

Indo-Pak ‘new peace’

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As the two South Asian nuclear rivals, India and Pakistan, step into an era of ‘new peace’, things have started to change [1]. The Bollywood film industry has started to produce films on Indo-Pak relations where the villains are portrayed to be against the Indo-Pak peace process. In the past it was quite the opposite [2]: a ceasefire now exists at the Line of Control (LOC) between the Indian occupied Kashmir and the Pakistani part of Kashmir [3]; prisoners of war are swapped; there is a reactivation in trade talks, air, rail and road links are resumed; artistes, sports men and journalist are being exchanged; the ban on each others TV channels is lifted; patients are moving across borders for treatments of fatal diseases; and, no wonder, the most vital of all, the visits of the foreign secretaries and foreign ministers to each other’s land for negotiating peace announce the arrival of a spring teamed with happy relations between India and Pakistan. Only time will tell how long this spring will last.

Both Pakistan and India celebrated their 57th independence days on the 14th and the 15th of August 2004, respectively. This half-a-century relation is fraught with acrimony, mistrust, and pessimism. Both have fought three conventional wars and a small war in 1999 at the heights of Kargil on the status of the state of Kashmir.

Their relation could be defined as chequered, which implies cycles of alternating periods of crisis and normalisation. Every crisis between India and Pakistan is followed by a normalisation process. After the 1987 crisis, when India designed to pre-emptively attack Pakistan’s nuclear installations, President General Zia-ul-Haq flew to New Delhi for reconciliation; after the 1990 crisis over Kashmir, Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi drafted a set of Confidence Building Measures; the Lahore Declaration, was passed in February 1999 after the tit for tat nuclear explosion by Pakistan, which was followed by the Kargil mini-war; subsequently, Musharraf held summit meetings with Vajpayee in Aagra in Spring 2001.

This time, India and Pakistan decided to unleash the process of normalisation after a long spell of tension as they looked forward to start a composite dialogue under different baskets which include contentious and bilateral issues such as Kashmir, Wullar Barage, Siachin Glacier, and trade and cultural ties.

January 6th, 2004 marked the first real step towards thawing the bitter-cold relations as witnessed in the landmark meeting on Pakistani soil of the then Indian Prime Minister Atal

Bihari Vajpayee with the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, under the auspices of the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation Summit.

Only two years earlier, relations between India and Pakistan were in such fragile state that armies of both countries stood eye ball to eye ball on their borders with the persistent threat of a possible nuclear exchange. This was due to the assertion of the Indian government that blamed the December 2001 bombing of its Parliament in New Delhi on Pakistani-backed terrorists. Following this event, the two erstwhile neighbours were not even willing to communicate with each other. All lines of communication were severed. Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf who participated in a conference at Al Matay, Kazakhstan were not even willing to shake hands, much less to enter into some sort of debate on issues of war and peace.

This comment focuses on, and tries to delve more deeply into, the following issues. It is a well established fact that this time the normalisation process is far more dynamic than the past peace processes. Thus, the question arises as to what is the urgency which has pushed India and Pakistan to look towards rapprochement at this point in time? What is the role of international community (and especially the United States) in this thaw of relations? Did the changed geostrategic environment that followed the attacks of 11 September 2001 drive India and Pakistan to take initiatives aimed at reaching peace? What are the hurdles in achieving this peace between India and Pakistan, among which the hurdles posed by the Pakistani hardliners? This comment argues that it was Track II Diplomacy which paved the way for a dialogue at the official level of the governments.

Why go for peace?

Below are some of the reasons which could explain the latest rapprochement between India and Pakistan.

Nuclear factor

Nuclear optimists believe that the possession of nuclear weapons leads to co-operation between two countries in conflict [4]. A situation in which competitors come to accept the status quo is one which opens the way for the emergence of other common interests. It has been argued that nuclear weapons have achieved this. With respect to nuclear weapons, it is significant that the habit of co-operation in the Soviet-US relationship began to develop as early as 1946 when the US and the Soviet Union first tried (but eventually failed) to reach agreement on the international control of atomic energy. By the early 1950s co-operative efforts to manage this threat had begun in earnest. The death of Stalin in 1953 encouraged both Malentov in the USSR and Eisenhower in the US to propose initial and highly tentative steps towards transforming the nuclear arms race into more peaceful forms of competition. The 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1972 Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) I and the 1979 SALT II are examples of co-operation between two nuclear superpowers under the threat of nuclear attack [5].

