

Some deterrence mathematics



TICKER

MIHIR SHARMA

Let us objectively consider what we know about the airstrikes launched by the Indian Air Force (IAF) this week into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, in Pakistan proper. We know that Balakot, the location of the Jaish-e-Mohammed seminary and training camp that was being targeted, is some 80 kilometres from the Line of Control. We can assume then that the IAF warplanes went some distance into Pakistani-controlled airspace given that, reportedly, Israeli SPICE-2000 pre-guided bombs were used that have a glide range of about 60 km. To be clear, this represents three significant innovations to India's arsenal of retaliation for attacks by Pakistan-backed jihadists. First, the use of air power; second, the willingness to enter Pakistani airspace; and third, the willingness to strike in Pakistan proper and not in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government would be right, thus, to claim that they have shown significantly greater risk tolerance in response to a jihadist provocation than their predecessors.

We should also consider the effects of the Balakot strike. First, did it achieve its stated military ends? Here we need to examine official statements and independent evidence. "Sources" have claimed 300 deaths and this was widely reported as fact in the Indian media — but it is clear that this need not be believed, as it is not an official statement. The Ministry of External Affairs has, however, stated that a "very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of *jihadis* who were being trained for *fidayeen* action were eliminated". This does not put a number on the deaths. More importantly, let us hear what the IAF itself, the most impeccable source in this context, has to say: "We have evidence to show that whatever we wanted to do and the targets we wanted to destroy, we have done that... it will be premature to give number of casualties." This is very careful phrasing. It does not imply that there were a "very large" number of deaths. It does not even imply, interestingly, that the intention was to directly degrade the JeM installation.

It is thus entirely possible, and even logical, to suppose that the strategic intent of the strikes was to demonstrate the three significant innovations mentioned earlier rather than to degrade JeM capabilities. This would seem to be a sensible conclusion especially given the copious evidence from neutral sources, including foreign intelligence services, that the JeM and other jihadist outfits have moved their main training camps further away from the LoC a decade or more ago. It is also worth noting that multiple independent sources, such as the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Laboratory and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's (ASPI) International Cyber Policy Centre have released satellite-based research indicating that there was no significant damage to the JeM facility. Both agree that there are clear impact areas 150 to 200 metres away from the boundaries of the facility. ASPI points out that, given that "statistically fewer than 0.2 per cent" of SPICE-2000 bombs "hit further than 10 metres from the designated strike area", it is likely that the intended target was indeed hit, and the purpose of the mission was to show intent and capability (and not to directly hamper JeM operations).

We now come to the second question about the effects of the Balakot strike. Does it significantly push the envelope in terms of deterring Pakistani adventurism in Kashmir or elsewhere? As a reminder, India seeks a method to ensure that sub-conventional war waged by Pakistan can be answered and deterred in a manner that utilises India's conventional superiority — while staying well below the nuclear threshold. The problem is that Pakistan's own air force in response to the Balakot raid carried out a major sortie into Indian airspace that led to the shooting down of a MiG-21 and the capture of an Indian pilot. Thus, as Ankit Panda, a senior fellow at the Federation of American Scientists, put it in *The Atlantic*: "Pakistan's own retaliation serves to reestablish deterrence, by demonstrating it has conventional options of its own short of nuclear weapons". From this point of view, therefore, the strikes cannot be called a success. If deterrence through India's conventional superiority is to be established now, then India will have to escalate to a point where its greater resources make the difference. This is, to put it mildly, both difficult and dangerous and thus inadvisable.

Given that, objectively, the outcome of the airstrikes can at best be described as of mixed usefulness to India's overall objectives, should they have been carried out? Here we have to examine the cost. By far the biggest cost was that India was spending its hard-earned reputation for strategic restraint and responsibility, built up over successive governments. This capital cannot be run down forever, and could have been spent elsewhere. Why it was instead spent on this particular occasion, with not enough to show for it, is a question that only the Prime Minister can answer.

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Arthur Moore and Indo-Pak peace

Moore died in the hope for "real peace between India and Pakistan". That remains the flickering faith of the millions who wished Abhinandan a speedy release



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

Every Indian's thoughts must be with Abhinandan Varthaman, the Indian pilot whom Pakistan's prime minister has released from captivity. Every Indian's prayer must be that Imran Khan's willingness and ability to keep his generous promise means not that the Indian air force wing commander lives to fight another day but that the days of fighting are over.

