

Indo-Pakistan relations

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Once again the Indo-Pakistan relations have been under going a massive flux since Prime Minister Vajpayee extended his hand of friendship to Pakistan from on 18 April last year. This is quite in keeping with the pattern of highs and lows that has characterised relations between the two countries during the last 55 years.

This time it is moving from the low water mark of eye ball to eye ball military confrontation a few months back to the high water mark of unprecedented level of people to people contact, restoration of full diplomatic and communications links, improvement in consular ties, anticipated expansion of trade relations and start of composite dialogue on all contentious issues and bilateral relations. But people in Pakistan, and India, have been so conditioned to this kind of roller coaster ride in Indo-Pakistan relations that a vast majority is finding it difficult to believe that it will last for long.

There is also a mixed feeling of hope and desire for a permanent peace and fear that President Musharraf has made too many concessions without receiving any from Mr Vajpayee. The unilateral declaration of cease-fire on the LoC by Prime Minister Jamali and readily accepted by India will let it rapidly complete the fence on the LoC and turn it into a permanent boundary. Giving up of our initial demand that in future it would not arbitrarily suspend the over-flights 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 would not lead to a reciprocal change of heart by India. That it will not even discuss the Kashmir issue seriously let alone budge from its stated position of Kashmir being an integral part of India.

There also persists among a large number of Pakistanis bewilderment 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

full support from the US and UK which accused China of committing aggression and supplied India with millions of dollars of military equipment. 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 and China was not at that time.

Till today China is in possession of these territories and India can do nothing but to accept the reality that it does not have the military strength to take them back by force and the world could not care less. India swallowed the bitter pill of its military weakness in 1962 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 normalisation of relations with China which is leading to greater cooperation to the great mutual benefit of both of them.

Hence those Pakistanis who feel let down by President Musharraf's recent peace overtures or positive response to Prime Minister Vajpayee's initiatives should ponder whether he had any other options. And if we could not force India militarily or through 12 years of militancy and decades of no bilateral trade or transit of Indian goods to Afghanistan to settle the Kashmir issue on the basis of UN resolutions, is it of any use to maintain tension and cold war with India indefinitely? Is it not at least as costly to Pakistan as to India to block all kinds of cooperative relations till the settlement of the Kashmir dispute? 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 India?

Many of us wrongly believe that since nuclearisation 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 such an attempt by us to use the nuclear factor to force India to the negotiating table. However, India decided to fight and the world condemned

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 is the major underlying cause of the violence by Al-Qaeda and other Islamic militant outfits against the US in particular and others in general, remains unresolved in spite of the many UN resolutions and deep involvement of the USA, 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. 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 recognised by the world as "occupied territories" which is not the case with Kashmir. Even we call it the "Indian Held Kashmir" (IHK) and not the Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) because it was not made a part of Pakistan at the time of partition of the subcontinent and later invaded and occupied by India. Had that been the case, the Indian position, at least legally and morally, would have been far weaker than at present though it would have made no difference in resolving 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 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

us for being an irresponsible nuclear power. It also warned us suitably to desist from again using this card. 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 which is not acceptable to us.

So the choice before us is to continue the pattern of the past confrontations or choose a new path of announcing for ever, except in self defense, the use of force in all its forms and manifestations in search of a solution of the Kashmir issue and move towards full normalisation of relations with India. That is going to be beneficial for both countries and particularly those 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 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 we may do, India will not give up its hegemonic designs against Pakistan, lack in self-confidence and proper 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 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.

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