

COUNTERING STRATEGIC COERCION: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

In pursuit of security, states often employ diplomatic instruments to achieve desired outcomes. Coercion is the preferred modum of defense and diplomacy at the bilateral, regional and global levels. The strategic coercion embodies three factors: demand(s), time, and the threat of consequences. In response, a state can employ a counter-coercive diplomacy strategy relying on its political/social/cultural strengths, diplomatic clout, and innovative use of media (traditional and contemporary) to foster linkages within coercer's domain. Pakistan has been the target of strategic coercion by its neighbors, specifically, India, and the US in various instances. Often, Islamabad walked on the tight rope – trying to balance strategic national interests while facing coercive diplomacy. While Washington used a carrot-and-stick policy, Islamabad relied on asymmetric strategies to respond, often dealing with competing economic and strategic pressures. The present study analyzes the concepts of coercive diplomacy and security dilemma. Secondly, it theorizes a Counter Coercion Diplomacy Model and relates it to Pakistan's case as a targeted state. It does so by surveying US attempts at coercion and Pakistan's effort at countering coercion while advancing its strategic interests. The study concludes that when facing US coercion, Pakistan was able to effectively mobilize domestic and diplomatic tools to counter US coercion. Pakistan's prudent diplomacy allowed it to pushback coercive pressures emanating from the US and register its point across the US audience.

Keywords: Strategic Coercion, Diplomacy, Pakistan, US, Security.

Introduction

International security environment has undergone a structural transformation since 9/11. The emergence of new threats, particularly, those linked to terrorism has changed the way states perceive national security threats. Consequently, the concept of coercive diplomacy has been employed by scholars to analyze confrontation/crises between two or more states. Coercion is the threat of the use of force or other destabilizing measures by a state to force an opponent to make concessions or change its course of action. It is, however, not a new concept. Scholar Alexander L. George formulated it in the 1960s and since then, it has been applied to diverse cases, such as Vietnam War, Cuban missile crisis, India-Pakistan crisis in 2001-02, and North Korean nuclear crisis.

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This paper focuses on the perusal of coercive diplomatic strategies vis-a-vis Pakistan by the US and India in many instances. It traces the concept of coercive diplomacy and also security dilemma. Strategic compulsions and weaknesses of a state often provide a pretext for strategic coercion against it. It, thus, surveys US attempts at coercing Pakistan and influencing its strategic decision. The study proposes a theoretical and a practical framework termed as Counter Coercion Diplomacy Model (CCDM) to be adopted by the target state. Employing this model, Pakistan's case in countering strategic coercion is analyzed.

Conceptualizing Coercive Diplomacy

Coercive diplomacy can be defined as the employment of threats and the use of limited force to convince an adversary to stop a particular course of action or rollback steps, it has already taken.¹ It also requires a credible threat backed by the demonstration of capabilities and even limited use of force to persuade the adversary to concede to demands.² The over-arching goal of coercive diplomacy is to attain one's objectives and make adversary concede without resorting to war by making the opponent believe that cost for it will increase exponentially if it does not concede. And at the same time, it is assured that there will be positive returns if the adversary changes course. Flexibility is, hence, built in the nature of coercive diplomacy as both threats and concessions – a carrot-and-stick approach is employed to convince the adversary.

From here on, coercive diplomacy can be categorized into defensive and offensive postures. The defensive variant includes strategies to “persuade an opponent to stop to reverse an action,” while offensive focuses on threats that can be “employed aggressively to persuade a victim to give up something of value without putting up resistance.”³ Beyond this, defensive variant can be sub-divided into three more types:⁴

- **Type-A:** Persuading an opponent to stop short of reaching its goal
- **Type-B:** Persuading an adversary to undo an action
- **Type-C:** Convincing an opponent to undertake regime change

These and other actions take place at two levels: First, broader contextual environment; and second, narrower factors directly related to the clash. The first category includes factors, such as the global strategic environment, nature of provocation and causes of immediate crisis, kind of multilateral diplomacy, and level of integration of the targeted state in the international community. Factors involved in the second level include asymmetric motivation of two states, objectives, leadership, escalation fears, international support, and ideas about end-state.

