
Can Modi Eventually Rescript India's Pakistan Policy?

Rana Banerji

Ironically enough, during the 2013 election campaign in Pakistan, public opinion there did not think obsessively about India. When India approached elections in 2014, there were credible assessments about a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) victory under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Taking a cue from history, sections of the intellectual elite and media even projected that detente had a better chance whenever there was strong leadership in both countries. However, among the hardliners, an almost visceral dislike of Modi persisted, not only on account of the 2002 Gujarat riots but in expectation of a turn towards ultra-nationalism in India, accompanied by chest thumping, anti-Pakistani belligerence and a revival of the politics of Hindutva. A year down the line, even the grudging optimism seemed to have eroded and the latter perception has prevailed, the escalated confrontations along the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border/Working Boundary during the latter part of 2014 and early 2015, confirming the worst fears.

The Current Setting of Indo-Pak Relations

There have been rare moments in the recent past, when the dialogue process appeared to move in the right direction. A number of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) have been signed from time to

Mr **Rana Banerji** is former Visiting Professor, Pakistan Studies Programme, Jamia Millia Islamia University, and Special Secretary (Retd), Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.

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time. At times, the relationship seemed to be entering a more promising phase. But those hopes were never sustained. According to seasoned Pakistani foreign policy proponents, even those regarded as fairly moderate, India and Pakistan have pursued mutually exclusive and self-sufficient narratives on why talks between them end in mutual recrimination instead of mutual understanding on how to move the process forward. The Kashmir

dispute has been at the centre of the sterility of the bilateral dialogue. In the Pakistani perception, even the issue of terrorism has been directly or indirectly Kashmir-related.¹ The talks between Prime Ministers Modi and Nawaz Sharif on the sidelines of the Ufa summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on July 10, 2015, signalled a much delayed resumption of the engagement process between the two countries that have made no substantive progress in resolving the contentious issues that have bedevilled their relationship over the last 68 years. Going by the terms of the Ufa India-Pakistan statement, these talks would focus only on “all issues connected to terrorism”.

Though the two Prime Ministers agreed to discuss “all outstanding issues”—a euphemism to include Kashmir—and “condemned terrorism in all its forms” (obliquely acknowledging ‘state sponsorship’ of terror), the Ufa statement drew a lot of flak in Pakistan, for being too “one-sided”. The wily 86-year-old Pakistani Foreign Policy and National Security Adviser (NSA), Sartaj Aziz had to hold a press conference three days later to emphasise that Kashmir would remain a core issue for all future discussions with India. In his Independence Day message (August 14), Pakistani High Commissioner in India, Abdul Basit reaffirmed Pakistan’s abiding commitment to the Kashmir cause.

Terror incidents in Gurdaspur, Punjab and Udhampur, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), saw a familiar pattern of tension ratcheting up whenever talks are slated between the two countries. Border firing and mutual recrimination about violations of the ceasefire on the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB) also escalated, even as the Pakistani side took its time in accepting the date for the talks or the agenda suggested by India. Against this backdrop, if the two NSAs were to discuss “all issues connected to terrorism”, it would be naïve to expect that Sartaj Aziz would not stress on the connection between terror and persisting alienation in Kashmir. In any case, there would be nothing to prevent him from claiming before his domestic political constituency upon his return that he had done so forcefully.

The Foreign Secretary level talks slated to be held in Islamabad on August 25, 2015, were abruptly cancelled after Pakistani High Commissioner Abdul Basit invited the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leaders for consultations. It seemed that ‘red lines’ had suddenly been delineated about when to meet with the APHC and what to do or not do with them, if Pakistan wanted bilateral relations back on an even keel. The stand taken by the Modi government was a dramatic departure from the more tolerant ambivalence displayed by the previous Manmohan Singh and Atal Bihari Vajpayee dispensations regarding contacts between the Pakistanis and the APHC. The latter had customarily been invited to meet with visiting Pakistani dignitaries and to attend festivals like Eid or Independence Day and National Day and had—since early 2001 onwards—been allowed to attend them. Now this was being changed and Pakistan would have none of it.

