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India-Pakistan Bilateral Engagement: Retrospect and Prospect

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Abstract:

Since independence both India and Pakistan have proved incapable of resolving their differences. The bilateral relationship has been characterised more by conflict and mutual mistrust rather than cooperation and mutual friendliness. However, both countries during the periods of relative cordiality successfully negotiated a number of bilateral agreements which were expected to provide the basis for lasting peace in the region, but each time widespread enthusiasm faded. The positive impact of these developments was diluted by periodic interceptions. Mutual distrust, antagonism and above all the lack of political will to systematically discuss all the differences and how these differences might be ameliorated or accommodated, have always caused a setback to the efforts aimed at the promotion of harmony and cordiality. The paper attempts to explore the following:

- a. *It analyses the efforts made by India and Pakistan to bridge their differences.*
- b. *It examines the forces that made India and Pakistan relations prone to conflict and made their engagement process futile.*
- c. *An attempt has been made to highlight the main factors which are likely to play most important role in determining the success of bilateral engagement.*

1. Introduction

India-Pakistan bilateral relationship has been characterised more by conflict rather than cooperation and mutual friendliness. The bilateral relationship is often portrayed as an enduring rivalry. Despite several efforts at reconciliation the two sides remain locked in embrace of seemingly Unending conflict (Ganguly, 2002). Mutual distrust, antagonism and above all the lack of political will to systematically discuss all the differences and how these differences might be ameliorated or accommodated, have always caused a setback to the efforts aimed at the promotion of harmony and cordiality. History reveals that the itinerary of India-Pakistan relations has never run smooth. Most important characteristic of Indo-Pak conflict is its persistence. Despite civil societies having intense and wide ranging commonalities, India and Pakistan have been stagnated in an adversarial predicament (Dixit, 2002, pp. 1-20).

Every crisis between India and Pakistan is followed by a normalisation process. However, neither war nor negotiations has brought the conflict any closer to a resolution. Both sides have been unable to establish a mutually acceptable power equation in South Asia. In any event, argues Shahid Amin, the *national egos* and consideration of *loss of face* have prevented any flexibility in making concessions (Amin, 2000, p. 167). Although there is much that divides the two neighbours (like history, ideological incompatibility, absence of significant economic and trade relations, etc.) but Kashmir issue arguably lies at the heart of enduring rivalry.

2. Indo-Pak Bilateral Engagement in Retrospect

India and Pakistan have engaged in negotiations at different levels, but the history of Indo-Pak engagement is a detailed story of frequent failures with rare instances of success. Unlike so many other regions of the world, diplomatic exchanges and dialogues have failed to resolve the enormously complex disputes between the two rivals because of the lack of political will, recurring terrorist incidents, and political instability in Pakistan (Misra, 2010, pp. 35-55).

India and Pakistan have successfully concluded a number of bilateral agreements such as Shimla Agreement, Lahore Agreement, etc., which were expected to provide the basis for lasting peace in the subcontinent, however, all the agreements miserably failed to ensure peace and security in the region. There are plenty of instances in India-Pakistan history wherein an adverse political climate has been the key reason for the failure of talks (Misra, 2010, pp. 181-200). The ethos of Shimla agreement was compromised by the follow on 1987 Brrasstack crisis, and 1990's compound crisis. Further, all hopes signalled by Lahore engagement was dashed upon the Himalayan peaks of Kargil in 1999. Post-Kargil war, both sides again tried to make peace in July 2001 in the Indian city of Agra. In Agra, General Musharraf insisted that India should recognize Kashmir as the core dispute but refused to accept any mention of the Indian contention that terrorism in India was being sponsored by forces across the border. The drafted joint statement was ultimately rejected by the Vajpayee Government because of deep divisions within the Indian Cabinet on the relationship between cross-border terrorism and the talks and even more importantly, between Kashmir and the

normalisation of bilateral relations (Mohan, 2005). In a way, the Agra Summit also broke down amid mutual or counter accusations and disappointment without a commitment to reconvene discussions at a later time.

The terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001 and the subsequent horrible attack on the Indian Army camp in Jammu in 2002, prompted Indian government to take an aggressive stance against Pakistan. Both sides carried out a dramatic mobilisation of troops and armour along the India-Pakistani border that brought the two sides precisely close to the brink of war (Ganguly, *Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise*, 2006, pp. 47-48). The military confrontation prevented the possibility of the two sides picking up the thread of conversation from the Agra Summit.

