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# India's Policy of Zero Tolerance Towards Terrorism

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# India's Policy of Zero Tolerance Towards Terrorism

One of the key features of Narendra Modi's era as Prime Minister is the policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism, leavened into an effective tool of foreign policy over the last few years.

This is unsurprising, given his focus on tackling terrorism during his long stint as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, a border state that has often been targeted by Pakistan sponsored organised crime and terrorism.

Less than a year after Mr. Modi took charge as the Chief Minister of Gujarat on 7 October 2001, two armed men attacked the Akshardham Temple complex in Gandhinagar, the state capital of Gujarat on 24 September 2002 killing 29 pilgrims, one NSG commando and two state police commandos, and injuring more than eighty individuals.<sup>1</sup> The siege ended the following day with the elimination of the two

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1. "Swaminarain Temple Attack: Terrorists Shift Focus to Soft Targets, Creating Communal Strife", India Today, October 7, 2002 at <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20021007-swaminarain-temple-attack-terrorists-shift-focus-to-soft-targets-creating-communal-strife-794197-2002-10-07>

attackers. Mr. Modi was one of the first to be contacted by the temple authorities and he had immediately reached out to the then Deputy PM L.K.Advani to requisition the NSG “Black Cat” commandos.

As Chief Minister of Gujarat, Mr. Modi had to countenance the challenge of terrorism linked to Pakistan, with which the state shares a long land and maritime border. During the serial bombings in Ahmedabad on 26 July 2008, in a short span of seventy minutes, 21 bomb blasts hit the city causing widespread death and mayhem. Fifty-eight people were killed and over 200 persons were injured, sparking off large-scale panic in the commercial capital of the state.<sup>2</sup> Just a day before, similar low intensity blasts had hit Bangalore in Karnataka. Unsurprisingly, terror outfits with links to Pakistan claimed responsibility for the attacks.

In his address to the UNGA in New York on 27 September 2019, Prime Minister Modi said<sup>3</sup>,

“We belong to a country that has given the world not war, but Buddha’s message of peace.

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2. “Ahmedabad Blasts: Toll Rises”, NDTV, July 26, 2008 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20080729021340/http://www.ndtv.com/convergence/ndtv/story.aspx?id=NEWEN20080058856>
  3. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Prime Minister’s Address to the UNGA”, September 27, 2019 at [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31878/Prime\\_Ministers\\_address\\_to\\_the\\_UNGA](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31878/Prime_Ministers_address_to_the_UNGA)

And that is the reason why, our voice against terrorism, to alert the world about this evil, rings with seriousness and the outrage.

We believe that this is one of the biggest challenges, not for any single country, but for the entire world and humanity.

The lack of unanimity amongst us on the issue of terrorism, dents those very principles, that are the basis for the creation of the U.N.

And that is why, for the sake of humanity, I firmly believe, that it is absolutely imperative, that the world unites against terrorism, and that the world stands as one against terrorism”.

## **Three-Pronged Approach to Tackle Terrorism**

### **A) Diplomatic Initiatives**

Prime Minister Modi’s government has adopted a three-pronged approach to deal with the menace of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism of which India has long been a victim, but which now affects the global community, as evident in the horrendous attack on 11 September 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York and other targets.

The first prong of the Modi government's strategy against terrorism is the diplomatic offensive to expose and isolate terrorist groups, their leaders and even more importantly, countries which are involved in the use of terrorism as part of their state policy. This is a powerful "name and shame" strategy. This is evident from the speeches and interactions of the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and Defence Minister of India during various bilateral visits and at various international fora.

In the Gulf region, in particular, the personal relationships between Prime Minister Modi and the local leaders have translated into greater cooperation on terrorism and intelligence sharing.

Since the world now has mounting evidence of Pakistan's involvement in harbouring terrorist groups, India has had considerable success in developing convergence with countries around the world. As a result, Prime Minister Modi has been increasingly successful in highlighting Pakistan's brazen use of terrorism to wreak havoc in India. Apart from India, Pakistan has not spared Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka spreading the virulent ideology and patronage of UN proscribed groups hosted by Pakistan.

