



INDIA- PAKISTAN RELATIONS: WHAT LIES AHEAD?

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Abstract:

This article delves into the history of dialoguing to highlight how the respective national narratives have shaped bilateral ties and have defined the expectation from each other. It also needs to be underlined that the important stakeholders on India Pakistan dialogue are the most challenging aspect for the bilateral relationship between the two countries. While there are several other security, political, economic and civil society stakeholders, the dominant factor is that the relationship has been deeply securitised therefore any forward movement in the bilateral relations is seen from the prism of security. In this context it is important to look into the history and how it has shaped the perception of the two countries and their narratives about each other

Key words: Pakistan, India, Dialogue, Democracy, Islamist, Ideology, South Asia, Terrorism

Título en Castellano: Las relaciones entre la India y Pakistán: ¿Qué les queda por delante?

Resumen:

Este artículo profundiza en la historia del diálogo bilateral para resaltar como las respectivas narrativas nacionales han conformado lazos bilaterales y han definido las expectativas de cada uno. También hay que subrayar que los actores más importantes interesados en el diálogo entre la India y el Pakistán constituyen el aspecto más desafiante en la relación bilateral entre los dos países. Si bien hay varias otras partes interesadas relacionadas con la seguridad, la política, la economía y la sociedad civil, el factor dominante es que la relación ha sido profundamente securitizada, por lo que cualquier movimiento hacia adelante en las relaciones bilaterales se ve desde el prisma de la seguridad. En este contexto, es importante examinar la historia y cómo ha dado forma a la percepción de los dos países y a sus narrativas bilaterales.

Palabras Clave: Pakistán, India, Diálogo, Democracia, Islamista, Ideología, Sur de Asia, Terrorismo

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1. Introduction

No other relationship between any two countries has undergone so many rough patches as frequently as is the case of India Pakistan relations. It has witnessed dramatic turn of events some time generating a hope for better bilateral ties and at times has descended into absolute hopelessness over the future direction. Yet, both the countries have realised the need to engage in dialogue to resolve outstanding bilateral disputes that have bedevilled the relationship. India and Pakistan have been engaged in dialogue intermittently but before the process could start off in the real earnest the dialogue has been suspended or both the countries have resorted back to non-dialoguing position due to the activities of non-state actors operating from Pakistan. There are several reasons why the two countries have engaged in dialogue and have disengaged from dialogue. It is pertinent to mention that the relationship between the two countries has been complex and over the period of time the national narratives build over several wars and bilateral conflicts have created a basis for continuation of confrontation where popular pressure for engagement in a dialoguing process has been lacking. This is because any compromise is seen from the perspective of zero sum game given the history of partition. In Pakistan, dealing with Indian threat has been a main orientation of its foreign policy.² This article delves into the history of dialoguing to highlight that how the respective national narratives have shaped bilateral ties and have defined the expectation from each other. It also needs to be underlined that the important stakeholders on India Pakistan relations are the Pakistan army on the Pakistan side and government of India whose position on bilateral ties defines the momentum of bilateral relations. While there are several other security, political, economic and civil society stakeholders, the dominant factor is that the relationship has been deeply securitised therefore any forward movement in the bilateral relations is seen from the prism of security. In this context it is important to look into the history and how it has shaped the perception of the two countries and their narratives about each other.

2. Why History Matters: Shaping the Perception/Misperception dichotomy

The bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan is yet to overcome the exclusive nationhood ingrained in the two-nation theory and subsequent partition. The premise that Hindus and Muslims cannot stay together as they belong to two different nations as propounded by Jinnah from the beginning nurtured a mistrust of India which deliberately was projected as the country of the Hindus in spite of its secular foundation and its opposition to the two nation theory. To most Pakistanis India and Hindu became synonymous a perception that is still dominant. Partition and subsequent flow of refugees and the killings that took place in the course of migration of the two communities towards both the sides of the border brought with it a construction of an 'enemy' image and sowed the seeds of mistrust and suspicion among the people who have lived together for centuries. Several books were written to attribute the award of Gurdaspur to India as a part of larger conspiracy against Pakistan. This award provided India a land link to connect to Kashmir. Apart from this, partition of military assets and reference to Pakistan as an artificial creation by Indian politicians also added to the construction of a narrative that India has not reconciled with the creation of Pakistan and wants to undo it.³ From the Indian perspective, Pakistan's decision to join the Western sponsored military alliance of SEATO and CENTO soon after its independence only deepened India's anxiety and India saw the policy of arming Pakistan as a Western conspiracy to undermine India's primacy in the region. Eventual decision of India not to hold plebiscite in Kashmir as the subcontinent became part of Cold War politics deepened the mistrust of India. Many common Pakistanis believed

² Yusuf, Hamid (1999): *Pakistan: A Study of Political Developments 1947-97*, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel Publication, p.90.

