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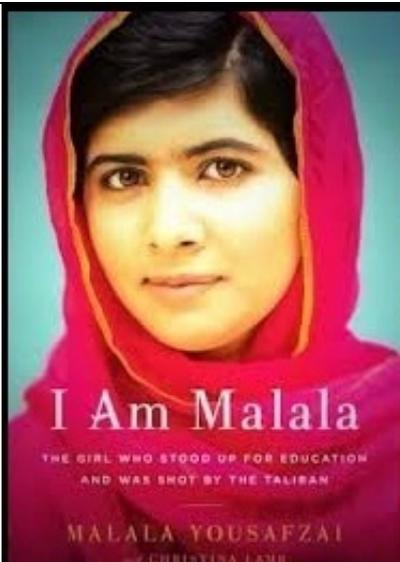
IPCS FORECASTS

PAKISTAN IN 2015

Civil-Military Equations & Increased Space for the Army | Intra-Political Relations amongst Political Parties | Threat from the Islamic State | Strategy towards J&K |

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IPCS Forecasts

Pakistan in 2015

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Pakistan in 2015: A Forecast

Making a forecast is always fraught with risk, more so when it is about a country like Pakistan where something is happening all the time, and worse, a single incident or event, whether or not within the country, can change the dynamics and trajectory of how things are likely to play out.

In 2014, there were some clear trends that manifest themselves: the civil-military tussle tilted heavily in favour of the military; politically, the Nawaz Sharif government weakened considerably, partly as a result of the military becoming more assertive and partly because of the potent challenge mounted by Imran Khan; relations with India went through the usual roller-coaster but the trend is significantly negative, more so with the issue of Jammu and Kashmir once again acquiring salience; and finally, the unabated march of radicalism what with the Islamic State registering its presence in the region and attracting elements from the Taliban. Most, if not all, of these trends are likely to gather force in 2015.

Civil-Military Relations: Will the Civilians Remain a Rubber Stamp?

The Nawaz Sharif government has, at least for the time being, reconciled to playing a subservient role to the military. While underlying tensions are likely to dog this relationship in 2015, it is unlikely that there will be any overt or hostile takeover of the government by the army. The army will continue to burnish its image in the public eye – the public relations exercise by the Chief of the Pakistan Army, General Raheel Sharif, at the Peshawar Army Public school reopening is an example – and will use this to keep the civilian government under pressure.

Civilians will be used to rubber-stamp decisions that the army takes on issues like counter-terrorism, Afghanistan, India, the US and other security and foreign policy issues. The space of the army has increased immensely, and that of the civilian government has constricted in the same measure after the creation of the military courts under the 21st Constitutional Amendment. While the government is likely to avoid any step that causes friction with the army, it will not be averse to taking advantage of any blowback of policies that the army forces on the country to claw back some of the space it had had to cede to the military. This will however deepen the disconnect between the civilians and the military establishment. The problem will be that if the army's policies start unravelling, there isn't much the civilians can do to set things right.

What is more, the army would have gamed how the government is likely to play its cards in the event of things going awry. It would therefore keep its levers to keep any possible civilian pushback in check. For its part, the Nawaz Sharif government has understood that it needs to

balance a rampaging opposition against an assertive army and prevent any linking-up between the two that can sound the death knell of the sitting government. But this balancing act will come under strain if the military makes demands that the government is loath to concede. For instance, if the military wants to act against religio-political parties or wants to continue playing favourites with jihadists or wants to undertake massive operations against ethnic separatists and dissidents, it could become unpalatable for the civilian government. While Nawaz Sharif has checked his proclivity to enter into a head-on collision for now, how long he will be able to do this remains a crucial question which will decide how the civil-military cookie crumbles.

Political Interplay: PTI-PML-PPP-MQM Equations

In 2015, at the national level, among the civilian political parties, the two main contenders will remain the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI). The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) is likely to diminish further and will only serve as a handmaiden of the PMLN while keeping up the appearance of being in the opposition. Even if Bilawal Bhutto Zardari starts playing a more active role in PPP affairs, it is highly unlikely that the party will be able to re-emerge as one of the poles of Pakistani politics.

The PPP has virtually no presence or resonance anywhere in Pakistan except for Sindh, where it could see some crystallisation of forces opposed to it. In Sindh, the PPP-Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) relations will remain fraught. The MQM is facing erosion in both its firepower and its political base and could face major crisis even if the criminal cases against Altaf Hussein in UK don't lead to his arrest. Nevertheless, if the MQM retaliates, Karachi could see large scale disruptions and disturbances.

