

A cold peace with India

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The ultimate result of the Composite Dialogue process as interpreted by India is a Pakistan transformed into an Indian client state, first economically and culturally, and then - as time takes its toll - politically in the end.

Two remarkable features of the Indian approach to this dialogue are ignoring Kashmir and looking down at Pakistan's legitimate interests. This fits into India's own image of itself as a regional power player that must demand and get all neighbours' total compliance. One of the best ways of doing this is through economic control, which explains the passionate appeals from New Delhi for a single currency and a borderless economic union.

Nothing has budged India from this vision of itself and its place in the region, not the government change in New Delhi, and certainly not even the new strategic reality that Pakistan had proven in 2002 that it would not be subjugated militarily. This in fact has emboldened India to pursue the economic and cultural routes, which are two of the most effective - and peaceful - ways for political domination.

So if Plan A - the military option - has not worked with Pakistan from 1947 to 2002, it's time for Plan B—the economic and cultural inroads leading to a political domination. Again, Kashmir is only the result of a longstanding Indian policy of power projection, not the cause. So theoretically, the resolution of this conflict does not mean an end to the design itself. This is a realistic assessment based on a five-decade history reinforced by New Delhi's dawdling during the recent Composite Dialogue talks.

The friends of both Pakistan and India in the international community must understand this: To solve Kashmir and diffuse regional tensions, tackle India's bloated ego. Pakistan and its position on Kashmir is just a sideshow.

Now back to the question of India's determination to delay or ignore Kashmir in the talks with Pakistan. New Delhi, of course, is hoping that it will be able to put in place its Plan B, the economic and cultural domination process, long before the talks come to Kashmir. The logic being, according to the Indians, that India will be able to hijack Pakistan's business and entertainment communities with its own self-created image of a business powerhouse and a cinema hub and prod them to pressure Islamabad to give up Kashmir.

Pakistan's military and political leaderships did the right thing by making it clear to New Delhi that normalization of relations and the exaggerated displays of friendship (India's Plan B) will not be sustained or expanded if India continued to refuse to sit to the table and negotiate the resolution of the core dispute of Kashmir.

But what after Kashmir is solved?

The Indians apparently have a well-crafted vision of what the situation and relations with Pakistan will look like with normalization of relations. The question is: Do we in Pakistan have a clear idea of what we want those relations to be?

Unfortunately, a small Pakistani lobby is pushing for Indian Plan B inside Pakistan. This lobby believes that Pakistan should forget Kashmir or just put it on the back burner and embrace India's culture and business. The effectiveness of this 'Plan B lobby' has been minimal so far. But it's educating to mention this lobby and its work for another reason: The peculiar nature of Pak-Indian relations and how they should be structured in the future.

A cold peace in the future is necessary in light of the history of both nations. The normal definition of relations between states does not and should not apply to the relations between Pakistan and India. The independence of these two countries from Britain, and especially Pakistan's birth, came in very unusual circumstances. Given the special nature of their history and present, the future peace will also carry a special status.

And it's easy to understand this by giving one simple example:

There is still confusion, especially in India, about whether Pakistan gained 'independence' from Britain or was 'partitioned' from India, which implies secession. Pakistan's ill wishers use this confusion to insist that Pakistan is an Indian territory cut out of India. The implication being that this removed territory can return one day to the supposed motherland. Free flowing economic and cultural relations with India should somehow expedite

this process and firmly bring Pakistan into the Indian cultural fold, as many in New Delhi still optimistically believe. And Pakistan's turbulent politics and the supposedly weak nationalism would play into all this.

This confusion is largely our own mistake because we failed within the first few years of our independence to formulate a definition of Pakistani nationalism and use our school system effectively to indoctrinate future Pakistani generations. The present nationalist leadership of the Pakistani military is on its way to correcting this historical mistake and Musharraf and his colleagues deserve a lot of credit for this.

On the cultural front, it's a fact that our national language, Urdu, has some things in common with Hindi, the language spoken by India's northern minority ruling elite. This doesn't mean a shared culture or language, but that's beside the point. Given India's prolific entertainment industry, we can expect to be deluged with Indian cultural products in the event of a complete normalization.

However, we are within our right to protect not only the rising independent Pakistani media and other cultural products but also block unnecessary cultural influences, recognizing that culture and television are often potent weapons of politics and warfare.

The 'Plan B lobby' here in Pakistan often tries to strengthen its case of Pakistan's cultural and economic integration into India (shyly, of course; they'd never say it openly) by resorting to emotional blackmail, referring to the 'combined fate and poverty of over one billion people' that hangs in the balance. And by that they usually mean that Pakistan is the obstacle to saving the billion poor because it continues to stick to Kashmir.

The fact is, this whole premise of 'over one billion poor people' is both misleading and a myth.

The real gigantic poverty problem is India's problem, not ours. And they have exacerbated it by bloating their military to occupy Kashmir and fight the Chinese in the north and pursue other delusions of grandeur. That problem can receive substantial funding from their own military budget if they stop deploying 700,000 soldiers in Kashmir and abandon the dream of controlling the sea from Hormuz to Malacca.

Combining Pakistan's poverty problem with India's gives us additional burden and responsibility that is basically none of our business. Moreover, our poverty problem in scope and structure is vastly smaller and different from India's. It requires a different approach and solutions.

And then this whole argument that India is this one giant economic hub that we stand to benefit from is not exactly accurate either. India remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. The recent high rates of growth there are limited to a few unproductive sectors of the economy. India's IT exports are remarkable (12 billion dollars annually) but are less than those of Singapore's, for example, and are limited to the 'professional services' category, the least creative in the industry. India's software exports not only translate into a negligible per capita figure but also - along with the mushrooming off-shore call centres - contribute very little to creating the kind of growth needed to lift India out of poverty.

A Pakistani economist, Dr Pervaiz Nazir, has summed this up by writing: "In general terms, Pakistan produces what India produces; what Pakistan doesn't produce, India doesn't produce either. The Indian idea that it can be the industrial-economic hub around which Pakistan ought to orbit is entirely misplaced. There is little that Pakistan can learn from India. It is therefore perplexing that many Pakistanis have internalised this Indian self-image."

Absolute normal relations between Pakistan and India based on sovereign equality should be a long-term expectation, requiring a few decades at least, and not an immediate result of the ongoing peace talks.

A more immediate result of the talks, however, - and again, once Kashmir is resolved - should be a cold peace with regulated, formal, and unexaggerated cultural exchanges and mutually beneficial trade without any grand expectations. The two countries have been entangled for decades now and a cold peace will give them a chance to go about their lives and avoid renewed grievances.

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