In international relations theory, the concept of coercion is firmly rooted in the anarchic international politics.⁵ As all states are responsible for their security and economic prosperity, hence, they pursue their national interests with all elements of national power at their disposal. Coercion and the use of force are one of them. Coercive diplomacy is part of the broader function of force. It is, thus, crucial to distinguish coercion from other uses of force, such as compellence, deterrence, and defense.⁶ Deterrence, essentially, is a strategy aimed at dissuading an adversary from pursuing a

particular course of action. Coercion is, however, a reaction to an action already taken by the opponent. Compellence strategies are meant to force an adversary into the desired course of action.⁷

Moreover, the success or failure of coercive diplomacy is directly linked to the strength of a political system in the target state. When a weak state is targeted, the coercer can apply three indirect strategies: First, employing a third party to influence leaders of the target state; second, extending support to dissidents in the target state with polarized political system; and third, supporting selected political groups in the target state to build domestic pressures on the leadership.⁸

In recent decades, preferred tactics for coercion have included aid and trade embargoes, economic sanctions, scaling down of diplomatic ties leading to a formal break in diplomatic representations, and jeopardizing standing and presence at international forums. From here, it leads to the imposition of arms embargoes and travel bans on leaders and policymakers of the target state. Often, it culminates in severing financial linkages between the national economy of the target state and international financial system aimed at the crippling financial system and its ability to do business with the outside world.⁹ In recent years, cyber-attacks against power grids and critical infrastructure have been carried out to coerce the target state.

Inevitability of Security Dilemma

The strategic coercion of a state takes place in an environment of the security dilemma. The concept of security dilemma originates from John Herz, who held that in an anarchic international system, states seek security. States acquire new capabilities and weapon systems to secure themselves. In the process, states accumulate more power. In turn, this makes neighbors and adversaries more insecure and they take counter-measures. It leads to a vicious cycle of security competition and power maximization.¹⁰ Between states, where the security dilemma is present, they pursue security as a zero-sum game which leads to further instability.¹¹ The result is arms race and military build-up often leading to the development of nuclear weapons and missile systems and acquisition of defensive systems like missile defenses.

South Asia continues to experience dynamics associated with the security dilemma. Two competitions are in full play, i.e., India-Pakistan and India-China. The US is also a stakeholder in this competition owing to the US-China strategic competition at a broader level. When China develops or acquires a capability in response to the US for enhancing its security, it is viewed by India as destabilizing. In turn, India builds up its defenses and capabilities to guard against vulnerability to China and Pakistan sees Indian systems as threatening. This can be termed as a cascading effect of security competition in South Asia.

Yet, India is a bigger country with ambitions to be a key regional and major international player. India has stated a threat perception from China in its quest for being a major power. Meanwhile, Pakistan is a medium-size state pursuing its security without grand regional and global aspirations. However, India's military prowess and

nuclear posture are directed against Pakistan. Indian military continues to update its war-fighting doctrines, i.e., Cold Start Doctrine to fight Pakistan. Similarly, Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) is being acquired.¹² These developments exacerbate the security dilemma for Pakistan and when it is coupled with diplomatic coercion it poses far greater strategic challenges to Pakistan's policy-makers.

Coercive Diplomacy against Pakistan

Pakistan has been a consistent target of strategic coercion and long-standing diplomatic campaign aimed at transforming the country's strategic posture. India and the US have been leading the strategic and diplomatic coercion against Pakistan often cooperating to achieve desired goals. Islamabad and Washington have differed over geostrategic alignments in South Asia, the on-going conflict in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's pursuit of nuclear weapons development. Moreover, Pakistan-US bilateral relations have also been a roller coaster ride. At times, Pakistan was considered most "allied ally" (the 1950s and 1980s) and at other times, Pakistan has been most 'sanctioned' country by the US. During the 1990s, Washington imposed several economic and arms-related sanctions over Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

Coercion takes the shape of a demand to be met by Pakistan and is backed by a threat of consequences. Often demand is made with time-specific actions to be taken by Pakistan. The US policymakers employed a carrot-and-stick approach in dealing with Pakistan after 9/11. This became a particular pattern since the onset of the War on Terror in October 2001. Islamabad, thus, has been forced to chart its course while balancing its national interests with coercive diplomacy.

