

United States – India Joint Leaders Statement and Implications for Pakistan

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



India's incessant gratuitous references to Pakistan in context of alleged 'cross-border terrorism' are nothing new. This tactic has been at the core of India's foreign policy narrative vis-a-vis Pakistan – designed also to deflect attention from New Delhi's own role in perpetrating state-sponsored terrorism against Pakistan and in the region and beyond. The recent India-United States Joint Leaders Statement once again repeated the familiar pattern. The Statement urged "Pakistan to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai, and Pathankot attacks and ensure that its territory is not used to carry out cross-border terrorist attacks."¹

Dragging Pakistan like this into the Joint Statement undermines Pakistan's important role as a frontline ally in the U.S.-led 'War on Terrorism,' Pakistan's own counter-terrorism initiatives as well as close cooperation with the international community on counter-terrorism. Having lost more than 80,000 human lives and incurred over \$150 billion in economic losses, Pakistan has been one of the biggest victims of terrorism.² Pakistan seeks regional peace and stability; however, it remains concerned that the transfer of sophisticated weapon systems and provision of advanced military technology to India serve to not only create military imbalance but also increase the risk of

¹ U.S. Embassy & Consulates in India, "United States – India Joint Leaders Statement" press release, February 13, 2025, <https://in.usembassy.gov/united-states-india-joint-leaders-statement/>

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, Transcript of the Press Briefing by Spokesperson on Thursday, 02 September, 2021, <https://mofa.gov.pk/transcript-of-the-press-briefing-by-spokesperson-on-thursday-02-september-2021>

inadvertent escalation in South Asia, while encouraging India's belligerent posture towards Pakistan. The untrammelled military enablement of India by the U.S. in the hope of propping it up as a supposed 'counterweight' to China further complicates the regional situation. These dynamics create a peculiar environment where Pakistan's cooperation with the U.S. on counter-terrorism is over-shadowed by India's serial accusations, while U.S. military transfers to India keep on complicating the regional security landscape and accentuating Pakistan's security challenges.

Pakistan's Response

Responding to the Indo-U.S. joint statement, Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson expressed 'surprise' and stated that the reference to Pakistan was "one-sided, misleading and contrary to diplomatic norms."³ He pointed out that such a diversion could not conceal India's sponsorship of "terrorism, subversion and extrajudicial assassinations in the region and beyond." According to the Spokesperson, this (Indo-U.S.) statement cannot deflect attention from hate crimes under state-patronage against Indian minorities especially Muslims. He added that the joint statement failed to address the core issue of regional instability, which was India's non-compliance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions that grant the inalienable right of self-determination to the people of Jammu and Kashmir who face seven decades of atrocities by Indian forces.⁴

The Spokesperson also voiced concerns over potential military sales to India, including advanced military technologies. He said that Pakistan has repeatedly stressed that such transfer of technology exacerbates military imbalance in South Asia. This not only undermines strategic stability in South Asia but also makes the objective of durable peace in the region impractical. In conclusion, he urged to take a holistic and objective view of South Asian security and peace, and to refrain from validating India's prejudiced views that are divorced from the ground realities.⁵

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Statement by the Spokesperson Regarding Pakistan-Specific Reference in the India-U.S. Joint Statement of 13 February 2025" press release, February 14, 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/statement-by-the-spokesperson-regarding-pakistan-specific-reference-in-the-india-us-joint-statement-of-13-february-2025>

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Statement by the Spokesperson Regarding Pakistan-Specific Reference in the India-U.S. Joint Statement of 13 February 2025." <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/statement-by-the-spokesperson-regarding-pakistan-specific-reference-in-the-india-us-joint-statement-of-13-february-2025>

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Statement by the Spokesperson Regarding Pakistan-Specific Reference in the India-U.S. Joint Statement of 13 February 2025." <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/statement-by-the-spokesperson-regarding-pakistan-specific-reference-in-the-india-us-joint-statement-of-13-february-2025>

Joint Statement Contrasts with the reality of U.S.-Pakistan Counterterrorism Cooperation

India's relentless one-sided 'terrorism' narrative against Pakistan is a calculated ploy to mislead the strategic and policy community internationally. Through its strategic partnership with the U.S., India seeks power maximization without any surety of delivering on the expectations of its assigned role as the so-called 'net-security provider' in the region. This could not be more evident from India's purported posture of 'strategic autonomy' touted in recent years.

