

# India-Pakistan Peace Process: Lessons from the Past

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## Abstract

*The India-Pakistan relations have been marred by consistent rivalry. The post-independence animosity over a period of time evolved into an intractable conflict, including four wars, the one in Kargil under the nuclear umbrella. Historically, the peace talks between India and Pakistan have not led to end in conflict, nor has it reshaped the way two countries perceive each other in the long term; however, in the short term, it has led to decline in violence, cross border infiltration, less terrorist attacks in Kashmir and across the India. The receding violence helped India to focus on its economic and development policy. The article aims to look at the episodic peace talks under various Prime Ministers that tried to reduce tension between the two neighbours.*

## Introduction

The longstanding hostility between India and Pakistan over a range of issues including territory and security has forced the two countries into an intractable conflict. The successful conclusion of negotiation on and political settlement of these issues have been marred by a range of factors—lack of trust, political instability, historical grievances, and above all lack of political will and risk-taking abilities by the respective governments. Various attempts in the past including the diplomatic process in 1987-89 and recently attempted composite dialogue have had helped reduce tensions and prevent a return to the climate of extreme hostility and outright war, but had failed to resolve two of the most important contentious issues — Kashmir and Terrorism. Some of the structural and institutional factors that played dominant role in constraining the

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policy choices were the dominant role of the military in Pakistan, conflicting interests, sovereignty issue of Kashmir, war in Afghanistan etc. These factors were key in restricting India to pursue a proactive policy of constructive engagement with Pakistan with the objective of cementing a durable structure of peace and stability in South Asia.

### **Past is Prologue**

Several Prime Ministers, including the incumbent PM Narendra Modi, had tried their hands in mending ties with the Pakistan. In the past, Rajiv Gandhi could be credited for attempting to revive India's relations with Pakistan during his tenure as an Indian Prime Minister. While India and Pakistan shared a small stint of comprehensive dialogue and confidence building measures during the Rajiv-Benazir Bhutto period; Rajiv Gandhi had initiated this process of extending hand of friendship to the leadership of Zia-ul-Haq.

This was amply clear during the Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq's visit to India in February 1987. During the press conference, Zia-ul-Haq on return from India admitted that his trip had been quite a success in further defusing tension between the two countries. In fact, he added, recent political contacts plus the 04 February accord on troop's pull-out in one sector had gone a long way in minimising the chances of any conflict between the two countries. He also assured cooperation with India in curbing smuggling, narcotics, and the movement of terrorists across the border.<sup>1</sup> The 04 February 1987 accord was an outcome of extensive consultation between the two sides to defuse tension, to prevent escalation, and to deescalate the situation along the Indian Pakistan border. Despite the fact that both sides took some honest measures including meeting of top officials in the coming months, Indo-Pakistan relations hardly saw any meaningful improvement, before it started to drift towards mistrust and suspicion.<sup>2</sup> It worsen after the President Zia's reported statement on Kashmir during his visit to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir on 20 July 1987. He, in his speech, claimed that Pakistan would not allow Kashmir issue to be consigned to the cold storage nor would it adopt apologetic attitude on this. He also reiterated Quaid-e Azam stand that Kashmir was the jugular vein of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> In an interview to the BBC on 16 August 1987, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi accused Pakistan

of direct interference in Punjab by training and arming extremists. Amidst tension between the two sides on the issue of insurgency in Punjab, role of Pakistan in Afghanistan, the two sides had some success in discussing some of the major irritants in their relations.<sup>4</sup>

Rajiv Gandhi visited Islamabad twice, once to attend the SAARC Summit in December 1988 and the other, on 17 July 1989 for a bilateral visit. This bilateral visit of an Indian PM to Pakistan took place almost after thirty years, if one were to discount the visits of Rajiv Gandhi to Pakistan for the funeral of Badshah Khan in January 1988 and for the SAARC Summit in December 1988. However, the ouster of Benazir Bhutto in 1990 and later, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 crippled the process, and could never revive despite attempts by former Indian Prime Minister late PV Narasimha Rao. The rise of violence by terrorists after the incitement, money and weapons, and training from Pakistan nearly shut the doors on any possible prospect of settlement of major issues between India and Pakistan. By the end of 1994, talks completely collapsed.

