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Development of Alternative Capabilities Must to Punish Pakistan for Cross-Border Terrorism



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Abstract

Terrorism is a disaster that is perpetrated by state sponsored non-state actors and super empowered groups/individuals to pursue their self-serving motive. However, when state starts using it as a strategic asset to fight a low cost war, it becomes the responsibility of the state to respond severely so that the sponsors of terror are made to pay the price. Use of military is a potent tool against terrorism, but this tool should not become a panacea for own failure to develop other leverages to defeat, deter, and destroy the terror organisations. Repeated threat of use of military as a leverage always and every time is a bad strategy, because if military fails then nation fails. Thus there is a need to fight this unjust war by other means and use of military should be as an exception and not as routine. India needs to develop capabilities to fight terror from where it originates and not in our backyard. Pulwama suicide attack is not the last attack and air strike in such a condition will not be the last one. But the question is, can India afford military confrontation with a nuclear neighbour after every six months? Will

Key Points

1. Employment of conventional force against irregular non-state actors is absence of strategy and alternative capabilities.
2. Investment in building military capabilities to deter Pakistan and dissuade China is an insurance for economic development and protection of vital national interests.
3. Human intelligence though is important but to add punch, intelligence agencies are required to be enabled by technology. Empowered and enabled intelligence agencies must be made accountable.
4. There are three stages when military should be employed to deter, defeat and destroy source of terrorism. The impact of military deterrence will be lost if it becomes first responder to every incident and on all occasions.
5. To prepare military to fight future wars, India needs to build capabilities to fight asymmetric war by other means.
6. There is no place to fight asymmetric war with rule books in hand and there is no taint either in fighting an enemy who has chosen to fight "unjust war with unjust means."

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it not be better to fight Pak-based terror groups with the help of Pak citizenry? Or fight Kashmiri terrorists by Kashmiri youth themselves, overtly or covertly. There is no moral taint in choosing to fight an unjust war the way the enemy has chosen to fight.

Introduction

Pulwama suicide attack that resulted in killing of more than 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel has demonstrated brazen use of cross-border terrorism by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) under the tutelage of ISI of Pakistan. Such an attack indicates that Pakistan is not deterred by threat of retribution if any from India. Pakistan did not stop cross-border terrorism after India undertook surgical strikes on terror launch pads. The big question is, will Pakistan stop cross-border terrorism after air strikes or will it change strategy and use home-grown terrorists to maintain deniability? Use of conventional force in a scenario of terror strikes by home-grown terrorists may not be justified in spite of their roots linked to LeT or JeM. In the absence of any other leverage, perforce use of conventional military as a tool to respond appears most obvious. There are two important aspects that need to be kept in mind by military and political leaders before choosing to employ military as a tool of state policy. First, you are judged by your adversaries and allies that how well you bring things to an end. Second, height of strategic wisdom is to avoid conflicts and entanglements from which there are no exits.¹ Employment of conventional force against irregular non-state actors is unlikely to end the conflict because unlike regular forces, irregulars neither hold ground nor remain static or consistent in their modus operandi. They keep changing and remain amorphous. India has remained engaged in conflict in Kashmir for the last 30 years and the character of conflict has changed and whenever it appeared that violence is suppressed, it emerged more forcefully in a different dimension. The more we think we are closer to finding a solution, the more we are getting entangled in a complex conflict. So-called muscular policy though it has led to elimination of large number of terrorists but terrorism has shifted to new paradigm that may escalate the conflict further.

Where have we gone wrong and why has India failed to prevent Pakistan from bleeding us by a thousand cuts? Why have we become so helpless that India is unable to deter Pakistan? These are issues that need answers.

Where is the Real Problem?

