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Pulwama Terror Attack - An Evaluation of India's Options

What is the issue?

With the recent [Pulwama terror attack](#), it is imperative to look at India's responses to terror attacks in the past and assess the options at present.

Have coercive mechanisms worked earlier?

- India has tried almost every kind of coercive mechanism in its efforts to induce behaviour change in Pakistan.
- But the **changes have only been temporary**.
- **Military** - In 2001-2002, after Jaish's attack on Parliament, India mobilised half a million troops and seriously considered an air-strike on PoK.
- But US persuaded PM Vajpayee to call it off, after the then military ruler of Pakistan General Musharraf called the attack a terrorist act and promised to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan.
- India came close to a strike again in 2002, after fidyaeen attackers killed 34 people, at the Kaluchak Army camp.
- Media reports also suggest air-strikes by India against Pakistani bunkers at the LoC in the Kel area of Kupwara at the end of July 2002.
- **Diplomatic** - At the end of December 2001, India had withdrawn its High Commissioner to Pakistan.
- It also asked the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to cut down the number of officials and staff at the mission by 50%, and banned Pakistan International Airlines from Indian airspace.
- In May 2002, India asked Pakistan High Commissioner Ashraf Jehangir Qazi to leave.
- India had considered withdrawing the MFN status to Pakistan many times earlier. Click [here](#) to know about recent move.

How about other mechanisms?

- **Negotiations** - Full-scale diplomatic relations resumed in May 2003.
- The joint declaration in 2004 came in after the landmark Vajpayee-Musharraf summit.

- India again halted its ongoing dialogue with Pakistan after the Lashkar-e-Toiba struck Mumbai with 7 coordinated train bombs, in July 2006.
- It resumed in October 2006 after Musharraf-Manmohan Singh Havana summit on the sidelines of the NAM meet.
- After the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008, India again halted the composite dialogue.
- **Tussle** - After 26/11, efforts by the two sides to restart talks have failed repeatedly on what the talks should be about.
- India wanted the talks to be held only on cross-border terror but Pakistan says it should include Kashmir as well.
- India's efforts to isolate Pakistan at that time bore some fruit; the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hafiz Saeed were designated as global terrorists under UNSC 1267.
- [If an individual or an organisation is included in the list, it helps in restricting their movement, financial penalties and assets freeze among others.]
- But beyond this, the **world did not stop doing business with Pakistan as it was crucial** to the West's **war in Afghanistan**.

Why didn't India go for military retaliation after 26/11?

- There was widespread anger over Pakistan army among its people upon Benazir Bhutto's assassination.
- So a war with India was exactly what Pakistan wanted to unite its civilians behind its Army.
- Their civilian government was also new and had a little control over the army.
- So not falling to that temptation was crucial for India, without which the world would have witnessed war between two nuclear-armed nations.
- So India managed to avert it.
- Nevertheless, former NSA Shiv Shankar Menon then stressed that if there were another attack from Pakistan, India would not take the same choice.

What is the present scenario?

- Pakistan has been stubborn these years and refusing to act against the perpetrators of 26/11 attack.
- Also, Pakistan PM Imran Khan repeatedly declared that the government and Pakistan Army are on the same page.
- Therefore India no longer feels obliged not to undermine Pakistan's civilian government.
- These provide compulsive arguments to choose military retaliation.

Is military retaliation the right option?

- US discovered from its drone attacks on Taliban leaders that though successful, it hardly brought an end to the terror infrastructure inside Pakistan
- In fact, a US-style aerial attack on the Jaish headquarters by India could make Pakistan's support for such groups stronger.
- Moreover, such strikes are sure to cause civilian casualties, which would not be a proportionate response.

What do these imply?

- Ultimately, success or failure in a military operation is judged only by the strategic objective it sets and meets.
- Revoking the MFN status has only a symbolic value.
- It will hardly hurt the Pakistan state as the country's exports to India are 2% of its global exports.
- Calling off the [Kartarpur Corridor](#) talks, scheduled in March, 2019 could be another option.
- In all, India should assess and arrive at options that would bring a real change to Pakistan's behaviour of supporting terror infrastructure on its soil, without much demerits for India.

Source: The Indian Express



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