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## Backsliding on Pakistan

Brahma Chellaney

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Last year was an unusual year: Never before had so many Indian security bases come under attack by Pakistan-based terrorists in a single year. For example, the terrorist strike on the Pathankot air base was New Year's gift to India, while the strike on the Indian Army's Uri base represented a birthday gift for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Furthermore, the number of Indian security personnel killed in gunbattles with terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir in 2016 was the highest in years.

In this light, it is remarkable that Modi is seeking to return to business as usual with Pakistan, now that the state elections are over in India and Pakistan-related issues have been sufficiently milked by him for political ends. Modi's U-turn on the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) issue could mark the beginning of India's backsliding.

After the Uri attack in September, his government, with fanfare, suspended the PIC. Now, quietly, that suspension has been lifted, and a PIC meeting will soon be held in Lahore. In reality, the suspension was just a sham because the PIC missed no meeting as a result. Its annual meeting in the current financial year is being held before the March 31 deadline.

The PIC was created by the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, the world's most generous (and lopsided) water-sharing pact. The PIC decision indicates that Modi, despite vowing that "blood and water cannot flow together," is not willing to abandon the treaty or even suspend its operation until

Pakistan has terminated its proxy war by terror. The World Bank, in fact, is pressing the Modi government to use the PIC to reach a compromise with Pakistan over the latter's demand for fundamental design changes in India's Kishenganga and Ratle hydropower plants that could make these projects commercially unviable. Construction of the Ratle project has yet to begin.

The observable backsliding is also evident from other developments, including the appointment of a retired Pakistani diplomat, Amjad Hussain Sial, as the new secretary general of SAARC after India withdrew its objection. Modi is even keeping open the option of holding talks with his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, in June on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The Modi government's reluctance to back up its words with action became conspicuous when it persuaded Rajeev Chandrasekhar to withdraw his private member's bill in the Rajya Sabha to declare Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism. If India, the principal victim of Pakistani terrorism, is reluctant to designate Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism, can it realistically expect the U.S. to take the lead on that issue? Other powers might sympathize with India's plight but India will not earn their respect through all talk and no action. The battle against Pakistan's cross-border terrorism is India's fight alone.

To be clear, the confused Pakistan policy predates the Modi government. Despite Pakistan's unending aggression against India ever since it was created as the world's first Islamic republic in the post-colonial era, successive Indian governments have failed to evolve a consistent, long-term policy toward that renegade country. Consequently, waging an unconventional war against India remains an effective, low-cost option for Pakistan.

A major plank on which Modi won the 2014 general election was a clear policy to defeat Pakistan's proxy war. His blow-hot-blow-cold policy toward Pakistan, however, suggests that he has yet to evolve a coherent strategy to reform Pakistan's roguish conduct. The key inflection point in Modi's Pakistan policy came on Christmas Day in 2015 when he paid a surprise visit to Lahore mainly to grab international spotlight. If it yielded anything, it was the twin terrorist attacks just days later on the Pathankot base and the Indian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, setting in motion the ominous developments of 2016.

To be sure, Modi sought to salvage his credibility when in late September the Indian Army carried out surgical strikes on militants across the line of control in J&K. But it was always clear that a one-off operation like that would not tame Pakistan. India needs to keep Pakistan off balance through sustained pressure so that it has little leeway to pursue its goal to inflict death by a thousand cuts.

It is not too late for Modi to develop a set of policies that aim to impose punitive costs on Pakistan in a calibrated and gradually escalating manner, including through diplomatic, political and economic tools. If Pakistan can wage an unconventional war with a nuclear shield, a nuclear-armed India too can respond by taking the unconventional war to the enemy's own land, including by exploiting Pakistan's ethnic and sectarian fault lines, particularly in Baluchistan, Sind, Gilgit-Baltistan and the Pushtun regions. India must also up the ante by unambiguously linking the future of the iniquitous Indus treaty to Pakistan's cessation of its aggression so that

Islamabad no longer has its cake and eat it too. Like Lady Macbeth in William Shakespeare's Macbeth, no amount of Indus water can "wash this blood clean" from the hands of the Pakistani military generals.