



Resuming the Dialogue India, Pakistan and the Composite Process

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In 2002, at the SAARC Kathmandu meet between India and Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf made a bold gesture of crossing the stage and extending what he called the "hand of genuine and sincere friendship," to the then Indian PM Atal Behari Vajpayee. The relationship between the two countries had recently been affected by the attack on the Indian Parliament. Despite their differences, both the leaders expressed their commitment to the composite dialogue and to renewing the Indo-Pak relationship. Four rounds of this dialogue had been held until last year; the Mumbai attacks, however, led to a suspension of this dialogue.

Today, India and Pakistan are again at a momentous juncture in their history. For the first time in their tortuous relationship, a Pakistani leader, President Zardari, has boldly admitted that Pakistan had supported certain militant outfits in the past, for tactical purposes. Pakistan, wanting to create "strategic depth" in Afghanistan and trying to "bleed" India in Kashmir, are no longer cloak and dagger ideas.

Most recently, on the sidelines of the 2009 NAM Summit, Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Pakistan PM Yousuf Raza Gilani signed a joint declaration and agreed to cooperate on an entire gamut of bilateral relations; including terrorism. The straws in the wind portend a genuine change in the erstwhile relationship.

Where should the dialogue from from here? What are the major issues? For this essay, interviews were conducted with former government officials and bureaucrats, retired military personnel, civil society activists, media persons and academicians, to ask them what the future course of dialogue between India and Pakistan should include and if India and Pakistan should start a dialogue again. The discussions revealed similar perceptions, India and Pakistan must dialogue but it might be time to revisit the content of their dialogue and change the nature of their relationship.

RESUMING THE DIALOGUE

It is imperative that India and Pakistan engage and restart a dialogue. The two countries are neighbors and even though they have had a tumultuous relationship, this should not stop them from making a fresh start. This is imperative not only for their domestic and regional stability but also for economic, social and cultural reasons. India and Pakistan will always remain neighbours and, despite their historical baggage are bound together by geography. This dialogue, which has been continuing for many years, has not been very successful, which suggests a re-visiting and revising of the dialogue to make it more productive.

According to Ambassador Salman Haider, there is a tendency in India to project this dialogue as being either a favor to Pakistan or one that is laced with so many preconditions that the dialogue plummets even before taking off- this attitude presents dialogue as being a concession. There has



Indo-Pak dialogue on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building is an ongoing project of the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi.

As a part of this project, the Institute is publishing a series of background papers on various Indo-Pak bilateral issues. Besides, the Institute is also organizing track-II dialogue between the two countries in October 2009. For more information about this project, kindly visit IPCS website.

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to be greater recognition that India and Pakistan are intertwined, and the only way forward is a dialogue between each other. India and Pakistan must talk if they wish to break away from the past and create a new future that is stable and prosperous. There are certain changes that might have to take place before any dialogue can be successful. It might be time to change the nature and content of the dialogue.

Ambassador KC Singh explains a conundrum in the Indo-Pak dialogue- a dialogue starts, terrorist attacks against the Indian state take place, dialogue is suspended, India seeks assurances, Pakistan assures but without taking any concrete action against militant groups, dialogue reluctantly restarts, then terrorist attacks against the India occur again.

The bone of contention in Indo-Pak relations has been the scourge of terrorism. Any dialogue that has taken place so far has been suspended in the face of rising threats from terrorists or actual terror attacks. Maj General Banerjee opines that in an ideal situation, a dialogue should not be any preconditions as that is against the basic principles of a dialogue, but the India-Pakistan situation has been so beset with terrorism that certain preconditions have to be attached to make any dialogue successful. Moreover, this dialogue has to be kept open and honest.

According to BG Verghese, after India and Pakistan signed the Lahore declaration, there was the Kargil invasion. Right up to the actual start of the fighting, Pakistan denied any infiltration. For a dialogue to be productive, such maneuvers have to be eschewed.

Moreover, both India and Pakistan have to think of a way to move forward beyond the Kashmir issue, which always tends to hold any dialogue hostage. There is no doubt that the Kashmir issue will have to be dealt with eventually, but starting any dialogue on this issue will only stall the process. Instead India and Pakistan can focus on resolving non-controversial issues like the Wullar Barrage, Siachen, the water issues and so on. A solution to these problems can create the goodwill required

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to move forward on more contentious issues like Kashmir and militancy.

