



Pakistan's Pulwama game plan: It is obsessed with changing maps in Kashmir and retarding India's global rise

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Pakistan has a problem. Pakistan is obsessed with changing maps in Kashmir. Pakistan, founded on the inherently communal, non-democratic and philosophically depraved "two nation theory", believes that it is entitled to the entirety of Muslim-majority Kashmir.

This claim is not based on any defensible procedure or proclamation. After all, neither the Indian Independence Act nor the terms of reference for Partition bestowed the territory upon Pakistan and indeed the former allowed the sovereign of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, to pick the dominion he would join. While he held out for independence, Pakistan dispatched invaders to seize it by force despite signing a stand-still agreement with Singh. Singh, unable to defend himself, requested Indian assistance. India agreed provided that he sign the instrument of accession to join India. Singh did so after which India dispatched forces to defend what became sovereign Indian territory.

Since then, Pakistan has supported subterfuge in Kashmir, waged a proxy war since 1990 in addition to starting wars in 1965 and 1999. As time marched on and India continued to expand and modernise its defences, Pakistan's aims have actually expanded. While seeking to wrestle all of Kashmir from India, it risibly also sees itself as the only power to retard India's rise in the international system.

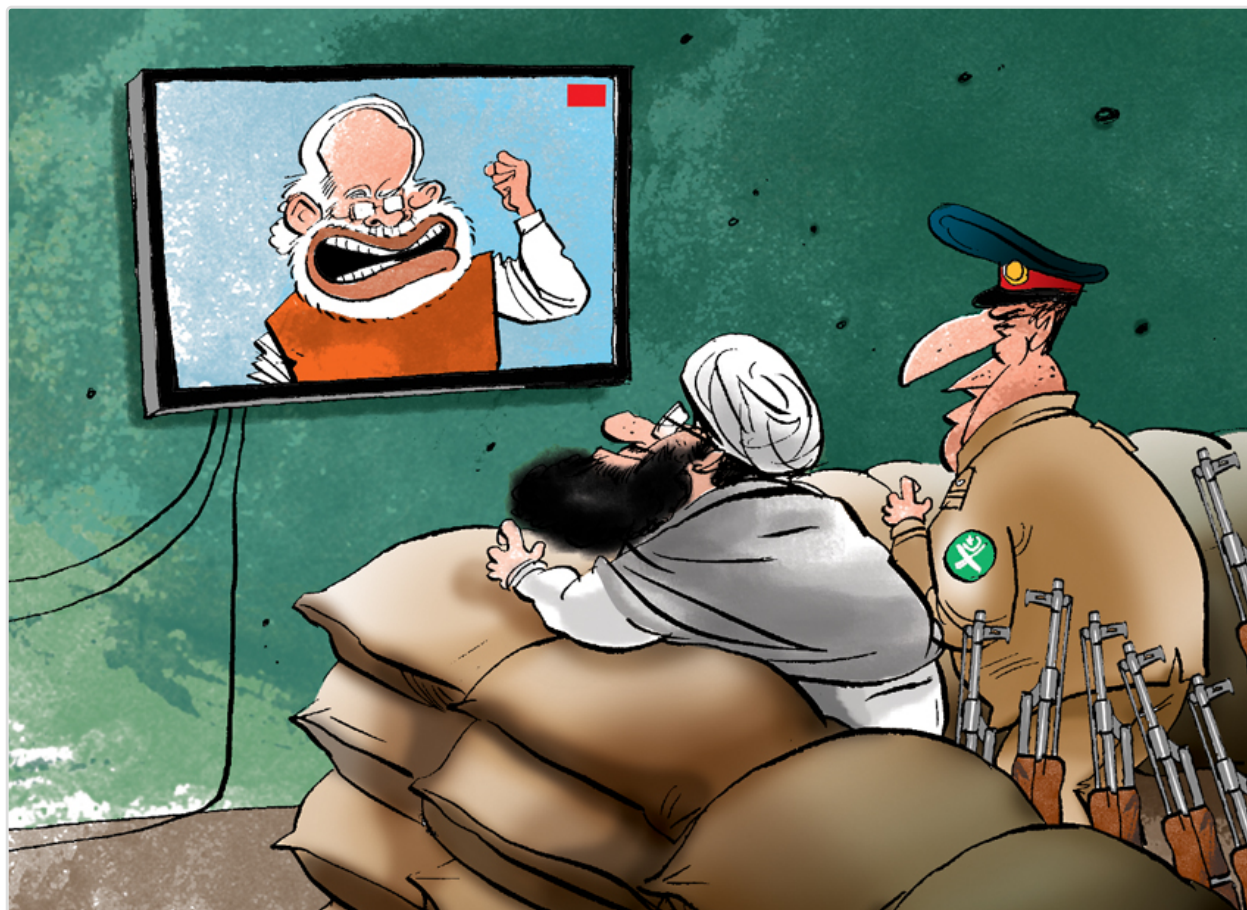




Illustration: Uday Deb

But there are two big problems: it has an army that can start wars but cannot win them and it has nuclear weapons it cannot use because, while India will suffer tragic losses from Pakistani launches, Pakistan will cease to exist as a geopolitical entity after India responds in kind. Thus Pakistan has forged a distinctly Pakistani approach: nurture, support and deploy Islamist proxies to perpetrate a variety of outrages while using its nuclear weapons umbrella to deter Indian conventional responses and catalysing American intervention to pressure India to de-escalate.

In this sense, Pakistan is an “international insurgent”. To be victorious, it does not have to defeat India, it need only demonstrate that India cannot defeat it and it does so by taking calculated risks like Pulwama.

Indians need to grapple with the sad truth that there will be no peace with the beast on the border irrespective of the particular inefficacious prime minister that is allowed to become the mayor of Islamabad: the army controls all policies that matter. In fact, Indians should grievously worry when Pakistani civilian leaders get too cosy with their Indian counterparts. In 1999, the Pakistan army was so outraged by the peace process that Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif forged that it launched the Kargil operation to sabotage it.

Pakistan maintains a virtual petting zoo of terrorist proxy organisations that it can deploy in Kashmir or elsewhere in India, depending upon its particular aims. Pakistan can calibrate the violence in several ways. First, it can control the sensitivities of the theatre. Targets across the line of control in Kashmir – which it considers to be contested terrain – are the least provocative, followed by third-tier cities like Gurdaspur, followed by the most provocative targets like Delhi and Mumbai. Second, it can calibrate the target of the violence. In India targeting security forces seems to generate more outrage than purely civilian targets. Third, it can calibrate the lethality and mode of attack.

