



India's "New Normal" with Pakistan

Briefing Paper
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CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan's national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, CommandEleven provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The implications were loud and clear when Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi proclaimed from a stage at a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rally, *"This was just a pilot project. We were just practicing. Now, we will carry out the real thing."*¹ This statement was echoed and reverberated throughout India, and the world, by the BJP leadership, politicians and spokespeople across various forums. This, according to Ajai Shukla, is what analysts are calling the "new normal" – India will retaliate for any terror attack perceived to be linked to Pakistan.²

For those who know the sub-continent, and the tenuous peace that exists between both these nuclear powers, this level of saber-rattling is nothing new. In fact, since the infamous Butcher of Gujrat took to the political stage, India has seen more division among its people, with no indications that it will decrease³. From his aggressive pre-election speeches against Muslims and Pakistan to his open-handed policy to Hindu extremist groups, Modi's India has been attempting to establish a regional hegemony⁴ by cozying up to the US-sponsored successive Afghanistan governments and expanding their unproven claims of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, while continuing to damage India's reputation as a secular state globally.

India's "surgical strike" in Balakot inflamed an already smoldering fire. India's numerous Line of Control firing violations, the continuous accusations of Pakistan sponsoring attacks against Indian military targets at Uri, Pathankot and Pulwama, all three carried out by Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), the human rights abuses highlighted by the United Nations Human Rights Commission⁵, and Modi's instigation of the Afghanistan government to make claims of Pakistan sponsoring terrorism inside Afghanistan, have forced Pakistan to respond in military, diplomatic and mass media circles.

Within hours of the attack, Indian Foreign Secretary VK Gokhale, claim that India had struck the "biggest training camp of Jaish-e-Mohammad in Balakot," and "a large

¹ "India-Pakistan Crisis: Modi is gambling with nuclear stakes," South China Morning Post, March 02, 2019, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1460231/press-review>

² "India-Pakistan tensions: Who won the war of perceptions?" Ajai Shukla, al-Jazeera, March 04, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/india-pakistan-tensions-won-war-perceptions-190304100556184.html>

³ "Nationalism is being used to divide people: Pratap Bhanu Methra on Modi Sarkar at IT Conclave 2019," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BA4266SYeA>

⁴ "Pulwama and Indian Hegemony," Mehr Ispahani, The Daily Times, March 11, 2019, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/363631/pulwama-and-indian-hegemony/>

⁵ "First-ever UN human rights report on Kashmir calls for international inquiry into multiple violations," United Nations Human Rights Commission, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23198%20>

number of JeM terrorists were killed.”⁶ Indian media began reporting between 250 and 300 dead in the attack. The Pakistan Army’s Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) not only released photographs and video of the supposed location of the strike, but also took both foreign and domestic journalists there to confirm, that the supposed India “surgical strike” had only broken some trees in a forest and injured an innocent man. The Indian claim has been countered by local villagers and health/emergency services, who are unable to find the location of such a significant attack on the Pakistan side of the border.⁷

The Balakot attack was very different for India. In India, opposition parties, journalists and analysts, who requested details of the strike was met with a chorus of nationalists branding them as traitors for “*questioning their nation’s military*” and “*supporting a Pakistan narrative in India.*” Modi’s India is dividing again, which is an advantage to Pakistan.

While the world understands that any conflict between India and Pakistan would be disastrous for the entire region, Pakistan has proven their restraint against repeated Indian instigation attempts. After the Balakot airstrike, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) fighter pilots staged a retaliatory incursion into India. The Indian Air Force (IAF) pushed back but the PAF pilots downed two IAF fighter jets across the Line of Control. The takedown resulted in a captured pilot⁸, who was immediately handed over to India as a demonstration of peace. India quickly responded by returning the body of a civilian Pakistani, who was executed by prisoners in an Indian jail. The post-mortem report shows that Shakirullah’s body “was missing his heart, lungs, stomach and brain.”⁹

From the Indian Supreme Court investigation of the French Rafale fighter jet purchase¹⁰ to the rampant spread of Hindu extremism, India is facing questions on their own credibility and maturity to be considered an emerging super-power, while Prime Minister Modi continues to flex his muscles against political and religious opponents.

⁶ Indian Foreign Secretary VK Gokhale Press Briefing, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-3tLOvPu2Y>

⁷ “No casualties in Balakot strike, concedes India,” The Express Tribune, March 04, 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1922397/1-no-casualties-balakot-strike-concedes-india/>

⁸ “JF-17, not F-16, used in air combat: report,” Anwar Iqbal, DAWN, March 04, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1467526/jf-17-not-f-16-used-in-air-combat-report>

⁹ “Shakirullah’s body was missing his heart, lungs, stomach and brain: postmortem report,” Shahzad Ahmad, March 03, 2019, <https://www.samaa.tv/news/2019/03/shakirullahs-body-was-missing-his-heart-lungs-stomach-and-brain-postmortem-report/>

¹⁰ “How can we fight (Pak) F-16s Without Rafale?” Centre Argues in Top Court, A. Vaidyanathan, NDTV, March 06, 2019, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/rafale-documents-were-stolen-petitioners-violating-official-secrets-act-by-relying-on-classified-pap-2003476>

THE BEGINNING

On February 14, 2019, Adil Ahmed Dar, aka Waqas Commando, carried out a vehicle-born suicide attack against an India's Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy in Pulwama. The attack, still under investigation, resulted the death of 40 personnel and injured 70 more¹¹. One of the key questions in the investigation, that is still unanswered, is how the attacker was able to accumulate 200 kilograms of explosives in Indian Occupied Kashmir. However, most of those questions, and the investigation itself, have silenced due to the war footing that India has adopted. Additionally, the new Indian policy of branding those who question national security matters as traitors has forced many to hold back the most difficult questions during an election campaign.

India, through the supposed airstrike, has sent one message to the world – airstrikes against non-military (terrorist) targets are acceptable. In fact, some India media outlets have even gone as far as declaring that "*sub-conventional warfare*" would also be an acceptable option against Pakistan. The meaning of sub-conventional warfare was made clear from 2007-2014, when the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) collaborated with India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Afghanistan's National Directorate of Security (NDS)¹² to launch a massive terror campaign against Pakistan's government, military and citizens. India has also demonstrated their willingness to attack again. Pakistan can only assume that it will be subjected to a new wave of terrorism and separatists' attacks over the next few months.

Most analysts believed this was just political bluster, but the actions after the Balakot strike have shown that India may have other intentions. The Modi government has engaged the Indian mass media in an influence operation, a key component of information warfare. Their operation has been seamless, in terms of planning and execution, as Pakistan has not been able to raise the same vociferous voices against India. Post-Balakot, while the India media was selectively targeting Pakistani defense analysts, Pakistan's was busy discussing the failures and shortcomings of the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf government and the health of the disqualified Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. When the Balakot discussion was initiated, Pakistan's analysts spent their time repeating Prime Minister Imran Khan's invitation for peace and table talk. None seem to understand when hostilities are rising, the possibility of table talk is impossible.

