

Pakistan Army sends Politco-military Signals to India through “Ex Azm-e-Nau”

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Introductory Observations

Pakistan Army’s massive war-readiness exercise codenamed “EX AZM-E-NAU III (New Resolve)” has been underway since April 10, 2010 and scheduled to culminate on May 15, 2010. The massive exercise involving more than 50,000 troops began in the Bhawalpur desert area of South Punjab and will culminate in Northern Sindh. The Pakistan Army has significantly gone much out of the way to highly publicise “EX AZM-E-NAU III” for both the domestic audience and the international media, more specifically India. Hence this Paper has no intention to repeat military details of EX AZM-E-NAU III which stand covered in the media already.

Massive military exercises of this magnitude are held periodically to validate war doctrines and operational strategies. However, the Pakistan Army has not conducted an exercise of this magnitude for 20 years. This draws more attention as to what impelled the Pakistan Army to go in for such a massive military exercise when at least 70,000 – 1,00,000 troops of the Pakistan Army are currently deployed in military operations in South Waziristan, Orakzai and Khyber regions. This in addition to Pakistan Army deployments in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Baluchistan.

Pakistan Army EX AZM-E-NAU III further draws attention in that it is being held contextually in the backdrop of United States pressures on Pakistan Army to divert more troops from India’s border to the Afghanistan border.

One has also to take note that in EXAZM-E-NU a fair share of United States supplied

military hardware is being employed, especially offensive strike assets like F-16 fighter aircraft and Attack Helicopters. With EX AZM-E-NAU III being publicly proclaimed as an 'India Threat-Centric' exercise it follows that despite US protestations to the contrary, US supplied military hardware would be used against India.

EX AZM-E-NAU III also incorporates the Pakistan Air Force Ex-HIGH MARK in which the entire Pakistan Air Force assets from Skardu in the North to Karachi in the South are dovetailed.

EX AZM-E-NAU III timing, magnitude, the contemporary contextual backdrop and more importantly the much publicised 'India Threat-Centric' operational orientation of this Exercise suggest that the Pakistan Army intends to send politico-military signals to India, more pointedly.

This Paper would accordingly like to examine the following issues:

- EX AZM-E-NAU III: Operational Features are "India Threat-Centric"
- EX AZM-E-NAU III: The Afghanistan Connection
- Pakistan Army's Politico-Military Signals to India through EX AZM-E-NAU
- Strategic Reality Check for Indian Policy Establishment

EX AZM-E-NAU III: Operational Features are "India Threat-Centric"

Expectedly, the Pakistan Army cannot provide any other operational orientation to such a massive Exercise. Pakistan Army's primacy in Pakistan's history and its numerous coups have taken place by whipping-up anti-India hysteria.

The major operational features of EX AZM-E-NAU III that need reiteration are:

- Pakistan Army has emphasised, directly and implicitly, that this Exercise has been designed to validate military doctrines to meet an Indian military threat and to neutralise India's much vaunted COLD START War Doctrine. The Pakistan Army to assuage Western concerns is emphasizing that this Exercise is purely a defensive warfare exercise focussing on conventional warfare only.
- This is misleading on both counts. It is learnt, and is logically so, that Pakistan's use of strategic assets are built-in in the exercise. Similarly, EX AZM-E-NAU, on available information, is focussing on "counter-offensives" (offensive warfare) as opposed to "counter-attacks" (defensive warfare).
- The geographical extent of this Exercise extending from South Punjab to Sindh with a secondary threat in the Sialkot Sector incorporated in EX AZM-E-NAU suggests that it is intended to defeat India's multiple thrusts as part of COLD START WAR Doctrine and also an Indian diversionary Corps strike launched against Sialkot.

EX AZM-E-NAU III: The Afghanistan Connection

Strangely, one cannot but help observing that Pakistan Army's two major and massive exercises have an Afghanistan connection.

Pakistan Army conducted EX ZARB-E-MOMIN(1989) in its first flush of victory of claiming that it was instrumental in forcing the exit of Soviet Army from Afghanistan, as the cats-paw of the United States.

Twenty years later, the Pakistan Army is now conducting EX AZM-E-NAU III with a heady sense of personal satisfaction of COAS Gen Kayani that he has single-handedly re-oriented the United States in a U-turn in favour of the Pakistan Army. In this case too the quid-pro-quo is that Pakistan Army will facilitate the US military exit from Afghanistan and the United States conceding 'strategic space' in Afghanistan to the Pakistan Army.

In the present context, the conduct of EX AZM-E-NAU against the Afghanistan backdrop, the sidelining of India by the United States on Afghanistan, all carry politico-military implications for India. In both cases American military hardware and financial largesse flowed-in preceding Pakistan Army major exercises.