In Balochistan, despite the growing dissent from a section of the PMLN leadership, the coalition government is likely to continue under the current Chief Minister. The anti-establishment Baloch nationalists like the Balochistan National Party Mengal (BNP-M) have lost political ground because of their participation in the 2013 General Elections and are likely to get squeezed between those the insurgents on one side and the collaborators on the other side.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there could be a political vacuum in 2015 if the anger, disillusionment and disenchantment with the PTI-led coalition grows, partly because it hasn't really broken any new ground in terms of administration and good governance and partly because of its soft attitude towards the Taliban. The trouble is that the Awami National Party (ANP) hasn't managed to really regroup after its loss in the 2013 polls and is in no position to re-emerge as a potent force in the province. The PMLN appears to be in disarray with senior leaders disgruntled and the central leadership averse to doing anything to destabilise the PTI-led government. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam- Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) has its pockets of support but its links with the Taliban are going to go against it.

The real battleground will remain the Punjab where the fight will be between PTI and PMLN. Unless the PMLN commits a major blunder, either with the military or in its dealings with other political parties, it is unlikely that in 2015 Imran Khan will be able to mount the sort of pressure he did in 2014. His anti-government campaign appears to have lost steam. Partly because of the urgency that the anti-terror campaign has acquired and partly because of the papering over of differences between the PMLN government and the military, Imran Khan is unlikely to get much traction in his quest to force the ouster of the government. The challenge for Imran Khan will be

to keep his flock together and even expand his political base. There is a good chance that many anti-PMLN elements in Punjab, including those in the PPP, will make a bee-line for PTI.

Therefore, while Imran Khan will remain a force to reckon with, he will not be able to force a mid-term election. In any case, if a situation develops where the elected government is ousted by hook or by crook, then instead of an election, there could be another extra-constitutional dispensation taking over.

Pakistan's Likely Strategy Towards Jammu and Kashmir

Kashmir is likely to once again become the big sticking point between India and Pakistan, more so because positions in both New Delhi and Islamabad have hardened over the issue. Even if Pakistan cracks down against all shades of jihadists, including groups focussed on India like the Jamaat-ud-Dawah/ Lashkar-e-Taiba, it won't be of much help because Pakistan will try and balance this action by raising the diplomatic and political temperature over Kashmir.

Efforts will be made to internationalise Kashmir, which in turn will be a red rag for the Indian government and tie its hands on re-engaging with Pakistan. On the other hand, if Pakistan continues with the policy of using jihadist proxies in India and tries to keep the pot boiling in Kashmir by exporting violence, then in addition to the normal political and diplomatic stand-off, chances are that the Line of Control (LoC) will also heat up.

Violence levels in Kashmir could also spike if Pakistan re-starts the export of jihad. Pakistan could get an opportunity to muddy the waters in Kashmir if the internal politics in the state remains in disarray.

Rise of the Islamic State?

The rising attraction of the Islamic State (IS) is among the most worrying trends that could unfold in 2015. Over the last few months, despite denials from Pakistani officials, there is good reason to believe that the IS has started gaining traction in Pakistan. If this trend grows, and IS gains more adherents, then it will complicate not just an already complex jihadist problem but also the regional dynamics.

There is a good possibility that if Pakistan manages to broker a deal between the Mullah Omar-led Taliban and the Afghan government, the more radical elements of the Taliban could gravitate towards IS. This could in turn lead to a fight between the Taliban and IS. On the other hand, if the Pakistani efforts at effecting a rapprochement between the Afghan government and Taliban comes a cropper, and the fighting continues, then there could be some kind of a compact between IS and Taliban, provided of course they are able to settle the ticklish problem of how a Caliph and an Amir-ul-Momineen are going to work together.

A third possibility is that the Taliban snuff out the challenge of the IS. The relationship between al Qaeda and the IS will also be a critical factor. Although al Qaeda has a strong base in this region, it has been losing its primacy in the jihadist scheme of things to the IS. For Pakistan the problem will be how it balances its links with the Afghan Taliban with its budding relationship with the Afghan government. If it leans too much on the side of the Afghan government, it could push the Taliban away and if this leads to the much feared compact between the Taliban and IS,

then Pakistan will have to pay a very heavy price. On the other hand, if it isn't able to deliver the Taliban to the Afghan government, then it could lead to a collapse of the Afghan-Pakistan relationship, which in turn will also destabilise the region. Regardless of what happens, radicalism isn't going anywhere any time soon.

