

Constraining the Pakistani Military-Jihadi Complex

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Introduction

The tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh have understandably dominated discussions in the Indian strategic community over the last few months. This focus on China led to the various important developments in the India-Pakistan conflict, being pushed into the background. Even as India responds to the People's Republic of China's (PRC) arrogance, none of the underlying causes of friction between India and Pakistan have reduced in scale or intensity. By June 2020, Pakistan had already violated the ceasefire more than 1400 times, as against 3168 and 1629 in 2019 and 2018 respectively.¹ In June again, two Pakistani envoys were expelled from the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi on charges of spying, which subsequently led to retaliation and escalation from the Pakistani side.²

In May, a new terror outfit by the name of 'The Resistance Front' (TRF) surfaced. Primarily made up of past Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists, this group claimed responsibility for several attacks and firefights after the Government of India scrapped Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019.³ Finally, Pakistan's domestic mismanagement in its response to COVID-19 and China's incursions, have also increased the possibility of elements in Pakistan ratcheting up tensions with India.

Keeping these recent developments in mind, this paper aims to develop a portfolio of options for India to tackle Pakistan in the short-term. The next section

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outlines a framework to understand Pakistan's actions towards India. Thereafter, each section takes stock of major domestic, international, and regional developments over the past year that can change the risk vectors emanating from Pakistan for India. While discussing each development, specific risks and opportunities for India are outlined. The paper then proceeds to discuss how India can prepare for these risks. Finally, it ends with a discussion on India's capacity to inflict pain on Pakistan.

The Framework

To put recent developments in perspective, it is important to have in mind a conceptual framework that can explicate Pakistan's seemingly duplicitous actions vis-à-vis India and the world. The framework used in this paper imagines Pakistan as not one geopolitical entity, but two. The first is a 'putative state' which has all the paraphernalia that gives it a veneer of a normal state. However, this putative state competes with a 'multi-dimensional entity' comprised of military, militant, radical Islamist and political-economic structures that pursues a set of domestic and foreign policies to ensure its own survival and relative dominance—something we refer to as the Military-Jihadi Complex (MJC).⁴

The inability to understand this duality of Pakistan has led to misplaced expectations, confounding outcomes, and failed policies by states and international governments alike.⁵ It is this 'other' Pakistan—the MJC—that is the most powerful political decision-maker in Pakistan today. As Nitin Pai has argued, "it exploits Pakistan's geopolitical position to promote its own interests, passing them off—often quite successfully—as Pakistan's national interests, thereby becoming the primary beneficiary of international assistance that ought to have accrued to the people of Pakistan".⁶

Structurally, the MJC is a highly interconnected and interdependent organisation, comprising a large number of co-evolving nodes: the armed forces, militant organisations, socio-religious organisations & networks, charity trusts having deep connections with terrorist networks, organised crime syndicates, for-profit organisations such as the National Logistics Cell (NLC), and even a few political formations. This MJC, as an institutional arrangement, leverages collective resources to achieve a specific objective—no reconciliation with India, which is a self-serving motive. By keeping India's actions tied to Pakistan's destiny,

the MJC has continued to enjoy a comparative advantage over the putative state because it has successfully projected that “corrupt politicians” cannot be relied upon to handle a hostile India.⁷

Given that of the two Pakistans, the MJC determines, directs, and executes the India policy, which is the primary focus of this paper. Every political development in recent months has been assessed in terms of its impact on the MJC—how it increases or decreases the MJC’s power domestically, and how it affects the MJC’s engagement with India and the world.

To make sense of some recent developments affecting the MJC, a commonly used contingency planning framework is deployed. In this framework, planning for future contingencies involves identification of four factors: developments, risks, preparedness actions, and countermeasures. *Developments* here refer to events encountered by the MJC. A single development can generate multiple *risks* and *opportunities* for the MJC, and hence to India. *Preparedness* actions are proactive steps that India needs to take in advance to mitigate an emerging risk or to exploit an underlying opportunity. Finally, *countermeasures* are reactive steps taken to reduce or contain the impact of a risk once it has begun materialising.⁸ From here on, each section in the paper parses one recent development relating to the MJC through the above framework.

Development 1: The MJC’s External Benefactors have Changed

This is perhaps the most significant development for the MJC in recent years. In his landmark book *Between Mosque and Military*, Husain Haqqani talks about a policy tripod that sustains the MJC—India as an existential enemy; Islam as the unifying entity; and the US as a chief benefactor. The big change has been in the third leg of this tripod, as the US began rolling back economic and security assistance to Pakistan.

