Volatile South Asian Security Environment: Pakistan-India Factor

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Abstract

The issue of terrorism has brought major shifts in the global political landscape especially after the tragic events of 9/11. South Asian region, with a characteristic volatility in its security environment due to India-Pakistan rivalry felt the shocks of global terror waves to a much greater extent than the rest of the world. Pakistan being a front line state in the global war against terrorism and a Muslim majority state had to bear an additional brunt of Indian hegemonic hostile state behavior which reached its highest ebbs in the post 9/11 South Asian political milieu. The two pressing issues of long held Indian hegemonic designs and global surge in violent religious extremism have deep ramifications for an already troubled India-Pakistan relations equation. A comprehensive understanding of these two phenomena is vital to understand the dynamics of contemporary South Asian regional security architecture. This paper takes into account the acrimonious relations between the two major actors, India and Pakistan, the forces at work in escalating their mutual distrust and antagonism and the impact on the security environment of South Asia.

Introduction:

The volatile security environment of South Asia has become a proverbial characteristic of the region. Even the creation of a regional organization like SAARC has not been proved fruitful in evading the characteristic stains of high levels of mistrust and suspicions that have been impeding prospects of cooperation among South Asian states in one way or the other. The South Asian move towards regionalism as manifested by the creation of SAARC seems to defy the core concept behind drives towards regionalism. Besides enhancing trade and cooperation among states, regional organizations, in the words of Karl Deutsch are intended for the creation and preservation of a *Pluralistic Security Community*. The regional cooperation in South Asia remained hostage to the acrimonious, aggressive and belligerent relations of its two major states India and Pakistan. Born in an environment of global politics marked with US-USSR rivalry, both India and Pakistan unsurprisingly chose different ways and found them naturally encamped against each other. The external global environment of bipolarity and great power rivalry replicated itself in the India Pakistan bilateral relations having deep rooted feelings of mistrust and animosity between their respective communities dating back to pre-partition colonial era marked with Hindu Muslim hatred and riots resulting in large scale bloodshed. All this culminated in the partition of India and Pakistan a Muslim majority state, was carved out of Hindu dominated United India. India halfheartedly accepted the partition but soon her actions and policies towards the nascent state of Pakistan put a big question mark on her intentions regarding Pakistan's security and survival. The aggressive and hegemonic Indian behavior compelled Pakistani security and foreign policy makers to follow India centric defense and foreign policy.

The widely discussed Kashmir issue in almost all writings on India Pakistan bilateral relations remained a vital issue and a bone of contention between the two states since their inception and throughout the Cold war era. The two states have fought four wars over the issue. But since the dawn of 21st century a more

pressing issue has replaced or tends to downplay the issue of Kashmir as a vital issue between the two states. The issue of alleged cross border terrorism, very much highlighted by the Indian media and defense analysts has crept in Indo Pakistan bilateral relations at a time when terrorism has got global attention and has become more of a global hysteria. The global dynamics of the phenomena of terrorism and its sudden spread needs to be understood in order to explain and understand its relevance to the India-Pakistan bilateral relation equation. Along with widely discussed phenomena of terrorism, the dawn of 21st century saw another important phenomena very much relevant to South Asian politics in general and India-Pakistan relations in particular. That new phenomena is the notion of "Asian Rise" or the Asian century subsequently translated by many writers and commentators as implying the Rise of India or the Dawn of Indian Century. This notion of Indian rise has occupied a central place in international studies for over a decade now. These studies have "projected India's rise as positive development for global politics, owing to India's adherence to multilateralism over unilateralism, soft power image, liberal and secular democracy, non-aggressive military modernization and Nehruvian philosophy of peaceful coexistence" (Misra 2013).