³ Haqqani, Hussain (2005): *Pakistan between Mosque and Military*, Lahore, Vanguard book, p.27.



that Kashmir should have formed part of Pakistan notwithstanding the fact that it was a princely state and was not part of British India that was divided on the basis of two nation theory.

Pakistan disputed the accession of Kashmir to India and tried to portray that the accession was concluded under duress. It conveniently projected that the promised plebiscite was not conducted in Kashmir because of India's unwillingness without mentioning that Pakistan was reluctant to implement clause 2 of the UN resolution which made withdrawal of Pakistan troop mandatory before plebiscite could be held. Therefore, Pakistan constructed a narrative that emphasised India as violator of UN resolution and projecting itself as champion of Kashmir cause. Moreover, the identity based on two nation theory made Pakistan to project its claim over Kashmir as ideologically legitimate. Therefore, in spite of realising how its policy of proxy war through jihadis have bled Pakistan itself it could still sell the concept of 'Kashmir runs in our blood' - as Musharraf emphasised on his 12th January speech in 2001. Both the countries have fought four wars in which the militaries were engaged directly. However, proxy war sponsored by Pakistan since 1990 still continues. Another important factor that has shaped debate in Pakistan is its quest for parity with India which is much bigger in size perhaps to emphasise the equality of Hindu and Muslim nations that forms foundation of Pakistan's identity and much of its political debate.

The Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 and India's role in it further strengthened this perception that India wants to undo Pakistan. Birth of Bangladesh had a deep impact on Pakistani psyche and entrenched mistrust of India. As Pakistan was unwilling to accept that its faulty policy led to the separation of East Pakistan, it constructed a narrative blaming India solely for the separation of East Pakistan projecting it as Indian conspiracy to divide Pakistan. As the civil-military quibbled over the ownership of responsibility that led to Pakistan's defeat and surrender of 95,000 Pakistani army soldiers, the military regime decided not to make the Hamdoor Commission report that was set up to enquire into the fall of Dhaka, a top secret document till a part of it was made public by the India Today magazine. This has helped Pakistan to keep its India 'threat' alive and has helped its Army to appropriate a disproportionate defence budget compared to Pakistan's spending on education and health and frequent military intervention in the name of security Pakistan.⁴

Not just in India, Pakistan has recently constructed a narrative that India is destabilising Balochistan and is involved in fomenting terrorism in Pakistan. This is despite the fact that Balochistan problem dates back to the days of partition. Violence inside Pakistan including FATA is perpetrated by Pakistan's home grown jihadist. Pakistan, which during the Taliban regime enjoyed absolute monopoly over Afghanistan's foreign policy, does not want any presence of India which had shut its embassy during the Taliban rule. Pakistan, which was not happy with India reopening its consulates in southern Afghanistan, started linking India to the violence in Pakistan.

Apart from this, Pakistan has outsourced its narrative on India to the jihadi groups. Some of the accuse India of engaging in water war and pointing to the water scarcity in Pakistan due to India and the Indus water treaty. Various Indian dam projects in Kashmir is projected as India's objectives to deny Pakistan its rightful share of water. In fact, the narrative against India is so entrenched Pakistan had to reinvent a different nomenclature to give India Most Favoured Nation (MFN) under the WTO arrangement. Because translation of MFN in Urdu would be '*subse pansandida desh*' and it will be politically suicidal to portray India in those terms, officially. Therefore, Pakistan and India agreed for a different nomenclature that is called Non-Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA).

⁴ "Cutting India to size" remained a motto within Pakistan Army after 1971. See Haqqani, *op.cit.* p.268.



While the bilateral relationship has contributed to a narrative which has created mistrust and suspicion, the textbook has also constructed a discourse that feeds into this narrative.⁵ For example the social science text book of class V reads “After 1965 war India conspired with the Hindus of Bengal and succeeded in spreading hate among the Bengalis about West Pakistan and finally attacked on East Pakistan in December 71, thus causing the breakup of East and West Pakistan.”⁶

All these have cast a shadow on India Pakistan relations between two countries and have made both the countries extremely cautious of peace moves. Domestic constituency against peace remains substantial. Efforts to change the dominant narrative has been few and far in between. In Pakistan the jihadi militant groups that have hijacked Pakistan’s India policy to a large extent by deploying their foot soldiers to fight India are in no position to change the narrative that has formed the basis of their existence. Similarly, Pakistan Army’s *raison d’être* is based on the perceived threat to India.⁷ India’s own domestic politics has shaped its narrative on Pakistan. Pakistan’s sponsorship of terrorism is seen as a security threat. Most importantly, the Kargil conflict and Mumbai attacks is seen as manifestation of Pakistan’s hostility. This has strengthened a narrative that Pakistan cannot be trusted and India’s peace move is a futile effort and dialogue is a projection of weakness of India.

