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## The Jihadi Factor in India-Pakistan Peace Process

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The India-Pakistan peace process, punctuated with fluctuating waves of optimism and anxiety, has completed three years, and it is appropriate, and timely, to review whether the primary conditions of its long-term objectives have been met and, if not, whether the failure would undermine the credibility of the dialogue on which peace and stability in the region have come to lean on heavily. Such an assessment has become all the more important in view of the proposed visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Pakistan later this year.

Although it could be argued, that the peace process in the past three years has gone beyond the issue of terrorism, it would be naïve to forsake, altogether, an assessment of Pakistan's Kashmir policy and its strategy of using terrorist groups in achieving some of its foreign policy objectives in India. The present paper, therefore, will analyse Pakistan's Kashmir policy, including the strategy of using terrorist groups as in-

struments of the state policy, and make an assessment whether de-linking the issue of terrorism from the peace talks is really prudent and viable, in the long run.

### COMPOSITE DIALOGUE

On April 22, 2003 the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told the Indian Parliament that India was unilaterally opening "the doors for talks" with Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> The offer was based on two simple premises: one, that Pakistan would stop cross-border infiltration and second, it would destroy the terrorist infrastructure in place on its soil. This statement was a sequel to his declaration made in Srinagar on April 18 that "we are again extending the hand of friendship, but hands should be extended by both sides."<sup>2</sup> A significant addition to these caveats was made on January 6, 2004 when "President Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee that he will not permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be

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used to support terrorism in any manner....”<sup>3</sup> These tentative but firm sequence of assurances for maintaining peace and stability in the region, subsequently, came to be known as the Composite Dialogue between India and Pakistan.

### PAKISTAN'S KASHMIR POLICY

Pakistan's Kashmir policy has been scripted and sustained by the Pakistan Army since 1947. In the Army's perception, “Kashmir is so strategically situated that it can be used to cripple Pakistan economically and militarily.”<sup>4</sup> Such statements were also based on the fact that the Indus river the life-line for Pakistan, flowed from Jammu and Kashmir, which, Pakistan's strategic planners believed, gave India an omnipotent weapon against the former for the future. Over the years, the Army exploited these fears to turn “Kashmir” into a question of identity, an “unfinished task of Partition”.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan's Army leadership has vested Kashmir with explosive emotional potential. One of the most recent and telling remarks was made by President Pervez Musharraf on January 12, 2002 in his address to the nation: “Kashmir runs in our blood. No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir.”<sup>6</sup> This statement represents, in a nutshell, the official policy of Pakistan on Kashmir.

This policy is driven primarily by factors like a national psyche under siege<sup>7</sup> and the Army's determined grip on Pakistan's destiny; it is implemented through para-state actors like terrorist groups “groomed and financed” by different state agencies to operate in Kashmir.<sup>8</sup> When three wars and more than four decades of diplomatic offensive failed to achieve its objective, the Pakistan Army, supported by the political establishment, chose to exploit the presence of the band of Mujahideen, returning flush with their victory in Afghanistan in the early nineties. Within years of Mujahideen<sup>9</sup> involvement in Kashmir, terror-strikes were given the respectability of jihad, and thus remained outside the purview of international scrutiny for long, till they became “terrorist acts” for the West. Not only did Pakistan train secessionists from Kashmir but also backed terrorist volunteers from other groups and countries in carrying out acts of sabotage and killings in Kashmir<sup>10</sup>, linking the cause with the emerging global “jihad”.<sup>11</sup>

Various terrorist and extremist groups were incorporated in the new jihad for Kashmir, some already existing, others created anew, by the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan

(hereafter ISI) with three primary objectives: to project Kashmir on the consciousness of the global community as a potential conflict zone in a nuclear environment by involving India in a low-cost but damaging (keeps a large number of Indian troops occupied in Jammu and Kashmir) proxy war; two, to aid and abet Kashmiri militants to force the secession of Jammu and Kashmir; and three, to gainfully employ the guerilla bands returning from Afghanistan to prevent an internal law and order problem for Pakistan, already reeling under severe economic and social convulsions.