Pakistan in 2014: A Review

I

Civil-Military Relations

Why is Army against Nawaz Sharif?¹

In 2014, Nawaz Sharif has managed to survive the first major attempt to oust him from office. A series of fortuitous developments – the whistle-blowing by Javed Hashmi about Imran Khan's links with the Pakistan Army stands at the top of the list – coupled with not just the uncharacteristic flexibility displayed in conceding most of the demands being raised by his adversaries but also the characteristic obstinacy in refusing to resign, have all helped Nawaz Sharif to come out on top in the latest round of Pakistan's unending, but also sinister, political drama.

While the 'establishment' might have failed to decapitate the Nawaz Sharif government, they have definitely succeeded in degrading it to a point where the Prime Minister is reduced to no more than a chairman of a municipality.

Even if Nawaz Sharif reconciles to a subordinate role to the military, it will not address the fundamental problem that the 'establishment' has with him. In other words, the army cannot reconcile to Nawaz Sharif's political primacy and prominence because his core constituency – Punjabi, right-wing, conservative, religiously inclined, business-trader community – is also the constituency that the army cultivates for pushing its own political and national agenda. This is a constituency that the army has consciously built and nurtured to gain political legitimacy and counter forces that it perceived as hostile to its interests.

Nawaz Sharif himself is a product of such a political engineering. Today, not only has he effectively split, nay captured, this natural constituency of the army, but has gone a step further with his anti-establishment stance – insistence on civilian supremacy. If Sharif is allowed to get away with this, it will have far reaching implications for civil-military relations. The clear and present danger for the Army is to allow the core constituency to turn against itself (in terms of its role and interference in politics). Then the balance of force will tilt against, which the army is simply not ready to accept.

Hence, the army wants to get rid of the Sharif brothers, which will create the space for retrieving control over its constituency. In many ways, the military's aversion to Sharif and PMLN is similar to its aversion to Zulfikar Bhutto and the PPP. The latter posed a threat to the

¹ Originally published as an IPCS Commentary in September 2014.

army's political position but was countered by building up and strengthening the right-wing. With the right-wing now sliding out of control, the Army finds itself in a bit of a bind.

The tectonic shift taking place in Pakistan's politics has been sometime in the making. In fact, it can be traced back to the tussle between Sharif and the Army in the late 1990s. Although Nawaz Sharif has had problems with all army chiefs whenever he was in power, this tussle has steadily become institutionalised with the PMLN openly speaking against the military's role in politics and policy making. The 1999 coup stalled the core constituency's drift away from the military. Although Sharif continued to enjoy the support of this constituency during the Musharraf and Zardari years, it didn't matter much at that time because the governments were subservient to the army's demands. But the power equation changed drastically the moment Sharif became Prime Minister and that too with a clear majority.

During the 2014 crisis, a tactical withdrawal has been made by many senior leaders of the ruling party, but there is no sign as yet that the PMLN has made a strategic retreat from the principle of civilian supremacy. The army knows this and will not be comfortable with Sharif at the helm partly because it anticipates trouble.

For the army, there are no easy options. Imran Khan is an option and is also making a pitch for the same constituency. But propping up Imran Khan as an alternative is a minefield that the army would not like to venture beyond a point. Imran Khan is a maverick and his megalomania is hardly going to make the army comfortable. For the army, Imran is a useful fool to fix Nawaz Sharif but dangerous to hand over the reins of government.

The second option is to destroy Sharif's credibility as a political leader by undermining his ability to deliver governance. This will only be possible at the cost of making the government completely dysfunctional which in turn will ensure that the economy doesn't recover. While Nawaz Sharif would undoubtedly be damaged in this option, it would not leave much for the army to rule. Third option for the army is to take over power directly and then build a new puppet who does its bidding. But this option will come with its own set of monumental problems.

Given the dearth of options, the army could well decide to enter into an uncomfortable co-habitation arrangement with Nawaz Sharif. Of course, on his part Nawaz Sharif could conclude that the lack of options for the army, opens up opportunities for him to keep pushing the envelope and slowly but steadily tilt the balance against the military. More than Nawaz Sharif's reduced powers it is this political tussle between him and the army that will decide the future of civil-military relations in Pakistan.

