

# Proxy War in Jammu & Kashmir

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*“For Islamabad, the liberation of Kashmir is a sacred mission, the only task unfulfilled since Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s days. Moreover, a crisis in Kashmir constitutes an excellent outlet for the frustration at home, an instrument for the mobilisation of the masses, as well as gaining the support of the Islamist parties and primarily their loyalists in the military and the ISI”<sup>1</sup>.*

— **Yossef Bodansky (Director of the US Congress Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare),1995.**

It had become increasingly difficult to hold on to colonial India after two world wars by the waning empire of Great Britain. With little hope for resuscitation in the public appetite in Britain and its key allies such as the United States of America insisted on the transfer of power to the Indians, London resolved to do the same to the new dominions of Pakistan and India on **14 and 15 August 1947** respectively - almost a year earlier than **June 1948, the timeline that had been** previously decided. Consequently, the British failed to plan for the partition leading to predictable chaos and violence<sup>2</sup>. Compounding the problem, the British did not announce the territorial boundaries of the new states until after the transfer of power, which only added fuel to the communal fire<sup>3</sup>.

Ever since Pakistani raiders and razakars invaded J&K in October 1947, and the state acceded to India, Pakistan continued to project J&K as the **“core”** issue and that the eventual merger of J&K with Pakistan was the only acceptable solution to the problem and that it is the **‘unfinished agenda of partition’**. Having failed to annex J&K by force in the several wars initiated by it against India over the last 77 years, and emboldened by its acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1987, Pakistan hatched a new conspiracy for the annexation of J&K by waging a covert **“proxy war”** against India. A doctrine of continuing the conflict by **“inflicting a thousand cuts”** had been declared by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as a **thousand-year war against India** in 1965<sup>4</sup>.

But his arrogance was soon dashed to ground in 1971 when India not only mortified Pakistan's armed forces through a crushing defeat but also dismembered it into two parts. Pakistan adopted a new strategy to deal with India as it was convinced that Pakistan could not match India in its military might and defeat the Indian Armed Forces in a conventional war.

**Operation ‘Topac’**, under which Pakistan launched its proxy war against India, was brilliantly conceived and skilfully executed. Pakistan’s **President, General Zia ul Haq’s** concept of **“K- 2”** (Kashmir and

Khalistan) under ISI in 1979 exploited the disgruntled elements among the youth of Punjab to fight for the creation of an independent Sikh state of Khalistan followed by whipping up passions of the Kashmiri people on communal and sectarian lines, fan the flames of religious fundamentalism to create conditions for waging a jihad. The very concept was aimed to destabilise India by creating conditions of insecurity in two contiguous front-line Indian border states and tie down the Indian Army, in internal security duties<sup>5</sup>.

Having failed miserably in all its attempts to annex J&K, Pakistan in collusion with China has revived terrorism south of Pir Panjal Ranges (**PPR**) in J & K towards the Kashmir valley between 2020-2024, post abrogation of Article 370 and 35 A. A new front in Bangladesh appears to be taking shape with Pakistan and Bangladesh having re-set their ties. This paper will endeavour to cover Pakistan's proxy war in J&K and its future to arrive at a strategy that India may adopt to counter the same.

### Changing Global Order

Ray Dalio in his book on “**The Changing World Order**”, said “[...], **the world order is now rapidly shifting**<sup>6</sup>. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US had tried to create a ‘unipolar’ world, much against the ‘rules-based liberal order’ expected to have dominated the post end of the cold war era, especially in the 21st century<sup>7</sup>.<sup>8</sup> Post COVID 19 Pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a NATO aspirant, on February 24, 2022, has not only challenged the post-Soviet security architecture of Europe but may go down in history as sharp manifestations of the changing global order<sup>9</sup>.

Further, the Hamas attack against the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) on **October 07, 2023** and Iran’s first direct attack on Israel on **April 13, 2024**, nearly two weeks after the deadly strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria will always be remembered as other two major ‘**Turning Points**’ in the 21st century as well.