It was at the SAARC Summit on 12 May 1997 at Male, Maldives, after the gap of 3 years that the two sides formally agreed to the idea of a structured dialogue or the Composite Dialogue Process (CDP)<sup>5</sup> when Indian PM, IK Gujral, met his Pakistani counterpart PM Nawaz Sharif. Within 09 months Gujral met Pakistani Prime Minister 4 times at various platforms and reiterated his stand for a peaceful solution to India-Pakistan conflict. Later, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Indian foreign secretary met with Pakistan's foreign secretary on 23 September 1998 and agreed to address the outstanding issues substantively and specifically through the agreed mechanism in an integrated manner under the levels indicated<sup>6</sup>:

- Peace and Security including CBMs at the level of Foreign Secretaries.
- Jammu and Kashmir Foreign Secretaries.
- Siachen Defence Secretaries.
- Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Secretaries, Water & Power Project.

- Sir Creek Additional Secretary (Defence)/Surveyors General.
- Terrorism and Drug Trafficking Home/Interior Secretaries.
- Economic and Commercial Cooperation Commerce Secretaries.
- Promotion of friendly exchanges Secretaries, Culture.

The mechanism and the levels became the template for future India Pakistan composite dialogue.

### **Composite Dialogue 2004-2008**

The years preceding 2001, witnessed intense tension between India and Pakistan. The deepening of faultlines between India and Pakistan and the surge in the level of violence in Kashmir were major factors which forced the two nations to engage in a dialogue process for a peaceful future of the region. Furthermore, the United States had also nudged both parties towards renewing a bilateral dialogue. Various foreign governments, including that of the United States, have urged mutual restraint along the Pakistan-India border, and requested that President Musharraf stop Kashmiri militants from crossing the border into India.<sup>7</sup> Major breakthrough came during the 2004 SAARC Summit paving way for the composite dialogue at highest bureaucratic level. The composite dialogue between India and Pakistan to resolve outstanding issues reached sensitive and important stage in 2005-06 with two sides getting more pragmatic and sincere in approach towards a lasting solution for a wide range of contentious issues.

The goodwill gesture shown by two sides after the devastating earthquake on both side of the LoC translated into further confidence building measures in 2006. Despite the 2006 Mumbai terror attacks, India and Pakistan kept space open for dialogue. During 2004-07, the two sides were involved in hectic diplomacy; composite dialogue was backed by backchannel negotiations. The two sides narrowed divergences and focused on convergence to the point that they came close to a framework agreement for resolution, comprising self-governance, phased demilitarisation on both sides of the LOC, and over time, joint development institutions.<sup>8</sup> For several years, special envoys from Pakistan and India had been holding talks in hotel rooms in Bangkok, Dubai,

and London.<sup>9</sup> The President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of India, had encouraged the negotiators to seek a 'paradigm shift' in relations between the two nations. The two principal envoys—for Pakistan, a college classmate of Musharraf's named Tariq Aziz, and, for India, a Russia specialist named Satinder Lambah—were developing what diplomats refer to as a 'non-paper' on Kashmir, a text without names or signatures which can serve as a deniable but detailed basis for a deal.<sup>10</sup>

Although the talks moved on at end of the 2007, internal political crisis in Pakistan and the growing international clamour over restoring democracy had started to mount monumental pressure on Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and reflected in the dialogue process with no major breakthrough achieved. Same year, discussing his vision of future South Asia, Indian PM Manmohan Singh in his FICCI address on 08 January 2007 said, "Retaining our respective national identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dinner in Kabul".<sup>11</sup> Indian PM clearly suggested that India is keenly interested in mending ties with Pakistan. Two days before the foreign secretary level meet in Islamabad, Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam said, "On Jammu and Kashmir it is important that we now move from CBMs to dispute resolution. We believe that an early resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir issue will pave the way for durable peace in this region and bring about greater cooperation in South Asia".<sup>12</sup> Kashmir despite, many measures remained the bone of contention.

In 2007, after two years of negotiations, Lambah and Aziz reached a solution deemed acceptable to all parties — India, Pakistan and the Gemini-twin Kashmiris. The final document would have been signed by Manmohan Singh and Musharraf, had the Pakistani lawyers' movement not weakened and then emasculated Musharraf. He asked the Indians for time, then an extension. The Indians waited, and finally gave up hope.<sup>13</sup> On Indian side, 26/11 Mumbai attacks derailed both front and back-channel negotiation between India and Pakistan. The attack closed the door over any possibility of bilateral relations, dialogue, and positive movement.

The downfall of Musharraf, the 26 November 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai eroded all the possibilities of a negotiated settlement of contentious issues between India and Pakistan. By

the end of the 2008, it was clear that the peace process was unravelling and the two countries were unable to regain trust and start it refresh.

