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Edited by:
M Waqas Jan

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Strategic Vision Institute (SVI)

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Editor's Note

The New Year started with yet another example of the dangers of US unilateralism, as the assassination of one of Iran's most senior military officials from a targeted US drone strike, brought the entire region dangerously close to all-out war. Pakistan's response which has repeatedly called for calm and restraint on both sides belies one of the harshest truths of our times; namely that another war would only worsen the prevailing security crises in every way as opposed to achieving whatever limited objective either side may be pursuing. Be it the US's insistence on regime change in Iran, or Iran's slow but measured approach to tipping the regional balance in its favor, any hostilities would likely pose dangerous consequences for the entire region, not to mention the fragile peace currently being brokered in Afghanistan.

With such ominous war clouds looming in its West, and after having just recently fought back the spillovers of the ongoing war in Afghanistan to its North West - the same threat to regional peace and stability also remains just as ever present for Pakistan from the East. With a new Indian Army Chief harping on the same jingoistic rhetoric that has become the mainstay of the ruling BJP's divisive communal politics, the threat of yet another mindless adventure remains disturbingly real. Especially considering how that too is likely to be aimed at simply diverting attention away from the raging turmoil which the entire Indian State is currently embroiled in.

Hence, what comes to the fore is the tragic realization that the very basis for any escalation of hostilities between India and Pakistan is likely to be driven more through sheer hubris and hate on India's part, let alone any forward looking strategic or diplomatic goal. Based on that, to willingly lead an entire region of nearly 2 billion people to the brink of nuclear war as simply routine politicking speaks not only of the reckless abandon with which the Indian Nation is being led with at the moment, but also the greed and narcissism underpinning its leadership. Rather than simply hoping for it, therein lies a strong, albeit controversial case for helping bring about a regime change in India, on the grounds of safeguarding regional peace and stability. After all, isn't that the same reason being put forth by the US in its case for regime change in Iran?

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M Waqas Jan
Senior Research Associate

Escalating to De-Escalate: From Balakot to Ain al-Asad

M Waqas Jan

With tensions between the United States and Iran dramatically escalating just days into the new year, the risks of a new and even more damaging war erupting in the Middle East have once again reached worrying levels. This was sparked by the brazen US drone strike which targeted [General Qassem Soliemani](#) – the commanding General of Iran’s Elite Quds forces- just outside Baghdad airport earlier this month. As a result, US-Iran tensions had seemingly skyrocketed overnight in what senior Iranian officials termed as an act of war against their country by the US. These fears were further realized by the [Iranian response](#), which comprised of a late-night fusillade of ballistic missiles launched at two US military bases in Iraq just three days later.

However, with no casualties reported as a result of the Iranian missile strikes and President Trump’s [de-escalatory statement](#) following the Iranian response, those same tensions seem to have subsided over the last two weeks at least for the time being. This de-escalation has largely been ascribed to the fact that Iran had [deliberately chosen](#) to avoid US casualties by choosing to balance an overt display of its intent and resolve, against its unwillingness to engage further in a protracted and costly conflict with the US. The argument follows that, while on the one hand widespread public sentiment and anger in Iran had demanded a punitive response in the form of clear retaliation against the US, the proportionality of such a response had required careful calibration with regards to its potential for further escalation. Thus, representing one of the most recent examples of how the importance of optics and crafting a domestic narrative remain key within the battle for escalation dominance in this century’s limited wars.

This emphasis on optics and narrative was also evident last year in the South Asian context, where following the Pulwama incident, both India and Pakistan had engaged in a dangerous yet limited exchange to gain escalation dominance over one another. For instance, the Indian cross-border air strikes at Balakot had also been domestically framed as being a punitive response to an attack which – like the strike against General Suleimani – had resulted in an unacceptable loss of military personnel. Hence, the retaliatory airstrikes which targeted a suspected militant haven inside Pakistan were also accompanied by growing national outrage and calls for revenge from India that was further amplified by its domestic media.