In Indo-Pak bilateral engagement a shift occurred when Vajpayee made the peace offer in Srinagar on April 18, 2003. Snapped air, rail and diplomatic links were restored as confidence building measures as spadework for bilateral engagements (Misra, *India-Pakistan Talks 2004: Nuclear confidence Building Measure (NCBM'S) and Kashmir*, 2004). Vajpayee, as quoted by Sumantra Bose, declared:

"In our search for lasting solution to Kashmir problem, both in its external and internal dimensions, we shall not traverse solely on the beaten track of the past. Mindsets will have to be altered and historical baggage jettisoned" (Bose, 2003).

A.B. Vajpayee's visit to Islamabad in 2004 in order to attend the SAARC Summit was a path breaking event as it signalled a formal end of the ten month crisis that unfolded following the twin peak crisis 2001-2002. The negotiations at SAARC summit between the senior aides of Vajpayee and Pervaiz Musharraf produced a Joint Statement issued on January 6 that defined an entirely new basis for bilateral talks on Kashmir and other issues (Mohan, *Soft Borders and Cooperative Frontiers: India's Changing Territorial Diplomacy towards Pakistan and China*, 2007, pp. 6-8). Further both sides agreed to discuss all outstanding issues concomitantly through a Composite Dialogue Process. The composite dialogue process covers the eight specific issues such as Jammu and Kashmir; Siachen; Wular barrage/ Tulbul navigation project; Sir Creek; terrorism and drug trafficking; economic and commercial cooperation; peace and security and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields (Misra, *India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms*, 2010). General Pervaiz Musharraf tried his best to revive the peace process with India by seeking to project a flexible approach towards Kashmir. He had come round to accept a process of Composite Dialogue, leaving aside his emphasis on the core issue (Kashmir) at least in agreement (Behuria, 2009, pp. 440-441).

The discussion have produced a few tangible accomplishments including a cease fire along the LOC, the establishment of new bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad and the permission for members of APHC to travel to Pakistan. Besides, expansion of economic, cultural, sporting and social exchanges and opening up of LOC in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 8 October are some of the developments which point towards a relative reduction of tension between the two neighbours. In spite of such measures and a series of high profile meetings, there has been a little progress on the core territorial issue (Ganguly, *Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise*, 2006, pp. 47-48). New incidents of terrorism, from October 2005 in New Delhi to July 2006 in Mumbai, compelled India to suspend the peace process with Pakistan. In 2006 at the sidelines of NAM summit in Havana both sides accepted that terrorism is a major source of concern and promised to setup Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism (JATM) engaging the intelligence officials from both countries to deal with the menace. They have also proclaimed for the first time since 2004 that progress has been made in the Kashmir negotiations, although many divergences remain to be addressed (Mohan, *Soft Borders and Cooperative Frontiers: India's Changing Territorial Diplomacy towards Pakistan and China*, 2007, pp. 8-10).

In 2007 when Musharraf took a fatal decision to remove Chief Justice of Pakistan, political instability again engulfed Pakistan. As Musharraf was battling for his survival, the back-channel talks between India and Pakistan lost their shine and were almost called off (Behuria, 2009, p. 443). Meanwhile, democracy returned to Pakistan when military dictator was replaced by the civilian President, Asif Ali Zardari. However, the democratic government also prove ineffective to curb terrorist attacks. Barely four days after Pakistani President Zardari's conciliatory remarks towards India, was a devastating three day terrorist attack mounted in Mumbai. The 26/11 attack brought an immediate halt to the peace process. Tensions reached to such an extent that the possibility of war was openly talked about on both sides. Pakistan went into a denial mode, though in an initial statement Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani condemned the attacks and offered to cooperate in the investigation. This led to the escalation of tensions, however, in spite of overwhelming public pressure to take hard actions against Pakistan, Indian Government acted with a great deal of restraint (Arvind Gupta, 2009). Nonetheless, throughout 2009, New Delhi continuously insisted that it would resume the composite dialogue process only if Pakistan proved willing to bring the perpetrators of the 26/11 terrorist attack to justice. After a prolonged gap, India and Pakistan have reinitiated the bilateral dialogue in April 2010 at the sidelines of the SAARC summit in the Bhutan. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani agreed to 'think afresh' towards a 'substantive dialogue' (Roy, 2010). Talks about resuming the dialogue process continued for almost a year and the Composite Dialogue Process finally resumed in March 2011. Both have been candid in their admission that peaceful coexistence is crucial to their interests. Ostensibly Pakistani leadership made some positive gestures, like Pakistan's President Zardari's remarks that there would be soon a good news on Kashmir and indeed attempts were made on both sides to carry forward the Confidence Building Measures, for example, cross LOC trade, but all the efforts fell short of achieving major breakthrough on complex territorial issues, Siachen or Kashmir (Kumar, 2009, p. 180).