The growing global condemnation of Pak-sponsored terrorism is best exemplified in evolution of the language

in the joint statements issued by India and Japan following summit-level meetings in recent years. Under Prime Minister Modi, India and Japan have established a close Special Strategic and Global Partnership which is also being cemented in the shared convergence within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. A year before Mr. Modi became Prime Minister, the then PM Manmohan Singh visited Tokyo. Para 30 of the Joint Statement issued on 29 May 2013 stated<sup>4</sup>-

“The two Prime Ministers condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purpose. They reiterated that no cause or grievance justifies terrorism, and the need to adopt a holistic approach that ensures zero tolerance towards terrorism. The two Prime Ministers expressed satisfaction at the meetings of the India-Japan Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and their cooperation in multilateral fora. They recognize the need to finalize and adopt the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations.”

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4. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement on Prime Minister’s Visit to Japan: Strengthening the Strategic and Global Partnership between India and Japan beyond the 60th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations”, May 29, 2013 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/21755/Joint+Statement+on+Prime+Ministers+visit+to+Japan+Strengthening+the+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership+between+India+and+Japan+beyond+the+60th+Anniversary+of+Diplomatic+Relations>

This was a helpful statement but did not pinpoint the root cause of trouble around the world, i.e., the state support and terrorist networks systematically created by Pakistan over the years. However, such condemnation achieved a quantum jump in the very first Joint Statement issued during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Japan on 1 September 2014. With the language becoming tougher, there emerged a direct call for the elimination of terrorist safe havens and infrastructure. Para 14 of the Joint Statement states<sup>5</sup>-

“The two Prime Ministers condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, irrespective of their perpetrators, origin and motivations. They emphasised that the evolving character of terrorism called for stronger international partnership in combating terrorism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence. They shared concern over deteriorating security situation in various countries, and affirmed, in this regard, the importance of elimination of terrorist safe havens and infrastructure. They also called for reinvigorating multilateral action on terrorism, including through the finalisation and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations at the earliest.”

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5. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Tokyo Declaration for India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership”, September 1, 2014 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/23965/Tokyo+Declaration+for+India++Japan+Special+Strategic+and+Global+Partnership>

This was followed by the Joint Statement issued on 12 December 2015 during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to India. Reflecting the Modi government's tough stand on Pakistan's culpability, para 37 of the statement contained, for the first time, a direct reference to the need to bring to justice those responsible for the Mumbai attack of 2008<sup>6</sup>-

“Sharing their concerns about the growing threat and universal reach of extremism, the two Prime Ministers reiterated their strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations with ‘zero tolerance’ and reaffirmed their deep concern over the continued threat posed by terrorists and terrorist groups. They called upon all countries to implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1267 and other relevant resolutions designating terrorist entities. They also called for eliminating terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, in disrupting terrorist networks and financing channels, and stopping cross-border movement of terrorists. They underlined the need for all countries to effectively deal with trans-national terrorism emanating from

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6. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement on India and Japan Vision 2025: Special Strategic and Global Partnership Working Together for Peace and Prosperity of the Indo-Pacific Region and the World”, December 12, 2015 at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint\\_Statement\\_on\\_India\\_and\\_Japan\\_Vision\\_2025\\_Special\\_Strategic\\_and\\_Global\\_Partnership\\_Working\\_Together\\_for\\_Peace\\_and\\_Prosperty\\_of\\_the\\_IndoPacific\\_R](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26176/Joint_Statement_on_India_and_Japan_Vision_2025_Special_Strategic_and_Global_Partnership_Working_Together_for_Peace_and_Prosperty_of_the_IndoPacific_R)

their territory. They emphasised that the evolving character of terrorism called for stronger international partnership in combating terrorism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence. They affirmed the importance of bringing the perpetrators of terrorist attacks including those of November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai to justice.”

