



Indo-Pak Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism Perspectives from Pakistan

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Both leaders agreed that terrorism is the main threat to both countries. Both leaders affirmed their resolve to fight terrorism and to cooperate with each other to this end.... Prime Minister Singh reiterated the need to bring the perpetrators of Mumbai attacks to justice. Prime Minister Gilani assured that Pakistan will do everything in its power in this regard. He said that Pakistan has provided an updated status dossier on the investigations of the Mumbai attacks and had sought additional information/evidence. Prime Minister Singh said that the dossier is being reviewed....Both leaders agreed that the two countries will share real time credible and actionable information on any future terrorist threats....

- Dr. Manmohan Singh and Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, in a Joint Statement, Sharm El Sheikh, 16 July 2009

India-Pakistan anti-terrorism cooperation can rightly be classified as a 'fisherman model' that is, you catch a fish when it comes to you! This implies an absence of a sustained and pro-active interaction versus the issue of terrorism, undermining peace and stability within and beyond their respective territorial boundaries. Why it is so?

How can both India and Pakistan jointly move forward towards eradicating terrorism? How did



Indo-Pak dialogue on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building is an ongoing project of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

As a part of this project, the Institute is publishing a series of background papers on various Indo-Pak bilateral issues. Besides, the Institute is also organizing track-II dialogue between the two countries in October 2009. For more information about this project, kindly visit IPCS website.

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India and Pakistan resolve to form a bilateral or Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism? What factors or variables have marred and continue to impact the smooth sailing of JATM? Finally, how to ensure sustained Indo-Pak interaction through Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism?

I JOINT MECHANISM: A SHORT HISTORY

Havana meeting of the Non Aligned Movement, in September 2006 concluded on a positive note. Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf, emphasized that the peace process must be maintained and it's "success was important" for both the countries. This marked a resumption of the derailed "composite Indo-Pak peace dialogue" following the 11 July 2006 Mumbai multiple train blasts. Both sides "resolved to create a joint institutional mechanism to identify and implement counter-terrorism initiatives and investigations." This marked a new beginning to tackle terrorism as a "collective threat" in the Indo-Pak equation. It was a bold step to move beyond finger pointing through media and engage directly through an institutional framework.

The first meeting of JATM (March 2007) was held in the backdrop of tragic Samjhotha Express incident and defined the parameters of bi-lateral anti-terror cooperation. This meeting defined the framework of the mechanism and agreed that specific information to be exchanged for "helping investigations on either sides related to terrorist acts and prevention of violence and terror acts in the two countries." It was also agreed that while the anti-terrorism mechanism would meet on quarterly basis, any information which is required to be provided on priority basis would be immediately conveyed to the respective heads of the mechanism.

Second meeting of the JATM (October 22, 2007) led to the update on the information shared in the earlier meeting and resolved to cooperate with one another to identify measures, exchange specific information and assist in investigations. However, prior to the meeting, both sides traded accusatory remarks about subversive activities within their respective borders. Pakistan's foreign spokesperson said: "We had indications of Indian involvement with anti-state elements in Pakistan". On the Indian side, National

Security Adviser MK Narayanan charged Pakistan, "for building up and stirring Sikh militancy in northern Punjab State". India also blamed the ISI for bomb blasts in Hyderabad, Ajmer, and Ludhiana. This love and hate relationship continued and prior to the third and last meeting of joint anti-terror mechanism, Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee expressed concern over the possibility of Pakistan's nuclear assets falling in the hands of radicals and threat of proliferation of Weapons of Mass destruction.

Third meeting of the Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism held in Islamabad on June 28, 2008 in the backdrop of the Kabul blast of Indian Embassy; both sides exchanged fresh information about terrorism incidents including Samjhota Express. They reviewed the steps taken on the information at the earlier meetings. Pakistan Foreign Office Spokesman stated: "The two sides agreed to continue to work to identify counter-terrorism measures, assist in investigations through exchange of specific information and for preventing violence and terrorist acts".

II WILL JOINT MECHANISM WORK?: A CRITIQUE

Was joint-anti-terror mechanism a useful medium to exchange information on the past terror incidents such as, Mumbai Train blasts (2006) or Samjhota express Feb 2007? There are multiple interpretations ranging from severe criticism to highly optimistic notes. A critical variable that marred the effectiveness of joint anti terror mechanism has been a persistent divergence while interpreting the creation of joint anti-anti terror mechanism across the Indo-Pak border. For instance in case of India, this development was interpreted as sign of giving in to the "Pakistan's trap". Yaswant Sinha condemned the joint statement by Singh and Musharraf as "an unprecedented capitulation of India before Pakistan on the issue of cross-border terrorism." He added that "resumption of the Foreign Secretary-level talks between the two countries in the background of increased violence from Pakistan is not acceptable to us."

