

# Behind India's Pakistan quandary

*Faced with Pakistan's firing across the LoC, India has no option but to respond. However, in general, more subtle strategies to contain and counter threats from Pakistan would be in the country's interest*

Pakistan's annual ritual of raising the Kashmir issue and the outdated U.N. resolutions at the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) has been followed by similar statements in Pakistan, including by the Chief of Army Staff, Raheel Sharif. Young Bilawal Bhutto has vowed to wrest every inch of Kashmir from India! The National Assembly has called for a diplomatic offensive. Pakistan's desire to internationalise the Kashmir issue has been mentioned as one of the plausible reasons for the recent ceasefire violations by it.

Left to Pakistan, the Kashmir issue would never go off the international radar screen. However, Pakistan's efforts to internationalise it cannot succeed in the face of a mature Indian response. For starters, the international scenario has completely changed from the days when Pakistan's theatrics on Kashmir attracted international attention. India has come a long way since then. Above all, Pakistan is not the same, both in its capacity to mobilise international opinion and the priorities of its people.

## **Manifestos and Kashmir issue**

The ruling Pakistan Muslim League (N)'s manifesto for the May 2013 election in Pakistan contained the following paragraph on Kashmir: "Special efforts will be made to resolve the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, in accordance with the provisions of the relevant UN resolutions and the 1999 Lahore Accord and in consonance with the aspirations of the people of the territory for their inherent right of self-determination." Significantly, this paragraph found a place in a three-page chapter on foreign policy and national security, beginning at page 80 of the 103-page document, with the first 79 pages devoted to bread-and-butter issues such as economic revival, energy security, agriculture and food security, a new framework for social change, democratic governance, science and technology, the employment challenge, speedy justice, etc.

*"India's growing power ought to be felt by its adversaries and not flaunted."*

The chapter began by acknowledging that Pakistan was at war within and isolated abroad, its independence and sovereignty stood compromised, its economic weaknesses were forcing it to go around with a begging bowl in hand; while foreign states undertook unilateral strikes on its territory, non-state actors used it as a sanctuary to pursue their own agendas, oblivious to Pakistan's interests and the country's social, economic and political schisms were creating grave

misgivings even in the minds of its friends. It noted that Pakistan is located at an important junction of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asia. Therefore, it could be a bridge between the energy-rich Central Asia and Iran on the one side and energy-deficit countries like China and India on the other and could also become a flourishing transit economy as the shortest land route from western China to the Arabian Sea, while linking India with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics. The paragraph on Kashmir figured at s.no.viii among the policy objectives listed in this chapter. It was preceded and succeeded by others such as establishing cordial and cooperative ties with Pakistan's neighbours, making foreign policy formulation the sole preserve of elected representatives, making sure that all civil and military institutions, "including those dealing with security and/or intelligence matters" act as per the directives of the federal government, and according special importance to promotion of external trade, etc.

The manifesto of the other major party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) had similar prioritisation with the first 60 out of 74 pages devoted to empowerment for all, inclusive and equitable growth, infrastructure and a new social contract, etc. However, the following reference figured on page 73: "We support the rights of the Kashmiri people and during our current government we initiated and continued to pursue a dialogue process agenda with India, including on Kashmir. We will not allow lack of progress on one agenda to impede progress on the others. Without prejudice to the UN Security Council Resolutions, we support open and safe borders at the Line of Control [LoC] to socially unite the Kashmiri people. We note that India and China have a border dispute and yet enjoy tension free relations."

### **Ties with India**

This did not imply that Pakistan's major parties were about to jettison the Kashmir issue. Far from it. However, since political parties trim the sails of their manifestos to the winds of public opinion, the two manifestos were a good indicator of the priorities of the Pakistani people and the issues agitating their mind. To be sure, a civil or military leader in Pakistan can still whip up short-term hysteria on Kashmir, especially in periods of tension with India. But in a reflection of the public mood, India was not an issue of even marginal consequence in determining the choices of voters in the May 2013 election. The manifestos were unusual in their candour and content and a departure from the influential security state narrative, which ranks confronting "enemy India" over the welfare and progress of the Pakistani people. However, what has transpired after the 2013 election is extraordinarily usual for Pakistan and India-Pakistan relations.

Soon after the election, the Pakistani media reported that the then Chief of

Army Staff, Gen. Kayani, had advised the Prime Minister-elect, Nawaz Sharif, to go slow on relations with India. Subsequently, the killing of five Indian soldiers in a Pakistani ambush at the LoC in the Poonch sector in August 2013 put paid to the efforts of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to revive the peace process with the Nawaz Sharif government. During the visit of Mr. Sharif's brother, Shahbaz Sharif to India in December 2013, it was decided to take the trade agenda forward, with India agreeing to give significantly improved market access to Pakistani products in return for Pakistan moving to a non-discriminatory market access regime (euphemism for Most Favoured Nation). However, Pakistan baulked at the eleventh hour, reportedly because of opposition by the army and the reluctance of the Nawaz government to clinch such an important deal with the outgoing Indian government on the eve of elections. Whatever the reason, Pakistan has failed to seal the trade deal, widely acknowledged by its top economists and businessmen to be in its interest, in spite of the positive attitude of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government on the issue. The promise generated by Mr. Nawaz Sharif's visit to India for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in in May 2014 was cut short by the meeting of the Pakistan envoy with the Hurriyat leaders.

From recent events, it appears that the security state paradigm, which is revisionist not only regarding accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India, but also India's leading role in South Asia and beyond, is on the ascendant again in Pakistan. Pakistan's adversarial posture towards India has entailed heavy costs for us and significantly heavier costs for the smaller Pakistani economy. The gap between the two economies is growing. Therefore, sustenance of this posture by Pakistan would imply increasing detriment to its economy and the well-being of its people who, more than Kashmir, crave better governance and economic opportunities. The imperatives underlying the candour and constructive ideas in the manifestos mentioned remain unchanged. Therefore, it would be wrong to assume that the thinking underpinning those ideas has vanished or should count for nothing in our policy formulation.

### **Countering threats**

Pakistani provocations, not entirely missing in periods of dialogue, tend to increase in its absence. Some are attempts to infuse life into its flagging "Kashmir cause" and drag us into verbal duels in the international arena, but have no impact on the ground situation. These, therefore, deserve cursory dismissal. References to Kashmir at the U.N. and the Pakistan-inspired hackneyed resolutions by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) are some examples. We did well in responding to the Pakistani reference to Jammu and Kashmir at the UNGA at the level of a First Secretary, while offering, in Mr. Modi's speech, dialogue without the shadow of terror.

There are, on the other hand, provocations which impact the ground situation adversely for us. These include Pakistan's continued harbouring of anti-India terror groups, infiltration of terrorists across the LoC and attempts to destabilise the situation in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. Such efforts need to be thwarted resolutely. Faced with Pakistan's firing across the LoC, we have no option but to respond. However, in general, more subtle strategies to contain and counter threats from Pakistan would be in our interest.

Finally, the jingoistic and threatening rhetoric in a section of our media in response to each provocation from Pakistan does us no good. Our growing power

ought to be felt by our adversaries and not flaunted. Threatening language tends to drive a significant number in Pakistan, who think constructively of relations with India, into the arms of the security state proponents.