3. Recounting the India-Pakistan Dialogue

The road to dialogue between the two countries has been tardy and challenging. The road map to peace has been arduous as dialogue has been interrupted by events that have taken the two countries back in time. Many describe the India Pakistan relations as two steps forward and two steps backward signalling the stagnation of dialogue process. Resumption of dialogue has been equally challenging. Each time the two countries have entered the process of dialogue it had to survive the public glare and scrutiny and each official statements are evaluated in the framework of zero sum game. Progress therefore has been extremely slow as the leadership is careful of negative publicity that will derail dialogue process. Soon after independence demarcation of border, refugees and Kashmir dispute consumed the priorities of the two countries. Few rounds of India Pakistan dialogue after independence also focussed on water sharing. While the World Bank mediated Indus water treaty was signed in 1960, the conflict over Kashmir has continued to impact the bilateral relations. Mentioning of Kashmir issue in joint statement and agreement is seen as a victory from Pakistan perspective and non-mention of Kashmir is seen as a victory for Indian diplomacy. For a very long time India evaluated Pakistan’s commitment to dialogue with India if Islamabad refrained from raising it in the UN General Assembly meeting. At present, UN has become of forum for exhibition of India-Pakistan acrimony.

Interestingly, 1965 Soviet brokered Tashkent Agreement did not mention the Kashmir which was seen as a diplomatic defeat of Pakistan. Failure to make Kashmir as part of the

⁵ Rahman, Tariq: “Back to the Future”, *Newsline*, June 2001, p.68

⁶ Social Studies (in Urdu) Class- V, Punjab Textbook Board, Lahore, p 112 as cited in Nayar , AH and Ahmad Salim (ed.):“Subtle Subversion The State of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan. Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics”, at <https://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/State%20of%20Curr&TextBooks.pdf>, p.22. Also see Aziz, K. K. (1993): “The Murder of History on Pakistan, Lahore, Vanguard Book Pvt Ltd.; Hoodbhoj, Pervez and A.H. Nayyar, ‘Rewriting History of Pakistan’, in Khan, Asghar (ed.) (1985): *Islam Politics and the State*, London, Zed Books, pp. 164–177; Behuria, Ashok K. & Mohammad Shehzad: “Partition of History in Textbooks in Pakistan: Implications of Selective Memory and Forgetting”, *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 37, nº 3, 2013, pp. 353–365. In the context of India see, Kumar, Krishna (2001): *Prejudice and Pride: School Histories of the Freedom Struggle in India and Pakistan*, New Delhi, Viking, Penguin India. Claire Rosser, Yvette: “Curriculum as Destiny: Forging National Identity in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh”, The University of Texas at Austin, 2003, at <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/891/rosseryc036.pdf>

⁷ See Fair, C Christine (2014): *Fighting to the End: Pakistan Army’s Way of War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp 159-172



agreement was capitalised by Bhutto and this was beginning of the end of Ayub regime. As Pakistan got embroiled in East Pakistan Kashmir issue took a back seat for few years even though India's role in East Pakistan added to bilateral tension. India perceived that the flow of 10 million refugees out of which 7 million were Hindus from East Pakistan as a deliberate attempt by Pakistani military regime to push its Hindu population to India.⁸ The 1972 Shimla agreement converted the UN implemented ceasefire line to Line of control which was politically significant for India in the context of Kashmir conflict. This helped India to withdraw support to UNMOGIP that observes the ceasefire as ceasefire line no more existed. Major achievement of Pakistan was return of the 92,000 POWs and return of the territory captured by India based on an informal understanding that Pakistan would respect the Line of Control and would resolve the dispute through bilateral dialogue. For India, Shimla agreements emphasis on bilateral settlement of disputes was a major achievement as India did not wanted internationalisation of the Kashmir issue which Pakistan used in the past to pressurise India.

However acrimony broke out between the countries over the interpretation of the Shimla agreement as Pakistan continued to internationalise Kashmir issue. Both the countries discussed a non-aggression pact and a peace and friendship agreement and established Joint Commission to promote cooperation on "economic, industrial, educational, cultural, tourism and technological fields."⁹ During Zia's period, both countries engaged in what is known as cricket diplomacy. Though both countries held bilateral parleys there was hardly any progress on the issues that were bedevilling the relationship. Moreover, perception about resolution of bilateral issues remained entrenched in the national position: Kashmir first or other issues which appeared to be easier to be resolved first. This is a dichotomy that continues to characterise bilateral relationship except for Musharraf years and post democratic transition in 2008. Ironically, the 'easier to resolve issue' defined as 'low hanging fruits' has not been plucked creating a vicious cycle of which issue should be prioritized. It also needs to be noted that during Rajiv Gandhi's regime sincere efforts were made to reach out to Pakistan as an analyst described the approach as India's attempt "to draw vainly Islamabad's attention"¹⁰ on its support to terrorism in Punjab and its earnest expectation that diplomatic persuasion would stop Zia's government even though Islamabad pretended its innocence in aiding Khalistani militants in Punjab. Interestingly a note was prepared by then Foreign Secretary regarding India's policy options towards Pakistan that ranged from diplomatic to military approaches.¹¹