But looking beyond the happy release, it would be unrealistic not to recognise that such situations may occur again and again until an

amicable solution is found to the Kashmir dispute. As Arthur Moore, editor of *The Statesman*, wrote, "Pakistan canal disputes, boundary disputes, displaced persons disputes — all these may be solved; trade between the two countries may be developed; but there will never be satisfactory relations between India and Pakistan till the Kashmir issue is amicably settled." That was in *A Study of Nehru* that Rafiq Zakaria edited and published in 1960 long after the British government had ensured Moore was sacked for his radical views. But he was still deeply involved in India, and called his article on Nehru "My Friend's Son" because he related to Motilal Nehru with whom he had become friendly when he represented the Bengal European constituency in the Legislative Assembly from 1927 to 1933.

In his unmarked pauper's grave outside London, Moore must suffer agonies as India and Pakistan pirouette on the brink of war and as a Pakistani listener to Mr Khan's speech laments "it is now our second nature to live in the well of hell". Moore thought of the federal plan associated with Nehru as the only way of saving South Asia from further conflict. There was no Kashmir problem then but the principle of uniting peoples and countries already

appealed to Moore who was much taken with the ideas of an American journalist, Clarence Streit, who published *Union Now*, a book calling for an international federation of democracies in which the sovereignty and jurisdiction of national states might decline, but the individual's status would improve.

Applying that idealistic notion to the British empire, Moore published an article, "A Federal British Commonwealth", in the *Manchester Guardian* in October 1938 and reproduced this thinly-veiled plea for dominion status for India in *The Statesman*. Urging the federation of transport and communications under a single command, he warned "we must federate or perish". India was to blaze a global trail. "We are a large part of the world and can contribute much to a world order if we can produce a united India", declared his first editorial in 1939. He returned to the theme at the Indian Institute of International Affairs which he addressed on "The Necessity for a British League of Nations". Underlying it was the hope that if war broke out, a united front by India in support of Britain might persuade London to concede political reforms.

Moore put these proposals to a startled Subhas Chandra Bose who feared the British

government wouldn't play along but promised to discuss them with Gandhi and Nehru. If they agreed, Jinnah and the British could be approached. The All India Congress Committee's demand for "a world federation of free nations" for "the future peace, security and ordered progress of the world" and to prevent aggression and exploitation so closely mirrored the political and economic federalism Moore propagated in his "This Our War" series of articles that people suspected him of being a closet Congressman.

Moore saw a subcontinental federation as the only way of containing the Kashmir problem. In 1948, he spoke to Gandhi about his plan for Kashmir to "be treated as an equal third party" in "a federated commonwealth state, with common foreign affairs, common defence, and such finance as concerned these subjects, but all three to be separate self-governing States". Gandhi who "was much interested" asked him to get Nehru's opinion. Moore was about to do so when Gandhi was killed. When he could discuss it with Nehru, the answer was not "No" but that "the time is not yet". Later, Nehru confided in Selig Harrison of *The Washington Post* "confederation remains our ultimate goal".

Nehru's response sent Moore to his death fortified with the hope "that at last there could be real peace between India and Pakistan and that the worst evils of partition would be forever wiped out". That still remains the flickering faith of the millions who are desperate like that Pakistani to get out of the "well of hell" and who wish Wing Commander Varthaman a speedy recovery from his ordeal.

LUNCH WITH BS ▶ ZOYA AKHTAR | WRITER-DIRECTOR

Director's cut

Every movie has changed her, but *Gully Boy* more so than any other, Akhtar tells Urvi Malvania & Arundhuti Dasgupta

It's cold no? Can we reduce the AC please?" Zoya Akhtar is on the dot for our rather late lunch appointment at San:Qui, a restaurant at Four Seasons Mumbai that describes itself as a "dramatic dining room" and promises a "pan-Asian culinary tour". Whatever that may be, when it comes to the freeze factor, this restaurant is no different from the rest in the city that dial it up to Arctic levels. The plusher they are, the worse it gets (yes, it is a pet peeve). But unlike our rants that are usually met with a studied glance into space, Akhtar's words result in action. A few suggestions on seating and a word with those in charge of the cooling and we are set.

Akhtar speaks very fast, but with the assurance of someone who is used to her words being taken seriously. As a director and a woman among a large fraternity of male professionals, she has probably had ample practice. "And a green tea please," she halts the retreating back of our attendant with a firm command. No lunch for me, she announces much to our dismay. On a diet, she wants just green tea and water. Her aide obliges us with a meal while we decide to tuck in later.

For the 46-year-old director who has directed four feature films and a couple of movies for Amazon and Netflix, *Gully Boy* has been a sublime rush of emotions. Akhtar is just back from Berlin, her first grand showing at an international film festival and she is blown away by the scale of the festival and its audience. The experience of watching her film in an 1,800-seat-theatre on an 80-foot screen is incomparable. "It was just so big and like so weird," she says sipping her jasmine tea. Much like the experience of making the movie, like a

sucker punch to the gut.

