

Pakistan & India: Sixty years of reluctant dialogue

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From the very beginning, the India-Pakistan relationship was not easy. With a legacy of Hindu-Muslim riots leaving perhaps over a million dead, dispute over Kashmir further complicated the matters. A further deterioration in bilateral relations occurred when India under Nehru opted a neutral foreign policy with a tilt towards communist block while Pakistan bent its knee before the United States.

A thaw in relationship between the two troubled neighbours came for the first time in April 1950. India's Pandit Nehru and Pakistan's Liaquat Ali Khan, the two Prime Ministers met in Delhi on April 2. The meeting lasted for six long days. On April 8, the two leaders signed an agreement. The Liaquat-Nehru Pact provided a 'bill of rights' for the minorities of India and Pakistan.

But the ink of Liaquat-Nehru Pact had hardly dried when Liaquat Ali Khan on 15 July 1951 created a stir in West Pakistan by stating that Indian army was moving close to Pakistani border. Nehru denied the charge. An exchange of letters began between the two prime ministers. In his letter on 24 July, Nehru in an attempt to prove his sincerity offered Pakistan a non-aggression pact. Liaquat rejected it. He told Nehru that a non-aggression pact before the solution to Kashmir issue was useless.

In July and August 1953, new hopes were kindled as Pakistani premier Mohammed Ali Bogra and his Indian counterpart, Pandit Nehru met in Karachi and New Delhi respectively in direct negotiations on Kashmir. In a joint communiqué at the end of the talks, the two leaders re-affirmed that the fate of Kashmir should be decided in accordance with the wishes of its people as well as that a fair and impartial plebiscite was the most feasible method of determining the wishes of the people.

On 30 July 1953, *The Hindu* under the headline 'From Karachi with hope', reported:

"On the 28th, Prime Minister Nehru expressed hope at Delhi airport on his return from a three-day visit to Pakistan, that Indo-Pakistan problems were nearer solution." "We have gone ahead a good deal. Some agreement has been reached on exchange of West Bengal-East Bengal enclaves, easier travel between the two Bengals, and on protecting Sikh Gurdwaras in Pakistan." "Asked whether agreement had been reached in regard to the exchange with Pakistan of certain areas, so as to bring within Indian territory three Sikh Gurdwaras across the Ravi in the Punjab, Mr. Nehru replied, "No. But agreement has been reached on having the shrines looked after well, and on providing facilities for Sikhs from India to go to them." "Regarding Kashmir, he said, "The problem is there. We are dealing with it." "On his visit as a whole, the Prime Minister declared, "I am glad I went to Karachi. The welcome by the people of Karachi was remarkable and spontaneous. I do believe Pakistan Prime Minister Mohammed Ali will come to Delhi by the beginning of September to continue the talks."

Hopes were further strengthened when in 1955, Pakistani Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra visited India from July 14-17. For the first time, a real improvement of bilateral relations between the two states was witnessed.

In summer 1958 some heated statements were issued by Pakistan's myopic war mongering politicians but on 5 July the then prime minister, Feroz Noon, at a press conference in Lahore made a categorical announcement repudiating any notion or possibility of war saying Pakistan would in no way go to war against India come what way. Though he refused to commit himself to sign a non-aggression pact offered by Nehru.

The military take over in Pakistan did not hurt the relations at first. Instead when Nehru travelled to Lahore in 1960 to sign the Indus Water Treaty, it seemed the ice had started melting. Though General Ayub, Pakistan's first military ruler, would bring Kashmir up but Nehru would simply ignore it. On 19 September 1960, Indus Water Treaty was signed.

A fresh round of talks began following Nehru's visit. From December 27, 1962 to May 16, 1963, six rounds of inconclusive talks between Indian foreign minister Swaran Singh and his Pakistani counterpart Zulfikar Ali Bhutto were held. The talks failed to make any breakthrough. At talks, Swaran Singh wanted some 'give and take' kind of bargaining on Kashmir that led Bhutto to believe as if India was losing control of Kashmir. A widespread uproar in Kashmir in 1964 made Ayub draw wrong conclusions and he sent his paratroopers to Indian Held Kashmir. He had expected a mass uprising against Indian occupation on the arrival of Pakistani paratroopers. It did not happen. Instead it led to second war between the two countries in 1965. A humiliated Ayub met Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in Tashkent as Soviet Union was playing the mediator. On 10 January 1966, Tashkent Declaration was signed. Shastri and Ayub expressed their firm resolve to restore normal and peaceful relations between their countries, and to promote understanding and friendly relations between their people.