The expansion of Islamic radical groups seizing power by force and the willingness of the world to legitimise the same as has been exemplified in Afghanistan in 2021 and now in Bangladesh and Syria in 2024, highlight the arrival of “Non-State Actors” at the centre stage with extended “Arcs of Influence and Dominance” in the new world order in 21st Century, that the world should be concerned about.

Being at the peak of its power in the 1990s, the US, in recent years, has exposed its signs of declining unilateralism. Its wars in the Muslim world having been far from what Washington had desired as it floundered in Afghanistan and Iraq - the changing world order had begun to manifest with aggressive Russia’s intervention in Georgia, annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine; a defiant Iran attacking Israel in direct confrontation despite having been weakened significantly by IDF; an unruly nuclear capable North Korea busy testing its missiles and its troops in Kursk ; a hegemonistic China with its quest for dominance over its neighbours and its ambition to be a global power so as to challenge the US as a *Monopolar* (emphasis added) leader suggest the visible shift in the balance of power towards a Multipolar world order<sup>10</sup>. Multipolar order, unstable and most unpredictable, have triggered large-scale conflicts in the world in the past as witnessed during World War I and II<sup>11</sup>.

However, preceded by the landmark ceasefire between Israel and Hamas on January 19, 2025, Trump's 2.0 with "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) and promise to end "four years of American decline" indicate America's resolve to restore its supremacy as the world's sole superpower<sup>12, 13</sup>.

## Global Strategic Environment

Marked by a growing polarization among the major powers and global grouping, the new emerging blocks characterize the current global strategic landscape - Russia and China on one side, Western powers closing ranks on the other despite differences in opinion, and the Global South refusing to pick sides; thereby making it one of the most noteworthy developments since the onset of the war in February 2022.

Further, the global security situation is becoming increasingly unpredictable and volatile due to intense competition among major countries, enhanced military expenditures, and a push for strategic capacity in nuclear, outer space, cyber, emerging and disruptive technology and missile defence. Grey-zone/Hybrid/Irregular and Proxy Wars **predominated by the "Non-state Actors"** have become the new normal in the 21st century<sup>14</sup>. India's push for its **strategic autonomy** and "human centric" globalisation has made India reclaim the true meaning of non-alignment, in the wake of the Ukraine war **where it has refused to take sides**<sup>15, 16</sup>.

## Regional Environment

South Asia continues to witness strategic rivalry amongst global powers for dominance in India's neighbourhood with the possible involvement of deep state of America in regime change in Bangladesh.

**Birth of Pakistan:** Demanding a separate homeland for Muslims in the South-Asian subcontinent in March 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as leader of the Muslim League, insisted on the "two-nation theory" and argued that without a separate Muslim home-land, South Asia would be mired in conflict and thus vulnerable to outside pressure<sup>17</sup>.

With an overwhelming vote for Pakistan in the referendums held in the North-West Frontier Province and the District of Sylhet in Assam, the new state of Pakistan came into existence on August 14, 1947<sup>18, 19</sup>.

**Strategic Importance of Pakistan:** For the British, the northwest frontiers of India were **the most sensitive of all the frontiers of their vast Empire**, as the Soviet Union's southern border was in proximity to oilfields of the Persian Gulf and India (Kashmir). It being at the cross-roads of South, West and Central Asia connecting to Europe, the perceived Soviet ambitions towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf, enhanced its strategic significance<sup>20</sup>. Further, both Britain and Americans came to see the strategic value of West Pakistan's location - particularly as a **possible bomber base on the Soviet Union's southern flank** that eventually led to close ties between the West and Pakistan's fledgling army making it a **conduit for Western influence**<sup>21</sup>.

## Historical Perspective of J&K

By executing an Instrument of Accession under the provisions of the Indian Independence Act 1947 on 26 October 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh agreed to accede his state to the Dominion of India on three subjects, namely, defence, external affairs and communications<sup>22,23</sup>. Islamic Republic of Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah, however, claimed that the accession was "fraudulent", as the standstill agreement signed was still in force<sup>24</sup>.

