It’s India’s Turn to Stop Terrorism

After a long hiatus in peace talks and putting aside its jingoism, perhaps momentarily, India has finally sent some positive vibes from across the border to ‘arch-foe’ Pakistan.

Following months of shelling by Indian army at Pakistan, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent his Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar to Islamabad recently. It was not an exclusive visit but a part of a series of visits to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries.

India had abruptly cancelled peace talks last year. The scheduled parley was cancelled by an infuriated Indian government last August when Pakistan consulted Indian-administered Kashmiri leaders before talks.

Both nuclear-armed neighbours were close to reaching a solution to the Kashmir dispute, courtesy backchannel diplomacy initiated by Gen Pervez Musharraf during his tenure. It could not materialise as overly cautious India slowed down the process, and the idea fizzled out. And Jaishankar’s tour didn’t prove more than a courtesy call instead of an effort to resolve issues pending for the last several decades.

And this does not include only the flashpoint in South Asia – the Kashmir issue. There are other burning issues that need to be discussed and are overdue, especially since Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Modi could not hold a bilateral meeting at SAARC summit last November.

India has long been harping on about terrorism by Pakistan. And this is despite that in a diplomatic cable by US Ambassador Timothy Roemer, the Congress Party leader, Rahul Gandhi, had told that “the bigger threat (to India) may be the growth of radicalised Hindu groups, which create religious tensions and political confrontations with the Muslim community.”

If New Delhi is sincere about peace and eliminating terrorism, it must see things through unbiased lens. Curbing terrorism should be done on a reciprocal basis. This is important if one takes into consideration the events of the past decade.

Terrorism must be on top of the agenda. It is time India stopped playing a victim at the same time sponsoring terrorist proxies from Afghanistan to create havoc in Pakistan, which has lost 60,000 lives in terrorism.

There is a history of terror acts in India which later proved to be either an inside job or a complete hoax. After scathing attacks on Pakistan by the Indian government accusing it of Parliament attack in 2001 and then Mumbai attack in 2008, an Indian whistle-blower blamed New Delhi for orchestrating the attacks. R.V.S. Mani, the former home ministry official, submitted to a court that according to investigator Satish Verma, the two attacks were pre-planned by the Indian government to make stricter anti-terrorism laws. Now that may not have ‘proved’ it as a false flag attack, statement by the Indian officials in the court has made the scenario questionable.

There have also been voices, including a minority affairs minister’s statement in the Indian Parliament, who has indicated duplicity of the Indian government in Mumbai attack case.
India’s accusation against Pakistan of an attack on Samjhauta Express (a train service between Pakistan and India) in 2007 also proved a hoax. Of 68 passengers killed in the bomb blast, most of them were Pakistanis, yet India blamed Islamabad for the massacre.

Eventually, Swami Aseemanand, a leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – a Hindu extremist outfit, confessed he was involved in the train bombing, and attacks on mosques in Malegaon in Maharashtra state and Andhra Pradesh state capital, Hyderabad, and a shrine in Ajmer in Rajasthan. Ironically, RSS has close ties to the Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government.

While India has refused to share details of the probe into Samjhauta Express attack with Pakistan, the Indian police accused an Indian army officer, Lt-Col P.S. Purohit of being involved in train and mosques bombings. Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence has often been accused by India of patronising anti-India extremists such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Now do we see a nexus between Hindu ‘saffron terrorism’ and the Indian military against Muslims/Pakistan, considering Lt-Col Purohit’s involvement in the bombings?

If former Indian spymaster Ajit Doval’s ‘defensive-offence’ strategy, and Indian military’s ‘Cold Start’ doctrine are not enough proofs of Indian covert and overt designs for pro-India lobby, it should at least pay heed to former US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel’s remarks.

Hagel in his 2011 speech at an American university did not mince words in saying: “India for some time has always used Afghanistan as a second front, and India has over the years financed problems for Pakistan on that side of the border. And you can carry that into many dimensions.” More than a hundred sub-consular offices established by India in Afghanistan are suspected of being Indian intelligence outposts used for covert operations against Pakistan.

Echoing Hagel’s words, Pakistan Army and the government officials have now categorically named New Delhi for fomenting separatist terrorism in the restive Balochistan province and even terrorism in the northern parts of the country. The Peshawar massacre of 132 schoolchildren on Dec 16 last year by Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan is believed to be the handiwork of the Indian intelligence.

And recently the ‘Pakistani terror boat’ drama ended on yet another embarrassing note for India. The Indian government had earlier stated that the crew destroyed the boat when it was ordered to stop on New Year’s eve in Indian waters. The Deputy Inspector-General of the Indian Coast Guard, B.K. Loshali, recently contradicted the statement, saying he ordered the coast guard to blow up the boat, saying “we don’t want to serve them biryani (a sumptuous dish made of rice and meat).” Red-faced, Indian government relieved Loshali of his command who now faces an inquiry.

And recently Indian special public prosecutor, Ujjwal Nikam, who represented the state in Mumbai terror case, admitted that he wrongly accused the Pakistani convict Ajmal Kasab of asking for mutton biryani only to “divert people’s attention” from Kasab’s emotional state during the trial. Nikam’s false statement created hatred towards Kasab and a media hype and “why feed them biryani” became the catchphrase.

Pakistan has already banned LeT and recently Jamaatud Dawa, a sister organisation of LeT, saying there are no good or bad Taliban. Most recently, the new Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Sayeed has given credit to Pakistan and the militants for peaceful elections in the state. According to Mufti, the elections could never have been held had the militants (considered Pakistani proxies by the Indians) created problems.

As there is already a paradigm shift in Pakistan’s security strategy, it is now India’s turn to overhaul its foreign policy vis-à-vis Pakistan and to realise that terrorism as an instrument of state policy cannot bring peace.

If Modi is serious about having peace with Pakistan, that could also bring tranquillity to the region, then there is ample diplomatic opportunity. Pakistan and India had an agreement over Siachen in 1989, but Modi and his predecessors are dragging their feet being influenced by the Indian army which does not want the deal implemented. Likewise, the Sir Creek issue can also be resolved as new survey maps of the area have been prepared and exchanged, but this agreement is pending as well. The resolution of these two issues could be a big game changer and pave the way for the solution of major disputes – Kashmir and controversial dam construction by India, which may leave Pakistani lands barren.

Pakistan should, however, not deal with India keeping in mind its new ‘special relationship’ with the US, which has been lately showering praise on and favouring India by signing partnership deals. If there are no permanent friends and foes in international relations – and the US and India have proved that – then Pakistan should follow suit. Islamabad can cement its ties with Russia and bolster its older friendships with China and Iran. US-Indo partnership
should not hamper conflict resolution involving Pakistan and India.

The ball is now in Modi’s court. The political ground is fertile to resolve long-drawn issues. It is time New Delhi took the initiative with out-of-the-box approach instead of sending a messenger to Pakistan for laying further diplomatic landmines, if that is what Modi had in his mind.

But things will never change unless the West also checks its double standards and insatiable obsession and love for India. India has been the favourite of the West for quite a long time, especially the US, mainly because it is being used as a counterweight to China. While the West leaves no opportunity of Pakistan bashing for terrorism, anything said against Indian hegemonic designs, machinations and interventions in the South Asian region raises concerns in the West.

India is seen as a ‘peaceful’ state by the West despite its bellicose jingoism and Hindutva. Accusations against India of having hegemonic designs cannot be dismissed as ‘conspiracy theory’ any more. Carrots for India and sticks for Pakistan from the West would be an impediment to peace in the region. The West needs to review its foreign policies if it is really sincere in bringing stability to South Asia.

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