Thus with the dawn of 21st century Pakistan found herself in an environment which needed special attention and cautiously designed, thoroughly analyzed policy responses viz a viz

- Global surge in violent religious extremism/ terrorism

- The mantra of rising India

Both these phenomena are intricately linked with security and survival of Pakistan and have far reaching implications for the overall security environment of South Asia. Pakistan being a Muslim majority state naturally finds it difficult to counter a global propaganda campaign against Islam launched under the labels of terrorism and Islamic militancy while the trumpet of Indian rise directly threatens her survival and security as India has

always been considered as the greatest threat to Pakistan's survival owing to her aggressive and hegemonic behavior. These two notions need to be thoroughly and cautiously examined as both terms have become more of clichés and lead to confusion because of lack of a consensual definition in the case of former and lack of coherent, substantial and convincing facts in the latter's case.

The Trumpet of Terrorism

The dawn of 21st century Muslims of the world found themselves in serious trouble. The tragic events of 9/11, a sudden, quick surge of Islamic militancy and extremism and consequent acts of violence throughout the world put a big question mark on the compatibility of Islam with modern state system. Experts on the subject count on a list of factors that result in stimulating anti- western/American sentiments in Muslim societies. Besides internal factors ranging from poverty, frequently disrupted democratic transitional processes in most of the Muslim states, exogenous factors also played a pivotal role in encouraging Islamic militancy. In some cases even the western powers backed and created Islamic extremism and militancy as is the case with creation and support of Afghan Mujahedeen against alleged Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The American led western world created Islamic militant groups to pitch them as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism in Afghanistan. Thus, the issue is deep rooted, multi-faceted and complex but somehow, using various propaganda tools and prevalence of sensational journalism a worldwide narrative has been developed wherein Islam is portrayed as a barbaric religion and Muslims as violent terrorists. It is true that most of militant groups use Islamic / religious labels but in reality have entirely different motives behind spreading violence. As early as in 2002, a U.S based research institute rightly observed that "terrorist often seek to legitimize through particular religious idioms. But the epithet "Islamic Terrorist"- often used as if this is a phenomenon requiring no elaboration- only further reinforces stereotypical image of Islam" (USIP July 2002). The same report lists various causes of emergence of

extremist Islamic outfits ranging from torture, humiliation and violation of civil liberties of the Muslim communities across the world, repression by authoritarian regimes as in the case of militancy in Arab world, global persecution and marginalization of Muslims as in the case of Muslim communities in the western world to political objectives like imposition of shariah laws or establishment of sovereignty over disputed territory best manifested in the case of rising militancy in Pakistan and Palestine.

Thus, a number of factors from historical to political, global structural to domestic economical are at work behind the emergence of Muslim terrorist outfits. The tendency of blanket condemnation of Muslim societies and the spread of stereotypical image of Islam by western media propaganda has given rise to a new troubling phenomenon of Islamophobia, an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims which further antagonizes and alienates Muslims across the world.

In the Backdrop of all this, Pakistan has been the most vulnerable state and a soft target for a hostile, anti-Muslim global propaganda. The reasons for Pakistan's susceptibility are obvious. Being the home for some 190 million Muslims the state bears deep imprints of religious notions and traditions. To make the picture more grotesque terrorist out fits have always found Pakistan a potential recruitment base playing easily upon religious sentiments backed by massive support from various exogenous elements. The long standing unresolved Kashmir dispute and pivotal role of the country in containing Soviet Expansionism in Afghanistan created a very conducive environment for the growth of extremist elements. The overall sufferings of the Muslims across the world turn out to be an additional psychological factor that feigns sentiments of religious brotherhood and the urge to resist the repression of Muslim communities. Hence the country got strangled in a complex situation wherein extremist elements started to loom from within owing primarily to two major factors, the occupation and persecution of Muslim majority state of J&K and the United States war against soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Murphy 2013). The global media and "instant