Hina Rabani Khar, Pakistan's first women Foreign Minister, during her visit to India on 26th July 2011 stated that, "we have learned lessons from history but are not burdened by history. We can move forward as good, friendly neighbours who have stake in each other's future and who understands the responsibility that both the countries have to the region and within the region" (Pakistan-India Talks: Hina Rabani Khar Arrives in New Delhi, 2011) During her visit the two Foreign Ministers affirmed the importance of carrying forward the dialogue process. She tried her best with her affable remarks that Pakistan desires to open a new chapter of their relationship with India, a chapter of goodwill, harmony and understanding. However, political introspections pervaded at other levels.

The killing of two Indian soldiers on January 8th 2013, well inside the Indian Territory by a Pakistani army group infuriated widespread outrage and calls for large scale military retaliation. It provoked fears for yet another major breakdown in India-Pakistan relations. Pakistan responded by saying that they are sure that Indian Army started the chain of events and things took a turn for the worse early on 6th January morning with the death of one of its soldiers and critical injuries to other. Indian External Affairs Minister, Salmaan Khurshid, lamented on the skirmishes along the LOC, "the mutilation and beheading that took place is tragic, unfortunate, and inhuman - even if you have to think of reconciliation, it must come after the truth is brought out" (Naravane, 2013). As maintaining sanctity of the LOC was acknowledged as one of the most important Confidence Building Measure, therefore, violation of ceasefire is of great concern. However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Secretary level talks ostensibly present a moment of optimism not seen since the collapse of bilateral talks in 2008, but questions remain over the feasibility of substantial outcomes.

New leadership in both India and Pakistan declared to promote good neighbourly relations, however, recent developments such as - Modi's decision to called off Foreign Secretary level talks with Pakistan scheduled for August 25, 2014 on the ground that Pakistan's High Commissioner Abdul Basit's meeting with Kashmiri separatist leaders amounted to an unacceptable interference in India's internal affairs (Mohan, No Table for Three, 2014); and Nawaz Shareef's insistence (while addressing the 69th session of UNGA) that we cannot draw a veil on Kashmir issue until it is resolved in accordance with the wishes of Jammu and Kashmir people (Haider, 2014), generated suspicion that the leaders in both countries are departing from their proclaimed commitment to improve relations.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that in the light of continual sticking points such as, the most frustrating and baffling territorial dispute over Jammu and Kashmir and the issue of terrorism, the feasibility of substantial outcomes from any engagement effort remains doubtful.

3. Problems

India-Pakistan relations are largely governed by the misperceptions of each other. A trust deficit persistently obstructs both countries from making any substantial progress in their bilateral relationship. The misguided perception, argues Ashutosh Misra, is at the core of Indo-Pak enduring rivalry. Ashutosh Misra argues that Anwar Sadat's speech in the Israeli Knesset in the context of Arab-Israeli conflict aptly illuminates this symptom of dyadic rivalries. He quotes Anwar Sadat's speech as:

"Yet there remains another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us, a barrier of suspicion, a barrier of rejection; a barrier of fear, of deception, a barrier of hallucination without any action, deed or decision, a barrier of distorted and eroded interpretation of every event and statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as constituting 70 percent of the whole problem" (Misra, India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms, 2010, pp. 190-191)

Besides, Jammu and Kashmir issue and cross border terrorism are the two main problems which continuously act as a stumbling-block in the way of their effective bilateral engagement. Despite certain positive developments in the recent past and the wish of both countries to normalize relations, no contentious issue between India and Pakistan has moved towards solution. Many eminent scholars considered Kashmir issue as the real bone of contestation between India and Pakistan, which by a process of accession belongs to Indian Union and which Pakistan considers to be a matter of principle on which its rulers are not prepared to compromise. In the context of bilateral negotiations with India following anti-India uprising in Kashmir in 1990's, Pakistan adopted an uncompromising position that without progress in Kashmir, there can be no normalization of relations with India. Pakistan has been insistent that Kashmir is the core problem and that everything else is peripheral (Amin, 2000).