From the people she interacted with to the poetry they exposed her to and the manner in which their lives intertwined, *Gully Boy* has been an explosive thrill. Akhtar, who is an avid hip-hop and rap fan, says that she was tuned into the American rap scene, but barely knew any in India. "I would never have met these guys if not for the movie," she says. The young boys who inspired the movie grew up in the slums in Mumbai and in the outskirts of Delhi, listening to Eminem and Tupac Shakur on YouTube. So did she but in a world so far removed from theirs that it could almost be a parallel universe. "The internet is just an amazing shift," she says. Without having ever stepped out of their localities, leave alone the country, the rappers in India have taken what is primarily an American angst-ridden art form that references local racial inequalities and made it their own. And poetry drew Akhtar to the movie, to the rappers.

Akhtar is a closet poet. Largely thanks to her father, she says. Javed Akhtar who has worked with her on *Gully Boy* has a poem for every occasion and can still recite large verses from memory. All her growing up years, she says, her father was introducing poetry to her and Farhan (her actor-director brother). She writes, but vows she will never publish her verse.

Mother Daisy Irani was their introduction to world cinema. She watched everything from Italian and French to Bollywood staples with her. The love for the craft of movie making is probably her mother's doing as

is — and Akhtar rolls her eyes — a set of rules. "She is a Parsi. So we were told, never be late. Respect money and your work. Switch off the lights when you leave a room." Even today, she is always the first to a meeting in an industry where hardly anyone turns up on time.

Akhtar says the four films that she has directed so far have been great learning experiences. *Luck by Chance* (2009), her first movie did not quite set the box office on fire but it gave her the confidence to take on more. And then came *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara* (2011) that brought commercial and critical success.

Money is important, she says. At the end of the day, the producer or whoever is putting his money into the venture must get a return on the investment. But what she does not get is the all-consuming obsession that even critics and audiences have developed with the ₹100-crore club. "Why should it matter how much a movie makes on a weekend? You like it or you don't. I can understand trade getting interested in movie collections but why the viewer?"

The digital universe, of Netflix and Amazon and others, liberate her from such constraints. A movie is watched, liked or disliked without its financials being dragged into the conversation. "There is no box office or money pressure. That's a huge positive."

Film making is an expensive medium and it takes deft management of finances and people, apart from, of course, a gripping narrative and competent actors. Art does not thrive in a vacuum or an echo chamber. When she made *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015), Akhtar said she learnt a lot about managing people. "It was a huge ensemble cast, taught me a lot about handling relationships. It was



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

also my most nuanced film, and I grew a lot professionally on that set."

What draws her to a script? How does she choose the story she wants to tell?

It is always the story first and then everything else. Once the story hooks her in, the rest take shape, the characters and the locations she shoots in, everything. "My locations speak too, they are like characters in the movie." For *Gully Boy*, Dharavi, the slum where she shot in Mumbai was a crucial part of the film. She says that the slum was a revelation in many ways. For one, it was the smoothest experience she has had

shooting outdoors in a metro, she says. No one really has time to stare or upset a movie crew's rhythm. They don't have the time and they just don't care. "They are just so cool," she says. But the slums must have been a huge shock for someone who is ensconced in the privileged world of Bollywood. Akhtar bristles at the insinuation but masks her irritation with the practised ease of a professional. "I am not alien to the place (Dharavi). I live here, I know these places. I have shopped there for leather like anyone else."

Despite the familiarity, what never fails to shock her is the inequality that is sewn into the fabric of the city. Working on *Gully Boy* drew an even starker picture of the harsh truth. Many have said that this is perhaps the most political movie she has made so far, also the most boldly and openly so in recent times.

Akhtar does not respond directly to the observation. No movie can really be apolitical, she says. Be it an entertainer, a thriller or a biopic, a film reveals everything about how one looks at race, gender, love, equality and whatever else you can think of. So in that sense *Gully Boy* is political but so is every other film. And it is as much about politics as it is about an ordinary human beating the odds to keep his hopes alive.

As a woman and a director what does she make of the odds stacked against women in her industry, in the wake of the #MeToo movement? She feels that Bollywood is unfairly singled out in this case; other industries have worse stories. It is all part of the national narrative around women. "We (women directors/writers) put out a statement that we won't work with proven offenders. Today, we are in a position to employ people and that is the best way to ensure a safe working environment."

Akhtar has another appointment to go to and the restaurant is about to close and hunger is gnawing at our insides. We look hopefully at the gentleman who has materialised by our side. He smiles ruefully, the kitchen has closed.