¹¹ "How Pulwama Terror Attack Unfolded: SUV packed with 200 kg explosives rammed CRPF convoy," Kamaljit Kaur Sandhu, India Today, February 14, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/kashmir-pulwama-terror-attack-jaish-e-mohammed-crpf-convoy-bomb-1456455-2019-02-14>

¹² "The Islamic State in 'Khorasan': How it began and where it stands now in Nangarhar, Borhan Osman, Afghanistan Analysts Network, July 27, 2016, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-islamic-state-in-khorasan-how-it-began-and-where-it-stands-now-in-nangarhar/>

Additionally, the withholding of the evidence, even to their own media, has made everyone question the actual series of events in the after-math of the Balakot air strike. No matter how much jingoism someone tries to pump into an already charged environment, the proof of the attack will bring structure to the actual conversation, which the Indian government refuses to allow.

In recent days, Pakistan has begun to believe that tensions have cooled between both nations since Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, stepped in to mediate. Rather, the tensions have taken on an additional flavor.

First, the military option continues to hang over Pakistan, as India has not backed away from their previously stated positions. On the 9th of March, a Union leader stated the potential for another surgical strike. Second, diplomatic options have also been added. With Pakistan suddenly taking on banned groups, *after the delivery* of the Indian dossier, the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) increased pressure on stopping terrorist financing, and US involvement, clearly shows that Pakistan has been pushed to act.

Understandably, the world community doesn't want any kind of war between India and Pakistan, as it would have a disastrous effect globally. With on-going wars in Iraq, Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan, a potential flare-up between India and Pakistan could bring more problems than solutions for the global community. Regardless of the global position, India continues to ramp up their instigations in their media, political statements and government briefing, repeating the same unsubstantiated statements with the belief they will be considered truth if repeated enough times. Their war drums have not been calmed or silenced, while Pakistan continues to speak of peace and maintain a position of self-defense. In fact, Aroon Purie, Editor-in-Chief of the India Today Group, even suggested more aggressive attacks against Pakistan, at the India Today Conclave 2019:

*"Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has claimed that he would immediately act if India provides actionable intelligence on the Pulwama attack. If Imran doesn't do so, it would justify any strong action that Prime Minister Modi takes in the coming days against terror groups, including Jaish, that Pakistan harbors."*¹³

Purie, a close confidante of Modi, also stated, at the same event:

"Frankly, we cannot win with Pakistan. And actually, we don't need too. We need to know how to manage them. What we need is to neutralize their terrorist networks and adopt a policy of, what experts call, 'mowing the grass,' meaning don't let their terrorist networks grow.... We need to apply sustained pressure, and the keyword is sustained,

¹³ "Full text of Aroon Purie's address at India Today Conclave 2019," India Today Web Desk, March 01, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/full-text-of-aroon-purie-s-address-at-india-today-conclave-2019-1467788-2019-03-01>

through all possible avenues, diplomatic, economic, and, if necessary, sub-conventional warfare. This is the long-haul, but we must do it if we are to avoid more Pulwamas. I don't think Pakistan will change his devious ways because of our strike or LoC firing."

Another clear indication that India has no intention of silencing the war drums, at least until after the election.

PAKISTAN'S OPTIONS

Since 9/11, Pakistan has been a frontline partner, whether willing or forced, in the War on Terror with the global community. It is very easy to prove that Pakistan's problems with extremism were limited to sectarianism, rather than outright terrorist acts. For many years, the United States had accused Pakistan of playing a duplicitous game by considering their own national interests before the interests of the foreign power. While many don't remember the history, after Pakistan's core involvement in Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion of the 1980s, Pakistan was thanked with sanctions and the Pressler Amendment¹⁴, which banned economic and military assistance to Pakistan unless the President certified annually that Pakistan does not possess a nuclear explosive device and that the proposed United States assistance program will reduce significantly the risk that Pakistan will possess a nuclear device. This restriction was sidelined by President George W. Bush to provide Pakistan with the military hardware and assistance to be able to support the US/ISAF campaign on both sides of the Afghanistan border.

While the US would not consider a similar strike inside Pakistan, India doesn't hold the same values or interests. As a matter of fact, India would rather wage a conventional war with Pakistan, no matter the loss to the India state, just to further affirm their narrative of Pakistan being an exporter of terrorism to India.

As with other conflict situations, Pakistan is handcuffed based on the acts of the aggressor. The options that are left open to Pakistan are very limited, and in some cases, extremely aggressive, with the potential to escalate the conflict to a point of no return. Thus, as a nation, Pakistan must make the best decision for its national interest.

As a nation, Pakistan faces four options, each analyzed in detail in this document.

¹⁴ Pakistan and the Pressler Amendment, Larry Pressler, Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Pressler

WAIT AND SEE WHAT INDIA DOES NEXT

Since the start of the conflict, Pakistan's position has been wait and see, respond rather than incite. Pakistan, more than anyone else, understands that war is not an option. It would be for these same reasons that Pakistan has kept their finger off the trigger.

Since India launched the brazen Balakot "airstrike," Pakistan has continued to offer talks and peace. Even with an Indian Air Force pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, captured as a prisoner of war (POW), Pakistan returned him to India¹⁵, simultaneously earning the respect and praise of the world, and Indian's citizens, for a "stunning diplomatic move." If Pakistan wanted to inflame the conflict, keeping a POW is not against Geneva Convention guidelines, rather Pakistan returned the pilot to his home country without harm.

It should also be noted that, after the return of their pilot to India, a massive offensive was launched across the Line of Control (LoC). Hal Turner, a far-right political commentator in New Jersey began to report the activities of the Indian Army, including:

- the use of short-range missile against civilians in Kotli, Azad Kashmir, killing 30, injuring hundreds more.
- A member of the US intelligence community confirmed that there is very heavy fighting ongoing between Pakistan and India across the Line of Control (LoC).
- India also initiated the use of 214mm Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher (MBRL) against Pakistani targets. Pakistan responded with 203mm M115 artillery shells.
- Pakistani snipers have reportedly killed multiple Indian forces at the LoC, with numerous civilian casualties on the Pakistani side.

Pakistan also decided to send their envoy back to India and continue to on-going discussions on the Kartarpur Corridor¹⁶. However, in a strange move, India has moved the discussions from New Delhi to Attari, as India is afraid of harming the incumbent Indian government's position by showing a resumption of dialogue with

¹⁵ "Pakistan returns Indian pilot downed over Kashmir," The Telegraph, March 01 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/03/01/pakistan-returns-indian-pilot-downed-kashmir/>

¹⁶ "Kartarpur Corridor talks to take place at Attari-Wagah border on March 14," The Indian Express, March 06, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/kartarpur-corridor-talks-to-take-place-at-attari-wagah-border-on-march-14/>

Pakistan¹⁷ on any issue. While tensions are still high. India has implied that the talks will only last for the day, and will be held in a room 100 meters from Azadi Gate at the Wagha border.