Pakistan: Degraded Democracy²

In August 2014, the Imran Khan's 'Azadi' March and Tahirul Qadri's 'Inquilab' (revolution) March were besieging Islamabad. The former was demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif; accountability of all people involved in rigging the 2013 election in favour of the

² Originally published as an IPCS Commentary in August 2014

current ruling dispensation; electoral reforms; and a government of non-political persons to conduct fresh elections. The latter wanted a complete overhaul of the current political system – hence revolution, though in a legal and constitutional way without resorting to violence, which was in itself a contradiction.

Even though the turnout of these two marches was nowhere close to the million or more that was being spoken about, Pakistan's capital city was on the tenterhooks. The fear was that if the crowds go out of control and large-scale violence erupts, it could well lead to the collapse of the government. Needless to say, such disturbances would bring neither Azadi nor Revolution. Quite to the contrary, it stifled 'Azadi' and ushered in a counter-revolution by that most reactionary of all forces in Pakistan – the Pakistan Army.

Perhaps when the Pakistan Army put Khan and Qadri to the job of destabilising Nawaz Sharif's government and bringing it under such immense pressure that it buckles and accepts its subservience to the military establishment, they never thought things would reach a point where they might have to step in and take over directly. But a series of administrative mishandlings and political miscalculations by the governments in Islamabad and Lahore, coupled with ever rising stridency in the positions of Khan and Qadri, brought the situation to a point where an honourable exit for any of the main protagonists seemed next to impossible.

None of the protagonists emerged from this battle unscathed. The only winner was the cat (read Pakistan Army) which made the monkeys (read Pakistan's political class) fight over the spoils of power. After all, Pakistan is a unique case where even the courts have upheld the legitimacy of military coups by calling them a revolution!

Clearly, neither Imran Khan nor Tahirul Qadri thought through the logic of what they were demanding. This was hardly surprising considering that someone else has been doing the thinking for them. The dialectics of their demands was that unless Nawaz Sharif was ready to roll over and play dead, the only way they could get what they want was through an extra-constitutional takeover. Bizarrely, even as they both emphatically stood against any military intervention, they were pushing things in a direction where the political logjam can only be broken by such an intervention.

For his part, Nawaz Sharif showed remarkable and uncharacteristic composure, and even a spirit of accommodation towards Khan's and Qadri's clearly illegitimate, illogical and illegal demands. While the army has fixed Sharif nice and proper, and it was quite apparent by then that Sharif can only survive if he accepted subservience to the military. At that time, the question was whether Khan would accept the military's diktat. What will be the quid pro quo which helps him keep his face among his supporters whom he has charged to an unsustainable level? Will the sop offered to Imran Khan be acceptable to Sharif, especially if it involves anything beyond electoral reforms? And if Khan refuses to back down, will the army force Sharif out of office? For the army, to cut Khan and Qadri down to size at that stage meant losing a potent political tool to keep Sharif under pressure – something they were averse to doing.

But deposing Sharif will also not solve the problem because that would set in motion the destabilising politics of the 1990s. Worse, even if Nawaz Sharif eats the humble pie and Khan backs down, the government will remain in crisis mode for the rest of its term, something that

will seriously distract it from its ambitious economic agenda. Most importantly, if this round of the political slugfest ends in a draw, it will only set the stage for the next round of an even worse civil-military confrontation, which won't be long in coming. What this means is that all those singing hosannas for democracy having finally stuck roots in Pakistan need to start singing dirges.

II Intra-Political Relations

Domestic Politicking in Pakistan: It's Not Cricket, Stupid! ³

For someone whose understanding of politics is limited to drawing banal cricketing analogies, the phrase 'it's not cricket' aptly describes the sort of politics Imran Khan is indulging in these days. His threat of leading a 'Long March' (how Mao must be twisting in his grave over the Pakistani mutilation of the original Long March) to Islamabad to shake up the political system – he is himself isn't clear on what he actually wants – is not cricket because it brazenly violates the basic rules of the political game set in the constitution. It is also not cricket in the sense that a five year term in government is not the same as a five-day test match in which the two contending sides get to play two innings each.