The Hurriyat had even been able to live down the ignominy of February 2003 when its representative, Anjum Zamruda Habib, was caught red-handed while coming out of the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi with Rs 3 lakh. This led to Deputy High Commissioner Jalil Abbas Gilani—later to become Pakistani Foreign Secretary and currently, Ambassador in the United States—being expelled from his post as *persona non-grata*, the first time a ‘blue-blooded’ Foreign Service man had to suffer this fate.

After the Ufa stalemate, one option proffered was that neither country should invest in dialogue at the moment, and should instead seek to contain bilateral tensions by refraining from provocative actions that could lead to dangerous confrontations.

This time, after Ufa, the invitation to the Hurriyat was issued after a crucial high-level meeting between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Army Chief, Gen Raheel Sharif on August 18, at which Sartaj Aziz and some important ministers of the Nawaz Cabinet were present. This seems to have been a calculated move to provoke Delhi into reacting adversely, which could have provided an escape route to the Pakistanis—who were not keen to keep the agenda of the proposed, post-Ufa August 23-24 meeting confined to terrorism.

Who Will Blink First?

Reacting to Islamabad's manoeuvre, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) immediately briefed reporters that India had no intention of falling for this Pakistani provocation and cancelling the talks—the realisation soon dawned that this would enable the Pakistanis to draw 'Kashmir' within the ambit of the talks, even if obliquely. The Modi government would have egg on its face for this volte face—which would be interpreted as weakness not only by an exultant Congress baying for its blood but also internally, by hardline detractors within the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The MEA spokesman, Vikas Swarup issued an eleventh hour statement advising Pakistan that it would not be appropriate for Mr Sartaj Aziz to meet with Hurriyat representatives during his visit "as this would not be in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Ufa understanding to jointly work to combat terrorism." The counter-statement issued by Pakistan later in the day made it clear that Sartaj Aziz did not intend to be deterred by this Indian statement.

Ultimately, the post-Ufa NSA talks did not materialise.

Pakistan appointed a retired military officer, Lt. Gen. Nasser Janjua as its new National Security Adviser, preferring, perhaps, to reduce the equivalence between their Cabinet level Foreign Policy Adviser and a former policeman and intelligence operative on the Indian side,

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as also to get the powerful military establishment’s voice more directly into the process. After the Ufa stalemate, one option proffered was that neither country should invest in dialogue at the moment, and should instead seek to contain bilateral tensions by refraining from provocative actions that could lead to dangerous confrontations. Saner Pakistanis also realised that any new subversive attacks from across the border on the Mumbai 26/11 model could elicit a much more drastic reaction from a BJP government.

The two Prime Ministers met briefly during the Paris Climate Summit. The ‘improved’ or ‘changed’ bonhomie and body language of both leaders during this meeting drew attention in both countries and was commented upon with some optimism in Pakistan. On December 09, 2015, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Islamabad to attend the ‘Heart of Asia’ Conference on Afghanistan, slated under the Istanbul process. The occasion was utilised to announce a revival of the long awaited and oft-thwarted bilateral engagement process between India and Pakistan on its sidelines, now to be called “comprehensive bilateral dialogue”. It was hoped then, that if this process could go forward without excessive media hype, a preliminary meeting of Foreign Secretaries would be held to delineate the schedule thereof.²

Prime Minister Modi’s December 25, 2015, stopover at Lahore, on the way back from inaugurating the new Parliament building in Kabul, signified a clever use of symbolism to add impetus to the revived Indo-Pak peace

process. This was the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Pakistan after 11 years and it was welcomed by major opposition parties and civil society in Pakistan. However, not all diehards were convinced. Typically, a well-respected retired Brigadier opined, “No wonder everybody is wondering: why the volte face? Let me state unequivocally right at the outset, I don’t trust Modi — not India or Indians, just Modi. Consequently, my subconscious might well be seeking for possible conspiracy theories”.³ In India too, there was criticism by opposition parties, notably the Congress about alleged ‘flip flops’ and ‘confusion’ in the BJP government’s approach.

