

Pakistan's win-win India policy

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It's December with a difference. If in 2001 the subcontinent wore a war-time look, in 2003 it's hard to keep count of peace offerings! Pakistan is to cease-fire along the LoC, end a ban on Indian flights over its territory, resumption of the train links, offer to withdraw troops from Azad Jammu and Kashmir if India did too. General Musharraf has also nominated Prime Minister Vajpayee for Nishan-e-Pakistan if he can help resolve the Kashmir dispute! In fact in ensuring that nothing dampens the 'all too positive' environment the Pakistan government was keen to downplay the Indian refusal to allow a chartered plane to fly home to Delhi the representatives of the Young Presidents Organisation. Similarly the general instructions are to keep 'the positive going.' The hope is to get India to the negotiating table.

In recent weeks Pakistan's policy-making establishment has had numerous high level meetings on Pakistan's India and Kashmir policy. Musharraf with advice from the Foreign Office and the military establishment calls the shots on India. Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali is automatically 'on-board.' Moving away from Pakistan's reactive approach the establishment opted for a proactive approach. It began with the Prime Minister's Eid speech in which he called for a cease-fire. In less than eight weeks after the diplomatic showdown at the UNGA, a sharp up-turn is underway in Pakistan-India relations. Restoration of bilateral ties is in full swing. Air, road and rail links will all be operational within weeks.

Indian post-December 2001 policy of military brinkmanship towards Pakistan has now been matched by Pakistan's political brinkmanship seeking to establish Pakistan's sincerity in pursuing dialogue with India. Musharraf's own 'front-foot play' in trying to engage India in a dialogue over Kashmir and other bilateral issues, Washington's advice, the Kashmiri opinion and the failure of a reactive policy towards India have all contributed to this changed Pakistani approach. While New Delhi's October list of CBMs prompted the current phase of normalisation, a host of steps and statements by Pakistan have kept the momentum going.

What also gives Pakistan the confidence to opt for a proactive approach to restoration of ties is the calculation that Pakistan and Kashmiris may gain from such a policy. Clearly Pakistan stands to lose nothing. Pakistan seeks Indian reciprocity in India agreeing to resume bilateral dialogue on Kashmir. Islamabad repeatedly states that only restoration of ties not sustainable peace is possible without addressing bilateral issues that lead to distrust between the two countries.

Some thawing of the India freeze vis-a-vis Pakistan is also evident. The Indian Prime Minister personally dictates India's Pakistan policy remaining within the limits set by domestic political compulsions. Having extended his hand of cooperation at Lahore and then subsequently at Agra, Vajpayee has



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looked to Pakistan for 'positive' signals on Pakistan-India relations which he could use to expand the limits set on him by political compulsions. Hence his first response, though at the level of gesture alone, has been his statement about meeting all the Pakistani leaders when he visits Pakistan. Vajpayee knows without Pakistan there can be no resolution of the Kashmir dispute. He and his key aides decided to announce the October CBMs. They

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however do recognise that CBMs can contribute to improving the bilateral atmospherics. Military CBMs do reduce possibilities of accidents caused by miscalculations. Yet CBMs are no substitute to a sustained, sincere and result-oriented dialogue.

Roller-coaster situations come easy to Pakistan-India relations. Yet for starting dialogue the ambience is now better than even before the Agra summit. While a key ingredient required to initiate a sustained dialogue process between Pakistan-India, top-level political engagement and trust is missing now as it was then, concrete steps towards confidence building have been taken by Pakistan.

While Pakistan must sustain its proactive normalisation policy towards India, the onus to convert it into sustainable peace rests on Indian shoulders. India set the ball rolling. Pakistan has whole-heartedly and proactively reciprocated to Indian CBMs. The ball is again in the Indian court.

India will have to re-visit its policy on dialogue with Pakistan. Its two key elements are: one, no talks on substantive issues outlined jointly at the Agra summit and in the Lahore Declaration unless "complete end to cross-border terrorism" and two, that increased US pressure on Pakistan rather than bilateral talks will

help to ease the Kashmir pressure on India.

Significantly by force of circumstances Delhi has been forced to somewhat veer away from this policy. Bilateral talks over the controversial issue of the Baglihar Dam have taken place. Similarly during the twelfth SAARC summit, the Indian Prime Minister will be obliged to meet the Head of State and the Prime Minister of the host country Pakistan. Going beyond the MEA brief India's seasoned Prime Minister must use this opportunity to prepare grounds for bilateral talks soon after the SAARC summit. After all Vajpayee, aided by his trusted National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra and former RAW chief AS Daulat, has opted for a hands-on approach in conducting India's Pakistan and Kashmir policies.

In India the sceptics write-off the LoC cease-fire as insubstantial. They claim snow-bound mountains making crossings difficult. Summer months will test Pakistan's cease-fire resolve. True. Yet how early does India engage with Pakistan on substantive issues will greatly affect the Pakistani resolve. The cease-fire will unlikely be sustained if there is zero movement on the Kashmir dispute.

Meanwhile Pakistan must stay the course on its current India policy. Islamabad believes it is a policy that may promote the interests of peace without compromising either Kashmiri interests or Pakistan's own strategic interests. Pakistan must see peace-building as a process hence results will not come forth instantly. In General Musharraf's own words, "We ought to work with great tolerance, responsibility and sincerity in order to carry these talks ahead." (Responding to a question he was asked in BBC radio's live programme on December 1.)

Ultimately bilateral dynamics and ground realities not Washington, Beijing, or Moscow will determine the fate of sustainable peace in South Asia. Central to the bilateral dynamics is the unresolved dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. If the South Asia nuclear reality rules out the possibility of war between the two, the reality of a resistance struggle prompted by the alienated Kashmiri heads and hearts rules out any 'sell-out' on Kashmir. The logic of the Kashmir dispute therefore now dictates that a political settlement must be found; one that is acceptable to all parties. None of the three parties can go it alone on Kashmir. This realisation alone will take India and Pakistan back to the negotiating table.

Intent will define policy content. Hence if the steps from Islamabad and Delhi have been prompted by point-scoring or pressure-deflection, this phase of normalisation may not carry the two to the essential dialogue zones. In that case tactical advances will inevitably be overshadowed by strategic retreats.

Both need to return to the affirmation of the unsigned Agra Declaration regarding "their commitment to addressing each other's expressed concerns and creating an environment conducive to the establishment of peaceful, friendly and cooperative ties, for the welfare of the people of the two countries."