

The anatomy of an impasse

Pak. F. rel India 26-2-03
Dawn

By Talat Masood

IN THE context of India and Pakistan, there are no lower depths to which their relations can sink. Regrettably, the slide seems unending with the BJP government relentlessly pursuing a dangerous course of heightened animosity towards Pakistan. It shuns any proposal for a bilateral dialogue, refuses to attend the Saarc summit in Pakistan and on the cultural side denies visas to Pakistanis, disallows its cricket team to play in Pakistan and boycotts the SAF games.

At the same time, an increased level of harassment of diplomats in both countries, followed by unsubstantiated allegations made by India, has resulted in the reciprocal recall of the deputy high commissioners from the two capitals. In a region as volatile and conflict-prone as South Asia, the deliberate snapping of the few remaining communication lines confirms that radical elements in the BJP's ruling elite have failed to achieve their primary objective of destabilizing Pakistan by prolonged deployment of troops and are now complementing the policy by diplomatic and psychological pressure.

Additionally, in sharp contrast to global trends, India is trying to bring about a qualitative and quantitative change in its military capabilities. It has been testing a wide range of missiles and acquiring latest generation of basic weapon systems from Russia, France and the UK. This clearly demonstrates that it is building up a strong military structure to tilt the strategic balance decisively in its favour. All this coincides with the BJP's deliberate policy of inflaming communal passions and hatred by whipping up anti-Pakistan and anti-Muslim sentiments in India. Apparently, this will also serve the party's narrow political agenda for winning support of the Hindu electorate in the forthcoming elections in nine states, as it did recently in Gujarat.

New Delhi seems determined to pursue the policy of isolating Pakistan with a single-mindedness of purpose, ignoring the world advice, including that of the US, to the contrary. For this purpose, the BJP government has adopted a broad-based policy of containment of Pakistan using military, political and economic means. It expects that over a period of time this will weaken Pakistan's economy and its political resolve to keep the Kashmir problem alive and undermine its capacity to challenge India's hegemony in the region.

Currently, New Delhi finds the strategic climate highly favourable for pursuing its long-term goals vis-a-vis the South Asian in general and Pakistan in particular. First, New Delhi and Washington are warming up to each other and building a solid, multi-level relationship in the political, military and economic areas. Second, Israel is now a strategic partner and a source and conduit of weapon systems and technology for India — something that greatly contributes to strengthening India's political and strategic relationship with the US as well.

Third, relations between India and Russia

Finally, India is taking full advantage of the changed world environment in the wake of Sep 11, 2001, and the unified fight against the threat of international terrorism to malign Pakistan. By drawing on the heightened international concern about terrorism, it cleverly tries to bracket the freedom struggle in Kashmir with terrorism and give it a bad name. By repeating the mantra of "cross-border terrorism" New Delhi tries to shift the entire blame for the impasse in bilateral relations on to Pakistan. In its blind animosity it failed to take advantage when President Musharraf's crackdown on the extremists and the firm measures he took to stop any cross-border movement by the Mujahideen. Neutral observers confirmed that for at least a few months there was a distinct decline in this activity.

India was also non-receptive to Islamabad's offer of positioning international observers on both sides of the LoC to ensure against hostile cross-border activity. Even now if both sides are sincere, they can work out a fair solution of this issue and get over the impasse, otherwise accusations and counter-accusations can only result in a major crisis erupting again. In return for a halt to militant support to the Kashmiris, Pakistan is fully justified in expecting the international community, particularly the US to prevail on

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India to negotiate the status of Kashmir.

Playing on the fears of a frightened world, the BJP government is also projecting an erroneous impression that Pakistan is using its nuclear capability to sustain support for Kashmir. What goes in India's favour is that the major powers too would not tolerate an active conflict in a nuclearized environment. Constant violence along the LoC in Kashmir and the semi-mobilized state of the armed forces continues to fuel militancy and religious extremism in both countries, pushing them into a narrow lane. There is always the lurking danger that extremist organizations could set off a chain of events that may ultimately lead to a catastrophic nuclear exchange.