The 1980s also added new dimensions to India Pakistan relations with the Siachen conflict in 1982 and the revelation that Pakistan possessed nuclear weapon in a well calibrated interview of A.Q.Khan to Indian journalist Kuldip Nayar in 1987. The revelation of existence of nuclear weapon and operation brass tack raised the bilateral tension and caused a fear of nuclear exchange. However, the two countries agreed to a series of CBMs in the 1980s to rebuild their bilateral relationship without much success as Pakistan deployed its indoctrinated jihadist in Kashmir taking advantage of the internal situation there. Only significant agreement that has stood the test of time, since it was signed in 1988, is the exchange of list of civilian nuclear installations that will not be attacked in case of tension.

The 1990s saw an increase in tension between the two countries as violence in Kashmir flared up and Pakistan decided to take the Kashmir issue to the human rights commission

⁸ Ayoob, Mohammad and K Subrahmanyam (1972): *The Liberation War*, Delhi, S Chand & Co, pp.190-191

⁹ India-Pakistan Commission is Approved", *New York Times*, 24 December 1982, at <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/24/world/india-pakistan-commission-is-approved.html>

¹⁰ Bhasin, Avtar Singh (2018): *India and Pakistan: Neighbours at Odds*, New Delhi, Bloomsbury, p.310.

¹¹ Three options were given by the then Foreign Secretary S.K.Singh. They were (i) diplomatic persuasion and political pressure, (b) outright threat of grave consequences; or (c) making our friendship attractive to them", as cited in Bhasin, n.9, p.310.



though it did not succeed to raise the issue as most of the members decided to abstain. However, state's jihadi machine supported by Pakistani establishment kept the ember of jihad burning even when the local militancy by 1995 was largely eliminated by the Indian army. Foreign militants were inducted to Kashmir to keep the rhythm of violence alive. To churn out jihadist so that recruitment continues, Pakistani propaganda machine spewed venom against India and portrayed the situation in Kashmir as ripe for jihad.¹² The compensation package for the jihadis was enormous in monetary terms and the family members were indoctrinated to accept the 'martyrdom' of their son killed in Kashmir. As a result, anti-Indianism was used to oil the cog of jihadism and many young men were recruited. Hate for India was well calibrated to suit military's institutional interest impacting on the bilateral ties. It is not surprising when Zia's military advisor explaining Pakistan's policy wrote "To keep the issue alive, Kashmir must hit the headline in the press and electronics media in the west.... My suggestion is that we should project India as usurper of human rights... India should be portrayed as an occupation force... Kashmiris are suffering because they happen to be Muslims in a Hindu state".¹³ Though India argued that Kashmir is integral part of India and it is the areas under occupation of Pakistan which is disputed, it soon agreed to include Kashmir as part of its bilateral dialogue agenda with Pakistan.

It was only in 1997 the two countries agreed to set up Joint Working Group to work out the modalities of bilateral talks as its newly elected Prime Minister wanted to "normalise ties with India without Kashmir cluttering the space".¹⁴ Both the countries agreed on composite dialogue that delineated eight issues that will be discussed at respective secretary level. Though there was a difference of opinion between the two countries regarding the centrality of Kashmir, Indian foreign secretary Salman Haider described Pakistan emphasis on Kashmir as 'neurotic'.

Two of the important landmark events in the bilateral relations in the 1990s decade were the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visit to Lahore in the inaugural Delhi-Lahore bus known as Sada-e-Sarhad (call of the border) and the Lahore declaration that generated hope for peace which was soon shattered in the Kargil war. The third important milestone that contributed to peace was the Vajpayee Musharraf agreement in 2004 where Pakistan assured that it will take steps to prevent jihadis to operate in Kashmir. These two events were political significant.