scholars" on the issue rushed to demonize Pakistan labeling the country as the most dangerous place, more dangerous than the war torn Iraq. Some even pronounced the country as "failed state" (2007a), a weak, about to collapse state or a country most likely to serve as a safe haven for Al Qaeda terrorist network along with greater risks of the its nuclear weapons to be transferred to terrorist out fits. The state was ranked 12th in the league of failed states in the above 2007 survey while more recent surveys place the country as among top ten dangerous, fragile/failed states (2007a). Some have even gone to the extent of justifying and advocating imperial rule over the state by powerful western democracies (Boot 2008). Surveys flooded each year since 9/11 showing people of the western world scared of Pakistan. A survey by Gallop (2007b) ranked Pakistan as the 6th most disliked country in the USA. Thus western research writings, main stream media and state backed intelligence reports tend to "portray Pakistan as an already failed state, a malign supporter of radical Islamic causes and the epicenter of global terrorism. "Failed," "Flawed," and unraveling are adjectives that are widely used to describe the country. It is now typically described as having failed, in the process of failing, or "a monster state of one sort or another" (Cohen 2011).

In their insane rush for portraying everything related to Pakistan in terms of extremism, violence and radical Islam, those reports even blurred cultural and traditional issues like early marriages, honor killings, *Badal* or the traditional concept of revenge with religion and ascribed them to beliefs of Islam and necessary traits of Muslim society of Pakistan. Such incidents are very common in other states of the region including India but in Pakistan's case the strong Islamic identity of the state and widely spread misperceptions and constructed myths about this religion and state (a gist of which is provided in the above discussion) gives a misleading picture of both Islam and Pakistani society. Concerted propaganda efforts have been on a rise in the American and British media and research reports, mainly focused on maligning Pakistan, its military and the states intelligence

agencies, especially the ISI. Frequent accusations are leveled against ISI and military without any proof. The accusations range from meddling in the affairs of neighbors, backing terrorist organizations and defying civilian control. No formal evidence has been furnished to date against the states military and security agencies, instead, the former U.S ambassador to Pakis tan William Milam has to say "I do not accept the thesis that the ISI is a rogue organization" (Bajoria and Kaplan 2011, May 4).

Given the harsh, volatile security environment of South Asia thanks to the decades old Indo-Pak rivalry, this misfortunate scheme of events against Pakistan got translated as a blessing for Hawkish Indian policy makers, researchers and political leaders. They also rushed hurriedly to label Pakistan as a terrorist state, her army a mercenary, her state security agencies as rogue and partners in crime with terrorists and narcotics dealers, and her nuclear weapons most likely to fell into the hands of terrorists or Islamic extremists. When biasness and projection of parochial interests creep into intellectual/academicians' mind than overgeneralizations and blanket condemnations without facts become a common practice. Rhetoric rather than substance, appeal to sentiments and emotions rather reason and common sense is what has dominated most of the Indian foreign policy and media reports particularly after the 9/11 in a bid to fish in the troubled waters and settle her old scores with Pakistan that was fighting a bloody war on terrorism within her own lands surrounded by hegemonic, hostile neighbor like non but India herself. As mentioned earlier the Indian occupation of Jammu and Kashmir coupled with gross violations of human rights through imposition of draconian laws and virtual military control of that Muslim majority state resulting in killing of thousands of Kashmir Muslims, large scale persecution of the Muslim minorities in India by extremist right wing Hindu parties like RSS, the growing state sponsored communalization resulting in isolating and targeting Muslim community and last but not the least the spate of labeling Pakistan and Muslims with terrorism by Indian state and media channels provide terrorist outfits an environment conducive

enough for attracting young recruits and justifying their acts of terrorism. Even the indigenous roots of Kashmir freedom struggle, widely portrayed and perceived as being backed by Pakistan is acknowledged to have stemmed from the wrong Indian policies as Manoj Joshi opines that the insurgent groups that surfaced "came up because of the pre-existing fault lines in the valley's politics" and obviously the fault lines are oppression of Kashmiri Muslim population, imposition of draconian laws and rigging of the elections to repress the voices of dissent (Joshi 1999). the situation in Kashmir coupled with oppression of the Indian Muslim minorities by the right wing Hindu extremist parties backed by government authorities further incite anti-Indian feelings in Muslims both within India and in Pakistan and give terrorist out fits a best scenario wherein they can recruit operatives to carry out their own agendas in the name of religion. Independent researchers and reputable international study groups have raised the issue of Hindu nationalist takeover of the government machinery using state authority for Muslim genocide as is very much evident in case of the notorious Gujarat mayhem of 2002 where thousands of Muslims were brutally killed and the police refused to extend any help replying to calls for rescue from Muslims as "We have no orders to save you" (Human Rights Watch 2003, April).