Over the years, terrorism has remained an integral part of Pakistan's Kashmir strategy<sup>12</sup> primarily because of the immeasurable dividends it brought forth. But for the terrorists, the issue of Kashmir would have remained confined to the subcontinent and attracted little attention from the international community.<sup>13</sup> Continued acts of terrorism not only brought global attention on Kashmir but also gave the Pakistan Army an opportunity to project the region, as Pakistan

Senator and former Information Minister described, as a flashpoint of nuclear conflict.<sup>14</sup> Besides, these groups gave Pakistan a “strategic depth” and “early warning capabilities” in India.<sup>15</sup> The Kargil conflict of 1999 proved that these groups<sup>16</sup> could also be effectively used to camouflage offensive operations and protect regular troops from the first line of fire.<sup>17</sup> No less significantly, the Kashmir conflict justified the Pakistan military's growing expenditure. In overall strategic terms, the tactic of using terrorist groups in Kashmir to foment terrorism exerted considerable pressure on India, undermining New Delhi's right over Kashmir.

**Musharraf in a speech on Feb 5, 2006 said, “I want to repeat it in this gathering that our agenda is the same as before -- the right of self-determination and plebiscite for the Kashmiri people.”**

### IS THERE ANY POLICY CHANGE?

Since it is the Chief of the Army Staff or the President who dictates policies on “vital national interests” like Kashmir<sup>18</sup> in Pakistan, it is entirely feasible to assess changes in the policy by analyzing the recent statements of President Musharraf who is both the Chief of Army Staff and the President. His address at Muzaffarabad on Kashmir Solidarity Day on February 5, 2006<sup>19</sup> befits such an analysis. He made it clear by stating: “I want to repeat it in this gathering that our agenda is the same as before -- the right of self-determination and plebiscite for the Kashmiri people.” This is an unequivocal affirmation of the past policy. His reiteration that “Kashmir runs in Pakistan's veins and my veins” is no different either, whether in letter or spirit, from his Address to the Nation on

January 12, 2002<sup>20</sup> confirming that despite talks of reconciliation and solution, the establishment in Pakistan, the Army, has not altered its historical stand on Kashmir.

The past is further affirmed by President Musharraf's consistent reference to the "Indian Held Kashmir" as the "nation fighting for their freedom", a view consistent with what he said in February 2005: "...a freedom struggle is not terrorism...this should be clear to all." His clarification that without the "struggle of Pakistan forces", Kashmir would not have been in the limelight only strengthens his subsequent view that "our original agenda is the same as it was before."

These views are consistent with what others in the Pakistan establishment have been stating in the last three years.<sup>21</sup> Making a presentation at the Roundtable Conference on the Kashmir issue, on January 11, 2005, Masood Khan, the Foreign Office spokesman, said Kashmir was an issue on which the entire nation of Pakistan was united. It was an issue, he said, on which Muslims across the world demand justice. "There is historical continuity in our stand on Kashmir. It has been resolute and consistent. There is no abandonment of the resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. They are still on the table. Up to this day, they constitute the requisite legal framework." More vocal has been the Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhary, Pervaiz Elahi, who said: "Pakistan's territorial boundaries are incomplete without liberation of Occupied Kashmir."<sup>22</sup>

### JIHADI STRATEGY

This "historical continuity" in Pakistan's Kashmir policy should be read with President Musharraf's consistent refusal to deal sternly with terrorist groups within the country. Giving up jihad could mean giving up Kashmir. By President Musharraf's own admission on July 21, 2005 terrorist groups, during his regime, have "mushroomed in cities which recruit people openly, train them, collect donations and publish and distribute jihadi literature."<sup>23</sup> What he did not say was that it could be a conscious decision on the part of his government to keep the jihadi infrastructure alive as an insurance policy on Kashmir<sup>24</sup> in case the peace process, especially the dialogue on Kashmir, gets mired in bickering and protests, and fails to yield any tangible results for Pakistan within a visible time frame.