Predictably enough, the prospect of renewed Indo-Pak diplomatic engagement — slated to begin during the Foreign Secretary-level talks in Islamabad (January 15-16)—spurred spoilers from across the border to throw a spanner in the works. A major militant attack occurred on the Pathankot Indian Air Force (IAF) base on January 02, 2016. It was carried out by suspected Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) militants, coming across the now seemingly porous Shakargarh-Bamial sector of the International Border (IB). It could be foiled, thankfully, due to timely and pinpointed intelligence. Collateral damage could also be contained, though there was much criticism and debate in the Indian media over the perceived ham-handedness and lack of coordination among the National Security Guards, Army and Air Force commandos, as well as the eroding capabilities of the Punjab Police and Border Security Force (BSF).

The attack raised new questions about the resurgence of the JeM as a radical militant organisation in Pakistan. To a certain extent, this has been evident since late 2011. Maulana Masood Azhar had been kept under house arrest in the initial years after his release in the IC-814 hijacking hostage swap. However, after Mumbai 26/11, he was allowed to gradually resume his proselytising and fund-collection activities from his lavish Bahawalpur mosque complex. Jaish volunteers trained with the Afghan Taliban in Balakote and elsewhere inside Pakistan. They continued to acquire battle inoculation inside Afghanistan, fighting the US and Afghan national security forces.

Faced with the increasing ire of their own spawned terrorists , like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after the Army cantonment attacks in 2010 in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Maulana Fazlullah's group in Swat (in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), the Pakistan Army's/Inter-Services Intelligence's (ISI's) calculation may have been to enlist another string to their bow, aiming to use the JeM, along with the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT), which has never attacked the state, against these groups that have turned inwards. Another reason for the use the JeM instead of the LeT could be to distance themselves (the Pakistani Deep State) from accusations of involvement in terror modules against India. Yet, though the Pakistani Foreign Office condemned the incident, the timing of the attack raised questions all over again about the will and intent of the Pakistan Army leadership to endorse any entente with India.

Since then, the two National Security Advisers, Ajit Doval of India and Nasser Janjua of Pakistan have met 'secretly' in Bangkok (January 06) and Paris (January 11-12, 2016—unconfirmed/ denied by the MEA). An First Information Report (FIR) has been filed in Gujranwala about the incident and a Pakistani Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted to enquire into the incident. India has accepted in principle the prospect of this SIT visiting India to assess the additional evidence though there have been contradictory utterances about whether it will get access to the incident site, inside Pathankot air base. The meeting between the two Foreign Secretaries has not taken place to delineate the schedule of comprehensive bilateral talks. Both sides have sought to underplay the delay as a matter of preoccupation and scheduling of mutually acceptable dates. The newly accredited Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan, Gautam Bambawale clarified that fixing of dates was not connected to progress in the Pakistani side's investigations on the Pathankot case. Mild optimism, therefore, persisted that whenever the meeting's schedule is eventually announced, there could be incremental progress on the various suspended and contentious subjects which have featured in the Indo-Pak dialogue in the past.

Issues Likely to be Raised in the Resumed Dialogue

The foremost issue of concern to India is the trial of the seven accused in the Mumbai 26/11 attacks. The recording of evidence by the Special Terrorism Court in Pakistan has been abysmally slow, despite being done in camera. Recently, the Prosecuting Attorney, Chaudhry Azhar declined to argue further as his security detail seems to have been withdrawn. In the last hearing, the Judge apparently demanded that all 24 Indian witnesses who deposed before the Pakistani Special Enquiry Committee which visited India should appear before it, in Pakistan. This will entail further procedural delays. Meanwhile, arch-perpetrator, Zaki-ur Rehman Lakhvi remains free on bail, and is reportedly still involved in plotting fresh attack plans with his LeT cohorts though ostensibly lying low, holed up in his home *madrassa* in Okara. This is an unacceptable state of affairs and has irked sensible, balanced political analysts and former investigators of the plot in Pakistan.