That was how Jammu and Kashmir came to be a part of India. Article 370, which gave special status to Jammu & Kashmir, a separate constitution, state flag & autonomy over its internal administration, was incorporated into the Constitution.

A new chapter in the history of Jammu & Kashmir was added on 5 August, 2019, when the Government of India removed Article 370 and consequently, the special status of Jammu & Kashmir<sup>25</sup>. It also passed the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act, which created 2 Union Territories (UT)- Jammu & Kashmir in the west & Ladakh in the East with three administrative divisions: Jammu, Kashmir & Ladakh. The UT of Jammu & Kashmir consists of two divisions: Jammu and Kashmir Divisions - both administered by the Central Government of India<sup>26</sup>.

### MAP OF UT OF JAMMU & KASHMIR AND UT OF LADAKH





**Geo-Strategic Importance of J & K:** The northernmost landmass of India covers an area that includes the India-administered territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, the Pakistan-administered territories of Pak Occupied J&K and Gilgit -Baltistan, and the Chinese-administered territories of Aksai Chin and the Shaksgam Valley. It shares its borders with China and Afghanistan in the north, and Pakistan in the west<sup>27, 28</sup>.

Located between the three nuclear powers of India, Pakistan, and China, its borders with Afghanistan in addition to its being at the crossroads connecting South and Central Asia, make it geostrategically important while Central Asia itself forms a geographical bridge between Europe and other parts of Asia. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) running through the state makes it vital for China's national interests.

**Population and Religion:** The Census of 2011 of the erstwhile complete state of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded the Muslim population at 85.67 lakh - again 68.31% of the total population of 125.41 lakh (1.25 crore) - and the Hindu population at 35.66 lakh (28.43% of the total)<sup>29</sup>. The changes in demography are a contentious issue in Jammu and Kashmir, the majority in the former being Hindus and the latter being Muslims respectively.

**Delimitation:** Delimitation is the **act of fixing or redrawing the limits or boundaries of territorial constituencies** based on its population size.

- Delimitation became necessary when the **Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, 2019** increased the number of seats in the Assembly.

- The erstwhile **J&K state had 111 seats - 46 in Kashmir, 37 in Jammu, and 4 in Ladakh - plus 24 seats reserved for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).**
- **Legislative Assembly:** The Commission has increased **seven Assembly seats - six in Jammu (now 43 seats) and one in Kashmir (now 47).**
- **Lok Sabha:** There are **five Parliamentary Constituencies** in the region.

### Prelude to Proxy War

The Partition: The partition of India in 1947 led to large-scale violence, with estimates of loss of life ranging from several hundred thousand to two million, one of the largest human migrations in modern history with roughly 14 million people displaced resulting in an overwhelming refugee crisis that triggered riots and mass casualties. The violence created an atmosphere of hostility and suspicion between India and Pakistan that continues to plague their relationship. The partition caused long-term memories of exile and loss. For Pakistan, Partition remains “unfinished business”<sup>30</sup>.

**The Border between India and Pakistan:** With borders uncertain as independence neared, communal militias mobilised to cleanse districts of minorities in the hope of achieving either Muslim majority or non-Muslim majority localities<sup>31</sup>. The border, primarily based on the Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Pakistan - known as the Radcliffe Line, was officially announced on **August 17, 1947, two days after the independence of the two countries.**

**Impact of Partition:** Jammu & Kashmir was one of the princely states, a unique region because of its religious composition, geography and ruler, during the British rule of the Indian subcontinent. With geographical proximity to both India and newly born Pakistan, while being a Muslim majority region during that time, it had a Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh.