The talks under various nomenclatures continued till 2012. The two sides, apart from the conventional issues, also included counter terrorism, Mumbai attack trials and humanitarian issues which were to be overseen at the home secretary level.<sup>14</sup> Along with peace and security, CBMs, and Jammu and Kashmir, cultural exchanges also came under the purview of foreign secretary. In the second round of the resumed dialogue, Secretary, Water of Government of India and Secretary, Water and Power of Government of Pakistan met in New Delhi on 27-28 March 2012 to discuss Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project. Home Secretary level talks were held on Counter-Terrorism (including progress on Mumbai trial), Narcotics Control and Humanitarian issues in Islamabad on 24-25 May 2012.<sup>15</sup> In January 2013, India accuses Pakistan of 'barbaric and inhuman' behaviour after two Indian soldiers are killed in a firefight in Kashmir and at least one of the bodies is mutilated. Indian Prime Minister Singh says there can be no "business as usual".<sup>16</sup>

### **India Pakistan Relations: 2015-2022**

Days before the change of guard in India in 2014, the former Pakistani Army Chief described Kashmir as the 'jugular vein' of his country, saying the issue should be resolved in accordance with the wishes of Kashmiris and in line with United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions for peace in the region.<sup>17</sup> In days to come, newly elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to be sworn in as India's 15th Prime Minister. Despite the provocation, India invited heads of the state of the SAARC countries for his swearing in ceremony. A day later, Narendra Modi held talks with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif and stressed his desire for better relations and trade. Later, in 2015, Indian PM made a surprise visit to Lahore on Sharif's birthday and the wedding of his grand-daughter.

However, tension started to escalate after one of the deadliest attacks on the Indian Army base in the garrison town of Uri killed 18 soldiers.<sup>18</sup> In less than two weeks after the Uri attack, Indian Army conducted 'surgical strikes' on suspected militants in Pakistan, suspects of preparing to infiltrate into the part of Kashmir it



controls.<sup>19</sup> The increase in terrorist activities, attacks on Indian forces in Jammu & Kashmir led to sharp rise in India-Pakistan tension. On 14 February 2019, 40 security personnel of CRPF were killed following a suicide bomb attack on a CRPF convoy in south Kashmir's Lethpora village of Pulwama district, along Srinagar-Jammu national highway. In a retaliatory strike, the Indian Air Force carried out an airstrike in Pakistan's Balakot on 26 February 2019, targeting terrorist camps.<sup>20</sup> According to Rohan Joshi, a fellow at the Takshashila Institution, the attack appears to have been timed to test the resolve of India's leadership and of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a time when he and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are in the midst of a contentious election season.<sup>21</sup>

Historically, the peace talks between India and Pakistan have not led to end in conflict, nor has it reshaped the way two countries perceive each other in the long term; however, in the short term, it has led to decline in violence, cross border infiltration, less terrorist attacks in Kashmir or across the India. The receding violence has helped India to focus its economic and domestic policy. Remember, India had done very well economically during the period of the composite dialogue in 2004-2008. Therefore, both India and Pakistan have limited, mid to long-term incentive to commence some kind of dialogue. The peace process of 2001-2008 may have some positive lessons to imbibe.

On the flip side, the long period of talks, followed by incremental positive steps and then the breakdown of the talks has exposed the critical gap between the institutional and organisational level attempts for reconciliation and ground level reality. The fact that the return of terrorist attacks on India, often, is blamed upon the non-state actors, and enemy of peace; it is very clear that the survival of non-state actors and their grand actions can't be possible without the support of state actors. The real challenge, therefore, for the India Pakistan is to address all the elements of the peace process which, in turn, would require uncharacteristic commitment from Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

India and Pakistan have opened channels for negotiation on Indus Water Treaty. The Pakistani delegation was here in India in May to hold dialogue on Indus water. Indian delegation was in Pakistan

in February 2022 for Permanent Indus Commission talks in Islamabad. Pakistan delegation was in India for multilateral talks on terrorism as part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Regional Anti-Terror Structure. The two sides, in February 2021, have held discussions regarding establishing a mechanism for hotline contact among both nations. Both sides had also agreed to a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC). The change of political leadership in Pakistan may open space for more bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, which in turn could lead to establishing mechanism and structure for resumption of talks between them. The role of the political actors, bureaucracy and back-channel diplomacy had played very critical role in achieving limited goals in the past. It has led to overcoming the phase of uncertainty between India and Pakistan, and had given some clarity and direction to the talks.

Therefore, it is important to understand the deployment of larger structural, procedural, organisational/institutional components, and enforcement mechanisms of peace process. It will help to give better insight into how the processes and measures adopted between India and Pakistan created overall attitude and mind-set of the two countries at public and policy level. Secondly, what were the main achievements of process? Also, what were the areas where the two sides had reached near consensus? The lessons from the past, particularly the composite dialogue between 2004-2008, and the underlying initiatives and processes started from 2001 onwards may provide better procedural understanding and way forward to conduct the talks.

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