However, just like Iran’s retaliatory strikes against US bases in Iraq, the Indian strikes at Balakot did not result in any casualties [despite official claims to the contrary](#). This was evident in the considerable extent to which the [Indian media](#) then and [Iranian media](#) earlier this month, had bragged of scores of enemy casualties including damage to key infrastructure. Hence, constructing palatable narratives that remained acceptable enough for domestic consumption while also helping quell the same national outrage these governments had themselves helped amplify. Consequently, questions following the Balakot strikes that were then raised by Pakistan over whether the absence of casualties was intentional or purely accidental stand as similar to the ones being debated currently within the US with regards to

Iran. These further boil down to questions over whether it was a lack of capability or instead a deliberate display of precision and intent by these strikes' perpetrators.

In order to assess this, it is important to note that while both the Indian and Irani strikes bear some similarities in terms of the preceding context within which they were conducted, their differing scopes and execution plans led to two very different outcomes. For one Iran launched over a dozen ballistic missiles targeting key locations and structures at US military bases, which drawing on the recent damage assessment reports appear to have been deliberately chosen as targets. While there were a couple of missiles that seemed to have fallen off target and remained unexploded, the vast majority seemed to have hit specific structures according to satellite photographs. In comparison, the air strikes launched by the Indian Air force while representing a clear show of intent, instead failed to offer a credible display of their strike capabilities. Specifically, if the objective was to display the reach and precision of their strike abilities in the form of a forced near miss, the ambiguity surrounding their choice of targets seems to have spectacularly backfired, if that in fact was the objective. Even worse, if it was simply an accidental miss, then instead of communicating military prowess, the strike simply presented a display of sheer ineptitude in which the battle for escalation dominance was already lost, no matter the media spin.

This for instance is further evident in the different responses generated by both the Indian and Iranian strikes. Whereas the US has chosen quite visibly and publicly to not escalate the situation any further; Pakistan last year felt compelled to not only respond in kind, but to reassert its ability to conventionally deter any provocative incursions into its airspace. Following [Pakistan's own display](#) of a forced near miss via air launched stand-off weapons, the highly publicized downing of an Indian fighter jet, and the unconditional release of its captured pilot; eventually presented a very real and irrefutable advantage in terms of escalation dominance

It is important to understand here that while the above incidents may offer a tantalizing vindication of the very concept of escalation dominance, expected outcomes only appear as clear cut in hindsight. Especially considering the inherent temptation of favoring escalation itself as a means of de-escalation, there exist a whole host of uncertain variables that not only amplify the inherent risks, but may dramatically alter the situation for the worse. In the recent standoff between the US and Iran, the US drawing on its already established military supremacy did not have to display any capability to Iran or anyone else, hence making the decision to de-escalate a lot easier. Especially after already having achieved its objective of taking out General Soleimani. In contrast and as evident in the events following Balakot, Pakistan being on the receiving end of a much larger and better funded adversary would be in any similar situation hard-pressed not to escalate and restore deterrence. This holds a highly dangerous truth considering that the escalation ladder in South Asia is essentially built around the threat of nuclear war. Even more so with competing and vague indications of where the nuclear option lies on said ladder, this alone should technically deter any misplaced sense of adventurism if simple common sense is to prevail in the region. Yet as both incidents have shown, nothing about limited war remains predictable in today's day and age.

<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/01/19/escalating-to-de-escalate-from-balakot-to-ain-al-asad/>

Justifying a Pakistani Response to India's Hybrid Warfare Campaign

Haris Bilal Malik

Hybrid warfare has irreversibly changed the dynamics of war in the contemporary era. In a way, it can be perceived as forming a 'new normal' that has also transformed the nature of warfare in South Asia, one of the most volatile regions of the world. There is no doubt in claiming that Pakistan has been a victim of 'hybrid warfare' widely perceived to be launched and sponsored by India.

This has remained evident even in the region's history where the situation in East Pakistan in 1971 involving the promotion of Mujib's six-point plan, and the training and support offered to the Mukti Bahini's violent separatist movement were all led by India. In the same vein, the current extent of hybrid warfare against Pakistan can also be analyzed from the fact that India is still waging a Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC), through the employment of its proxies in the region.