As per the latest Congressional Research Service data, the total assistance from the US to Pakistan had fallen from US\$ 2.6 billion in FY 2012 to just US\$ 0.1 billion in FY 2018.⁹ This change reflects the growth in the US-India relationship on one hand and the relative decline of the US-Pakistan relationship on the other, which is now narrowly focused on the situation in Afghanistan. As a result, the MJC has been in desperate search for another financier. Another candidate for this role, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has failed to compensate for the declining US economic support. Given the backdrop of an economic recession due to

COVID-19, it is unlikely that Saudi Arabia will ramp up its economic assistance to Pakistan in the near future.

This leaves MJC with only one major financier, the PRC. Unlike the US, the PRC is willing to accept the MJC as a legitimate political actor and has no intentions of changing the civil-military power dynamics in Pakistan. Also, unlike the arrangement with the US, its financing in Pakistan is in the form of loans and conditional grants for projects, and not in the form of unconditional cash.

- ***Risks and Opportunities for India***

There are both risks and opportunities arising from the outlined changes in the MJC's financial backers. The most prominent risk is that, since the MJC is dependent on PRC like never before, and both are adversarial to India, therefore, it will continue to hurt Indian interests in order to prove its relevance to the PRC. The risk of the MJC acting in this manner becomes higher if PRC and India are engaged in an overt confrontation like the one along the LAC. The MJC might dial up infiltration and terrorist attacks in the coming months in order to link the India-China clashes in Ladakh to the Kashmir dispute. MJC's efforts projecting that the August 5th decision by India i.e. changing the status of the erstwhile J&K state, is the cause of tensions in Ladakh, are a case in point. Another risk is that, in case of tensions, the MJC and PRC might collaborate to attack India through non-kinetic means. Joint cyber attacks against India or collaborated misinformation efforts to undermine India, are not beyond imagination.

The opportunity for India is that as PRC and MJC come closer, it will be easier to expose the structural flaws in their unequal relationship. As PRC increases its influence in Pakistan's economy, nationalist forces (and even sections of the MJC) are likely to create fault lines between the two countries. There are already murmurs accusing PRC of 'neo-imperialism' and a 'win-loss' arrangement. The lack of transparency in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will aid such accusations of PRC's extraction of Pakistan's resources. Significant cultural differences between the two countries will continue to remain a source of friction.

- ***India's Preparedness and Countermeasures***

India should be prepared to face a diplomatic offensive of the MJC-PRC combine at various multilateral fora over Kashmir. Closer ties with the US, Japan, Australia and France are important to tackle this offensive. India also needs to be prepared for a rise in infiltration attempts and terrorist activity in Kashmir. As a countermeasure, India's messaging should aim to accentuate the underlying

cultural, social, and economic differences between China and Pakistan in order to reduce the flow of capital from PRC to the MJC. The weaker the MJC's external benefactor, the more constrained it will be. Exposing the PRC's treatment of violence in Xinjiang will also find sympathisers in the MJC.

Development 2: The US-Taliban Peace Agreement

The US President has repeatedly expressed a desire to withdraw troops from Afghanistan ahead of the November 2020 presidential elections.¹⁰ To achieve that goal, the US was also ready to sign a 'humiliating' peace agreement with the Taliban in which the US committed to a full-withdrawal, over 14 months, in exchange for the Taliban's guarantees of not acting against "the US and its allies" in the future and public denouncement of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.¹¹ The MJC has played a major role in steering and pressuring the Afghan-Taliban to sign this agreement. In the process, it managed to partially repair flailing ties with the US. More importantly, it made a major headway in its long-cherished aim of installing a pliant government in Kabul.

