

Posturing to Dialogue: India and Pakistan must Establish Military-to-Military Contacts

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Continuing Instability

South Asia is the second most unstable region in the world after West Asia. The main causes for the prevailing instability are the ongoing conflict in the Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak) area and the nearly seven decades old stand-off on the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) between India and Pakistan. Pakistan's proxy war against India, now in its third decade, also contributes substantially to regional instability. The level of violence in Kashmir remains high despite some reduction in successful infiltration attempts even though the number of attempts has not reduced.

India and Pakistan are both states armed with nuclear weapons and, because of the frequent clashes and infiltration attempts along the LoC, the international community views the conflict over Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint. Pakistan's continuing sponsorship of trans-border terrorism – recent incidents include the strikes at Gurdaspur in Punjab and Udhampur in J&K – remains a cause for concern as a major terrorist strike could lead to military retaliation from India. Even though such retaliation would be carefully calibrated to avoid escalation, it would carry the risk of snowballing out of control to a full-blown conventional conflict with nuclear overtones. Both nations need to move forward and ensure

that conflict avoidance is accorded high priority. Existing Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) need to be implemented in letter and spirit and new ones need to be introduced to reduce the risk of conflict.

Though a few meetings have been held between the two Prime Ministers and between interlocutors of the two Ministries of External Affairs, since the Modi-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government came to power in May 2014, attempts at long-term rapprochement have been rather feeble from both sides. The primary cause of the lack of progress is that these efforts do not appear to have the support of the Pakistan Army. The trust deficit between the two countries has proved hard to overcome. Perhaps the time has come to bring the Pakistan Army into the talks as a direct participant to make it a stakeholder. A beginning could be made by instituting regular military-to-military contacts to reduce tensions and overcome the lack of trust between the two militaries. The clearest justification for this channel to be opened is that each one of the previous agreements between the two militaries, particularly the two Armies, has been honoured in letter and spirit by both sides. Hence, it is necessary to review the efficacy of the existing military-to-military and nuclear CBMs, upgrade them to the next higher level and also introduce new measures aimed at contributing to greater stability and the avoidance of conflict.

Composite/ Resumed Dialogue

The 'Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue' process between India and Pakistan, earlier called first the 'Composite Dialogue' and then the 'Resumed Dialogue' (after it had been stalled for some time), comprises the following major issues:

- Peace and security.
- Jammu and Kashmir.
- Siachen.
- Sir Creek.
- Tulbul/Wullar, Baglihar and Kishanganga.
- Terrorism and drug trafficking.
- Economic and commercial cooperation.
- Counter-terrorism.
- Narcotics control.
- Humanitarian issues.
- People-to-people exchanges and religious tourism.

**Military CBMs
have not reduced
border tensions.**

Of the 11 issues that figure in the structured dialogue process, discussions on peace and security, Siachen, Sir Creek and terrorism would benefit directly from military-to-military discussions. To a limited extent, such discussions would also be useful in resolving the Tulbul/Wullar, Baglihar and Kishanganga issues.

Military CBMs Prior to the Kargil Conflict of 1999

It would be helpful to take stock of the existing military-to-military CBMs between India and Pakistan.

Communications Measures

- Hotline between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) since December 1971. After the tensions prior to Exercise Brass-Tacks IV and the 1990 Gates Mission that set international alarm bells ringing, the DGMOs hotline began to be activated weekly.
- Telephone links between Sector Commanders on the Line of Control (LoC).
- Hotlines between the Prime Ministers (PMs). Installed in 1989 by Benazir Bhutto and Rajiv Gandhi; in November 1990, reestablished by Chandra Shekhar and Nawaz Sharif to facilitate direct communication; in May 1997, I. K. Gujral and Sharif pledged to reinstate the hotline.

Notification Measures

Agreement on Prior Notification of Military Exercises, 1991: 10,000 or more troops; no manoeuvres *towards* the International Boundary (IB); exercises at corps-level, minimum 45 km, and division-level, minimum 25 km, away from the IB; no division exercise near the LoC; no military activity within 5 km of the IB.

Border Security Measures

- Karachi Agreement, 1949: no deployment less than 500 yards from the Ceasefire Line (CFL) (now LoC). This is observed more in the breach.
- India-Pakistan Agreement on Border Disputes in the west, 1960.
- Rann of Kutch Tribunal Award after the 1965 War. The Sir Creek dispute was left out.
- Agreement on Prevention of Violation of Air Space, August 1992: armed fixed-wing aircraft not to fly within 10 nautical miles (nm) of IB; armed helicopters

not permitted within one nm; no aircraft within 1,000 metres (m). This is often breached: Atlantique incident; Remote Pilotless Vehicles (RPVs), helicopters shot down at Siachen.