Although President Musharraf has been claiming action against terrorist groups, security forces have only been targeting either al Qaeda leaders (on the US list) or sectarian and

religious extremist groups like Lashkar-e- Jhangvi (whose target is Musharraf himself)<sup>25</sup>. There are credible reports in the Pakistan media about large-scale recruitment carried out by the group from rural areas in the Punjab, Balochistan and North West Frontier Province and the huge amount of donations and contributions garnered from various national and international sources. The group has recently set up 54 al Dawa schools in Punjab, 11 in Sindh and one in Quetta, Balochistan<sup>26</sup>. Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) leader Hafiz Saeed is free and conducts prayers at a Lahore mosque every Friday. According to the vernacular media, Saeed has also been openly entertaining several opposition leaders in his new house in Lahore. His headquarters, where young students are first indoctrinated in jihad before being sent for three-phase guerilla warfare training, are located close to Lahore.

The group's current negotiations with various religious-political parties only confirm the directions of its future political strategy. Saeed has been negotiating with Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam--Samiul Haq<sup>27</sup> for creating a new alignment of religious political parties under the umbrella of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), the religious alliance currently sharing power in the ruling coalition with the King's party, the PML-QA. There are also indications of Jamat-ud-Dawa (JuD) being wooed by a staunch rival of Samiul Haq, Jamat-e-Islami chief Qazi Hussain Ahmed, one of the top leaders of the MMA. After the earthquake in October 2005, JeI chief visited JuD camps and mobile dispensaries in Muzaffarabad and praised Saeed for the relief activities.

The person who accompanied him -- Syed Salahuddin -- might mean another link in the coalition. Salahuddin heads the Muttahida Jihad Council (United Jihad Council), a loose confederation of terrorist groups operating in Kashmir with headquarters in Muzaffarabad which lost heavily, both in terms of men and material, during the October earthquake. In fact it was the October 2005 devastating earthquake in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, which catapulted JuD on to the mainstream political scene in Pakistan. The quake left the civilian and military establishment, more pre-occupied with the damage to the military and nuclear assets in the region, floundering for a comprehensive and rapid response. It was the JuD which first stepped in to fill this vacuum and carried out, by all accounts, an unprecedented rescue and relief and, rehabilitation operation.

**LeT is organised on a strictly hierarchical structure, has a clearly articulated agenda, generous financial resources and assets, and a large number of recruits from different parts of the world.**

### QUAKE DIVIDENDS FOR LeT

Within days of the earthquake, the JuD set up several mobile dispensaries, mobilized teams of doctors from different countries and ensured immediate relief like tents, food materials and medicines to far-flung areas. Ironically, while the JuD was able to set up relief camps in the remotest of areas in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, the Pakistan Army took weeks to even reach these areas. The extent of JuD's reach and influence could be gauged from the fact that it bought a mobile operation theatre from Karachi at a cost of Rs 1.6 crore for the field surgical and medical centre established at Shanwai Nullah in Muzaffarabad. This hospital was run by Dr Amir Aziz, famous for treating Osama bin Laden. Several doctors from Turkey and Indonesia also joined him at the hospital. Not only that, JuD activists also provided security escorts to various other NGOs involved in the relief and rehabilitation work in the area. Recently, the group provided security cover to NGOs from UK.

No less significant was the fact that JuD activities had the blessings of some of the ministers in the ruling coalition. Federal Minister Zubaida Jalal accompanied UNICEF officials to the JuD hospital on October 17, 2005 where she held meetings with Hafiz Saeed and was informed that the Pakistan government should provide the group with helicopters to ferry relief materials and the injured. On October 24, the Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas, Syed Faisal Saleh Hayat, visited the hospital run by the JuD. Hayat praised JuD and its leader Hafiz Saeed profusely for the relief and rehabilitation work.