Three distinct areas of the State including the Ladakh region had a Buddhist majority population, the Jammu region had a Hindu majority and the Kashmir Valley had a Muslim majority. These distinct features became the deciding factor based on which the ruler of Jammu & Kashmir was given the opportunity to choose the fate of Jammu & Kashmir unlike present day Bangladesh which was awarded to Pakistan during partition because of being a Muslim majority region. Around the same time, Sheikh Abdullah was building a movement against the rule of the Maharaja. Given the complexity of the situation, the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir remained neutral and delayed his decision because of the heterogeneous composition of the population<sup>32</sup>. Before the neutrality of the Maharaja could be converted into a peaceful transition to the next step for Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan invaded Kashmir and Jammu provinces from the north. The Maharaja and his government were unable to defeat the coalition of the Pakistani Army. Despite their failure, the Maharaja did not give in to Pakistan’s aggression; instead, the Maharaja decided to accede to India and signed the Instrument of Accession<sup>33</sup>.

**India - Pakistan Conflict : 1947-1949:** The first war between India and Pakistan over Jammu & Kashmir broke out in 1947. Prime Minister Nehru chose to take the issue to the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations (UN) passed a Resolution on 13 August 1948 aimed to arrange a free and fair plebiscite and restore the situation in a pre-1947 State only after the withdrawal of the Pakistani Army which never happened. The UN finally settled an agreement between India and Pakistan for a ceasefire based on a Cease Fire Line (CFL), on 1 January 1949, which awarded India the control of a significant part of Jammu & Kashmir whereas the rest of the area remained in control of Pakistan<sup>34, 35</sup>.

**The 1962 Sino-Indian war:** The occupation of Aksai Chin by China in 1950s, Indian Territory part of then Jammu & Kashmir State, was crucial for the Chinese to establish routes for transportation between Xinjiang and Tibet. China refused to give up its control and consequently, China and India fought a one-month long war of bloodshed in 1962.

The Chinese retained control of **Aksai Chin** and in addition China also gained control of **5,180 sq km** of Pakistan Administered Jammu & Kashmir through a border agreement between these two countries in 1963<sup>36</sup>.

**The 1965 war and the Tashkent agreement:** Pakistan launched a secret mission, called '**Operation Gibraltar**' to win over Jammu & Kashmir with a sudden attack in Indian Administered Jammu & Kashmir with a force of 30,000 armed soldiers.

However, India made significant progress against Pakistani aggression in the 1965 war but the war ended in yet another ceasefire due to diplomatic pressure from the international community. Following the UN mandated ceasefire, the Tashkent agreement was signed on 1 January 1966, and both countries were left with the territory they already administered pre the 1965 war<sup>37</sup>. A second attack by Pakistan in such a short time reiterated the fact that **Pakistan would continue to attack India** to take control of Jammu & Kashmir.

**1971 War - Liberation of Bangladesh:** India and Pakistan fought another brief war in 1971. Pakistan suffered a humiliating defeat. Bangladesh was liberated following the 1972 Shimla agreement signed on July 02, 1972. The Cease Fire Line was renamed as the Line of Control (LoC) resulting from the ceasefire of 17 December 1971.

### **The Trigger - Pakistan's Proxy War**

The trigger to Pakistan's Proxy War in J & K was the alleged rigging of the election of 1987 in Jammu & Kashmir where in the coalition of Farooq Abdullah's and the Congress party of India were declared victorious against the coalition of several Islamic parties. In addition, the armed movement of Amanullah Khan, Chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in exile in Pakistan with the support of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and some political decisions of Farooq Abdullah led to the beginning of the uprising of militancy in Jammu & Kashmir<sup>38</sup>.

**Cross-border Terrorism Supported by Pakistan:** Acts of violence started from the year 1987. However, 1989 marked the rise of the militants in Jammu & Kashmir as the impact of militancy in that year was massive resulting in an exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The armed struggle was responded with a heavy hand by the Indian authority, as it met the definitions of **cross-border terrorism supported by Pakistan**<sup>39</sup>

**The Proxy War - Pakistan's Alternate Strategy:** Having failed several times through active military efforts and negotiations to win over Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan made covert armed militancy a strategy to fight against India avoiding war and negotiations. In essence, this became a **proxy war** against India through which Pakistan aimed to impose a heavy political and economic cost on India and further jeopardize the political authority of India in Jammu & Kashmir<sup>40</sup>.