The Lahore bus journey remains historically significant. Prime Minister Vajpayee who headed the BJP, a political party, which always argued for Akhand Bharat visited Minar-e-Sharif where Pakistan resolution was passed, and took a historic step recognising the existence of Pakistan and wishing it all the best. This was politically significant move. The Lahore declaration that took place in the aftermath of nuclearisation of the sub-continent contains several nuclear risk reduction measures.¹⁵ However, the Kargil ingression brought the parameter of mistrust and suspicion back to the discourse on bilateral relations. Whereas India felt that it was backstabbed by the ambitious generals in the Pakistan Army who refused to attend the reception hosted by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in honour of Prime Minister Vajpayee in Lahore, some in Pakistan tried to justify Army's ingression in Kargil. However, the damage to the relationship was done as Pakistan moved back to military rule in

¹² Blank, Jonah: "Kashmir: Fundamentalism takes Root", *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 1999), p.42

¹³ Arif, K.M: "Kashmir Problem – Overview" in Tariq Jan and Ghulam Sarwar (ed.) (1990): "Kashmir Problem: Challenge and Response", Institute of Policy Studies, p.65

¹⁴ Shukla, Ravi : *Sunday*, 29 June 1997.

¹⁵ "The Lahore Declaration, Joint Statement/ Memorandum of Understanding", Ministry of External Affairs, 2 February 1999, at <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?18997/Lahore+Declaration+February+1999>



1999 by overthrowing the Sharif government in a coup and India did not see any compulsion to engage in dialogue.

Hijacking of Indian aircraft to Kandahar, the 2001 attack on Indian Parliament followed by mobilisation of the troop on the border raised tension and forced Musharraf to take action against some of the jihadist groups by banning them as international pressure mounted, while assuring the Pakistanis that “Kashmir runs in our blood” and emphasising Kashmir as the “core issue” between India and Pakistan - an approach that was rejected by India which emphasised on making terrorism the core issue in a tit for tat diplomatic response. As a result, it was not surprising that the two countries failed to arrive at a consensus at Agra blaming each other for the failure of Agra summit. Nevertheless, the 12 January speech was the official recognition of the support that Pakistan provided to various jihadist groups operating in Kashmir, going beyond the political and diplomatic support often claimed by Pakistan¹⁶. Situation in Kashmir and firing in the LoC cast a shadow on India Pakistan relations.

A significant move towards normalisation of relations in fact started after the then Prime Minister Zaffarullah Khan Jamali announced ceasefire in the LoC and AGPL in 2003 during Eid ul Fitr which continued to remain in force for more than a decade. The suspended composite dialogue resumed in 2004. However, things certainly looked bright after Musharraf committed that he would not allow its territory to be used against India when he met Prime Minister Vajpayee on the side-line of SAARC which shaped the bilateral relations.¹⁷ The suspended dialogue was revived.

A new beginning in the dialogue process was made after Pakistan agreed to enter into a dialogue process to resolve all the outstanding issues between the two countries and agreed to give up its demand on making progress on other issues contingent on resolution of Kashmir issue. Most importantly General Musharraf’s statement that whatever was accepted to Kashmiris is accepted to Pakistan created political space for India to manoeuvre the internal dynamics in Kashmir by seriously seeking political solution from within. Both the offer of P.V.Narasimha Rao in 1995 to Kashmiris that ‘sky is the limit’ to Vajpayee’s ‘insaniyat ke dayare mein baat karenge’ (within the ambit of humanity), could not resolve the political problems in Kashmir. Pakistan was prepared to give up the UN resolution as a basis for resolution of Kashmir issue and rather General Musharraf floated 4-point proposal. Though India did not agree to these proposals which were floated through television, a back channel was operationalised to conduct serious talks behind the door on Kashmir. These talks, the second back channel after R.K.Mishra and Niaz Naik’s parleys, facilitated greater interaction and the two countries agreed to introduce bus services and agreed to open the LoC for people to people contact and trade between the two Kashmir. During PM Singh’s visit to Srinagar he said, “We seek the normalisation of our relations with Pakistan, a solution of all issues that cause estrangement, including Jammu and Kashmir through dialogue and peaceful negotiations in an atmosphere free of violence. While we cannot change borders, we can make them irrelevant”.¹⁸

Earlier in 2004, India was allowed to fence the LoC to check infiltration as ceasefire was enforced. Pakistan which had objected fencing earlier saying that it violated the UN resolution on Kashmir looked other way after the Ramadan ceasefire that brought much respite to the border population. The border fencing was completed between 2007 and 2008. A joint

¹⁶ See Abbas, Zaffar: “Back from the Brink”, *Herald, Annual*, January 2002, p.36.