A former official in the Ministry of Defence, P.R Chari states that India and Pakistan must focus on revising the nature and content of their dialogue. Engaging in a dialogue that is going to be unyielding from the start is counter productive, because it negates any progress that was made in the last dialogue. If no new ideas are being brought into the dialogue, the process fails and merely creates unwanted pessimism. Most importantly, any dialogue must take into consideration, the obtaining public opinion. After the Mumbai attacks, there is a mass resentment among the people of India, and unless Pakistan offers some satisfaction in curbing militancy, public support for a dialogue will be unenthusiastic. There is no doubt that India and Pakistan must dialogue; but the dialogue must be nuanced, and the timing has to be right.

A dialogue with preconditions is symptomatic of the traditional Indo-Pak relationship and does not offer a creative solution to this ongoing conflict. Maybe India and Pakistan need to engage in a dialogue that is honest, open and is not held hostage by too many preconditions, albeit without ignoring the existing environment. After the Mumbai attacks, it has become hard for India to engage in an unconditional dialogue. India can instead, engage in "talks" with Pakistan, without "dialoguing", till the time is right, or till the time Pakistan makes good on some of its promises to curb militancy.

According to KC Singh, a "dialogue" has a different connotation from "talking". The former means adhering to a specific structure and format, which in the case of India and Pakistan, already exists, and therefore they can still talk, and not have a dialogue. This is what India and Pakistan have been doing, most recently at the summit at Yekaterinburg, and on the sidelines of the NAM summit. This could also mean keeping the unofficial contacts open, even during volatile times; in other words, by engaging aggressively in a Track 2 dialogue.

II TRACK II & BACK CHANNEL INITIATIVES

This entails finding solutions that are private, non-governmental efforts at peace, and the goals of these efforts are to foster mutual understanding between people in the conflicting countries. In the case of protracted and deep rooted conflicts, entire populations have internalized a certain way of thinking about the other and this belief system can and does stand in the way of any political negotiations that might take place at the Track One level. Thus a peace deal signed by the leaders of the two countries might not be enough in an environment of animosity, as the populations might be opposed to a peace deal.

This can be done by increasing people to people contact, expanding trade links and so on. A good example of such a dialogue is the Neemrana dialogue, which is ongoing. It comprises former diplomats, former military personnel, media persons, NGO workers, educators and academics from the two countries and because of their former positions; they have networks in the incumbent government and are able to wield a significant amount of influence within the government. Such efforts should be bolstered, and new avenues for cooperation, including more people-to-people contact should be created.

A participant in the Neemrana Dialogue, Meenakshi Gopinath, feels that even though Track One is very important, Track Two cannot be ignored, because it enables the creation of a larger constituency for peace. In addition to Track One, she feels that Track One and a half, and Track Three should be explored as well. An area where she feels that India and Pakistan could create unprecedented cooperation is fighting terrorism. An issue that has traditionally divided India and Pakistan can help in creating a space for genuine cooperation.

Another area of co-operation is educational exchanges and this can open up access across the LoC, offer scientific know-how and optimize soft power in the region. Amidst rising global anxiety about climate change, India and Pakistan should cooperate on their common concerns on receding glaciers, rising sea levels and water sharing. The Indus Waters Treaty has been successful, and strengthening it can optimize the gains. The possibility of building a zone of peace in Siachen can also be considered. Prof. P.R Chari points out that trade can play an important role because a climate of peace will provide incentives for seeking profit. The essential problem between India and Pakistan is the trust deficit and, as long as that exists, there will always be ebbs and flows in the relationship.

India and Pakistan have been very successful in conducting negotiations via back channel modalities and this should be continued. Indian PM Manmohan Singh and Former President of Pakistan, General Musharraf, were very close to a political solution on Kashmir two years ago, but it had to be suspended because of internal political problems and instability in Pakistan. This channel however has remained one of the few successful avenues of contact between the two countries and this should not be closed.

III

ENGAGEMENT: IDENTIFYING ISSUES & AREAS

There are several issues, which need to be resolved for Indo-Pak relations to move forward. The most important is the question of Kashmir and the establishment of the LoC as the final border. As Maj Gen Banerjee says, this should include ISI-

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aided incursions into Indian territory and terrorist training camps. Pakistan has always been reluctant to address these concerns about militant havens that facilitate terror attacks, but the issue of Pakistani-supported terrorism inside Kashmir has to be discussed. President Zardari's recent acknowledgement of Pakistan's use of terror outfits for short-term goals is an encouraging step, and should be built upon to focus on dismantling the terror network.