Pakistan's decision to join the War on Terror in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda can be partly termed as a product of strategic coercion by the US. President Musharraf's regime came under significant international pressure in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. These ranged from the threatening posture of the US to the possibility of India assuming a lead role in Afghanistan and the fast-changing geopolitics of the region. Then US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, told the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence: "You are either 100% with us or 100% against us. There is no grey area."¹³ General Pervez Musharraf claimed in his Memoir, *In the Line of Fire*, that Armitage told the Director General that "not only that we had to decide whether we were with America or with the Terrorists but that if we chose the terrorists then we should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age."¹⁴ This was followed by a list of non-negotiable demands presented to General Musharraf, which included the following:

- Stop Al Qaeda operatives coming from Afghanistan to Pakistan, intercept arms shipments through Pakistan and end all logistical support for Osama bin Laden;
- Give blanket over-flight and landing rights to US aircraft;
- Give the US access to Pakistani naval and air bases and the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan;

- Turn overall intelligence and immigration information;
- Condemn the September 11 attacks and curb all domestic expressions of supporting terrorism;
- Cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and stop Pakistani volunteers from going into Afghanistan to join the Taliban;
- Note that should the evidence strongly implicate Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan and should the Taliban continue to harbor him and his accomplices, Pakistan will break diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime, end support for the Taliban and assist the US in the aforementioned ways to destroy Osama and his network.”¹⁵

It was based on these demands that when General Pervez Musharraf addressed the nation on September 19, 2001, the following four reasons for agreeing to cooperate with the US:¹⁶

- Safeguard the cause of Kashmir
- Prevent Pakistan from being declared a terrorist state
- Prevent an anti-Pakistani government from coming to power in Kabul
- Have Pakistan reemerge politically as a responsible and dignified Nation.

The crucial point here is that the US forced Pakistan to abandon its earlier pro-Taliban policy in Afghanistan. Resultantly, when the US invaded Afghanistan, it was able to remove the Taliban from power in three months. Kabul was captured and a new government was installed. Though decision had far-reaching strategic consequences for Pakistan in later years, it was termed as a tactical move to Pakistan’s pre-9/11 isolation and economy towards growth and development in addition to denying India strategic leverage in the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan.

For the next few years, Islamabad and Washington cooperated extensively against Al Qaida in Afghanistan. The security agencies of both countries undertook joint operations to capture and kill Al Qaida terrorists. Meanwhile, the Taliban also reorganized themselves and by 2006, started attacking US forces inside Afghanistan. In tandem, terrorist violence also gradually increased inside Pakistan. Islamabad was forced to send military forces to the semi-autonomous region of FATA (now part of KP) near Afghanistan. In retaliation, local tribes and terrorist groups started attacking Pakistani security forces and civilians. The US raised fears globally about instability inside Pakistan. This gradually led to a divergence between Pakistan and the US on conflict inside Afghanistan and terrorism in Pakistan. From 2008 onwards, Washington began to blame Pakistan for providing sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani group fighting US forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan denied it, professing that it has been a victim of terrorism itself and doing its best to counter this phenomenon.

As national security interests of both sides diverged in the later years, particularly, after 2008, Washington resorted to a carrot-and-stick approach in its engagement with Pakistan. Consequently, US policy focused on granting India a larger role in Afghanistan and undertaking a troop surge to escalate fight against the Taliban. Concurrently, the US carried out unilateral drone strikes against militant groups and its

leadership inside Pakistan's tribal regions. Moreover, the US also pressurized Pakistan to "do more" against the Taliban and Haqqani network. Pakistan, however, resisted as it was focused on anti-Pakistan groups. In turn, the US withheld economic and security assistance, it had promised. It led to instability in Pakistan as Islamabad has been seeking economic and development assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Even the transactional nature of the relationship was used as leverage by US policymakers against Pakistan.

Similarly, India has been employing coercive diplomacy against Pakistan. In recent years, the most sustained campaign was carried out during the 2001-02 military stand-off. India enjoyed support from the US and other members of the international community. India attempted to take advantage of the post-9/11 international environment related to terrorism. Pakistan also held its ground; however, with the passage of time, the crisis was defused and armies of both countries were pulled back from the brink.

Following Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008, India again launched an international campaign against Pakistan. Bilateral dialogues aimed at resolving outstanding disputes through talks were suspended. New Delhi linked the resumption of dialogue on concrete action against terrorism. Pakistan rejected such preconditioning of the talks. India also moved against Pakistan at various international forums to declare it a state supporting terrorism. Pakistan effectively countered it. Gradually, New Delhi moved towards supporting terrorist groups that were attacking innocent people in Pakistan. This was done to pressurize Pakistan to change its strategic posture. In tandem, diplomatic pressure on Pakistan was increased. The sanctions committee of the UNSC was repeatedly used by India to sanction Pakistani nationals.