In the Joint Statement of 11 November 2016 on the occasion of Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan, para 49 had even tougher language calling upon Pakistan, by name for the first time in any joint statement concluded by India, to bring the perpetrators of terrorist attacks in India to justice.<sup>7</sup>

“The two Prime Ministers condemned terrorism in strongest terms in all its forms and manifestations in the spirit of “zero tolerance.” They noted with great concern the growing menace of terrorism and violent extremism and its universal reach. They expressed their condolences to the bereaved families of the victims of both countries in the recent terrorist attacks including in Dhaka and Uri. They called upon all countries to implement the UNSC Resolution 1267 and other relevant resolutions designating terrorist entities. They called upon all countries to work towards eliminating terrorist safe havens and

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7. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “India-Japan Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister to Japan”, November 11, 2016 at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27599/IndiaJapan\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_to\\_Japan](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/27599/IndiaJapan_Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_Japan)

infrastructure, in disrupting terrorist networks and financing channels, and stopping cross-border movement of terrorists. They underlined the need for all countries to effectively deal with trans-national terrorism emanating from their territory. They emphasised that the evolving character of terrorism called for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence. The two Prime Ministers noted the ongoing bilateral dialogue on counter-terrorism and called for enhanced cooperation including through greater exchange of information and intelligence between the two sides. They also called for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of terrorist attacks including those of November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai and 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot to justice.”

Apparently, Pakistan was so spooked by this direct reference and exposure of its misdeeds that Islamabad sent two senior interlocutors to visit Tokyo in quick succession. It was rumoured that the then NSA of Pakistan, Nasser Khan Janjua, took up this matter with his Japanese interlocutors during his visit to Tokyo on 2 December 2016, to little avail. Munir Akram, now the Pakistani Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, was then Pakistan’s roving Ambassador of sorts. He too visited Tokyo in early December 2016 to discuss these issues in an effort to get Pakistan off the hook in the Joint Statements issued by India and Japan.

In para 54 of the Joint Statement issued on 14 September 2017 during Abe's visit to Gujarat, India and Japan not only called upon Pakistan to deliver the culprits of the Mumbai attacks to justice but also named terrorist groups such as Al-Qaida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Toiba.<sup>8</sup>

“The two Prime Ministers also condemned in the strongest terms the growing menace of terrorism and violent extremism. They shared the view that terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is a global scourge that must be forcefully combatted through concerted global action in the spirit of “zero tolerance”. Accordingly, the two Prime Ministers called upon all UN member countries to implement the UNSC Resolution 1267 and other relevant resolutions designating terrorist entities. They also called upon all countries to work towards rooting out terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, disrupting terrorist networks and financing channels and halting cross-border movement of terrorists. They underlined the need for all countries to ensure that their territory is not used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries. They emphasised the need for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and violent extremism, including

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8. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “India-Japan Joint Statement during Visit of Prime Minister of Japan to India”, September 14, 2017 at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28946/IndiaJapan\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_of\\_Japan\\_to\\_India\\_September\\_14\\_2017](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28946/IndiaJapan_Joint_Statement_during_visit_of_Prime_Minister_of_Japan_to_India_September_14_2017)

through increased sharing of information and intelligence. They called for enhanced bilateral cooperation in this regard. The two Prime Ministers also called for Pakistan to bring to justice the perpetrators of terrorist attacks including those of the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai and the 2016 terrorist attack in Pathankot. They looked forward to the convening of the fifth India-Japan Consultation on Terrorism and to strengthening cooperation against terrorist threats from groups including Al-Qaida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lakshar-e-Tayyiba, and their affiliates.”

This para was also maintained in the Joint Statement issued during Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Japan in October 2018.<sup>9</sup>

The noose had tightened, much to Pakistan’s chagrin, in several joint statements made following summits with other strategic partners. The USA is one of India’s closest partners with which it has a Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership. Over the years, the two countries have developed a growing convergence on terrorism which threatens all democratic principles and peace-loving societies everywhere. Yet again, Prime Minister Modi’s focussed diplomacy is reflected in the

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9. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “India-Japan Vision Statement”, October 29, 2018 at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30543/IndiaJapan\\_Vision\\_Statement#:~:text=Shri%20Narendra%20Modi%20visited%20Japan,Prime%20Minister%20of%20Japan%20H.E.&text=Based%20on%20their%20shared%20vision,free%20and%20open%20Indo%2DPacific](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30543/IndiaJapan_Vision_Statement#:~:text=Shri%20Narendra%20Modi%20visited%20Japan,Prime%20Minister%20of%20Japan%20H.E.&text=Based%20on%20their%20shared%20vision,free%20and%20open%20Indo%2DPacific).

naming and shaming of Pakistan in the summit statements, on account of its harbouring of terrorist networks and UN-proscribed terrorists.