The Air Power Doctrine considers Military Relations between China and Pakistan is to threaten India<sup>41</sup>. The Land Warfare Doctrine also mentions that China and Pakistan pose a long-term proxy / hybrid/grey zone multidimensional threat to India<sup>42</sup>.

Further, having joined the US forces in their fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan acquired modern weapons and ammunition from the US and also gained access to a large number of weapons following the withdrawal of Soviet forces in Afghanistan in 1989.

With an abundance of ammunition and weapons as well as experience to assist the militants to implement a guerrilla war in Jammu & Kashmir and funds from the sale of narcotics in Afghanistan, one of the largest opium producers of the world, and from donations of other Muslim organizations which financed the proxy war, Pakistan was adequately prepared to unleash the fury of a heightened militancy in J & K<sup>43</sup>.

**From Militancy to Terrorist Movement:** The presence of the religiously motivated militant groups changed the dynamics of the Kashmir-issue completely making it a religious struggle without any personal connection with Kashmir, thereby making their fight against Indian rule solely because of their religious motivation of **Jihad or as a religious mission of Muslim brotherhood**. Some of the militant groups with members from Pakistan and Afghanistan having joined the Jihadi organization of **Osama Bin Laden, called the International Islamic Front**, the insurgency in the Kashmir Valley soon became a **terrorist movement that led to change of tactics** because of affiliation with **international terrorist organisations**. The militants started attempting suicide attacks which were not common at the beginning of the struggle<sup>44</sup>.

As the local Kashmiris kept losing interest after the initial momentum of jihadi movement due to casualties, the Pakistani military establishment adopted backup strategies - **recruited militants from other Muslims countries** such as **Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Egypt, Libya and Sudan who joined hands with Pakistani and pro-Pakistani militants in their proxy war against India using the banner of a religious struggle**. This backup strategy of sending foreign militants did not achieve the desired outcomes as many of these **militants were killed** by the Indian security forces. Among the militants killed between

1989 and 2002, about 3,000 were from outside Jammu and Kashmir (mostly from Pakistan and some Afghans)<sup>45</sup>.

As the Pakistani intelligence services kept changing their strategies regarding the continuation of militancy in Jammu & Kashmir, Indian authorities also kept improving their tactics continuously besides deploying a large number of troops, both national and local security forces including the local people in its efforts to track and battle the militants through the establishment of *'Village Defence Guards'*<sup>46</sup>.

**The Kargil War in 1999:** The plan of a proxy war was executed to avoid direct confrontation, yet the proxy war resulted in a direct conflict in 1999, around ten years after militancy had started, following the infiltration of Pakistani troops in Kargil, in Jammu & Kashmir. India's tactical victories in this conflict and pressure from the US forced the Pakistani Government to withdraw its troops. The war lasted for three months<sup>47</sup>. Except for the Kargil war in 1999, Pakistan has been careful to contain the conflict to an extent that it would not end up in a direct confrontation but would still affect India significantly.

**Transition to Normalcy:** After around 2000, the insurgency became far less violent and assumed the form of protests and marches<sup>48</sup>. Certain groups also chose to lay down their arms and look for a peaceful resolution to the conflict<sup>49</sup>. With the South of Pir Panjal Ranges (PPR) gradually returning to normalcy, the Strategic Reserves deployed from outside the theatre were withdrawn and redeployed to respective original areas in 2008 - 2009.

Though the violence levels gradually continued to decline with effective and successful Counter Terrorist operations, there were sporadic terrorist attacks in J & K, especially in Kashmir valley during this period. India undertook trans - LOC surgical operations in Pakistan Occupied J & K and in Pakistan in response to terrorist attacks in Uri (2016) and Pulwama (2019) respectively.

