comprising the Madressatul Sabir and Jama-e-Masjid Subhanallah in Bahawalpur is reportedly the headquarters of JeM. Pakistani analyst Kunwar Khuldune Shahid reported that Masood Azhar was based in this campus until two years ago, when renal failure caused the Pakistan military establishment to shift him to a military hospital in Rawalpindi. Azhar's brothers, Abdul Rauf Asghar and Ibrahim Athar, stepped in to carry out the day to day activities of JeM on his behalf. Azhar subsequently returned to the campus, but he reportedly continues to remain dependant on local military authorities for regular rounds of dialysis.

While the Bahawalpur madrassa campus was the ideological center of JeM, it was not its main militant hub. A majority of JeM's militant training and operations are conducted in, and from, Pakistan Administered J&K. As the Islamabad-based award winning security analyst Aoun Sahi put it, the JeM *"draws its strength from Karachi. Mardan is also important. Bahawalpur is very important but not the whole picture. They don't carry many militant activities in Bahawalpur. JeM has its infrastructure out of its madrassas. To understand them one needs to think beyond madrassas"*. Further, JeM also operates under various other banners to circumvent scrutiny and the impact of sanctions. Masood Azhar formed the charity the Al-Rehmat Trust as one such front that supports JeM's operations. JeM also has a publication called *Al-Qalam*, which promotes jihadist literature targeting Kashmir.

Other prominent Pakistani analysts such as Ayesha Siddiq, author of *'Military Inc: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy'*, believe that the JeM, along with the LeT, forms part of the Pakistan Army's plans to mainstream terrorist outfits by getting them to enter politics. She believes that the military establishment *"wants to internationalize Kashmir along with Afghanistan. And the Kashmir-bound militants are central to the military's planning"*. Hence, she argues that the establishment would be loath to act meaningfully against JeM despite coming under tremendous international pressure to do so after the Pulwama attack.

India's Reaction to the Pulwama attack

The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has in its almost five years in power projected a muscular approach to national security. Feeding off this projection and the blatant provocation of Pulwama, the majority of Indians expect the government to act decisively against both terrorism and its sponsor Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi, in sync with the public mood, has in his public statements been assuring Indians that an appropriately forceful response was in the works and that the Army had been given a free hand to crush the menace of terror. His initial response set the tone, *"Attack on CRPF personnel in Pulwama is despicable. I strongly condemn this dastardly attack. The sacrifices of our brave security personnel shall not go in vain. The entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with the families of the brave martyrs. May the injured recover quickly"*.

Amidst the tensions between India and Pakistan, incidents of harassment of Kashmiri students, traders and workers in different parts of India in the aftermath of the Pulwama attack indicated that sections within the country need urgent education on the contribution, status and rights of the people of J&K as equal citizens of India. In a laudable and heartening gesture, none other than the Prime Minister of the country took this important task upon himself when he publicly deplored these incidents on 23 February. Modi underlined that *"The way Indian soldiers have laid down their lives, sons of the Kashmiri soil have also fallen victim to the bullets of terrorists... The safety of each Kashmiri settled anywhere in the country is the responsibility of every Indian and I exhort people here to raise their hands and promise to ensure the safety of Kashmiris"*.

Modi also called an emergency meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security on 15 February, following which he reiterated, *"I want to tell the terrorist groups and their masters that they have committed a big mistake. They have to pay a heavy price. If our neighboring country thinks that it will succeed in creating instability through such acts and conspiracies in our country, they should stop dreaming"*. He followed this up with statements in the next few days in various parts of the country in which he left no doubt that strong retribution was in the offing. At an event in Dhule in India's Maharashtra state he pledged, *"This is a time of restraint, a time of sensitivity. This is a time of sorrow. But I want to assure every family of the martyrs that each drop of tear after Pulwama terror attack will be avenged"*. At Yavatmal in the same state he said about Pakistan, *"A nation which came into existence after Partition and encourages terror activities, and which is on the verge of bankruptcy, has now become the second name for terror"*. He added that *"Our jawans (soldiers) will decide what, where, when and how the perpetrators of the Pulwama attack will be punished. Have patience and faith in our soldiers. The nation understands the anger in the armed forces and the CRPF. We have given them a free hand to decide the punishment for those who carried out the Pulwama attack"*.