These are further bolstered by its Anti-Pakistan psychological operations, mainstream and social media campaigns, information operations, false flag operations, and undermining Pakistani interests economically, politically and diplomatically at various international forums. As a result, Pakistan is being forced to counter this hybrid warfare campaign through greater preparedness and a concerted strategy as this 'new normal' continues to threaten Pakistan's national security.

These hybrid threats to the national security of Pakistan have resultantly become a major concern for its politico-strategic outlook. In view of this, the unrest in Baluchistan, which is all the more pertinent because of CPEC, is not acceptable to Indian interests at the present. Hence, this forms one of the primary reasons behind its sustained campaign against Pakistan. This is evident for instance in how [Kulbhushan Jadhav](#), a serving Indian military officer was very recently convicted for spying inside Pakistan and supporting terrorism in Baluchistan.

Furthermore, the [Balochistan Liberation Army \(BLA\)](#), a terrorist group that has been known for decades as being backed by India was also reportedly involved in an attack on the [Chinese Consulate](#) in Karachi back in November 2018. Similarly, the [Pashtun Tahafuz Movement \(PTM\)](#) which is evidently involved in anti-state activities [is also widely understood as being](#) sponsored by India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Afghanistan's National Directorate for Security (NDS). All the above activities have thus carried with them the hallmarks of both the NDS's and RAW's *modus operandi* with regard to destabilizing Pakistan.

In addition to this, Pakistan has been the target of multiple Indian sponsored 'hybrid' campaigns at the international diplomatic level specifically when it comes to Pakistan's nuclear program. In this regard, India has been working for quite some time to project Pakistan as a country involved in nuclear proliferation. As a result, significant lobbying at various multilateral forums has been carried out by India to paint Pakistan as an irresponsible or even 'rogue' nuclear weapons state.

Whereas, in fact, the irony is that it is Mr. Modi's BJP led Hindu Nationalist government that is willfully acting the role of the irresponsible near unhinged BJP nuclear weapons state through its consistent and deliberate [negative nuclear signaling against Pakistan](#). Thus, it is instead India which coupled with its sustained hybrid warfare campaign against Pakistan manifests a very real danger in terms of the present situation escalating towards the nuclear realm.

This, for instance, is further evident in how Mr. Modi has repeatedly [threatened](#) Pakistan with the use of nuclear weapons – such as thermonuclear weapons – solely for the sake of political and electoral goals. As such, India has actively aimed to portray Pakistan's nuclear posture and doctrines as a 'Nuclear Bluff', blaming Pakistan for 'Nuclear Blackmailing'. All while the Indian Nuclear Arsenal, which unfortunately still remains under the control of Hindu Extremists, presents a more pressing and immediate danger.

The fact, however, remains that within the current scenario in India; conditions are ripe for Pakistan to wage its own campaign to bolster its stance at the international as well as the domestic level within India by launching its own hybrid warfare campaign. For instance, the Indian government's unilateral revocation of the special status of the Kashmir region - which had been previously granted under Articles [370](#) and [35\(A\)](#) of the Indian constitution - has played a key role in bringing to surface deep-seeded and pre-existing communal tensions.

In the same way, the discriminatory decision by the Indian Supreme Court regarding the demolition of the [Babri Mosque](#) which the court has ironically based on [preserving the balance](#) between Hindus and Muslims has also inflamed tensions even further. Similarly, the recent controversy surrounding the '[Citizen Amendment Bill](#)' (CAB) has also come to represent India's failed attempts at justifying its Anti-Muslim agenda. In view of all these challenges being posed to Indian Muslims, Pakistan can opt for a more offensive stance in helping further accelerate the widely foreseen demise of the ruling BJP government, which in itself is primarily of its own making.

At the very least Pakistan can provide moral and logistical support to some of India's most marginalized groups to help lay bare the injustices and wickedness of the ruling BJP. Thus, appealing to a more principled stance aimed at a domestic Indian as well as a wider international audience.