**The Turning Point: On 5 August 2019, with the** abrogation of Article 370 & 35 (A), the President of India issued a new Presidential Order, **whereby all the provisions of the Indian Constitution were made to apply to the State without any special provisions.**

**OP SINDOOR:** On 22 April 2025, five militants entered the Baisaran Valley meadow, which is located about 7 km from the Pahalgam town in Anantnag district. The area is surrounded by dense pine forests on all sides, and is a popular spot for tourists<sup>50, 51</sup>.

The loss of innocent and unarmed civilian tourists' lives in the Pahalgam carnage by the terrorists of The Resistance Force (TRF) is only an example that acknowledges the fact that Proxy War as a tool of Foreign Policy of Pakistan will not end anytime soon. The Indian Government indicated a desire for a strong response<sup>52</sup>.

On 7 May 2025, the Indian Armed Forces launched ‘OPERATION SINDOOR’, hitting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir from where terrorist attacks against India have been planned and directed. The trans -border (across LoC and IB), precision and surgical operations conducted against nine targets of terrorist camps from where terrorists have been operating in Pakistan against India<sup>53</sup>.

### China’s Role

*Four days after the abrogation of Article 370 & 35 (A), Mr Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan flew to China on a two-day visit on August 09, 2019. Both the countries, jointly decided a strong response to the India’s move.*

*The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of China, in a surprise move amidst the Covid Pandemic, intruded into areas in Eastern Ladakh of Indian territory around April-May 2020 disregarding the three decade old peace and tranquillity along the border<sup>54</sup>.*

The Galwan (2020) triggered an extended stand-off along the entire 3,488 Km long border **drawing out Indian Army (IA) troops deployed in South of PPR in J&K** as also the strategic reserves in depth to India’s northern border.

**Revival of Proxy War:** Taking advantage of India’s vulnerability, Pakistan revived the Proxy War from Poonch to Rajouri, Reasi, Kathua, Doda, Kishtwar, the conflict zone that lay dormant for a little over a decade and then to Kashmir Valley between 2020 -24.

**Collaboration between ISI Pakistan and ISIS and Establishment of Three Regional ISIS Caliphates in India, 2019-2023:** The emergence of ISIS in 2014 and its failure to establish a Global Caliphate between 2014-2019 brought it closer to ISI of Pakistan in 2019. The former was provided the sleeper cells by ISI of Pakistan for formation of “ Regional ISIS Caliphates “ in Bengal and Maharashtra to start with. Soon the ISI of Pakistan extended the network of sleeper cells in UP, Bihar and Assam in addition to Bengal and Maharashtra between 2019-2023 . The radical elements of “Yusuf-ul- Hindi (YUH)”, “Ansar- Ul-Tahid( AUT)” and “ Harkar-Ul- Harbez- Islami (HUHI)” expanded the existing network of sleeper cells with an aim to create “ Transnational Terror Network “ and destabilise India.

The “Global Islamic Caliphate (GIC)” with a frontal subunit under the name of “Global Islamic Council (GIC)” consisting of “Over Ground Workers OGWs” with an exterior of a charitable outlet came into existence in J& K in 2023. This outfit did not have any elements from the YUH, AUT or HUHI of the Regional Caliphates within India. The aim of the GIC was to liberate J& K, not allow it to join Pakistan and develop the same into an extension of the “ GIC”. The nefarious design, however, has been under a tight scanner of Indian sleuths for the past few years and deserves to be busted soon.

**Myanmar-Manipur-Bangladesh:** As no analysis would be complete in isolation, looking towards Myanmar, already on the boil since February 2021, in conjunction with the state of Manipur since May 03, 2023, suggests ominous signatures of China-Pakistan-Bangladesh collusion, especially when viewed with the abrupt worsening of the situation in Bangladesh in August 2024.