Every strategy has a shelf life and no strategy or leverage is eternal. When Mahatma Gandhi adopted non-violence as a strategy to get freedom from colonial power, he was aware that India cannot win a freedom struggle by violence or with rag-tag military power of fragmented states. Thus non-violence was a great idea because he understood colonial power cannot use violence for a prolonged period against peaceful agitation and make India an open prison. Mahatma Gandhi was successful in using non-violence as a powerful strategy against colonial rulers. But to adopt this strategy eternally and incorporate it as a philosophy to protect national interests was a miscalculation and made inimical forces believe that India will not respond militarily against their misadventures. Similarly, post-independence leadership tried amassing allies through comity of nations to stay away from the cold war and arms race by adopting Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Subsequent wars that India was forced to fight is a testimony to the fact that this was the biggest failure of India's foreign policy. Irony is that during 1962 war, the very same friends from NAM adopted even-handed positions and refused to unequivocally condemn China's aggression.² It was a major setback to India and some countries including Ghana (co-founder of NAM) even cautioned the United Kingdom against giving military aid to India since it might "aggravate the unfortunate situation."³ Similarly, in 1965 *The Indian Express* noted in an editorial at that time that, "We do not seem to have many friends abroad"⁴ because no member of NAM stood by India against Pak aggression. Ideally, India should have learnt the lessons and should have commenced building capabilities to develop leverages against adversaries.

India, China and Israel came into existence almost at the same time. China and Israel did not depend upon allies or international support for security of national interests and went on to develop Comprehensive National Power (CNP) without looking at allies or neighbours. But unfortunately India continued to flog the strategy of non-violence and NAM as principal leverages to protect vital national interests without doing enough to build military capabilities in terms of modernisation of military and establishment of domestic arms industry to achieve self-reliance. The result of this neglect or miscalculation is now unfolding, and India is being bled by Pakistan for the last 30 years without any fear of retribution.

Britain realised, even before World War I, that instrument of grand strategy, was not winning battles by employment of military, but economic warfare that had the potential to undermine the nation's fighting power and so had the potential to produce a victory for Britain. Use of military is resorted to when all other options fail. Employment of military as the first option for conflict termination and conflict resolution is certainly absence of strategy and leverages. But the moot question is that before you start using military as a leverage, the state must build capabilities so that it does not fail. If military fails then nation has no tool left at their disposal and a militarily defeated nation not only loses face but also last leverage. Therefore, is it wise to use military as a leverage every time when there is cross-border terror strike?

Frank Herbert had said, "Enemies strengthen you. Allies weaken." If the state has no inherent leverages that can act as guarantee to provide intrinsic security, in that case the nation will be blackmailed and bled repeatedly by state and non-state actors. Strategic wisdom suggests that a nation surrounded by inimical forces should develop capabilities and leverages to guarantee safety and security of the people and the nation state. Investment in development of capabilities that become credible leverages for security is the utmost responsibility of the state. Leverages are built on the basis of geographical

disposition, economic prowess, intelligence and covert and overt military capabilities to ensure conventional and sub-conventional deterrence. In addition, science and technology, research and development, cultural and ethnic ties also act as leverages. In other words CNP consisting of hard and soft power is an insurance and guarantee for national security. A mature democracy should develop leadership that is able to lay down the roadmap for capability building and also skilled in employing tools of national power in the best interests of the nation.

The buyer-seller relations are unlikely to dissuade China from engaging in a coercive strategy along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) or condemning Pakistan for orchestrating terror attacks on India. Delay and deferment of capability building could prove suicidal with evolving China-Pakistan strategic nexus. We are in an era where the adversary's main goal is to confuse, disrupt, discourage and deny capability building either by creating a false notion of no threat or by coercion. If India continues to neglect capability building any further, use of disruptive forces against India will increase.

The support for militant proxies is a product of the Pakistan Army's strategic culture of "emboldenment" derived from nuclear deterrence behind which Pakistan pursues aggressive policies. Part of the logic, however, is undoubtedly strategic.⁵ Pakistan has mastered the art of using proxies as an asymmetric tool to project influence against Afghanistan and to counter India's conventional military superiority.⁶ Apart from acquiring asymmetric capabilities Pakistan has also used geostrategic location to develop leverages against India. Pakistan has ensured that it has stonewalled India's access to Central Asia and effectively blocked access to the natural resources of Central Asian Republics (CAR) by illegal occupation of Gilgit-Baltistan. Pakistan provided insurance to itself by allowing China to build Karakoram National Highway, handing over Sakshgam valley to China and allowing China unrestricted access to Arabian Sea through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Thus Pakistan ensured an unbreakable and uninterrupted