Zaid crops to the rescue



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

At a time when farmer distress is on an all-time high, I find myself looking for farming models that are able to tweak traditional agricultural practices to increase profit. Years ago, I saw one such model in Bharatpur (Rajasthan) where farmers fed their cattle the same grain they'd traditionally given them — but after they'd sprouted it. The simple act of sprouting improved their milk yields substantially. Last year, I met the good people of Nagla Tula who craft garments from *desi* rain-fed cotton that they commission farmers in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana to grow, reviving traditional and long-forgotten multi-cropping techniques. Unexpectedly, farmers made tidy

profits on the chilli they had planted with cotton. Similarly, last week, while on field visits to Barabanki (UP) and Panipat (Haryana), I saw farmers successfully plant zaid crops to boost their income.

Zaid crops are essentially irrigated crops that can be planted between rabi and kharif seasons from March to June to give farmers income from a third crop every year. In Barabanki, the zaid crop of choice is *mentha arvensis* (wild mint). Sown in mid-February and harvested two times from April onwards, *mentha* leaves are dried to extract oil. This is used in products ranging from toothpaste to *pan masala*. Farmers here estimate that a *bigha* of *mentha* can yield as much as 30 litres of oil. "It is an easy crop to grow here, as we have good irrigation facilities," Tej Narain, a local farmer told me. "It's growing period also fits well in our traditional rice-wheat cropping system." Most farmers in Haidargarh, his village, have small holdings of less than two *bighas*. "We find it costs about ₹10,000 per *bigha* to sow the crop," he said. "If all goes well, it gives a return of about ₹30,000." For Narain and other small scale farmers in the area, *mentha* has provided a much-needed extra income. "Earlier, we left the fields fallow between the rabi and kharif seasons," he said. "Planting a third crop

instead has given us added income and insulated us from risks".

Farmers in Panipat are sowing muskmelon as a zaid crop, but have tweaked the process further for better results. Like *mentha*, this too is sown between the wheat and rice crops. "Earlier, we used to sow melon after harvesting wheat in April," said Ram Singh, a farmer there. But they found that often, when the melon crop was in its delicate early stages, temperatures in May were too high for it. "Now, we plant melon before harvesting wheat," he said, showing me his nursery of melon seeds in a protected nook by the well. Neat ridges were already being prepared along the periphery of his field for melon plantation. This ensures that the melon crop is well-rooted before the summer sets in and has made a substantial improvement to their yield. Singh estimates that his input costs for melon plantation are about ₹1 lakh per acre. He earns between ₹2-2.5 lakh from the harvest.

Given the uncertainty of agrarian life, zaid crops can substantially pad farmer profits, boost yields and improve their quality of life. As Narain said, "*mentha* cultivation has changed the lives of small farmers like me — I don't think many of us would have survived without it".

Life in cantonment



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

Those of us who reside on civvy street have flawed notions about life in the country's cantonments. Once upon a time this was defined by an envy for the "facilities" enjoyed by the defence forces — subsidised canteen services, for instance, and the availability of liquor at rates no bootlegger could match. This counts for less now as hypermarkets have helped the price-sensitive housewife pick out bargains in her neighbourhood, or online, and the availability of alcohol is no longer an issue, unless you live in prohibition-bound Gujarat, Bihar, or Nagaland, in which case "connections" with *faujis* can help you score the occasional tippale. There are some

more myths about frequent partying, or access to cars with drivers for the *memsahibs*, but as is often the case, the taint of a few merely misrepresents the rest.

Growing up in cantonments was a privilege and vastly different from these perceived distortions. Most cantonments, even in the midst of rapidly expanding cities, tend to be oases amidst the squalor that is urban India. Public areas are as well tended as homes and embody the spirit that we can live cohesively, and well, should we choose to. For a youngster, cantonments offer what crowded city colonies fail to provide — affordable sports facilities, libraries, clubs where you learn to socialise without being an embarrassment, tolerance and understanding of the other, and the ability to cope with life's googlies.

If that is the upside of cantonment life, there are downers too. Accommodation is not always a given with a queue for family quarters that can take up to half of one's posting with life lived in a cramped mess room. Allotted homes are often too old to cope with modern amenities. Frequent postings imply constant adjusting to newer environments, and friends, schools, teachers and uneven teaching standards. My own growing up as an army brat led me to 13 schools across the country's length and breadth in places as far apart

as Deolali and Wellington, Coonoor and Kolkata, Kasauli and Pathankot.