Nuclear weapons caused cold war statesman to approach a common standard for rationality in issues of war and peace. Nuclear weapons, in this sense, have been an improbably effective instrument of cross-cultural education. The mere possession of nuclear weapons has compelled those who behold them – notwithstanding their other dissimilarities – to find similar modes of thinking about the new realities with which they are confronted.

I do not agree that a strong parallel has been drawn between India and Pakistan on the one hand and the former cold war rivals (the USSR and the US) on the other. In all dimensions, there still remain a few similarities here and there. Thus, in a way similar to the understanding of both the USSR and the UN on the devastations of the nuclear bomb, India and Pakistan have realised the urgency for creating peaceful relations to face the challenges of the new world order.

In addition, nuclear pragmatists believe that steps and measures should be taken to build peace and resolve contentious issues and to contain the nuclear technological demon in South Asia. ‘The positive development clearly reflects that the two countries are conscious of the inherent dangers of continuous confrontations and appear to be determined to deal with it rather constructively’. noted nuclear pragmatist Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, president of a renowned Pakistani think tank while referring to the two day talks between the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan in early July 2004 on Nuclear related issues [6]. Both are fully cognisant of the fact that there is no winner in a nuclear confrontation and are acutely aware of the grave dangers that accompany the possession of nuclear weapons along with their carrier systems. Both the Indians and the Pakistanis have already started a process to introduce restraint measures. The Lahore meeting, and more specifically the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed on February 22, 1999, clearly reflected the desire to cage the nuclear monster.

Domestic factor

Over the last year, President Musharraf has made some rather striking statements, in stark contrast to the conventional policies of Pakistan. Departing from the ritualistic positions on Kashmir, he has called for a mutually flexible solution for Kashmir, urged for a relaxed Pakistani insistence on holding a plebiscite, and pledged directly to Prime Minister Vajpayee that he would not permit any territory under Pakistan’s control to be used to support terrorism. Musharraf’s repositioning on Kashmir fits within his larger vision of transforming Pakistan into a ‘moderate, developed, enlightened and welfare Islamic state’ [7]. During the Independence Day celebrations Musharraf urged the need to project a ‘soft image’ of Pakistan through culture, sports and tourism [8]. Musharraf represents a larger civil military oligarchy, ‘The Establishment’ of Pakistan. The foreign, domestic and economic policies of Pakistan are drafted by this ‘Establishment’ which knows that locking Pakistan in an arms race with a larger and expanding India would take Pakistan nowhere. The ‘friends’ of Pakistan have time again used it and then left it in lurch. There is an understanding among the ‘elite’ and even the commoners that once Afghanistan is stabilised and Al-Qaeda erased, the Americans would vanish, leaving Pakistan without a major ally. China, a long ‘time tested’ Pakistani friend is alarmed at the popularised support for Islamic radicals within the country and has thus bettered its relations with India while trying to resolve the Indo-China border dispute [9].

Pakistan is bearing the brunt of US cold war policies in Afghanistan which gave rise to the elements of Mujahedins. However, Pakistan now has to clear its image of backing any Mujahideens and Talibans, the so-called terrorists. Pakistan is undergoing all efforts to root out the terrorists and extreme Islamists from its soil, thus goes the official Pakistani line [10].

Economic factors

The doves in Pakistan and the nuclear pessimist lobby are of the view that a normalisation of relations with India would divert the huge resources spent on Pakistani defence and more towards intra-economic development. Musharraf and other military leaders have often admitted that the stability of Pakistan rests on two pillars, i.e. armed forces and economics [11]. For attracting foreign investment and seeking positive economic benefits, the Pakistani delegates at the 2004 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, prepared a brochure which, under the section 'Relations thaw with India', contained a passage with the phrase 'looks as though commerce may succeed where diplomats have so far failed'. There is no doubt that the trade benefits would be massive.