In the Joint Statement issued during the visit of Prime Minister Modi to the USA on September 30, 2014<sup>10</sup>:

“The leaders reaffirmed their deep concern over the continued threat posed by terrorism, most recently highlighted by the dangers presented by the ISIL, and underlined the need for continued comprehensive global efforts to combat and defeat terrorism. The leaders stressed the need for joint and concerted efforts, including the dismantling of safe havens for terrorist and criminal networks, to disrupt all financial and tactical support for networks such as Al Qaeda, Lashkar-e Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, the D-Company, and the Haqqanis. They reiterated their call for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai to justice.”

“They pledged to enhance criminal law enforcement, security, and military information exchanges, and strengthen cooperation on extradition and mutual legal assistance.”

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10. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement during the Visit of Prime Minister to USA”, September 30, 2014 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24051/Joint+Statement+during+the+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+USA>

“Through operational cooperation through their law enforcement agencies, they aimed to prevent the spread of counterfeit currency and inhibit the use of cyberspace by terrorists, criminals, and those who use the internet for unlawful purposes, and to facilitate investigation of criminal and terrorist activities. The leaders also committed to identify modalities to exchange terrorist watch lists. President Obama pledged to help India counter the threat of improvised explosive devices with information and technology. The leaders committed to pursue provision of U.S.-made mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles to India.”

“As active participants in the Nuclear Security Summit process, the United States and India welcomed progress toward reducing the risk of terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons or related materials, and noted their shared commitment to improving nuclear security nationally and globally. They reviewed their bilateral dialogue on nuclear security and endorsed working through India’s Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership to reinforce safe and secure use of nuclear energy worldwide. They also pledged to strengthen their efforts to forge a partnership to lead global efforts for non-proliferation of WMDs, to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in international affairs, and to promote universal, verifiable, and non-discriminatory global nuclear disarmament.”

During President Obama's visit to India, the two sides issued a joint statement on 25 January 2015<sup>11</sup>, in which inter alia -

“The leaders committed to undertake efforts to make the U.S.-India partnership a defining counterterrorism relationship for the 21st Century by deepening collaboration to combat the full spectrum of terrorist threats and keep their respective homelands and citizens safe from attacks. The Leaders reiterated their strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations with ‘zero tolerance’ and reaffirmed their deep concern over the continued threat posed by transnational terrorism including by groups like Al Qaida and the ISIL, and called for eliminating terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, disrupting terrorist networks and their financing, and stopping cross-border movement of terrorists.”

The language had strengthened further, indicating greater congruence and action-oriented cooperation with regard to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism-

“The Leaders reaffirmed the need for joint and concerted efforts to disrupt entities such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, D Company and the Haqqani Network, and agreed to continue ongoing efforts through the Homeland

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11. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement during the Visit of President of USA to India ‘साँझाप्रयास - सबकाविकास’ – “Shared Effort; Progress for All”, January 25, 2015 at [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24726/Joint_Statement_during_)

Security Dialogue as well as the next round of the U.S.-India Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism in late 2015 to develop actionable elements of bilateral engagement. The two sides noted the recent U.S. sanctions against three D Company affiliates. The President and the Prime Minister further agreed to continue to work toward an agreement to share information on known and suspected terrorists. They also agreed to enter discussions to deepen collaboration on UN terrorist designations, and reiterated their call for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai to justice.”

By the time Prime Minister Modi visited the US in September 2015, the joint statement unequivocally condemned the July 27, 2015 terrorist attack in Gurdaspur, Punjab, and the August 5, 2015, attack in Udampur, Jammu and Kashmir. Intelligence sharing and cooperation with regard to terrorist watch-lists received a boost.

During Prime Minister Modi’s visit to the US in June 2016, the two sides ramped up their bilateral cooperation even further. In the joint statement on 7 June 2016<sup>12</sup> -

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12. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “India-US Joint Statement during the Visit of Prime Minister to USA (The United States and India: Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century)”, June 7, 2016 at [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26879/IndiaUS\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_during\\_the\\_visit\\_of\\_Prime\\_Minister\\_to\\_USA\\_The\\_United\\_States\\_and\\_India\\_Enduring\\_Global\\_Partners\\_in\\_the\\_21st\\_Century](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/26879/IndiaUS_Joint_Statement_during_the_visit_of_Prime_Minister_to_USA_The_United_States_and_India_Enduring_Global_Partners_in_the_21st_Century)

“Recognizing an important milestone in the U.S.-India counterterrorism partnership, the leaders applauded the finalization of an arrangement to facilitate the sharing of terrorist screening information. They also called for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai and 2016 Pathankot terrorist attacks to justice.”