¹⁷ “India-Pakistan Joint Press Statement, 6 January 2004”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, at http://www.satp.org/satporctp/countries/india/document/papers/indo_pak-6jan04.htm

¹⁸ “We can make borders irrelevant: PM”, *The Hindu*, 11 October 2008, at <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/We-can-make-borders-irrelevant-PM/article15320076.ece>



terror mechanism was set up and held two meeting between 2007 and 2008 until the Mumbai attack. India kept the hope that this mechanism will be useful if implemented effectively even though Kashmir was not included in its ambit. It must be emphasised here that India's concern regarding cross border terrorism emanating from Pakistan was highlighted in the Annual Reports published by the Ministry of External Affairs since 2005. To quote, "The dialogue process which began in 2004 is premised on the commitment given by the Pakistan President on 6 January 2004 not to permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner."¹⁹ This emphasised that for the dialogue to succeed, Pakistan must stop sponsoring terrorism. However, after the attack on Indian Embassy in Kabul and Mumbai attack, India emphasised that "Pakistan has eroded the fundamental premise of the Dialogue process."²⁰ It needs to be emphasised that Musharraf's exit in 2008 cast a shadow on the bilateral relationship as the new democratic dispensation took over. While Pakistan Army that was a stakeholder in India-Pakistan peace since Musharraf was the COAS of Pakistan army, his exit meant that Army no longer was willing to own up the back-channel diplomacy and his formula on Kashmir.

4. Transition to Democracy and India-Pakistan Relations

Preceding the transition to democracy in Pakistan, the political parties in Pakistan, with the exception of Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaaf, acknowledged that if the civilian government has to survive in power, they cannot continue with this anti-India stance which would strengthen the Army at the cost of democratically elected government. Friendship with India was essential for the longevity of civilian government. Though the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) agreed to follow the charter of Democracy agreed between the two parties in London in 2006²¹ which among other issues emphasised on peaceful relations with India, the PPP entered into the US brokered understanding with Musharraf to return to power. However, Benazir's assassination undermined the agreement with the military regime. As a result, PPP did not adhere to the political understanding it reached with PML after it assumed office. With the promise of working together broken for short term political gain, it was Sharif who filed a petition against the Zardari government in the memogate case for ridiculing and maligning the Pakistan Army²². With the transition to democracy, India Pakistan relations were now subjected to indirect control of the powerful Pakistan Army in which the civilian continue to play a second fiddle. The civil-military tussle that threatened the political stability in Pakistan was largely due to their differences over India policy. This was very much apparent when the Pakistan People's Party during its 2008-2013 tenure and Nawaz Sharif who succeeded him did not wanted to adhere to the military's script on India-Pakistan relations. Speaking at the *Hindustan Times* Conclave in 2009, the then President Zardari ruled out no first use against India²³ which added to Army's suspicion. Government's second sin was to announce that he will send the Director General of ISI to India to help investigate the Mumbai attack and had to backtrack after he was pressurised by the Pakistan Army.

¹⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 2007-2008, p.v

²⁰ Ministry of External Affairs, Annual Report 2008-2009, p.v

²¹ The two parties pledged, "We will respect the electoral mandate of representative governments that accepts the due role of the opposition and declare neither shall undermine each other through extra constitutional ways. We shall not join a military regime or any military sponsored government. No party shall solicit the support of military to come into power or to dislodge a democratic government." See: "Text of the Charter of Democracy", *Dawn*, 16 May 2006, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/192460>

²² "Memogate: SC admits Nawaz petition for regular hearing", *Express Tribune*, 28 November 2011, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/298881/memogate-inquiry-supreme-court-admits-pml-n-petition/>

²³ "Pakistan ready for nuclear no first use offer: Zardari", *Dawn*, 22 November 2008, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/956201>



The two countries indeed worked on making border irrelevant when they took steps to accelerate people to people contact and signed a new liberalised visa pact to ease the process of granting visa – one of the most stringent visa regimes in the world in present times. According to the liberalised visa regime number of places to be visited was increased for Pakistani businessmen to start with. A six-month visa for social visits was introduced with a maximum period of three weeks stay at a time, one-year visa for senior citizens and couples married across the border with children aged under 18. Visa on arrival facility to Pakistani senior citizens aged above 65 years at the Attari Integrated Check Post from 1 April 2013. Though all these generated a hope for better ties but the atmospheric of the relationship was soon vitiated by ceasefire violation in the Line of Control.

Since 2014, along the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL), Line of Control (LC) and International Border (IB) Sectors in Jammu and Kashmir there has been number of ceasefire violations compared to the past. According to the Ministry of Defence Annual Reports of 2014 to 2017, in 2014 there were 153 violation, in 2015 it was 152 in LC and IB was 253²⁴ in 2016 it rose up to 228 and in 2017, according to the Press Information Bureau it peaked with 860 cases of ceasefire violations and during January 2018 it was 209.²⁵ However, when compared to the pre 2003 ceasefire the numbers are certainly less. It needs to be mentioned that firing across the LoC and IB only added to the bilateral tension. As firing gives cover to infiltration.