That Khan isn't clear on what he hopes to get out of the 'Long March' (or is it Tsunami March or Azadi March?) is evident because he keeps shifting the goalposts depending on what catches his fancy at a particular time. He started with demanding a vote verification in four constituencies, went on to demand a mid-term election, retracted to demanding an audit of the entire election (inspired by Afghanistan). The end-game – how he hopes to get his demand met, what he will do if the government continues to stonewall, and what the consequences of any widespread disturbance in Islamabad could be, including the outside chance of a derailment of the democratic process – has obviously not been thought through by him. Not only is his timing wrong (barely a year after the general election he is demanding a mid-term poll), he has also not factored in the possibility that even if he managed to grab power, he would then be faced with similar efforts to overthrow him. In other words, it will be back to the sordid politics of the 1990s.

Imran Khan suddenly became hyperactive against the government after the military establishment seemed to get into a tussle with incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government leading many analysts to suspect that he had been put up to the task by the powers that be. Despite being seen as riding on the back of the military to queer the pitch for the Nawaz Sharif government, Imran Khan was careful to keep parroting his commitment to democracy, even though he is doing everything to undermine it. Even if he can't force the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PMLN) out of office through his agitation, he would have weakened the civilian dispensation to a point where it would be forced to lean on the crutches of the military, or at least remain extremely diffident, before the military. That the PMLN government has come to

³ Originally published as an IPCS Commentary in July 2014

such a pass with just about a year in office is a sorry statement on the fragility of the democratic process in Pakistan.

It is not just Imran Khan who is on the march against the government. The somewhat comical cleric from Canada, Tahirul Qadri, has also been on the warpath, selling an instant revolution to his acolytes as if it were some kind of instant coffee. Politically, Qadri is a non-entity. But like many other God-men, and such like in the subcontinent, Qadri has his following which probably runs into a million or more. His game is even less nuanced than Khan's because he makes no bones about completely overthrowing the system. Ironically, he calls his 'revolution' legal and constitutional! Qadri has been given a leg up by the horribly botched strong-arm used by the PMLN government against Qadri's Lahore headquarters, killing around a dozen people and injuring some 100 in police firing.

Individually, however, neither Qadri nor Khan can oust the government. Hence, efforts by quintessential establishment flunkies and Tonga politicians (whose support base can fit on a horse-driven Tonga) like the Chaudaries of Gujarat and Sheikh Rasheed of Rawalpindi to bring them together. But this appears to be an uphill task because while Khan has some kind of a stake in the system, Qadri is a misguided missile seeking to destroy everything without any clear idea of how and what to replace it with. What is more, they have their problems on who will lead and their suspicions on who will retreat first leaving the other in the lurch. Meanwhile, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) which was fast becoming irrelevant and leaderless, with Asif Zardari in his bunker, Bilawal active only on twitter and the party is disarray, disunited (especially in Punjab) and directionless, has also started making noises against the government and in support of Khan. But even if the PPP joined the opposition ranks, unless the army casts its lot with the forces arraigned against the government, it is unlikely that Sharif would lose power anytime soon.

Despite its problems with the government, the army doesn't seem quite ready to either force mid-term elections, or usher in a medium-term interim government of technocrats, or even take over power directly. Even the praetorian Pakistan army knows that doing any such thing would tantamount to jumping from the frying pan into the fire. It would rather put up with a weak government that subordinates itself to the military than tempt fate or worse by destabilising the government or ousting it. Of course, if massive disturbances break out as a result of the agitations being planned by Khan, Qadri and Co. then all bets are off. If things come to such a pass, then Imran Khan will have to cool his heels in the pavilion, his dreams and delusions of leading Pakistan shattered.

The most remarkable thing in the unfolding political drama in Pakistan is the swiftness with which Nawaz Sharif has lost political capital and managed to box himself into a corner because of wrong political decisions. He could still recover lost ground, but that will require political cunning, coolness and compromise, none of the things he is known for.

III Threat of Islamic State

In 2014, there has been a lot of activity taking place in various parts of Pakistan in the name of the abominable, but also ineluctable, Islamic State (IS). Apart from some senior commanders of the Mullah Fazlullah-led Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) faction who have announced their allegiance to the IS' Caliph Ibrahim a.k.a. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, there are reports of other smaller groups of militants who have cast their lot with the pestilential IS. Graffiti and posters of the IS have appeared in Karachi, Peshawar, Lahore, Bannu, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, Wah, Hangu, Kurram, Bhakkar, Dera Ismail Khan and other towns and cities of the country.

