

# creating 'compulsions' through geography

Musharraf's formulation. Let me add a few of my own.

**Assumption 3:** No state has ever, in recorded history, conceded territory under its control without being decisively defeated. Pakistan has tried to settle the issue militarily, but failed. If it had succeeded, there would have been no problem. India, too, cannot defeat Pakistan decisively in order to force Islamabad to sign on the dotted line. While war between the two is still possible at levels lower than a full-blown conflict, the nuclear dimension has closed the window for major conflict.

**Assumption 4:** India is a big country and wants to play a bigger role in the region and beyond. While it has made diplomatic and economic strides in recent years, its conflict with Pakistan has not allowed it to realise its potential at the optimal level. Poor relations with Pakistan also put up a wall between India and West and Central Asia. It makes eminent sense for New Delhi — as pointed out by more discerning Indian analysts — to engage Pakistan on a more permanent basis. Kashmir figures prominently in any such long-term, mutually-beneficial settlement.

**Assumption 5:** While Pakistan's commitment to Kashmir remains intact, its actual capacity to push the issue through a combination of diplomatic and military means has drastically decreased. This is owed to multiple factors that have precipitated because of post-9/11 events. The proxies it was using to bleed India have become discredited; Pakistan's alliance with the United States in the 'war on terror' has turned the Islamist groups fighting in Kashmir and Afghanistan against Pakistani security forces; the policy has metamorphosed large sections of Pakistani society over the past three decades, making *jihad* the biggest export of the country and undermining the concept of the state itself; the economy, until recently, was in a shambles and so on. These are sound reasons for Pakistan to try and work out a deal with India. It is no coincidence that Musharraf makes it a point to talk about Pakistan's image problem and how important it is to improve that image. All these factors feed into the problem and his identification of these factors, and the emphasis on Pakistan-first, is bang on target.

**Assumption 6:** During my recent visit to Jammu and Kashmir, one thing was very clear. Regardless of ideological affiliations, no Kashmiri wants carving out of the state. Indeed, all of them emphasise a solution that is *inclusive* (includes AJK) rather than *exclusive*.

**Assumption 7:** Both India and Pakistan have

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reasons to engage each other. For both it is important to settle Kashmir. Neither is going to accept territorial dislocations. Both have to find a solution *within the evolving framework of the peace process and normalisation*. Finally, Pakistan cannot emphasise self-determination on the one hand and then talk in terms of territory on the other. Kashmiris won't accept it.

If these assumptions are accepted, what can be the possible way out? I use the term, 'way-out' rather than 'solution' deliberately because what I intend to propose is itself an evolving process rather than an immediate settlement.

*The most important factor is geographic contiguity.* Kashmir is contiguous to Pakistan, not India. The Jammu-Srinagar Road our delegation travelled on is an unnatural route and depends on the Banihal Pass. Close

down the pass and there is no link between the two areas. India has for long been trying to develop the Leh-Manali route but the project remains dicey. Forget Jammu-Srinagar; take instead the Atari-Jammu route. It takes nearly seven to eight hours to reach Jammu and longer, on a good day, to travel from Jammu to Srinagar.

Now consider the option of travelling from Lahore to Sialkot to Jammu. The Suchaitgarh border checkpoint is less than nine kilometres from Sialkot cantonment: two-and-half hours to Sialkot and another 45 minutes to an hour to the heart of Jammu city. If the Jammu-Sialkot border is opened up and an Indian is allowed to travel to Amritsar from Jammu via Pakistan, he would reach his destination in less than half the time it would take him if he were to travel to Amritsar through Indian territory! And one thing was very clear in Jammu. *Everyone* wants the route to open up. If Pakistan were to propose this, its support would come from Jammu.

The same holds true of Muzaffarabad-Srinagar Road and other traditional points from where travel took place before Partition. Kashmiris want these routes to open up. It is no coincidence that trade was conducted through the natural routes; it always is because of reduced costs. Neither was it a coincidence that before Partition Lahore's hinterland extended up to Srinagar in the north and Delhi in the east. When visitors from East Punjab — all the three states carved out of that one state — talk about removing the 'line' — the border — they point to this very fact. We get upset unnecessarily in trying to put a literalist spin on this figurative formulation. Interestingly, in doing so, we forget that the Quaid-e-Azam was opposed to the division of the Punjab and Bengal!