- ***Risks and Opportunities for India***

The acceptance of the Taliban as a legitimate political force by the US, is a moral and material victory for the MJC. The US-Taliban peace agreement is a tangible result for its policy of sustained terrorism in Afghanistan. Even a partial withdrawal of the US on the Taliban's—and by extension, the MJC's—terms will reaffirm the MJC's faith in using terrorism as a state policy. It might then apply this lesson to double down on terrorism against India as well. The ascendance of the MJC-backed Taliban is already showing direct consequences for India's presence in Afghanistan. In April this year, the two consulates in Herat and Jalalabad were temporarily closed down on account of the worsening security situation and COVID-19.¹² Further, India's economic and diplomatic footprint will reduce in the short-term. A case in point is the MJC's attempt to designate four Indian nationals in Afghanistan under the UN 1267 Sanctions List, accusing them of spreading terrorism in Pakistan.¹³ Another risk is the MJC relocating its terror networks to Loya Paktia in eastern Afghanistan, which was a hotbed of anti-India activities in the past. This would allow the MJC to use terrorism against India while claiming that it has driven terrorists out of Pakistan.

The long-term opportunity for India is that as the US reduces its presence, Pakistan will be left with the unenviable task of managing the volatile situation in Afghanistan. It will be drawn into the seemingly irreconcilable differences

in the Afghanistan polity. If a civil war-like situation erupts, the MJC will be left with more problems in its hands. Moreover, the Taliban itself has been a difficult stakeholder for Pakistan to manage in the past. Despite the MJC supplanting the Haqqani Network inside the Taliban, the MJC will find it difficult to get concessions from the Taliban on the Durand Line.

- ***Preparedness and Countermeasures***

India needs to be prepared for a scenario in which the MJC attempts to eliminate all Indian presence in Afghanistan. India must act to help its friends, not just in north Afghanistan but also among the anti-Taliban forces in the south. It is time for India to extend capacity-building in the security domain. One possibility is assisting the Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in more substantive ways such as conducting training courses on Afghan soil and sharing lessons from our counter-insurgency experience.¹⁴ At the same time, India would need to look at opening links, if not already done, with sections of the Taliban that do not want to be beholden to the MJC's control. Finally, India's focus in Afghanistan, over the long-term should shift towards eliminating Pakistan-backed terrorist outfits' relocation to eastern Afghanistan.

Development 3: India's Revocation of the Special Status of Jammu and Kashmir

On August 5, 2019, the Government of India revoked the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution. Further, the erstwhile J&K state was divided into two new Union Territories. This move has led to a volatile security situation in J&K abetted by the MJC, exacerbated by the absence of legitimate political channels, a weak economic infrastructure, and inadequate administrative capacity. Given how invested the MJC has been in fomenting trouble in J&K, it is unlikely to take this move lying down. Any action in Kashmir will help the MJC to prove its relevance to the Pakistani society in the short-term. Hence, it would be eager to use this situation to further destabilise J&K and spread unrest elsewhere in India citing India's move as the reason. While it was anticipated that the summer months of 2020 would be when the MJC would strike back in Kashmir, that didn't materialise. While the jury is still out on whether this was due to COVID-19 or due to India's better preparedness, underlying national security risks to India still remain.

- ***Risks and Opportunities for India***

The MJC is likely to continue with its policy of abetment of civil disobedience and violent protests. It will continue to support cross-border terrorism and might even resume a new insurgency against the Indian State by creating new outfits. The MJC would also want to revive insurgencies in other parts of India. Finally, India will face diplomatic offensive from PRC and Pakistan in the coming months over this move.

The opportunity for India arising out of this development, is a chance to change the nature of the social contract of Kashmiris with the Indian state once and for all. Previous attempts at growth and prosperity in Kashmir, were opposed by fundamentalists who saw these as attempts to change the demographic character of the Kashmir valley. The change in the special status of J&K allows India to ignore such calls and bring economic opportunities to Kashmir.

- ***Preparedness and Countermeasures***

In order to reduce the MJC's ability to disrupt events in Kashmir, India needs to overcome the trust deficit that exists with Kashmiris, which has arguably increased because of the abrogation of Article 370 and the communication blockade that has continued since then. Here are a few measures that India can take to prepare for the MJC's attempts to foment trouble in Kashmir. Most of these do not address the MJC directly but are aimed at reducing the support that the MJC might enjoy in Kashmir.¹⁵

- First, India needs to shift to a surgical and "smart" Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) approach whose provisions can be limited in time and space. A change in the AFSPA will signal New Delhi's bona fides and invite Kashmiri political leaders to reciprocate.
- Second, the Government of India should opt for a marginal and not maximal response. It should reverse the damage done to the morale of the J&K Police. It should lift the communications blockade and allow public protests and demonstrations to resume as these outlets are key to reducing the importance of the MJC as the prime influencer.
- Third, India can consider deploying a Special Task Force of highly capable middle level civil servants from across India, for a period of three years to restore broken governance delivery systems.

