

Winning the peace

There have been a lot of accusations and counter-accusations by both India and Pakistan on how their soldiers have been killed in the sudden violence triggered across the Line of Control (LoC). The important thing to consider here is the reason that why this sudden rise in hostilities occurred. How did a military stand-off that was prevented by a ceasefire and maintained for over a decade get re-triggered? Whose interest did this sudden escalation of violence serve? Why would the Pakistan Army want to be tripped over on the eastern front when its hands are already full with so many other brewing crises?

Surely, India being the biggest democracy in the world must know the importance of resolving disputes through a democratic process. Why, then, has the Indian media, its politicians and government overreacted so much over these violations? Is it a question of a regional power looking for an excuse to demonstrate to its public its military potential and capability? Why does India refuse to learn that its policy of bullying Pakistan into submission never worked in the past and is not likely to work in the future either? Courtesy of the Indian reaction, the biggest worry is not the destructive potential of the two nuclear powers that maintain a regular stand-off across the LoC but the fragility of this stand-off. Predictably, the fate of over a billion people living in the two countries is easily in the hands of a few non-state actors, who can trigger a process at any time that may eventually culminate into military confrontation.

Military bravado and statements of public figures seeking votes in the next elections aside, the public of the two countries have now little stomach for any more military confrontations. Although the current skirmishes across the LoC have made some exciting headlines, on balance, these have only compromised and not advanced the two nations' bilateral interests.

Although necessitated by conditions and circumstances not of its making, the rollback of the proxy war in Kashmir that happened almost a decade ago, did change permanently the Pakistan Army's 'Kashmir attitude'. "Lay kay rahein gay Kashmir" ("We will not rest until we win over Kashmir") was a slogan which, over the years, had influenced the minds of majority of the officers and men of the Pakistan Army, only because the international environment at the time favoured the acquisition of Indian-held Kashmir through military means. Now, even a second-lieutenant knows that it is impossible to achieve this through a conventional military initiative. Also, the army chief in his latest statement, referred to a military response and not a military initiative when he said, "the Pakistan Army is fully prepared to respond to the full spectrum of threats, direct or indirect, overt or covert."

There is no doubt that there are critical national interests to safeguard and to do that, powerful armies have to be retained and maintained but can these national interests not be safeguarded without the two armies deploying their offensive military assets in threatening forward postures? The best thing under the current circumstances for both countries would be to agree on establishing 'disengagement zones' in selected and unstable areas of the LoC. In these selected areas, strike forces, including troops, armour and artillery, should be pulled back to prevent sudden escalation that has the ability to spin out of control. To do this, India will have to give up its cold start doctrine. The Pakistan Army, on its part, will have to draw down on its military assets positioned to respond to the Indian cold start doctrine.

The civilian leaderships in both countries will also have to play their parts. Military strategies only succeed when beefed up with resources to achieve military objectives. It is by limiting these resources to their militaries that the democracies of the two countries can prevent the chances of military confrontation. Both Indians and Pakistanis know that even if their leaders don't do that, winning the war is not an option; winning the peace is.

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