As *Dawn's* Zahid Hussain commented, "It is not just cross-border involvement but also the activities of banned outfits at home that raises questions about how much control the state really has within its own domain. Then there is also the question of whether or not we are really serious about getting rid of all violent non-state actors that have become a pervasive challenge to state authority".⁴ One of Pakistan's most respected police officers, Tariq Khosa, remarked, "Pakistan has to deal with the Mumbai mayhem, planned and launched from its soil. This requires facing the truth and admitting mistakes. The entire state security apparatus must ensure that the perpetrators and masterminds are brought to justice. The case has lingered for too long".⁵ This statement would have left Pakistan's military establishment squirming. In another context, the former chief investigator of the 26/11 case in Pakistan went further, lamenting their dual standards which "has acquired the art of turning its strategic follies to triumphs. It is this deep state that has curtailed and trimmed democracy, ensuring the country stays rigged in favour of a small but self-aggrandizing elite. And until those changes, democracy in Pakistan will remain imperilled."⁶

It may, thus, be unrealistic for India to expect any dramatic change of pace in the trial. In a recent interview to a prominent Indian media anchor, Pakistan's Foreign Policy Adviser, Sartaj Aziz talked of "India's obsessive adherence" to the demand for progress first in this terror trial, which was holding progress in the context of other major geo-political changes hostage to the Indo-Pak relations. India is unlikely to get any joy through judicial processes in Pakistan any

time soon. Ultimately, it will have to appeal to international pressure to shame Pakistan into bringing these killers to book. At the outset of the Composite Dialogue in January 2004, both Pakistan and India agreed in principle to set up a Joint Anti-Terror Mechanism (JATM). However, it was not until March 2007, following the Samjhauta Express bombings of February, that discussions regarding JATM implementation took place. The JATM was conceived as a joint institutional mechanism that could identify and implement counter-terrorism initiatives and investigations. It was agreed by both sides that specific information would be exchanged to help facilitate and expedite investigations on either side related to terrorist acts, and to prevent terrorist violence. It was further agreed that while the anti-terrorism mechanism would meet on a quarterly basis, any information required would be provided on a priority basis, and immediately conveyed to the respective heads of the mechanism. But it quickly became clear that JATM's effectiveness was curtailed by a critical divergence on how Pakistan and India chose to view and interpret the agreement.⁷ Mutual trust must develop much further before intelligence cooperation yields results. This could presage work on developing mutual legal assistance mechanisms/treaties.

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The Sir Creek comprises a dispute which has languished needlessly, due partly to the interrupted hiatus of bilateral exchanges. In recent years, new joint surveys were conducted of the disputed land border. Missing boundary pillars were re-located and non-papers exchanged. These steps brought considerable clarity in how to move forward from the positions stated by both sides. The Pakistanis want the creek's eastern boundary to conform to the Green Line of the 1914 map, while India prefers the boundary shown in the 1924 map. Also, India wants acceptance of the median line principle to sort out the maritime boundary claims, from a base island at the mouth of the Sir Creek. If there is adequate political will, and media hype is avoided, the dispute can be resolved amicably with a little bit of give and take by both sides.

Pakistan's High Commissioner to India Abdul Basit has on several occasions conveyed Pakistan's readiness to grant Non-Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) to India once the dialogue resumes. Both Indian and Pakistani Commerce Ministers will have to meet to focus on fresh proposals to speed up the trade normalisation process. The completion of this process will undoubtedly open new trade opportunities. For exports from India, there is tremendous scope in chemicals, textiles, machinery, mechanical appliances and electrical equipment. As for imports from Pakistan, trade possibilities exist in textiles, jewellery and precious metals, and base metals. The services sector, which has become increasingly important in both countries' economies, provides fertile ground for trade, especially in sectors such as information technology and business process outsourcing, health care and entertainment.