The selection of Attari for talks is unusual because it is typically where military officials meet, including the Directors General – Military Operations (DGMOs), Pakistan Rangers and Indian Border Security Force (BSF).

Interestingly, Attari was also where the 1998 Kargil withdrawal was finalized. It must be understood that Pakistan is not interested in waging war against India, but India is dead set on attempting to “teach Pakistan a lesson,” as Sambit Patra said himself:

“Pakistan thought it could perpetuate terrorism and go unabated. For the first time, not a punitive measure, but a pre-emptive mission. Yes, if you plan terrorism across the length and breadth of this country, we are not going to leave you.... And for domestic consumption, F-16s were sent. A MiG-21 Bison blows the F-16 of Pakistan. So just imagine, with hands tied, this is what India could do to Pakistan, with open hands, how India would teach a lesson to Pakistan?”¹⁸

Some Indians, specifically BJP party members, have tried to paint those, in India, that question the Modi narrative as traitors and propagating Pakistan’s narrative in India, as said by Piyush Goyal, Minister for Railways:

“Are you part of this little narrative that is trying to belittle our armed forces? Are any of you subscribing to what Rahul Kanwal is saying? Trying to belittle our Indian armed forces. Trying to prove that they are lying? Is that what your interest is, Rahul? I wonder where this world, where this country is going, when you are having this thinking that you are going to accept what Pakistan says. And the colleagues of yours are going to propagate the Pakistan theory in India? I think it’s a matter of shame.”¹⁹

Arun Jaitley, Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, said, at the India Today Conclave 2019:

¹⁷ “Kartarpur talks have nothing to do with dialogue with Pakistan, says Centre,” NDTV, March 09, 2019, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/kartarpur-talks-nothing-to-do-with-resumption-of-dialogue-centre-2005221>

¹⁸ “Is BJP war ready? Kiren Rijju & Sambit Patra exclusive at India Today Conclave 2019,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBXo0rWOZ-0>

¹⁹ “World recognizes strength, not weak leadership: Piyush Goyal at India Today Conclave 2019,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTdUSxhtGiA>

*"Those asking for operational details and photos are those who are upset that Balakot succeeded."*²⁰

India's Air Chief, Birender Singh Dhanoa, while claiming that it is an "ongoing operation," has attempted to paint Pakistan's response as proof that their airstrike was successful, which has been discussed throughout this document. His statement that *"if the attack was unsuccessful, why would Pakistan respond?"*²¹

The Air Chief seems to forget the rules of engagement.

If Indian fighter jets had entered Pakistani airspace mistakenly, there would not have been a shot fired. Rather, when Indian Air Force fighter jets enter Pakistan to carry out an attack, drop 1000 kilograms of bombs and attempt to leave our airspace, they will be engaged and shot down, as was the case, whether the mission was successful or not.

As stated previously in this briefing paper, India halted a planned missile strike against Pakistani cities after Pakistan's military informed India that they knew about the planned attack and would respond with three times the force²². The Pakistan Navy has on two occasions stopped Indian Navy vessels, one being a supposed nuclear submarine, from entering Pakistan's waters.²³

Pakistan also boycotted the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) Foreign Ministers meeting because India's Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj, was invited as a guest of honor.²⁴ The OIC declared India's actions in Indian-occupied Kashmir as "state-sponsored terrorism," which India's Foreign Minister refuted with the claim that "Kashmir is an internal matter for India and Pakistan," showing that India had no

²⁰ "Arun Jaitley exclusive at Conclave 2019 : Air strikes: Pros & cons of breaking Pak Impasse," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlxVSNU3krk>

²¹ "Indian Air Force not in a position to count casualties, air chief marshal says on Balakot air strike," DAWN, March 04, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1467586/air-force-not-in-a-position-to-count-casualties-air-chief-marshal-says-on-balakot-air-strike>

²² "India plotted dangerous attack with Israeli help," Meher Bokhari, DAWN, March 05, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1467659>

²³ "Pakistan Navy detects Indian submarine, foils intrusion into its waters," GEO News, March 05, 2019, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/230065-pakistan-navy-detects-indian-submarine-prevents-it-from-entering-pakistani-waters>

²⁴ "Pakistani minister boycotts OIC meeting in Abu Dhabi over Indian presence," Reuters, Khaleej Times, March 01, 2019, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/230065-pakistan-navy-detects-indian-submarine-prevents-it-from-entering-pakistani-waters>

intention of taking dictation from anyone on Kashmir, as they have shown in the past.²⁵

Pakistan has successfully brought the US, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and China into the conversation with India so that sanity will prevail and war can be averted. According to the statement from Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, the US played a pivotal role in decreasing tensions between both nations.²⁶

Simultaneously, Imran Khan's government launched a massive crackdown against banned organizations in Pakistan, seizing assets and arresting leadership.²⁷ The Indian media reported it as "protective custody."²⁸

If Prime Minister Imran Khan's actions are a response to the Indian dossier, it shows that he was true to his statement that he would act, if provided with actionable intelligence. The question that emerges is what actionable intelligence was provided in this dossier that was never presented to Pakistan previously.

It should be clear that in response to India's aggression and India's movement of military hardware and forces to the Line of Control, Pakistan has also moved military hardware and forces from the Afghanistan border, in anticipation of the potential Indian next foray. This does present a potential problem, as Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, even after fencing, is still quite porous and terrorists can slip through with the assistance of local on the Pakistan side of the border.

During the last round of saber-rattling, while most analysts were looking to the Eastern border, CommandEleven analysts were predicting a higher potential attack from the Western border with Afghanistan, as India has regularly shown they have no issues with using proxy warfare or terrorism against Pakistan.

²⁵ "OIC resolution on Kashmir a slap on India's face: Congress," Swati Mathur, India Times, March 03, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/oic-resolution-on-kashmir-a-slap-on-indias-face-congress/articleshow/68245881.cms>

²⁶ "US defused Pak-India tension," Shafqat Ali, The Nation, March 07, 2019, <https://nation.com.pk/07-Mar-2019/us-defused-pak-india-tension>

²⁷ "Pakistan launches major crackdown on extremist groups," Mehreen Zahra-Malik & Michael Safi, The Guardian, March 08, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/08/pakistan-launches-major-crackdown-extremist-groups-kashmir>

²⁸ "Pakistan's crackdown on terror groups an 'eyewash'. Says US news website," Hindustan Times, March 07, 2019, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pakistan-s-crackdown-on-terror-groups-an-eyewash-says-us-news-website/story-ASvFBXpzOYoA2ahMK6aoWP.html>

In July 2018, Manohar Parrikar, former Indian Defense Minister, famously stated – *"terrorists have to be neutralized only through terrorists (kante se kanta nikaina),"*²⁹ which was met with harsh criticism from Pakistan's Advisor on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz:

*"It must be the first time that a Minister of an elected government openly advocates the use of terrorism in another country on the pretext of preventing terrorism from that country or its non-state actors (NSA)."*³⁰