Pakistan is a very poor country by all standards. In the last fifteen years, the incidence in poverty in Pakistan has risen from 20 to 33%. Pakistan's burgeoning population, now approximately 140 million, is poorly educated and cared for. According to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report, for 2003 Pakistan spent 1.8% of its GDP on education and 0.9% on health, compared to 4.5% on defence.

As long as Pakistan does not clear its image of siding with Taliban and supporting jihadi groups 'carrying freedom struggle' in Kashmir, it will not achieve the status of an attractive place for investment. Statistics show that US foreign direct investment in Pakistan over the five year period from 1998-2003 averaged \$202 million – or twenty times less than Bermuda and five times less than in Panama. Since the insurgency in Kashmir began, Pakistan's rating of attractiveness for foreign investment dropped from 92 to 129 out of 140 countries surveyed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

The geostrategic position of Pakistan makes it a gem for it can become a transmission belt for trade and energy between Central Asia and the subcontinent. However, its failed national security policies towards Afghanistan and partly towards India have forfeited both markets. In 2001-2002 Pakistan's direct trade with five central Asian states was a paltry \$27 million. Pakistan could earn more than twice this amount by serving as a conduit for natural gas or oil between Iran, Central Asia and India.

The elite in India, meanwhile, has been sharply critical of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government's costly and failed attempt to extract concessions from Islamabad by mobilising the army in attack formation on the Pakistani border for ten months in 2001-02. Increasingly, the BJP is of the view that it can secure its claim to power by coupling a massive expansion in India's armed forces with a strategy of economic partnership with the six other South Asian states. A key decision of the South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation (SAARC) summit, and one which figured in New Delhi's readiness to enter into a dialogue with Islamabad, was the finalising of plans to create, over, a South Asian Free Trade Zone a 10 year-period beginning in 2006. Dr. Tanvir Ahmed Khan, a former Pakistani Foreign Secretary, commented: 'It looks to me that India is giving up its hegemonic designs over small neighbours and now wants to establish its economic domination in the region' [12].

Post 9/11 factors

September 11, 2001 was a defining moment in the process of Indo-Pakistani normalisation. Fearful of the emergence of India as a major destination for international investment and its

growing geopolitical partnership with Washington, many in members of the business and political elite in Pakistan argue it would be better to seek a deal with New Delhi now, while Pakistan remains a valued ally of the Bush administration in its ‘war on terrorism’, rather than to risk having to deal with a stronger India in the future. Moreover, many share Musharraf’s view that the military promotion of Islamic fundamentalist extremists in Afghanistan and Kashmir has redounded against their interests, bringing Islamabad into conflict with Washington after September 11 and fuelling increasing sectarian strife within Pakistan itself. Fears among the Pakistani elite are that the jihadi groups are turning against the regime [13].

The role of the international community

The Bush administration, which has embraced the military regime in Pakistan as a key ally in its ‘war on terrorism’ and has identified India as a potential strategic partner of the US, is a moving force behind the Indian-Pakistani rapprochement. Yet Washington has found it is politically useful to downplay its role. US officials will only admit to encouraging the two sides to talk, although it is evident that the Bush administration is using the growing economic and military leverage of the United States in Central and South Asia as a means to prod the two sides to the negotiating table.

As for the Bush administration, it views developments in South Asia from the standpoint of its goal of securing the unchallenged military and economic dominance of the US in the 21st century. It is anxious to partner with India both because of its economic potential – Wall Street increasingly refers to it as the future ‘office of the world’ – and because it can serve as a geopolitical and military counterweight to China.

Indeed, only a few days after the ‘breakthrough’ in Indo-Pakistani relations at the SAARC summit, George W. Bush announced what he termed the ‘next steps in strategic partnership’ between India and US. These include greater co-operation in non-military nuclear activities and space exploration, an invitation to India to collaborate on missile defence, and a resumption of high technology trade.

At the same time, the US views Pakistan as pivotal to its occupation of Afghanistan, to future ambitions elsewhere in oil-rich Central Asia, and its struggle against Al-Qaeda and other Islamic extremist groups.

During the Cold War the US fanned the Indo-Pakistani conflict so as to secure Pakistan as an anti-Soviet ally. Now, however, Washington wants to bring about a settlement between its traditional ally (Pakistan) and its new Indian ally in order to secure its predatory interests and ambitions across Asia.