Among the documents signed/finalized in the run up to the visit of Prime Minister of India to the US was the arrangement between the Multi-Agency Centre/Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India and the Terrorist Screening Center of the Government of the United States of America for the exchange of Terrorist Screening Information. As per this Arrangement, India and the US shall provide each other access to terrorism screening information through the designated contact points, subject to domestic laws and regulations. The Arrangement would enhance the counter terrorism cooperation between India and the US.

By the time Prime Minister Modi went to the US in 2017, the noose around Pakistan’s neck was tightening further. The US was even more forthcoming. In their joint statement of 27 June<sup>13</sup>-

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13. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement - United States and India: Prosperity Through Partnership”, June 27, 2017 at <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28560/#:~:text=Joint%20Statement%20%2D%20United%20States%20and%20India%3A%20Prosperity%20Through%20Partnership,-June%2027%2C%202017&text=President%20Donald%20J.&text=In%20accord%20with%20India’s%20Think,partners%20in%20the%20Middle%20East.>

“India appreciated the United States designation of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen leader as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist as evidence of the commitment of the United States to end terror in all its forms. In this spirit, the leaders welcomed a new consultation mechanism on domestic and international terrorist designations listing proposals.”

During President Trump’s visit to India, the joint statement of 25 January continued to put pressure on Pakistan<sup>14</sup>-

“Prime Minister Modi and President Trump denounced any use of terrorist proxies and strongly condemned cross-border terrorism in all its forms. They called on Pakistan to ensure that no territory under its control is used to launch terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks, including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot. They called for concerted action against all terrorist groups including Al-Qa’ida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the Haqqani Network, TTP, D-Company, and all their affiliates.”

The Modi government’s strategy on terrorism relates to the firm policy of linking the resumption of dialogue with an end

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14. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “Joint Statement: Vision and Principles for India-U.S. Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership”, February 25, 2020 at [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32421/Joint\\_Statement\\_Vision\\_and\\_Principles\\_for\\_IndiaUS\\_Comprehensive\\_Global\\_Strategic\\_Partnership](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/32421/Joint_Statement_Vision_and_Principles_for_IndiaUS_Comprehensive_Global_Strategic_Partnership)

to terrorism by Pakistan. That terrorism and talks cannot go hand in hand has been made abundantly clear to Pakistan. India has told Pakistan, and those that advocate talks between India and Pakistan, that India has never shied away from a dialogue but also that talks cannot be held unless Pakistan takes visible and substantial steps against terrorist groups operating with impunity from its soil against India with state connivance.

## **B) Use of Hard Power**

The third element of the strategy has been India's firm and unequivocal response in the face of the repeated and wanton acts of terrorism emanating from across the border in Pakistan. That India is ready to strike militarily at terrorist camps by crossing the Line of Control of the International Boundary would have come as a huge surprise to Pakistan which has long believed that the nuclear overhang would prevent India from retaliating militarily to its policy of "bleeding India with a thousand cuts".

"Bleed India with a Thousand Cuts" is a strategy long adopted by Pakistan against India. It involves waging a covert and low intensity war against India using insurgents and terrorists at multiple locations in India, especially in Kashmir. Its foundation lies in a 1965 speech by the then Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at the UN Security Council in New York. Bhutto, who

publicly declared a thousand-year war against India.<sup>15</sup> General Zia-ul-Haq gave shape to this doctrine by fanning militancy and infiltration during the Punjab insurgency, and later, in Kashmir.

The Modi government's diplomatic initiative and collaborative action with others has proved successful in containing the menace of terrorism.