As stated previously, Pakistan is not unaccustomed to terrorism being used by neighbors. Pakistan has seen Afghanistan's soil used against Pakistan since 2007, even with all the assurances provided by Presidents Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani, respectively, that Afghanistan's soil would not be used against Pakistan³¹. It has been proven repeatedly that Afghanistan's intelligence organization, NDS, fully supported and cooperated with Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) leadership against Pakistan, even to the point of providing safe haven, medical treatment and weapons to their fighters. It has also been suggested by former US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel³² that India has participated in the training and financing of Tehrik-e-Taliban in Afghanistan, and used terrorism against Pakistan.³³

²⁹ "Pakistan expresses concern over Manohar Parrikar's remarks on terrorism," India Times, July 11, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/pakistan-expresses-concern-over-manohar-parrikars-remarks-on-terrorism/articleshow/47404779.cms>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Karzai opposes use of Afghan soil in others' conflicts," Radio Free Europe, July 13, 2008, https://www.rferl.org/a/Afghan_President_Hails_Relations_With_Iran_US/1183464.html

³² "Chuck Hagel criticized for India-Afghanistan remarks," Dean Nelson, The Telegraph, February 27, 2013, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/9897707/Chuck-Hagel-criticised-for-India-Afghanistan-remarks.html>

³³ "India financed problems for Pakistan in Afghanistan, says US defence secretary nominee Chuck Hagel," India Times, February 26, 2013, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-financed-problems-for-Pak-in-Afghanistan-says-US-defence-secretary-nominee-Chuck-Hagel/articleshow/18694475.cms>

INITIATE HOSTILE ACTION AGAINST INDIAN ASSETS

Pakistan does hold a first-strike capability, but if it chooses to use that first strike is the question for every member of Pakistan's military and political leadership.

Pakistan could move troops and fully engage with Indian forces across the LoC, but that would lead to an escalation that the world is not ready to accept. While the international community is working to decrease the escalation between both countries, Pakistan taking a first strike option on the LoC, or mainland India, would further inflame the situation and present both nations with no options outside conventional war, and effectively isolate Pakistan internationally at a time when the country needs international support.

Pakistan could also take a very bold step and execute Indian spy Commander Kulbhashan Jadhav³⁴, while the case is on-going in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The execution of a confessed spy is not a violation of the Geneva Convention, nor is it a violation of the agreement revised in 2008 between India and Pakistan. For Pakistan, this is a step that should have been taken long before now. When Commander Kulbhashan Jadhav entered Pakistan on a fake Indian passport (Hussain Mubarak Patel), orchestrated terror attacks in Balochistan, Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and provided material support to terrorist organizations³⁵, he violated every international and domestic law. India's pursuit of the case in the ICJ demonstrates India's belief that they are above reproach, but Pakistan should be held to different standards than them.

In other words, *kante se kanta nikalna*.

The last, and probably, most viable option for Pakistan would be sending the Pakistan Air Force into Afghanistan to neutralize terror group leadership and their camps across the border. The Pakistan Army has been shelling terror camps inside Afghanistan since the end of Operation Zarb-e-Azb. While Pakistan has been able to neutralize and contain the TTP, the potential of another attack coming across the border is always a real threat that Pakistan's security establishment is always contending. Additionally, the TTP has left numerous sleeper cells inside Pakistan that are slowly being dismantled and neutralized through intelligence-based operations (IBOs) throughout the country. Their largest strongholds were in the metropolitan city of Karachi and across FATA, where the military continues to face attacks from TTP loyalists.

³⁴ "Kulbhushan Jadhev," Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kulbhushan_Jadhav

³⁵ "Transcript of RAW agent Kulbhushan's confessional statement," DAWN, March 30, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1248786>

If Pakistan chooses to follow the potential line of attacking terror groups in Afghanistan, it could become a sliver lining. Understanding that Afghanistan has been the staging ground for attacks in KPK and Balochistan, with the insurgent groups also maintaining camps alongside the terror groups, it could bring peace to Pakistan's troubled regions. Afghanistan's Nuristan, Kunar and Paktia provinces have been home to all the terror groups that wage war against Pakistan. By taking firm action against those groups, Pakistan would eliminate the Indian proxy agents and bring long-term peace to the nation.

While we have seen the Afghan Taliban taking a tougher stand against foreign fighters inside Afghanistan, with numerous attacks and assassinations of TTP, Islamic State – Khorasan (ISKP) and Lashkar-e-Islam leadership and camps, the potential of an attack from the Afghanistan side is significantly higher than war from India.

It should be understood that Pakistan, who has already suffered almost a decade of terrorism on its soil, has proven its ability to swiftly deal with those who attempt to destabilize the country.

For Pakistan, the greatest concern is where the next attack will come from. Whether the Indian or the Afghanistan border, the victims are guaranteed to be civilians, especially if the attack is carried out through proxy organizations, like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or any of their affiliates.

But Pakistan also needs to exercise extreme caution. If the national security agencies begin to believe that supporting separatist groups inside India is an option, this would be the worse choice for the country, as a whole.

In 1988, Lt. General Hamid Gul met with then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and advocated a strategy to support the Khalistan movement³⁶, a Sikh nationalist movement, in India. General Gul's belief was this strategy was the only way to preempt a fresh Indian threat to Pakistan's territorial integrity. Bhutto disagreed with his views and asked him to stop playing this "card." General Gul reportedly told the Prime Minister – *"Madam Prime Minister, keeping Indian Punjab destabilized is equivalent... to the Pakistan Army... having an extra division at no cost to the taxpayers."*³⁷

Prior to the start of the Restoration of the Judiciary Movement, Aitzaz Ahsan handed over a list of Sikh fighters to the Indian government, giving significant advantage to India in conquering the Golden Temple, and cleansing the whole Sikh movement

³⁶ "A leaf from history: The rise and fall of the Khalistan movement," Shaikh Aziz, DAWN, July 12, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1193181>

³⁷ "Benazir Bhutto conspired against Pakistan & ISI by leaking secret information to Rajiv Gandhi," October 05, 2016, <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/benazir-bhutto-conspired-against-pakistan-isi-by-leaking-secret-information-to-rajiv-gandhi-retros.453595/>

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from throughout Punjab and Canada, the then stronghold of the movement, to end the strength of the movement.

Pakistan can't afford to have a similar situation occur again, thus, it is not feasible to support any of India's internal separatist groups.

INDIAN ATTACKS TO SWAY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA AGAINST PAKISTAN

For many, Pakistan has already achieved a public relations coup against an over-excited Indian media. However, Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government must understand that the perceived victory can be overturned with one wrong or misplaced statement.

Pakistan's media and military have done an impressive job in controlling the narrative since the morning of the Indian attack, when ISPR announced on social media that Indian had *failed* to bomb Pakistani targets, along with pictures of craters and broken trees in a forest. Before the Indian Defense Ministry could announce the attack on a supposed JeM camp inside Pakistan, people were questioning whether Indian bombs missed their targets, whether the claimed number of terrorists had been killed, and if the mission had actually been a success.

