

India, US and the Politics on Terrorism

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In the international arena, joint statements are considered as an important document which not only reflect a common position of the parties involved but also carry an important message for the audience as well. In line with thinking, the recent Biden-Modi Joint Statement issued on June 22, 2023, besides presenting an overview of broad-range bilateral cooperations, reflects a 'common position' of New Delhi and Washington on a very important issue, i.e., 'terrorism'. This common position needs to be examined carefully as it carries important implications for South Asia, in general, and for Pakistan, in particular.

If we search the keyword 'terrorism' in the recent Biden-Modi Joint Statement, we find that the word terrorism has been mentioned five times in Para 32 of the statement. Further break down of the above figure reveals that the word has been mentioned four times in the context of global terrorism and counterterrorism collaboration and one time in Pakistan's reference which can broadly contextualized as an instruction to 'do more'. Looking back at previous Joint Statements since Modi's rise to power, we find that the recent Biden-Modi statement on terrorism is no more different from Obama-Modi and Trump-Modi statements.

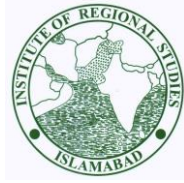
The 2016 Obama-Modi Joint Statement says that 'leaders (i.e., Obama and Modi) committed to strengthening cooperation against terrorist threats from extremist groups,

such as Al-Qa'ida, Da'esh/ISIL, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, D Company and their affiliates, including through deepened collaboration on UN terrorist designations. They called for Pakistan to bring the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai and 2016 Pathankot terrorist attacks to justice.¹ Similarly, the Joint Statement of Modi and Trump in 2017 tells the same story.

The Trump-Modi Joint Statement reads that 'they (Trump and Modi) committed to strengthening cooperation against terrorist threats from groups including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, D-Company, and their affiliates...the leaders called on Pakistan to ensure that its territory was not used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries.'² Likewise, the Trump-Modi Joint Statement of 2020 reiterated previous stance on terrorism.

The Trump-Modi Joint Statement of 2020 says that 'both US and India called for concerted action against all terrorist groups, including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Hizb-ul Mujahideen, the Haqqani Network, TTP, D-Company, and all their affiliates. They call on Pakistan to ensure that no territory under its control is used to launch terrorist attacks, and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks, including 26/11Mumbai and Pathankot.'³ In the same vein, both the US and India in the Joint Statement reiterated the call for 'concerted

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action against all UN-listed terrorist groups including Al-Qa'ida, ISIS/Daesh, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and Hizb-ul-Mujhahideen as well as asking Pakistan to take immediate action to ensure that no territory under its control is used for launching terrorist attacks.⁴ This recent statement too, is not different from previous joint statements mentioned above.

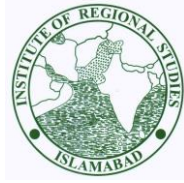
Since 9/11 to date, the terrorism landscape has changed altogether. In the post-US withdrawal era especially, the discourse on terrorism has taken a dramatic turn wherein the change of loyalties among the hardcore terrorists has become a new normal, and thus unfolding new challenges to the regional as well as extra regional countries. Pakistan, for its part, has remained steadfast in its commitment to fight terrorism in the testing times and sacrificed thousands of its civilians since 9/11. Pakistan, being a front-line state in the war against terrorism, conducted several military operations against militant organizations and non-state actors. Furthermore, in the wake of the Mumbai attacks in 2008, and the Pathankot incident in 2016, Islamabad fully cooperated with New Delhi despite the fact that those incidents happened because of grave security lapses by the Indian government.

Given that, Pakistan's reference in the recent Biden-Modi Joint Statement, is a typical example of stereotype. The statement implies that there is a 'deliberate oblivion' on behalf of the US and India to historical as well as present-day terrorism challenges and Pakistan's untiring efforts in dealing with terrorism threats. A mere copy-paste of terrorism-related statements about Pakistan in the above Joint Statements

reveals that the US, particularly, India is more concerned about Pakistan than terrorism.

Going through the literature that has been produced in India on Pakistan since 2008, one can easily find that there is a concerted effort to declare 'Pakistan, a state sponsor of terrorism'. Despite widespread condemnations of the Mumbai attacks and assurances by the then President, Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, for an all-out support to curb militancy, India chose the path of the blame game. Instead of providing concrete evidence, New Delhi remained non-cooperative on joint investigations to find the truth about the Mumbai attacks. Having realized the importance of the issue, Pakistan, initiated an internal investigation on its own. It banned Lashkar-e-Taiba and arrested several members of Jamaat-Ud-Dawa (JuD) including its senior leadership. Later, in the wake of UNSC resolution 1247, Pakistan launched a countrywide crackdown on the so-called JuD network and registered several cases against the members of the JuD. Furthermore, Islamabad responded effectively to all Indian queries in that turbulent time.