### **Myanmar Strike**

Insurgents have long used cross-border camps in Myanmar to launch attacks against the Indian military in the north-eastern part of the country. The first major instance of firm action against them was by the Modi government, undertaken along the border with Myanmar. A convoy of the Indian Army was ambushed in a clinical strike led by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) [NSCN(K)] on June 4, 2015, leading to the death of 18 soldiers.<sup>16</sup> In less than a week after the incident, the special forces of the Army, with the support of the Indian Air Force and Assam Rifles, carried out a pre-emptive military strike to neutralise camps of insurgents

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15. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1965), "Speech Delivered at the UN Security Council on September 22, 1965 on Kashmir Issue", at <https://bhutto.org/index.php/speeches/speeches-from-1948-1965/speech-delivered-at-the-un-security-council-on-september-22-1965-on-kashmir-issue/>

16. "Five NSCN(K) Militants Killed by Indian Army in Myanmar, Claim Reports", The Wire, June 29, 2018 at <https://thewire.in/security/five-nscnk-militants-killed-by-indian-army-in-myanmar-claim-reports>

involved in the ambush, who were planning to carry out more strikes against India.

Such strikes had been carried out earlier as well. The two previous cross-border operations undertaken by the Indian army were Operation Golden Bird conducted along the Myanmar border in 1995 and Operation All Clear inside Bhutan in 2003. The former was against the NSCN. The latter, in close cooperation with Bhutan, was against the ULFA and NDFB. Neither of these, though, was as clear, an enunciation of a nationally avowed policy against terrorism as the 2015 strike in Myanmar.

### **Surgical Strike 2016**

However, it was the surgical strike against terrorist camps in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), undertaken on 28/29 September 2016, that underscored the extraordinary lengths to which the Modi government would go to curb Pak-sponsored terrorism.<sup>17</sup> The swift retaliation came in the wake of an attack by Pakistan-based terrorists on an Indian Army camp at Uri on September 18, 2016 which left 19 unsuspecting Indian soldiers dead in a cowardly attack on their quarters.

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17. "Target Terror: India Strikes Across LoC", The Hindu, September 29, 2016 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Target-terror-India-strikes-across-LoC/article15006525.ece>

The counter-terrorist strikes undertaken by the Indian Army inside PoK are the most significant operations in the recent past. The Pakistan-sponsored terrorists were carrying weapons with under-barrel grenade launchers with incendiary capability. This is usually not a weapon of choice of terrorists, unless it is specifically related to the nature of target. In this case, the target, a group of tents in which the soldiers were asleep, part of the rear elements of the Indian Army unit, provided a soft target to the terrorists. The type of weapons used and the selection of the target clearly indicated the involvement of a trained military establishment, i.e., the Pakistan army.

There was great public outcry in India in the wake of the attack. Given the difficult terrain and the high concentration of defences on the Pakistani side, a strike at the terrorist camps and infrastructure across the LOC presented a huge challenge. Nevertheless, the firm decision taken by Prime Minister Modi and the courage of the Indian Army commandos led to the decimation of seven targets along a large front of the LOC, ranging from a few hundred to a couple of kilometres deep on the Pakistani side. This was a really bold strike given the presence of large number of regular forces of the Pakistani Army in the area.

Moreover, the surgical strikes by India were carried out shortly after the attack at Uri, when the preparedness of the

Pakistani forces was likely to be high.

Carrying out multiple and simultaneous coordinated strikes in enemy controlled territory is a daunting and dangerous task, especially given the execution of the strikes along a broad front. Even more laudatory is the fact that the Indian Army commandos returned without suffering any casualties, after having successfully neutralised several targets and terrorists. This speaks volumes about the training and professional capabilities of the Indian Army.

The strike is unique in the history of India-Pakistan relations as it is possibly the first time that India publicly announced the conduct of the mission through a joint press conference of representatives of the Army and the Ministry of External Affairs. And, for good measure, it was also officially conveyed to the Pakistani Army Director of Military Operations.<sup>18</sup>

Since the target was terrorist infrastructure, international sympathy was clearly with India. Moreover, Pakistan found no justification to launch a counter strike.