Pakistan arranged a visit for local and international media to the supposed target of the IAF in Balakot, and Reuters³⁸, the New York Times³⁹ and al-Jazeera⁴⁰ began reporting that there were no signs of casualties in the so-called terrorist camps, supporting Pakistan's narrative.

While Pakistan has won the public relations battle in this conflict, they are losing internationally on numerous others.

From their failure to achieve the requirements that FATF had set to be removed from the 'grey list' to growing international concern that Pakistan can't control militant groups operating from its soil could create another crisis with India, which could result in conventional war, Pakistan is being boxed into a corner with manufactured crises and orchestrated insurgencies.

Additionally, the United States, United Kingdom and France has proposed the UN Security Council add Masood Azhar, the Jaish-e-Mohammad chief, to the UN

³⁸ "What happened at Balakot? Satellite images reviewed by Reuters tell a different story," India Times, March 06, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/what-happened-at-balakot-satellite-images-reviewed-by-reuters-tell-a-different-story/articleshow/68281337.cms>

³⁹ "The India-Pakistan Conflict was a parade of lies," Farhad Manjoo, The New York Times, March 06, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/06/opinion/india-pakistan-news.html>

⁴⁰ "Images show madrasa buildings standing after Indian attack claim," al-Jazeera, March 06, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/03/images-show-madrasa-buildings-standing-indian-attack-claim-190306033806638.html>

blacklist⁴¹, another long-term demand of the Indian government, which Indian media reports Pakistan won't oppose.⁴²

Pakistan needs to take bold and aggressive steps, but they need to simultaneously exercise caution to avoid backlash both domestically, in terms of terror attacks, and internationally with potential sanctions and blacklisting.

The Prime Minister's first step in cracking down on banned organizations⁴³ operating in Pakistan, including jihadi groups and their financing wings, should have been taken without the backdrop of the Indian dossier on jihadi groups operating in Pakistan. The impression the public, especially the international community, will hold is Pakistan's hand was forced to act in return for a de-escalation of tensions with India. Whether actually the case or not, the impression is created that Pakistan can be handled.

The government must also be careful in how it handles internal matters, especially in areas like FATA and Balochistan, as they will be used to turn public opinion against Pakistan, and ramp up potential hostile activities against the country. India will use all their proxy agents to further dirty Pakistan's international reputation, minimizing Pakistan's initiatives and agenda in the global diaspora.

Pakistan should expect an uptick across the following groups and areas, due to the hostility and electioneering in India:

Manzoor Pashteen's Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) will become more active with statements against the Pakistan Army. He will attempt to incite Pashtuns to disrespect, even physically or verbally attack, Pakistan Army soldiers and officers. Pashteen's rhetoric has always been clear, as has his agenda against Pakistan's armed forces. He is used international funding and organizations to turn himself into a "*hero for the cause*," where there is no cause. His claims of abuse and disrespect of Pashtuns, specifically women, are cross-sections during times when security risks were high and the TTP were donning burkas to evade capture by Pakistan's security

⁴¹ "US, UK, France bring fresh proposal for UNSC ban on Jaish chief Masood Azhar," India Times, February 28, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/us-uk-france-bring-fresh-proposal-for-UNSC-ban-on-jaish-chief-masood-azhar/articleshow/68194345.cms>

⁴² "Pakistan may not oppose move to list Masood Azhar in UN Security Council terror list: Report," Hindustan Times, March 03, 2019. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pakistan-may-not-oppose-move-to-list-masood-azhar-in-un-security-council-terror-list-report/story-Cmf6u5YLbeeCsMfOIXN2HJ.html>

⁴³ "Pakistan cracks down on banned outfits, takes 44 members into custody," Haider Ali, Daily Pakistan, March 05, 2019, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/pakistan-cracks-down-on-banned-outfits-takes-44-members-into-custody/>

agencies⁴⁴ and carry out attacks⁴⁵. Pashteen, however, does not provide any reasons for why these same terrorists were given safe haven in FATA and allowed to use innocent civilians as human shields for their homes.

This same message was also shared in a recent audio message from Mufti Noor Wali Mehsud, the TTP Amir, where he called for all Pashtuns, Punjabis, Balochis and Sindhis to band together against the "*na pak army*" (unclean army) rule over Pakistan. The TTP Amir also said that they do not accept democracy, the Constitution of Pakistan or the judiciary of the nation, because they all answer to the Pakistan Army.

Pakistan should keep a close eye on the Afghanistan border for the potential of a terrorist attack. There has been a significant uptick in threat alerts on Afghanistan-based terror groups organizing to attack Pakistan in Quetta, Peshawar, FATA and Swat. **CommandEleven** receives numerous alerts of terrorist movement and meetings close to the Pakistan border. These alerts all show a potential threat of a massive round of terrorist attacks against the Pakistan military, provincial police, judiciary and government officials.

There has been an increase in threat alerts of a potential attack on Pakistan Air Force installations in an attempt to destroy, or hijack, a plane. Many will recall the brazen attack on PNS Mehran⁴⁶ in Karachi, where the singular target was the two American P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft. 18 military personnel embraced martyrdom in the attack. The team that attacks the PAF installation will be very well trained, strong military coordination and clearly defined roles. **CommandEleven** has intelligence from sources inside Afghanistan that terrorists are being trained on par with Pakistan's Special Services Group (SSG) in Kunar and Nuristan. They have also been given specialized training in tactics and explosives for attacks within Pakistan.

Additionally, potential attacks or assassination attempts against leaders of jihadi groups cannot be ruled out. India is attempting to define new rules of engagement with Pakistan, which will include a departure from strategic restraint. The India's new normal with Pakistan means immediate retribution for any attack they feel has Pakistan's fingerprints. Here Pakistan will be faced with a significant international problem.

⁴⁴ "al-Qaeda's Great Escape: The Military and the Media on Terror's Trail," Phillip Smucker, Potomac Books, Inc, May 2014,

⁴⁵ "Gunmen wearing burqas storm Pakistan university, at least 9 killed," Imtiaz Ahmad, Hindustan Times, December 01, 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/gunmen-attack-peshawar-agriculture-college-in-pakistan-5-injured/story-sng3OKCSEo2qOBz3FRIVUN.html>

⁴⁶ "PNS Mehran attack," Wikipedia page, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PNS_Mehran_attack

If Pakistan provides security to the leaders of specific madrassas and jihadi groups, they will look like they are protecting their military assets from assassination or capture. If Pakistan does not provide additional security and one of the individuals mentioned above is assassinated, Pakistan will be faced with sectarian violence within its own borders.

A potential attack on airports can't be ignored. While an airport attack will not be on the level of Quaid-e-Azam International Airport⁴⁷, Pakistan should expect a rocket launcher, grenade or vehicle-born IED attack on Peshawar, Quetta, or Multan airports, with the highest potential being Peshawar and Quetta due to their proximity to the Afghanistan border.