Having said that, a noteworthy question to ask is that can we consider US and India's obliviousness toward Pakistan's cooperative efforts and compliance with the UNSC resolutions? The answer is No. The Indian media is witness to it. Several articles appeared in India, though biased, documented Pakistan's back-and-forth engagements throughout the course. So, it is merely a case of obsession on India's part as it never acknowledged Pakistan's support in crucial times. Contrarily, New Delhi was stuck on proving state sponsorship of



Pakistan in the Mumbai attacks in which it failed badly. On the other hand, there are concrete pieces of evidence of Indian interference and terrorism in Pakistan that have been recorded in the dossier which Islamabad handed over to the UN Secretary-General back in 2017.⁵ However, the world especially the US, has turned a blind eye over Indian-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan.

Looking at the current situation, the discourse on terrorism in Pakistan in particular, and in the region, in general, has completely changed. Gone are the days when the so-called Jaish-e Mohammad, or Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, on which India is still banking on, were the talk of the town. After the US withdrawal, the decades-old terrorism landscape is undergoing rapid transformation in which the change of loyalties among different sects is on the fast track. Right now, it has become extremely difficult to claim which militant faction is siding with whom? Several members of the Afghan Taliban have parted away from the core and have joined the Daesh group. Similarly, several Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan members are joining the Islamic State of Khorasan and vice versa. Regrouping and de-grouping are also underway among the several militant groups on the Pak-Iran border. Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan are equally apprehensive about the existing terrorists' game plans.

That said, where does Biden-Modi terrorism mantra stand? Are both US and India oblivious to the fact that terrorism has undertaken a new course after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan? Again, it would be naïve to say that both the US and India are oblivious to the present-day terrorism

challenges since both had cooperated with each other in the last twenty years in Afghanistan and still keeping eye over the developments.

If we look at India, the media reports suggest that New Delhi is closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan since the US withdrawal. Even before the withdrawal New Delhi was in touch with several stakeholders, mainly the Taliban.⁶ In November 2021, India hosted a Delhi Regional Security Dialogue for Afghanistan purposely to deal with the threat of terrorism.⁷ In June last year, India sent a high-level delegation of its officials to Afghanistan which met Taliban's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul to set out the future course of relations.⁸ Nevertheless, there is lot more in India's Afghan policy that could establish that New Delhi was fully aware of terrorism situation in Afghanistan and beyond. The same is the case for the US.

The US State Department's Country Report on Terrorism for the year 2021 has acknowledged the emerging terrorism threats in Pak-Afghan border. The reports claims that the "Terrorist and insurgent groups, including ISIS-K, elements of AQ (including affiliate al-Qa'ida in the Indian Subcontinent [AQIS]), and terrorist groups targeting Pakistan (such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), continued to use Afghanistan, especially its remote regions, as a safe haven."⁹ This shows that how US has been maintaining a constant vigilance on terrorism.

In view of the above, the article argues that both the US and Indian, have opted a 'deliberate oblivion' coupled with Pakistan's obsession. While doing so, both countries are shying away from collective responsibility to uproot terrorism from this region. For Modi

especially, the Pakistan's obsession, has important meanings. History shows that Modi has remained a political beneficiary of the anti-Pakistan approach. He maintained a hardline approach towards Pakistan and portrayed Islamabad as a terrorist state in his several public speeches.

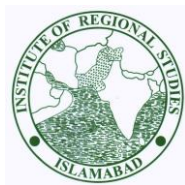
Even now, Modi seemingly finds a silver lining in Pakistan-obsession approach to further his political gains. For a short-term gain, yes, Modi's 'state-sponsor terrorism' narratives about Pakistan might serve the purpose in the coming general elections in 2024 but for the region at large, it will continue to block a collective wisdom that is essentially required to deal with the new face of terrorism that has

made every country in the region more vulnerable than before.

The 'segregated approaches' towards terrorism are keeping the region away from a regional mechanism. The vicious cycle of the blame game, India to Pakistan, Pakistan to Afghanistan, and Afghanistan to Iran, and vice versa, is only helped re-unite the militant organizations in the post-US withdrawal era. Thus, the situation demands that Washington, and New Delhi need to change their attitude and should come out of their decades-old Pakistan-obsessed approach and join hands in uprooting militancy from this region so that regional countries can better serve their nations.

Notes and References

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