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# Indian Foreign Policy vis-à-vis Pakistan: Dialogue and Prospects

Satish Chandra

India's foreign policy, like that of any other country, is the result of a complex interplay of several factors, most notably its history, geography, power potential, ethos, and polity. These have beckoned India towards the adoption of a resolutely independent foreign policy, outside any alliance system, based upon a sense of empathy and solidarity with the developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. The inherently tolerant and resilient Indian ethos, marked by the absence of any hegemonistic and territorial ambitions, which propelled it towards a democratic, secular and federal polity, equally influenced its fervent advocacy of peaceful coexistence and the resolution of differences through dialogue. The practical underpinning for such an approach lay in the recognition that peace was essential for rapid economic progress—a prerequisite for taking its teeming masses out of poverty.

In view of the foregoing, it is no surprise that the establishment of close and friendly ties with its immediate neighbours has always been high on India's priority. Its relations with its neighbours have been coloured by the concept of *Panchsheel* which entails respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. But beyond this, India's vision for South Asia is that it should enjoy the freest possible movement of people, goods and services across state boundaries as is the case in Europe. Visas should become redundant or at least much easier to obtain, cross-border trade and investments should be the norm, joint ventures should flourish, and a South Asian identity should be more recognisable. This is

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India's hope and endeavour within the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) framework. Though progress in this direction has been slow, India has registered considerable success bilaterally in taking its relationships with some of its neighbours like Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to new highs.

Regrettably, such success has not been replicated in India-Pakistan relations. These continue to be marred by differences and distrust although India has always wanted friendly and good neighbourly ties with Pakistan and remains committed to date to progressing them through dialogue. Since prominent Pakistani leaders, like former President Musharraf and former Foreign Minister Kasuri, have made known that the differences on major issues had been virtually resolved on the back channel, it would be logical to assume that the root of the rocky relationship between the two countries rests not on such differences but on Pakistan's inimical mindset in regard to India.<sup>1</sup> Such a mindset has, through the years, been promoted by the establishment in need of the Indian bogey in order to keep the country together, to avoid ceding genuine power to the democratic forces, and to ensure that it continues to call the shots in perpetuity.<sup>2</sup> No wonder, therefore, that Pakistan today repudiates the understandings reportedly arrived at on the back channel.<sup>3</sup>

Pakistan's negative mindset, which has been the stumbling block to the normalisation of India-Pakistan relations, is largely due to the cultivation and propagation of the following myths about India.

*Myth No 1* is that India has never reconciled itself to the creation of Pakistan and that it wants to undo the same. There is no truth in this. While India never subscribed to the two-nation religion-based theory, the fact of Partition as an irreversible phenomenon was accepted by it immediately after the event. In this context, it is relevant to recall that while speaking at Aligarh Muslim University on January 24, 1948, Prime Minister Nehru stated: "We have been charged with desiring to strangle and crush Pakistan, and to force it into a reunion with India. That charge, as many others, is based on fear and a complete misunderstanding of our attitude.... Compulsion there can never be and an attempt to disrupt Pakistan will recoil to India's disadvantage.....There is no going back in history. As a matter of fact, it is to India's advantage that Pakistan should be a secure and prosperous state with which we can develop close and friendly relations. If today,

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by any chance, I was offered a reunion of India and Pakistan, I would decline it for obvious reasons. I do not want to carry the burden of Pakistan's great problems. I have enough of my own."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Indian leaders like Mr Vajpayee and Dr Manmohan Singh have echoed Mr Nehru's view about wanting to see a stable and prosperous Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

*Myth No 2* is that India has hegemonistic designs on Pakistan. Indian policies are not Pakistan-centric unlike Pakistan's policies which are India-centric. Any action taken by India is commonly regarded by Pakistan as directed against it. India has never coveted any Pakistani territory nor had any designs on it. Its primary concern is the well-being of its nationals and it would, therefore, not like to be

distracted from this task. It is the harsh reality of geo-politics that India, with its security concerns extending well beyond Pakistan, has had to divert its resources into building up its capabilities so as to be able to safeguard its territorial integrity and sovereignty. This does not signify hegemonistic tendencies. Indeed, as pointed out by Air Marshal Asghar Khan in the late Eighties, all the India-Pakistan Wars were started by Pakistan. India did not initiate them.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, George Fulton, while referring to the omnipotence of the Pakistan military in the *Express Tribune* of March 2, 2011, states, "Kargil, the attack on India's Parliament and, more recently, Mumbai have all occurred since we got the bomb — attacks that couldn't have been carried out without some military/intelligence involvement." It is thus clear that while India has all along been a status quo state, Pakistan has stopped at nothing to change the status quo against India.

