

Gurdaspur attack: India can't afford a tepid response

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By C Christine Fair

From the moment it became apparent that [Narendra Modi](#) would become India's Prime Minister, Pakistan has wondered how India would respond to its terrorist predations. Would it follow the path of the previous PM Manmohan Singh and tolerate [Pakistan-based terrorism](#) in hopes of avoiding any entanglement that would retard India's economic ascent? Or, would it pursue a more hawkish policy? Earlier this week, Pakistan tested the waters when it dispatched three terrorists to Gurdaspur via the Ravi River. The attackers killed seven people, including a Punjab police SP, before being felled.

It's not the first time Pakistan has sought to test the mettle of this government: in May 2014, before Modi had been sworn in, the Indian consulate in Herat, Afghanistan was attacked. Analysts believed the Herat attackers were either associated with [Lashkar-e-Taiba](#), now operating as "Jamaat-ud-Dawa," or the Haqqani network, both of which operate at the behest of Pakistan's ISI. The next test came in March 2015 when two heavily armed militants raided a police station in J&K's Kathua district -the first such attack after the PDP and BJP formed a coalition government in the state.

The Gurdaspur incident comes soon after Modi's meeting with Pakistan's [Nawaz Sharif](#) on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meet in Ufa, Russia on July 10. For peaceniks, it heralded new portents for South Asian peace mongering. The mombatti-wallahs lauded the agreements, including a much-celebrated common definition of terrorism. This would be of little comfort to the victims of Gurdaspur who perished under this agreed-upon lexicon.

Such optimism was misplaced to begin with. One, even if Nawaz Sharif wants peace -a question able assertion -he is not the Sharif that matters: Army chief [Raheel Sharif](#) is the one in charge. Pakistan's army has no incentive to normalize relations with India; its pre-eminent hold upon the state is predicated upon an interminable civilizational war with "Hindu India". Second, such meetings can be productive if there is some glimmer of common ground. Alas, there is little evidence of that. Pakistan wants to change the status quo through terrorism backed by nuclear proliferation while India wants to ratify the status quo and get on with the business of being a rising power.

The [Gurdaspur attack](#) should remove any doubt that Pakistan's generals want peace with India. This attack is a clever move for several reasons. It is the first attack during the Modi government's tenure that has taken place outside of J&K. Yet Gurdaspur, a middling city that will not capture public attention for long, does not have the provocation potential of an attack on Delhi or Mumbai. Would India risk war for Gurdaspur? However, it is almost certain that a tepid response to Gurdaspur will invite more ambitious attacks on high-value targets within India.

Gurdaspur, however, is a target laden with significance. Historically, it animates a grudge that Pakistan has nursed since Partition: namely, that Muslim majority tehsils from Gurdaspur went to India in connivance with the British to facilitate India's acquisition of Kashmir. Of course, Pakistanis conveniently omit that these areas were likely allocated to India because of their large Sikh population. Pakistanis also fail to acknowledge that Pathankot--with a Hindu majority--would have gone to India in any event. India only needed that tehsil to dispatch troops into [Kashmir](#) via ground. Pakistan's versions of Partition animate military, militant and popular thinking about India.

Gurdaspur is also important because it harkens back to the bloody days of Sikh militancy that got ample support from Pakistan. There is reason to believe that it seeks to reopen Punjab as a theatre of terrorism beyond Kashmir. Pakistan is anxious to persuade militants to stop fighting Pakistanis and resume the fight in India and Afghanistan. It has rejuvenated [Jaish-e-Mohammad](#) in an effort to lure fellow Deobandis from the [Pakistani Taliban](#) and back to Jaish under whose auspices they can kill in India. India's Punjab with its rampant drug problem creates numerous opportunities for militant-criminal-trafficking collusion.



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So far, Pakistan has used terrorism under its nuclear umbrella because it is cheap, effective, difficult to deter and ultimately successful in fanning the international chorus for "resolving the IndoPakistan problem".

It would behoove India to tell its international backers bluntly that there is no "India-Pakistan problem;" only a Pakistan problem. It needs to develop a suite of policies that will impose significant and escalating costs upon Pakistan, diplomatically , politically and militarily. And India's partners should support India in its application of power rather than continually excusing Pakistan's behaviour. Pakistan is trying to ascertain whether this Indian government is all bluster and no follow-through.Failure to respond vigorously will surely encourage further Pakistani terrorist adventurism.

The writer is an assistant professor at Georgetown University and author of Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War My Times, My Voice: Like this article?

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