A lot of evidences and recorded events clearly show the extremist Hindu rise in the Indian society, established training camps in urban centers, patronage of top cadre military and civil servants of the acts of terror committed by violent anti-Muslim groups even ministers have been found key supporters of such violent groups (Human Rights Watch 2003, April). Instead of understanding her own backfiring policies that alienate minorities and create hatred against the oppressive nature of Indian regime both within and across the border, the Indian state and media have long been following a propaganda tactic of fabricating victimhood attributing her own state failures to neighbors especially Pakistan. India, sensing the global harsh environment characterized by rising Islamophobia, thought the times ripe for striking a final blow by

launching a vigorous propaganda campaign demonizing Muslims in general and Pakistan in particular in a bid to isolate Pakistan in international comity of nations and settle her old scores. After the Mumbai attacks of 2008, "Pakistan saw a tirade of allegations from India unsurprisingly terrorism as the central theme ranging from allegations and issues such as "forty two terrorist camps operating in Pakistan" (Times of India 2009, Nov 7)rise in infiltration to India, exporting terrorism using it as a policy tool against India and jeopardizing Indian interests in Afghanistan. Representation of Pakistan in Indian narratives a an epicenter for terrorism and panting Muslims as folk devil has been a central theme of most of the Indian intellectuals and media campaigns stirring more fear and hatred towards oppressive Indian state policies in the Muslims of India and Pakistan. The drawing of equivalence between "Muslim" and "Pakistani" subsequently translated as any adept to Islam as a "potentially a fifth column Pakistani" shows the dual dilemma of Indian statesmen and politicians i.e., the hatred towards Pakistan as a state and the hatred towards Muslims as adherents of another religion other than Hinduism (Jaffrelot 2003, November).

Thus a vicious circle of inciting hatred towards Muslims through negative media campaign and oppressive communal policies on the one hand by Indian state authorities resulting in wide spread resistance and increased anti-Indian sentiments in Muslim societies on the other hand, has been created. India seems to suffer from victim syndrome and has never acknowledged her policy faults which have pushed the whole region into perpetual hostility and security dilemma. It is very much clear and widely acknowledged by more serious writers and voices from within India that Muslims and Islam alone are not the greatest threat and that terrorists do not merely come from Muslim backgrounds. The demonization and negative image creation of Pakistan and Islam will never work and such a policy terrain will lead to further increase in anti-Indian feelings and widening chasm between the two states and their people. In spite of Indian baseless allegations of maligning Pakistan globally, the struggling state of Pakistan has

been fighting both the Indian hostile attitude at global plat forums and the barbaric terrorist menace at the domestic front. Ironically, Pakistan has suffered massive man and material losses due to violent extremism and terrorism. A country that lost more than 48 thousand civilians, more than 5000 security personnel lost their lives, 34,86 bomb blasts, 283 major suicide attacks and a combined loss of 68 billion dollars to the economy of the country in just a decade of the war on terror campaign means more than mere commitment and fight against the menace. It is utterly disappointing that in the political score setting games these sacrifices are downplayed or ignored leaving Pakistan in a situation where she has to fight the menace of terrorism on the one hand while putting much energy in countering the negative demonizing campaign on the other hand to keep the moral of its people and forces high.