Other indications of Saeed's growing clout is the freedom with which he holds Friday prayers at a Lahore mosque where he exhorts his followers to take up the path of jihad against India and the US with renewed vigour. He appears regularly in the columns of the Urdu press with statements condemning President Pervez Musharraf's 'pro-US' and 'pro-India' policies. He hosts parties for political leaders.<sup>28</sup> His group has been allowed to distribute jihadi literature freely even in government offices where they have a sizeable readership among senior officials.<sup>29</sup> He was even paid severance pay by the ISI to lie low when the peace process with India began taking shape.<sup>30</sup>

Along with these emerging linkages and associations, there is also growing warmth between JuD and various Kashmiri groups like the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

(JKLF). According to *Jang*, the most widely read Urdu daily in Pakistan, JKLF chief Yasin Malik visited Saeed's camps and hospitals on November 6, 2005 and said JuD was doing a commendable job. *Jasarat*, a conservative Urdu daily, reported on November 7 of Malik's visit to JuD offices to hold meetings with the central leadership of the group. Saeed, in fact, hosted a reception in his honour at Markaz al-Qadsiya in Lahore where the LeT chief reiterated his resolve to continue the jihad in Kashmir. Markaz al-Qadsiya is the new double-storey complex, containing *madrasas* and a mosque, which is being constructed in Lahore at a cost of about Rs 50 crore. No less significant has been the presence of quite a few editors of Urdu newspapers who shared the common belief that anyone opposing jihad in Kashmir would lose power.

This coalition of religious, secessionist, political and terrorist groups in Pakistan has serious implications for Kashmir, India and the world in general. One of the obvious consequences would be the emergence of JuD and its armed wing, LeT, with new networking capabilities on both sides of Kashmir and hence stronger in position and reach to cause terror in Kashmir, and elsewhere in India.

There are enough reasons why this political move should be monitored closely in the months to come. First, LeT is the only terrorist group, which is organised on a strictly hierarchical structure, has a clearly articulated

agenda, generous financial resources and assets, and a large number of recruits from different parts of the world. Second, for the above reasons, it is a group, which has the capability to evolve independently of the State. Third, it has escaped a greater scrutiny because of its conscious attempts to project itself independent of al Qaeda. Fourth, it has the support of the Pakistani State. Fifth, it has a large network in India and is now spreading its cells in the US, Australia, Europe and South-East Asia. Sixth, LeT is the only group that today has the wherewithal to threaten India beyond Kashmir. Seventh, the group is currently recruiting a large number of youngsters for terrorist activities, setting up new training camps and expanding its base beyond the Indian subcontinent.<sup>31</sup>

### BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN MATRIX

Besides supporting and sustaining groups like LeT, Pakistan has been working on an alternative plan to create terror in India. According to credible reports, for the past two years, with the United States leaning heavily on General Musharraf

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to rein in terrorist groups, the ISI has been shifting the base of terrorist operations against India to Bangladesh. This operation is focused on creating a coalition of different terrorist groups operating in north-eastern India and Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup>

This coalition is a mirror of Syed Salahuddin's United Jihad Council headquartered in Muzaffarabad. The Bangladesh chapter of the Jihad Council is believed to be led by Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami-Bangladesh (HuJI) and comprises Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Al Hikma, Jamaat-e-Tulba, Jamaat-ul-Muderrasin, Islamic Chattra Shibir, Islamic Oikyo Jote, Imam Parishad, Islamic Shahsantantra Andolon, Bangladesh Khilafat Majlish, and Hizbut Tehrir and United Liberation Front of Assam. Both HuJI and JMB have been involved in terrorist incidents in Kashmir and have trained together in training camps set up by the ISI in Afghanistan and Balochistan.

There are intelligence reports that the ISI has tied up with the Bangladesh Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) to implement the new terror strategy, which is focused on creating communal tension in India. The ISI has moved a significant number of its operatives from Nepal to Bangladesh to recruit and train recruits for the new coalition.<sup>33</sup> These training camps, according to media reports, are located at Dinajur, Rajshahi, Rongpur, Satkhira, Jhinaidaha and Maherpur, Sylhet, Moulvi Bazaar, Brahmanabaria, Comilla, Cox Bazaar, Chittagong, Khagrachari and Rangamari. Most of these camps are either being run in cantonment areas or in secluded army and BDR camps.<sup>34</sup> This operation was first planned and initiated at a two-day meeting on December 27/28, 2004 in Mohammadpur near Dhaka, which was addressed by Brigadier T.K. Baksh of the ISI.<sup>35</sup> The plan involves raising a cadre of 20,000 jihadis to achieve the objective of creating a Greater Islamic Homeland in India.