The involvement of the American *Deep State* is palpable. India had good relations with Bangladesh during the sixteen year rule by Sheikh Hasina. However, tensions have increased since the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024 and her later escaping to India. But since Hasina's departure, **Pakistan and Bangladesh** have edged closer to each other in an apparent reset at a time when politics in both countries have a general anti-India sentiment, overriding the historical animosity between Islamabad and Dhaka.

**Thaw in Extended Stand-off:** With western and eastern flanks of the country in turmoil, Mr Vikram Misri, the Indian Foreign Secretary on October 21, 2024 announced disengagement in eastern Ladakh where about 50,000 troops of the PLA and IA each were deployed in eyeball-to-eyeball contact from 2020.

**China's Fresh Activities:** China's announcement on establishing the two counties in the Aksai Chin area came days after Special Representatives of the two nations resumed boundary talks that had been stalled for almost five years. New Delhi has lodged a protest with Beijing over China's establishment of two new counties in its Hotan Prefecture since parts of jurisdiction of these counties fall in the Union Territory of Ladakh, in the Aksai Chin area as also an objection to China's proposed plan to build a mega dam on the Brahmaputra River in Tibet close to the Indian border<sup>55</sup>.

The Chief of the Army Staff of India, on January 13, 2025, said, "India will not reduce the number of its troops deployed along the LAC with China anytime soon, asserting there is still 'a degree of stand-off' persisting between the rival armies and the two countries need to rebuild trust to de-escalate overall tensions.

According to the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment released on February 05, 2024 by the Director of National Intelligence, USA, since the relations of India with both China and Pakistan are fragile, it is likely to result in a war between these three nations<sup>56</sup>.

**It seems that the battlefields in South Asia are being shaped by China and ISI of Pakistan for a two-front war on India in which Pakistan will attack India for Jammu & Kashmir and China will attack India for Arunachal Pradesh in the coming decade.**

### Overall Assessment - Pakistan's Proxy War in J & K

The peaceful elections in J&K were the result of a zero-tolerance approach towards the terror ecosystem and its sympathisers in the region resulting in a significant decline in local recruitment. The four years

since 2020 have seen a steady increase in foreign terrorists, initially in the south of Pir Panjal, Doda/Kishtwar Area and now in Jammu as well as in the Kashmir region<sup>57</sup>.

Islamabad and its terrorist groups are now making desperate attempts to radicalise and escalate terrorist violence through manipulative top-down techniques. Pakistan not only established new virtual terrorist groups but also intensified anti-India activities across social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, X, Telegram, as well as the Dark Web<sup>58</sup>.

The TECHINT-based (Technical Intelligence) information about the presence and movement of the terrorist has diminished, forcing the security agencies to generate actionable HUMINT (Human Intelligence) for successful operations against the terrorists<sup>59</sup>.

In view of the foregoing, the Af-Pak region being a traditional cradle for terrorism due to Islamabad's state policy of using terror for geopolitical and geostrategic interests as a foreign policy tool, distortion of the hadith, the use of encrypted apps and social media for recruitment, and state support from Pakistan and other terror groups are likely to continue in collusion with China in J & K and other parts of India.

### India's Counter Strategy against Proxy War in J&K

India should, therefore, exploit vulnerabilities of the adversaries and, strengthen its counterterrorism strategies by adopting short, medium and long term proactive countermeasures - based on effective surveillance and accurate intelligence as also by adopting the *International Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons* in All its Aspects of United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs<sup>60</sup>. This is achieved by ensuring capability enhancement of security forces with "Multi-domain Response" on an "Escalatory Matrix" at strategic, operational and tactical levels, as part of an integrated, whole of nation and multi-prong approach. As part of this, steps need to be taken to dismantle terror networks in all forms including accumulation, proliferation, illicit transfer and misuse of small arms and light weapons, narco-terrorism, and money laundering.

A deeper challenge that needs to be addressed is radicalisation through social media as part of Pakistan's Proxy War in collusion with China in J & K and elsewhere in the country.