The Mantra of Rising India

The dawn of 21st century if witnessed biased, discriminatory and harsh policies towards Muslims and Islam globally in general and Pakistan in particular. The century also marked the emergence of a constructed myth, the myth of rising India. Many books, media reports and statements from western governments, especially U.S.A, scholarly works done by instant researchers on the region, all echoed the same mantra of a Rising India. The facts, needless to say, speak volumes against this constructed myth. In a bid to contain the rising influence of china the United States of America has been dreaming of creating India as a powerful state that would act as a bulwark against growing Chinese economic power. India, owing to her long held desire of being a regional Hegemon, found in United States of America a strong hope for fulfilling her hegemonic designs. The china scar of 1962 on the Indian memories and their hatred towards Pakistan amidst a rising Sino-Indian cooperation acts a throne in the flesh of Indian dreams of becoming an unrivalled regional power. A number of books written in the last 10 to 15 years on India exhibit this new trend. A mere glimpse of even the titles of a number of

these books explains this new trend. Their titles necessarily incorporate the words like Rise or Ascend of India (see for example Dietmar Rothermund's "India, the Rise of an Asian Giant (2008), Stephen Cohen's "emerging Power, India" (2001), Edward Luces "in spite of the gods, the strange rise of modern India" (2006). This perceived rise or ascent of India was given a further push by statements praising India's centrality in world affairs by American presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. In 2009 the American president termed the India-U.S relations as one of the "defining partnerships of the 21st century". Newly elected Prime minister of India, Narindera Modi hence, no wonder eyed the 21st century as an Indian Century (The Economist 2015, 23 May). The voices from various intellectuals and strategists beating the trumpet of Indian rise coupled with statements from top U.S officials praising India's development journey and her potential to thrive in global politics adds fire to the burning fuel of Indian hegemonic designs in the south Asian region with far more greater ramifications for Pakistan.

The attempts of India to assume managerial status in the affairs of south Asian states by preserving and promoting a British colonial style security structure that perceived and constructed South Asian region as one single security unit centered around India got a severe blow from the self-asserting Pakistan who joined western backed security arrangements, involved super power America in the region and her growing cooperation with china, all these became strong impediments in the path of Indian hegemonic designs. It is thus no wonder that Pakistan has been considered as a classic spoiler by India. Pakistan's rejection of accepting Indian supremacy in the region and her successful escape from the Indian security threat emboldened other small states of the region to follow the same track of averting Indian hegemony and asserting state sovereignty. The American quest of countering the growing Chinese influence in the global economy found a potential bulwark in the form of India who in her turn found an apt convergence of American global strategic interests with Indian aspirations of becoming a regional hegemon. The western support

and propaganda of a rising India is actually the depiction of their wishful thinking of countering China, creating an illusion of a clash between the world's so called largest secular democracy and a powerful communist economy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Whenever south Asian security is discussed, the Indo-Pak rivalry inevitably creeps up and is given a wide space. The issue has gained so much attention that it has become a hall mark of south Asian political and security studies narratives. In recent years, especially since the dawn of the 21st century a new phenomenon has emerged and given a wider space in the narratives dealing with south Asian politics, notion of Rising India. There are various articles, books and assessments that vehemently strive to prove that the present century is the Indian century. Counting on many virtues that India seems to exhibit like her military prowess, soft power, democratic values and secularism the related literature inevitably concludes that India is on the rise. It can be very clearly observed that the since the rise of the myth of rise of India, Pakistan has been facing an equal negative propaganda that embroils her with terrorist organizations against whom she has been fighting a costly war. Thus the" rise of India" myth is simultaneously followed by a negative propaganda against Pakistan under the garb of a campaign against rising Islamic militancy and extremism and thus framing Pakistan's image as a weak state harboring Islamic militancy.

The self-acclaimed leadership status of the Indian state in south Asia and myopic analyses of the Indian political, economic and foreign affairs by some writers praising her so called virtues while turning a deaf ear towards her heinous crimes against humanity and her nefarious designs well manifested in her troubled borders with all neighboring states puts Pakistan in a very difficult situation. Being the victim and witness of Indian aggression and hegemonic designs and facing an aggressive negative campaign launched against her by Indian writers and strategists Pakistan needs to formulate a comprehensive strategy

that calls a spade a spade by unveiling the true face of Indian secularism and multilateralism on the one hand while on the other hand trying to persuade India to come out of the self-deceptive myth of her rise as a global power, accept the principle of equality of states and resolve her disputes amicably with her neighbors.

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