Pulwama Terror Attack - India's Security and Diplomatic Response

What is the issue?

- The Pulwama terror attack calls for a serious look into the security lapses and a more thought-out diplomatic response.
- A similar attack in Iran around the same time calls for waking up to the ideological powers at play in the region.

What does it call for from Pak and China?

- The attack's intent seems to be to provoke and polarise India.
- The Pakistan-based terrorist organisation Jaish-e-Mohammed has claimed responsibility for the attack.
- Pakistan bears the onus to explain why Masood Azhar, the leader of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, enjoys such freedoms on its territory.
- Certainly, diplomatic backing by Pakistan and China has defeated India's and others' efforts at the UN to put Azhar on the list of banned global terrorists.
- China now cannot evade questions about its previous blocking of action at the UN against Azhar.

What should India do?

- **Security** - The attack has perhaps taken the highest toll of security forces in any attack in the State.
- It has raised serious questions on intelligence gathering, dissemination and coordination in the Kashmir Valley.
- Investigations should yield a better picture on the security lapses.
- Effectively upgrading intelligence gathering and plugging security gaps, and winning the confidence of the local population in the Valley are vital.
- **Diplomacy** - India's response must not play into the perpetrator's plans with reflexive and precipitate official action.
- India has withdrawn the Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan in a signal that could economically hamper Pakistan to an extent.
- While coercive diplomacy is likely to continue, to be effective, the effort needs a wider net.
- The effort must be to isolate Pakistan at the international arena for its support to the Jaish and seek substantive action.

- This is more crucial at a time when the U.S. is seeking Pakistan's help in concluding a deal with the Afghan Taliban.

What is the larger regional significance?

- A day before the Pulwama attack, there was an almost identical attack in Iran's Sistan-Balochistan province, which borders Pakistan.
- Troops of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, an elite arm of the Iran armed forces, were attacked and nearly 30 people were killed.
- The Jaish ul Adl (JuA) has claimed responsibility for this.
- While there are no apparent connections, JuA and JeM (behind Pulwama attack) are both ideologically linked, being Sunni extremist groups.
- Both have been mentored in Pakistan and both are based in Pakistan.
- JuA, with other Sunni sectarian groups, target the Shia Iran on religious grounds.
- Likewise, Sunni sectarian groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which operate in Pakistan's Balochistan target Shia minorities in the province.
- They have flourished in the region in the shelter provided by Afghan Taliban strongholds.
- Much like India's call for Pakistan shutting down Jaish-e-Mohammed, Iran has repeatedly asked Pakistan to crack down against the JuA.
- Both JeM and JuA deploying the well-known Taliban method of suicide car bombing indicates a complex jihadist networks working to destabilise the region.
- Both Iran and India now have crucial reasons to be attentive of the Pakistan-aided US-Taliban talks.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

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