The United States has played an important role to avert major wars both in the 1999 Kargil crisis and during the fiasco which followed the 2001 December Delhi Parliament bombing. The United States also wants to create peace in the region as a means for stopping an Anti American movement started in the valley by the jihadi. These jihadi were used to oust the red Soviets from 1979 till the demise of USSR. Later they gave momentum to the Kashmiri war of independence and became very strong while they gave rise to the Taliban factor [14].

The role of track II diplomacy

Behind-the-scenes initiatives taken up by many Track II Diplomats have also a role to play in the new peace process [15]. Of course Pakistani, official line does not agree with it. They

believe that its only official level understanding that starts a dialogue [10]. The US has been the driving force of this unofficial diplomacy. Many individuals and think-tanks funded by the US government have become involved in supporting track II initiatives. The Regional Centre of Strategic Studies in Sri Lanka, with General Rtd Dipanker Banerjee as its previous Executive Director, has held summer workshops every year to give a chance to young scholars as well as senior policy makers from both countries to meet in an unofficial environment. In addition the FRIENDS Institute in Pakistan headed by General Mirza Aslam Beg has been involved in organising conferences and seminars in a very cordial atmosphere where interaction could be made possible and where ideas are formed away from the official policy line and more towards building confidence and finally resolving contentious issues.

Conclusion

There is both scepticism and hope pinned to the peace talks in South Asia. India and Pakistan need to have trust, confidence, and a will to make this peace process into one which seeks a resolution of all conflicts inflicting on their relations. Hardliners need to be uprooted or their ideology ought to be change. Musharraf has even risked his life by starting military operations all around Pakistan and especially in the Wanna region with the objective of ousting the menace of extreme jihadis.

Many times the peace process has been derailed due to the presence of the parochial interests of the elites. The world is changing into a global economy, and if policymakers in both India and Pakistan look to their vested interests then the prospects of peace seems very bleak. Much reward goes to Musharraf rather than to the Indian leadership for the initiating of this peace process as he is ready to take a U-turn in Pakistani foreign policy.

Notes

1. The term 'New Peace' was first used by Dr. Shaun Gregory, The Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, 'New Peace, New War: Global Perspective', read on the launch conference of the International Center for peace and conflict Studies, Islamabad, 20 May 2004.
 2. Bollywood motion picture: Mein Hoon Na, released June 2004.
 3. On Nov. 26, 2003 Indian and Pakistani armed forces ended 14 years of virtually daily artillery exchanges, when they began a 'general' ceasefire – a ceasefire that covers the international border between India and Pakistan and the Line of Control (LOC) and Siachen Glacier in the disputed Kashmir region.
 4. David J Karl, Proliferation pessimism and the emerging nuclear powers, *International Security* 2 (3, Winter 1996/97); also Sarahh Bokhari, Nuclear risk reduction in South Asia – nuclear instability in Asia, *CISS Journal* (Spring 2003), p. 40.
 5. James R Schlesinger, The impact of nuclear weapons on history, in: Jorn Gjelstad and Olav Njolstad (Eds.), *Nuclear Rivalry and International Order*, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo and Sage Publications, 1996.
 6. Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, *The News*, Sun, July 4, 2004.
 7. Trading Militancy for Peace in South Asia, Feb 26, 2004, www.stimson.org.
 8. 15th Aug 2004, *Daily Times*.
 9. Dr. Stephen P Cohen, *India and Pakistan: Steps Towards Rapprochement*, Testimony Prepared for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, The Brookings Institution, January 28, 2004.
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10. Interview with the Honorable Counsel General of Pakistan in Canada, Mr Ghalib Iqbal by the author, Aug. 10, 2004.
 11. Referred to in [7].
 12. Keith Jones, India and Pakistan to Pursue Composite Dialogue, 30 January 2004. (<http://www.countercurrents.org>).
 13. Ibid.
 14. Syed Saleem Shahzad, Keeping the Peace Initiative on Track, Asia Times 16th February 2004.
 15. Fifteen years ago in Foreign Policy, Joseph V Montville described the relatively new concept of citizen diplomacy. By this he meant the unofficial initiatives of private citizens and groups to help open lines of communication and build trust between countries involved in conflicts.
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