

Gist of RSTV “The Big Picture”: India – Pakistan Downgrading Ties

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Guests:

1. Maj. Gen. Ashwani Siwach (Retd.), Defence Expert
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What's in the news?

India has decided to reduce the staff strength in the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi by 50%. India, in a reciprocal move will also scale down its own presence in Islamabad to the same proportion.

Details:

- The usual strength of the High Commission in Delhi is 110, and will now come down to 55.
- This decision has been taken after two Pakistani staffers at the high commission in Delhi were expelled by Indian police because of their involvement in cross border espionage and terror funding activities.
- In retaliation to India's decision, Pakistani security agencies picked two Indian high commission staffers in Islamabad, tortured them and framed them in a false case of a road accident and possession of fake currency.
- Indian government asserted that the behaviour of Pakistan and its officials is not in conformity with the Vienna Convention and bilateral agreements on the treatment of diplomatic and consular officials.
- This spells another downward turn to the already strained India-Pakistan relationship.

Background:

- Relations between India and Pakistan have been complex and largely hostile due to a number of historical and political events.
- Pakistan is a civilizational revisionist state in ideology which puts its claims on even Mughal monuments in India. There is large scale intolerance and discrimination towards religious minority in Pakistan.
- Indo-Pak relations have been characterized by several conflicts, and military standoffs. The root of the continued tension is territorial claims in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (now, union territory).
- According to Hassan Askari Rizvi (Pakistani political scientist and military analyst) - “After the Kargil War, Pakistani army woke up to the massive capability of Indian military” which they previously underestimated.
- From 2015 onwards since Indian Prime Minister's Pakistan visit there has hardly been any constructive dialogue between the two countries.
- The 2001 attack on Parliament of India, had been carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-

Mohammed (JeM) - two Pakistan based terrorist. The then foreign minister, Jaswant Singh had said that officials from the Pakistan High Commission were not only involved in espionage but had links with terror outfits. After 19 years the history has been repeated.

- The main standoffs in recent years-

- Pulwama Attack 2019 - Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy carrying security personnel on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway was attacked by a vehicle-borne suicide bomber at Lethpora in the Pulwama district.
- Balakot Airstrike 2019- Move by Indian Government to attack training camp for Jaish-e-Mohammed, the terrorist group that claimed responsibility for the bombing.
- Indo-Pak Fighter Jet clashes where Pakistan crashed Soviet-era MiG-21 plane and captured Abhinandan Verma, an Indian pilot.
- Heavy financial loss to Indian aviation sector due to Pakistan closing its air space for a 140 days period in 2019.

Current degradation of Indo-Pak ties:

- There are two aspects of the relationship between India and Pakistan in the current scenario.
- **Strategic Aspect-** Both the nations look at their place in history as well as the world diametrically opposed, conflicting and fundamentally different. Pakistan believes that it can garner support from the larger Arab world through diplomatic and strategic ties, for protection against India.
- **Tactical Aspect-** The ongoing cycle of retribution and hatred in form of attacks, cross border insurgencies and surgical strikes which have happened in recent years like- Uri , Pathankot, Balakot.
- As per the Indian Foreign Affairs Minister, Jaishankar - “POK will one day be under a physical jurisdiction of India and not just legal jurisdiction”. This has caused indignation among Pakistani side.
- Opening up of the Kartarpur Corridor by Pakistan for Indian Sikh pilgrims has been ridden with security concerns from Indian Government. In November 2019, the Indian intelligence reported spotting alleged terrorist training camps in Narowal district where the gurdwara is located.
- Despite the travel restrictions applied due to COVID-19, the opening of Gurudwaa has also been seen as a fake and divisive attempt by Pakistan to flare pro Khalistan sentiments among the Sikh community, targeting the referendum of 2020.

Fundamental reasons for tensions between India and Pakistan-

- Pakistan bases its very existence on separatism from India. The existence of Pakistani army is based on its hatred with India. ISI has played a major role in propagating this agenda.
- Pakistan has misled the world by claiming that it experiences military threat from India.
- Religion remains the only ideology around which Pakistan centres its policy and decisions especially when it comes to its foreign policy towards India.