My father wasn't the only *fauji* in a family that has had strong martial roots. Both grandfathers served in the Army — one travelling to London before the start of the second World War to pick up a medal and a pension guaranteed to three generations, the other participating in the same war and doing time as a prisoner of war in Italy. Expectedly, several members of the tribe chose the Army as careers, taking hardship, non-family postings in their stride while helping their own children compete with their civilian peers whose continuity in education served them better when it came to studying for higher education and alternative professions.

But the lure of the Army remains strong among children of defence personnel. The new generation in the family is spread all the way from Congo as part of a UN peacekeeping force to those who have qualified as pilots in the Army's aviation wing, while others remain in the infantry, artillery and armoured corps. As a grateful nation pays lip-service to our soldiers keeping vigil in these ratcheting times, we might do well to remember that life in the cantonments isn't just about pruned trees and starched linen. And that soldiers are being lost every day on the borders while we pursue our own, less altruistic, aims.

WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

The week's takeaways

Perhaps the biggest positive takeaway from the military action over the last few days is the evidence of India's new diplomatic heft. People old enough to remember earlier conflict situations will recall how no non-aligned country spoke up for India during the wars of the 1960s — though India had been a co-founder and leader of the non-aligned movement. Even in 1971, it was principally the Soviet Union that stood by India, as it had done more than once by using its veto in the UN Security Council. In comparison, today India enjoys the support of not just the leading western powers but also of middling powers like Australia, friendly engagement with Russia, and most remarkably some helpful intervention by Arab countries. To have the external affairs minister speak as a guest of honour at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, even as the Pakistan foreign minister feels obliged to boycott it in protest, is something that few would have predicted.

The change in the diplomatic situation began with Bill Clinton and Kargil in 1999, and has to be credited to the sustained diplomacy of successive governments and prime ministers, including the present one; India's increasing importance as a market; and changed perceptions about Pakistan as "an international migraine", to quote a former US secretary of state. Husain Haqqani, the former Pakistan ambassador to the US, had to point out the uncomfortable truth to Islamabad that not one country had spoken out in its favour after India sent in its Mirages.

The biggest negative takeaway from this past week has to be the news-distorting nationalism of ratings-hungry TV news channels, with bellicose anchors screaming war from the safety of their studios while the wives of fallen soldiers pleaded for dialogue and peace—and got trolled for their pains. It is an old dictum that one should not fall prey to one's own propaganda, and it must be hoped that those in charge of national security and international relations have cooler heads than those venting on talk shows. It would be as well to remember the pressure that news television mounted on the Vajpayee government to yield to the Kandahar hijackers, leading to the freeing of (among others) the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed. The country is paying for that today.

The truth about the military engagement over two days is that it was not a clear victory for India. The Modi government has taken a step forward by putting in place a more aggressive response to cross-border terrorism, and by striking targets in Pakistan, but the country has also lost a fighter plane. Though the prime minister has talked somewhat needlessly of pilot projects and the real stuff to come, India cannot be sure of a clean victory in any full-fledged conflict—even if there is reason to engage in such.

Indeed, the loss of the MiG-21 raises the inevitable question why the air force still has to fly such dated aircraft, putting both planes and pilots at risk. The failure to equip the armed forces with contemporary weapons in sufficient numbers, such as to offer a demonstrable deterrent, points to the hard fact that defence budgets (especially for weapons acquisition) have been squeezed for years together. The finance minister rightly asked why India should not do what the Americans did by taking out Osama bin Laden. The only reason why not, is the difference in capabilities. That is what needs to be addressed.

There is one other domestic issue to consider: Is the policy on Jammu & Kashmir working? The figures show escalating violence and killings, while field reports talk of growing alienation in the Kashmir valley. The unusual experiment with a coalition government comprising polar opposites did not last, and the state is under President's rule. Terrorism in the state would not continue if it had no domestic roots. Ignoring this reality is not going to achieve anything. Instead, matters could get worse—especially if there are more episodes of Kashmiri students and workers being driven out of other parts of the country. The Kashmir problem cannot be ended without winning over the Kashmiri.

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



Imran Khan's choice: Lead or follow on

In last 50 years, Pakistan has lost face, support and economic status. Balakot has given Khan a chance to change that

There are two challenges when you talk about Pakistan today. First, whether you focus on the history, geography or politics. And second, whatever tack you choose, where do you begin? I could have begun this National Interest, for example, with 2019, today, as Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman returned home. I could have also chosen 2009, 1999, 1989 or 1979.

I am taking you back, instead to 1969, don't worry, you will be back soon to Friday, March 1, 2019.

It was in 1969 that Muslim countries, smarting under Israel's spectacular victory in the six-day-war of 1967 decided to form Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). Indira Gandhi wasn't about to stay out and decided to send minister Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed (later President of India) as the head of the Indian delegation.