Trade normalisation would benefit producers and consumers in both countries. Greater trade integration will give producers access to a much wider market and allow them to achieve greater efficiency in production by exploiting economies of scale in production, thus, enhancing productivity. The consumers in both countries would also benefit from lower product prices and better quality and more variety. The most substantial impact of

the trade normalisation process would be on informal trade flows, which are often considered a defining characteristic of the India–Pakistan economic relationship. Estimates of the extent of such trade range between US\$250 million and US\$5 billion. The primary reason for informal trade are the high transaction costs of trading, as a result of which traders often resort to trading through third-country ports, mainly Dubai.⁸ Today, goods travel from Delhi to Lahore through Mumbai,

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Dubai and Karachi, making the journey eleven times longer and four times more costly. The move towards trade normalisation would certainly lead to a reduction in transaction costs and consequently shift informal trade flows to formal channels. But for this potential to be realised, India and Pakistan need to prepare themselves to facilitate the expansion of bilateral trade. Poor land connectivity is a major problem. Currently, there is only one land route — through Attari and Wagah in Punjab — for rail and road transport of goods. To handle the increase in traffic and decongest the route, more land routes need to be opened, such as the Munabhao–Khokhrapar and Hussainiwala–Ferozepur routes.⁹ The transport protocols between the two countries also need to be amended to allow seamless transportation of cargo in each other's territory. If the two countries agree to grant transit rights to each other, India could be connected to Afghanistan and further to Central Asia through Pakistan.

Visa relaxations for business and religious travel could provide an impetus to bilateral ties and herald better environs for people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges, which presently often get stymied due to adverse media attention to activities or threats of fanatic, extremist groups on either side of the political spectrum in both countries. The

Siachen Glacier is a wedge of territory between NJ 9842, Karakoram Pass and the Shaksgam Valley. The Indian line of defence is along the Saltoro ridge which separates the 76-km-long Siachen Glacier from the Konduz Glacier. It runs from NJ 9842 northwards to the west; whereas Pakistan claims that the Line of Control (LoC) should run northeastwards from NJ 9842 to the Karakoram Pass. India has been in occupation of Saltoro since 1984 and denies access to Pakistan for the sub-glaciers in this region. Pakistan's threat along Saltoro does not end at the snout of the glacier but continues to flow south and southwest towards Turtuk and Chalunka in the valley below.

For some time now, especially after the Gyari avalanche in 2012 in which over 130 Pakistani soldiers in a brigade level encampment on their side were killed, Pakistan has signalled, through Track II mediatory contacts and other channels, a change in its position in the dispute, indicating a possible readiness to respond positively to a joint ground demarcation of actually held positions and exchanging initialled maps for the same, in prelude to agreed withdrawals by both sides from the 1984 held positions. Even when India suffered 10 casualties recently in a snowslide of only slightly smaller dimension on the Indian side, Pakistan's High Commissioner in India, Abdul Basit was quick to reach out to the media, striking a seemingly conciliatory note to espouse mutually acceptable withdrawals.

However, the Indian position has hardened, holding that continued presence in, and control over, Siachen-Saltoro ridge is not only affordable but an essential geo-strategic requirement.

Against China, India has to assess its security along the East Karakoram range, continuing into the plains towards Aksai Chin. If we were to give up Saltoro and pull back, the next line of defence cannot lie in the Shyok and Nubra Valley; that is where the delaying elements would be deployed, the covering troops, so to say. The next line would have to be the Ladakh range on which there are two major passes, Khardungla and Chang La. That's a stone's throw from Leh and the Leh Valley. The boundary of Gilgit-Baltistan

with China is long but the northern parts are all impassable and uninhabitable. Our presence in the Siachen sector prevents this broadening of useable terrain contact. Given the state of fragility of the borders in Ladakh, both with Pakistan and China, anything which risks the future status should be avoided by us. Additionally, the Siachen Glacier is the source of the Nubra river that flows into the Shyok river, which, in turn, flows into the Indus.

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Water resources are weapons of last resort and if nothing else, their control strengthens deterrence.¹⁰ If these parameters govern the Indian responses, there would seem to be very little scope for a compromise solution to the dispute acceptable to both sides. There is a contrarian view, albeit in a minority, which is sceptical of the strategic imperatives attached to Siachen's military relevance in the context of 'taming,' or keeping a check on, China's military advantage in this region.

