**A cold peace?**

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THE recent developments on the Line of Control have engendered a great deal of debate, or at least what passes for debate in our discourse. That discourse is as tedious as it is predictable, littered as it is with bombast, homilies, false equivalences, straw man arguments and partisan point-scoring.

So let`s try and cut through that noise as much as possible, while acknowledging that any actual analysis of an evolving situation is a work in progress and subject to revision.

To start with, this isn`t the melting of ice as much as it is the (temporary?) extinguishing of a burning fire. The ceasefire that both Pakistan and India have jointly pledged to observe has beenin place since 2003 butin recent years had seen unprecedented violations, mostly from India, which have resulted in both military and civilian casualties. Indian forces have conducted indiscriminate shelling on civilian targets while Pakistani forces have targeted only Indian military installations. So in the immediate, the beneficiaries of this re-established ceasefire are Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC and that cannot, under any circumstances,be considered a bad thing.

Now, repeat after me: one ceasefire does not make for a comprehensive peace agreement. Pm asking you to repeat this because far too many seem to think this agreement somehow means that Kashmir has been abandoned/ sold/ given away, and that the government/ establishment/ state has taken a craven U-turn on its previous stance vis-àvis what they called the fascist/ genocidal/ Nazi-inspired Indian government.

It`s understandable when this sort of talk comes from opposition politicians and spokespersons; having been accused of treason and selling out Pakistan with every other breath, this provides, in their mind, an opportunity to push back and counteraccuse. When it comes from people one would expect to have a more holistic view, it`s somewhat disturbing.

Let`s start by understanding that no amount of bloodshed at the LoC brings the liberation of Kashmir even an inch closer, and never will. Note also, that a cessation of hostilities, as mentioned before only saves the lives of innocent civilians and is thus more in Pakistan`s interests than it is in India`s, which has never shown any regard for the lives, livelihood and honour of Kashmiris. Also know that the escalation at the LoC was largely due to India, and its agreeing to observe the ceasefire it repeatedly violated (to the extent of targeting a UN vehicle) does seem an acknowledgement that the campaign at the LoC has not given them the desired results.

Another factor is that the confrontationwith China, and subsequent deployment of a significant number of Indian troops to the Line of Actual Control also diverts Indian attention and resources. Some hawks on our side are lamenting that we didn`t `take advantage` of this confrontation to mobilise against India,but thatis a childish refrain, emphasising tactics over strategy and ignoring the fact that we simply cannot afford war. We also made the same mistake after the 1962 Sino-Indian war, where China`s victory led Pakistani military planners to underestimate Indian capabilities with unpleasant results three years later.

Nevertheless, the Chinese threat to India is now permanent, and this will have lasting effects.

Was this agreement possible without some level of contacts and political cover? Absolutely not. Any such move is the result of contacts and channels that stay open even in the worst of times, and in the case of Pakistan and India, this has been the norm throughout decades and different govern-ments. But does this translate into a farreaching peace agreement in which Kashmir is presumably ignored? To comment on that at this point would be recklessly premature, but the situation argues against any such thing being on the cards.For one, we have no way of 1(nowing how long this (re-established) ceasefire will last, or whether the Indian government, dominated as it is by theocratic hawks who suborn foreign policy to domestic political and ideological agendas, has any real commitment to peace. As for Kashmir, we have few cards to play, and the cards that we have played in the past have caused more harm than good. At the risk of sounding cynical, you cannot give away what you do not possess and have little hope of possessing in the foreseeable future.

It is also being said that Pakistan has communicated to India that the restoration of occupied Kashmir to its pre-annexation status is a prerequisite to formal talks, and ifthatis so then the odds are that talks are a distant dream as, given the situation on the ground, it seems politically impossible for the Modi government to walk back on such a crucial policy plank. The current arrangement, then, is a step forward, but it is not peace. One swallow does not make for spring.  The writer is a journalist.

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