Indian analyst B Raman reflected it as a double game of President Musharraf; he wrote: "Musharraf is now prepared to revert to the pre-July, 2005 jihadi lull and co-operate with India in the investigation of any acts which have taken place since July, 2005, in return for Indian co-operation in dealing with what the Pakistani authorities' project as cross-border

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On the Pakistan side, Former foreign secretary Ambassador Shamshad Ahmed observed: "In our anxiety to have the dialogue resumed, we rushed into signing an unnecessary agreement at Havana on establishing a joint anti-terror mechanism. This gives India another tool to manipulate the dialogue as it did after the Mumbai blasts. The peace process that we are following now is no longer about resolving our disputes with India or redressing our grievances over India's transgressions in Siachen and Sir Creek. This peace process is now all about "terrorism" which has become our bete noire and which we have undertaken to fight, first on behalf of the US and now on India's behalf."

On the other hand, there are numerous pronouncements particularly from the government, media and academic side that termed the very creation of JATM as a positive break from the past. Foreign Minister Kasuri viewed this development as an "optimistic trend that it would address concerns of both the countries and help bridge the trust-deficit" Likewise, Indian National Security Adviser MK Narayanan also saw "it as an opportunity..... The mechanism could also take care of certain issues such a money-laundering under a broader framework"

Benazir Bhutto was the most optimistic: "I believe that Indo Pak relations can be creatively re-invented.... there is a consensus amongst the political parties of India and Pakistan, a consensus between our military and security establishments that peace must be established. We also agree that the one serious danger to the peace process comes from militants and terrorists. Therefore the challenge for us is to dismantle the militant cells so that they cannot hold the foreign policy of two independent nations hostage to their acts of terrorism..... In this connection, I welcome the decision by both India and Pakistan to work together on anti-terrorism efforts and to share information in this regard. This is a positive step forward..... Militancy and terrorism are the roots of violence, senseless destruction and loss of lives..... With terrorism now a global issue, cooperation between India and Pakistan to work on eliminating terrorism from the region offers an important opportunity to reinvent the relationship"

At this juncture one must note that both sides, India and Pakistan though committed to institutionalize a bi-lateral counter-terrorism mechanism were fully aware of the presence of differences as natural to begin with. To quote former Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid M Kasuri: "I think in both countries' interest, the joint security mechanism is a success. Whereas India has concerns, Pakistan also has concerns and it is much better that we have a mechanism where both countries can voice their concerns."

This leads to another key point that divergence in perceptions about the issues to be discussed under the new mechanism also existed from the day one and explains the punctuated output of this interaction to date. On the question of Kashmir dispute, while New Delhi pressed for its inclusion as a

"cross-border issue", Islamabad maintained "violence in Kashmir is not part of anti-terror mechanism". Similarly in almost all the meetings both sides exchanged dossiers relating to the wrongdoings or involvement of one another in numerous terror incidents and happenings. While the joint statements of all the three joint anti-terror mechanism meetings (March 2007, October 2007 and June 2008) reiterated essential need to combat terrorism, no tangible solution of any major terrorist incident was recorded.

One can argue that JATM is not a final platform to deliver solutions but essentially a diplomatic and institutional framework to exchange data while sitting across the table rather than communicating through media only. This is the essence of its creation and its effectiveness lies in not being trashed whenever terror hits either India or Pakistan. To quote an Islamabad based research analyst, Dr Shaheen Akhtar: "JATM has emerged as a shock absorber which pre-empts any derailment of India-Pak dialogue process".

III ONE ISSUE, DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS

Throughout 2008-09, Pakistan has been advocating a return to "dialogue" as critical to act jointly against the threat of terrorism. A briefing by Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs Briefing said: There is a mechanism which was put in place jointly by Pakistan and India. This is a mechanism which is there to be invoked in order to take care of our mutual concerns vis-à-vis security and terrorism....This is a mechanism which is kind of embryonic at this stage and in order to strengthen it we need to make use of it... Terrorism is a global problem and in order to deal with this menace we ought to have a cooperative engagement. What we expect from India is to resume the Composite Dialogue, to invoke the bilateral arrangement which we have i.e. the Anti-Terrorism Mechanism with view to addressing our mutual concerns in this regard rather than making statements which are part of politicking and might be helpful only for their election campaign.

New Delhi froze the dialogue process including the JATM following 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi expressing "shock and horror" at the terror attacks in Mumbai Pakistan Foreign Minister Qureshi, called for "strengthening the joint anti-terror mechanism and offered to set up a hotline between intelligence chiefs of the two countries. ...Warned against "making insinuations against each other" in case of terror attacks and stressed the need for a cautious approach towards tackling the common scourge..... Pakistan wants to cooperate. We have to face the common enemy in terrorism and it is a global challenge."