Kashmir has bedevilled relations between our two countries since Partition. Pakistan regards it as the 'core issue' and keeps harping on various forms of international mediation and pressure from great powers like the USA, despite having committed at Simla in 1972 to solve the issue bilaterally. It keeps going back to the UN Resolution of 1949 regarding a plebiscite, conveniently overlooking that the conditions for observing it were violated by not honouring the withdrawal of armed forces from all occupied parts of the provinces prescribed in the 1948 resolution. India has passed a resolution in Parliament deeming the Pakistan occupied areas of the state as inalienable parts of India. We dispute the ceding of territory by Pakistan to China in the 1963 agreement and object to the Chinese building the Karakoram Highway through Gilgit-Baltistan. This presents a dilemma of future negotiating stances to both countries.

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In this backdrop, the best prospects for resolving the deadlock emerged through the 'back-channel process' started by both countries after the Kargil stand-off in 1999. These contacts, between 2000 to 2007, made considerable progress in crafting options which could be acceptable as 'win-win' solutions for both sides. Though kept under wraps, these have been described in detail by a former Foreign Minister of Pakistan.¹¹ According to him, the "framework for a Kashmir settlement" would involve: (i) major reduction of deployed armed

forces in the region or "demilitarisation"; (ii) "efforts by both sides through all means available" to reduce violence on the Indian side of Kashmir – this implied acceptance by Pakistan of the need to dismantle the apparatus of training and sending across of "non-state actors/militants"; "self-governing" involving autonomy under the respective Constitutions on both sides, "in equal measure"; defining what constituted "units of Jammu & Kashmir"; and "joint mechanisms" for cooperation in the two parts of Kashmir in respect of specified subjects like the environment and water resources management; while acknowledging that "borders cannot be re-drawn", both sides to work on the premise that "the Line of Control (LoC) can and should be made irrelevant".¹²

After the Musharraf government fell, the Pakistan Foreign Office went into denial about the entire Track II process and returned to its old negotiating position of basing its Kashmir policy on implementation of the 1949 UN resolution. In India, there are new disturbing trends discernible in the developing political and insurgency situation in J&K,

which could impinge on Indo-Pak relations. Despite an accord between the BJP and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) to form a government after the 2014 elections, an impasse has emerged on non-delivery of promised development packages after the demise of Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. A new breed of young, technologically savvy militants are joining the violent movement, being aided from across the border.¹³ Consensual political initiatives to tackle the growing alienation of the youth in J&K seem lacking.

Some recent developments have further served as dampeners on prospects of improving Indo-Pak relations in the near term.¹⁴ Though the five-member Pakistani Joint Investigation team on the Pathankot terror attack visited India (March 27-30, 2016), a report in *Pakistan Today*, quoting a source within the team, alleged that the entire incident may have been stage-managed by India to give Pakistan a bad name.¹⁵ Soon thereafter on April 7, 2016, Abdul Basit, Pakistan's High Commissioner in India held a press conference where he claimed the Indo-Pak peace process seemed "suspended" and the JIT visit was more about "co-operation" and not "reciprocity". This claim has been countered by the Indian Foreign Office spokesperson, who pointed out that "reciprocity" of a NIA team visit was woven into the terms of reference for the Joint Investigation, which had been clarified to Pakistani authorities in a note verbal given by the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan.¹⁶ In his press conference, the Pakistani High Commissioner queered the pitch by justifying the Chinese refusal to support the UN process for banning Jaish-e-Mohammed leader, Maulana Masood Azhar. He also raised 'alleged spy' Kulbhushan Yadav's episode in Baluchistan to pejorate India's intentions. These steps indicate, perhaps, a hardening of positions and expression of impatience by sections within the Pakistani military establishment at the deferment of the bilateral engagement process.

Looking ahead, America's best known expert on Indo-Pak relations, Stephen Cohen describes this situation as "a hurting stalemate" that will

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likely continue for “two, five or ten years, let alone to 2047”, with fluctuating “more or less tensions”. He ascribes this to “three sets of factors”; (1) visible disputes like Kashmir, river sharing and territorial claims; (2) identity issues, not between peoples but between states; and (3) strategic pressure points like Afghanistan.¹⁷ The hard truth is that both India and Pakistan are caught in a test of wills, promoting opposing visions of how relations can be normalised. For