Hence while Pakistan is facing a variety of threats from India, it has not yet undertaken a similar campaign of its own to counter and respond to such threats in kind. Despite the Indian government's continued atrocities, the fact remains that Pakistan still holds a highly principled stance vis-à-vis the tactics currently being employed by India. The difference remains that based on this scenario, any action taken by Pakistan would be based on championing a purely more inclusive and pluralist approach promoting human rights in the face of a violent extremist ideology. The recent opening of the Kartarpur Corridor stands as a valid case in point. As such Pakistan's stance remains miles apart from India's deliberate, deep-seeded and destabilizing divisions fueled by hate and indifference. In essence, representing its own 'New Normal' that remains worth fighting for.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/541188/justifying-a-pakistani-response-to-indias-hybrid-warfare-campaign/>

India-Pakistan: Stitched in Multilateral Interests

Shamsa Nawaz

Bilaterally botched relationship, Pakistan and India would be working together in an economic and strategic multilateral forum of Eurasia's Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The China-led Organization has eight members – India, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – and four observer states, Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. Both India and Pakistan were given the membership in 2017.

Founded on June 15, 2001, the SCO characterizes inter-governmental interactions to provide an institutional platform for broad regional economic cooperation within the context of the new realities of globalization and regional integration. As such the interlacing of relations between countries and regions is significantly augmented with the paradigm shift of increasing interdependency and commonly accessible communication. The major objective is to encourage a more cohesive global community for development and prosperity.

However, locked in unrelenting hostility, to establish a non-securitized culture with collective security through conflict resolution between India and Pakistan is blocked by their parochial politics. Teaming up when encountering transnational challenges, as members of a multilateral forum, such as the SCO, presents a ray of hope despite the antiquated politics of Indo-Pak relations. Nationalism and politics of 'otherness' or populism has mainly kept the basic conflict dynamics unchanged between India and Pakistan so far. It is painfully being exacerbated even further with Modi's Hindutva ideology.

Similarly, one of the characteristics of regional cooperation is strengthening conflict management to ensure security. The Composite Dialogue initiated between the two states, way back in 1998, with reference to "all outstanding issues including Jammu and Kashmir" never reached its conclusion. A brief rethought of holding the "Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue" in 2015, also got scuttled by ever soaring tensions. Likewise, geo-economic collaboration in the region, with autonomy for individual countries is dependent upon its political and security conditions. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is perhaps the only regional forum which has not been able to provide a much-needed platform for discussing security-related issues.

Hence, the question whether Prime Minister Imran Khan will attend the SCO summit when India would host the event in October this year, is one of extreme consternation for Pakistan against the backdrop of the deteriorating bilateral relations between both countries. Especially since India revoked Article 370, keeping the Kashmiris under siege for more than 150 days now, an emboldened Modi's recent Bill on Citizenship, and the erstwhile incident of February 27 when Pakistan's borders were violated, with its opposing hostile narratives all present an 'incandescent panoply' of South Asia's collective security concerns. Already deep rooted and agonizing for the people of both India and Pakistan, the territorial disputes between both countries have significantly stampeded the possibility of cordial bilateral relations between both neighbors.

Mr. Raveesh Kumar, the spokesman for India's Ministry of External Affairs [has already declared](#) that "India will be hosting the heads of government summit later this year. As per established practice and procedure within SCO, all eight members, as well as four observer states and other international dialogue partners, will be invited."

South Asia is desperately negotiating its place in an arena of global interconnections within the throes of rapid change. Within the purview of both immediate and distant history where relentless confrontation between two major nuclear armed nations has played a defining role, how would one geographical unit benefit from a multilateral venture? Where would India and Pakistan start as co-members of the SCO, in the absence of the complementarity of political interests? Who would step forward to challenge the prevailing incongruity both internally and externally?

