



PULWAMA AND ITS AFTERMATH: INDIA ON DANGEROUS WAR PATH

By
Mahwish Hafeez
Research Fellow

Edited by
Najam Rafique

March 12, 2019

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do
not represent those of ISSI)*



The 14th day of February was no different than any other day till around evening, a suicide bomber rammed his car packed with explosives into bus that was part of a 78 vehicle convoy killing 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel on the spot and leaving another 20¹ seriously injured at Lethpora in Pulwama district of Indian occupied Kashmir. This is said to be the deadliest attack since 1989 when Kashmiris took up arms against Indian atrocities. The last such incident was the car bomb attack near the legislative assembly in Srinagar on October 1, 2001 killing 38 people.²

As has always been the case, India did not waste any time in pointing fingers at Pakistan. Threatening Pakistan with a "strong reply", India announced its decision of revoking Pakistan's Most Favoured Nation Status.³ Modi also said that those responsible for the attack will pay a heavy price and that they have made a huge mistake.⁴ Upping the ante, Ministers of the Modi government also

¹ 40 CRPF jawans killed in worst terror attack in Kashmir, India slams Pakistan, *Hindustan Times*, February 14, 2019 at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/44-crpf-jawans-killed-in-worst-terror-attack-in-kashmir-india-slams-pakistan/story-wCajHcY345jfHufloa4pN.html>

² A blood soaked timeline of terror attacks in Kashmir, *rediffnews*, February 14, 2019 at <https://www.rediff.com/news/report/a-blood-soaked-timeline-of-terror-attacks-in-kashmir/20190214.htm>

³ Modi warns of 'strong reply' to Kashmir attack as India withdraws Pakistan's MFN status, *Express Tribune*, February 15, 2019 at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1911036/1-modi-threatens-strong-reply-occupied-kashmir-suicide-attack/>

⁴ PM Modi on Pulwama attack: Terrorists will pay a heavy price for heinous act, *Indian Express*, February 15, 2019 at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/pm-modi-on-pulwama-attack-terrorists-will-pay-heavy-price-for-heinous-act-5585265/>

did not hesitate from issuing strong worded statements against Pakistan. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh warned that "some elements are being funded by Pakistan and ISI. We won't tolerate terror. We will eliminate terror."⁵ Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that, "those who perpetrated, supported and patronized this heinous attack would not go unpunished."⁶ He went on to say that there will be an "appropriate and suitable response as may be strategically decided" and that Pakistan was isolated in the comity of nations. India also announced that it would not let its share of water from Indus river network flow to Pakistan.⁷ The allegations were strongly rejected by Pakistan. And thus, within hours of the incident, the South Asian region was once again on the brink of war between two nuclear armed countries.

A careful look at the timing of this event raises several serious questions and observations. The first and the most important is: who benefits from such an attack? To answer this question, following points need to be considered:

- 1- Since India is going to hold its 17th Lok Sabha elections in April and May 2019, BJP seems to think that any anti-Pakistan rhetoric or move would help in wooing more voters.
- 2- Raising anti-Pakistan rhetoric helps the BJP government to divert the attention of masses from the mega Rafale fighter jet scandal.
- 3- It is an accepted fact that the freedom movement in Kashmir is purely indigenous and over the past 70 years, India has miserably failed to win the hearts and minds of Kashmiri people.
- 4- Apart from national audience, anti-Pakistan rhetoric also helps India to divert the attention of international community from its atrocities in Indian occupied Kashmir. This is particularly relevant as lately, international community finally did break its silence as more and more voices were heard condemning India for the massive human rights abuses. For the first time, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report of gross human rights violations on June 14, 2018.⁸ Earlier, Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC)

⁵ Pulwama attack: Rajnath vows to win decisive war against terror, says morale of jawans not hit, *Indian Express*, February 15, 2019 at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-morale-has-not-taken-a-hit-rajnath-singh-on-pulwama-terror-attack-5586202/>

⁶ Pulwama attack: Perpetrators will not go unpunished, says Ravi Shankar Prasad, *The Hindu*, February 15, 2019 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/pulwama-attack-perpetrators-will-not-go-unpunished-says-ravi-shankar-prasad/article26278869.ece>

⁷ India not to allow its share of water from Indus network of rivers to flow into Pakistan, *The Hindu*, February 21, 2019 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-will-stop-its-share-of-indus-water-from-flowing-into-pakistan-nitin-gadkari/article26332065.ece>

⁸ "Report on the Situation of Human Rights in Kashmir: Developments in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir from June 2016 to April 2018, and General Human Rights Concerns in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission had also released a report in October 2017⁹ detailing brutal Indian tactics to break the will of Kashmiri people, particularly the youth. More recently, UK's Parliament All Party Parliamentary Kashmir Group also released a report in October 2018¹⁰ whereas in a latest such instance European Parliament held a public hearing on February 19, 2019¹¹ on situation in Kashmir and called upon India to immediately halt human rights abuses in Kashmir. Thus, the Pulwama incident gives India a chance to shift the entire blame on Pakistan and picture the indigenous movement of Kashmir as terrorism and justify its atrocities.