At Pulwama, Pakistan's choice was very specific. While the location was among the least provocative, the other details were clearly calculated to outrage. The group of choice was Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM). With Lashkar-e-Taiba deployed within Pakistan to counter Islamic State (IS) and other Deobandi militias murdering Pakistanis, JeM has become a principal vehicle to lure members of the Pakistani Taliban away from targeting the state and reorient them towards killing in India.

After a hiatus of 19 years, it reintroduced the vehicle-borne suicide attack. More shocking yet, the suicide attacker, Adil Ahmad Dar (20), was a Kashmiri boy from the area who ostensibly went to Pakistan in the spring of 2018. JeM's previous suicide bombers were not Kashmiri. Perhaps reflecting distrust that Dar would follow through, he made a pre-attack video announcing the attack.

What explains the details of this particular attack? I suspect there are several motivations. First, both IS and al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent have tried to draw Indian Muslims in Kashmir and elsewhere to their global causes while disparaging Pakistan-backed proxies. Both have mocked Indian Muslims for their alleged pusillanimity and failure to defend themselves against cow vigilante attacks, Hindutva ascendance, the resurgence of the demand to rebuild the Ram Mandir while supposedly also being uninterested in global Muslim concerns. This audacious attack – with a Kashmiri suicide bomber – is surely intended to regain the initiative and reassert Pakistan's equities. Dar's video also delivers a clarion message to northern Kashmiri Muslims: stop free-riding on the sacrifices of southern brothers.

But it is also clearly intended to taunt Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Make no mistake: the interest of Pakistan's deep state is best served by a Modi victory, which is now uncertain. Modi and his BJP seem to lend credence to the Pakistani deep state's narratives about “Hindu India” and the safety of Muslims within it. Modi's tenure also provides Pakistan's various Islamist proxies with bountiful recruitment opportunities. By affording Modi to demonstrate his muscularity as he did in Uri – sensationalised in the recent eponymous film – Pakistan is giving Modi yet another opportunity to burnish his tough credentials vis-a-vis his notoriously tepid Congress competitors. And, given the tough election season ahead, Modi has no choice but to oblige.

In the game of terrorism, Pakistan again proves itself to be the master.

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AUTHOR



C Christine Fair

C Christine Fair is Associate Professor at Georgetown University's Security Studies Programme.

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Very biased article with no consideration whatsoever of the historical truth and the disputed nature of the conflict. Kashmiri issue can only be solve...

Ashok