bridge with China. Similarly, Pakistan has exploited its strategic location in such a manner that today it is an important country for China, the US, Saudi Arabia and even to Russia primarily because it has leveraged its geographical disposition to gain favours from China, the US and Saudi Arabia. Though in the long term this may lead to compromise in Pakistan's strategic autonomy but it has ensured that it continues to get a security umbrella to undertake proxy war against India. Pakistan has developed its leverages after 1947-48 war in such a manner that it has so far managed trusted allies that prevented its isolation from the international community in spite of being an incubator of terrorism. However, time is running out for Pakistan and the global community is getting weary of Pakistan's experimentation with terror groups.

India should have ideally invested in building military capabilities so that Pakistan is deterred and China is dissuaded. But lopsided and skewed vision of national leadership to discard possibility of conventional war has resulted in weak budgetary support that is grossly inadequate to make up hollowness and modernisation to fight future wars. As a result, Pakistan is not deterred because it has ensured robust asymmetric capabilities under the nuclear umbrella. As a consequence, Pakistan is making India bleed economically and physically. Similarly, China is unlikely to be dissuaded unless India develops comprehensive military capabilities to maintain status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Another elephant in the room is political and bureaucratic nexus that has kept military out of the policy decision-making loop. The most dampening issue is that in spite of repeated military engagements with adversaries and non-state actors, India did not learn lessons and continues to keep military at low threshold of capability building. Even after Kargil, military capability building did not get impetus and modernisation continues to remain a distant dream. India has so far no matching capabilities vis-à-vis China in cyber, space, psychological, electronic and irregular warfare.

Pakistan engaged India in what Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru called "an informal war" sponsoring terrorist groups in both Kashmir and the Northeast⁷ since independence. State sponsorship of proxy groups is a common phenomenon, because it confers cost savings, military advantages, and bargaining leverage.⁸ Correspondingly India's covert and intelligence capabilities have been kept at low threshold by successive governments to win peacetime wars without direct military engagements. In fact one of the main problems is lack of acumen and understanding of the art of employment of covert intelligence capabilities by political leadership unlike the US, Russia, China, Israel and even Pakistan. Bold application of intelligence agencies can win wars against drug cartels, criminals, terror organisations and rogue states. Lack of conceptual vision has not only allowed Indian intelligence agencies to go into a shell but has also led to loss of sharpness. The direct impact is that intelligence agencies have always punched below their potential. Invariably intelligence agencies have covered their lack of capabilities by providing prophylactic information to riposte at later stage if some incident takes place by suggesting "we informed and alerted authorities." More often such information is not actionable and hence issued just to cover accountability. Intelligence operations are high cost and high dividend. Human intelligence though is important but to add punch, intelligence agencies are required to be enabled by technology. Empowered and enabled intelligence agencies must be made accountable.

Is it Pakistan or the mindset of our political and bureaucratic leadership that is the real problem? Somehow political leadership of this country was convinced that India is unlikely to fight a conventional war with any of its neighbours in spite of the fact that conventional war with Pakistan is just one terror strike away and conflict with China is another Doklam stand-off away. Traditional wisdom suggests that while building military capabilities, there is no compromise and no middle ground.

Time is Running out for India to Build Coherent Tools of National Power

The best way to fight off aggression is to keep them from attacking you in the first place. To accomplish this you must create the impression of being more powerful than you are.⁹ However, it requires reputation, capabilities and capacities to give credibility to this notion. Thus it is apt to say that those who have not developed any reputation and leverages will be forced to pursue employment of military as a tool. Diplomacy will fail to achieve desired results in the absence of comprehensive national power. Israel has developed leverages and deterrence primarily by developing suitable and coherent tools of national power to respond to external threats without apprehension of retribution. As a result, no nation big or small can take chances with Israel. They have ensured uninterrupted energy security even when entire Muslim nations had ganged up against them. If a nation does not build capabilities, people will have to suffer humiliation. Sun Tzu had said, "Don't depend on the enemy not coming, rather depend on being ready for him." It will always require other tools of national power as a support to plug the security gaps that can be exploited by the adversaries. Military actions alone cannot bring conflict to a favourable end.

