

Inside, outside

Any response to Uri must factor in the Pakistani state's relationship with non-state actors.



Soldiers guard outside the army base which was attacked suspected militants in Uri, Jammu and Kashmir. PTI photo

The Uri attacks have returned India-Pakistan relations to an old and familiar groove. India blames Pakistani terrorists. Pakistan denies the charge, instead proposing that India's oppression in Kashmir fuelled the attack on the army camp. This clash of narratives is unlikely to end. But as India contemplates its response, it may be worthwhile to look at how the world of scholars is analysing the relationship between the Pakistani state and its non-state armed groups.

For a long time, it has been observed that many states defy Max Weber's

theory that modern states seek a monopoly over the means of coercion and do not allow non-state groups to use violence. We know that states often don't crush armed organisations, even if they can; or they liquidate some groups while protecting others. In light of this larger problem, the key puzzle about Pakistan is: Should Pakistan's relationship with non-state terror groups be viewed as simply an illustration of a larger problem that many states encounter, or is Pakistan sui generis with few relevant comparisons?

In a body of emerging work, Paul Staniland (University of Chicago) argues that Pakistan is not the only country to have collaborated with non-state armed groups. The Indian state of Chhattisgarh protected and deployed a para-military group (Salwa Judum) against its Maoist insurgents, and Delhi collaborated with non-state groups to deal with the insurgents in the Northeast too. Similar examples can be cited from Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burma's Shan state etc. Yelena Biberman (Skidmore College), another scholar working on the outsourcing of security to non-state groups, argues roughly in the same vein, drawing comparisons between how Turkey has dealt with the Kurdish rebels and how India used Ikhwan-ul Muslimoon in its counter-insurgency operations in Kashmir in the 1990s and later. Indeed, the problem is not only about collaboration. As we know, over the last few years, Pakistan has launched a brutal military assault against those terrorist groups that attack the Pakistani state, such as the Pakistani Taliban, but it has protected terrorist organisations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba that attack India, or groups like the Afghan Taliban that violently seek to undermine the elected governments of Afghanistan. Staniland explores why this is so. The divergence is driven by two sets of factors: The ideological correspondence between the state and the armed group, and the operational utility of the armed organisation. By this logic, Pakistan would consistently support LeT and the Afghan Taliban because both of these organisations share the state's ideology and are operationally strong, but its support for

Jaish-e-Mohammed would be inconsistent, because the latter organisation also attacks Pakistani groups that have nothing to do with India, and the Pakistani army would wish to decimate the Pakistani Taliban because their target is the Pakistani state itself. Commitment to Islam is not the sole issue. Such a commitment must also be conjoined to a strong opposition to India and to the project of dominating Afghanistan.

This comparative argument about Pakistan is pitted against those who contend that Pakistan's relationship with non-state actors is virtually unparalleled. In *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War*, Christine Fair (Georgetown University) argues that Pakistan is ideology-driven, not security-driven. A standard security calculus, emphasising the primacy of national interest and a calibration of costs and benefits, would have demonstrated the necessity of compromise with India. But Fair writes: "For Pakistan's men on horseback, not winning, even repeatedly, is not the same thing as losing. Simply giving up and accepting the status quo and India's supremacy, is, by definition, defeat."

Pakistan's army sees victory, says Fair, simply "as the ability to continue fighting", regardless of consequences for the nation's development, welfare or international opinion. It is hard to find such states in history. Fair's explanation of how Pakistan's army distinguishes between good and bad terrorists is also different from Staniland's. The bad ones are not only those who have turned against the Pakistani state and army, especially the Pakistani Taliban (as distinct from the Afghan Taliban), but also those who are inspired by the Deobandi religious tradition. The good terrorists, in contrast, are not only those opposed to India, but also ones inspired by the Al-Hadith tradition, which seeks Muslim unity and is not out to attack minority Muslim sects such as the Shias, or syncretistic Islamic groups such as the Sufis. Deobandi organisations violently attack the latter groups as heretics or apostates, but Al-Hadith organisations, such as the Lashkar-i-

Taiba, do not.

Whichever argument is correct, the implications are serious. The first implication is for the liberal approaches to understanding Pakistan.

Liberals have resolutely believed that enhancing people-to-people exchanges, experiencing cultural similarities and expanding trade with Pakistan would build the foundations of peace. It is not that such exchanges should be abandoned, but one should clearly see their limits. An argument about the re-discovery of a shared culture runs up against the very foundations of the Pakistani state.

In a famous exchange in the 1940s, Maulana Azad had argued that Pakistan was unnecessary because Muslims and Hindus, though religiously distinct, had the same Indian culture. Mohammed Ali Jinnah's argument was the opposite. Not only were Hindus and Muslims culturally distinct, but the preservation of Muslim culture, Jinnah said, required a separate state. It is Jinnah's argument that became the basis for Pakistan. One can see why a discourse about cultural similarities can only threaten the state in Pakistan and its army will never allow it to become the dominant discourse. Maulana Azad can't possibly become a Pakistani hero.

When anti-Indianism is constitutive, it can't easily be expelled. That being so, should one believe that Pakistan's army would give up its relationship with non-state terror groups that call India their incorrigible enemy? That can happen if such groups, to use Staniland's argument, lose their operational utility. The strategic community in India may have to think seriously about how to make that happen. It would also help if Delhi repairs its relationship with Kashmir. Nothing lends greater strength to Pakistan's army and terrorist organisations than unrest in Kashmir. Nothing lends greater unity to Pakistan's deeply fractured polity and society than protests in Kashmir — not

even Islam. Expected to be its cultural glue, Islam has actually been Pakistan's source of interminable religious conflict.

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