With COVID-19, the tourism economy of Kashmir has been severely hit. This could make the young more vulnerable to the MJC's machinations. Hence, it is

important for India to find livelihood alternatives. One way to do that is to create Priority Development Areas for the promotion of agro processing, premium bottled water, and premium handicrafts. In the Jammu plains, the government could invite investors in contract farming. Bringing in international expertise in this place, would also be a positive step.

Next, India needs to develop a strategic communication plan to defeat false and competing narratives generated by the MJC. Finally, conducting local and assembly elections, in the medium term, to restart the political machinery and reverting J&K to a full state under the Republic of India after announcing elections, will take off the edge from the MJC's misinformation campaigns.

As a direct countermeasure, India should draw the world's attention to the atrocities the MJC has unleashed in FATA. The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)—a protest movement—poses a unique challenge to the MJC because of its mass support base and a non-violent character. This movement has the potential to seriously challenge the MJC and India's efforts in Pakistan should be to align with the Pashtun cause. The Baloch insurgency by itself is too weak to change the power equations in Islamabad.

Development 4: Pakistan's Economic Downturn

Pakistan's economic situation has declined over the last few years. The Pakistan Economic Survey estimates that the economy will shrink by minus 0.38 per cent in FY20. At the same time, the survey estimates the rate of inflation to be 11 per cent.¹⁶ The survey further says, "the fundamental weaknesses of Pakistani economy: low tax to GDP ratio, poor savings rate and minimal export growth with negligible value addition, etc., were further attenuated by misaligned economic policies like loose monetary policy and overvalued exchange rate which have made it difficult to control twin deficits; the fiscal and the current account".¹⁷ This weak domestic economy, coupled with the MJC's diminished inability to extract from its external benefactors, also affects the MJC's fortunes. It is now forced to look inwards and corner more resources for itself.

- ***Risks and Opportunities for India***

A weakened economy reduces the range of options available to the MJC and makes some of its elements risk-averse. This means that the MJC will continue to rely on low-cost asymmetric options such as terrorism to hurt India. Abetting and sponsoring terrorism in areas with active insurgencies, both in Afghanistan and India, are likely to continue.

The opportunity for India is that, a weak economy puts the MJC squarely against forces opposed to it. For instance, the Pakistani Army has been opposing a reform for fair division of fiscal resources between the federal and provincial governments.¹⁸ This offers an opportunity for India because this fight over economic resources has a powerful ethnic dimension. Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan—all three provinces that stood to gain from the 18th constitutional amendment, see this controversy as another attempt by the overwhelmingly Punjabi-Pakistani Army to amass resources at their cost.

To further constrain the MJC, India should utilise the FATF mechanism and press upon the member countries that, Pakistan still remains a hotbed of institutionalised terror activity.

- ***Preparedness and Countermeasures***

Whenever the MJC's popularity declines in Pakistan, tensions with India allow it to regain lost ground. So, India should be prepared to face new asymmetric warfare attempts. To further constrain the MJC, India should utilise the FATF mechanism and press upon the member countries that, Pakistan still remains a hotbed of institutionalised terror activity. FATF greylisting will make capital inflows difficult in an already investment-starved economy.¹⁹

Finally, studies to expose how the MJC corners economic resources of the Pakistani state, might also help manufacture a public opinion within Pakistan that questions the MJC. The lynchpin of the MJC, the Pakistani Army, is still the most trusted institution in Pakistan. To get the two Pakistans to lock horns with each other, public narrative needs to be built exposing the extractive nature of the MJC.

Discussion

This paper surveyed some major developments involving the MJC in the recent months and analysed the risks and opportunities for India arising from them. It proposed some measures to constrain the MJC in the short and medium terms. However, it should be noted that the extent to which India can deploy these options are limited by its own domestic situations. First, a weak economy means that India will become cautious in exercising options that demand considerable resources. Second, the communally-charged domestic narrative that the Citizenship Amendment Act has unleashed, allows the MJC

to reciprocally exploit fissures in the Indian society. Conversely, a fast-growing economy and a stable, peaceful society will allow India to exploit a wider range of options to tackle the MJC. Finally, the MJC is an implacable strategic adversary that India needs to constrain in the short-term and destroy in the long-term.

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Notes

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