



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

WHY IT IS DIFFICULT TO TALK TO PAKISTAN?

Dr. Shalini Chawla

Senior Research Fellow, CAPS

The recent terrorist attack in Udhampur by Lashkar-e-Taiba, sponsored by Pakistan, is not a new phenomenon. The captured terrorist, Usman Naved, has provided sufficient leads leaving little space to allow denial by Islamabad. India has been facing terrorism sponsored and supported from the Pakistani soil for more than four decades now. We need to ask ourselves why each attack surprises us? How do we counter Pakistan's consistent strategy of hitting us with covert war through terrorism?

Almost every single time, the commencement of any form of dialogue between the two states gets jolted by fresh terror attacks perpetrated on the Indian soil. Last month on July 27, a severe terrorist attack on the police station in Dinanagar, near Gurdaspur in Punjab, killed nine people, including the Superintendent of Police and eight civilians. The terrorists had been briefed to attack two temples and a college. It was the first major attack in the area in the last eight years. Investigation reports provided clear leads connecting the attack to LeT.

India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, on August 3, very aptly said, " ...if you are not able to exercise power, it is as good as not having it...There is no point having Rs 50,000 in your pocket if you starve to death...". The statement indeed carries a very sound message for a nation where dealing with cross border terrorism remains one of the most vital challenges for national security.



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Coincidentally, NSA's statement came along at the same time as Islamabad's embarrassing disclosures regarding the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Pakistan's Chief investigator for the Mumbai attacks, Tariq Khosa, former DG, Federal Investigation agency, has stated that the attack was planned and conducted from Pakistani soil, a fact which is not new but denied consistently by Pakistan up until now. Khosa, in his article in *Dawn*, "Mumbai attacks trail" on August 3, wrote, "Pakistan has to deal with the Mumbai mayhem, planned and launched from its soil. This requires facing the truth and admitting mistakes."

Khosa's article in *Dawn* revealed the following facts which are pertinent and affirm Pakistan's sponsorship and support to the attack: First, Ajmal Kasab was a Pakistani national and his place of residence and his joining Lashkar-e-Taiba were established by the investigators. Second, the LeT terrorists were imparted training near Thatta, Sindh, and launched by sea from there. Third, the fishing trawler used by the terrorists for hijacking the Indian trawler, which was used to reach Mumbai, came back to the harbor and was concealed. Fourth, the engine of the dinghy abandoned by the terrorists near Mumbai harbor was recovered. The investigations revealed it originated in Japan, was exported to Lahore and then reached the Karachi sports shop from where it was purchased by LeT. Fifth, the operations room from where the Mumbai operation was conducted is in Karachi, and has been investigated. Sixth, the alleged commander and his deputies have been identified and arrested. Lastly, a couple of foreign financiers have been identified and arrested.

Islamabad has relied on terrorism as a foreign policy tool against India for the last forty years now. Covert war for Pakistan has become an acceptable tool as it has been a relatively low cost option and, more importantly, it gives Pakistan an option of *denial*. Although Pakistan has been denying its involvement in the acts of terrorism so far, there is ample evidence proving Pakistan's engagement and its faith in terrorism as the most potent weapon to deal with India. Pakistan discriminates between the so called "good terrorists" and the "bad terrorists", the discrimination being more out of strategic calculation rather than ideological sympathy. The anti-India groups



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

nurtured by the state like the LeT and the JeM are the “good terrorists” serving the strategic interests of the Pakistan military, and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is obviously the “bad terrorist” which targets the military and the state due to Pakistan’s engagement with the West on the war on terror.

The Peshawar school massacre on December 16 last year, which killed 132 children, created tremendous unrest in Pakistan. The incident, which was supposed to be the worst in the history of Pakistan since 1971, should have been an eye opener. Pakistan did take some measures by establishing military courts, but certainly measures to change its overall strategy and support to terrorism were not adopted.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif did meet in Ufa last month and agreed to cooperate on fighting terrorism in all forms. The bilateral relations were discussed with the intentions of taking the dialogue further. India proposed a dialogue between the National Security Advisors of both the countries in the fourth week of August. Pakistan military and the ISI definitely do not approve of the talks and any further dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad with the objective of countering terrorism.

There have been frequent intense attacks following the meeting in Ufa, creating a non-conducive environment for any dialogue. The phenomenon is not new and attempts for any normalization of relationship have always been thwarted in the past. The civil society in Pakistan is facing the blowback of the military’s strategic calculus, which adopts terrorism as a foreign policy tool. The country faces frequent terror acts killing hundreds of civilians and the economy is in doldrums with major infrastructure challenges and rising unemployment. Despite the economic woes, conventional military modernization, build up of the nuclear arsenal and nurturing of the non-state actors, has been the priority led by the military, which is focused on catering to its strategic objectives and managing the threat perception against India.



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Dialogue and talks with Pakistan can go any further only when the military and the ISI decide to alter their strategic calculus. Islamabad's posture of deniability cannot be accepted by India and the international community. Leadership in Pakistan needs to take the responsibility of the terror acts conducted from its territory against India.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])