*Myth No 3* is that India is Hindu state and, therefore, inimically disposed to Pakistan. This is both incorrect and unwarranted. Though the majority of the Indian population is Hindu, India is a secular state. Home to nearly all the major religions, India accords equality of treatment to all persons both in terms of practising and propagating their faith and in terms of their participation in all spheres of public life. Muslims, numbering nearly 161 million, constitute the largest minority community in India and are the third largest conglomeration in any country after Indonesia and Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> They are active participants in all facets of India's national life and have adorned the highest and most sensitive positions in government. But even if India were a Hindu state, to regard it as inimical purely

on the grounds of religion would be a gross misreading of Hinduism which is not an aggressive, proselytising faith.

*Myth No 4* is that India is averse to good neighbourly ties with Pakistan. This is a travesty of facts. India has always been deeply committed to improved ties with Pakistan. Towards this end, it has over the years made many concessions and gestures to Pakistan. Some of these may be enumerated as follows:

- Payment of Rs 75 crore to Pakistan on account of division of assets of undivided India, Rs 20 crore were paid in August 1947 and balance of Rs 55 crore in January 1948 even as Pakistan was attacking India.
- Non-pursuit of its claims vis-a-vis Pakistan for non-payment of the latter's partition debt of Rs 300 crore.<sup>8</sup>
- Conclusion of an enormously generous Indus Waters Treaty in 1960 under which India, though it had 40 percent of the catchment area, agreed to an allocation of only 20 percent of the flows of the Indus waters. In addition, India paid Pakistan over 62 million pounds sterling for building replacement canals, reservoirs, etc. as per Article V of the Indus Waters Treaty.
- Following the 1971 conflict, India negotiated an agreement with Pakistan at Shimla in 1972 for across the board normalisation of relations rather than imposing a settlement. In the process, India returned the 5,386 square miles of Pakistani territory captured by it in Sindh (5,000 square miles) and Punjab (386 square miles) without exacting a *quid pro quo*.<sup>9</sup>
- India obtained "the concurrence of Bangladesh" <sup>10</sup> for the return of nearly 92,000 Pakistani prisoners of war held by it under the joint India-Bangladesh Command without asking for anything in return.
- India facilitated Pakistan's entry into the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1979<sup>11</sup> and its reentry into the Commonwealth in 1989.
- India has unilaterally accorded Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment to Pakistan for import of the latter's goods to India.

Clearly the jettisoning of such negative myths about India is necessary for any genuine improvement in India-Pakistan ties. Notwithstanding Pakistan's unrelenting hostility towards India, the latter continues to seek normalisation of relations through dialogue.

## **Multiple Tracks of Engagement**

India-Pakistan engagement has been taking place on multiple tracks which fall into the following four broad categories:

- Track 1, or official level dialogue, conducted between the two countries at the summit level, the ministerial level and amongst their respective diplomats and bureaucrats. Such dialogue has often been in the full public gaze but, occasionally, has also been discreet.
- Track 1.5 dialogue, better known as the back channel, is the officially sanctioned dialogue on behalf of the respective governments but away from the public gaze.
- Track 2 diplomacy which constitutes unofficial interaction amongst opinion-makers constituting former officials and military personnel, academicians, journalists and even politicians. Such interaction may be with or without government approval and its outcome may or may not be fed into the respective governments.
- Track 3 diplomacy which is in the nature of people-to-people exchanges.

### **Official Level or Track 1 Dialogue**

This ranges from expert level meetings, as between the Indus Water Commissioners, to summit level meetings between the leaders of the two countries. The point persons for India-Pakistan relations and for the conduct of dialogue amongst them are the foreign secretaries.