There are, in fact, fundamental differences between India and Pakistan in defining India-Pakistani conflict with particular reference to Kashmir question. Unlike Pakistan India does not regard Kashmir as the core problem and believes that even if Kashmir conflict is resolved, the conflict with Pakistan can take some other form until Pakistan decides not to externalise its internal problems in the form of hostility with India (Kumar S. , 2001). Kashmir issue seems to be most perplex and frustrating one. With all the good will in the world the Kashmir issue is persistently keeping India-Pakistan relations embittered. Kashmir dispute is much more than a territorial dispute; through it national identities are being formed, further complicated by domestic political games on either side. Differing perceptions of both the countries over Kashmir issue, like, (for India it is vital for the protection of Her core national issues of territorial integrity and secular democracy and for Pakistan, Kashmir remained an unfinished agenda of the partition), have kept the Kashmir problem alive. Gowher Rizvi has given a suitable analysis of the problem:

"The Kashmir dispute, itself a legacy of partition, reactivated all the issues and traumas which the partition was intended to stop and made normal relations between the two countries well-nigh impossible. Kashmir institutionalised in a microcosm all the historical irritations between India and Pakistan and has continued to defy all rational solutions" (Rizvi, 1987, p. 118)

Difference in attitude about the settlement of Kashmir dispute, for example, India is striving to find a solution on bilateral basis and Pakistan is attempting to internationalise the issue, is also one of the reason for poor result of bilateral negotiations. Besides, Pakistan's policy of making 'India bleed through thousand cuts' reflected in their support for terrorism, has had a negative effect on bilateral dealings. It has not only make bitter the mutual relations but also has created a confrontational atmosphere, based on mistrust and antagonism, preventing either side from taking the first step towards compromise (Misra, India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms, 2010, p. 190). Therefore, one of the central problems that had undermined past Indo-Pakistani engagement efforts for reconciliation has been the simple fact that both states approach the conflicting issues for reasons that are basically and structurally in conflict. It is because of it that the current initiatives at rapprochement, merits a great deal of scepticism. Pessimists held that the objectives held by India and Pakistan has not changed substantially and that

this elemental asymmetry is likely to persist as a structural barrier to substantive engagement even if procedural engagement continues (Special Report, 2005).

Kashmir is not an unsolvable problem. It needs mutual cooperation, understanding and accommodation. Terrorism should be handled jointly and there is no option but to abandon antagonistic attitude. The issue of terrorism will remain a major irritant in the effective engagement process like Kashmir and will need to be addressed if relations have to improve.

4. Prospects

More than six decades after the trauma and calamity of partition, a number of issues continue to vex India-Pakistan relations and cast long shadows on bilateral talks. The roots of the Indo-Pakistan conflict are deep. It is possible that the two sides have evolved *modus-Vivendi* and learnt to live in peace and even to build bridges through collaboration in overcoming problems common to both, events however, turned out otherwise (Dodani, 2006, p. 29). They have been locked in a bitter rivalry with decades old roots that have almost erupted into outright war several times.

For the negotiations to succeed it is extremely important to create the proper atmosphere. There are abundant instances in India-Pakistan relationship wherein an adverse political climate has been the key reason for the rupture of talks. Scores of Indo-Pak engagement efforts have proved futile because of the absence of peace and tranquillity along the border. Besides, the powerful political tool for fanning public passions in the hands of those decision makers and governmental institutions having vested interests in perpetuating hostilities is a continuing siege mentality on both sides fuelled by bitter historical memories, deep rooted prejudices and the undying mistrust. From the very beginning the atmosphere has been vitiated by the extremist hate lobbies in both countries. It seems that the stalemate is the best likely outcome of any engagement process between the two countries. Both the countries still hesitate to make any significant concession over Kashmir issue even if they propose to break away from the past. The progress has only been placed on the table and does not promise much beyond the current stage (Misra A. , 2005, pp. 33-38).

