

The cost of Pakistan-I

THE STRATEGIC FORESIGHT GROUP (SFG), A Mumbai-based private-sector think tank on security and foreign policy issues, has recently published a document highlighting the multiplicity of costs of conflict for India and Pakistan. Among other things, it has sketched a scenario for nuclear war that may not be imminent or likely, but which cannot be ruled out if the outstanding issues between the two states are not resolved and the level of tension substantially reduced.

The SFG document posits at the start a curious aspect of the relationship between the two countries over the last five or six years: the rapidity with which the pendulum has swung between periods of high tension or near-war between the two countries to pro-active efforts for peace. The period leading up to and following the May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan was characterised by high levels of tension but within less than a year we find the prime ministers of the two countries meeting at the Lahore summit in February 1999. This is followed by the 'low' of the Kargil war and the 'high' of the Agra summit that gives way to a near-war situation between the two countries by May 2002.

The current 'high' in relations started with the Indian prime minister's peace initiative of April 2003 followed by the declaration of a unilateral ceasefire by Pakistan's prime minister. The peace effort was strengthened with the January 2004 SAARC meeting in Islamabad and an even more important meeting on the sidelines between the leaders of India and Pakistan that saw agreement on the resumption of a composite dialogue between the two countries. Staying with the

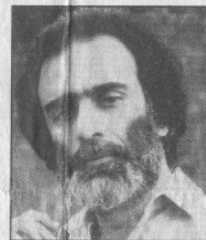
'swing model of bilateral relations,' however, the SFG warns that 2005-2007 could well see the pendulum swing the other way.

The document illustrates with the help of effectively presented information and graphs why this should not be allowed to happen: it warns that a number of scenario planning exercises looking at the security environment in South Asia over the next decade have pointed to the likelihood of a tactical exchange of nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan if hostilities between the two countries continue to escalate. The cities of Mumbai and Karachi are assumed to be likely targets in India and Pakistan, respectively, for the reason that they are the most populated. But the targets could as easily be other important cities in both countries.

In a daytime attack on a working day SFG calculates that in Mumbai, a city with a population of about 12 million, the death toll in the main financial and commercial areas alone would be approximately 2.3 million. Similarly a bomb dropped at a densely populated area of Karachi would result in a death toll of over 1 million. This obviously does not include deaths in other zones and over longer periods of time. Further, key physical assets would be destroyed as also a large part of the financial infrastructure. It is difficult to categorise anyone as the 'winner' in such a deadly conflict. As the SFG document points out, as a result of a nuclear exchange, 'the surviving nation would be economically, socially and politically far weaker than calculable.'

There are some projections, however, that seem entirely out of place in such a document. In a section headed 'Interference in Internal Problems', the SFG

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India conflict

Pak. F. Rahabi - India
Daily in
6.3.04

document observes that there are 150 million Muslims in India and 'if ISI manages to persuade even one per cent of them (1.5 million) to take up arms, these 1.5 million is a large enough number to create internal turmoil in India.' The ISI's role in different contexts has been a subject of considerable concern and discussion. But, apart from anything else, it is an insult to the Muslim citizens of India to even allude to the possibility that 1.5 million of them could take up arms against their own country as a consequence of ISI's persuasive powers. It is also dangerous, given the rise of an intolerant Hindutva ideology in India promoted by the Sangh Parivar and targeted against the minorities. It is, in fact, at least one of the major threats to the peace process between India and Pakistan.

The document provides some telling details on the dominance of the military in Pakistan, well-resourced extremist groups and their political affiliations, emphasising that in the absence of peace with India and rapid economic development, extremism would grow at a rapid rate and pose a serious internal threat to Pakistan. This endorses the view held by many within and outside Pakistan. The recent killings in Quetta on Ashura and the use of suicide bombing to kill fellow Muslims is a grave reminder of the sorry pass we have come to and the need for redressing the situation, most of all for our own sake.

The document points out that the conflict is over 0.25 percent of the total area of India and Pakistan, 0.25 percent of their total economy and 0.25 percent of their combined population. This is a way of putting matters in perspective. But, as the document

suggests in its concluding chapter called the 'Peace Building Ladder,' the Kashmiris remain central to a solution that clears the way for a better future for India and Pakistan: It recommends talks between the government of India and All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), a dialogue between Kashmiri groups from both sides of the LoC and seeks a directive on the part of the Indian government to its security forces in Kashmir demanding humane and fair conduct and suspension of operations against any groups that may announce a ceasefire.

Not least, leaving aside the potential of earnings for Pakistan through pipelines, the figures on trade provided in the document highlight the potential benefits for the people of both countries: While current official trade between India and Pakistan is estimated at \$200-250 million, third-country trade is \$1 billion and contraband trade is \$1-2 billion. In a conducive environment, this trade could rise to \$3-4 billion and under SAFTA go up to \$5 billion annually. Also, it would clearly create additional economic opportunities as a consequence. This is not unimportant, given that the poverty ratios in India and Pakistan are 26.1 and 32 percent respectively. And, while they are two of the fifteen major military spenders in the world, the Human Development rank (2003) for India is 127 and for Pakistan 144. There can be no lasting peace if millions of people in this region continue to live in conditions of abject poverty and deprivation.

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