It did not happen. Instead in six years time both were fighting another war. This time, it was East Pakistan and not Kashmir that had led to war. When Bhutto took over truncated Pakistan, he travelled to India. Bhutto was a foreign policy hawk. Not merely he was held responsible for 1965 war fiasco but had been spreading hate-India mania to play on national chauvinism to muster support. But with almost 90 thousand Pakistani soldiers in Indian jails, he had to travel to an India he was passing threats of war. He met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and on 2 July 1972 signed the Simla Agreement. The Agreement attempted to create an order in the region after the creation of Bangladesh. Also, agreements were reached on a number of issues including the normalising of diplomatic relations, resuming trade, communications and travel, fixing the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The governments of the two countries resolved to put an end to the conflict and confrontation that had hindered their relations.

But Simla Agreement was soon forgotten when India went for a nuclear explosion in 1974. A nuclear race had begun in the region. Throughout the 1970s, there remained a stalemate despite in November 1974 the two sides agreed to lift mutual trade embargoes and to extend most favoured nation status to each other.

The 1977-79 period proved fateful not just for Pak-India relations but for the whole region. Kabul had gone red while Tehran had grown beard. Islamabad was again under Jackboots while in India Congress had lost elections. Delhi for the first time had a non-Congress government. But in three years, Indira Gandhi was back.

With General Zia in control of Pakistan (r: 1977-88), relations between the two were really at their worst. He started backing a violent separatist-Sikh movement in Indian Punjab. India meantime had

captured posts at Siachin glacier thus starting a war that is yet to be concluded. But it was Indian Punjab that dominated the bilateral issues throughout the 1980s. As the situation in Punjab got out of Delhi's control, the immediate victim was bilateral relations. At times, India in the name of Operation Brasstacks moved its battalions to advance positions along Pakistani border in 1986. Both countries were very close to war. Pakistan used the stick of nuclear threat and carrot of Zia's cricket diplomacy to avoid the war. After all, Pakistan did not afford a full-scale war with India. All it wanted was to engage India in a low-intensity proxy war and bleed it.

It was a government change in Islamabad, in 1988 following Zia's death/murder in plane crash that offered a respite. Rajiv Gandhi, who had replaced his mother after she was killed at the hands of her Sikh bodyguards (fingers were also pointed at Pakistan), visited Islamabad in December 1988. Rajiv Gandhi, after his grandfather Nehru, was the second prime minister to visit Pakistan. His December 1988 visit saw him sign three agreements in Islamabad. These were on nuclear facilities, cultural interaction and trade. In the agreement he entered into with Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on that occasion, the two countries agreed to prohibit attack on each other's nuclear installations. It also provided for exchange of data on locations of nuclear power and research reactors, fuel fabrications, uranium enrichment, isotopes separation and reprocessing facilities.

But Benazir had to pay big price for Rajiv's visit. Khaki hawks, with opposition leader and later Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as their spokesman, accused her of selling Kashmir and 'betraying' separatist-Sikh movement. She was accused of handing over lists of Sikh militants to Rajiv. Consequently, when Benazir was back in Islamabad second time, she was more hawkish on India than hawks. The 1990s were a period of an uneasy stalemate with Pakistan (army) sending Afghan-veterans to Kashmir to engage India in a proxy war as Sikh militants had done in 1980s. The art of proxy war learnt in Afghanistan has become a main strategy of Pakistan army. It was applied in Indian Punjab, later on in Kashmir and again in Afghanistan to put Taliban in charge of Kabul.

With both countries going nuclear, the tensions ran high in 1998 until in February 1999, Vajpayee travelled to Lahore on Dosti Buss (Friendship Buss). Both countries had agreed to run a buss service between Lahore and Delhi. Nawaz Sharif invited Vajpayee to reach Lahore by the inaugural run. Vajpayee accepted the invitation. It was strange for many to see an anti-Pakistan Hindu fundamentalist to reach Lahore for unfurling a new era of peace on the invitation of a right-wing prime minister who in the past had been accusing Benazir, on the question of India, of sell out. The newfound love for peace on part of the two right wing politicians had actually been a reaction to pressure exerted by the donors. The donors were putting question marks on the defence allocations in annual budgets of both the countries. Pakistan following US sanctions had particularly been hit hard. The donors wanted both the countries, particularly to cut the defence budget and improve its debt servicing. Also, both countries wanted to show that these were responsible countries capable of handling their problems and nuclear arsenal. Vajpayee was the third Indian prime minister to visit Pakistan and second to visit Lahore after Nehru. His visit to Lahore and the consequent agreement for normalisation of relations was given the name of Lahore Process.

