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Issue Brief

India-Pakistan Relations: Post Pathankot

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The history of India-Pakistan relations has always been marred by ill-fated incidents. Jammu and Kashmir and terrorism are two major issues that have always impacted relations between the two countries. The year 2015 was also characterised by another wave of tensions between India and Pakistan. However, towards the end of the year, a series of high-level meetings between the Prime Ministers of the two countries, the national security advisers, the visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and the informal visit by Prime Minister Modi to Pakistan, raised the hopes for some improvement. Nevertheless, whenever it comes to India-Pakistan relations, such diplomatic breakthroughs are often sabotaged by terrorist incidents or by other provocations. In this case, the terrorist attacks at the Indian air base in Pathankot and the Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, Peshawar, in January 2016 were no exception.

Indian intelligence agencies accused Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Maulana Masood Azhar as the mastermind of the Pathankot attack, and shared the identity of four suspected attackers with Pakistan.¹ The Indian media also campaigned actively against Pakistani state institutions.² Strongly condemning the terror assault, Pakistan formed an investigation committee, took Maulana Masood Azhar into custody and sealed the offices of his organisation in Pakistan.³ Further, to probe the Pathankot incident, Pakistan also offered to send a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to India.⁴ However, so far, investigations by SIT have revealed no evidence against Maulana Masood Azhar.⁵

Despite Pakistan's assurances to bring the perpetrators to justice, not only jingoistic statements were issued from the Indian side, but Pakistan International Airline (PIA) office in New Delhi was also attacked by Shiv Sena members. In response to the Pathankot incident, the Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar also issued a veiled threat that whoever hurts India should be given the same pain, but, how, when and where should be India's choice.⁶ A senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader, Subramanian Swamy, also tweeted that it is time to put in place a two-year strategic plan and teach Pakistan a lesson by breaking it into four.⁷ Such anti-Pakistan sentiments are a cause of concern, and a stark reminder of Indian extremist tendencies to eliminate Pakistan.

On January 20, three weeks after Pathankot and Parrikar's outburst to inflict pain on Pakistan, four terrorists attacked Bacha Khan University (BKU) in Charsadda, Peshawar, killing twenty people and injuring several others. The Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the responsibility for this attack. Initial investigations confirmed that the attack was handled and planned in Afghanistan.⁸ Some media

sources also reported that the whole plan of attack on BKU was financed with some three million Indian rupees provided by the Indian consulate in Jalalabad, to carry out the attack.⁹ Pakistan's civil and military leadership, while demonstrating the sincerity to eliminate terrorism and improve bilateral relations, have avoided blaming India.

On the other hand, continuous unsubstantiated allegations from the Indian side are undermining Pakistan's efforts to cooperate. Such incidents and accusations have endangered the recent efforts by Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Narendra Modi to restart the dialogue process and improve bilateral relations. Both countries announced resumption of a renewed 'Comprehensive Dialogue' (CD) during Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to Pakistan on December 8, 2015. This CD would include issues of peace and security, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage/Tulbal navigation project, economic and cultural cooperation, counter-terrorism, narcotics control, religious tourism and people-to-people exchange.¹⁰ Historically, the Composite Dialogue Process (CDP) between India and Pakistan, since its inception in 1997, has always been impeded by provocative statements and terrorist incidents. Consequently, both sides could not achieve the desired goals.

The major reason of this failure is that Indo-Pak hostility that exists at the military and political level has always been discussed at length, but hostility at societal and grassroot level has largely been ignored. Historically, the Indians under the influence of their extremist ideology of 'Hindutva' find it hard to accept Pakistan as an equal, sovereign and progressive state. Therefore, recent antagonistic statements and anti-Pakistan campaign in India should not be a surprise. These events have not only demonstrated that India's current domestic politics has regained its hostile tone, but also raises doubts about India's policy of cooperation with Pakistan. What is more disturbing is the openness of such provocative statements by Indian cabinet-level state functionaries.

The present scenario demonstrates that Hindu extremist ideology plays an active role in India's political discourse. This has raised concerns that peaceful and cordial relations between India and Pakistan cannot be achieved with India's acerbic approach. In order to sustain peace, India needs to break its traditional hostile approach towards Pakistan. There is also a need to reduce and eliminate the extremist tendencies within the Indian society.

The following recommendations are suggested to achieve more realistic progress in order to improve India-Pakistan bilateral relations:

- **Reverse the tide of extremism:** To improve their bilateral relation, India should work to reverse the extremist tide within Indian society.
- **Avoid blame game:** Both Pakistan and India are victims of terrorism. Therefore, India, instead of blaming Pakistan, should cooperate with Pakistan in defeating a common enemy.
- **Provocative statements:** Indian leaders should move away from making provocative statements, since they reflect a dangerous state policy.
- **Peace building role of the media:** Indian media should act responsibly and, instead of widening the gulf, play an active role to build peace between India and Pakistan. The Pakistan media can play its constructive role in this area.
- **Joint mechanism for investigation:** Absence of credible investigation often leads to unilateral conclusions. Hence, to tackle such terrorist incidents, both countries should devise a joint mechanism for investigation on case-to-case basis. In this regard, the proposal by Sri Lanka in 2010 for creation of a SAARC police body needs to be given a close consideration in order to investigate such cross-border crimes in future.
- **Calendar of India-Pakistan talks:** The entire process of India-Pakistan talks should remain uninterrupted, despite unforeseen setbacks.
- **Result-oriented dialogue:** To make the dialogue process result-oriented, both states should find areas of common interest and cooperate with each other to work to root out the causes of conflict.
- **Enhance confidence building measures (CBMs):** Even in times of hostility and differences, both should not only continue to implement the existing CBMs, but also find new areas for expanding CBMs.
- **Supportive role of civil society:** Civil society on both sides of the border should play a supportive role in the implementation of any commitment made by India and Pakistan.
- **Role of international community:** The international community should play a proactive role, and help nuclear armed India and Pakistan to resolve their issues peacefully through dialogue.

Notes and References

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- ⁶ "Whoever Hurts India, will get Same Pain, Parrikar", *The Tribune India*, January 11, 2016.
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