**PAF: A Pillar of Deterrence Stability**

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South Asia remains in search of tools and instruments that may provide much-needed strategic stability to a conflict-ridden and war-prone sub-region of an area of great interest for the global powers. The two archrivals: India and Pakistan have tried to expand and enhance their capabilities to improve their deterrent capability since the overt nuclearization of the region in May 1998. However, the possibility of the next military engagement could not be eliminated even if the probability had remained low due to the presence of nuclear weapons.

This author thinks that Pakistan may have placed its bid in the revived spirits and enhanced capability of the PAF. The events of the past five years, since the fateful day of February 27, 2019, when the PAF shot down two Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jets in the first aerial engagement since the 1971 War, suggests that it is the PAF that will first respond to any aggression by any of the adversary to its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Be it against India in 2019, Iran in January 2024, or Afghanistan in March 2024, it is the PAF that will speak for Pakistan with the firm support of the Pakistan Army and Navy.

However, it would be interesting to explore how has PAF transformed itself from modesty to modernity in such a short time that it has been handed over the lead role to respond to any aggression against the motherland.

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During my research, I determined at least five major factors that have led to this change of guards in practicality. This does not mean that PAF has replaced its senior services, rather it is the confidence of the other services they have shown in the PAF for the lead role. The five factors that have helped PAF in expanding and enhancing its deterrent capability include Leadership, Strategy, Training, Teamwork, and Technology (LST3).

Historically, the leadership of PAF has been its most significant asset. The legacy of strong, firm, and merit-based leadership since the days of Asghar Khan and Noor Khan has continued by the successors, over time. Even under extremely difficult and complex situations, the leadership of PAF has served as a game-changer in the security architecture of Pakistan. The current leadership of the PAF has lived up to the nation’s expectations and has made proud of its predecessors in terms of developing capability development and employment strategy. Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber’s transformation of the PAF has made it a weapon of first choice to mount a national response against any type of aggression by any adversary. His decision-making has been swift, and his choice of weapon system has been equally challenging for the adversary to cope with. The speed at which he works, and the strategic communication skills that he deploys creates fear and terror in the hearts and minds of the adversary, a prerequisite for a credible deterrence.

Strategy formulation and execution have been an area of great significance where PAF has had an upper hand over the adversary. Superior deployment and employment of strategic assets and the timings of the response have kept the enemy guessing. PAF has been a prime mover of the synergetic planning and application of Pakistan’s armed forces capabilities in all its operations in counterterrorism campaigns.

Next is the training, in which PAF has invested the maximum. PAF has always been numerically inferior to its archrival IAF, but its human resources were always more ready than the adversary both in the air and on the ground. Today, PAF trains and operates in synch with several regional air forces and earns praise for its professionalism and dedication.

Teamwork is another area that gives PAF an edge over its rivals in the region. The synchronized and synergetic training that PAF gives to all its human resources is the real asset the service has over time. Visiting its prime training institutions in Risalpur, Sargodha, and Korangi Creek, it is difficult to distinguish between pilots, engineers, air defence, and traffic controllers in the airmen or the officer’s cadre. The same is then displayed in times of war and conflicts by the aircrew and ground crew in their respective domains. Passion to perform, deliver, and embrace Shahadat is perhaps the most enviable asset of the Team PAF. Each person in his/her place of duty is so passionate about performing and delivering that it creates terror in the hearts of the enemy. When faith and passion combine to protect the motherland, the inventory of the enemy becomes meaningless.

Technology absorption is another area of great significance that PAF has mastered over time. Even when PAF is denied access to some sensitive technologies for the acquired inventory, PAF’s manpower finds ways and means to overcome the deficiencies through skills, passion, and inquest for knowledge.

PAF has now assumed the lead role in protecting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the motherland with the fullest support of senior services. Pakistan Army has even extended financial support from its scarce resources to meet the capability development plans of the PAF to ensure that it does not face any deficiency when it rises to face the four times bigger adversary.

I sincerely extend my best wishes to the PAF in the performance of its responsibilities as the pillar of deterrence stability in the region.

*The writer of this article has authored three international books: “Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict Management Between India and Pakistan” “South Asia Needs Hybrid Peace” and “Understanding Sun Tzu and the Art of Hybrid War.”*