Pulwama Terror Attack – An Evaluation of India's Options

What is the issue?

With the recent Pulwama terror attack, it is imperative to look at India's responses to terror attacks in the past and assess the options at present.

Have coercive mechanisms worked earlier?

- India has tried almost every kind of coercive mechanism in its efforts to induce behaviour change in Pakistan.
- But the **changes have only been temporary**.
- **Military** - In 2001-2002, after Jaish's attack on Parliament, India mobilised half a million troops and seriously considered an air-strike on PoK.
- But US persuaded PM Vajpayee to call it off, after the then military ruler of Pakistan General Musharraf called the attack a terrorist act and promised to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan.
- India came close to a strike again in 2002, after fidyaeen attackers killed 34 people, at the Kaluchak Army camp.
- Media reports also suggest air-strikes by India against Pakistani bunkers at the LoC in the Kel area of Kupwara at the end of July 2002.
- **Diplomatic** - At the end of December 2001, India had withdrawn its High Commissioner to Pakistan.
- It also asked the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi to cut down the number of officials and staff at the mission by 50%, and banned Pakistan International Airlines from Indian airspace.
- In May 2002, India asked Pakistan High Commissioner Ashraf Jehangir Qazi to leave.
- India had considered withdrawing the MFN status to Pakistan many times earlier. Click here to know about recent move.

How about other mechanisms?

- **Negotiations** - Full-scale diplomatic relations resumed in May 2003.
- The joint declaration in 2004 came in after the landmark Vajpayee-Musharraf summit.
- India again halted its ongoing dialogue with Pakistan after the Lashkar-e-Toiba struck Mumbai with 7 coordinated train bombs, in July 2006.
- It resumed in October 2006 after Musharraf-Manmohan Singh Havana

summit on the sidelines of the NAM meet.

- After the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in 2008, India again halted the composite dialogue.
- **Tussle** - After 26/11, efforts by the two sides to restart talks have failed repeatedly on what the talks should be about.
- India wanted the talks to be held only on cross-border terror but Pakistan says it should include Kashmir as well.
- India's efforts to isolate Pakistan at that time bore some fruit; the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hafiz Saeed were designated as global terrorists under UNSC 1267.
- [If an individual or an organisation is included in the list, it helps in restricting their movement, financial penalties and assets freeze among others.]
- But beyond this, the **world did not stop doing business with Pakistan as it was crucial** to the West's **war in Afghanistan**.

Why didn't India go for military retaliation after 26/11?

- There was widespread anger over Pakistan army among its people upon Benazir Bhutto's assassination.
- So a war with India was exactly what Pakistan wanted to united its civilians behind its Army.
- Their civilian government was also new and had a little control over the army.
- So not falling to that temptation was crucial for India, without which the world would have witnessed war between two nuclear-armed nations.
- So India managed to avert it.
- Nevertheless, former NSA Shiv Shankar Menon then stressed that if there were another attack from Pakistan, India would not take the same choice.

What is the present scenario?

- Pakistan has been stubborn these years and refusing to act against the perpetrators of 26/11 attack.
- Also, Pakistan PM Imran Khan repeatedly declared that the government and Pakistan Army are on the same page.
- Therefore India no longer feels obliged not to undermine Pakistan's civilian government.
- These provide compulsive arguments to choose military retaliation.

Is military retaliation the right option?

- US discovered from its drone attacks on Taliban leaders that though

successful, it hardly brought an end to the terror infrastructure inside Pakistan

- In fact, a US-style aerial attack on the Jaish headquarters by India could make Pakistan's support for such groups stronger.
- Moreover, such strikes are sure to cause civilian casualties, which would not be a proportionate response.

What do these imply?

- Ultimately, success or failure in a military operation is judged only by the strategic objective it sets and meets.
- Revoking the MFN status has only a symbolic value.
- It will hardly hurt the Pakistan state as the country's exports to India are 2% of its global exports.
- Calling off the Kartarpur Corridor talks, scheduled in March, 2019 could be another option.
- In all, India should assess and arrive at options that would bring a real change to Pakistan's behaviour of supporting terror infrastructure on its soil, without much demerits for India.

Source: The Indian Express