- **Strategic End State:** India must aim to take back Pakistan Occupied J&K by applying Comprehensive National Power (CNP) as long-term strategy of the country in accordance with the parliament resolution of 1994. Therefore, the Country must formulate a plan and put it in place at the earliest.
- **Concept:** As a National Security Strategy, India must prepare for a long haul to contain, counter and contest the menace proactively by exploiting vulnerabilities of the adversaries, and adopting global means and methods such as Improving weapons tracing as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and focusing on the generation of "actionable and hard intelligence" within and

beyond the boundaries of India. India must declare an open, clear and coherent strategy to neutralize terrorists anywhere in the world while pursuing the national objective relentlessly of being a developed country of \$30 Trillion USD economy or more by 2047.

- **External:** Collaborate with Strategic partners and leverage tribal affinities of Taliban (Afghanistan) and others; penetrate anti- India forces, seek and share real time intelligence about recruitment, arming, training, camps and infiltration into J & K across Borders/ LOC, with agencies in advance and neutralise them at a time and place of India's choosing.
- **Along the LOC:** Strengthen anti-infiltration obstacles, surveillance using emerging technologies and deployment of troops in counter infiltration roles and neutralise terrorists at the Borders/ LOC using contact and non contact methods.
- **Hinterland:** Establish an effective Counter Insurgency (CI)/Counter Terrorism(CT) grid in layers , dominate/launch surgical operations based on actionable intelligence<sup>61</sup>-
  - ❖ Enhance coordination within the Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) with greater collaboration among agencies.
  - ❖ Establish dedicated fusion centres for improved coordination in North Kashmir, South Kashmir, Rajouri-Poonch and Jammu, with locals from different agencies under the supervision of a multi-agency centre (SMAC) at the UT level.
  - ❖ Impart joint training and exercises to multiple agencies at these fusion centres on the use of big data, technological advancements and Artificial Intelligence to curb terrorism for lasting peace in J&K.
  - ❖ Enhance coordination and collaboration at the tactical level.

## Conclusion

The Pakistani central government originally supported, trained and armed the insurgency in Kashmir. However, President Pervez Musharraf decided to end support for such groups, after groups linked to the Kashmiri insurgency attempted to assassinate him twice. His successor, Asif Ali Zardari also continued the policy, calling insurgents in Kashmir "terrorists".

But the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence hasn't followed the lead of the government and has continued its support for terrorist groups in Kashmir.

Pakistan's internal troubles have already threatened US's Security and International peace, and Pakistan's rapidly growing population, nuclear arsenal, and relationships with China and India will continue to force

it upon America's geostrategic map in new and important ways over the coming decades. Hence, there is “No Exit from Pakistan” for USA<sup>62</sup>.

Hence, the Pakistani ruling elites are not in complete control of the supporting structures existing since the 1980s for terrorism, which they have been using for their proxy war in J&K. Because of the above factors, jihad and terrorism in J&K are likely to continue.

The ISI of Pakistan is likely to continue to exploit the advantage of being on the sides of both China as well as USA, being adept at playing double games, and extend Proxy war in the form of terrorism in J&K as well as insurgency in northeastern states.

India, hence, must enhance the capability of its security apparatus in multi domains in all fronts and be prepared to address the emerging security challenges including escalation of collusive China-Pakistan Proxy war.

To shut the tap of terrorism flowing from Pakistan to India permanently, India has to apply a long term counter strategy of kinetic and non kinetic measures against Pakistan’s “bleed India with thousand cuts” by ensuring that the leadership in the terror organisations based in Pakistan are neutralised, money laundering is brought under check; comd, cont, comn, int, svl, Trg and the Pak Army establishments supporting terror outfits are gradually destroyed by the Israel concept of “mow the grass” from time to time . Pakistan must be brought under FATF; USA dissuaded to extend any bail out packages through IMF as also financial support for maintenance of F16 fleet in Pakistan AF.

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