

FATF MEET VERDICT: PAKISTAN'S PEOPLE DESERVE BETTER

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It's tragic that Pakistan has been brought to its knees by its army-controlled establishment

Last week, the global body spearheading the fight against terror financing just stopped short of classifying Pakistan as "terroristan". The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF) failed the country on 22 of the 27 parameters employed to measure a country's commitment to combat terror financing.

"The FATF again expresses serious concerns with the overall lack of progress by Pakistan to address its TF (terrorist financing) risks, including remaining deficiencies in demonstrating a sufficient understanding of Pakistan's transnational TF risks, and more broadly, Pakistan's failure to complete its action plan in line with the agreed timelines and in light of the TF risks emanating from the jurisdiction," the 36-member grouping said in a severe indictment of Pakistan.

In fact, but for the intervention of China, Turkey and Malaysia—the new global axis backing evil—who blocked inclement action, India's troubled western neighbour may have found itself in deeper trouble. Identified by former US defence secretary James Mattis as the "most dangerous country" on Earth, Pakistan has another four months to get its act together, failing which it will be brought under the "blacklist"—to be subject to undeclared global sanctions, which is effectively an economic death knell for a country whose economy is already on life-support; it just received yet another bail-out package from the International Monetary Fund. If indeed Pakistan is still found to be remiss after the deadline lapses, it will join North Korea and Iran on the FATF blacklist, which makes private investment in these countries a tricky proposition as it could potentially invite sanctions from the US.

It is tragic that a nation of 200 million people has been brought to its knees by the misdemeanours of successive establishments who have embraced the idea of a terror factory to achieve short-sighted gains in the neighbourhood. This is most evident in light of the fact that within hours of the indictment by FATF, the Pakistan Army was trying to facilitate the movement of terrorists across the border into Kashmir; it invited a strong reciprocal action with the Indian Army taking out at least three terror launch pads in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Clearly, no lessons have been imbibed.

To be sure, though, it is not in India's interests that Pakistan ends up on the blacklist of FATF. Yes, while it will be an affirmation of what India has been arguing at global fora for decades, strategically it won't be wise to have a basket case as a neighbour. The imminent rehabilitation of the Taliban in Afghanistan is already sufficient cause for concern; an imploding Pakistan, a very likely outcome of it being classified as a pariah state, will be the worst nightmare for the region, which is only just overcoming decades of conflict even as it struggles with the fallout of a rapidly slowing global economy.

The people of Pakistan deserve better. They are no different from their Indian counterparts—in fact, both countries just celebrated their 70th year of independence; while one had a cause to be optimistic about the future, the other can only look back with remorse at its troubled past—and yet, they find themselves on the wrong side of history due to strategic mistakes by its army-controlled establishment.

India's decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution providing special status to Kashmir—the central reason for the three wars between the two countries—has potentially robbed the Pakistan establishment of a key grouse. It has, despite desperate lobbying worldwide, been unable to rouse significant international opinion against India's decision. The reason is very simple: the world is seeing terrorism fatigue and has little patience with its perpetrators, especially when most countries today are in some form or the other a victim of such acts.

Clearly, the FATF missive is the writing on the wall for Pakistan. The issue is whether its establishment has the vision to pay heed, at least to provide for a better future for the people of Pakistan.

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