Pakistan's response- after the abrogation of Article 370 by India:

- The scrapping of Articles 370 and article 35A is a watershed event for India. It has made Jammu & Kashmir an integral part of India. J&K has also been bifurcated in 2 Union Territories - Ladakh and J&K. The draconian laws existing in the state have been removed.
- Pakistan is very threatened by this move of India. Increased insurgency in Kashmir due to obsession of Pakistani army with territorial occupation of Kashmir.
- As a response Pakistan expelled Indian High Commissioner Ajay Bisaria.
- Pakistan called the Indian move to revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir as ‘unilateral and illegal’ and announced "suspension of bilateral trade with India”.
- According to Pakistan’s National Security Committee (NSC) statement, “Pakistan would take the matter to the United Nations, including the Security Council”.

- Pakistan also decided to observe its Independence Day on August 14, 2019 in solidarity with Kashmiris and to observe August 15 as "Black Day".
- Pakistan PM Imran Khan expressed apprehension that Pulwama-like attacks could follow the revocation of the special status for Jammu and Kashmir. This could lead to a conventional war between Pakistan and India, with global repercussions.

Continued acts of terrorism despite the lethargic condition of Pakistan's economy :

Maj. Gen. Ashwani Siwach (Retd.), Defence Expert- "Pakistan army is a rich army which has a poor country. It is the army in Pakistan which is running parallel economy"

- Economically vulnerable state of Pakistan has a debt of \$115 billion, Inflation is more than 13%, Foreign Reserves are at \$ 8 Billion. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor has a debt of - \$ 62 billion.
- The Pakistani Rupee has fallen down by 30% in the last one year. The Defence Budget has increased by 20%.
- Best years of growth for Indian economy were the 1990s, when Pakistan was only busy unleashing acts of terrorism across Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir.
- According to the US Department Of Agriculture-
- Indian Economy- \$3.2 trillion economy
- Pakistan Economy - \$2.58 billion economy. (By 2030 the ratio between economies will be 14:1)
- Pakistan is already grey listed by The **Financial Action Task Force** (FATF) and has been receiving warnings of getting black listed for its inability to control terrorist funding.

Why is it difficult to continue constructive dialogue with Pakistan?

- It is important to keep some semblance of dialogue going on even with an aggressive nation like Pakistan, given the complicated geopolitical world order.
- Not just the Pakistani military, but also common citizens are fed on a staple diet of hatred against India right from their childhood years.
- Pakistan is very irrational in thinking that talks and cross border terrorism can be conducted together. Pakistan is more a nuisance for India than being a major threat.

What does India need to be watchful of in the future?

- The dispute between India and China in areas such as - Galwan, Pangong Tso , Demchok, Depsang, DaulatBeg Oldi, is an opportunity for Pakistan to help its strategic friend China.
- The borders (LOC) are already vulnerable, which makes infiltration of terrorists from Pakistan more easy.
- High possibility of collusion between Pakistan and China especially in areas like Siachen glacier and DaulatBeg Oldi, as these are territories which geographically intrude into Pakistan. On one side is Gilgit- Baltistan and on the eastern side is Aksai chin.
- India's forward air bases like Leh and Srinagar are on less elevation and can take more air load than Chinese airfields in TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region). However Pakistan has offered Skardu along with their aircrafts J11, J7 and J 10 to China.
- Possible BAT (Border Action Team) action in other parts of the border by Pakistan due to India's total involvement with Pakistan.

Impact of degrading ties between the two nations on sports:

- India has taken a strong position against Pakistan by avoiding all sports engagements on the international front.

- Also, India has been really assertive of its nationalist sentiments while participating in sports.
- Indian hockey team wore black armbands during the World League Semi Finals in London 2017 against Pakistan, to express their condemnation of the attacks on Indian soldiers.
- MS Dhoni wore the army's dagger insignia on his gloves during India's opening match against South Africa in the World Cup, 2019.
- India does not play any tournaments with Pakistan except those sponsored by the International Hockey Federation.

Benefits of Abrogating Articles 370 And 35 A:

- After abrogation of articles 370 and 35 A, J&K is progressing on a path of peace and development.
- Militancy has been reduced considerably with almost 110 terrorists being killed recently.
- The South Kashmir region has been completely wiped off from Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba groups.
- There seems to be a possibility of complete integration of J&K into India which may also reduce age old tensions between India and Pakistan.