While these developments have caused a flutter in the media, official circles are quite nonchalant about the IS's presence in Pakistan at present, or even its potential for establishing a presence in the future. Despite a classified report of the Balochistan government about the 'growing footprint' of IS, Federal Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar has confidently claimed that the IS doesn't exist in Pakistan.

Considering that just a few days after Nisar declared that there was no danger of terrorism in Islamabad an attack was launched on Islamabad courts and the city's vegetable market, he shouldn't be taken seriously. Although there is no sign of a major presence of the IS in Pakistan, the threat of the IS establishing itself is very real. There are eerie parallels that can be drawn between how the IS is registering its presence in Pakistan with how the Taliban network was established in the country. In the mid-1990s, more so after the Taliban captured Kabul, there were a spate of gangs and groups, especially in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), who declared themselves local representatives or chapters of the Taliban movement.

The sort of graffiti that today proclaims the arrival of the IS had back then done the same for the Taliban. No one had imagined at that time that the Taliban would manage to establish such a robust presence in the country or attract so many fighters, supporters and sympathisers for its cause. More importantly, at that time, hardly anyone outside the liberal fringe in Pakistan believed that the Taliban would be able to occupy the mind space of Pakistanis the way they did. Today, there are people from all walks of life in Pakistan –traders, soldiers, politicians, journalists, doctors, teachers, labourers and techies – who identify with the Taliban. It is therefore not too farfetched to imagine that something similar may happen with the IS, more so given the manner in which this ghoulish outfit has managed to strike resonance among certain sections of Muslims around the world and become a magnet for them, much more than the Taliban or their predecessors in Afghanistan had managed to do ever since violent jihad became fashionable.

One big disadvantage that the IS will suffer in its quest to make Pakistan a province of its Caliphate is that, for now at least, it doesn't enjoy the support of the Pakistan Army which continues to back Mullah Omar, the other pretender to the title of Amir-ul-Momineen. On the flip side, the IS has advantages that the Taliban or their patrons in the GHQ Rawalpindi don't. Mullah Omar is nothing more than a medieval mullah who in the words of al-Baghdadi, is "an illiterate, ignorant warlord unworthy of spiritual or political respect." The IS on the other hand is a modern, tech-savvy outfit with ideological and propaganda machinery that strikes a chord among Muslim youth around the world. Second, the IS has resources and revenue stream that neither the Taliban nor their bankrupt patrons in Rawalpindi have. This allows them to buy and attract support as nothing else can. Third, unlike Omar who is an Afghan and as such unfit or

unacceptable as a leader of the Islamic world as a Caliph or Amir-ul-Momineen, al-Baghdadi is an Arab who traces his roots to the Prophet's tribe and clan and as such is better-placed to assume leadership. Fourth, while Omar's vision doesn't extend beyond his donkey, al-Baghdadi talks of global domination of his Islamic caliphate. Omar's outreach to the global Islamists is through al Qaeda – that has already been pushed to the fringes of the jihadist narrative by the IS which now is in the vanguard of the international Islamist movement. The IS has started establishing a global footprint through its use of modern communication tools while the al Qaeda leadership remains stuck in their rabbit holes, unable to communicate or command their franchises.

Despite the fact that a bulk of the jihadists in Pakistan currently swear loyalty to Mullah Omar, the advantages that 'Caliph' Ibrahim enjoys does somewhat level the field in trying to win over Pakistan. Perhaps, the biggest advantage he will have is that he doesn't depend on the crutches of the Pakistan Army. This, coupled with the fact that Pakistan is a highly radicalised society, makes it a fertile ground for the IS to spread its poison. What is more, al-Baghdadi is believed to have heavily relied on Jamaat-e-Islami founder Abul Ala Maududi's writings in his first khutba as Caliph, something that will make it easy for him to connect to Pakistanis who have in one form or another been indoctrinated by the Maududi and his followers.

Clearly, Baghdadi would be smacking his lips at the prospect of a nuclear-armed Islamised Pakistan (part of the legendary Khorasan) becoming a province of his caliphate. For their part, many Pakistanis too would be looking forward to becoming a part of such an abomination because that would fulfil their quest for living in a pure Islamic caliphate. And given the sort of intolerance that exists in Pakistan, it is ideally suited to become a province of IS. All that remains is to get rid of that other pretender and then the path will be clear for 'Caliph' Ibrahim.