The other existing issues in the composite dialogue like Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage also need to be resolved. However, as some experts we interviewed opined, the format perhaps should be reviewed so that a more constructive agenda can evolve. Prof PR Chari says the existing agenda has to be reformed so that new ideas can be generated and rigidity on both sides is reduced.

Amb. Salman Haider pointed out that nuclear confidence building measures have become a specific area of mutual interest for Pakistan and India post 1998 and should be strengthened. They are of greater relevance today and should be given due importance. A new area of engagement - military to military dialogue is proposed by Gen. Patankar, who feels it should be included in the composite dialogue at the earliest.

IV

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Indo-Pak relations have always been fraught with difficulties and a dialogue has never gone forward smoothly. Currently, the two countries face several problems that pose challenges to the dialogue. The Indian public was enraged after the Mumbai attacks and holding a dialogue seemed pointless, as most people would not support it. Promises without concrete results for the past several years have frustrated India. The opinion espoused by several public personalities and representatives is that Pakistan should first offer some satisfaction by controlling terrorists after which talks could be

held.

US pressure on both countries is another challenge to the dialogue. The US feels that it is essential to reduce tensions between the two nations, which is also in its own strategic interests. Pakistan has shown a penchant for engaging in dialogue due to Western pressure, without being entirely honest or inclined towards a solution. Gen. Patankar states that whenever a solution seems close at hand, they bring in issues like Kashmir to hold the agreements reached to ransom. Currently, India is again being persuaded by the US to resume the dialogue with Pakistan. However, as BG Verghese says, Pakistan needs to create conditions that are conducive for dialogue, for any constructive engagement to take place.

The domestic political scene in each country is also a major challenge. The political structure in Pakistan is not monolithic, which needs being taken into account. Meenakshi Gopinath expressed concern that India should not be seen to be fomenting trouble in Pakistan. Opposition parties in India, too, live up to their parliamentary classification, and oppose dialogue. The BJP's spokesperson, Prakash Javdekar, states his party's stand on dialogue is based on the precondition that terrorism and dialogue cannot co-exist. They feel there should be no dialogue unless Pakistan takes concrete action to dismantle terror networks and deport terrorists wanted by India. The cycle of initiating dialogue, not reaching a successful conclusion and ending up in a deadlock will continue; hence, there is no point in engaging in dialogue. One can sympathize with this viewpoint when one sees the past history of dialogue and engagements. Prof P.R. Chari points out that Siachen has been on the agenda for 25 years and nothing has been resolved. Faced by such challenges, the composite dialogue seems to be on slippery ground at present.

IV CONCLUSIONS

India and Pakistan have come a long way since their independence in 1947, they have fought wars, and have dealt with insurgencies and infiltration. Despite this, they have been able to continue on the path of cooperation and dialogue. This path has not been smooth and there have been bumps and roadblocks on the way, but it has been successful in that it has maintained a degree of continuity, albeit in fits and starts. The recent statement by Zardari accepting Pakistan's involvement in militancy within India is a step in the right direction. According to Meenakshi Gopinath, although Zardari is prone to pronouncements and retractions, a statement like this by the highest authority in Pakistan has the potential to take Indo-Pak dialogue forward.

At this juncture, creativity, imagination and

strength of conviction are required by the leadership to conceive of innovative solutions to the enduring conflict. The fact that the composite dialogue has not worked for so many years means that it must be reviewed and reassessed to reflect the present realities. Track 2 diplomacy must be kept open to create a larger population of people in both countries who feel that India and Pakistan have a stake in improving their relations. This could be through increasing people to people contact and through trade and military cooperation.

India is ushering in a period of economic growth and any rising power has to be a responsible power. India has a stake in helping to create a stable South Asia and dialogue and engagement with Pakistan can ensure this.

When it comes to India and Pakistan, there are issues and misunderstandings that creep in even during their negotiations. This is reminiscent of their intertwined histories and a bitter partition, but often due to inexplicable motivations. As Robert Frost wrote, " ...the gaps I mean, no one has seen them made or heard them made, but at spring mending time, we find them there..."

Interviews

B.G. Verghese, *Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi.*

Maj. General Dipankar Banerjee (retd), Director, IPCS.

Dr Meenakshi Gopinath, *Principal, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi & Honorary Director of WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace),*

Ambassador K.C. Singh, *Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, India*

Prakash Javedkar, *Spokesperson, BJP*

Mr P.R. Chari, *Research Professor and former member of the Indian Administrative Service.*

Ambassador Salman Haider, *Former Indian Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to China.*

Lt. General V.G. Patankar (retd), *Former General-Officer Commanding (GOC), 15 Corps, Indian Army.*



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