To borrow from the Theory of Transcendence for conflict resolution, proposed by Johan Galtung, India and Pakistan have the following three options to respond to the changing world of multi- polarity and regional integration: 1. To give up in advance on the outstanding issues, 2. Content oneself at the expense of the other or 3. Reach some compromise. Hence, would their presence in the SCO this year impart a new momentum towards a more coherent and effective exercise in conflict management? Is it an opportunity? Or would it deepen their already existing strains and widen their ancient rivalries further afield to Afghanistan and Central Asia?

Through the SCO, China and Russia are building a decidedly multi-polar "Eurasian" point of view. Its strategic aims are to condemn any efforts to achieve a "monopoly in world affairs", divide the world into "leaders and followers" and "impose models of social development." This obviously reflects [China's insistence](#) on forging a "multi-polar" world against the US's persistence of a "uni-polar" international order.

Agreeably, the SCO does provide an opportunity to both India and Pakistan to transcend from their parochial politics. It has historically provided a platform to its member states to sign such crucial agreements like the Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions and the Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, amongst its member states. The transformation of the regional and global security paradigm amidst the growth of new economic centers also necessitates a qualitative change. The world looks askance at teamwork.

Though the forum is too feeble to bear the consequent shocks of Indo-Pak hostility, the converging interests of the member states offer an opening for an effective intermediary role to resolve the Kashmir issue as well. The presence of unimplemented resolutions in the United Nations and now universally noticeable human rights violations has already given it an international status. Conclusively, a final decision on whether Prime Minister Imran Khan attends the meeting, scheduled for October, is yet to be made by Islamabad. Placing cooperation above conflict in the conduct of interstate relations is certainly a viable solution however, without compromising on its principled stance. As an alternative there is already a precedent from the past to have the foreign ministers representing the national interests in such multilateral forums should the Prime Minister choose to abstain.

<http://southasiajournal.net/india-pakistan-stitched-in-multilateral-interests/>

From Scapegoat Back to Key Ally: Pakistan and the Perils of US

Maximalism

M Waqas Jan

In the two years since President Trump accused Pakistan of giving [nothing but deceit and lies](#) to the US, relations between both countries seem to have undergone a dramatic turnaround. This is evident not only in the official narrative being put forth by both countries with respect to one another, but also in how this growing sense of cordiality has culminated into a series of high-level visits and meetings between key representatives. For instance, the [icy indifference](#) with which US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was greeted with in Islamabad back in September 2018 now stands in stark contrast to the frank more amicable meetings that have been held between Prime Minister Khan and President Trump thrice since then. Not to mention the back to back visits from [Alice Wells](#), the current US government's focal representative for South Asia, that have further accompanied a steady yet gradual thawing of tensions.

Signs of this turnaround are further evident in how last month's resumption of military education and training programs for Pakistani Officers marks one of the first steps towards renewed strategic cooperation. This represents an important milestone since President Trump had announced the cancellation of all forms of US military aid to Pakistan in early 2018. Similarly, acknowledgments of the progress made as per the requirements of the FATF review, as well as the 'concern' expressed over India's recent actions in Kashmir are all signs aimed at placating some of Pakistan's most pressing interests. Thus, hinting at what more cordial relations with the US could look like for Pakistan, while just stopping short of making any concrete commitments.

Yet, to say that Pak-US ties have begun to 'normalize' or 'revert' towards a mutually beneficial status quo would be ignoring the age-old complexity that has characterized relations between both countries. Especially for a relationship that has been long described as blowing hot and cold, on and off, as a rollercoaster ride, or simply a love-hate one. History has borne witness to the fact that US foreign policy towards Pakistan has more than often been based on a ruthless pragmatism and maximalism. This all or nothing approach has brought immense amounts of aid and funds for Pakistan which have been always cut off just as abruptly as they were initiated. Often without any long-term assessment or appreciation of what such actions are likely to lead to beyond the US's more immediate goals.