Transparency Measures

- MAs/DAs being invited as observers for major exercises: Zarb-e-Momin in 1989; several Indian exercises.
- DGMO clarifications – Brass-Tacks, 1990, Kargil 1999, ongoing.

Military CBMs: 1999-2011

- Informal ceasefire along the IB as also the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) brought into effect at midnight on November 25, 2003, which has remained in effect since. However, this informal ceasefire agreement has been repeatedly breached by the Pakistan Army in recent years.
- First flag meeting between Indian and Pakistani Army units in three years in Chhorbat La sector in India, February 20, 2004.
- Biannual meetings between Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) and Pakistani Rangers – in effect since 2004. There is an understanding that local commanders should meet more frequently to resolve local problems.
- On the eve of a visit to Jammu and Kashmir, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced reduction in the deployment of troops on November 16, 2004. India redeployed 5,000 troops from Jammu and Kashmir, citing “improvement” in the situation in February-April 2006.
- Establishment of a communication link between the Pakistan Maritime Security Agency and Indian Coast Guard – brought into effect in 2005, primarily to facilitate early exchange of information regarding fishermen apprehended for straying into each other’s waters. The agreement also brought into discussion the possibility of holding joint search and rescue operations and collaborating in marine pollution control.
- Agreement on Advance Notification of Military Exercises, Manoeuvres and Troop Movements – brought into effect in 1991. This agreement has an important role to play in the reduction of tensions on both sides of the Line of Control.
- Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities – signed in 1998. This particular exchange has continued for 17 consecutive years.

- Agreement on Prevention of Air Space Violations and for Permitting Overflights and Landings by Military Aircraft – signed in 1991. It has significantly reduced costs for both nations, and also brought into being a structure of redress in case of violations and mutual trust.
- Agreement reached on the establishment of a hotline between the two maritime security agencies to facilitate early exchange of information regarding apprehended fishermen who inadvertently stray into the other side's territorial waters, October 04, 2005.

Nuclear CBMs

- India and Pakistan exchange lists of their respective nuclear facilities as per the 1998 agreement, every year on January 01.
- Agreement on Advance Notification of Ballistic Missile Tests – brought into effect in 2005. It required both parties to inform the other 72 hours in advance before testing any ballistic missiles within 40 km radius of the International Boundary and the LoC. The pre-notification of missile tests does not include cruise missiles.
- Agreement on Reducing the Risk from Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons, February 21, 2007.
- Hotlines between Foreign Secretaries.

Experience with Previous Military Agreements

Disengagement from Chumik Glacier

India and Pakistan successfully disengaged their forces from the Chumik Glacier in the Salto Ridge conflict zone, west of the Siachen Glacier. The operation is not well known and needs to be studied for insight into the risks, sustainability, and durability of a disengagement agreement between India and Pakistan. The experience brings out that field commanders can reach an agreement that is likely to be acceptable to both sides. The Chumik Glacier disengagement was arrived at by field commanders and has continued to function and serve as a guide to what may be possible in the case of Siachen.

The Chumik Glacier (Chumik means spring in the Balti language) is an offshoot of the Bilafond Glacier, and is about 6 km in length. The heights east of the Chumik Glacier had been occupied by Pakistani forces since 1986. These heights dominate the approaches to Indian positions in the Gyong area. In February 1989, hostilities ensued between Indian and Pakistani forces. Both sides

competed to occupy the highest points in the Chumik Glacier area to dominate each other's positions on the Saltoro Ridge and adjacent areas. On May 13, Brig Rostum Nanavatty, Commander of the Siachen Brigade and Brig Bokhari, his Pakistani counterpart, reached an agreement regarding the withdrawal of forces from their positions. The respective headquarters subsequently ratified the agreement reached by the field commanders. The disengagement was conducted successfully and the agreement has held till now.