At the same time Minister Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee observed: "There is a need for effective steps to address the menace of terrorism which threatens societal and state stability in our region. The institutions which we have set up within the Dialogue framework such as Home Secretary level talks and the Joint Anti Terror Mechanism have

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been meeting regularly. In fact the Union Home Secretary had a meeting yesterday in Islamabad with his Pakistan counterpart, and the Joint Anti Terror Mechanism had met in a special session to discuss the terrorist attack on our Embassy in Kabul a few weeks ago. We agreed that it is important that these institutions should show concrete results".

III RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key pointers can be deduced as a "Way Forward" for re-inventing trust based bilateral equation:

- Issue of Counter-terrorism at the local, national, bilateral and regional level is essentially a team work at the state and society level. There is a dire need to invest in re-framing and projecting a balanced image of one another. This in turn, requires political will backed by institutional will to break from the "zero-sum" mentality in perceiving and pursuing ones security policy.

- There is dire need to contextualize terrorism as a phenomenon that is a product of not only external environment or work of "foreign hand". There is critical need to locate and address the grievances (political, social, economic, etc) and bridge the gaps/caveats within a system of governance that often result in terrorist related incidents. Here, responsible behavior on part of the policy makers should be exercised to the maximum. Plus, media on both sides should exhibit prudent and pro-active behavior to highlight the benefits of sustainable peace between India and Pakistan. Both governments should not 'abuse' media to gain national, bilateral and international attention and create 'hostile image' of one another.

- The aforementioned recommendations must be complemented by enlarging the spectrum of "security matrix" of both India and Pakistan. That is, for a stable and prosperous mutual relationship "security of people called human security" must be a key to the strategic planning on both sides. This requires a judicious mix of traditional and non-traditional security priorities. For example, human security as postulated by the United Nations.

Thus, holistic conception of security is the best medium for assuring a collective and coordinated approach towards counter-terrorism. Here, one cannot contest the central role of security residing

with the state given a fact that present security challenges (including Terrorism) are complex and requires broadening of the security paradigm. Thus, it is strongly recommended that human security must complement state security in practice for nurturing a credible joint anti-terror Indo-Pak mechanism.

■ Another plausible recommendation to both New Delhi and Islamabad is to learn from the experience of others. An Innovative step can be to create "safety net or pool" of intellectuals from both sides that should together undertake analytical studies on how to remove trust deficit at the institutional level by looking into the successful cases of conflict resolution around the world. These studies should be considered as essential reference material for the delegations to be engaged in future bi-lateral discourses on the issue of terrorism.

■ Lastly, one must not judge the effectiveness of labeling JATM as "not delivering much" institutional mechanism but should look at it as "primary or sub-stage" in the process of building a positive and sustainable bi-lateral equation. Its success should be measured in not being "discarded" but being "retained or paused instrument" as point of contact between the India and Pakistan. The ultimate goal should be use JATM as a preventative and pro-active forum to ensure peace in one another quarters.

■ There is urgent need to not build up media –hype regarding the Peace process between the two neighbours – India and Pakistan. Both sides need to be realistic, gradualist and pragmatic versus their respective desired results from the Peace dialogue including joint anti terror mechanisms. That is, policy practitioners should understand that mutual distrust of decades cannot be removed in one joint meeting but be prepared to invest time and energy in keeping the bi-lateral mechanisms on track. Both sides must recognize that elements against the direct dialing on issues such as terrorism will always try to off-set the process by staging terrorist attacks here and there. The effectiveness of any bilateral interaction depends on its ability to survive the jolts and come out more resolved in favor of "dialogue" than "military, political, diplomatic stand off".

■ Both governments, should not be fixated in laying out sketch of approaching or re-activating stalled bilateral counter-terrorism mechanism. Here, statement of Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna, "any meaningful dialogue with Pakistan can only be based on fulfillment of its commitment, in letter and spirit, not to allow its territory to be used in any manner for terrorist activities against India," – does more damage than repair a trust deficit equation between India and Pakistan. That is, open-mindedness and willingness to listen and respect each other standpoint must be followed in letter and spirit. Both should perceive each other as "partners" engaging in a "collective enterprise" versus terrorism. If interaction starts within the framework of "us versus them" both sides will end up "only talking" and not moving forward in a pro-active way. Plus, it leaves a room to engage in rhetoric competition where both sides deliberately engage in "war of words" and real

purpose of direct and sustainable interaction is lost from the very beginning.

In nut shell, the starting point for an effective joint counter- terror mechanism lies in recognizing the essential value of "talking" directly than sliding into "conflict based syndrome" – a persistent feature of past Indo-Pak relations. This fact is well captured in the following words of the former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill: "To jaw-jaw is always better than to war-war".

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