Her move was thwarted by an outraged Pakistan. It found sympathy in the ummah. The Islamic world accepted the logic that there could be no OIC without the country with the largest Muslim population in the world at the time. Remember, Pakistan was yet undivided. India was left rejected and humiliated.

Jump exactly 50 years, as we had promised, to March 1, 2019. Watch External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj holding forth at the OIC summit as an honoured guest. She delivered a finely crafted speech, which underlined India as a home to the third-largest Muslim population in the world. She said Muslims were integral to India's diversity and, less than 100 of them had joined ISIS.

Of course, there will be many valid arguments and qualifications here, over her party's marginalisation and "Otherisation" of the mainstream Indian Muslim and the demonisation of Kashmiris. But please do not overlook at the significance of a top woman leader of a conservative Hindu nationalist Indian government saying this to the world's Muslims. Even more, you can't miss the supreme irony of a sulking Pakistan staying out of this OIC summit in protest against the invitation to India.

Fifty years ago, Pakistan had the power to veto India's presence at the premier Islamic alliance. Today, all it can do is express hollow pique and humiliation with a boycott. How did Pakistan, which calls itself the "Citadel of Islam" (Islam ka Qila), with its nukes and missiles, 20 crore Muslims, get itself in such a sorry place? Think about it.

I will now drag you back 40 years to 1979. Pakistan lost the 1971 war and broke up. It was still rebuilding itself — and quite well — when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. It brought America and its allies, including Saudi Arabia and China in as, what is now called, the Af-Pak region became the hottest battlefield of the Cold War. Pakistan was their willing, capable and indispensable ally. This started the process of easy and free re-arming of the Pakistani military, strengthened new dictator Zia-ul-Haq who, over time, began to see himself as the true commander of this jihad.

The new power had gone to his head. If they could lead this war against a superpower, why couldn't they do so against India? This grew into a kind of national hubris. Please note again that militancy began in Indian Punjab in 1981, the AK-47s appeared the following year, and then RPG-7 grenade-launchers. These were standard Afghan jihad weapons.

I made my first visit to Pakistan as this phase was peaking, in the summer of 1985, to cover the trial of Sikh hijackers of an Indian Airlines aircraft. I was awed by the difference in the levels of ordinary people's prosperity, quality of life, infrastructure, even the quality of telecom services, which was like oxygen for journalists in the pre-internet era. In short, the average Pakistani lived much better than the average Indian in 1985. Data tells you why, Pakistan's per capita income then was about 60 per cent higher than India's.

Apologies for doing this to you again, but leapfrog to 2019. Now, the average Indian earns about 25 per cent more than the average Pakistani. How did the



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

Who wins if India and Pakistan fight?



VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATA

This war between India and Pakistan is being fought for rational reasons. One side has consistently pursued an asymmetric strategy of fomenting terrorism and insurgency for nearly three decades and it sees no reason not to continue. The government on the other side wants to win re-election and is looking to score points. Hence, it looked to escalate matters by air strikes across the border after five years of doing very little. That meant, of course, that the Pakistanis had to escalate further.

Of course, India and Pakistan are not officially at war. But both sides have mobilised resources and there has been heavy and continuous shelling ever since the Pulwama terror attack. Both sides have claimed kills in aerial dogfights, and the airspace has been shut down and civilians have been evacuated from border areas. In effect, this is a war, though neither side has bothered to declare it. That leaves some diplomatic wriggle room of course.

More than casualties in military action, this war is one of perception. It has already seen the generation of terabytes of fake news and disinformation. Cyberspace has been flooded with conflicting reports and pictures sourced from all over the place.

What makes matters more confusing is the fact that officials on both sides have made absurd and unverifiable claims.

Indian officials claimed "off the record" that the airstrike at Balakot killed anywhere between 300 and 650 terrorists. Pakistan claims the only casualty is a crow. Who knows what the truth is? Pakistan claimed it downed two fighters and produced one IAF officer as proof. India denied that Wing Commander Abhinandan had gone missing for several hours until he was paraded on TV. India continues to insist that one Pakistani fighter was downed, and Pakistan continues to stoutly deny this happened.

In wars, adversaries routinely indulge in propaganda. Governments lying to inflate their successes, to conceal weaknesses and to deflate losses are age-old phenomena. One classic example of that was the Spanish Flu that killed millions in 1918-19. The Flu originated in America and it infected millions of troops sitting in the trenches of Western Europe. But it's called the Spanish Flu because Spain, being a non-combatant, was the first nation where the national media reported its existence.