This strategic and military masterstroke has set a precedent for similar action in the future. It was able to call Pakistan's

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18. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Transcript of Joint Briefing by MEA and MoD", September 29, 2016 at [https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/27446/Transcript\\_of\\_Joint\\_Briefing\\_by\\_MEA\\_and\\_MoD\\_September\\_29\\_2016](https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/27446/Transcript_of_Joint_Briefing_by_MEA_and_MoD_September_29_2016)

bluff that the LOC could not be crossed by the Indian Army without drawing a strong response from the Pakistani side. It was a clear warning to Pakistan that India would not stand by and watch idly if Pakistan carried out terrorist attacks through cross-border infiltration by terrorists trained and indoctrinated in camps on the Pakistani side. It was a huge blow to the Pakistani Army that, in any case, has never prevailed in any regular war against India. It was a wake-up call to Pak-sponsored terrorists that they could be struck regardless of the cover provided by the Pakistani Army.

The surgical strikes made the Indian people proud of their armed forces. It was a morale booster for the Indian armed forces.

### **Balakot Strike 2019**

In February 2019, a Kashmiri youth indoctrinated by Pakistani propaganda carried out a suicide terrorist attack in a car laden with explosives, killing 40 Indian troopers in a CRPF convoy near Pulwama in Kashmir.<sup>19</sup> India's response was even bolder this time. Prime Minister Modi authorised the Indian Air Force to carry out air strikes on 26 February 2019 at a terrorist encampment at Balakot in Kyber Paktunkhwa, deep inside Pakistan on 26 Feb, 2019.

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19. "Pulwama Attack 2019", The Hindu, February 14, 2019 at <https://www.thehindu.com/topic/pulwama-attack-2019/>

Indian Air Force war planes targeted the Jaish-i-Mohammad (JeM) training camp, dropping SPICE 2000 precision-guided munition on the intended target.

Yet again, the air strike was successful in challenging the status quo that existed with Pakistan under which Pakistan had been brazenly carrying out terrorist attacks against India “to bleed India through a thousand cuts” without any military retaliation. The air strikes in Balakot were unique. They had an element of surprise and succeeded in shocking Pakistan. Even more, they sent a message to Pakistan that India could not be taken for granted. They proved that India would not hesitate to take military action against terrorist targets across the International Border, not just the LOC. Pakistan has begun to discover that this is a new India under Prime Minister Modi. It is not only bold, but also capable of taking well-calculated risks in regard to the ladder of escalation. It was also capable of using unpredictability in action to its advantage, thereby completely seizing the initiative from Pakistan. The decisive action, accompanied by extensive outreach to the international community, conveyed a message to both the Pakistani authorities as well as the people of India that India is no longer willing to accept terrorism as Pakistan’s state policy and as a “normal” feature of bilateral relations. The support received from the international community reinforced India’s stand on “zero tolerance for terrorism” emanating from

Pakistan.

A day after the Balakot air strikes, the Pakistani Air Force carried out an intrusion in Indian air space but failed in its attempts at retaliation when bombs released by its jets missed the military installations that were being targeted. The Indian Air Force was quick to engage the intruding aircraft, and in the dog-fight that ensued, a third-generation Mig-21 flown by Wing Commander Varthaman shot down an F-16 of the Pakistani Air Force, before his own craft was brought down by an air-to-air missile. Prime Minister Modi's government left no stone unturned to secure Varthaman's release after he was taken captive on the Pakistani side.

India has proved in recent years that it has the political will and military capability to hit targets across the LOC. In 1999, during the brief but bloody Kargil war in the high mountains of northern Kashmir, the Indian Army had the limited directive to evict the Pakistani infiltrators comprising regular Pakistani troops and officers mixed with irregulars. In 2016, the Indian surgical strikes across the LOC would no doubt have caught the GHQ in Rawalpindi by surprise. In 2019, the bar had been set higher through even firmer action. The generals in Rawalpindi were rudely awakened and had their illusions shattered. India had demonstrated that it was not loath to resort to military action in the face of asymmetrical low intensity terrorist strikes waged by Pakistan. The myth that a nuclear overhang

would prevent India from hitting back has been destroyed. With this firm response, a new red line had been created by Prime Minister Modi.

### **C) Multilateral Initiatives**

As one of the biggest victims of terrorism, India has played a leading role in spearheading global efforts to combat it. Traditionally, India has called for early conclusion of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT), which is opposed by countries like Pakistan that harbour terrorists or support their radical ideologies through moral, material and financial assistance. Under Prime Minister Modi, India has been especially active in multilateral bodies like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), working along multiple axes such as strengthening its legal framework, bringing more rigour in its evaluation mechanism and highlighting country specific risks.