Modi's strong words were backed up by his senior cabinet colleagues. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his first comments after the attack said, *"Attack on CRPF in #Pulwama, J&K is a cowardly & condemnable act of terrorists. Nation salutes martyred soldiers and we all stand united with families of martyrs. We pray for speedy recovery of the injured. Terrorists will be given unforgettable lesson for their heinous act"*. He subsequently said at a business summit on 22 February that the government will use all instruments to tackle Pakistan, which he described as a rogue state that had failed to act against terrorists in its territory. He added, *"Pakistan is riding a tiger and the tiger never spares its own riders... This is not a one-week battle, it has to be undertaken on various fronts... We have to act in a manner that this battle has to be decisively won by us"*. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman averred on 19 February that *"The response of all Indians to the terror attack in Pulwama has made our armed forces assert they are ready to retaliate against the enemy squarely"*.

As has been the convention in India on issues of utmost national importance, the opposition parties were taken on board and briefed on the Pulwama attack by the government at an all-party meeting called by it on 16 February. The meeting passed a resolution condemning the Pulwama terror attack, which *inter alia* stated that *"India has during the past three decades faced the menace of cross border terrorism. Of late, terrorism in India is being actively encouraged by the forces across the border. India has displayed both firmness and resilience in dealing with these challenges. The entire nation speaks in one voice to express its determination to fight these challenges. Today, we stand united in solidarity with our security forces in fighting terrorism and in defending the unity and integrity of India"*.

The first official reaction to the attack was a statement issued by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the evening of 14 February. It was scathing in its criticism of Pakistan, and stated that *"this heinous and despicable act has been perpetrated by Jaish-e-Mohammed, a Pakistan-based and supported terrorist organisation proscribed by the United Nations and other countries. This terror group is led by the international terrorist Masood Azhar, who has*

been given full freedom by Government of Pakistan to operate and expand his terror infrastructure in territories under the control of Pakistan and to carry out attacks in India and elsewhere with impunity... We demand that Pakistan stop supporting terrorists and terror groups operating from their territory and dismantle the infrastructure operated by terrorist outfits to launch attacks in other countries. We strongly reiterate our appeal to all members of the international community to support the proposal to list terrorists, including JeM Chief Masood Azhar, as a designated terrorist under the 1267 Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council and to ban terrorist organisations operating from territories controlled by Pakistan”.

The MEA also embarked on a concerted diplomatic outreach following the attack. It briefed dozens of countries, including the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), on the ramifications of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on the region and sought Pakistan’s isolation. It also summoned Pakistan’s High Commissioner in New Delhi to demand that Islamabad take “*verifiable*” action against terrorist groups.

International reactions

United Nations (UN) Secretary General António Guterres on 19 February strongly condemned the Pulwama terrorist attack and called for those behind the attack to be swiftly brought to justice. He stressed that it was essential to ensure accountability under international law. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, also strongly condemned the suicide bomb attack and called on authorities to bring those responsible to justice.

In an indisputable display of solidarity with India, the 15-member UNSC brushed aside Chinese objections to issue a statement on 21 February through which “The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the heinous and cowardly suicide bombing in Jammu and Kashmir, which resulted in over 40 Indian paramilitary forces dead and dozens wounded on February 14, 2019, for which Jaish-e-Mohammed has claimed responsibility. The members of the Security Council underlined the need to hold perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of these reprehensible acts of terrorism accountable and bring them to justice, and urged all States, in accordance with their obligations under international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, to cooperate actively with the Government of India and all other relevant authorities in this regard. The members of the Security Council reaffirmed that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security.” It added that any “acts of terrorism are criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed”.