Through the 1980s and right upto the January 1994, the Dixit-Shahryar Khan talks, the India-Pakistan foreign secretary level dialogue, was without a pre-determined and standard written agenda, with each side free to raise any issue. Of course, each side was made aware in advance of what the other would raise. Discussions at these meetings were wide ranging and occasionally even covered regional issues. The foreign secretary level talks were supplemented on a need basis by secretary/expert level talks which had their own autonomous life.

Following the January 1994 India-Pakistan foreign secretary level talks, Pakistan indicated an unwillingness to continue them unless India gave some substantive signals to meet its demands on Kashmir, notably de-induction of Indian troops and the holding of a plebiscite. In adopting this approach, which resulted in a three-year hiatus in the foreign secretary level talks, Pakistan, perhaps, felt that the breakdown in talks would serve it well in internationalising the Kashmir issue, so important at a time when it was seeking a Kashmir oriented resolution against India in the Human Rights Commission and the First and Third Committees in the UN.

Through 1996, much work was done quietly, away from the glare of publicity, at the initiative of the Indian foreign secretary to get the dialogue process back on

track.<sup>12</sup> The advent of the Nawaz Sharif and Gujral governments greatly helped this process and in March and June 1997, the broad parameters of the composite dialogue process were hammered out in formal foreign secretary level talks. Final shape was given to these in a meeting between the foreign secretaries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly Session in September 1998.

The price that India paid for getting Pakistan to the table was agreeing to give a high profile to the Kashmir issue, through a structured and written agenda which provided that it would be discussed in a separate meeting at the foreign secretary level and prior to the meetings on all the other issues barring those on peace and security.<sup>13</sup> While not accepting Pakistan's view that progress on any issue should be hostage to progress on Kashmir, it conceded the point that all issues should be addressed in an "integrated manner" and progress thereon would be coordinated and monitored by the foreign secretaries. It was India's hope that once the dialogue was underway, progress in some areas at least would become possible and thereby the normalisation of relations would be facilitated.

The India-Pakistan joint statement of September 23, 1998, issued following the meeting of the two foreign secretaries in New York, identified the issues of concern to be addressed by the two sides and the levels at which this would be done in the following terms:

- Peace and security including confidence-building measures (CBMs) – foreign secretaries.
- Jammu and Kashmir – foreign secretaries.
- Siachen – defence secretaries.
- Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project – secretaries, water & power.
- Sir Creek – additional secretary (defence)/surveyors general.
- Terrorism and drug trafficking – home/interior secretaries.
- Economic and commercial cooperation – commerce secretaries.
- Promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields – culture secretaries.

In pursuance of the aforesaid joint statement, the first substantive round of the composite dialogue was initiated with the foreign secretaries having separate meetings on first and second items cited above, in October 1998, followed by meetings between the concerned officials on the remaining six issues. The review of these discussions scheduled for the first half of February 1999 did not take place because of Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan that month and the subsequent deterioration in ties between the two countries. Kargil, the military coup in Pakistan, the IAC aircraft hijacking to Kandahar, Agra, the terrorist attacks,

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most notably on the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Assembly and the Indian Parliament, Operation Parakram, etc stymied the composite dialogue process, led to curtailment of existing links and brought the two countries to the brink of war.

The composite dialogue process, in its present form, could only be resumed in June 2004 after a thaw in India-Pakistan relations in the preceding year, marked by moves to restore and enhance contacts and connectivity, together with the decision of the two countries to observe a ceasefire along their borders. The immediate impulse for a renewal of the composite dialogue came from the Vajpayee-Musharraf meeting on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit in Islamabad in January 2004. The joint press statement issued thereafter not only refers to their decision to resume the composite dialogue but also to a clear undertaking by Musharraf that he would “not permit any territory under Pakistan’s control to be used to support terrorism in any manner.”<sup>14</sup> It is clear from the joint statement issued by the two foreign secretaries following their meeting in February 2004 that the agenda

and modalities of the dialogue process would remain the same as hitherto except on the following two counts:

- The linkage between progress on other issues to that on Kashmir, so keenly desired by Pakistan and earlier to an extent ensured by the words that all issues be addressed in an “integrated manner”, was attenuated as these words did not figure in the joint statement issued by the foreign secretaries in February 2004.
- The review process earlier kept at the foreign secretary level was elevated to the foreign minister level in deference to Pakistan’s demands.

