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## India and Pakistan Tensions

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1/13/2016



There are many military confrontations around the world, most fostered by the United States which seeks domination as its prerogative, because, as President Obama [declares](#), it is «*the one indispensable nation in world affairs*». In addition to Washington's pursuit of military supremacy, however, there are other international predicaments, not the least dangerous of which is the long-standing confrontation between India and Pakistan.

In the early morning of January 2 there was a terrorist [attack](#) on an Indian Air Force base at Pathankot in northern Punjab only 50 kilometres from the border with Pakistan. The six attackers were killed, but there were also seven military fatalities. It seems that the terrorists may have come from Pakistan and that they almost certainly received their orders from controllers there.

The physical aim of the assault is verging on the irrelevant because there was no damage to

aircraft or technical facilities. But it is obvious that damage was intended to be done to India-Pakistan relations which had received a much-needed boost by reason of a visit to Pakistan by India's Prime Minister Modi on December 25.

Even before that, there were indications that Mr Modi was rethinking relations with India's important neighbour.

On December 22 Modi **presided** over a conference of India's senior military commanders on board the aircraft carrier INS *Vikramaditya*. These gatherings are important because they set national policy so far as the military are concerned, and at this one Mr Modi was surprisingly upbeat about Pakistan, which was not what was expected by many people who thought he would tell his military leaders to prepare for further confrontation.

While he was critical of Pakistan (without naming it) in saying that *«We see terrorism and ceasefire violations; reckless nuclear build up and threats; border transgressions; and continuing military modernization and expansion»*, he unexpectedly affirmed that *«We are engaging Pakistan to try and turn the course of history, bring an end to terrorism, build peaceful relations, advance cooperation and promote stability and prosperity in our region. There are many challenges and barriers on the path. But the effort is worth it, because the peace dividends are huge and the future of our children is at stake»*.

This was sensible and realistic and not what India's nationalist extremists wanted to hear, so they didn't listen; but Mr Modi confounded them – and surprised all of us – by what he did next in regard to Pakistan.

The day after delivering his message of conciliation and prudence to his military commanders he went to Moscow (having observed at the conference that Russia *«has always been a source of strength for us»*) and had productive **talks** with President Putin. Then he flew to Afghanistan in the early morning of December 25 to spend a few hours in Kabul where he met with President Ghani. He was then expected to fly directly home to Delhi, crossing Pakistan on the way, but decided to ask the country's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, if he could drop into the city of Lahore to speak with him.



Their short meeting was a success, which reflects much credit on both leaders.



*'Am personally touched by Nawaz Sharif Sahab's gesture of welcoming me at Lahore airport and coming to the airport when I left.' (Twitter)*

Given the poor state of relations between India and Pakistan, this initiative was as wanted as it was surprising, and the obviously sincere welcome by Nawaz Sharif was a civilized response to what was a decided gamble by Modi, much of whose domestic political support comes from extreme nationalist groups whose solution to discord with Pakistan is usually to advocate military attack.

Modi's political base, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People's Party), was elected to national government by a large majority in May 2014 and has since exerted itself to place India firmly on the world stage, which objective has been achieved most effectively by Modi himself. His rapport with such disparate world leaders as Presidents Putin and Obama and Prime Ministers Abe of Japan and Cameron of Britain is remarkable, and, contrary to forecasts and pontification by many commentators (including this one), he has refrained from extremist rhetoric in his pronouncements about Pakistan.

Unfortunately for Modi and his new-found and most welcome pragmatism, which can do nothing but benefit India, there are prominent organisations in his country that are far from rational, one being the Shiv Sena (Army of Shiva) ultra-nationalist political party (allied to Modi's own BJP) which **declared** that «Seven of our soldiers get martyred in return of a cup of tea with Nawaz Sharif... we had warned [PM Modi] not to trust Pakistan». A Shiv Sena member of parliament, Sanjay Raut, **declared** that «we can say with our eyes closed that the attackers are from Pakistan... When shall we give a befitting response to Pakistan?»

Apart from that, however, it seemed that open-eyed common sense prevailed, as illustrated by a wise editorial in the Tribune newspaper which **commented** that «the Prime Minister seemed to

*have put aside his own cultivated hostility towards Pakistan and, for now, overruled the hawks in his security establishment... While the road to restoration of civility in bilateral diplomatic ties will be a long haul, Modi should try to neutralise the domestic obstructionists wanting to inflame and incite Indian public opinion against Indo-Pak dialogue in the wake of the Pathankot attack... He is being tested. He must stay the Lahore course».*



It is important, however, that **both** countries take public action to reassure each other of their genuine desire to achieve trust and move towards lasting peace – and the ball is more in Pakistan’s court than that of India. It would be wise of PM Nawaz Sharif to neutralize the terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammad (Army of the Prophet) which, although outlawed since 2002, continues to operate within Pakistan as well as in Indian-administered Kashmir. Its leader, the deranged and barbaric Maulana Masood Azhar, **praised** the Pathankot terrorists, describing them in a widely-seen video clip as «mujahideen» who fought against «Indian tanks, helicopters and Indian forces to reach their goal». This was outrageous rubbish but, as we have seen from off-the-planet statements by such as US presidential candidate Donald Trump, it is not necessary to speak the truth in order to be believed and enthusiastically supported.

As **observed** by Pakistan’s Dawn newspaper in 2014, «*the resurfacing of Masood Azhar and other militant leaders exposes the duplicity of our policy on militancy. The country has paid dearly for using militancy as a tool of our regional policy in the past and it is high time that it is stopped*». Quite so. While it is far-fetched to imagine that the Pathankot attack was conjured up by Pakistan’s government or military, there is no doubt that the government has been reluctant to order decisive action against fanatics who threaten India. It would be wise to do so.

And on the Indian side? – It’s quite simple: please, Mr Modi, Stay the Course.