A hundred years later, the difference lies in the amplification of lies and propa-

ganda on social media where conflicting narratives and fake news are competing for eyeballs. This makes it impossible for even balanced neutrals to make sense of what's going on. It also devalues the authenticity of official releases from either government since the claims by one country are instantly denied by the other. The ensuing trollfest may be entertaining but it obfuscates the truth, whatever it might be.

War was once famously defined as diplomacy by other means. But what are the strategic objectives of these two governments now? One would just like to keep the pot boiling in Kashmir. The other would like to win an election.

Oddly, those objectives may not be incompatible. The Modi government has done more to foster alienation in Kashmir than any previous central administration. It has also done its best to polarise Indians along caste and religious lines. That cannot make Pakistan unhappy. By allowing India to claim a diplomatic victory, Pakistan can strengthen the case for Modi's re-election. Hence, it could be looking to de-escalate, seeing a potential win-win.

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One world, two nuts



LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRINIVASA-RAGHAVAN

and the Americans thought that Korea was unfit for self-rule.

So the British walked away leaving India and Pakistan to it. But the Russians and the Americans created two protectorates — one each in the North and the South of Korea.

In the event, while India and South Korea showed they could govern themselves, Pakistan and North Korea have shown they can't, not quite.

Pakistan immediately went to war against India — just two months after breaking away. North Korea went to war against South Korea in 1950. In 1953, its army was roundly defeated. Korea formally broke into two in 1953.

The same thing happened to the Pakistan army in 1971. Pakistan broke into two.

The Koreans now have the demilitarised zone (DMZ). We have the LAC (Line of Actual Control), now called the LOC (Line of Control).

The Russians groomed the North Korean Army and armed it. They even helped out with nuclear technology.

The Americans didn't go that far but they did arm Pakistan to the teeth. They also turned a blind eye to Pakistan's progress towards nuclear weapons in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, the Russians dumped North Korea as a huge nuisance. The Americans dumped Pakistan for the same

reason — also in the 1990s.

Freed from American pressure, Pakistan tested its nuclear weapon in 1998. North Korea tested its in 2006.

Today, both have become Chinese protectorates. China has a veto on international cooperation against these two countries.

The North Korean economy is in a mess. The Pakistan economy is also in a mess.

The differences

But major similarities end here. North Korea, after some initial acts of terrorism, gave it up in 1983. Pakistan started developing terrorism exactly then, in fact, in the same month — October.

North Korea troops indulged in some minor transgressions of the DMZ and the Northern Limit Line in the West Sea. But Pakistan, the lakhs of minor skirmishes apart, has gone the whole hog at the LOC — not once but four times. On that score, at least, it is the bigger nutcase.

Another difference: The North Korean army knows its limits and has behaved itself. The Pakistan army, in contrast, has no concept of limits and has been causing mayhem wherever it can, including within Pakistan. Its Jihadi groups are like those country made handguns of North India: They can fire in both directions.

However, in mitigation, Pakistan chooses its head of government via elections. North Korea takes the hereditary route.

But the real power in both countries lies with the army. Pakistan's prime min-

ister appoints the army chief and is then controlled by him.

In North Korea, the top guy heads everything but is just as vulnerable to the army's power. If the army wants it can depose him in a jiffy.

In Pakistan, there is active politics, a vibrant civil society, a reasonably free press, an excellent judiciary and a general longing to be rid of the army yoke. In North Korea, it is the very opposite.

Pakistan has a great sense of humour. North Korea has the Great Leader who decides when a citizen may laugh.

The paradoxes

There was a time when the US dandled Pakistan on its knees and treated North Korea like a wild hooligan. Now it is the other way around.

North Korea is being pulled out of its 65-year isolation by, of all countries, the US. In contrast, Pakistan is being pushed into it after 65 years by, of all countries, the US.

Russia, which had always treated Pakistan as a pariah, is now trying to prevent this isolation thing. And China is picking up the debris of the old relationships, more so in Pakistan than in North Korea.

In the end, though, everyone has a bad feeling about all this because neither North Korea nor Pakistan can be trusted. They are like that only, total nutjobs because, as has been well said, while other countries have armies, in Pakistan and North Korea the armies have a country.

Reignited nepotism

EYE CULTURE

VIKRAM JOHRI

One of the hallmarks of the new Bollywood, it is said, is its willingness to welcome new talent that is not connected to the notoriously nepotistic industry. From Ayushmann Khurrana to Rajkumar Rao, Bollywood is increasingly offering roles to outsiders, a term reserved for those who are not connected by birth or marriage to a member of the industry.

