

The end of the cold war provided India and Pakistan with opportunities to develop the concept of cooperative peace and security. The desire for peace, recognition of the futility of confrontation and the utility of confidence-building measures, the cumulative impact of 'track two diplomacy' and the intent to succeed in a dialogue process have all strengthened the peace process in recent years. Added to this is a post-9/11 change in South Asia's security environment and a perceptible shift in US attitude to subcontinental affairs compelling the countries towards peace initiatives.

Post-cold war Indo-Pak friendship

Giving peace a chance after 9/11

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External powers have been instrumental in the process of regional peace making. Post-cold war developments have changed the US's attitude to subcontinental affairs. The US accepts that there are possibilities of better relations with India. It also accepts India's security concerns. However, this does not dilute US relations with Pakistan. Pakistan remains important to US interests in the region and 'constructive engagement' is useful and necessary for monitoring and controlling cross-border terrorism and religious extremism. Linkage with Pakistan is also considered necessary in maintaining an atmosphere of restraint in the region in the context of the nuclear weaponisation of India and Pakistan. The US wooed Pakistan during the cold war period, in particular after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. That era is dead and those compulsions are now gone. In the post-cold war era, Pakistan has little choice but to go along with US interests, ending its isolation and carving out a new role as a frontline state fighting the Islamic militants in South Asia.

Locked in a loveless embrace

After 9/11, Pakistan and the US found themselves locked in a loveless embrace. Their mutual relations conditioned more by fundamental differences than by shared convictions and interests. The US believes a strong and friendly India can maintain stability and prosperity in South Asia. India remains an obvious choice for the US: Increasingly powerful in economic terms, militarily responsible (despite Pokhara II) and with a track record of combatting terrorism. The US and India are building a strategic partnership based on their shared commitment to freedom, prosperity and security. This new Indo-US partnership has changed the security environment in South Asia, and India's increased importance in the eyes of the US after 9/11 has forced Pakistan to seek peace in the region.

Changes had already taken place prior to 9/11. When the Taliban took power in Afghanistan "they made use of their ISI and Pakistani military contacts, but also relied on the support of drug barons and provincial governments. For recruits and for influence beyond the country they made use of networks of Deobandi Madarsas in Pakistan".¹ These religious colleges politicised Islam and generated a flow of recruits fed on a diet of religious dogmatism and jihad. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan saw advantage in courting American patronage. India, eager to prove Pakistan an untrustworthy ally, backed the Taliban and promoted insurgency in Kashmir. Pakistan supported the Taliban in the hope of protecting its western border in the event of war with India.² The fall of the Taliban was seen as a spectacular failure of this policy. It also allowed the US to tilt the regional security environment in favour of India, in turn persuading Pakistan to rein in

jihadi elements and obliging Musharraf to collaborate in the 'war on terror'.

The Kargil conflict of 1999 revealed the threat of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. India got a taste of this threat and an opportunity to share its fears with the US. Kargil saw Pakistani attempts to internationalise the Kashmir issue fail as the spectre of Islamic militancy struck terror across the world. Islamabad's efforts to persuade the major powers to intervene met with little success. Both regional and international opinion favoured India and its policy of military restraint. The US argued that the rules of engagement in the subcontinent fundamentally changed with the introduction of nuclear weapons into the equation in the 1990s. It believed that irresponsible actions (such as Kargil) by Pakistan could destabilise the region with dangerous consequences. As a result, Pakistan came under tremendous international pressure to enter bilateral talks with India. The American-led coalition operations in Afghanistan in 2001, the international pressure on Musharraf to wind up the jihadi culture and the presence of US Special Forces in Pakistan sent shock waves through Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment, with the effect of persuading Pakistan to work more closely with India and the international community in order to neutralise the networks of extremists.

Compulsions behind peace initiatives

The US has been an effective mediator, encouraging both India and Pakistan to stick to the peace process. It has entered into an historic nuclear deal with India and has chosen Pakistan as an ally in its global war against terrorism. As the world's sole super power the US has proved that it can haughtily influence the course of events. Musharraf clearly anticipates a sympathetic response from the US by cooperating in every possible way to combat Islamic terrorism.

At the heart of the renewed process after 9/11 is an apparent understanding by India to learn to deal with Musharraf. This includes understanding his compulsions and domestic problems. "India is moving from a position of being a victim of Pakistan's terrorism for the last 20 years to a position where we are endorsing Musharraf's assertion that Pakistan is also a victim of terrorism".³ India also feels that Musharraf has made serious efforts in fighting hardliners and jihadi outfits. Musharraf knows that these groups threaten not only the Kashmir peace process but Pakistan's own stability. India, therefore, does not want to press him too hard, for fear of further undermining his political base and thus India-Pakistan dialogue.

An intense international pressure to normalise relations with Pakistan, plus a desire to address the international community and the Kashmiris meant that India was ready

to go the extra mile for peace. Vajpayee wanted to go down in history as a man who wanted peace with Pakistan. "The BJP-led NDA government's legitimate approach to the US has been to leverage good relations with the world's only superpower to project India's interests: persuading Pakistan to abandon support to Kashmiri militants".⁴ This approach prompted India to take these peace initiatives unilaterally in the hope of winning US support over Kashmir.