Khakis disapproved the Lahore Process. They decided to stall it. Khaki machinations resulted in Kargil war that started on May 5 when Indian army patrols spotted a group of infiltrators in the Yaldor area of the Kargil region, on the Indian side of occupied Kashmir. A large Indian patrol was sent to investigate and was ambushed on May 8. Four Indian soldiers were killed. On May 9, the infiltrators destroyed the main Indian army ammunition dump outside the town of Kargil, blowing up 40,000 to 50,000 artillery rounds. Aerial surveillance on May 12 revealed the seriousness of the challenge: hundreds of 'heavily armed infiltrators had occupied at least 35 well-fortified positions atop the ridges facing Drass, Kargil, Batalik and Mushko valleys. They were being provided fire cover by Pakistani artillery, which had begun a systematic bombardment of National Highway 1 A. India's initial response, was to send some 20,000 to 30,000 troops to try to evict intruders.

Commandos were dropped to mountain ridges by helicopters. Army soldiers equipped with howitzers, rocket launchers and heavy mortar with a backing of gunship helicopters attacked the ridges. The operation was called Operation Vijay. Soon India had realised that army alone would not do. The air force help was sought which came finally after an initial reluctance. On 25 May Vajpayee ordered the Indian armed forces to 'take any action necessary to evict the invaders'. By May 26, gunship helicopters and ground-attack aircraft of Indian air force were pounding the intruders' positions. The air force even lost two air crafts, a MiG 21 and a MiG 27, besides a helicopter.

The Kargil war could have reached the Pak-India border as India had ordered its troops to prepare for a possible war on Pak-India war. In late May, US satellite detected these preparations.

By mid June, almost 1,000 infiltrators were resisting the Indian offensive in Kargil. India was getting impatient as infiltrators were putting up fierce resistance. On June 14-15 Clinton realising the seriousness of the situation, telephoned Vajpayee and Nawaz urging restraint. But as Indian casualties mounted, India intimated the USA that it might go for a full-scale war. The US was deeply concerned by the prospect of war in a region, as U.S. companies had started big investments; Clinton on June 23 dispatched commander in chief of the US Central Command General Zinni who happened to be an old friend of General Musharraf. Zinni offered Islamabad good offices for capitulation.

General Zinni, when asked how close Pakistan and India had come to all-out war? 'Very', he responded. 'Both sides were on automatic pilot; both sides were without much control. The danger of situation was not fully appreciated, even in Washington. But it certainly was on the ground. I think one of the reason Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif were glad to see me come was that they had really scared themselves to death'. According to a report by President Clinton's chief advisor on South Asia, Bruce Riedel, published by the University of Pennsylvania in May 2002, Musharraf and his Army high command may have prepared their nuclear weapons for deployment then.

On July 4, Nawaz travelled to Washington and pledged 'concrete steps will be taken for the restoration of Line of Control in accordance with the Simla Agreement'. Withdrawal of infiltrators and fall of Nawaz Sharif proceeded apace. Kargil helped Vajpayee win next elections while his Pakistani counterpart ended up in exile on account of Kargil.

Since fourth Khaki coup did not have a prior-approval from Washington, it therefore suffered an international isolation. Until of course September 11 when Jackboots were needed again. In his initial period of international isolation, Musharraf tried to break the isolation by an attempt to bridge relations with India, which he himself had strained. He travelled to India in July 2001 and met Vajpayee. The July 14-16, the Agra summit failed to yield any results. However, in post-September 11 scenario when Delhi realised the importance Musharraf had achieved, it decided to pick the broken thread up. On January 3, 2002 Vajpayee travelled to Islamabad for SAARC conference. He held talks with Musharraf and a new round peace process was set in motion by the two. However, the friendship gestures to consolidate the peace process were nothing but hypocrisy. A suicide mission attacking Mumbai in November 2008 stalled the so/called normalisation process. With the arrival of Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna in Islamabad on July 15, an impression is made as if dialogue process has been put back on track. To assess the progress, US Foreign Secretary Hillary Clinton also arrived Islamabad on July 18. Under US pressure, few more rounds of talks will be staged. As soon as things will began to appear normal, a terrorist attack will derail the process. This is what we have been witnessing for last sixty years: tension between two countries leads to dialogue, as soon as dialogue process picks up it is stalled by a violent action, a diplomatic stand-off ensues until the resumption of talks. It is indeed a vicious circle.

Farooq Sulehria

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* From Viewpoint:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/fullstory.php?t=Sixty%20years%20of%20reluctant%20dialogue&f=full-2-july-23.php&y=2010&m=july>

* Farooq Sulehria is working with Stockholm-based Weekly Internationalen (www.internationalen.se). Before joining Internationalen, he worked for one year, 2006-07 at daily The News, Rawalpindi. Also, in Pakistan, he has worked with Lahore-based dailies, The Nation, The Frontier Post and Pakistan. He has MA in Mass Communication from Punjab University, Lahore. He also contributes for Znet and various left publications in Europe and Australia.