Terrorist Attacks Continue in Pakistan

It looks like it may become a bad tradition to use the opening phrase “No sooner had the New Eastern Outlook...” in an article on the situation in Pakistan, which is prompted by yet another terrorist attack on Pakistani territory.

These attacks have increased sharply recently, which fits in with the general pattern of increasing turbulence in the Central and South Asian region. It should be noted that in addition to Pakistan, the political picture that is emerging in the region also involves major regional and global powers such as China, Russia, India and the United States, whose interests often (and often strongly) do not coincide.

So, no sooner had the “New Eastern Outlook” discussed the 14 July terrorist attack in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in the context of the Afghan issue than a new one occurred just five weeks later. This time in the territorially opposite to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan province of Pakistan. Specifically in the Gwadar port area.

As in the previous case, the suicide attack was aimed at Chinese nationals. It is recalled that a bus carrying Chinese experts was blown up near Dasu town (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province). In the Gwadar area, a terrorist attacked a vehicle, also carrying Chinese nationals. The bus was on its way to the construction site of the hydropower plant, which has been under construction by a Chinese company since 2017. The vehicle was moving somewhere near the Gwadar port complex, which is also being “modernized” (actually being rebuilt) with the decisive involvement of the
In Dasu, 9 Chinese and 4 Pakistanis were killed; in Gwadar, mostly children playing nearby were injured (of whom two were killed and two injured) and one Chinese was also injured.

Again, the only thing that seems to be common between the two attacks that took place two thousand kilometers apart are their targets, namely the Chinese specialists working in various, much-needed facilities in Pakistan. The Dasu hydropower plant (whose first phase is due for completion in 2025) will substantially solve the country’s electricity deficit.

As for the Gwadar port complex on the Arabian Sea, it serves several purposes. Previously, the possibility of permanently stationing Chinese naval units here was mentioned among them. In recent years, however, it has been mentioned mainly in connection with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, which in turn is one of the main elements of the global Chinese Belt and Road Initiative project.

But a substantial part of the CPEC runs through the Pakistani province of Balochistan, where separatist sentiments are strong. Representing the infrastructural skeleton that binds Pakistan, the CPEC is seen by Balochs as a major challenge in their quest for independence. The PRC specialists involved in its implementation, who are periodically attacked by armed personnel, are treated accordingly. The most recent was the aforementioned attack in Gwadar, although no one has yet claimed responsibility for it.

Less clear is the motivation for the Dasu attack, for which Foreign Minister Sh.M. Qureshi blamed the Tehreek--Taliban (banned in the Russian Federation), which is somewhat perplexing. For until recently, this group based in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (populated mostly by Pashtuns) has been fighting mainly against its own “secular, pro-Western government betraying the interests of its brethren.” This “betrayal” is mainly seen in relation to the Kashmir issue.

It would seem to be one thing to deal with bombing of trucks with soldiers of the central government of Pakistan, who are periodically engaged in “counter-terrorism operations” in various parts of the said province. But what has this to do with the Chinese building a facility in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that is useful to all (including Pashtuns)?

One could, of course, refer to the motive of revenge against Beijing for its policies towards the indigenous population of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the PRC. But the Pakistani Taliban (who, by the way, should not be totally correlated with the Afghan Taliban, also banned in Russia) hardly know the true cost of propaganda hysteria about the “genocide of the Uyghurs,” initiated by the West.

Be that as it may, Beijing appears to be becoming concerned about the increasingly visible helplessness of its “iron ally” government to control its own territory. The cost of this issue is by no means limited to the economic component, although the total cost to the PRC of building the CPEC facilities alone is now estimated to be in excess of USD 60 billion.

Equally important is its political-strategic component. Again, the PRC’s main regional ally must ensure control of the situation at least in strategically important areas of its own territory, which are undoubtedly the port of Gwadar and facilities such as the hydropower plant in the Dasu area. The transport arteries leading to them must function just as reliably.

But perhaps most important is the security of Chinese citizens. Despite China’s tight control of the situation internally, its leadership cannot ignore its own public’s possible bewilderment (to put it mildly): what kind of ally is this, in whose territory our specialists are being killed while helping it to build vital facilities?

That was apparently why there was a certain irritation with the PRC Public Security Minister during his (video) conversation on the subject of recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan, which he held with the country’s Prime Minister’s adviser and head of its foreign intelligence, M. Yousuf, on 24 August. Notably, it came only a week after the Foreign Ministers of both countries, Wang Yi and Sh.M. Qureshi, had spoken about the same thing on the phone.

As for the conversation between Zhao Kezhi and M. Yusuf, the latter was quite clearly confronted with the need, first, to solve the problem of supplying Chinese citizens in Pakistan and, second, to get a comprehensive answer to the question of not only the direct perpetrators of both terrorist attacks, but also those who ordered them. Although the Chinese minister did note “significant progress” by the Pakistani side on the issue.

It seems remarkable that in both these conversations there was no mention of the hypothesis put forward earlier by
Sh.M. Qureshi that the Indian foreign intelligence agency RAW (the Research and Analysis Wing) was behind the direct perpetrators of the Dasu attack. Earlier, this kind of “tie-up with India” was made in connection with the attacks in Balochistan.

Finally, it seems appropriate once again to refer briefly to the category of “terrorism” itself (in particular “international” one) and its place in contemporary global political processes. In the author’s view, around the end of the 1990s the victors of the Cold War tried to define a specific phenomenon with this odd newspeak (based on a word for a fighting method).

The term “international terrorists” has come to denote those bad people who have resorted to (equally bad) means in an attempt to change the world that was so glorious for the main beneficiaries of the Cold War victory.

With the resumption of the (almost “completed”) historical process, however, the issue of “international terrorism” began to turn into one of the instruments of struggle between the leading world players. Behind at least some of the “international terrorists” they can clearly be discerned.

It seems clear enough that both attacks discussed here are aimed at causing problems for one of the two global powers, which de facto already is China. Namely, in the realm of its relations with both Pakistan and India. In particular, if China and India establish trusting relations, the prospect of an anti-Chinese “Asian NATO”, with the latter playing a central role, would become quite slim.

So immediately after another noisy act of “international terrorism” (such as the ones that happened at Kabul airport on 26 August), we “watch the hands” of some of the participants in the global political game.

While keeping in mind to ask the eternal question: Qui prodest?

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