Pakistan's security forces, military and police should be placed on high-alert for the potential of kidnappings and assassinations. It is possible that India will use its proxy organizations to attempt to kidnap Pakistan Army officers and smuggle them into India to be used for leverage at a later time. As most analysts recall, Lt. Colonel Mohammad Habib Zahir (Retired)⁴⁸ being lured to Nepal and then kidnapped by Indian intelligence officers. Many believe he is being held for a prisoner swap with India's Commander Kulbhashan Yadhev, if the ICJ case fails to garner his freedom. India refused to assist Pakistan in finding the retired Colonel.⁴⁹

Karachi, while being Pakistan's largest city, financial and commercial hub, is a regular target for smaller terror groups attempting to make a reputation. While the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) has been largely dismantled by the Sindh Rangers, Altaf Hussain cannot be ignored due to his influence over segments of the Muhajir community, but his force is no more.

Similarly, in February, Hizbul Ahrar announced Operation Shamzai with reference to the upcoming Pakistan Super League (PSL) in Karachi. Hizbul Ahrar has announced that, while PSL matches themselves are not a target, the security forces that guard them are. Hizbul Ahrar recently executed one police officer and injured three others in a gun attack in Orangi Town, Karachi.

⁴⁷ "2014 Jinnah International Airport attack," Wikipedia page,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Jinnah_International_Airport_attack

⁴⁸ "Col. Habib was kidnapped by Indian RAW to secure Kulbhashan's release, security officials confirm," Haider Ali, Daily Pakistan, April 19, 2017, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/col-habib-was-kidnapped-by-indian-raw-to-secure-kulbhushans-release-security-officials-confirm/>

⁴⁹ "India refuses to help Pakistan find officer who went missing in Nepal," Nausheen Yusuf, GEO News, September 13, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/158002-india-refuses-to-help-pakistan-find-officer-who-went-missing-in-nepal>

The reason that these items are specifically identified is because they will achieve India's objectives of demonstrating Pakistan exports terrorism, protects terrorists and cannot protect their own citizens from the terrorists they have created as state policy.

At **CommandEleven**, we know many of the groups we've identified are operating at the behest of the Indian government, India's RAW or Afghanistan's NDS, and these three organizations have been working to destabilize Pakistan since the start of the War on Terror through terrorism and insurgencies.

WAGE A TRUE INFORMATION WAR

While Pakistan may have won the current conflict from a public relations point of view, it is still well behind India in its capability to fight an all-out information war. India has progressed significantly in its ability to manufacture fake news, disseminate it through fake accounts and leverage it to smear opposition candidates and nation-states. Additionally, India, specifically the BJP, has mastered the ability to leverage India's 1.14 billion mobile phone connections, 460 million internet users, 300 million smartphones and 200 million WhatsApp users with fake news, disinformation, texts, audio, video, graphics and cartoons to support the Indian narrative both domestically and internationally.

CommandEleven firmly believes that Israel is providing significant assistance in raising India's technological capabilities. It is well known that Israel is a leader in the manufacture and export of surveillance products used against civilians. Well-placed sources have told CommandEleven of RAW's interest in acquiring Israeli social media monitoring software, phone interception tools, the recording of wireless and land communications, decrypting messages, espionage equipment and mass surveillance technologies. CommandEleven also believes that the Israeli Hasbara has also been shared with and taught to India's decision makers.

For those unfamiliar with Hasbara, a Hebrew word meaning explanation, it is a form of propaganda aimed at an international audience primarily. It is meant to influence the conversation in a way that positively portrays one nation's, in this case Israel, political moves and policies, including actions undertaken in the past. Hasbara can also be used to negatively portray anyone else. Hasbara is so intrinsic to the Israeli narrative that Prime Minister Netanyahu formed a Hasbara Ministry for the first time, including a situation room, which operates in five languages, and a new media (digital media) team that can reach 100,000 volunteers on social media networks, as well as many bloggers, with any changes in messaging or activities.

Hasbara links information warfare to strategic efforts of the state:

- to bolster the unity of the home front
- ensure the support of allies
- disrupt efforts to organize hostile coalitions and campaigns
- determine the way issues are defined by the media, the intelligentsia, and social networks
- establish the parameters of politically correct discourse
- delegitimize both critics and their arguments
- and shape the common understanding and interpretation of the results of international negotiations.

Hasbara is multifaceted and well-adapted to the digital age, as it uses the public-private partnership model to implement its information strategy with committed volunteers.

If we look at Indian activists and media since Modi became Prime Minister, it is clear that there has been a similar shift in thinking in New Delhi.

Hasbara, much like India, targets political elites, opinion makers and the public simultaneously. It includes traditional advocacy efforts, as well as general appeals made through mass media, and it is carried out by government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), lobbying groups, private citizens, students, journalists and bloggers.

For Pakistan to be able to wage information war against India, it would require a massive shift in thinking in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Keeping that dynamic shift in mind, Pakistan would need to expand its capabilities on the digital media front. The expansion of digital media is specifically to counter the Indian activists, who are being provided disinformation by the Indian state.

An example of India's disinformation came after Pakistan's retaliatory incursion into Indian-Occupied Kashmir, New Delhi claimed the IAF shot down a Pakistani F-16⁵⁰. For those who understand the operations of an F-16 and Pakistan's tenuous relationship with US defence contractors, know this is an impossibility. However, due to India's vociferous claims, both Lockheed Martin, the manufacturer of the F-16, and the United States government took notice⁵¹. Bellingcat⁵², an internationally respected investigative publication, using open source intelligence from both India and Pakistan, categorically refuted the India claim based on photos of the wreckage and markings on the downed plane. Bellingcat stated that the fighter jet in the photos were more likely the downed Indian MiG-21 Bison. The New York Times called the Indian Air Force vintage⁵³, which repeating the impossibility of the F-16 story. PAF officials confirmed to The New York Times and CNN that the JF-17 Thunder was used

⁵⁰ "No proof India shot down Pakistan F-16," Saikat Datta, Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, Asia Times, March 05, 2019, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/03/article/no-proof-india-shot-down-pakistan-f-16/>

⁵¹ "Washington wants to know if Pakistan used US-built jets to down Indian warplane," Drazen Jorgic, Fayaz Bukhari, March 03, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-usa-pakistan/washington-wants-to-know-if-pakistan-used-u-s-built-jets-to-down-indian-warplane-idUSKCN1QK0AR>

⁵² "Falcon vs. Bison: Verifying a MiG-21 Wreck," Veli-Pekka Kivimaki, Bellingcat, March 02, 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2019/03/02/falcon-vs-bison-verifying-a-mig-21-wreck/>

⁵³ "After India loses dogfight to Pakistan, questions arise about its 'vintage' military," Maria Abi-Habib, The New York Times, March 03, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/03/world/asia/india-military-united-states-china.html>

in the combat operation, not a F-16. Even India's claim of "Wing Commander Shahzaz Ud Din" being lynched⁵⁴ were debunked quickly.⁵⁵

But investigations and facts don't deter the Indian disinformation machine, who enlisted downed MiG-21 Bison pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who claimed that he had fired the R-73 air-to-air missile that downed the F-16 during a fierce dogfight⁵⁶. India also claimed parts of an AMRAAM missile, which is only carried by F-16 aircraft in the Pakistan Air Force, were recovered from the site. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Raveesh Kumar also claimed that India had eyewitness accounts and electronic evidence to prove their claims, although no evidence has been provided to Pakistan, India's domestic media outlets or the international media outlets, who have rubbished the claim.