The civilian government's inability to bring the Mumbai attackers to justice worsened the situation further with the Indian government finding it difficult to justify its engagement with Pakistan to its people. The cold handshake between Manmohan Singh and Zardari at Yekaterinburg June 2009 and the adverse reaction to talks in Sharm-el-Shaikh between the two Prime ministers, Manmohan Singh and Yusuf Raza Gilani, a month later, signified the apathetic mood in New Delhi, which also affected the process of engagement from the Indian side. For political survival, Zardari had to tow to the Army line as Pakistan's decision to provide Non-Discriminatory Marker Access (NDMA) to India was shelved and Zardari delivered a hard hitting speech on Kashmir at the UN General Assembly meeting in 2012.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who came to power in June 2013, placed improvement of India Pakistan relations in his government's political agenda as a priority. His decision to attend Prime Minister Modi's swearing in ceremony was not liked by the military leadership which closely watched his overtures to India. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Lahore on Sharif's birthday though created personal rapport there was very little scope for Sharif to take the relationship forward. The Pathankot attack, the beheading of Indian soldiers, massive firing across the LoC and Sharif's praise for the killed Kashmiri terrorist Burhan Wani only added to the deteriorating relationship. Though the two countries revived their relationship as India granted five-person Special Investigation Team (SIT) from Pakistan to visit Pathankot in a rare gesture and hope that Pakistan will sincerely take action against the perpetrator of Pathankot attack. Though Pakistan took Masood Azhar in protective custody, there was no forward movement. Following on his 'neighbourhood first policy' Prime Minister Modi offered his condolences to Sharif following the Lahore blast in March 2016 and similarly Sharif offered condolence for the fire at a temple in Kerala. However, the relationship could not move forward as Sharif got embroiled in domestic political crisis and the temperature on the border escalated. In May 2017, beheading of two Indian soldiers by its Border Action Team of Pakistan closed all door for any breakthrough in the bilateral relations. India's retaliatory surgical strike in

²⁴ "Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question n° 1097", Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 27 July 2016, at <https://mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2016-pdfs/rs-270716/1097%20E.pdf>

²⁵ "Ceasefire Violations J&K", Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 7 March 2018, at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=177081>



September 2016 and its reiteration that “terror and talks cannot go together” and Pakistan’s reluctance to control the infiltration only added to the bilateral tension.

Indian businessman Sajjan Jindal also facilitated an hour long meeting between Prime Minister Sharif and Modi in Kathmandu in November 2014 and he also met Sharif in Murree in April 2017 which many believe was carrying a message from the Indian Prime Minister for a meeting on the sidelines of SCO in June 2017. However, such personal bonhomie could not translate into concrete bilateral initiative as his relations with the military deteriorated partially because of his differences with the army over his India policy. The military of Pakistan has always wanted to have a say in the India Pakistan relations and considered Nawaz’s move against the interest of Pakistan. It is noteworthy that tension between Nawaz Sharif and the military establishment had been building up quite some time. This is attested by the famous *Dawn* leak (2016) where his government blamed the military establishment for Pakistan’s international isolation.²⁶ His ouster from power has further aggravated the friction between the two. In a recent interview to *Dawn*, Sharif is quoted blaming the military establishment for not being sincere in investigating the role of non-state actors in the 2008 Mumbai attack. He said “Militant organisations are active. Call them non-state actors, should we allow them to cross the border and kill 150 people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can’t we complete the trial?”²⁷ All these suggest that Sharif was prevented from improving relationship with India. However,

5. Repairing the Relations: Back from the Brink

The announcement of ceasefire is not surprising if one follows some of the forward movements in the bilateral front. After the relationship touched rock bottom with the harassment of diplomats in each other countries – a repetition of the behaviour of late 1990s, the two countries have slowly tried to put the relationship back in track. As Pakistan High commissioner Sohail Mehmood reflecting on the harassment of diplomats said to *Hindu*, “This is a moment for sober reflection on the state of the bilateral relationship. It is too important to be allowed to drift. There is a need to handle matters with wisdom and thoughtfulness”²⁸ underlining the delicate nature of bilateral relations that many times have gone to the brink and back. The seeming thaw appeared to have come after Pakistan army signalled a change of policy. Departing from the past practice, for the first time, Pakistan Army invited Indian Defence Attache and senior diplomats of the Indian High Commission to join March 23 Pakistan day celebrations. This was followed by a report that Pakistan Navy helped the Indian fisherman whose boat had developed snag in the deep sea. Both the countries released fisherman and prisoners. The Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria also visited the trade chambers in Pakistan and underlined the low bilateral trade in spite of immense potential that bilateral trade holds. In January 2018, Islamabad sent a four-member team of counter-terrorism and intelligence specialists to attend an SCO meeting held in Delhi. The permanent Indus Water Commission also had a meeting in New Delhi. And, both the countries are scheduled to have a coast guard meeting on 4th of June and later the two countries for the first time will be part of SCO joint terror exercise to be held in Russia. Speaking to *Indian Express*, Mr Bisaria said, “We have in recent months been working on small steps forward, particularly on the humanitarian side, to build an atmosphere of trust between the countries,”

However, the Indian Minister for External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj ensured that the current phase of bilateral relations did not affect those people who want to come to India for

²⁶ Almeida, Cyril: “Exclusive: Act against militants or face international isolation, civilians tell military”, *Dawn*, 6 October 2016, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1288350>

²⁷ Almeida, Cyril: “For Nawaz, it’s not over till it’s over”, *Dawn*, 12 May 2016.