None of this has been more evident than in US expectations from Pakistan regarding Afghanistan and the Taliban. It's no secret that the very inception of the Taliban came from US funds and training during the waning stages of the Cold War for which Pakistan played the role of an indispensable intermediary. Yet following the 9/11 attacks, US policy towards the Taliban changed overnight when the US in lumping the Taliban together with Al-Qaeda brought down its military might on the entire Afghan State. What's more, it forced Pakistan to join its War on Terror almost at gunpoint. The infamous statement attributed to then US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage where he [allegedly threatened 'to bomb Pakistan](#)

[back to the stone age](#)' stands as a stark reminder of how even labeling this relationship as 'complex' is simply an understatement.

This aspect is further reinforced in the damning revelations of the [Afghanistan Papers](#) that were released just last month. Representing a cache of candid interviews of key officials responsible for formulating and implementing the US's Afghanistan policy, these interviews have been used to piece together crucial mistakes at the strategic and policy levels made by successive US governments over the last two decades. One of these mistakes has been highlighted as 'trusting Pakistan as a friend' where Pakistan has been repeatedly accused of providing sanctuary and support to certain militant groups. Hence, accusations of Pakistan playing a double game, as well as the confusing distinctions between good and bad Taliban all contributed to a narrative that Pakistan was doing more to upend US progress than support it. This had caused much of the resentment and mutual distrust specifically during the Obama years which starting from calls to 'do more' resulted in the US unilaterally and covertly taking out Osama Bin Laden deep inside Pakistani territory. As ties worsened, the advent of the Trump presidency brought with them an overt sense of finality in the form of his new year tweet that was referred to in the beginning of this article.

Yet, even now as both countries come full circle with the US asking for help in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table, one fears that the US may still not have learnt anything from its adventurist debacles. As the Afghanistan Papers themselves testify, Pakistani officials have remained [quite candid](#) in their desire to hedge their bets against the US by maintaining limited ties with the Taliban. This was made clear to Ambassador Ryan Crocker who had served as the US ambassador in Islamabad from 2004-2007. In one of his interviews in the Afghanistan Papers, the former ambassador directly quotes a conversation he had with Gen Ashfaq Kayani who was then the DG ISI. As Mr. Crocker himself recounts, the general had quite explicitly made clear his reservations against an abrupt US withdrawal that would force Pakistan to once again pick up the pieces in Afghanistan while having made the Taliban a mortal enemy. Hence justifying the reasons behind Pakistan's so-called duplicity.

But considering how it is in fact the US now that is pressing Pakistan to use those same ties to help extricate itself out of the Afghan quagmire, Pakistan's strategy against the Taliban seems to have stood wholly vindicated. In fact, it appears downright visionary considering how in hindsight, Pakistan had repeatedly called on the US to consider negotiating with the Taliban – especially when the US had the upper hand following its initial successes back in the early 2000s. However, the US after squandering its own reputation and credibility and already having missed multiple chances to engage with the Taliban are now ironically banking on Pakistan to help secure an exit. A kind of exit that not only allows the US to perhaps save face at the international level, but also offer something palatable to the American people during an election year. Thus, once again reeking of the reactionary maximalism that has so often brought into question the US's reliability and trustworthiness as an ally. Not to mention President Trump's own 'America First' policy, which already risks squandering whatever little credibility the US has been left with in the first place.

<https://foreignpolicynews.org/2020/01/25/from-scapegoat-back-to-key-ally-pakistan-and-the-perils-of-us-maximalism/>

Questioning the Novelty of India's New Normal

Haris Bilal Malik

In recent years, Indian notions of Pre-emption and so-called surgical strikes have been referred to as the 'new normal' by many in India. These have contributed to further affecting the security, stability and strategic equilibrium in the South Asian region. This is evident in how the top-brass within the Indian military has repeatedly asserted that India reserves the right to punish Pakistan with such notions of preemptive strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) under its limited war doctrines, which themselves belie a desire to wage a low-intensity conflict across the border. At the doctrinal level, India has been planning this for quite some time as evident from its [2004 Cold Start Doctrine \(CSD\)](#) as well as its more recently released doctrines such as the [2017 Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces \(JDIAF\)](#) and the [2018 Land Warfare Doctrine \(LWD\)](#). All these doctrines unabashedly flesh out proactive strategies and indirect threats of preemptive strikes against Pakistan. Based on the current patterns of Indian aggression, these ideas hold immense significance when considering the latest rounds of tensions over the disputed territory of Kashmir as witnessed in the short-lived military engagement between the two countries in [February 2019](#).