This statement not only placed Pakistan in an unenviable position, but also exposed the mischief behind the repeated Chinese blocking over the last ten years of the listing of JeM chief Masood Azhar as a “*global terrorist*” at the UNSC Resolution 1267 sanctions committee. Even after the Pulwama attack, China consciously chose not to mention the JeM in its reaction despite the outfit having unequivocally claimed responsibility for the attack. The Chinese Foreign ministry spokesperson had said, “*China notes reports on the suicide terrorist attacks and (is) deeply shocked by the attack. We express deep condolences and sympathies to the injured and bereaved families. We firmly oppose and strongly condemn all forms of terrorism*”. At the UNSC, however, China found itself all alone in arguing an indefensible position, and had little option but to fall in line. This did not prevent China from subsequently exposing the scant regard that it has for the principles of civilized international engagement when Geng Shuang, its Foreign Ministry spokesperson, attempted on 22 February to contradict the statement that China had signed a day earlier at the UNSC. He said that “*Yesterday, the*

UN Security Council issued a press statement that mentioned a particular organization but only in general terms. It does not represent a judgment on the attack”.

As Tom Rogan, a columnist with the Washington Examiner fittingly wrote, “While China’s defense of Azhar is blatantly immoral, it reflects Xi Jinping’s transactional approach to international relations. Xi happily keeps more than a million of his own moderate-Muslim citizens in concentration camps while simultaneously defending an Islamic terrorist”.

The US government has been highly vocal and unsparing in its condemnation of the Pulwama attack. Responding to queries regarding the Pulwama attack, President Donald Trump said, *“Right now between Pakistan and India, there is a very, very bad situation. A very dangerous situation... India is looking at something very strong. India just lost almost 50 people in the attack. I can understand that too”.* White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, added in a statement that the US *“condemns in the strongest terms the heinous terrorist attack by a Pakistan-based terrorist group... The United States calls on Pakistan to end immediately the support and safe haven provided to all terrorist groups operating on its soil, whose only goal is to sow chaos, violence, and terror in the region... This attack only strengthens our resolve to bolster counterterrorism cooperation and coordination between the United States and India”.*

Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, said on Twitter that *“We stand with #India as it confronts terrorism. Pakistan must not provide safe haven for terrorists to threaten international security”.* Robert Palladino, deputy spokesperson for the US State Department, said that the US *“condemns in the strongest terms the terrorist attack today. The UN designated, Pakistan-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Muhammad has claimed responsibility for this heinous act. We call on all countries to uphold their responsibilities pursuant to UN Security Council resolutions to deny safe haven and support for terrorists”.*

The strongest message from the US emanated from National Security Adviser (NSA) John Bolton, who told his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval on 15 February that the US supports *“India’s right to self-defense”.* Bolton also told the media that the US has been very clear to Pakistan on ending support to terrorist safe havens, *“We have been very clear on that score... And, we are continuing to be in discussions we are going to have with the Pakistanis”.* Implicit in the use of the term *“self-defense”* was that the US would not stand in the way of whatever response, including the military option, that India chose to respond to the Pakistani provocation.

Over 75 US lawmakers have also condemned the Pulwama attack and expressed support for India's efforts to fight terrorism.

Scores of other countries, both regional and from afar, have expressed solidarity with India in its fight against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. France has gone a step further and is reportedly planning to once again move a proposal at the UN shortly to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. Philippe Etienne, diplomatic adviser to French President, Emmanuel Macron, telephoned Ajit Doval on 19 February to convey this decision. He also informed Doval that in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary then being held in Paris, the French government had recommended that Pakistan be kept on the grey list, which has since actually been done.

French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, also released a statement condemning the Pulwama attack. He said, “I most firmly condemn the heinous attack just perpetrated in India. My thoughts go out to the families of the fallen soldiers and my deepest solidarity to the Indian government and people. France has always been and always will be by India’s side in the fight against terrorism in all its forms. I call on every State to fight effectively

against terrorist networks and their financing channels and to prevent cross-border movements of terrorist groups, such as the Jaish-e-Mohammed, which has claimed responsibility for this attack”.