There are three stages when military is employed to deter, defeat and destroy source of terrorism. The impact of military deterrence will be lost if it becomes first responder to every incident and on all occasions. If state has well-articulated strategy and leverages, application of military should be avoided as the only and first response. To anticipate, prevent, deter, pre-empt and warn about the threat is the responsibility of non-military security institutions. If there is still a threat that slips through all these filters in that case military should be applied. However, application of military should be an exception and not an order. A nation cannot keep armed forces always ready with dagger in the hands to strike and go to war 24x7, 365 days. It impacts economic growth, infrastructure development,

investment atmosphere and development of military capabilities for enduring threats.

India can no more afford delay in creating leverages to deal with proxy war sponsored by Pakistan and non-state actors. At the top of the priority list is building military capabilities, followed by credible intelligence capabilities having technical and human resource. The objective should be to carry out overt and covert operations deep inside enemy territory to anticipate, prevent, deter, warn and pre-empt any threat to the nation. The cyber, psychological and electronic warfare capabilities are of utmost significance for offensive and defensive operations to preclude repeated employment of the military.

There is no denying the fact that India needs to follow 15 years perspective plan to develop military capabilities with dedicated budget in consonance with "Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan" (LTIPP) for the Armed Forces. To supplement conventional war efforts, India needs to build capabilities to fight war by other means. Therefore, it is high time military is allowed to develop their own tri-services intelligence agencies with overseas operational mandate. Closing down of Technical Support Division (TSD) was premature and a step in haste. Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) is only a coordinating Headquarters with no organic intelligence generation units operating directly under their command. The government has sanctioned Tri-Services Defence Cyber Agency, however, it may be a measure too little too late because cyber, psychological and electronic warfare is an everyday war and hence this agency may be inadequate to undertake defensive and offensive cyber, psychological and electronic war. Sooner or later, India will have to go in for Cyber Command with Psychological and Electronic component built in it. India must hit at where it hurts them most. Domestic industry, financial institutions (including stock markets), FDI and curtailing operations of those multinationals who are doing business on both sides of the border. Diplomatic pressure must continue on Pakistan, however, the

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diplomatic offensive can only work when nation is militarily and economically strong and has something to offer both to regional and extra-regional powers.

Conclusion

Government's response post-Uri and now Pulwama suicide attack has displayed sufficient adherence to a nation's will¹⁰ by using conventional military capabilities to strike back. But it may not be a good idea to use military to deter acts of terror frequently, because application of conventional military power in an inconclusive proxy war is a bad strategy and loses deterrence value. It will hamper capability development to deter and dissuade long-term adversaries. Therefore, India should not fall back on single option of use of military, but should start preparing "what next" and "with what."

Suicide attack will change the character of terrorism in Kashmir. Pakistan and its strategic assets are likely to intensify calibrated attacks on India. There is a possibility of spilling violence beyond Kashmir by creating a façade of indigenisation of Jihad. As a result, India is required to plug all perils of corridors

Notes

1. Robert Greene, *The 33 Strategies of War* (Viva Books, 2006), p. 253.
2. S. Kalyanaraman, "Was the Non-Aligned Movement Ever Relevant for India?" *Swarajya*, September 29, 2016.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Sameer Lalwani and Emily Tallo, "India and Pakistan Aren't Ready for Another Terrorist Crisis," *Foreign Policy*, November 30, 2018.
6. Ibid.
7. Praveen Swami, "India's rusted fangs need urgent repair," *Firstpost*, February 22, 2019.
8. Lalwani, N 5.
9. Greene, N 1, p. 123.
10. Lt Col Jill Long, "What Is War? A New Point of View," *Small Wars Journal*.
11. Greene N 1, p. 143.

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