

## Revisiting Kashmir

Are we supposed to carry out a reassessment of threats to our national security? Is there an institutionalised mechanism of carrying out this reassessment? Is it only the military that carries out this reassessment or are civilian authorities also part of the process? Whatever be the method of our threat reassessments, for the common person, the types and priority of threats to our national security are all shrouded in mystery and so is the national priority to challenge and meet them. If threats evolve, which they do, then so should our national security and defence policy.

General Ahmad Shuja Pasha, while in office, termed terrorist as our enemy number one. Going by his assessment, which holds a lot of weight, the biggest threat to Pakistan's national security today is, therefore, not external but internal from terrorists/forces with extremist ideologies from within. If it is so, then should the state continue to maintain a very significant conventional force posture to deal with the Indian threat? Doesn't this changed threat perception warrant a change in our military force structures and modification of our state defence and security policies? Given the significance of the internal threat, should we still continue with our India-centric state defence and security policy?

The January 12, 2002 'about turn speech' by General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf changed forever the motive for war between India and Pakistan. Faced with serious Indian military threat looming on our eastern front, the general unconditionally announced the cessation of state support to the jihadists, who fought the military's proxy in Kashmir. The military ruler committed to not allowing the use of Pakistani territory for any terrorist act against India in the future. This resulted in the demobilisation and withdrawal of Indian forces from the international border but more than that, it enabled Indians to complete uninterrupted the border fence along the 1,500 miles long Line of Control. All attempts by the Indians had previously been blocked by intense artillery firing from the Pakistani side of the border. Most significantly, the Pakistan Army also decided to roll back its proxy fighting infrastructures, finally demonstrating to the Indians its resolve to remain committed to the promise the military ruler had made. On the Indian side, the one big reason to go to war with Pakistan – 'supporting jihadists in Kashmir' – ceased to exist.

Considering that Kashmir, since then, has gone quiet and also considering that we actually cooperated with the Indians to ensure its quietness, should we still maintain our military-imposed perpetual public desire for acquisition of Indian-held Kashmir through military means? Considering that Kashmir had been the bone of contention and the sole reason for both India and Pakistan to fight almost all wars, is the peace and quiet on the Kashmir front not good news for politics in the region, for the people of the region, for democracy and even for the peace process between the two countries that should now progress towards reaching a meaningful end? Politicians on both sides should take this as an opportunity to build on the prevailing atmosphere and make advances for a negotiated settlement of the issue.

'Operation Parakaram' in 2001-02, and its consequent actions by our state, have closed all doors on finding a military solution to the Kashmir conflict. Realistically speaking, the Pakistan Army's best chances to acquire Indian-held Kashmir through military means are now over, dead and buried in the past. Both the conventional military means, as well as Kashmir proxies, have failed to bring about any meaningful ends that the military desired.

Given the background, it seems that the plausible way forward for the Pakistan Army to ensure the safety and survival of our nation state is to create enabling conditions for politicians to pursue peace with India and carryout organisational and structural changes in the armed forces to meet both the actual threat as well as the external threat. Above all, the army can help the civilian leadership to redefine and reformulate the state security and defence policy, more inclined to meet all the threats with appropriate force structures. It's also time that the strategic thinkers on both sides of the border carried out some soul-searching and, instead of spending huge amount on defence expenditures, provide the people of the two countries an opportunity to live better lives. This will only be possible if it is realised that it is no more necessary to maintain and sustain huge conventional armies especially when downsizing them is possible, considering the calm that prevails on the Kashmir front.

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