With the jihadi policy collapsing and international pressure mounting, Musharraf used the peace initiative to rebuild his credibility. In order to be a modern and moderate Islamic state, Musharraf believes Pakistan must turn its back on religious extremism. Failure could see world public opinion branding Pakistan as an irresponsible state and earning the wrath of the US in the long run. After 9/11 things changed drastically, the US administration left Musharraf with no choice but to clamp down on state sponsored terrorism against India and begin a dialogue for peaceful resolution of bilateral disputes. When terrorism - the Frankenstein's monster that Pakistan had given life to - struck back, Pakistan's army found it difficult to keep its house in order. "Some critics feel that the rapprochement process with India was a tactical ploy on the part of Musharraf to face the new internal dangers and not a strategic change of heart".⁵

Pakistan's partnership with the US in the 'war on terror' has forced it to be more pragmatic on the Kashmir issue. Pakistan's domestic elites stand divided on Musharraf's Kashmir policy. Mainstream political parties and liberals have made a strong case for ending the insurgency, believing that perpetual confrontation with India has financially bankrupted Pakistan. Peace is achievable only if Pakistan's military-intelligence establishment desists from waging proxy war through militants in Kashmir.⁶

Furthermore, the US has accepted India's argument that Pakistan is part of the terrorism problem in South Asia and has rejected Islamabad's claims that it lends only moral and political support to freedom fighters in Jammu and Kashmir. "The US has also perceived the nuclear threat in South Asia, and for that reason, the Bush administration has pressurised General Musharraf to deliver on his promises to stop cross-border terrorism in India-controlled Kashmir and to reduce the political temperature in the region".⁷ Both India and Pakistan have made a commitment not to let terrorism derail the peace process. Even the recent US offer to sell F-16s to Pakistan is "aimed at giving the Bush administration leverage on Musharraf in pushing him in the direction of accommodation over Kashmir and other bilateral disputes with India".⁸ The Musharraf regime, confronted with the responsibility of reining in the militant proxies fighting in Kashmir, requires a political cover to hide retreat. India has offered this cover by making reciprocal concessions

such as demobilisation of the Indian army and restoring dialogue over Kashmir. This mutual reciprocation has brought the two neighbours closer than ever before.

The urge for peace

The cry for peace is palpable across Pakistan especially among the younger generation, which feels that the strife is getting in the way of their desire for economic prosperity. Many of Pakistan's youth want to see their country integrated with the world community. The fact is that 'peace constituency' has expanded much beyond the expectation of the leaders of both countries. There is great curiosity to understand one another. The inability to cross the border and visit the other was a real constraint. Now, the two governments have agreed on a bus service across the Line of Control. Adopting more confidence-building measures (CBMs) to beef up people-to-people contacts and allowing the public sentiment for peace on both sides to emerge, leaders of both countries have succeeded in generating a climate of peace. The potential utility of CBMs became evident in bilateral relations as the focus shifted to suit the changing security concerns and domestic political compulsions. Instead of hastily conceived high-profile summitry as in Lahore and Agra, the two sides are now laying a solid groundwork of confidence-building measures before expecting something spectacular.

CBMs include 'track-two diplomacy' and the process of ongoing dialogue. "Track two diplomacy is not a substitute for track-one official diplomacy but it supplements the process of unofficial manner to promote an environment through education of public opinion, that would make it safe for political leaders to take risk's for peace".⁹ During the 1990s, despite officially imposed constraints, both governments found it valuable to have a track-two channel available in the absence of any serious official dialogue. It is non-official dialogue in a bid to promote cooperation and resolve issues through conflict management and it aims to heighten the level of trust and understanding. It tries to overcome past reservations, enmities and misunderstandings and find creative solutions to difficult issues. Track-two has had a cumulative impact on the recent peace initiatives, creating interest in the minds of the Indian and Pakistani public to get to know each other better, to correct misperceptions and create opportunities for rational behaviour by leaders of both countries.

Ongoing dialogue

In the post-emergency phase, a civilian government in Pakistan is likely to be friendly to India. Since the army would have to continue its counter extremist operations for the foreseeable future, there is also the option of 'buying' peace with India. As a civilian President, Musharraf is still able to dictate the terms of the peace process which he initiated, as he enjoys the support of the army

and the US. Peace talks have taken place under both dispensations (civilian rule and military rule), making it difficult to draw any facile connections between democracy in Pakistan and good relations between the neighbours.

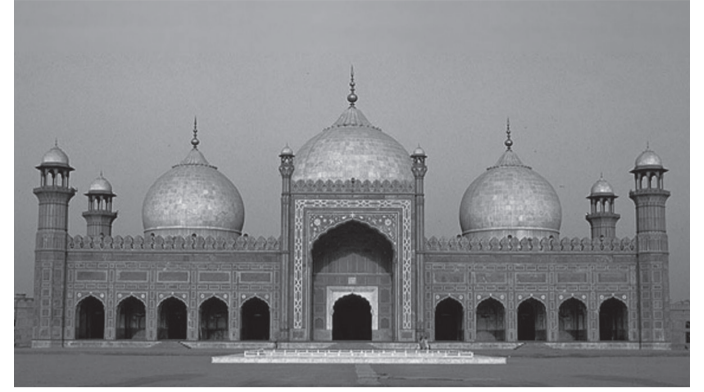
Intent to succeed is the most important aspect of the current India-Pakistan dialogue process and hopefully both countries will exhibit the required degree of flexibility and openness to offer the best prospects of a détente, if not a solution. Despite continuing political turmoil in Pakistan, the talks to resolve the issues bedeviling Indo-Pak relations continue. While both countries are still unable to address the crucial issues in meaningful terms, mutual tension and suspicion has been reduced. The peace process remains highly vulnerable to Indian and Pakistani political whims that have always been inconsistent. That said, both sides exhibit tremendous political will and determination and recent peace initiatives have been responded to by both countries with equal vigour. There is room for guarded optimism.

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