



# India's grand strategy on Pakistan

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## **Develop a sophisticated counterterrorism strategy, while exuding a vision of peaceful coexistence**

- When a society's patience wears thin, one of two things typically happen.
- Either its leaders embark on a bold new direction, or they spin a story for their domestic audience and carry on as before.
- What the Modi government has undertaken recently, in response to Pakistan's relentless proxy war, defies a neat description.
- It is true that an impending national election provided abundant motives to make political capital through publicised air strikes.
- There is little doubt on that score, and many have called upon the government to resist from brazen use of the 'national security' card in mobilising public opinion.

### **A clear shift**

- Nevertheless, the willingness to take the fight to the Pakistani heartland and cultivate a measure of uncertainty is a clear departure from the policy of strategic restraint.
- And, even if the main impetus for this shift in strategy was domestic politics in India, the geostrategic consequences will outlast this phase.
- What has India got from the air strikes? We can point to three gains.
- The idea that India has a right to pre-emptive self-defence — a right that so far has been the exclusive privilege of the Western powers — has been legitimised by the reaction and behaviour of the great powers during the crisis.
- While total deterrence is unrealistic, Delhi has made the other side conscious that its actions could produce unpredictable consequences.
- Ambiguity about future Indian responses to state-sponsored terror, it is envisaged, will persuade Pakistan to tread more carefully.
- Finally, by raising the stakes in a long-standing proxy war, Delhi has brought Pakistan's patrons to consider more responsible and active

roles in persuading it to restrain its destabilising behaviour.

- Changing perceptions of third parties is directly linked to India's resolve to adapt its posture of strategic restraint.
- The next challenge before Indian security planners is to incorporate this approach as part of a grand strategy.
- The military counterpart of an Indian grand strategy would involve a more robust internal security framework, including the introduction of more advanced counter-terror capabilities and doctrines that seek to substantially minimise Indian military casualties in Kashmir.
- Patiently building covert proxy capabilities that impose reciprocal costs on Pakistani security institutions, and a more sophisticated conventional military posture that can offer the political leadership a variety of highly limited and targeted options to degrade the flow of terrorist networks while also presenting the Pakistan army with a costly choice to escalate to a bigger conventional clash.
- There is nothing unusual or provocative in this approach.

### **The larger canvas**

- There is a geopolitical counterpart to an Indian strategy too.
- It must be recognised that although Pakistan cannot be isolated, its patrons and allies, many of whom seek to develop deeper ties with India, can be persuaded in their own interests to influence Pakistani behaviour.
- Unless India conceives a broader plan to alter Pakistan's behaviour and its internal setting, it will find it difficult to sustain international support and it would only embolden the Pakistan army to up the ante knowing the Indian side is utterly unprepared for a serious game.
- India can engage in calculated risks, avoid publicising everything it does, and yet remain receptive to engagement with the civilian government and, more importantly, the Pakistani people, towards whom it must exude a vision of peaceful coexistence.