Pakistan needs to immediately implement the following steps to become more responsive to the disinformation and media manufacturing from Indian attempts to corner Pakistan:

- Establishment of an Information Warfare division under either the Pakistan Army or the federal government. This division must be apolitical and operate only to defend the image of Pakistan against false claims, while disseminating information that is factually correct to better control the national narrative. This Information Warfare division must include a Counter Intelligence Cell, that will work closely with the Pakistan military to refute any manufactured claims of attacks.
- Initiation of social media monitoring tools that include sentiment analysis and keyword monitoring. Pakistan must also engage with Facebook, twitter and YouTube to immediately remove fake news from the social media platforms to control the spread of manufactured information without credible sources and citations. This is not an impossibility because both Facebook and twitter have already taken measures to remove unsupported articles from their platforms. Pakistan only needs to develop a working relationship with all three platforms to avoid any negative media. As a point of fact, India was able to remove 18 videos of captured Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman being tortured

⁵⁴ "Why claims about the PAF pilot's lynching don't add up," Prateek Goyal, NewsLaundry, March 05, 2019, <https://www.newsLaundry.com/2019/03/05/why-claims-about-the-paf-pilots-lynching-dont-add-up>

⁵⁵ "The mysterious tale of PAF Wing Commander Shahzaz Ud Din," Archis Chowdhury, BOOM, March 05, 2019, <https://www.boomlive.in/the-mysterious-tale-of-paf-wing-commander-shahzaz-ud-din/>

⁵⁶ "Wing Commander Abhinandan-piloted MiG-21 Bison shot down Pak F-16l have electronic evidence: MEA," India Times, March 11, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/wing-commander-abhinandan-piloted-mig-21-bison-shot-down-pak-f-16-have-electronic-evidence-mea/articleshow/68334783.cms>

and beaten by local villagers when he was first downed in Pakistan-administered Kashmir.⁵⁷

- Work closely with "friendly" media outlets inside Pakistan that can be activated to spread Pakistan's narrative, both during peace and war times. Friendly media outlets are more likely to present the pro-Pakistan image, whereas the hostile domestic media outlets are more likely to provide questionable coverage and information that clouds or confuses the domestic population. These hostile outlets have already been identified, as well as individual journalists.
- Implement a hands-off policy with hostile journalists. When the military is active in attempting to develop a narrative, much like India's military, certain Pakistani journalists paint the military as "controlling the media," rather than controlling the narrative. Prime among these hostile journalists are Taha Siddiqui, who fled the country to Paris, after falsely claiming that 16 ISI operatives attempted to kidnap him and he escaped without harm. Taha Siddiqui earned the moniker "Jason Bourne" after the story became public, but the damage to Pakistan's military, which was the actual objective of the manufactured story, was done.
- Pakistan needs to work closer with its own regulatory agencies to draft and implement a code of conduct for the media. This has been in discussion for a number of years, with many media outlets refusing to accept a government drafted code, but have made no attempts themselves to draft a code they will follow. This lack of action from detractors has proven that the Pakistan media environment will continue to be muddled by domestic influence operators.
- Pakistan also needs to develop better relations with international media outlets, such as The New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian, The Los Angeles Time and Chicago Tribune, to name a few. Both of these newspapers take a hard stand on Pakistan because they are not given access to the information and individuals they need for their articles. Pakistan's domestic journalists have also made similar claims about Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) division.
- **CommandEleven**, has on numerous occasions, advised the Pakistan military to appoint a spokesperson who is not in uniform and has no military background to be the face of the Pakistan military to the media. The reason for such an

⁵⁷ "YouTube caters to IT Min request, removes 11 video links of IAF Wing Commander Abhinandan," India Times, March 01, 2019,

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/youtube-caters-to-it-min-request-removes-11-video-links-of-iaf-wing-commander-abhinandan/articleshow/68212713.cms>

appointment is to provide the media with a 24/7 team that can answer their questions, provide information and maintain relationships that the military is unable to cater. If Pakistan would consider how other nations handle the media, it would become clear that uniformed personnel are only put before the media to provide operational details and answer questions related to the military aspect, whereas the spokesperson maintains the relationships with the media outlets, making themselves available for interviews and comments, as and when needed.

- While Pakistan cannot achieve a complete Hasbara model within its current structure, it needs to develop a quick response strategy, including software tools, to be able to identify and respond to negative articles and commentaries that appear in the international media. This means being able to identify each negative article, disseminate it to a team of volunteers and staff to respond through blogs, newspaper articles and posted comments on the original articles.

Pakistan has long been targeted for following their national interest over the interests of foreign nations, US, India and Afghanistan included, but with a strong information warfare division, Pakistan's response to accusations and manufactured news will decrease significantly. Pakistan needs to understand that this road is a difficult climb and it will need to show patience and perseverance to achieve its own short- and long-term objectives.

RECALLING THE POST-URI "SURGICAL STRIKE"

When considering the Balakot "surgical strike," it is very easy to draw similarities to the 2016 Indian "surgical strike."⁵⁸ CommandEleven is presenting these similarities to establish a nature of behavior by the Indian government, whether it is BJP or Congress, to mislead and misinform both their own citizens and the international community.

India's problems with so-called surgical strikes started in September 2016, when they launched a supposed surgical strike against "militant launch pads" across the Line of Control in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. As with the Balakot strike, footage of the attacks was not shared with the domestic media until June 2018, almost two years later.

Indian officials claim that three to four team of 70-80 soldiers crossed the LoC at multiple entry points shortly after midnight Indian Standard Time, travelling 1-3 kilometers to their target, where the teams destroyed the terrorist camps with hand grenades and 84mm rocket launchers⁵⁹. They claim that they suffered one casualty when a soldier stepped on a land mine. India also stated that it also attacked "those who are trying to support them," indicating that they attacked Pakistani soldiers as well. The government briefed opposition parties, but did not disclose operational details.

While Pakistan accepted the claim of Indian troops crossing the LoC, but had only skirmished with Pakistan troops and were pushed back. Pakistan stated the martyrdom of two Pakistani soldiers and nine injuries. Pakistan also stated that eight Indian soldiers have been killed and one captured.

Days prior to the "surgical strike," four militants had attacked the Indian Army at Uri, killing 19 soldiers. India had also accused Jaish-e-Mohammad of carrying out the attack. On the 19th of September, India said they have "displayed great restraint in the wake of the attack, but reserved the right to respond at the time and place of our own choosing."