III

Pakistan: The Futility of Internationalising Kashmir⁴

Ideally, Pakistani efforts to internationalise the Kashmir issue should draw big yawns, not just from India but also the international community. After all this is a script that has played out before, and except for a short period in the early 1990s, it hardly draws any traction in international forums. But because of the recent ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC), the ratcheting-up of rhetoric from both sides, the Pakistani approach to the UN to intervene and now, the 'million man' march being planned in London, the issue of internationalisation of Kashmir has started drawing a little more than passing interest.

For India, Pakistani efforts to once again internationalise Kashmir is nothing more than a needless distraction. But instead of reacting either with fury or fluster, India should use this as an opportunity to show the world Pakistan's perfidy and puerility.

In a way, Pakistan might be doing India a favour by trying to internationalise Kashmir, more so at this point in time. To not put too fine a point on it, Pakistan is today all but an international pariah, not to mention an international migraine. India, on the other hand, is once again being

⁴ Originally published as an IPCS Commentary in October 2014

looked at with great interest by the international community and is on the verge of becoming the toast of town. And yet, strangely enough, Pakistan is strutting with confidence that it will be able to gain by internationalising Kashmir, while India remains chary over the Pakistani ploy.

There is nothing new or novel in Pakistan's play this time that it hasn't tried in the past. Whether it is the nonsense about tensions between two nuclear weapon states, or about the exaggerated and mostly false accounts of human rights violations, the 'stifling' presence of the Indian security forces, or even allegations of India violating the ceasefire, it has all been done before. And unfortunately for Pakistan, the world has seen through its game of starting the fire and then running to the international community asking for intervention. The only new tack Pakistan is trying to sell this time is that while it is fighting to save the rest of the world from terrorism – via Operation Zarb-e-Azb – India is creating problems by responding with uncharacteristic ferocity to ceasefire violations.

But the world knows that more than being a victim of terrorism, Pakistan is like that arsonist who sets fire to his own establishment and then plays victim to claim insurance money. Of course, given its nuisance value, the world will lend it an ear (which as if their wont, Pakistan will misconstrue) and appeal to both sides to show restraint and start a dialogue. If this is the sum and substance of Pakistani efforts to internationalise Kashmir, then it won't be long before the very mention of the word Kashmir draws yawns once again.

Pakistan probably understands this and therefore it will try and further raise the temperature on the border, holding out thinly veiled threats of a possible nuclear conflagration. Normally when this happens, the world tends to lean upon India, which is seen as a nice and reasonable party, to back down and start some dialogue. But the last time this happened – Kargil – India dug in its heels and refused to let Pakistan get away with its blatant and brazen brinkmanship. This led to the pressure rebounding on Pakistan which was then forced to withdraw unceremoniously and with utter humiliation from the heights they had occupied.

For Pakistan, this is probably the last chance to internationalise Kashmir. They have a small window of opportunity till 2016 when the presence of US and other foreign forces give Pakistan some leverage as they control the logistic and supply routes. Pakistan would like to use this opportunity to get some concession on Kashmir because it knows things will be very different post 2016 and it won't be able to exercise the blackmail on Afghanistan anymore. This means Pakistan will do everything to stir the Kashmir pot – restart violence in the state, heat up the LoC, send delegations to Western capitals to drum up international support, and organise the marches, like the one in London, in which only Pakistanis will be in attendance.

India could react in two ways: first, ignore Pakistan with contempt and refuse to dignify their propaganda by responding to it forcefully. The problem in this option is that India will leave the field open for Pakistan to feed all sorts of self-serving lies to their western interlocutors. Worse, India could start being perceived as arrogant, haughty and with something to hide or embarrassed about something.

The second option is engaging the international community and taking the initiative to explain why whatever Pakistan says is a lie, pointing to Pakistan's past record of perfidy and worse,

undertaking hectic public diplomacy to expose Pakistan – remember Ghulam Nabi Fai and his ISI-funded jamborees – and making it clear to all countries why their indulgence of Pakistan and/or any attempt on their part to either interfere or mediate in Kashmir will not be seen as a friendly act.

If India plays its cards well, then this internationalisation gambit of Pakistan could in fact work in India's favour because if, after having tried both open and proxy wars, Pakistan's internationalisation effort also comes a cropper, then there is an outside chance that Pakistan could become amenable to a lasting solution to this issue.

