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FORTNIGHTLY REPORT ON PAKISTAN
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This report is based on the reading of Pakistani media during the last two weeks.

Pakistan-India Relations

The deep state in Pakistan looms large over country's foreign and security policies. Civilian leadership, despite having a different approach and thinking, often has to toe the military line for one reason or the other. However, both civilian and military authorities in Pakistan have similar views when it comes to the issue of Kashmir. Irrespective of the kind of government in Islamabad, cross-border terrorism has been used as a tool to vitiate the atmosphere in Kashmir and put pressure on India for dialogue. The political leadership in Pakistan, cutting across party lines, and the security establishment have never missed any chance either to create trouble in J&K or exploit internal political turmoil to their advantage. The recent unrest in Kashmir is no exception.

The religious right, terror outfits disguised as philanthropic organisations and most importantly the politico-security establishment of the country all are on the same page in condemning and criticising India over the ongoing turbulence in the Kashmir valley following the killing of Burhan Wani, a young Hizbul Mujahideen commander. Pakistan's propaganda machinery has become hyperactive following recent developments in Kashmir. There is a renewed effort by diplomats in Pakistan to show India in bad light in every possible international forum. The foreign secretary of Pakistan has appealed to the international community, especially the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), to put pressure on India over the issue.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has, quite expectedly, condemned the killing of Burhan Wani by Indian security forces and termed the Kashmir situation "deplorable." His advisor on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz called the ongoing protest in Kashmir as a movement for self-determination and blamed India for spreading chaos in the region. He also argued that Pakistan was firm on its stance that Kashmiris must be allowed to exercise their right of self-determination.

Interestingly, the opposition in Pakistan was not content with Nawaz Sharif's reactions to the development in Kashmir and came down heavily on him alleging that he was rather soft on India because of his "cordial and personal" relations with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. The main opposition party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) launched a scathing attack and accused

him of issuing soft statements due to his friendship with Modi. The PPP has recently submitted an adjournment motion to discuss the Kashmir situation in National Assembly.

These developments have undoubtedly had their negative on India-Pakistan relationship. The repeated attempts, on the part of Pakistan, to internationalise the Kashmir issue and show India in bad light is likely to result in India hardening its position on Pakistan.

Civil-Military Relations

There was a kind of relief in some sections when the incumbent army chief, in January, expressed his desire to vacate the office at the end of his tenure in November 2016 rather than seek an extension. Despite this, things did not go smoothly. Soon after this announcement, a little unknown provincial political party "Move on Pakistan" put up posters in Punjab requesting army chief not to retire. Given, the "popularity" of Raheel Sharif people did not read too much into these posters. However, in early July 2016, the same party put up posters, banners and billboards across 13 major cities of Pakistan including the cantonment area, requesting the army chief to assume power (*Khuda ke liye abb aa jao*). The spokespersons of the party argued forcefully in the electronic and print media in support of a coup and formation of a government of technocrats. Although the military clarified through ISPR that it had nothing to do with these posters, observers in Pakistan argued that it could not have been possible without support from some powerful group in Pakistan.

Interestingly, while some of the smaller political parties, considered close to the military establishment, indirectly endorsed the idea of a military coup, the mainstream political parties even termed it a conspiracy by the ruling dispensation to divert the attention from the Panama papers probe. The PPP senator Aitzaz Ahsan categorically stated that "The banners are a ploy by the government to put pressure on the opposition and are being used to create an atmosphere of uncertainty." The fact that the PML-N government did not take immediate action to arrest the leader of the party, 'Move on Pakistan' gave credence to such allegation. However, the PML-N denied its involvement in any such conspiracy. It seems the government was moving very cautiously on this issue before taking action against those who hailed a military takeover. Finally, Islamabad police registered a case against the party on July 14 under Sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 124-A (sedition), and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief) of the Pakistan Penal Code. It is believed that powerful sections within the establishment might have been behind such a move to test the popular mood on the one hand and, at least, secure an extension for Raheel

Sharif on the other. In the meanwhile, immature statement by Imran Khan that Nawaz Sharif was acting like a monarch and people would 'distribute sweets' if the army usurped the current government drew wide criticism and once again led to speculations about his close links with the establishment.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Ever since China and Pakistan agreed to build the \$46 billion economic corridor, the ruling elite has been projecting it as a solution to all the problems faced by Pakistan. The government has accorded CPEC top priority. To protect the project from terrorist attack, the military has already raised a special division. The planning, development and Reforms minister Ahsan Iqbal further underlined the importance of the project this month and after reviewing the progress issued directions to complete each and every project within the stipulated timeframe. The National Security Advisor Naseer Khan Janjua, while addressing a meeting of 'Friends of China' in Islamabad, argued that with the completion of the CPEC Pakistan will become a gateway for Central Asia. Meanwhile, the controversy over the routes of the corridor refuses to die down. A new alliance of political parties called Corridor Front (CF) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) announced massive protests against the federal government for ignoring the province while building the corridor. There were also reports of Chinese authorities suggesting inclusion of the army in the process of implementation of the project. This could well be due to indirect pressures from the Pakistani establishment to keep a close eye on the financial flows under the CPEC.

The Panama Papers

The tussle between the government and the opposition is continuing on the issue of Panama probe. Each side is sticking to its position. The joint committee, even after several rounds of discussions, could not come up with a commonly agreed Terms of References (ToRs) for the commission that is supposed to probe the Panama papers issue. With each day passing, the united opposition is running out of patience. It has threatened to bring thousands of people in the streets if the government does not accept their demand to constitute an independent commission. The government, on the other hand, has made it clear that if the two sides fail to reach any conclusion, it will make public the respective ToRs of the government and the opposition and subject it to public scrutiny. On the other hand, there is a view that the combined opposition— especially because it includes the major opposition political party, the PPP— may snowball into a

destabilising force and derail the process of democracy. However, it is improbable that the PPP would back military.

The Pak-Afghan Theater

There is no sign of Afghan Taliban coming to the negotiating table given its determination to fight out the Afghan army all over the war torn country. It was seen to be masterminding well-planned attacks on the Afghan security forces on a regular basis. However, Pakistan is continuing with its public pronouncement that it wants an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. Jalil Abbas Jilani, Pakistan's ambassador to the United States, was seen to be making attempts to convince the US administration about Pakistan's role in fighting the menace of terrorism in the region. He argued that American people were not fully apprised of the sacrifices Pakistan had made in its fights against terrorism. He argued that the country had lost more than 60,000 precious lives and its economy suffered the loss of billions of dollars.

On the other hand, the Afghan establishment is getting frustrated with Pakistan day by day. Recently, the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani-- who had advocated rapprochement with Pakistan in the interest of peace, after coming to power, was seen to be openly blaming Pakistan for harbouring insurgents and terrorists within its borders. After getting NATO's funding commitment for his forces, he launched a scathing attack on Pakistan by saying that neighbouring states must not give "shelter" to the enemies of Afghanistan.

All in all, there is no sign of Pakistan turning over a new leaf and changing its approach towards either Afghanistan or India, which define the main contours of its foreign and security policy. In the wake of the threat posed by the combined opposition, the Nawaz government is getting cornered once again, foreclosing all hopes of bringing about a transformation in Pakistan's foreign policy outlook, as promised by Nawaz during his campaign during the 2013 elections. Rather, the ongoing unrest in Kashmir, sponsored by shadowy forces across the border, has made it easier for Nawaz Sharif government to shed its policy of normalisation with India in its bid to outshout its opponents in reiterating its commitment to the cause of Kashmir and Kashmiris.
