

## Second opinion

# Preparing for Tal

Husain Haqqani

**All our past wars with India have been fought for no purpose.**



*Pat. F. Rel. India*

Soon after the talk of another round of talks between India and Pakistan surfaced in the media, a senior Pakistani academic in the United States wrote to me, "Supposing the Indians say to us, okay, let's talk. What do we intend to say to them that we haven't already said and which they haven't brushed aside?" In many ways this represents the dilemma of India-Pakistan negotiations. The absence of dialogue causes tension, spiked now with the prospect of nuclear confrontation. Dialogue usually ends with both sides sticking to stated positions, with little scope for a substantive breakthrough.

Negotiations usually involve reconciling maximum demands - what one side says it desires - with its minimal expectation - what it will settle for. Most observers agree that India's maximum demand is that Pakistan gives up its claim on all of Jammu and Kashmir, and its minimal expectation would probably be that Pakistan accept the status quo and a de facto partition of Kashmir along the Line of Control. An Indian negotiating team would try to secure more than the minimum and would probably settle for less than the maximum. But in Pakistan's case, there has never been much discussion of a 'bottom line' national position on the Kashmir conflict. Pakistanis feel that they were cheated at the time of partition, when a contiguous Muslim majority state was not allowed to become part of Pakistan. There is a desire, and hope, that a UN-sponsored plebiscite be held in the Jammu and Kashmir state that sets right that original injustice and paves the way for Kashmir's accession to Pakistan. But that is a maximum position. Attempts at different times to try and define alternatives to that position have all been declared as running contrary to the national interest. What, then, is the gray area over which a negotiating process can yield a settlement? In the days before a new round of India-Pakistan talks, perhaps there is scope for discussion and debate within Pakistan to define alternative negotiating positions for a future Pakistani negotiating team.

India and Pakistan have fought three wars in 54 years, two of them over Kashmir, and have clashed in other bloody battles short of full-blown war. Kashmir has been the centre of violence - described by Pakistan as an insurrection against Indian rule and by India as a separatist movement backed by Pakistan - since 1989. Pakistan's alleged support for the insurgency in Indian-controlled parts of Kashmir and the induction of Islamic militants, at least some of whom share beliefs similar to those of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, has highlighted the need for early resolution of the conflict between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

When India and Pakistan tested their nuclear weapons in 1998, some experts expressed the hope that there would be no further wars between them. Nuclear wars served as a deterrent to war between the United States and the Soviet Union and it is a widely held view that the prospect of nuclear annihilation creates a 'balance of terror' that in turn forces protagonists to talk to each other. India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons but do not have in place any of the other elements of deterrence. They do not have clearly identified 'red lines' the crossing of which would result in a nuclear strike. There are no arms control talks, no detailed nuclear doctrines and no hotlines to guard against triggering accidental nuclear clashes. Given the geographic proximity of the two states, their reaction time in case of a missile attack is barely a few minutes. And neither side can nuke the other without having to bear some of the fallout.

Deterrence has already failed in part between India and Pakistan since their nuclear tests, the Kargil clash being an example of a non-nuclear conflict between the nuclear-armed neighbours. After the December 12, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament, one million troops from both sides massed along their 2000-mile border. The troop mobilization ended several months later only after US shuttle diplomacy and Pakistani commitments to interdict militants crossing over from its territory into Indian-controlled Kashmir. Relations between the world's other nuclear powers have never been characterized by such frequent confrontations.

Pakistan's military-dominated decision-making process has resulted in combinations of short-term military and diplomatic moves without a well thought out end game. As pointed out by retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan, Pakistan's military adventures have been launched in the "hope that world powers would come to our rescue, intervene, bring about a cease fire and somehow help us achieve our political objectives. All our past wars with India have been fought for no purpose (and) we have suffered humiliation as a result." Rounds of negotiations have been no different. Pakistan has called for talks but has gone into talks without alternative negotiating positions. The Indians have ended up digging in their heels, making negotiations a zero-sum game as well.

A feeling of insecurity against a much larger and

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hostile neighbour was the original source of Pakistani apprehensions about its nationhood. The emphasis on seeking to 'complete' Pakistan by acquiring Kashmir, which should have been part of Pakistan in the first place, is directly related to this sense of insecurity. But over the years, structures of conflict have evolved, with the Pakistani establishment as the major beneficiary of maintaining hostility. The possession of nuclear weapons has given the Pakistani elite a sense of invulnerability and has increased its willingness to consider options of unconventional warfare. The environment of the global war against terrorism restrains Islamic militancy in Indian-controlled Kashmir. But in the absence of a sustained peace process between India and Pakistan there will always be room for new tactics that prolong the conflict and attempt to alter the status quo.

Pakistan's domestic politics has also become a major factor in its relations with India and vice versa. The Pakistani establishment does not trust the leaders of Pakistan's two major political parties - Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Since the 1999 coup d'état that brought General Musharraf to power, the military has attempted to rewrite Pakistan's constitution and restructure its polity - the fourth such attempt in Pakistan's relatively short history as an independent nation. The exclusion of Bhutto and Sharif from the political process has benefited the Islamist political parties, which were the major beneficiaries of the controlled parliamentary election held in October 2002. Their political power makes it difficult for politicians and intellectuals to advocate a settlement with India. An Islamist leader recently declared publicly that "killing Hindus" was "the best approach to the 56-year old dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir." The rise of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism in India is feeding the religious frenzy in Pakistan while the political gains of the Pakistani Islamists have empowered India's religious hardliners. The clash of these rival religious sentiments is hardly conducive to rational discourse aimed at seeking solutions for the Kashmir issue. Still, it would be in India's interest to help Pakistan gain sufficient confidence as a nation to overcome the need for conflict or regional rivalry for nation building. The international community, especially the US, could increase pressure for restoration of civilian rule in Pakistan, paving the way for a constitutionally mandated civilian government to resume the Lahore peace process. In Kashmir, India could start a process of political inclusion that would help identify credible Kashmiri partners in restoring peace. Until these basic changes, and a comprehensive peace process, India-Pakistan talks will serve only to relieve current tensions. And the relief will last only until the next crisis.

**E-mail queries and comments to:**  
**[hhaqqani@nation.com.pk](mailto:hhaqqani@nation.com.pk)**