On the New Terrorist Attacks in Pakistan

Right after NEO commented on the terrorist act that happened on April 21, 2021, in the capital of the Pakistani province of Balochistan, Quetta, amidst the transformation of Pakistan’s foreign policy, similar reasons "arrived just in time" in order to again turn to the same generalized question.

The author is referring to two terrorist attacks committed at weekly intervals (June 23 and 29), this time in Lahore, that is, the capital of the largest province of Punjab and the second (after Karachi) in terms of population (over 11 million people) in Pakistan.

Note that most often the media attention is attracted by similar events in neighboring India, which take place mainly in the part of the territory of the former principality of Kashmir, controlled by Delhi. So, the terrorist act that happened on February 14, 2019 near the city of Pulwama in the Indian state (and since the summer of the same year, a union territory) Jammu and Kashmir gained considerable attention. A suicide driver, driving an off-road vehicle with 300 kilograms of explosives, attacked an Indian military convoy moving along the highway. That led to the death of over 40 people and about the same number were also injured. Delhi officially accused Islamabad of direct support to the terrorist group that planned this attack. In turn, these accusations gave rise to “acts of retaliation” (with the involvement of the Indian Air Force) in the form of strikes on the bases of this group on Pakistani territory. Which almost led to a full-scale war between the two de facto nuclear powers.
The terrorist attack in Pulwama took a prominent place in a series of events that accompanied the next stage of aggravation of relations between India, on the one hand, and the Pakistan-China tandem, on the other. And only at the beginning of this year, the parties took measures to reduce the tension levels. This is mainly about the ceasefire agreement concluded on February 24 by the military representatives of India and Pakistan on the so-called Line of Actual Control, which separates the Indian union territory of Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan.

A number of events that followed made it possible to (albeit cautiously) hope for further progress in establishing relations in the India-China-Pakistan triangle. In this regard, the aforementioned terrorist attacks in Lahore happened at precisely the worst time. Or, on the contrary, right on time - for certain players for whom any positive development of events in the designated triangle is rendered useless.

Of the two terrorist attacks in Lahore at the end of June, in terms of scale and some accompanying details, the first, which was, one might say, a “classic” terrorist act, deserves special attention. A car with an explosive device was left near a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Lahore, which was then (apparently remotely) detonated. As a result, 4 people were killed and over 20 (including several police officers) were injured of varying severity.

It should be noted that in terms of the ethno-religious and social structure, Pakistan is no less complicated than India and it has no fewer problems in relations with the outside world. This provides a wide scope for guessing as to who needed the next bloody demonstration. One motive could be the internal dissatisfaction with the policy of Islamabad to develop relations with the PRC, while “suppressing the freedom of fellow Uighurs” in Xinjiang. Or it could be the revenge on the part of certain groups (no less complicated) of the Taliban (banned in Russia), whose cross-border movement with neighboring Afghanistan has recently been sharply complicated.

The angry reaction of the Minister of The Interior Sheikh Rashid Ahmed was quite general. There were talks about some “elements trying to sow disorder.” The successes of both the Indian department for strengthening the borders and the political course of the country as a whole under the strict guidance of the current Prime Minister Imran Khan were not forgotten.

However, after a day or two, the image of the “villain” began to be defined more concretely. First, attention was drawn to the fact that the aforementioned police checkpoint was not located anywhere in Lahore, but next to the house of Hafiz Sayeed, who is considered the founder of the Islamist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Righteous) (banned in Russia). In India, the latter is accused of organizing a bloody terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008, which killed over 160 people.

At the end of June, there were reports about the arrest of two (out of three alleged) members of the group that directly carried out the terrorist attack in Lahore, who were said to be associated with the Indian special services.

Speaking at a July 4 briefing, Adviser to the Prime Minister for National Security Moeed Yusuf bluntly said that the organizer of the attack was an Indian citizen “directly associated” with RAW. This abbreviation stands for the Research and Analysis Wing.

On the same day, Prime Minister Imran Khan himself directly linked the fact of this terrorist act “with the funding from India” of the spread of terrorism in Pakistan. His appeal to the world community with a demand to support “countering Indian terrorist activities in Pakistan” reflects the intention of the country’s leadership to use the terrorist attack under discussion for pushing foreign policies.

This intention was especially clearly manifested in the special statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Shah Mahmood Qureshi. Repeating his boss’s thesis “on the funding of terrorism by India,” Shah Mahmood Qureshi stressed that his country is doing everything it can to “cleanse the tribal areas of terrorists” and strengthen national borders.

The above remark contains an obvious reference to the problem of the (more or less permanent) Pakistani-Indian confrontation in various kinds of international organizations. Such as, for example, the UN Human Rights Committee, but mainly in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

In February 2021, during the regular FATF meeting, Pakistan remained on the “grey list” of countries that, in the opinion of this respected organization, have certain shortcomings in this area. This, of course, is not a “black list”, but being in a “grey” zone creates certain problems in solving the problem of access to international sources of financial resources.

Be that as it may, but the author, who at the beginning of this year barely received any reason for positive
expectations regarding the nature of the development of Pakistani-Indian relations, which are extremely important in modern global politics, again plunges into a state of depression.

It is possible, however, that to a certain extent it will dissipate if the forthcoming visit to the Russian Federation of Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar ends with success. The main purpose of the visit to Moscow of the distinguished Indian guest reportedly boils down to agreeing positions on the situation in Afghanistan after the US leaves the country. This is a good reason to use the upcoming talks to help reduce tensions in Pakistani-Indian relations. Moreover, Pakistan is closely involved in the Afghan question.

In general, the main function of Russia in the modern troubled world is seen in every possible way to contribute to the mixing of various geopolitical intensity.

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