**The New Normal**

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Pakistan finds itself in an ex­tremely volatile, hostile region. Apart from China, its relations with its other three neighbors always seem to totter on the verge of hostilities, of one type or the other. In the East-North East it has the most likely nuclear flash point in the world as three for­midable nuclear-missile-military forces sit eyeball to eyeball in the larger Kash­mir region. India keeps the pot boil­ing through unnecessary cross LAC/LOC skirmishes with both China and Pakistan. Iran, in the West, contin­ues to fight off international isola­tion. Its relations with its neighbors especially Pakistan remain frosty and on edge, more often than not. In the West-North West, it has Afghani­stan whose Tehrik-e-Taliban Afghan­istan (TTA) government plays host to a plethora of terrorist groups which remain busy carrying out cross-bor­der terrorist attacks, (un)surprising­ly, only into Pakistan!

Pakistan has been subjected to ag­gression by all three of its neighbors. India and Iran carried out sneak al­beit planned attacks through their Armed Forces while Afghanistan has callously let many terrorist groups launch vicious trans-national at­tacks into Pakistan. All these epito­mize a major paradigm shift in the region’s strategic environment.

[China’s success in innovation holds promise for Pakistan](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Mar-2024/china-s-success-in-innovation-holds-promise-for-pakistan)

India carried out a false flag oper­ation in Pulwama, killed forty of its own soldiers and blamed Pakistan for that “terrorist attack”. Thereafter, it committed a classic strategic faux pas when it launched a sneak air-missile attack on Balakot. Nervous and panicky IAF pilots hit nothing. Pakistan responded the next morn­ing with a well-planned, profession­ally executed kinetic operation. In Operation SWIFT RETORT, the PAF shot an IAF Su30MkI and a Mig-21 Bison out of the skies capturing Wing Commander Abhinandan in the pro­cess. A flabbergasted IAF thereafter shot down one of its own helicopters killing all on board. In what appeared to be an act of undisguised haughti­ness, a blatant strategic miscalcula­tion or both Iran violated Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity by carrying out an unwarranted mis­sile-rocket attack against presumed safe havens of Jaish-e-Adl in Balo­chistan. Pakistan retaliated. In Oper­ation Marg bar Sarmachar, the PAF imperiously knocked out terrorist group BRAS’ safe havens/hideouts in Iran’s Sistan-Balochistan. Pakistan’s unambiguous, distinct and meaning­ful message to the entire region and beyond stood reiterated, reinforced! The proclivity to gain the more ad­vantageous position vis-à-vis one’s neighbor(s) is now pervasive in this rather trigger-happy region. The In­do-China brawl in the freezing envi­rons of the Ladakh Valley, India’s fu­tile, foolhardy, abortive aerial foray into Balaokot, Pakistan’s response through Op SWIFT RETORT, Iran’s missile-rocket attack in Balochistan, Pakistan’s retaliation in Iran’s Sistan-Balochistan and Afghanistan’s export of terrorism into Pakistan now define the contours of the region’s current strategic environment. Its paradigms have evidently shifted to Pakistan’s detriment. Cross border surgical strikes/sneak attacks against sus­pected terrorist bases/hideouts have explicitly emerged as the unsaid albe­it well-practiced new normal! Nego­tiations and talks come in as an after-thought, if at all; mediation never!

[Lesco detects 350 power pilferers in 24 hours](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Mar-2024/lesco-detects-350-power-pilferers-in-24-hours)

Pakistan has demonstrated re­markable political will while its Armed Forces have exhibited out­standing military competencies, ca­pacities and capabilities in safe­guarding their national interests. Pakistan’s responses to Indian and Iranian hostilities have been prompt, decisive, effective, in equal measure and more. Why then is it not happening against Afghanistan? Can the TTP, IS and others of their ilk carry out cross border terrorist attacks into Pakistan without the connivance of the TTA? The TTA is directly complicit. Period. Pakistan should have absolutely no doubts in coming to this conclusion and taking steps to counter this threat. Pakistan needs to make a basic paradigm shift in its policy towards Afghanistan. Appeasement, essentially a policy of the weaker antagonist, has never and will never work. Pakistan needs to come up with a new, multidimen­sional, multi-pronged Afghan policy, primarily aimed at neutralizing all existential and terrorist threats em­anating from Afghanistan.

[14 dead, 1245 injured in 1127 road accidents in Punjab](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Mar-2024/14-dead-1245-injured-in-1127-road-accidents-in-punjab)

At the diplomatic level, Pakistan must help Afghanistan gain interna­tional acceptability albeit as a quid pro quo only. Concurrently, it must expose to the international commu­nity the nefarious links between the Indian intelligence agency RAW and the TTP, ISK IMU among others. At the economic level, cross border trade and movement of people must con­tinue to be defined by proper legal documentations, passports and visas as this reiterates the legal status of the Pak-Afghan border too. CPEC should be expanded to Afghanistan and the CARs to enhance regional connectiv­ity and economic interdependence. This could be a win-win position for the entire region. Afghanistan is a landlocked country and ought to be wary of the vulnerabilities of its tran­sit trade, especially with India.

If efforts at the diplomatic and eco­nomic levels do not bear fruit readily and terrorist attacks continue to em­anate from Afghanistan, then Paki­stan must re-demand from the TTA to enforce measures to stop/block them completely. If they fail to do so, then Pakistan must offer to help them do it through intelligence sharing, joint training and operations etc. If they still do not concur then Pakistan must consider other options. It has strange­ly been reactive to all the aggressions meted out to it by its neighbors thus far. It is high time for it to now restore strategic balance; become emphati­cally proactive, wrest the initiative, launch definitive kinetic operations and start dominating the strategic environment. That will be in line with the new normal in the region. It must have no qualms in launching decisive, punitive, kinetic operations/surgical strikes astride the Pak-Afghan border to snuff out this scourge of terrorism at its base! Period.

[Free medical, dental camp held at LPC](https://www.nation.com.pk/04-Mar-2024/free-medical-dental-camp-held-at-lpc)

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