Pakistan’s Response

Pakistan’s initial response to the Pulwama attack was on expected lines. It sought to wash its hands off the attack. Pakistan’s foreign ministry stated that *“the attack in Pulwama is a matter of grave concern”*, while promptly adding, *“We strongly reject any insinuation by elements in the Indian media and government that seek to link the attack to Pakistan without investigations”*.

As the statements emanating from India took on a more belligerent note and the impact of its international outreach began translating into a cascading chorus of pressure on Pakistan to act against its terrorist proxies, it became clear to Pakistan that this time around India meant business. In a desperate attempt to stave off any immediate Indian aggression, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, on 18 February wrote to the UN Secretary-General with the request that he facilitate *“de-escalation”* of the current tension. He sought to play another dog-eared Pakistani card when he told the Secretary-General that Pakistan would *“honestly investigate”* any *“actionable evidence”* of involvement of Pakistan-based groups in the Pulwama attack if India made available such proof. Incidentally, Pakistan’s *“honest”* investigation into the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks has not even begun in earnest more than a decade after the event despite India providing copious amounts of *“actionable evidence”* to it.

Prime Minister Imran Khan eventually woke up to join the discourse on 19 February through a video message. Without even bothering with diplomatic, or even humanitarian, niceties such as condemning the deaths of the CRPF personnel, Khan roared, *“If you think that you can carry out any kind of attack on Pakistan, Pakistan will not just think about retaliating, we will retaliate. There will be no way to respond other than to retaliate”*. He sought to project generosity while reiterating what Qureshi had written to the UN Secretary-General: *“I would like to make the Indian government an offer. If you have actionable evidence, share it with us. We will take action. Not because we are under pressure, but because it is our policy”*. Subsequently, after a meeting of Pakistan’s National Security Committee (NSC), Imran Khan formally authorized the country’s armed forces *“to respond decisively and comprehensively to any aggression or misadventure by India”*.

India’s retorts to Imran Khan’s statements were incisive and scathing. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, *“The head of the government says, ‘Give me actionable intelligence’. You need actionable intelligence if it is a blind offence, but here is a man sitting in your own country who owned up to the offence. So when there is a confession... You have people sitting in your own country and admitting to the offence and saying that ‘yes, we have done it’ and taking credit for it”*. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman added, *“Since the Mumbai attack on November 26, 2008, the previous government had sent evidence to Pakistan, but they did not take any action. Even our government sent evidence of involvement of non-State actors but no action has been taken so far. Pakistan has nothing to show that they have taken action after evidence provided for earlier attackers”*. The MEA said that India was not surprised that Imran Khan had refused to acknowledge the attack on India’s security forces in Pulwama as an act of terrorism, and described his offer to investigate the attack if provided proof as a *“lame excuse”*. It added that there had been no progress in the pledged Pakistani investigations into the 2016 Pathankot terrorist attack despite India sharing concrete evidence. Promises of *“guaranteed action”*, therefore, rang hollow given Pakistan’s track record.

Conclusion

In the face of India's coordinated diplomatic campaign against Pakistan's sponsorship of terrorism, Pakistan appears to have realized that it is in a very vulnerable situation with the international community, barring China (which itself was cornered on the issue and marginalized in the UNSC), demanding immediate and visible action from it. The threat of a military response by India is also looming large on the horizon. Under duress, even the tardy, confused and cosmetic steps that the Pakistani government grudgingly tried to brandish as proof of its sincerity in dealing with the matter were negated by the pressure the government came under from the military establishment. Pakistan's Information Minister, Fawad Chaudhry, announced on 22 February that the Punjab provincial government had taken over "*the headquarters of Jaish-e-Mohammad*" in Bahawalpur in line with the decisions taken during the NSC meeting held a day earlier. Startlingly, on 23 February Chaudhry, obviously smarting from the ticking off he received from the establishment, contradicted his earlier statement and claimed that the Madrassatul Sabir and Jamia-e-Masjid Subhanallah that were taken over had no connection with the JeM. As brought out afore, this campus was the ideological center of JeM and not its main militant hub. Nevertheless, even this eyewash proved unpalatable for the military establishment.