Matters came to head when US President, Donald Trump, in a tweet on New Year's Eve in January 2018, accused Pakistan of "lies and deceit" while receiving extensive foreign aid from the US.¹⁷ Pakistan reacted by saying that all funding was accounted for and US President was bitter due to its defeat in Afghanistan. For months prior to this showdown, Washington had been forcing Pakistan to accelerate actions against terrorist organizations.¹⁸ Trump administration had earlier suspended economic and military assistance to Pakistan and conditioned revival of any foreign assistance to cooperation in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) also formally placed Pakistan on its grey-list due to 'strategic deficiencies' in anti-money laundering and terrorism financing regulatory regime.¹⁹ Pakistan believes that it has been done on the behest of India and with the consent of the US. At the moment, Pakistan is engaged with the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) and FATF to address short-coming in its regulatory regime. A plan of action has been drawn and is being implemented. Pakistan has also frozen assets of designated terrorist groups and individuals under UNSCR 1267 and 1373.

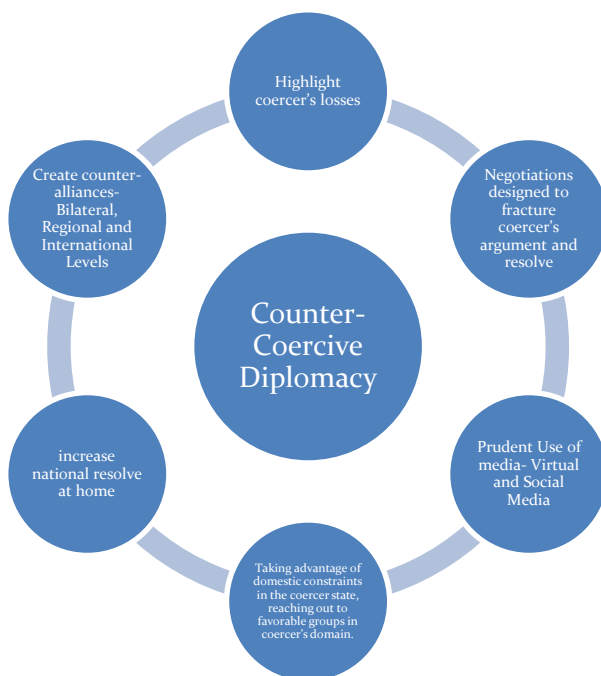
Counter-Coercion Diplomacy Model (CCDM)

Being at the receiving end of strategic coercion, Pakistan’s decisionmakers are faced with a question: What can they do to counter strategic coercion? This question is relevant for policymakers beyond Pakistan as well. Since strategic coercion as a policy-framework is applied in stages, it provides an opportunity for leaders in target states to come up with a response based on an in-depth SWOT analysis. This analysis should take into account the strengths of a state, its weakness, threat assessment, and opportunities available to policymakers for navigating a complex situation.

When coercive strategies are applied against a target state, coercer aims for the ultimate strategic objectives but follows a step-by-step approach. This gradual process is an opportunity for the target state to get a clear picture of the intentions of the aggressor and chart a counterstrategy. It also provides time to develop an effective response to the initial round of coercive strategies and in the process, the target state can increase the cost of continued coercion for the coercer. As the intensity and cost of coercion increase, it deepens the crisis between two states with conflict escalation becoming a possibility.

In CCDM, there is no sequential binding; each coercive move may reproduce a unique set of responses from the target state given its leadership’s calculation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) in a given timeframe. The elements of CCDM are summarized in the following table:

Figure-1: Counter-Coercive Diplomacy Model (CCDM)



Principles of CCDM

Avoid War (massive repercussions) and Make Peace (foster understanding) through engagement with the coercer. That is minimizing risks to men, material and human aspects via counter-coercion mediums with the coercer or powerful actor.

Since the pursuit of national interest is at the core of every coercive and counter-coercive strategy, it requires rational decision-making. All nations pursue national interests without any compromise. Weak states, however, have to work hard for achieving their national interests in a single move. They can follow a gradualist approach as strength is relative in inter-state relations. Over the period, weak states can keep their national interests alive, build relative power, and continue pursuit of national interests.