In comparison, despite the highs and lows of Pakistan-U.S. relations, bilateral cooperation on counter-terrorism remains robust. The recent arrest of ISKP's top tier operational commander Mohammad Sharifullah, an Afghan national accused of 2021 bombing of Kabul airport, was a result of successful U.S.-Pakistan joint counter-terrorism cooperation.⁶ The significance of this counter-terrorism cooperation can be gauged from the overwhelming response from Washington's highest corridors: President Trump's appreciation and thanks for the Government of Pakistan during his State of the Union Address; the appreciation call by U.S. National Security Adviser Michael Waltz for Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar; statement by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), and others.⁷ Pakistan and the U.S. held Counterterrorism Dialogue in Washington in May 2024, which highlighted that counterterrorism efforts remain a mutual interest even after U.S. departure from Afghanistan due to challenges to regional and global security, including Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), ISIS-Khorasan and other terrorist organizations.⁸ Senior U.S. officials maintain that both U.S. and Pakistan have paid a heavy material and human cost owing to terrorism, and that the U.S. recognizes Pakistan's efforts⁹ and aims to strengthen counterterrorism efforts, collaboration, exchanges and capacity building.¹⁰ Such affirmations also indicate U.S.'s interest in contributing to regional security and stability.

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, Transcript of the Media Briefing by the Spokesperson Thursday, 06 March 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/transcript-of-the-media-briefing-by-the-spokesperson-thursday-06-march-2025>

⁷ Umair Jamal, "Pakistan and the US Join Hands in Counterterrorism Operation," *The Diplomat*, March 11, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/03/pakistan-and-the-us-join-hands-in-counterterrorism-operation/>

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Joint Statement of Pakistan-U.S. Counterterrorism Dialogue" press release, May 13, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-of-pakistan-us-counterterrorism-dialogue>

⁹ Remarks by U.S. Ambassador Blome at the "International Conference on Strengthening Pakistan-U.S. Relations" at ISSI, July 24, 2024, <https://issi.org.pk/remarks-by-u-s-ambassador-blome-at-the-international-conference-on-strengthening-pakistan-u-s-relations-at-issi/>

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, "Joint Statement of Pakistan-U.S. Counterterrorism Dialogue" press release, May 13, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-of-pakistan-us-counterterrorism-dialogue>

Pakistan's Counterterrorism Cooperation with U.S. Allies

Pakistan has not only cooperated with the U.S. on counter-terrorism efforts but also continues its collaboration with key U.S. allies. Recently, Pakistan and the UK held Counter Terrorism Dialogue in London from February 17-18, 2025, where the two sides conducted a regional threat assessment and focused on continued bilateral cooperation in CT efforts.¹¹ The next round of discussions is expected to take place in Islamabad in 2026.

Similarly, Pakistan and the European Union (EU) engaged in the ninth round of Counter-Terrorism Dialogue in Brussels on 20 February 2025.¹² The two sides condemned terrorism and exchanged best practices and areas of concrete cooperation on “prevention and countering of violent extremism, recruitment and movement of foreign fighters, offline and online radicalization, combating terrorism financing and more topics that are relevant to address the growing challenges posed by terrorism.”¹³ Likewise, Pakistan and Japan held the fourth round of Counter-Terrorism Consultations in Tokyo on February 26, 2025.¹⁴ This illustrates Pakistan's consistent efforts in fight against terrorism with international cooperation.

Pakistan also has active multilateral engagement such as at the UN fora, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). This indicates that Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts cannot be overlooked or undermined. Rather, there is a need to objectively acknowledge Pakistan's contributions and take a holistic view of security issues in South Asia instead of uncritically endorsing India's one-sided views.

Conclusion

India's unrelenting attempts to link Pakistan with ‘terrorism’ in joint statements with the U.S. are self-serving and misleading, and seek to whitewash Pakistan's significant contributions to global counter-terrorism efforts. These tactics are also meant to divert attention from India's own illegal extra-territorial assassinations and state-sponsored terrorism as well as her role in regional instability and its non-compliance with the UNSC resolutions. For concrete efforts towards stability

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, “Second Round of Pakistan-UK Counter Terrorism Dialogue (London, 17-18 February 2025)” press release, February 19, 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/second-round-of-pakistan-uk-counter-terrorism-dialogue-london-17-18-february-2025>

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, “Pakistan EU Hold Counter-Terrorism Dialogue” press release, February 20, 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistan-eu-hold-counter-terrorism-dialogue>

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, “Pakistan EU Hold Counter-Terrorism Dialogue” press release, February 20, 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/pakistan-eu-hold-counter-terrorism-dialogue>

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, “Fourth Round of Pakistan-Japan Counter-Terrorism Consultations” press release, February 26, 2025, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/fourth-round-of-pakistan-japan-counter-terrorism-consultations>

in South Asia, it is crucial that the world at large and the U.S. in particular adopt a holistic and objective threat assessment approach, rather than view the matter through the Indian lens. Washington needs to recognize that appeasing New Delhi on this account is a hopeless undertaking, which will only further whet India's appetite -- without any concrete benefit for the U.S. The U.S. must understand Pakistan's legitimate security concerns and take seriously the threats to Pakistan posed by the supply of advanced military weapons and critical technologies to India. Only a balanced perspective, constructive engagement, and result-oriented dialogue could usher in sustainable peace and stability in South Asia.