

# Why normalization is the only option

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*Pak. F.B. - India  
D. 3.1.04*

**O**NCE again the Indo-Pakistan relations are undergoing a massive flux. This is quite in keeping with the pattern of highs and lows that has characterized the bilateral relations during the last 55 years. This time it is moving from the low water mark of eyeball-to-eyeball military confrontation to the high water mark of unprecedented level of people-to-people contact, restoration of full diplomatic and communications links and expected improvement in consular ties and trade relations. But people in Pakistan, and I suppose in India too, have become so conditioned to this kind of roller-coaster ride in their countries' relations that a vast majority may find it difficult to reconcile with and be sure it will last long.

Discussions on the subject also reveal a mixed feeling of hope and desire for a permanent peace and fear that President Musharraf has made too many concessions without receiving any in return. The unilateral declaration of ceasefire on the LoC by Prime Minister Jamali and readily responded to by India has eased the latter's task to rapidly complete the fence on the LoC and then turn it into a permanent boundary.

Giving up of our initial demand that in future it would not arbitrarily suspend the overflights has let India off its own petard. President Musharraf's declaration that he was willing to move away from our stated position and set aside the UN resolutions to reach a settlement has not yet led to a reciprocal change of heart on the part of India. Rather, it sticks to its old stated position that it will not even discuss the Kashmir issue for the disputed territory remains its integral part.

Many Pakistanis find it difficult to digest the fact as to why the world treats Kashmir differently from other regional issues like Palestine, Bosnia and East Timor. However, they forget that the world has not been able to do much either to force Turkey to withdraw its forces from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and its reunification with the Republic of Cyprus or about the territorial dispute between Iran and the UAE over the Greater and Smaller Tumbs (Abu Musa islands in the Gulf) or about the Western Sahara where the Polisarios have been struggling for independence from Morocco.

The Tamils of Sri Lanka and the IRA of Northern Ireland too have been forced to give up their respective demands after enormous sacrifices. Palestine, which has been the cause of three wars between the Arabs and Israel and continuing violence by both sides, remains unresolved in spite of the many UN resolutions and deep involvement of the US, EU, Russia and the UN itself.

The fact of the matter is that in the ultimate analysis despite the progress made by mankind in establishing respect for international law, realpolitik continues to play a dominating role in international relations. This was starkly manifested by the US-British invasion of Iraq on "sexed up" charges without the approval of the UNSC. The same tyrant and evil Saddam Hussein would have escaped his ugly and humiliating end if only he had possessed the nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. Then the US would have negotiated with him as it is doing with North Korea, another member of the "axis of evil".

But besides the negative factor of imbalance of

power between India and Pakistan, the case of Kashmir is also different from Palestine and East Timor. Both of these are recognized by the world as "occupied territories" which is not the case with Kashmir. We call it the "Indian-held Kashmir" (IHK) because its future was not decided through a plebiscite at the time of the partition and was later invaded and occupied by India. Had that taken place, the Indian position, at least legally and morally, would have been far weaker than it is now, though it would have been still difficult to resolve it because of India's stronger military and economic position.

But a similar case in point is that of India's own territorial dispute with China over NEFA in the northeast and Aksai Chin in the northwest. India claims that these were part of British India, therefore, should have formed part of independent India. Hence China's occupation of these areas is illegal. Prime Minister Nehru took this position and went to war with China in 1962. He also received full support from the US and the UK which accused China of committing an aggression

The transformation of confidence-building measures of today into complete mutual trust and mutually beneficial bilateral relations of tomorrow will create a greater stake in better relations rather than in bitter relations and will also lead to the kind of amicable solution which will be acceptable to all the three parties: Pakistan, Kashmiris and India. As for those who believe that no matter what initiatives we may take India will not give up its hegemonic designs against Pakistan, they lack confidence in themselves and an understanding of the factors which make a country weak or strong in the present day world. Pakistan's real strength, like any other country, lies in its internal unity, harmony and that of the prosperity of its ordinary citizens as against a narrow oligarchy.

and supplied military equipment worth millions of dollars to India. The USSR, then a communist ally of China, also took a somewhat pro-Indian position. But in the end it meant nothing even though the US and UK were nuclear powers.

Till today China is in possession of these territories and India could do nothing but to accept the status quo as it does not have the required military strength to take them back by force and the world did not care much whether China's possession was legal or illegal. Having suffered the defeat in 1962 India swallowed the bitter pill of its military weakness and international indifference and never again tried to take the military route to seek a settlement. Though it has not abandoned its claim to these territories it is well on its way to complete normalization of relations with China which is, in turn, leading to greater economic cooperation to the great mutual benefit.

Hence, those Pakistanis who feel let down by President Musharraf's recent peace overtures and major concessions in response to Prime Minister Vajpayee's initiatives should ponder for a while over what other options he had if the objective is to end 55-year old tensions. If we could not compel India militarily and even through 12 years of militancy and decades of suspension of bilateral trade to settle the Kashmir issue on the basis of UN resolutions, then of what benefit it is to carry on border tension and the cold war with India indefinitely? Is it not as costly to Pakistan as it is to India to freeze all kinds of relations till the Kashmir dispute is settled? If the answer is yes, which most would agree that it is

then what else the president and prime minister of Pakistan could do but to move towards rapprochement and normalization of relations with our neighbour?

Many of us wrongly believe that since nuclearization of South Asia has made the Kashmir dispute the most dangerous regional conflict we could use this fear to persuade the world into forcing India to settle it amicably. But they should recall that Kargil was seen by the world as one such attempt by us to use the nuclear factor to force India to the negotiating table. However, India decided to fight and the world condemned us for being an irresponsible nuclear power. It also warned us suitably to desist from using this card in future. No one should entertain any doubt that the big powers will teach us a lesson if we make another attempt to start an armed conflict with India.

Pessimistic as it may sound, the fact is that imbalance of power between India and Pakistan and international community's inability to force India to implement the UN resolutions makes the

Kashmir dispute impervious to a military solution or an early negotiated settlement other than transformation of the LoC into permanent international boundary for which we are not yet ready. So the choice before us is to continue the pattern of the past or choose a new path of renouncing forever, except in self-defence, the use of force in all its forms and manifestations in search of a solution of the Kashmir

issue and move towards full normalization of relations with India.

That is going to be in the interest of both the countries and particularly their poor people, of whom hundreds of millions are living in abject poverty. The transformation of confidence building measures of today into complete mutual trust and mutually beneficial bilateral relations of tomorrow will create a greater stake in better relations rather than in bitter relations and will also lead to the kind of amicable solution which will be acceptable to all the three parties: Pakistan, Kashmiris and India. As for those, who believe that no matter what initiatives we may take India will not give up its hegemonic designs against Pakistan, lack confidence in themselves and an understanding of the factors which make a country weak or strong in the present day world.

Pakistan's real strength, like any other country, lies in its internal unity, harmony and growing prosperity of its ordinary citizens as against its narrow oligarchy, which is the case at present. If the present trend of growing income disparity between the rich and the poor continues then not even its nuclear capability can save Pakistan any more than the enormous nuclear capability of the USSR could save it from collapse. Successive governments have exploited the emotional attachment of ordinary Pakistanis to Kashmir only to the benefit of the privileged. The poor have paid the price of consequent heavy expenditure on the armed forces. They have got nothing in return. ■