Responding to strategic coercion is mostly a defensive act. Being subject to aggressive moves by opponents' forces, the target state is to undertake a rational cost-benefit analysis for its own sake. Facing with time-bound threat and with the increasing cost of the status-quo, policymakers need to focus on minimizing the damage to the national economy and keeping national cohesion. Meanwhile, in its external outlook, the state needs to convey that it does not seek confrontation. Foreign policy should focus on searching for common ground with regional states and major powers based on mutual interests and cooperation.

Strategic coercion is attempted when states do not have space for direct conflict but the threat of escalation is real. This factor entails certain uncertainty. Facing a prospect of conflict escalation, both sides (coercer and target state) lack full control over the response of the other side. Coercer cannot predict how a target state will respond. And, the target state cannot forecast how coercer will react to its counter-strategy. It is this danger that has the potential of stopping coercer in its tracks or even escalating tensions to an armed conflict, which will be an outcome that both sides would not have preferred.

A default response of the target state is to activate diplomacy and seek support from the state in neighborhood and major powers with critical interests in the region. The objective, often, is to divide the international opinion and bring to bear counter-international pressure on the coercer state. In this diplomatic battle, the target state has to navigate complicated alliances and intersecting interests and win diplomatic support against the coercer. In tandem, coercer will also be engaging in diplomacy to gain international approval for its coercive strategy.

In contemporary times, the role of media, particularly, social media platforms have become crucial in countering diplomatic and strategic coercion. In the age where states and societies are competing for narratives, it is the story about a country and a nation that has a multiplying effect during a crisis. Policymakers, thus, should prudently use media and social media platforms to communicate with international audiences and domestic constituencies. In current times, policymakers can weaken the onslaught of a coercer through effective signaling using new media platforms.

Pakistan's Strive for Counter-Coercion

In the face of consistent strategic coercion from the US and India, Pakistan's policymakers have pursued multiple strategies to gain necessary diplomatic support and space. To the US leaders, Pakistan made clear that its policy-change is permanent and it will not fight others' war again. In February 2018, then Foreign Minister, Khawaja M. Asif, categorically stated that "Pakistan has played a vital role in the war against terrorism but it cannot fight others' war on its soil."²⁰ Similarly, Prime Minister Imran Khan, responding to tweets of US President Donald Trump, stated that "Pakistan has suffered enough fighting US's war. Now, we will do what is best for our people and our interests."²¹ These consistent messages sent a signal to Washington that Pakistan is not ready to be coerced again and will put its national interests above everything else.

As the differences between Pakistan and the US deepened over the issue of terrorism and war in Afghanistan, Islamabad went the extra-mile in highlighting the cost it had paid in its war against terrorism. Pakistan held that it had suffered economic, military, and humanitarian losses. Islamabad also emphasized that it had conducted numerous operations against militant groups from its own resources. Given budget constraints and stretching out of Pakistan Army on two fronts, i.e., Indian border and western theater, Islamabad cannot go all-out against militants in Pakistan, at once. Pakistan's leadership committed a sequential strategy. Pakistan's sacrifices were acknowledged by the international community and leading major powers including China and Russia.

As for the conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistan committed to supporting Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace initiatives for the settlement of decades-old war and strife. Islamabad vowed to support any peace process which delivers sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan professes that instability in Afghanistan leads to instability in Pakistan. To advance its position, Pakistan engaged with China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the UK, and the US in holding various rounds of talks with the Afghan government and also the Taliban. In 2016, Pakistan was part of four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) which ultimately collapsed. Pakistan has participated in talks held in Moscow on Afghanistan. Pakistan continues to be part of the Afghanistan-China-Pakistan trilateral process. Pakistan continues to support direct talks between the Afghan Taliban and the US government in Doha. Facilitating and supporting these initiatives have given Pakistan a space to counter attempts at strategic coercion by the US. Even Pakistan's critical role in any peace process has been acknowledged by regional countries, major powers, and international organizations.

While the US in concert with India upped strategic and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan; in turn, Islamabad reached out to its friendly nations including China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Continued engagement with these countries helped Pakistan in dealing with the consistent US pressures and demands to do more. An example is Pakistan's fight at FATF. While New Delhi and Washington sought to place Pakistan on the blacklist of FATF leading to punitive sanctions against Pakistan's financial sector. Islamabad with support from Ankara, Riyadh, Beijing and

Kuala Lumpur, twice averted placement on the blacklist. Islamabad was placed on grey-list and tasked with improving its anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing regimes. Islamabad developed an action plan and is working with FATF to implement it. China and Turkey, in particular, have called on to recognize Pakistan's fight against terrorism and not to politicize the process at FATF.

