

On Pakistan and India relations

Today, puzzled and perplexed people in Pakistan wonder why the cold war with India has suddenly turned hot as demonstrated by the continued violations across the Line of control (LoC). Is the Indian motive and reason more prompting today, than the one that was presented in 2008 in the aftermath of the Mumbai terrorist attack? The Pakistan Army, in the decade following 9/11, was a strategic asset and an all important tool for the US to fight the US-led war on terror in this region. It was in the interest of the US that the Pakistani military leadership felt no worries to shift its focus of attention, as well as its military assets, from the eastern to the western front when the world led by the US, needed them most. For this purpose, peace and military calm prevailed on the LoC for a decade. With the US military drawdown from Afghanistan now only months away, the Pakistan Army today is fixated with the likely scenarios that may develop post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The army's 'nightmare scenario' is to be pushed to fight a war on two fronts. Promoting and creating a hostile environment along the LoC at this stage seems only to convey a strong message to the Pakistani military that 'India will not let Pakistan have its way in Afghanistan'.

India has accused the Pakistan military of beheading one of its soldiers and the world believes it. On the other hand, the Pakistan Army has been crying hoarse of Indian involvement in financing and supporting the militants harboured across the border in Afghanistan but the world is not ready to believe it. Whether it is support for the Baloch militants or Maulana Fazlullah's crusaders that cross the western border at will, it is allegedly the Indian-led proxy that is killing Pakistani security personnels on the western front.

By escalating tensions across the LoC, there is much that India is likely to lose as well. It will lose the opportunity of promoting and strengthening the democratic process in Pakistan, which guarantees the prevention of hostilities and the potential for future military conflicts between the two countries. The current hostile attitude of India would also mean that again the Pakistan military will be forced to look upon the militants as the assets that they once were against Indian occupation in Kashmir. The Pakistan Army's focus back on the LoC will also affect the intent, purpose and attention to hunt down the militants within the country. Hostile Indian actions will also badly hamper the all-important ongoing debate in Pakistan on the purposefulness of spending precious resources on the country's defence budget. Courtesy hostile Indian actions across the LoC, these expenditures will now largely be seen by the civil society as necessary as well as justified. In short, Indian hostile actions on the LoC will only help the Pakistan Army to reimpose its control over civilian authorities that are seeking to limit its role in politics in this country.

India must realise that promoting and creating a hostile environment on the eastern borders will only favour growth of militancy in Pakistan. Poor relations with India have been a major factor in our country raising and fostering overambitious military rulers like General Ziaul Haq and General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf. We have all seen the lengths that the Pakistan military, under military rulers, has gone to match Indian capabilities, at the cost of causing people to suffer at home. Easing tensions with India for the Pakistan Army, a force which is primarily structured to combat the Indian threat, means the removal of a major factor of its continued development and enlargement. A hostile India will mean that the army will continue to develop and enlarge at the cost of the welfare and well-being of the people of this country. Indian self-definition may draw meaning from Pakistan. But can't it be a Pakistan at peace with itself and not a hostile and unacceptable one?

By Muhammad Ali Ehsan

The writer is a defence analyst who retired as a lieutenant colonel in the Pakistan Army