Interestingly, the Indian claims were quite similar to the claims they are making today after another supposed "surgical strike" inside Pakistan. After Uri, *The Guardian UK* claimed that India's patience had worn out due to Pakistan's inaction in curbing the

⁵⁸ "4 hours, choppers and 38 kills: How India avenged the Uri Attack," July 12, 2018, India Times, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/army-conducted-surgical-strikes-on-terror-launch-pads-on-loc-significant-casualties-caused-dgmo/articleshow/54579855.cms>

⁵⁹ "Inside the surgical strike: Choppers on standby, 70-80 soldiers," Sushant Singh, The Indian Express, October 01, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/surgical-strikes-india-pakistan-loc-jammu-and-kashmir-indian-army-3059059/>

activities of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad⁶⁰. On the 21st September, India gave Abdul Basit, Pakistan's High Commissioner to India, a protest letter detailing the involvement of a terrorist group in Pakistan. Pakistan claimed India provided no evidence the attack was launched from Pakistan. Khawaja Asif, then Pakistan's Minister of Defence, suggested that the Uri attack was a false flag to detract from the popular protests in India-Occupied Kashmir. Similar accusations were leveled after the Mumbai, Pathankot, and Pulwama attacks, with many claiming a false flag to achieve a different government or military objective. In this case, the accusations are to re-assure Modi, and the BJP, re-election in the Lok Sabha.

Uri the first time India used the phrase "pre-emptive mission." Lt. General Ranbar Singh, then India's Director General – Military Operations, claimed India had very credible and specific information about terrorist teams who were preparing to carry out infiltration and conduct terrorist attacks in Indian-Occupied Kashmir and other cities inside India. At the time, India claimed their operation was "a pre-emptive self-defense against terrorism."

India's problem then started to spiral out of control when Pakistan denied a surgical strike occurred. Pakistan Army's ISPR stated there had only been cross-border firing. Additionally, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said the UN Observer Group in Pakistan-administered Kashmir did not observe any firing across the LoC, drawing a harsh response from the Indian envoy to the United Nations, Syed Akbaruddin, saying *"facts on the ground do not change whether somebody acknowledges or not."*⁶¹

To further strengthen Pakistan's narrative on the strike, the Pakistan Army took a group of international journalists to the location of the supposed surgical strike on 29th September, who confirmed that the "area seemed intact," but added that they were only shown what the Pakistan Army wanted to show.

In the media, analyst Sandeep Singh, writing for *The Diplomat*, said that the operation is "better characterized as a cross-border firing raid because surgical strikes involve striking deep into enemy territory, typically with air power."⁶² Shawn Snow, another analyst, questioned whether India had the capacity to conduct a

⁶⁰ "Pakistan humiliated by South Asian countries' boycott of summit," Jon Boone, Michael Safi, *The Guardian*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/28/pakistan-humiliated-by-south-asian-countries-boycott-of-summit>

⁶¹ "India snubs UN for saying didn't 'observe' LoC firing," Shubhajit Roy, *The Indian Express*, October 02, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-snubs-un-for-saying-didnt-observe-loc-firing-3060608/>

⁶² "India's Surgical Strikes: Walking into Pakistan's trap?" Sandeep Singh, *The Diplomat*, October 05, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/indias-surgical-strikes-walking-into-pakistans-trap/>

surgical strike, noting Pakistan has a very comprehensive and modern air defense system.⁶³

In the 5th October edition of *The Indian Express*, the newspaper confirmed that they had been able to corroborate the Indian account through covert interviews with local villagers. The Express clarified that the actual number of militants killed was significantly lower than India's claims of 38-50, ranging at 5-6 in Dudhnial and another 3-4 from Khairati Bridge.⁶⁴

The Economist, speaking to journalists and eyewitnesses in both India and Pakistan, put together the following account of what happened:

*"it appears that small teams of Indian commandos had slipped across the line to strike at safe houses believed to be used by Islamist guerrillas. The number killed was estimated at a dozen or fewer, rather than the 38-50 initially claimed by India. None of those killed were Pakistan Army personnel. And since the Pakistani government has no wish to inflame domestic opinion and so be forced to escalate matters, it preferred to pretend that nothing had happened."*⁶⁵

A senior Indian Home Ministry official claimed that, in the wake of the attack, at least 12 training camps belonging to Lashkar-e-Taiba, Hizbul-Mujahideen (HuM) and Jaish-e-Mohammad had been swiftly moved to crowded towns deep inside Pakistan, in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab to "minimize casualties to their assets."⁶⁶ According to the same Indian official, the camps housed around 500 militants.

Both Indian Defense Minister Parrikar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval were shown the original, unedited footage of the military raids and decided that it did not need to be released to the public. The government also clearly stated, when the opposition parties called for the release of the footage:

⁶³ "Is India capable of a surgical strike in Pakistan Controlled Kashmir?" Shaun Snow, The Diplomat, September 30, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/is-india-capable-of-a-surgical-strike-in-pakistan-controlled-kashmir/>

⁶⁴ "Surgical strikes: Bodies taken away on trucks, loud explosions, eyewitness give graphic details," Parveen Swami, The Indian Express, October 07, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/is-india-capable-of-a-surgical-strike-in-pakistan-controlled-kashmir/>

⁶⁵ "India and Pakistan: Reversing roles," The Economist, October 06, 2016, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2016/10/06/reversing-roles>

⁶⁶ "Training camps now shifted to crowded Pakistani towns," The Hindu, October 01, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/%E2%80%98Training-camps-now-shifted-to-crowded-Pakistani-towns%E2%80%99/article15419789.ece>

"The opposition should understand that difference between an overt and covert strike. And it is not incumbent on the Indian Army to release video footage every time they do their duty."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "Have proof of surgical strikes along LoC, but will not release it: Centre," DK Singh and Shishir Gupta, Hindustan Times, October 06, 2016, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/have-proof-of-surgical-strikes-along-loc-but-will-not-release-it-centre/story-d8aGCr9mQfDO0zeTjTi1YI.html>

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As Director General of CommandEleven, Khalid Muhammad takes over 26 years of international experience to guide and drive his team to deliver accurate, reliable and actionable analysis for private organizations, institutions, government policy and media outlets. He provides tactical and comprehensive analysis into terrorist and extremist groups operating in the Indian sub-continent and Middle East, including recruitment, financing, operations and warfare strategies. His experience and vision guide the growth and expansion of CommandEleven into new opportunities.

ABOUT COMMANDELEVEN

CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan's national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

Founded in 2015, CommandEleven provides situational awareness to facilitate a better understanding of the key dynamics that effect Pakistan from a national security perspective, especially in relation to terrorism, insurgencies and extremism.

CommandEleven seeks to inform and guide public policy and decision makers in government, business and military through a rigorous program of publications, conferences, digital medias, policy briefings and recommendations.

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