Meanwhile, internally, Pakistan's leadership – civil and military – built a national consensus on the country's relations with Afghanistan, India, and the US. Efforts were made for engaging discussions across party-lines. During the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) tenure, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif convened the All Parties Conferences (APCs) on important national issues to forge consensus. Given that major political parties have representation in the Parliament, it has helped in building a unified national position.

A crucial part of Pakistan's counter-strategy has been to highlight the futility of on-going US presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan's officials have stated on several occasions that the US expects Pakistan to defeat terrorism but it has not been able to secure Afghanistan despite spending blood and treasure running over \$1 trillion. At the height of the war in 2010, the US military had deployed more than 100,000 troops. With the most advanced weaponry, superiority in airpower, and backing of the world's most sophisticated intelligence and information gathering apparatus, US forces have been unable to defeat the Taliban. How can Pakistan deliver when the US has not made headway despite having abundant resources and technology at its disposal? When confronted with such stark truths about US failures in Afghanistan, US officials often evade the questions.

Similarly, Pakistan also engaged in the skillful use of traditional media and social media platforms to signal national resolve. Media effectively portrayed national message in the face of strategic coercion from the US. Policymakers also relied on media to signal to external interlocutors and build domestic support for Pakistan's position. Such use hindered US ability to put pressure by building a narrative inside Pakistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan also relied on social media platforms, particularly, Twitter to swiftly respond to tweets emanating from Washington, particularly, President Trump. Pakistan's leaders, government and opposition members, and spokespersons of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and military promptly react to any development related to Pakistan's external relations and put out the country's national position on such matters. Quick reactions to events help in setting the agenda and directing the conversations taking place in the cyber realm.

Conclusion

Strategic and diplomatic coercion is part of statecraft and inter-state relations. Every state employs variants of such strategies according to its capabilities. Similarly, responding to such coercion, target states also deploy counter-strategies. Literature has mostly focused on studying coercive strategies and its limitation has been ignored. Various crises between adversarial states (e.g., the US and the USSR, and India-

Pakistan) have been analyzed through the prism of strategic coercion. Meanwhile, less attention has been paid to the study of counter-coercive strategies. This paper has, therefore, proposed a counter-coercive strategy based on rational decision-making and prudent cost-benefit analysis. The model has been SWOT built-into it. As coercion takes place in a certain context and external strategic environment, this context and environment present strength and opportunities to the target states which can be exploited by a detailed analysis of their weakness and prudent threat assessment.

Pakistan has faced strategic coercion at multiple levels in recent years from India and the US. India-Pakistan relationship has been adversarial for decades. During post-2008 Mumbai attacks, however, India has relied on coercion to extract policy concessions from Pakistan conditioning the resumption of bilateral dialogue by first addressing Indian concerns on the issue of terrorism. Similarly, due to divergent strategic interests and outlook for the South Asian region, Islamabad and Washington have often been at odds. Employing a carrot-and-stick approach, the US has withheld approved economic and security assistance to Pakistan. It even suspended payments of the Coalition Support Funds (CSF), the amounts Pakistan has already spent and now is facing a crisis. Eventually, diplomatic coercion of Washington resulted in Pakistan being placed on the grey-list by FATF. It has added to Pakistan's economic woes amid an economic slowdown due to fiscal crisis. In response, Pakistan has focused on building its national resolve strengthening a political consensus on staying firm in the face of adversity. Islamabad has deepened its relationship with the Gulf countries and China to secure economic assistance and thwart efforts for putting Pakistan on the FATF blacklist. Pakistan also engaged in proactive use of social media and international media outlets to spread its narrative for building support. This led a pushback domestically and internationally against attempts to coerce Pakistan into changing its strategic outlook.

Effective counter-strategic coercion requires the activation of diplomacy by the target state and engaging in multi-layered response involving bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. Such multi-tiered diplomacy opens new avenues and adds to the diplomatic capital of a country. Like diplomacy, domestic consistencies also need to be taken on board. Building a national narrative is crucial to the success of counter-coercive strategies. It requires farsighted leadership and institutions' ability to undertake prudent analysis of challenges confronting states. In recent years, Pakistan has engaged in a counter-coercive strategy by activating diplomacy and building domestic consensus to advance national interests.

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