Pakistan, it is the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, whereas India accords high priority to terrorism and is unwilling to engage on other issues. All this is layered with emotions and ego, and is oblivious to the reality that the way India-Pakistan relations are managed at present will determine the security dynamics and landscape of South Asia in the years to come. It is important for leaders of both countries to appreciate that pursuing a policy of undermining each other has not paid off in the past and is unlikely to be rewarding in the future. Borders have shrunk and despite sophisticated measures to insulate neighbours, such a policy seemingly does not work. What is needed is respecting the security of other countries. Only then will it be possible to ensure the security of one’s own.¹⁸

India has to remain aware that its aspirations for economic development could be affected if tensions with Pakistan rise to a level that leads to a serious conflict. The Pakistani establishment insists that relations with India are contingent on its willingness to discuss the future of Kashmir. One view espoused by Pakistani analysts is that by pursuing a hard line towards Pakistan, India further strengthens the role of the military there. It is not surprising, in this sense, that the BJP being in power in India suits the military in Pakistan, enabling it to justify its policies. This, in turn, boosts the arguments of hardliners in India. The resulting dynamic only perpetuates antagonism between the two countries.¹⁹

Another argument given is that the political leadership of both India and Pakistan should consider statements that they will give the highest priority to improving the quality and substance of the bilateral relationship in order to meet the challenges their respective peoples will face in the 21st century. Both sides would need to keep in check “a shrill media, which resonates too loudly, reflecting insensitivity, often reducing well-crafted diplomatic initiatives to a farce.”²⁰ While staying within their constitutional parameters, both sides should engage constructively, sincerely and thoroughly with each other on any issue raised by either of them in the search for viable and mutually acceptable solutions – logically, this could lead to reactivation of the CSBMs that have lapsed, and active exploration of the possibilities, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, of further CSBMs and ‘out of the box’ approaches to transforming the bilateral relationship from being a hindrance to being a facilitator for the development of their national potential. However, that this will not be possible without progressively changing deeply ingrained and negative mindsets and projecting a more promising image of each other.²¹

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Concluding Observations

Any engagement process with Pakistan would provide enlarged diplomatic space in its interactions with the major powers. This would be a modest dialogue so that the India-Pakistan relations are not marked by tension, which becomes a distraction. Some degree of peace on the LoC may permit political processes to improve in the Valley. Some opening in terms of trade and transit and, finally, some people to people interactions, religious tourism, etc. would be positives. Whether the dialogue delivers on these subjects may partly depend on the timing and the internal politics in

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Pakistan. When would Pakistan see a temporary advantage to commit to this process even if there are no immediate deliverables on core issues? The process could fluctuate depending on when the civilian political leaders perceive that domestically they may be having a slightly upper hand over the Army. This would depend, in turn, on civil society's perceptions on the respective popularity and charisma of civilian and military personalities. If Raheel Sharif stands by his decision not to seek extension beyond November 2016, Nawaz Sharif may have some space to take this relationship forward. However, in the foreseeable future, the Army is unlikely to give up its veto or leverage on the India policy, and nuclear issues, especially when it needs to focus on Afghanistan.

A more hard-headed approach for India would be to make the talks with Pakistan 'periodic' and almost routine, rather like Annual General Meetings. There would be no expectations and a lot of verbal give and take. Meanwhile, India must develop the capability and political will to give Pakistan a graded response for its acts of omission/commission that are bound to continue, talks or no talks. Improvement in economic ties with all other neighbours and maintaining a benign attitude with them would also help, if only to mark out a contrast to the unchanging Indo-Pak ties' paradigm. The Modi government seems to be in a process of a transition, through trial and error, trying out various hardline or less hard postures, till it moves toward this phlegmatic status of engagement with few expectations. The way forward may have to be found through a mix of gradual, middle of the road approaches accommodating reasonable expectations in respect of long-pending or contentious bilateral issues. Former Pakistani Foreign Minister, KM Kasuri emphasises the value of "back channels" or "Track II" contacts between well placed intermediaries in this context.²² We should

seek constructive exchanges where possible and ad hoc agreements on issues that are not invested with too much political emotion. Engagement is unavoidable and the process must be continuous, even if incremental.

Notes

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6. Tariq Khosa, "Power of the Establishment," *Dawn*, February 22, 2016.
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