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# Musharraf-Manmohan Summit

**W**ithout substantive preparations and prior agreements Summits are no occasions to look for 'breakthroughs.' The planned September 22 New York Musharraf-Manmohan Singh summit meeting can be no exception to this rule. The fourth meeting between the non-foreign office channel, Tariq Aziz the secretary of Pakistan's National Security Council and J N Dixit of the Indian National Security Council, took place in Dubai on Saturday to perhaps iron out possible hurdles to the meeting. If in fact the Indians did convey to Pakistan that the planned Musharraf-Manmohan meeting was conditional to no mention of the Kashmir dispute by President Musharraf in his General Assembly speech, then Musharraf needs to fully understand what are the dialogue objectives and expectations for India's Congress government. Only when summit meetings are the culmination of a dialogue process conducted by two parties with common objectives in mind, can summits 'deliver.' For example unless the negotiating parties do not acknowledge the validity and necessity of logic, legality and flexibility, in achieving results from any dialogue, summits cannot bring about breakthroughs.

Pakistan and India experienced this at the July 2001 Agra Summit. At Lahore in January 1999 and in Islamabad in January 2004 summits produced agreements, though of varying importance, only when prefaced by back channel negotiations. The Lahore Summit however was also prefaced by many high-level bilateral meetings including the very significant September 1998 Nawaz-Vajpayee New York meeting. Through the meetings a common approach to post-Nuclear bilateral dialogue was evolved. Nawaz and Vajpayee agreed to the 'Kashmir-plus' dialogue approach; that Kashmir would acquire central focus while operationalising the 1997 composite dialogue formula requiring solutions to other bilateral disputes.

Currently there is unprecedented interaction between Pakistan and India, both at official and unofficial level. Yet from the two capitals the real uncensored message is not of optimism. Pakistan maintains that timelines and solutions to the Kashmir dispute must be discussed. From Delhi the regular complain of cross-border infiltration is heard. Five elements of the current situation need to be identified.

One, Pakistan's approach to the dialogue in 2004 is very different from its earlier approach. In 2004, Pakistan has adopted the 'Kashmir Plus' approach to dialogue with India. Specific decisions on CBMs including institutional linkages and exploration of new areas of cooperation including energy resources and greater trade are being explored. The 2004 Kashmir plus dialogue strategy has visibly moved faster than it did in 1999. In opting for this Kashmir plus approach Pakistan and especially the military leadership has opted to meet India half way given that India had always resisted Pakistan's Kashmir first dialogue policy. On



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Kashmir the Pakistani establishment showed unprecedented flexibility by showing its willingness to set aside the UNSC resolution calling for a plebiscite to enable Pakistan India and the Kashmiris to arrive at a mutually acceptable solution to the Kashmir dispute. Two, on the ground Pakistan since November 2003 has maintained ceasefire along the LOC, the Pakistani establishment subsequently opted to not criticise India for constructing a fence along the LoC and also created conditions since the ceasefire which is enabling the Indians to solidify their control of the disputed territory by constructing roads tracks and bunkers near the LoC.

Also the significant decrease in the cross LoC infiltration in recent months has been acknowledged by even India's own national security advisor J N Dixit in his September meeting with Pakistani delegation in Delhi. In fact he maintained that if this decrease continued India could consider reduction of Indian security forces in Kashmir. Publicly however the Indian Foreign Minister chose to say the reverse on infiltration!

Three, the breakdown in the Delhi-APHC dialogue. APHC leaders from its two factions have publicly rejected to continue with the dialogue since the Congress government announced that the talk will be held within the parameters of the constitution. These leaders are well aware of the strong Kashmiri sentiment against accepting Kashmir's position as an integral part of the Indian Union. In this case they have opted to break the dialogue to maintain their political support base among the Kashmiris. The APHC has demanded that only a tripartite dialogue would ensure progress towards the solution of Kashmir dispute.

**F**our, India's approach to dialogue is operationally a Kashmir minus approach. While India seeks to proceed fast track on institutional linkages and CBMs including interaction between artists, poets and men of the armed forces it is on a slow track on dispute settlement. In addition to Kashmir even on Siachin, Wuller Barrage and Sir Creek only negligible movement has taken place. India's foot dragging and inflexibility on all issues relating to Kashmir including dealing with human rights violations, starting the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service, all indicate India's Kashmir-minus approach to dialogue. In fact India through its regular complaint of "cross-border infiltration" is attempting to both deflect focus from the critical question of Kashmiri self-determination and at the same time neutralise the pressure from Pakistanis and Kashmiris.

Five, currently there are three strands of regular interaction taking place between

India and Pakistan. The Aziz-Dixit 'back channel', the Kasuri-Natwar interaction and the bureaucrats, led by the Pakistani Foreign Office belonging to various ministries related to the disputes being discussed through the composite dialogue. Regular interaction at these levels has been useful insofar as it has clarified the respective positions of the negotiating parties. There is a difference however in the way that the three strengths of communications of either sides coordinates among themselves. In Delhi the NSC advisor, the Foreign

Minister and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) coordinate strategy and negotiating tactics very closely. In fact the NSC advisor Dixit is always accompanied by an MEA official to the Aziz meetings. While the MEA official does not participate in the meeting, Dixit uses him as a sounding board and a record keeper of the meeting.

In Pakistan meanwhile in recent months inter-institutional coordination has increased while coordination between the back channel and the MFA is minimal. The president himself chairs regular institutional meetings to ensure coordination in policy making on India. However unlike the MEA, the MFA does not appear to be in the information loop on the back channel interaction plus in the substance of discussions. Aziz is a non-diplomat, the President's trusted back channel, has interacted with the Americans and the British before beginning his engagement with the Indians in late 2003. Aziz reports directly and only to the President who remains the centre of policy-making and execution.

Clearly any meeting between India's new Prime Minister and Pakistan's President Musharraf would be an important one. However, in preparing for such a meeting

Pakistan needs to take a clinical assessment of the current dialogue process. While both India and Pakistan have wisely concluded to persevere with the dialogue, in the interest of sustainable peace Pakistan needs to state unambiguously its expectations from the dialogue process. Meanwhile Pakistan cannot be impatient about seeking a quick solution to the Kashmir dispute. A sudden rush on Kashmir without a system of check and balances while examining possible solution can create more instability than stability in South Asia.

For now it appears that the Congress government is not keen to take the dialogue forward on Kashmir. Delhi's strategy is to chip away on Pakistan's position on Kashmir, bilaterally and through external 'advise.' Delhi needs to change this approach and look for a sustainable and just solution in the medium term.

Summits are useful occasions to clearly convey your position to the other side. They cannot be reason for chipping away at one's own position. Summits are not an end unto themselves. They can however be important means for taking critical steps forward in deeply troubled bilateral relations. Millions in South Asia hence have their eyes on the September 22 summit meeting.