IV

Modi and Indo-Pak Relations⁵

Given the decades of hostility between India and Pakistan, animosity and prejudice is entirely understandable; even natural; but the sheer ignorance about each other never ceases to surprise. The Pakistani reaction to the victory of Narendra Modi in the Indian general elections, and the rather ill-informed and mostly pedestrian analysis about the political change that has swept India left little doubt that not only can the two countries not have friendly relations, they don't even make good enemies. Forget about understanding the forces of change, people across the Radcliffe line cannot even correctly pronounce names of Indian politicians and organisations.

True to their form, Pakistani TV channels fielded either fossilised ex-diplomats, soldiers and even some journalist-turned-politicians, or neo-lunatics (like the Man with a Red Beret) to discuss what Modi's ascendancy means for Pakistan. There was a lot of hot air and intemperate language used against the Prime Minister-designate, but very little light. This was not entirely unexpected because most of these characters are unabashed, if also informal, spokesmen of the military establishment.

In that sense, their rants gave a fairly good idea of the thinking in Rawalpindi. The official response (i.e. of the de jure government) was more sober – Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulated Narendra Modi and invited him to Pakistan, and other senior members of the government let it be known that Pakistan looks forward to engaging with the new Indian government. The High Commissioner of Pakistan in New Delhi, perhaps inadvertently, chose words that seemed to convey a message contrary to that of the government and more in keeping with the military.

In almost all Pakistani analyses, there was the inevitable reference to the Gujarat riots and Modi's alleged role in them. This was held up as a marker of his credentials as a Hindu hard-liner. Extrapolating from this, he was painted as someone who was inveterately anti-Pakistan. That Pakistan has given no reason to any sensible Indian to be pro-Pakistan was conveniently ignored.

⁵ Originally published as an IPCS Commentary in May 2014

What is more, the constant reference to the Gujarat riots glossed over the fact that this was neither the first nor the worst riot in India – worse things had happened under the watch of so-called ‘secular’ parties.

There was the comparison with Atal Behari Vajpayee and the conclusion that while Vajpayee was a soft and reasonable person, Modi was completely the opposite. Once again, the Pakistanis seemed to forget that when Vajpayee became Prime Minister, there was great disquiet in Pakistan that a ‘Hindu hard-liner’ had come to power. If it is Gujarat riots in Modi’s case, it was the demolition of Babri Masjid that was held against Vajpayee. This disquiet turned into hysteria after the 1998 nuclear tests. But subsequent events – the Lahore bus diplomacy, the Agra summit, and finally the start of the Composite Dialogue process in 2004 – made the Pakistanis see Vajpayee in a different light.

To be sure, Modi is no Vajpayee; at least that is the impression he gives. However, this doesn’t mean that he will be looking for a fight. All it means is that if Pakistan seeks a fight, he will not back down. What it also means is that the pusillanimous approach of the previous governments to ceaseless provocations from Pakistan will probably change.

In this sense, if there is some amount of apprehension and concern in Islamabad, it is all for the good and could form the basis of a more fruitful and cooperative engagement between the two countries. But the portents are not good. Already there is a sense in New Delhi that sooner rather than later the Pakistanis will test the Modi Sarkar, either through a terrorist attack or an incident along the Line of Control/International Border. How the new Indian government responds will determine the future trajectory of relations between India and Pakistan.

The optimists in Pakistan who are hoping for a Nixonian moment with Modi coming to power are likely to be disappointed. The reason is that Nawaz Sharif is no Mao and General Raheel Sharif is no Lin Biao; nor is the Pakistan Army the People’s Liberation Army which falls in line to the orders of the political authority.

In the past couple of weeks, the Pakistani prime minister has been boxed into a corner by the military and like in the case of the previous regime, speculations have begun in the Pakistani media about when he might be toppled. Even if nothing of that sort happens, the very fact that this is the talk in Islamabad is enough to disabuse Nawaz Sharif of any notion he may have had about normalising relations with India. With his space getting increasingly constricted, Sharif is in no position to offer India what it wants on issues such as export of terrorism into India.

On the other side of the great divide, it is highly unlikely that Modi will be inclined to give Pakistan what it wants on issues such as Siachen, Sir Creek and Kashmir. Perhaps, the best hope in these circumstances is that the two countries do their own thing and avoid stepping on each other’s toes and wait for another time and opportunity. Any misplaced optimism is likely to blow up in their faces and create a situation far worse than what obtains at present.