Pakistan has fairly and squarely brought upon itself the predicament that it finds itself in. Sponsorship of terrorist groups in pursuit of dubious political goals is abhorred by the vast majority of the international community. Pakistan failed to foresee that the impunity it had begun to consider the norm and take for granted would eventually come to a grinding halt, and the retribution that would follow would be potent and severely damaging.

All is still not lost for Pakistan, though. The question really is whether it is "*honestly*" willing to take firm, decisive and demonstrable action against the terrorist empire it has created and nurtured over decades. This course of action has also gained traction amongst an educated section of Pakistanis, as the following tweet by prominent Pakistani journalist Taha Siddiqui demonstrates, "*Instead of releasing such panicky statement to deflect attention, the Pakistani #foreignoffice should look within. #JaisheMohammed that claimed responsibility is based in Pakistan and was recently being promoted at a rally in Lahore. #GHQ must stop its #terror sponsoring policy*". If Pakistan is willing to do so, the international narrative would quickly swing to calls for India to show restraint. The route to salvation for Pakistan, therefore, lies in "*honestly*" addressing the crux of the problem itself; nothing short of it is likely to work this time. There is, alas, nothing so far to indicate that Pakistan is considering travelling down this difficult path.

The Pulwama attack appears to have exhausted the decades of patience that India chose to exercise despite repeated Pakistani transgressions. The exhaustion was by no means abrupt or knee-jerk – India's self-restraint was tested and sapped incrementally, terrorist attack after attack. When that happens, the pent up frustration and anger tend to boil over quite quickly. Prime Minister Modi's following words at a rally in Rajasthan last week were, therefore, in tune with the expectations of an incensed nation, "*We are moving ahead with strength to punish the perpetrators of terrorism... The scores will be settled this time, settled for good*".

The options available to India are by no means unlimited or free of risk. It has, therefore, opted for a comprehensive strategy. It has already withdrawn the *Most Favoured Nation* status that it had granted unilaterally to Pakistan, and raised import duties on Pakistani products to 200%. The State security provided to the separatist leaders in J&K has been withdrawn. On the diplomatic front, that the strongly phrased UNSC statement was issued suggests that India is proactively and fairly successfully pursuing its stated objective of isolating Pakistan on the issue of terror. India has renewed its push to designate Masood Azhar as an international terrorist by the UN. It has also briefed the FATF on Pakistan's continuing support to terrorism.

Among the more hard-hitting options available to India is the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty until such time as Pakistan eliminates India-directed terrorism from its soil. This course of action has been strongly backed by mandarins such as Sibal. Further, the statements emanating from the Modi government have hinted that a military component formed an integral part of India's comprehensive strategy. Trump's statement on India preparing for "*something very strong*" also suggests the same. The spectrum of potential military responses is wide, and could range from covert operations to counterforce strikes. However, any cross-border operation, especially a war, is fraught with risks. As Shivshankar Menon, India's former NSA underlined, a military response risks "*a cycle of escalation which you're not sure you can control or manage*". Former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was more graphic in his description of what a war could degenerate into, "*If we would attack India with one atomic bomb, then the neighbouring country could finish us by attacking with 20 bombs. Then the only solution is that we should first attack them with 50 atom bombs so that they cannot hit us with 20 bombs. Are you ready to first launch an attack with 50 bombs?*"

India is fully justified in pursuing a comprehensive strategy, including military options, to neutralize Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in J&K and other parts of India. The absence of a strong response from India would only encourage the Pakistani military establishment to persist with its wayward ways, as it has done over decades. There is also little doubt that cessation of Pakistani interference is the key to stability returning to J&K. The burden of ensuring that the grim scenario painted by Musharraf does not actually play out on the ground, therefore, rests firmly on Rawalpindi's shoulders.



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