Between 2004 and 2008, four rounds of the composite dialogue were completed, and the two countries had barely commenced the fifth round when

the 26/11 terror attacks by the Lashkar-e-Taiyyeba (LeT) violated the solemn assurances given at the highest levels by Pakistan and thereby eroded the basis of the dialogue viz. talks must take place in a terror-free environment.

The main achievements of the composite dialogue from 2004 and 2008 may be listed as improving the international ratings of the two countries, improving the atmospherics between the two countries, introduction of several CBMs designed primarily to enhance India-Pakistan contacts and connectivity, including across the Line of Control (LoC), a 500 percent increase in trade and a tangible decline in infiltration and ceasefire violations.

It may, however, be noted that despite all the hype about increased people-to-people links and connectivity, the actual movement of people between the two countries is still well below the levels prevailing before the closure of the Indian mission in Karachi in 1994. Prior to that, India was issuing over 20,000 visas per month as against around 10,000 after the much vaunted CBMs were put in place. It is also an unpleasant reality that even as the composite dialogue was underway, through 2004 and 2008, there were as many as 21 major terrorist actions against India, including the 2005 bombings in a Delhi market and the 2006 Mumbai train attacks.

Moreover, apart from not satisfactorily addressing India's concerns on terrorism, the composite dialogue also showed no success in resolving any of the big ticket items namely J&K, Siachen, Tulbul, and Sir Creek. Progress on each of these issues was stymied by Pakistan's inflexibility. On J&K, it continued to work for a change of the status quo adverse to India; on Siachen, while agreeable to a pullback of forces of both sides, it was averse to authenticating on maps the positions occupied by its forces; on Tulbul, despite having cleared the project at a technical level in 1991, it held that it was not within the parameters of the Indus Waters Treaty; and on Sir Creek, it refused to accept a settlement as per international norms along the mid-channel of the creek and insisted upon its maximalist position that the boundary should be on the eastern bank of the creek.

### **Back Channel or Track 1.5**

The back channel came into vogue in November 1998 when RK Mishra and Niaz Naik engaged each other on behalf of their principals Prime Minister Vajpayee and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The Musharraf coup derailed the back channel and the same was only revived following the January 2004 Vajpayee-Musharraf meeting, with the Indian side being represented by the National Security Adviser (NSA) Brajesh Mishra and the Pakistani side by Principal Secretary Tariq Aziz.

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While the back channel has continued since, albeit with changed interlocutors, it has been comatose as a result of the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai.

While the composite dialogue undertaken in the public gaze gave the participants little opportunity to stray from the standard official line, the back channel which operated much more discreetly, could explore out-of-the-box ideas. Accordingly, the real business for bringing about a paradigm shift in India-Pakistan relations was being attempted on the back channel. Thus, not just Musharraf but also Dr Manmohan Singh<sup>15</sup> and former Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri have publicly acknowledged that the two sides were close to a settlement on J&K in 2007. While the details of this settlement are still unknown, it is believed that it contained elements of Musharraf's four point-plan – softening the LoC, demilitarisation, self-rule and joint mechanism – as also the Indian position that there can be no change in borders nor can there be any solution based on

communal considerations. However, internal political turmoil in Pakistan in 2007 left Musharraf in no position to go through with the deal and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government has all but repudiated the understanding reached on the back channel.