Inspired by such notions and in typical fashion, the new Army Chief of India [Gen. Manoj Mukund Naravane](#) wasted little time in blaming Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism in India. The same day he took charge of his new appointment he claimed that India reserves the right to respond in the same way it had previously done through its so-called 'surgical strikes.' Moreover, he openly asserted to physically taking control of [Azad Jammu and Kashmir \(AJK\)](#) if his government ordered him to do so.

However, such assertions from the Indian political and military leadership are simply repetitions of the same statements that have been made by Prime Minister Modi, Mr. Rajnath Singh, and former Army Chief Gen. (R) Bipin Rawat in the recent past. Representing the same aggressive and jingoistic posturing, there is not much novelty in these statements. In fact, even in this so-called 'new normal' which these leaders have repeatedly described over the last few years, there is nothing new at all.

Even the oft-quoted notion of a preemptive '[splendid first strike](#)' is not new for Pakistan as it had already formed a key part of the discourse surrounding the Indian and international strategic community since the years 2016-2017. According to this, if in India's assessment, Pakistan was found to be deploying nuclear weapons, as a contingency, India would likely resort to such a splendid first strike which it has always hinted as being a nuclear strike. As such all this does is prove Pakistan's pre-existing doubts over India's long-debated 'No First Use' (NFU) Policy. Yet, what's worth noting here is that this overt shift towards declaring a more offensive doctrinal posture from India, represents a more focused attempt at undermining the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrent, thus ultimately destabilizing the South Asian region.

Instead, the only thing new to come out from all these assertions from Indian leaders is the prevailing fascist mindset within India that is being fueled by a false sense of racial superiority and hatred against Muslims. This was clearly stated by Prime Minister Imran Khan in his tweet when he attributed the

cause of such provocations to the [RSS's extremist ideology](#). Hence, Pakistan perceives the recent statements from India's top military brass as also being wholly politically inspired and as a routine attempt to divert attention away from the rampant domestic socio-economic issues currently plaguing India. The fact remains that Pakistan's response to this Indian self-proclaimed 'new normal' which was on full display during the Balakot crisis itself set a clear example of its full spectrum deterrence. Contrary to the notion that a conventional asymmetry of sorts exists between the two countries, Pakistan had responded conventionally and more befittingly while holding its own toe to toe. In other words, Pakistan proved that it can also restore deterrence via conventional means despite the quantitative edge of India's conventional forces and military hardware.

It is also worth noting that while India is spending billions of dollars on its military modernization program both in terms of its conventional and unconventional acquisitions; allocating billions for defence spending does not necessarily guarantee military supremacy. Especially if the adversary is determined to thwart any such attempts right from the outset. India's actual capabilities still differ widely from what its political and military leadership projects itself to be. In fact, there is a huge gap between the Indian leadership's expectations and what its military can actually deliver. As apparent not only in the absurdity of Gen. Naravane's statement but also in Prime Minister Modi's and others, the credibility of such threats already remains highly questionable.

Hence at the present, it seems that India is more keen on simply projecting military supremacy vis-à-vis Pakistan as opposed to actually attaining it, as reflected in the statements of its political and military top brass. Its favored notions of preemption at the doctrinal and strategic levels are evidence of such aspirations. As such the increasingly provocative posturing against Pakistan in the form of this so-called 'new normal' seems to represent simply a jingoistic approach to manipulate Indian public sentiment in the ruling government's favor. However, the fact remains that Pakistan has already nullified such notions of preemption in the recent past and has proved it time and again. Consequently, India's aggressive posturing seems to be collapsing on itself with its self-proclaimed 'new normal' unlikely to pose any serious challenges to Pakistan's strategic posture at least for the time being.

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/25012020-questioning-the-novelty-of-indias-new-normal-oped/>