DGMOs Agreement at Attari-Wagah in July 1999

In the spring months of 1999, the Pakistan Army intruded across the LoC at several places in the Kargil district of J&K. The intrusions were discovered in May 1999 and India launched carefully calibrated ground and air offensive operations to evict the intruders. The Indian fight back succeeded despite heavy odds, and one by one, the mountains tops were taken back. Soon after the recapture of Tiger Hill by Indian troops on July 04, the Pakistan Army sought a meeting at the appropriate level. At the request of the Government of Pakistan, a meeting was held between the Indian and Pakistani DGMOs at the Attari-Wagah border near Amritsar on July 11, 1999, to chalk out a timeframe for Pakistani forces to withdraw from Indian territory. The Pakistani DGMO agreed that the Pakistani withdrawal would be completed by first light on July 16, 1999. However, the Pakistanis failed to keep their word and sought an extension, which was granted. While most of the Pakistani intruders withdrew, some remained entrenched in small numbers in one pocket each in the Dras, Mushko Valley and Batalik sub-sectors till July 25, 1999. On July 26, 1999, the Indian DGMO declared at a press conference that all Pakistani intruders had been evicted from Kargil district.

The agreement reached by the two DGMOs has been honoured by the Pakistan Army though Pakistan's continuing occupation of Point 5302 in the Dras sub-sector is still disputed. Pakistan claims that it was always in occupation of this mountain top, something that India disputes. Overall, the DGMOs' discussions led to an agreement that helped to end the Kargil conflict.

Recommendations for Military-to-Military Contacts

The above examples clearly establish that military-to-military contacts have been useful in the past and provide grounds to believe that such contacts are in the national interest and will be beneficial in the future as well. It would not be appropriate to advocate that since India is a democracy, only the political leaders and the bureaucracy should interact with their counterparts

Regular Meetings must be initiated to discuss contentious issues.

in Pakistan. While the Indian Army has always been subordinate to the elected political leadership, the Pakistan Army plays a unique role in Pakistan's polity. For most of the time since independence, the Pakistan Army has been in power. During the remaining period, it has continued to call the shots on Pakistan's policies towards India and J&K, and nuclear issues among others. If the Indian armed forces were to deal directly with the Pakistan armed forces, it would be mutually beneficial. Obviously, on the Indian side, the brief would be approved in advance by the government and representatives of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) would be present in each meeting. The recommendations given below should be considered for early implementation.

- The DGMOs of India and Pakistan should meet biannually at the Attari-Wagah border to discuss contentious military issues with a view to reducing tensions through negotiations. While the talks may be unstructured initially, these could be based on a prioritised agenda in later rounds. Issues like the demilitarisation of the Siachen conflict zone, the boundary dispute at Sir Creek and infiltration across the LoC could be taken up for discussion besides local border issues like incursions across the LoC. In due course, it should be possible to evolve a joint mechanism for humanitarian and disaster relief operations.
- Regular flag meetings need to be instituted at the brigade level along the LoC and DIG range level between the BSF and the Pakistan Rangers along the IB sector in the Jammu division, which Pakistan calls the working boundary. Such meetings will help to reduce the trust deficit resolve local issues.
- A joint mechanism should be evolved to look into the incidents of violations of the ceasefire agreement and recommend measures to minimise future violations.
- Officers attending the two Navies should consider the following maritime CBMs for mutual benefit:
 - Incidents at Sea Agreement (first proposed at Lahore, 1999).
 - Maritime disaster management.
 - Joint search and rescue at sea.
 - Mechanism to resolve incidents of fishermen straying into each other's waters.

- Officers attending the National Defence College (NDC) courses of the two countries, which are attended by Brigadier and equivalent level officers, should visit each other's capitals for an exchange of views on issues related to regional security and non-traditional threats to security that are common to both countries. In later years, they may be permitted to travel outside the capitals as well.
- Similarly, cadets under training at the three training academies could exchange visits to respective academies and participate in sports activities.
- Both countries are major contributors of contingents for the peacekeeping missions of the United Nations (UN) and the experience has been that their troops get along very well on UN missions. Both have very good training facilities and would benefit by cooperating for UN peacekeeping training.
- Participation in each other's sports and games would help to foster a spirit of healthy competition. The two Services Sports Control Boards can work out a mutually convenient schedule.
- Joint mountaineering expeditions should be organised, especially on both sides of the AGPL in the Siachen conflict zone.
- Contacts between old regiments should be gradually reestablished and visits to each other's regimental centres permitted.
- Joint events should be organised for the military bands of both countries for military as well as civilian audiences.

Military-to-military contacts will not be easy to establish and implement. There will be many hold-ups in the initial years. However, once these take root and begin to show results, these will raise mutual confidence by an order of magnitude. Gradually, these CBMs will become effective in reducing the present trust deficit so that the two countries can move towards long-term conflict resolution.

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