- 5- This also gives India an opportunity to further escalate its killing spree in Kashmir as is evident from the statement of Corps Commander Lt. Gen. KJS Dhillon where he said that anyone who picks up the gun will be eliminated.¹²
- 6- The case of Indian agent Kulbhushan Yadev who confessed his involvement in anti-Pakistan activities is being contested in International Court of Justice.
- 7- India also wished that Pakistan be blacklisted in the Financial Action Task Force meeting following the Pulwama incident.¹³

Pakistan on the other hand had no benefit from such an incident. Pakistan has always supported the indigenous Kashmiri struggle politically and diplomatically and would certainly not do anything that can undermine the legitimate freedom struggle in Kashmir.

The saner minds in both the countries were hoping that the aftermath of Pulwama incident would be confined to verbal dual and social media war. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Following days saw military escalation between two countries that resulted in Pakistan not only shooting down two Indian air force aircraft, but also capturing a pilot alive. However, since Pakistan has been repeatedly

and Gilgit - Baltistan", Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, June 14, 2018 at <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IN/DevelopmentsInKashmirJune2016ToApril2018.pdf>

⁹ Report of the OIC-IPHRC Fact Finding Visit to the State of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to Assess Human Rights Situation in the Indian Occupied Kashmir, 27-29 March at https://www.oic-iphrc.org/en/data/docs/field_visits/236756.pdf

¹⁰ For full text of the report visit http://mofa.gov.pk/documents/kashmir/Kashmir_APPG.pdf

¹¹ European Parliament to hold hearing on HR abuses in held Kashmir, Pakistan Today, February 14, 2019 at <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/02/19/european-parliament-to-hold-hearing-on-hr-abuses-in-held-kashmir/>

¹² Anyone who picks up gun in the valley will be eliminated : Army, *Times of India*, February 19, 2019 at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/anyone-who-has-picked-up-gun-in-valley-will-be-eliminated-army/articleshow/68058681.cms>

¹³ India's efforts to blacklist Pakistan go in vain as FATF decides to keep graylist status, *International Business Times*, February 22, 2019 at <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/indias-efforts-blacklist-pakistan-go-vain-fatf-decides-keep-grey-list-status-792463>

calling for peace, it decided to release Indian pilot as a peace gesture¹⁴ to de-escalate and force India to step down from its unreasonable offensive posture.

The Pulwama incident and its aftermath has once again brought to fore the fragile nature of peace in South Asia. Once again, it reminds us that unless Kashmir issue is resolved according to the wishes of the Kashmiri people, peace in the region will remain elusive. This incident also served as a rude reminder to India that it is simply not possible to break the will and resolve of the Kashmiri people through force. This is a political issue and needs political settlement. This incident has also once again reinforced the fact that war is not an option between two nuclear armed countries and the only way forward is the dialogue process. Any miscalculation can result in a catastrophe that is beyond imagination not only for South Asia, but the world at large.

The events which unfolded in the aftermath of Pulwama incident showed that Pakistan wishes to pursue the path of peace. The decision by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan to release the Indian pilot was not only hailed domestically, but the entire world recognized and appreciated it. This appreciation was specifically mentioned in the Declaration of the 46th Session of Council of Foreign Minister of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation that concluded on March 2, 2019.¹⁵ In fact, calls for a Nobel Peace Prize for the Pakistani premier became a top trend on social media.

On the other hand, Prime Minister Modi finds himself in a difficult situation as he faces a tirade of criticism and allegations of using Pulwama incident for his political mileage. It is extremely unfortunate that in an effort to win the upcoming elections due to be held in April-May 2019, the Modi government embarked on a dangerous path of war mongering. This fact was recently exposed when BJP Karnataka unit chief Yeddyurappa said that Indian air force strike in Pakistan would help BJP win more than 22 out of 28 Lok Sabha seats in the state in upcoming elections.¹⁶ In fact, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee while criticizing Modi for using air strikes for political gains demanded to know the truth behind government's claims of killing around 300 people in an airstrike in Pakistan's Balakot district.¹⁷ While it remains to be seen who emerges victorious in the upcoming elections, one can only hope that sanity will prevail and Indian government will take full advantage

¹⁴ Releasing captured Indian pilot as peace gesture : PM Imran, *Express Tribune*, February 28, 2019 at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1920234/1-pm-imran-briefs-joint-parliament-session-indo-pak-situation/>
¹⁵ For full text visit <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/abu-dhabi-declaration-46th-session-of-council-of-foreign-minister-of-the-organisation-of-islamic-cooperation-1.1551555952948>

¹⁶ IAF air strike will help BJP win 22 seats says BS Yeddyurappa: Cong says 'disgusting', *Hindustan Times*, February 28, 2019 at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/iaf-airstrike-will-help-bjp-win-22-seats-says-bs-yeddyurappa-cong-says-disgusting/story-bgzauQkRB8cpjugcmDI0UK.html>

¹⁷ IAF airstrike aftermath: were the bombs on target? Mamata Banerjee wants information to be public, *India Today*, February 28, 2019 at <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/mamata-banerjee-iaf-airstrikes-pulwama-terror-attack-jaish-e-mohammad-1467460-2019-02-28>

of Pakistan's "peace gesture" to de-escalate the situation. One also hopes that the events of past couple of weeks would also force India to realize that war is not an option and problems need resolution through dialogue.