In the event of an invasion of Iraq, there is always a danger that India may be emboldened by America's unilateralist approach. Pursuing an adventurous course, it may be tempted to apply the doctrine of preemption against Pakistan, little realizing that the two situations are very different. Secondly, in a worst-case scenario, if there is a violent reaction in Pakistan to the invasion of Iraq and the government has problems controlling the radical elements behind the upheaval, American foreign policy expert, Mr. Strobe Talbott thinks, this "may inspire India to follow the US preemptive lead and launch its own nuclear war" against Pakistan. This may seem far-fetched but it goes to show how the

ians by the militants, however unquestionable their cause, is no more acceptable to the world. By our own moral and humanistic criteria, such acts should be treated as reprehensible. International community is not prepared to accept terror as a "legitimate tool for freedom fighters". This is as true for America as for Russia, Europe, Japan or China. The unfortunate aspect of militancy is that it gives a free rein to India to use brutal methods to suppress the struggling people of Kashmir, while the international community including the Islamic fraternity, have perforce to remain silent and not openly oppose suppression.

Experience in Afghanistan and in Kashmir has proved beyond doubt that permitting the use of militancy by any organization even tacitly does ultimately recoil to destabilize and harm practically every aspect of life in the country of its origin. Taking cognizance of the domestic fallout of militancy and the changed anti-terror international scenario, there is an urgent need for fundamentally changing our approach to dealing with India. Islamabad's response is mostly reactive.

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into the hands of a group of militants with their own agenda. We must develop the capacity of structured thinking on these grave issues of national concern. Only concerted strategic planning and effective implementation can put a halt to drifting and blundering. In the interest of the Kashmiri people as much in our own an unequivocal reaffirmation of the political route to problem solving is necessary. Pakistan must downplay militancy and encourage indigenous Kashmiri political forces, especially the APHC, to reassert themselves. The

intrusion of militancy has distorted the true character of Kashmir struggle, marginalized the political movement, given an excuse to India to adopt coercive means and the world to condone it. Militancy is also acting as a destabilizer for our own society and doing incalculable damage to Pakistan's image abroad.

For all purposes, the BJP government which suffers from an exaggerated notion of India's power status in political and diplomatic terms and to equate itself with China, Russia and other major European powers. The advice of these countries for initiating a dialogue for resolving problems and differences with Pakistan is thus conveniently ignored. America's current preoccupation with Iraq, combined with New Delhi's strong relationship with that country, places it in a comfortable position to rebuff international advice, however well meaning it may be. Even if India agrees, in the near future, to engage in dialogue, it is possible that it will only talk but not negotiate and for that to happen many parameters will have to change.

Meanwhile, irrespective of India's position, Islamabad should strictly adhere to its official policy of supporting the Kashmir freedom struggle politically, morally and diplomatically and effectively curb militancy by the non-state actors. Any deviation from this would further erode the credibility of its for-

diplomatic and psychological pressure.

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Currently, New Delhi finds the strategic climate highly favourable for pursuing its long-term goals vis-a-vis the South Asian in general and Pakistan in particular. First, New Delhi and Washington are warming up to each other and building a solid, multi-level relationship in the political, military and economic areas. Second, Israel is now a strategic partner and a source and conduit of weapon systems and technology for India — something that greatly contributes to strengthening India's political and strategic relationship with the US as well.

Third, relations between India and Russia are very close. Moscow is the major supplier of latest generation of conventional weapons and nuclear and space technology. Fourth, its relations with China are improving even if in the longer term it considers itself as a rival. China is also taking a more neutral position on Kashmir and is wary of Islamic militancy. Fifth, the world seems to have quietly accepted India's nuclear status, whereas in our case doubts are being planted through the powerful western media to keep us off balance.

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The BJP government also sees the present civilian regime in Pakistan as merely an extension of military rule with a civilian facade and would not make any conciliatory move which could indirectly strengthen the Pakistan's military.

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