### DESTABILISING INDIA

It is quite obvious that neither LeT nor HuJI, independently or jointly, are capable of planning such a confederation or enabling an extraordinarily multi-layered logistic network to support its mission objectives. This terror matrix -- three major terrorist groups, at least half-a-dozen big and small front organisations with extremist ideology, spanning three countries; several layers of support bases; an extensive network of *hawala* channels running from the Middle East to Indonesia; a weapons route, a communications network linking hideouts in Kashmir, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal--needs to be closely analysed to understand the underlying game plan.

There are other aspects of this changing strategy, which strengthens the apprehensions of a terrorist onslaught. The recent terrorist incidents establish the intention of terror

masterminds to expand the scope of terrorism beyond Kashmir, a strategic move considering the international limelight and pressure on the issue. Another integral part of this strategy is the use of local recruits<sup>36</sup> and locally available explosive material to create bombs as seen in Varanasi and Delhi blasts. Both the factors give LeT and Pakistan the benefit of deniability.

What should concern us more is the agenda behind this new strategic alliance: to destabilize India. The recent Delhi, Varanasi and Jama Masjid blasts were triggered to create a communal backlash and cause riots. The Varanasi blasts and Jama Masjid incidents in particular were timed and planned to exploit the seething anger in the Muslim community over the Prophet's cartoons and the visit of the American President George W. Bush.

### ASSESSMENT

These are unambiguous indications that Pakistan has not given up its strategy of using terrorists to implement its foreign policy objectives, particularly on Kashmir.<sup>37</sup> According to the Indian government, it has "fail-proof and fool-proof evidence" about the existence of terrorist training camps across the border.<sup>38</sup> No less significant is a warning issued by a noted western analyst about the possibility of Pakistan using Kashmiri terrorists to rise up in rear positions in case of a future conventional war between both the countries.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, by all indications, a new terror strategy has been put in place by Pakistan's state agencies with the following objectives:

- To keep the jihadi option open in Kashmir and elsewhere to keep India on the defensive;
- To help the Pakistan Army to disengage, temporarily from the Kashmir front, to concentrate on the insurgency in Balochistan and the new Taliban emerging in Waziristan;
- To encourage Kashmiri terrorist groups to rise in revolt in rear positions in case of a direct military confrontation;
- To hoodwink the international community on the oft-repeated assurances to reign in terror groups.

In all likelihood, therefore, India is likely to witness terrorist incidents not only in Kashmir but also in other parts of the country, especially in areas which are becoming India's emerging icons of progress like Bangalore and Hyderabad. There are equally grave possibilities of the Capital, New Delhi, coming heavily under terrorist focus in view of the forthcoming Commonwealth Games (2010) and the expansion of the Metro railway network.

The new Bangladesh-Pakistan terror matrix will make it extremely difficult for India to calibrate a military strategy to counter such attacks. With Bangladesh and Pakistan of-

ficially fighting terror on their homeland, India would be either forced to bear the brunt of terrorism or evolve a suitable counter terrorism strategy. Both options are likely to disrupt the peace process and call for decisive actions from the leadership in Pakistan and Bangladesh.<sup>40</sup> This is highly unlikely considering both the countries are scheduled to hold general elections in the coming months where political parties would be keen to strike partnerships with religious extremist groups like JuD (in Pakistan) which has considerable ground support in rural Punjab and Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

The challenge before India, therefore, is how to calibrate

the next sequence of moves if the peace process has to be kept on line? Can we afford to make unilateral concessions on Siachen and the Kishenganga project when Pakistan resolutely refuses to meet the fundamental promises on which the peace process began on April 22, 2003?<sup>41</sup> The key question is: With Pakistan keeping a studied silence on its jihadi network, how long can India ignore the existence of virulent anti-India terrorist groups like the LeT, especially if attacks like Varanasi and Delhi bomb blasts were to be repeated before Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Islamabad later this year.

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