²⁸ Haider, Suhasini: “Pakistan envoy calls for ‘sober reflection’”, *The Hindu*, 14 March 2018, at <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pakistan-envoy-calls-for-sober-reflection/article23246637.ece>



medical treatment, even though India at one point of time had asked the patient to procure a letter from their foreign minister to get a medical visa. However, between May 2017 to December 2017, India provided 380 medical visas to patients in Pakistan.²⁹ The NSAs of the two countries have met four times in the past three years, even though the official dialogue between the two was stalled. Pakistan had also pulled out of a World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in New Delhi after confirming the participation of Commerce Minister Pervez Malik.

6. Powerful Signalling

The ultimate message to peace came from Pakistan Army Chief General Bajwa. Speaking at the passing out cadets at Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul, he said peace with India runs through comprehensive and meaningful dialogue. Bajwa had earlier spoken to some selected journalists about his vision of Pakistan which includes the internal situation which is popularly known as Bajwa doctrine. Appearing before the Senate committee on Defence, General Bajwa urged the political leaders to improve relationship with India³⁰. Echoing similar sentiment, the ISPR spokesperson Asif Ghafoor in a meeting with Indian journalists said, “Issues between India and Pakistan can only be resolved through dialogue; positive engagement based on trust can take us forward. If we continue to be dictated by history, we will continue to make mistakes.”³¹ While India agreed to the offer of holding talks by Pakistan’s new Prime Minister Imran Khan, but it soon back tracked putting the precondition that Pakistan needs to tackle terrorism emanating from its soil against India. With general election due in India next year, holding of fresh talks may signal a direction towards ‘soft tracking’, which cannot be afforded by the current Indian government.

7. Concluding remarks: What Next for India Pakistan Relations?

India Pakistan dialogue is the most challenging aspect for the bilateral relationship between the two countries. As the violence in Kashmir continues, India will not be in a position to start the dialogue as domestic pressure for ‘no dialogue’ will gain ground. It also has been seen in the past a thaw in bilateral relations has brought salutary effect on Kashmir. Several steps in the past had provided positive dividends. People to people contact have remained a significant ingredient of India Pakistan peace. Crossing of the border to travel remains a single most confidence building measure as it demolishes the perception of enemy image build by nation state. In the past several steps were taken at the civil society level. For example, during the India Pakistan cricket match families on both the sides hosted visitors from across the border. In the past few years the two countries have taken regressive step and restricted cultural interaction. While India has banned Pakistani serials from Indian television, Pakistan court has banned Indian cable. However, Indian movies get same day release in Pakistan due to commercial consideration – a courageous measure that was taken by Pakistani military dictator which has stood the test of time.

While terrorism will remain a major spoiler, comprehensive dialogue (after composite dialogue was renamed) remains the key for resolving issues. Pakistan at the same time needs to take step to ensure that terrorist groups should not hold bilateral relationship as hostage. While

²⁹ Kumar, Krishna: “RTI plea raises questions over Pakistan's medical visas “, *Economic Times*, 13 February 2018, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/rti-plea-raises-questions-over-pakistans-medical-visas/articleshow/62896344.cms>

³⁰ Sajjad Saeed, Baquir: “Bajwa says army not destabilising civilian govt”, *The Dawn*, 20 December 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1377681/bajwa-says-army-not-destabilising-civilian-govt>

³¹ Singh, Sushant: “In bilateral chill, small steps towards thaw, says Indian envoy to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria”, *Indian Express*, 22 May 2018, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-pakistan-relations-exchange-of-prisoners-indus-water-commission-ajay-bisaria-5186022/>



the Pakistan Army is willing for an India Pakistan détente it is imperative that the Army has to allow the civilian government to take the lead. Observing ceasefire, establishment of hotline between military commanders are pre-requisite. Trade and people to people contact hold key to the bilateral relations. Pakistan needs to take steps to see that terrorists from its soil do not emerge as a spoiler. This is extremely important when Pakistan is already placed in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list. The Jadhav case which will come up for hearing sometime this year is likely to put stress on the bilateral relations. However, with the Pakistan army on board on the issue of dialogue, the two countries may move to restore normalcy in bilateral relationship. While it may be two steps forward and one step backward, it will certainly be a progress. India Pakistan peace needs people as stakeholders and a visa regime that facilitate such interaction. It is the dialogue process that could heal the wound of mistrust and suspicion that has been nursed by both sides beyond 70 years of partition.

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