This, however, is at best a qualified assertion. It is true that we see more outsiders in key roles today, but that could equally be an outcome of the sheer number of films being produced. The Hindi film industry alone produces close to a thousand films per year, with other local industries adding to that number. With so much work to go around, there is little doubt that Bollywood looks to newcomers from outside its circles.

And yet, it can be notoriously hard for a "struggler" — Bollywood-speak for a newcomer to Mumbai trying to enter the entertainment business — to make ends meet. Nawazuddin Siddiqui wrote in his autobiography of the challenges during his early days in Mumbai to find enough money to buy *vada pav*, the city staple. For years, he struggled in the shadows until finally achieving success with *Black Friday* in 2007.

The debate gained traction after it was popularised by Kangana Ranaut, who used her appearance on *Koffee with Karan* in 2017 to attack the industry's ways. Karan Johar, the show's host, and Saif Ali Khan, Ranaut's co-guest on the show, came out with statements criticising her, and the episode became a rallying cry for both sides of the nepotism divide. Ultimately, the word came to define the mix of insouciance and indulgence that Bollywood insiders operate with.

Last year saw a new generation of Bollywood progeny make their screen debuts, and it is perhaps a mark of how central the debate has become in Bollywood that each of these newcomers felt the need to acknowledge their privilege. Both Sara Ali Khan and Jhanvi Kapoor repeatedly expressed gratitude for the opportunities their lineage affords them. Khan was candid enough to add in one interview that it would be silly for her not to use her advantage when it is clear that there is an advantage to use.

Yet, the controversy refuses to subside. Part of the reason for the heartburn is the outside possibilities for success that Bollywood offers. No one complains about television or theatre being

Pakistanis, despite their newfound geo-strategic value for those winning the Cold War, lose a 60 per cent head start and slip so far behind? That gap is increasing almost by five percentage points every year. The Indian economy is growing by about three percentage points faster than Pakistan's, whose population is rising at twice the pace of India's. The net result is a near-five per cent, steady differential in per capita GDP.

How did we get here? Zulfikar Ali Bhutto famously threatened a 1,000-year war on India. In the 50 of these since 1969, Pakistan has so lost its pre-eminence that even its ummah prefers India to it. In the 40 years since it embraced jihad, it has ruined its economy. But wait, this isn't all the price Pakistan has paid for this permanent blood feud with India. Keep adding.

By 1989, the defeated Soviets were negotiating their retreat from Afghanistan. A victorious Pakistani establishment instinctively turned its attention east. This is precisely when the ongoing troubles in Jammu and Kashmir began. The self-styled Ghazis in khaki were now going to win the jihad that really mattered to them. The next three years were the bloodiest. Kashmir and Punjab counted corpses by the thousands.

But Pakistan grappled with some internal changes. Democratic forces fought back often, and Zia's legatees were engaged in an internal tussle with politicians. Nawaz Sharif, originally an army favourite, preferred peace. He dared, exactly a decade after the insurgency in Kashmir was launched, to make peace with Vajpayee, in January 1999. His army responded by infiltrating Kargil that winter.

Pakistan lost that war and two more important things: One, the larger global view that Kashmir was a disputed territory ended. There was new unanimity that the Line of Control was the de facto border and must be respected. Second, the same year, Pakistan lost its hard-earned democracy again as Pervez Musharraf toppled Nawaz. In those 10 years, therefore, Pakistan lost its moral cause on Kashmir and returned to military rule. All because of that one self-destructive obsession.

We have come a long way since. With the madness of 26/11 Pakistan earned the awful but well-deserved status as the locus of global jihad. Then, as during the Kargil and post-Parliament attack standoffs, India had the world on its side by acting responsibly and not retaliating. Today, India has the world, including Saudi Arabia and UAE, on its side even after it retaliated.

Let's make a balance sheet. In 50 years, Pakistan lost its pre-eminence in the Islamic world. The Arabs are counselling restraint to it, Iran is hostile. In the past 40 years, its per capita income has suffered almost a 90 per cent net deficit relative to India and the gap is rising. In the past 30, it has lost its campaigns in Indian Punjab and Kashmir, and permanently embedded jihadis in its cities and institutions. And in the last two decades, the LoC has become the de facto border in Kashmir, nobody has any patience with terror as an instrument of policy, there isn't even token disapproval of India bombing Pakistan's mainland, and most importantly, India and the world have called Pakistan's nuclear bluff.

Imran can carry on as in the past, or take fresh guard and begin a new inning. It will be risky, but there is a chance of success if he dares. If he doesn't, two things are guaranteed: Failure for him, and continued slide for his nation despite its talented people, strong nationalism, the gift of geography and a formidable army. That's the bottom line.

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