India's efforts in the FATF have been instrumental in bringing Pakistan to account. It is worth recalling that Pakistan was put in the so-called "grey list" for enhanced monitoring by the FATF between 2012-15. It managed to wriggle free in February 2015 without substantially fulfilling its undertakings given to the FATF. Meanwhile, Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, a UN designated international terrorist, roamed free and gave public interviews ridiculing the UN action and proclaiming his

determination to continue to operate as before.

Rising to such a challenge, India meticulously gathered and presented evidence before the FATF. It also launched a diplomatic offensive with like-minded countries which resulted in Pakistan being put back onto the “grey list” in June 2018.<sup>20</sup> The success of the efforts can be gauged from the fact that, this time around, Pakistan was put on the “grey list” based on a proposal moved by the US, Germany, France and the UK. This was evidence that the world was condemning Pakistan for its support for terrorism. Now, with Pakistan again in the dock, it is obliged to adhere to a timeline in implementing the FATF Recommendations under enhanced monitoring.

Enhanced monitoring by the FATF has compelled a reluctant Pakistan to take some steps. It has enacted some laws against terror financing and it has also banned terrorist organizations such as the Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF). It has also convicted Hafiz Saeed on terror funding charges but tried to weaken the case through weak evidence and sloppy prosecution. Alongside, India has been able to overcome the repeated Chinese veto in the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UNSC to let Pakistan off the hook in regard to Maulana Masood Azhar, who was

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20. “Pakistan Placed on FATF’s ‘Grey List’”, The Hindu, June 28, 2018 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-placed-on-fatfs-grey-list/article24277229.ece>

finally designated as international terrorist and placed on the sanctions list on 01 May, 2019.<sup>21</sup> This has finally brought him under the purview of the FATF. Fearing renewed pressure, Pakistan has resorted to subterfuge and claimed that Masood Azhar, along with his family and associates remain untraceable! With increasing evidence being provided by India, it is highly unlikely that the FATF is going to buy Pakistan's specious argument. The FATF has also forced Pakistan to place Pakistan-based Dawood Ibrahim on the designated list of terrorists and attach some of his bank accounts and assets. Seen in this light, the year 2019 has seen substantial achievements in the global fight against state-sponsored and cross border terrorism.

UN Security Council Resolution 2462 gives the FATF an explicit mandate to act against terror financing. As a full-time member of the FATF, India is expected to play a leading role in reviewing the processes of the FATF and strengthening the mechanism in its fight against terror financing. These efforts will receive a big boost with India entering the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for a two-year term

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21. United Nations Security Council (2019), "Mohammed Masood Azhar Alvi", at <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/mohammed-masood-azhar-alvi>
  22. "India Leads from Front on Counter-Terrorism, Climate Action at UN in 2019", The Economic Times, December 26, 2019 at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-leads-from-front-on-counter-terrorism-climate-action-at-un-in-2019/articleshow/72977235.cms>

beginning 1 January 2021.<sup>23</sup>

Prime Minister Modi's statement to the UNGA of 25 September 2020 underscored India's resolve to continue inter alia the fight against terrorism<sup>24</sup>-

“From January next year, India will also fulfil its responsibility as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. I express my gratitude to all our fellow countries who have bestowed this trust upon India. We will use the prestige and experience of the largest democracy for the benefit of the whole world. Our path goes from human welfare to the welfare of the World. India will always speak in support of peace, security and prosperity. India will not hesitate in raising its voice against the enemies of humanity, human race and human values – terrorism, smuggling of illegal weapons, drugs and money-laundering.”

India's recent actions stand out for their extraordinary boldness and calculated risk against the scourge of terrorism. India has shown a firmness seldom seen since independence.

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23. “India Coasts to Win in U.N. Security Council Polls”, The Hindu, June 18, 2020 at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-elected-non-permanent-member-of-united-nations-security-council/article31856470.ece>

24. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, “English Translation of Prime Minister's Address at 75th United Nations General Assembly”, September 26, 2020 at [https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33064/English\\_translation\\_of\\_Prime\\_Ministers\\_address\\_at\\_75th\\_United\\_Nations\\_General\\_Assembly](https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/33064/English_translation_of_Prime_Ministers_address_at_75th_United_Nations_General_Assembly)



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