It is, however, debatable if the purported deal being worked out in the back channel would have been saleable in India. Solutions on such critical issues, to be viable, must enjoy broad consensus within the country or risk rejection. For instance, in working out the composite dialogue process through discreet Track I diplomacy, the Indian leadership of the day had taken on board both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress. This is why the composite dialogue found such ready acceptance in the country and survived successive regimes. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of the settlement being evolved on the back channel and, hence, its acceptability in India would always be suspect. Indeed, even the formalisation of the border along the LoC, which is speculated to be a part of the deal, would be a big concession on the part of

India in the context of its claim to the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir. In this context, one need only recall the unanimous resolution of February 1994 of the Indian Parliament that declared that the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, including the portions of the state under Pakistani and Chinese occupation, was an inalienable part of India.<sup>16</sup>

## **Track 2 Diplomacy**

There is a surfeit of Track 2 diplomacy between India and Pakistan, much of which is financed by external players. The Ford Foundation, some German foundations and Pugwash are in this game. Some of the more prominent Track 2 exercises are the Neemrana Dialogue, set up about two decades ago, and the Chaophraya Dialogue which is of more recent origin, organised by the Jinnah Institute and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Track 2 diplomacy enjoys the advantage of enabling interaction in a relatively unstructured setting between opinion-makers of the two countries who have a degree of access to policy-makers and are not weighed down by the responsibility of office. This is conducive to out of the box thinking to a greater extent than in the case of the back channel. The major advantage of Track 2 is that it enables the participants to get a better perspective of the thinking as well as compulsions of the other side and, therefore can be a useful input to policy-making.

In concrete terms, however, Track 2 deliberations have achieved little. The declarations issued after these deliberations are rarely noted by the two governments. Officials neither keep any record of these meetings nor track them. This attitude is, perhaps, due to the general scepticism within both governments about non-governmental organisation (NGOs). It may also be germane to mention that there is a wide divergence in the nature of participation between the Indian and Pakistani delegates, with the former reflecting the entire spectrum of opinion in the country and the latter sticking, by and large, within a narrow band of the official Pakistani policy.

## **Track 3 Diplomacy or People to People Exchanges**

This is, from the long-term view-point, perhaps second in importance only to the official level engagement, and is the most ignored and underrated in terms of its potential. It includes criss-crossing of the borders by the entire spectrum of society such as divided families and friends, academicians and scholars, lawyers, businessmen, doctors, civil society activists, poets, singers and musicians, actors, film-makers, sports persons, etc. It is something which India

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has all along worked for as it is only through such exchanges that misperceptions in each country about the other can be eradicated and long lasting goodwill fostered.

### **Post 26/11 Scenario**

The 26/11 attacks on Mumbai by the LeT, Pakistan's complicity in them, its reluctance to take any action against the perpetrators, and its failure to shut down the infrastructure of terror, has left little desire in India for renewed engagement with it.

Dr Manmohan Singh has, nevertheless, tirelessly sought to revive the dialogue process even though there is no evidence that Pakistan is serious about addressing India's concerns on terrorism. While his endeavours at Sharm -el- Shaikh in July, 2009 to jump-start the dialogue process by delinking it from terrorism had to be aborted<sup>17</sup>, in the face of adverse public opinion, following the

India-Pakistan foreign secretary level talks of February 2011, it is clear that the stage has been set for their resumption in the near future.<sup>18</sup> Since such an exercise does not enjoy popular support in the country, it could damage his political prospects.

In any case, the key to improved ties between India and Pakistan does not rest on dialogue *per se* but upon a radically changed attitude by the latter towards the former. The prospects of normalisation of relations between the two countries will remain bleak until and unless Pakistan gives up its anti-Indian mindset which is clearly reflected in the Pakistan Army chief's assertion that India poses a bigger threat to the country than the Taliban terror groups.<sup>19</sup>

### **Notes**

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3. Shah Mehmood Qureshi's policy statement in Parliament *The News*, May 5, 2010.
4. From Nehru's Convocation Address at the Aligarh Muslim University as cited in the *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, Vol 5, pp. 25-26 under the caption "A Common Cultural Inheritance."
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15. <http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2009/May/3/deal-that-wasn-t-58.asp> for Dr Manmohan Singh's vision on relations with Pakistan
16. See text of the Indian Parliament's resolution on Kashmir, at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/parliament\\_resolution\\_on\\_Jammu\\_and\\_Kashmir.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/document/papers/parliament_resolution_on_Jammu_and_Kashmir.htm)
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