Pakistan Army's Politico-Military Signals to India Through EX AZM-E-NAU

Pakistan Army's political signals to India through EX AZM-E-NAU have to be viewed as more tangential than direct. The following need to be considered:

- India may rejoice and revel in its infatuation with the US-India Strategic Partnership, but when the chips are down, the United States will always throw its dice in favor of the Pakistan Army.
- Pakistan Army, its strategic sensitivities and interests in Afghanistan would be upheld by the United States, disregarding India's objections to the contrary.
- Pakistan Army could prevail over the United States to make India yield on the Kashmir issue.

Can one blame the Pakistan Army for having such perceptions and the claim of the Pakistan Army on priority attention and tilt of the United States? The facts speak for themselves.

Militarily, the signals that emanate from the Pakistan Army to India through EX AZM-E-NAU are more direct. These are:

- Pakistan Army, notwithstanding its commitments on the Afghan border and a de-stabilizing internal situation is militarily capable of repelling any Indian military offensives emanating from India's COLD START War Doctrine.

- Pakistan Army will not confine itself to defensive “counter-attacks” in its operational doctrines. Pakistan Army will resort to “counter-offensives” against India to force it to recoil from its COLD START War Doctrine multiple trusts.
- Overall, therefore today, Pakistan Army is operationally trained, organizationally structured, and well equipped with military hardware to fight a “one and a half front war” or even a “two front war” with India.

Strategic Reality Check for Indian Policy Establishment

The Indian policy establishment needs to recognize Pakistan Army’s EX AZM-E-NAU as a wake up call. The politico-military signals are clear.

In fact, Pakistan Army’s politico-military signalling to India is taunting in nature. It has signalled, we are prepared to effectively defeat India’s COLD START War Doctrine, but are you (India) ready with the political will to launch COLD START War Doctrine and are the Indian Armed Forces well-equipped to successfully execute this war doctrine?

Perceptions between military adversaries count and the Pakistani perception reflected in the Pakistani Newspaper DAWN Editorial of April 20, 2010 should be an eye-opener for the Indian policy establishment:

“While Cold Start does raise new and troubling questions about the possibility of war between India and Pakistan, it has not quite captured the imagination of the civilian bosses of the Indian Armed Forces. Major technical and resources questions aside, there is some uncertainty about whether the politicians and bureaucrats in India are committed to new doctrine as Pakistan side suggests.”

Reticently, on a sensitive issue that has grave implications for India’s national security, all that one can say is that the Indian policy establishment needs a strategic reality check on the following issues:

- India’s current Pakistan policy of peace at all costs. Do such political postures prompt the above perceptions in Pakistan?
- India’s war readiness for successful implementation of COLD START War Doctrine. Is Pakistan Army seeing glaring voids in India’s offensive warfare capabilities?
- India’s political will for hard decisions. Has Pakistan Army drawn wrong lessons from India’s lack of strong response to Mumbai 9/11 and earlier major incidents of terrorism?

- In the highly surcharged and current tense India-Pakistan relations, is India's war-readiness receiving a 24X7 political scrutiny and oversight?

The answers can best be given by India's policy establishment.

Lastly since the United States and Afghanistan are the predominating factors in the Pakistan Army strategic calculus, does the Indian policy establishment need to recalibrate and carry out mid-term corrections in its United States and Afghanistan policies. What perceptions are being generated when the Pakistan Army sees India being sidelined by the United States on Afghanistan and India withdrawing 30,000 troops from Kashmir, because Pakistan Army made USA prevail over India on this issue.

Concluding Observations

The Pakistan Army was badly in need of refurbishing its professional image both domestically and externally. Domestically, the Pakistan Army image was dented as till a few months back it was reluctant to take head-on the internal threats that were looming large. Externally, the reluctance of the Pakistan Army to undertake ground offensives to tackle insurgents in the frontier regions and instead rely only on F-16 fighter aircraft strikes, attacks helicopter strikes and heavy artillery bombardment spoke poorly of its professional capabilities and its propensity for ethnic genocide reminiscent of its record in then East Pakistan.

EXAZM-E-NAU III has provided an opportunity for the Pakistan Army to redeem its image. Publicizing the Exercise widely was intended to shore up its image domestically.

Publicizing it widely externally has enabled the Pakistan Army to send politico-military messages and particularly to India. The central message to India was that Pakistan Army is ready in all respects to offset India's military advantages and especially those centered on the COLD START War Doctrine.

Source: <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org//papers38/paper3772.html>

Additional Reading

- Exercise Azm-e-Nau-3: An Assessment by Dhruv Katoch

Source: http://www.claws.in/index.php?action=master&task=550&u_id=82