For the development of peace and prosperity in South Asia, various scholars, commentators and analysts have written thousands of words suggesting how to resolve the Kashmir issue. They have examined the state of Jammu and Kashmir as an independent state, the valley as a part of India, part of Pakistan, as an autonomous region, as a joint protectorate, demilitarised with or without UN peacekeeping forces, a unitary plebiscite, a regional plebiscite, elections, bilateral negotiations, tripartite dialogue with or without mediation. In spite of all it no specific proposal has ever left the drawing board. The peace and security for all the inhabitants of India and Pakistan could only be assured if the government of both the countries could set aside their differences and determine gallantly to address the Kashmir issue, regardless of political and emotional obstruction. The 'peace process' initiated in 2004 was a beginning but there needs to be a continuation until there is an end (Schofield, 2010, pp. 247-259).

The prospects for breakthrough in Indo-Pakistani relations even after the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, remains remote. National obsession of Pakistan, that Kashmir is a jugular vein, the unfinished business of partition, without which Pakistan will remain incomplete, should be dropped. It has supported three wars and is an innovation to unending conflict and eventual disaster. Pakistan must visibly demonstrate that it has put an end to all links with the militant groups it formally supported.

Human rights activist groups have well documented the brutality of Indian forces, typical of state counter insurgency efforts to deal with separatist and independent movements. Indians rigid refusal to deal with Kashmir reality must go. Demilitarisation should take place in order to free Kashmiri people from their constant feeling of being *occupied* (Schofield, 2010, pp. 242-246). India must seriously engage the dilemma of how it treats people of Kashmir. How can the state deny basic rights while simultaneously claiming them as citizens?

Both India and Pakistan must do more to create constituents for peace, India and Pakistan need to have trust, confidence, and a will to make the peace process into one which seeks a resolution of all conflicts inflicting on their relations (Bokhari, 2005, pp. 145-50). The engagement process may be encouraged by expanding people to people contacts across the border. The two countries are basically punishing the common people by imposing strict visa policy. There is much better scope for the success of the people to people contact approach in resolving the long pending differences between India and Pakistan as people on both sides of the border share a common culture and a historical past. Besides, the other avenue which has the potential to make the India-Pakistan relations meaningful is economic cooperation. In the recent past, both sides have shown some impetus for change. On 28th April 2011 both the countries issued an ambitious Joint Statement that promised to improve trade. The optimistic and sound hopes were captured by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh when he declared, "If there is cooperation between Pakistan and India and not conflict, vast opportunities that will open up for trade, travel and development will create prosperity in both countries" (Peace Brief, 98, 2011)

Bilateral economic cooperation should be pursued in order to enable commercial progress to facilitate political reconciliation. Besides, maintaining sanctity of LOC is of great concern, and if violations of LOC are not immediately contained, it would have adverse impact on India-Pakistan relations. If history is any guide, the likelihood of any engagement process between India and Pakistan will breakdown is high and the prospects of the meaningful breakthrough are quite slim.

5. Conclusion

The problems which afflict India-Pakistan relations are complex but not beyond rational settlement. There are indeed both major problems and opportunities that can tilt the relationship either way. There are genuine threat perceptions on both sides about each other, they need to be recognized and a way should found to instil confidence in each other. However, it seems that there is no option particularly with reference to Kashmir issue which is fully acceptable to India, Pakistan and the people of

Jammu and Kashmir and which will come across to solve the conflict. Protracted issue of Jammu and Kashmir and terrorism will continuously hamper all efforts directed for the normalization of relations. The establishment of sustainable engagement process for peaceful relations would require a joint resolve by both countries to open a new chapter in their relationship. Indeed the leaders of both countries have been saying for years that a harmonious relationship is their cherished objective. It is apparent that the people of both countries desire to live in peace and amity. Therefore, they would dearly like to see a tension free relationship between two antagonistic neighbours. This would open the door to normal, commercial, social and cultural contacts. A new Indo-Pak frame work to address bilateral problems in a spirit of greater trust and accommodation alone would improve confidence and strengthen regional cooperation in South-Asia. Sustained inability to work for a negotiated settlement can only prove counterproductive for both the countries in the long run. In order to achieve results negotiations must be conducted willingly and honestly and the past must not be presented to bar progress or serve vested interests.

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