

PAKISTAN AND INDIA: CAN THEY FIGHT TERROR TOGETHER?

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Inseparable by geography, Pakistan and India are Siamese twins that have emerged together from the womb of history. For better or for worse, their futures will always remain inextricably tied together.

Today, one of the two is in deep trouble. The ferocious militant fanaticism of Pathan tribals, once sequestered in the mountains of Waziristan and Swat, has migrated down into the plains and across the country. Every city of Pakistan has been attacked, some repeatedly and without respite. With threats, abductions, beheadings, and daily suicide bombings, extremists have drastically changed the way Pakistanis live.

Just a couple of months ago, Pakistanis had heaved a sigh of relief. A brief lull in terrorist attacks had followed the army's successful operation against the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Swat, and the killing by an American drone of TTP's supremo, Baitullah Mehsud. Some hubris-filled "analysts" – who incessantly chatter on Pakistan's numerous private television channels – claimed that the TTP had been mortally wounded. But they were dead wrong.

Islamabad is now a city of fear as the TTP retaliates. Traffic crawls past concrete blocks placed across its roads as helmeted soldiers peer suspiciously from behind their machine-guns. Restaurants barely function, and markets are deserted. Still, the attackers appear unstoppable and, as in Peshawar, they have paralyzed the city. Some attacks are more spectacular than others, but even the outstanding ones are forgotten once the next one happens. Explosives inside a car blow up over a hundred shoppers in Peshawar's crowded Meena Bazaar; a suicide bomber detonates himself in the girls' cafeteria of the International Islamic University in Islamabad; three simultaneous attacks hit police institutes in Lahore; school children are shredded by ball bearings from a suicide bomber's exploding jacket in Kohat,...

Other recent attacks – against hard targets – were even more dramatic. Just days earlier the headlines had been dominated by Taliban militants who

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had stormed the apparently impregnable General Headquarters (GHQ) of the Pakistan Army in Rawalpindi, Islamabad's sister city. The 20-hour siege, followed diligently by private television channels, showed meticulous planning and execution that culminated in hostage-taking and killing. Still more recently, the heavily protected ISI headquarters in Peshawar was blown up by a suicide car bomber. The message was clear: no place in Pakistan is safe any more, not even the safest ones – particularly those belonging to former handlers and mentors.

Incredibly, Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, says that Pakistan is "compiling hard evidence of India's involvement" in terrorist attacks upon Pakistan's public and its armed forces. If he, and the Interior Minister, are correct then we must conclude that the Indians are psychotics possessed with a death wish, or perhaps plain stupid. While India's assistance for Baloch insurgents could conceivably make strategic sense, helping the jihadists simply does not.

As Pakistan staggers from one bombing to the other, some Indians must be secretly pleased. Indeed, there are occasional verbalizations: Is this not sweet revenge for the horrors of Mumbai perpetrated by *Lashkar-e-Taiba*? Shouldn't India feel satisfaction as Pakistan reels from the stinging poison of its domestically reared snakes?

But most Indians are probably less than enthusiastic in stoking fires across the border. In fact, the majority would like to forget that Pakistan exists. With a 6% growth rate, booming hi-tech exports, and expectations of a semi-superpower status, they feel that India has no need to engage a struggling Pakistan with its endless litany of problems.

Of course, some would like to hurt Pakistan. Extremists in India ask: shouldn't one increase the pain of a country – with which India has fought three bloody wars – by aiding its enemies? Perhaps do another Bangladesh on Pakistan someday?

These fringe elements, fortunately, are inconsequential today. Rational self-interest demands that India not aid jihadists. Imagine the consequences if central authority in Pakistan disappears or is sharply weakened. Splintered into a hundred jihadist *lashkars*, each with its own agenda and tactics, Pakistan's territory would become India's eternal nightmare. When Mumbai-II occurs – as it surely would in such circumstances – India's options in dealing with nuclear Pakistan would be severely limited.

The Indian Army would be powerless. As the Americans have discovered at great cost, the mightiest war machines on earth cannot prevent holy warriors from crossing borders. Internal collaborators, recruited from a