

A long way to go

It is significant that the Delhi Declaration of India and 10 [ASEAN](#) countries last week mentioned, for the first time, “cross-border movement of terrorists” and made a commitment to counter the challenge through “close cooperation”. In an endorsement of the longstanding Indian view, these leaders not only agreed on a comprehensive approach to counter “foreign terrorist fighters”, but also supported efforts to target terror groups and sanctuaries.

While stressing that “there can be no justification for acts of terror on any grounds whatsoever,” the Delhi Declaration on the 25th anniversary of the ASEAN-India partnership also said that they would “deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building under the existing ASEAN-led mechanisms”.

When the same group of countries had met five years ago there was no mention of terrorism. The clear mention of cross-border movement of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters is a marked change, then, from the 2012 statement, which only had a commitment to foster greater security cooperation.

For the past many decades, India has been a victim of cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir. Its efforts to garner international support to diplomatically isolate Pakistan have borne fruit in recent years, particularly with the recent statements issued by the Trump administration.

But other countries, whose support is critical, have not been as forthcoming in targeting Pakistan, allowing Islamabad to get away with patronising — or at least turning a blind eye towards — India-centric terror groups and leaders. This joint statement with ASEAN leaders could embolden New Delhi's efforts to list Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Maulana Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, and pressure Pakistan to take action against Mumbai terror attack mastermind and Jamaat-ud-Dawa founder Hafiz Saeed.

Notwithstanding the support from ASEAN countries, India is aware that Pakistan's impunity flows mainly from its close alliance with China. Beijing has constantly blocked all efforts by India to press Pakistan at the UN under various UNSC resolutions on terrorism, and New Delhi has been unable to find a way around it.

The ASEAN countries have a varied and complicated relationship with China, and are sensitive to Chinese concerns. This is visible in the absence of any mention of Indo-Pacific or China's Belt and Road Initiative from the joint statement. It used to be said that Pakistan is able to unleash terrorism against India because of the support it could garner from the US, Saudi Arabia and China. While the US clearly stands in New Delhi's favour, Saudi Arabia also seems to be sympathetic to Indian concerns. It is on getting China around that India will have to work, if it wants to see concrete action against Pakistan. The ASEAN statement is a good beginning but there is a long way still to go.

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