How does this fact of geography work into the process of normalisation? It's somewhat simple. A 'way-out' must respect, on the basis of ground realities, the sentiments of all the three parties involved in this problem: Pakistan, Kashmiris and India. Musharraf identified the factor of geography correctly but moved from that premise to a formulation that may not interest India and certainly is not acceptable to the Kashmiris. However, were the issue of 'control' to be fudged — and it's important to fudge it — the only way to go about it would be to allow the natural routes to open up and let the dynamics of economic integration come into play on the basis of geography.

If a trader were to send apples to New Delhi and Rawalpindi and if the costs were Rs100 and Rs40

respectively, which destination would he prefer? Ijaz Nabi, an eminent Pakistani economist at the World Bank, did a remarkable study of trade between India and Pakistan and also focussed on the natural trade linkages between the two Punjabs. It would be great to get someone like him to also study the trade patterns and direction of trade from and into Kashmir if the old routes were to be opened up. It is a project worth undertaking.

Of course, taking steps to allow geography to determine the course of events and linkages needs to be supplemented with other measures. One very important issue relates to giving Kashmiris their life and dignity back. India would be required to stop its internal security operations under the Disturbed Areas Act. The excess military and paramilitary troops would need to be withdrawn. Right now, India has three corps — Kargil, division-minus; Srinagar, division-plus and Jammu, a regular corps — in the region. The paramilitary troops and police include J&K Police, BSF, CRPF, RR (army but performing IS duties) and even elements from ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police). Other elements — STF and intelligence — are in addition to this strength.

This state of affairs is completely unacceptable and is a major hindrance to the process of normalisation. The recent suggestion by a group of former Indian army chiefs that a separate force be raised to man the LoC is even more lethal to the process. As part of the process of normalisation, India has to introduce confidence-building measures *within* Kashmir. Once this is done and the process is in an advanced stage, the two sides could even talk about joint border patrolling.

Since this is an evolving mechanism, there is no need for the two sides to talk about any final settlement. Modalities can be worked out not just for travel across the LoC but also for allowing Indians from the region to visit Indian Punjab through Pakistan.

This is by no means a detailed proposal. Pakistan needs to study this option very carefully before deciding in favour of or against it. However, it does seem to me as viable enough, given the seven assumptions, to at least merit serious thought. The idea is to create 'compulsions' on the basis of geography and economic linkages for an ultimate solution without emphasising the issue of control at this stage. And geography works to Pakistan's advantage.

*Ejaz Haider is News Editor of The Friday Times and Contributing Editor of Daily Times*

# Kashmir: creating 'compulsions' through ge

AS THE PEACE PROCESS BETWEEN Pakistan and India pushes ahead, Pakistan is seriously thinking about the possible, and viable, options it can put on the table to interest India. General Pervez Musharraf's recent formulation on Kashmir may have come at an Iftar-dinner, an unlikely forum to talk about the core issue between the two sides, but the manner in which he articulated his view shows the extent and depth of the exercise that is being carried out. It also evinces an admirable attempt to try and break new ground.

However, as I mentioned in my article in *The Friday Times* ('Musharraf's offering on Kashmir,' *TFT*, Oct 29-Nov 4) the not-so-hidden emphasis on territory — carving out areas on the basis of ethnic affiliations and geographic contiguity, if not religion — is unlikely to wash with India. There is another way of looking at the problem and I present its broad outline here in the same spirit in which Musharraf floated his own idea — to have a debate.

Let me begin with some assumptions.

**Assumption 1:** As Musharraf mentioned, India would not accept the plebiscite mechanism contained in the UN resolutions. The resolutions are under Chapter VI of the Charter and therefore non-enforceable. The UN can only intervene if both parties agree to its mediation. India shot down the idea long ago and there is no way it can be made to accept it as things stand.

As an aside, let us also remind ourselves that in the event of a plebiscite, Pakistan will have to withdraw all its troops, to the last soldier, from Azad Kashmir and what are now known as the Northern Areas even as India will continue to retain a specified number of its troops in areas controlled by it. It is a moot point whether Pakistan would actually be prepared to do so should India somehow agree to plebiscite under the UN resolutions.

**Assumption 2:** Again, as Musharraf said, Pakistan has not accepted the proposal floated by some quarters to turn the Line of Control into international border and will not do so. There are two strong reasons for Pakistan's stand: the issue relates to Kashmiris' right of self-determination, not territory. Two, if the LoC were to become international border, Pakistan will lose any *locus standi* as a party to the dispute. Indeed, there would be no dispute after that. India will be left alone to deal with its part of Kashmir as it deems fit.

These two broad assumptions underpinned

Musharraf's formulation. Let me add a few of my own.

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