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India-Pakistan relations and South Asian Security

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Following an invitation to this conference from the Secretary General of the Pugwash Conferences, it was agreed that I should give a summary of my views on the subject of this conference for advance circulation. A ten page summary follows.

I have limited my views to the latest elections in Pakistan to the National Assembly, and in India to the state assembly of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, both in the first week of October this year, because these are two of the most important events that have taken place in the two countries since top level political dialogue between them broke down a couple of years ago.

In this limited field I have also further confined my comments to the following aspects of each of the two elections:

1. [Main features of the elections for:](#)

- A) Pakistan
- B) India

2. [Main consequences of the elections:](#)

A) Main consequences of the Pakistan elections for:

- i) Pakistan
- ii) India

B) Main consequences of the J & K elections for:

- i) Pakistan
- ii) India

C) Main consequences of the elections for the prospects of South Asian dialogue (the main subject of this conference)

3. [Some suggestions for improving the prospects.](#)

1. Main features of the election for:

□A) PAKISTAN.

(i) It was held in circumstances which had the following unfavourable features:

It was held when the President and Chief of the Army staff, General Musharraf, had taken all democratic teeth out of the Constitution and insured himself against the consequences of any adverse verdict, a fact denounced by many foreign observers,

including those sent by the European Union. Also, it was held when he had further insured himself against even the possibility of such a verdict by electorally crippling the two most important opposition leaders in Pakistan, former Prime Ministers Mrs Benazir Bhutto and Mr Nawaz Sharif, who alone had also been Prime Ministers for more than one term. Their participation in politics was severely restricted by certain decisions taken by him when, as chief of the Pakistan Army he deposed the Prime Minister of the day, Mr Nawaz Sharif, and put the country back under full military rule. A short time before the election on October 10, General Musharraf also imposed similar restrictions on the Pakistan People's Party, the party of Mrs Benazir Bhutto, and the Muslim League, the party of Mr Nawaz Sharif, which are the two main opposition parties. Left standing in the name of these parties was a splinter of each, considered acceptable to the regime. These events, coupled with the low turn out of voters, crippled the credibility of the election even before it was held, and the outcome, a forgone conclusion as it was, received a very poor rating at home and abroad.

(ii) The opposition space left after the sidelining of the two main opposition parties and leaders has been occupied in the election by some ultra conservative and religion based groupings, which in the past had been more active in street battles and violent fights than in parliamentary processes. They had always been seen as violent and fanatical supporters or opponents of various sectarian factions of Islam rather than as true Islamists, closer to the Taliban phenomenon than liberal democracy, closer to what has come to be known as the politics of jihad. In most earlier elections they had been noticed mainly as noisy agitators, more able to motivate crowds than voters. But in this election their joint front, MMA, has emerged as the third largest element in the National Assembly, the majority party in NWFP, and the biggest party by far in Baluchistan. These two of the four provinces of Pakistan border Afghanistan, have been the cradle of the Taliban movement, and next only to Afghanistan have been of the greatest concern to the international alliance against terrorism. Their off-shoots in the extreme east of Pakistan have been of concern to China, just as those in north-western Pakistan and in northern Afghanistan have worried Russia and its neighbours in Central Asia.

B. INDIA.

The elections in Jammu and Kashmir were unprecedented in some ways and most unusual in some. They were unprecedented because for the first time in the state the ballot box clearly gave a negative verdict, and the government quit. This had happened innumerable times in other states of the Indian Union, and has been happening at the national level also, more often than not, in the past quarter century. But in Jammu and Kashmir it has happened for the very first time, now.

In the earliest elections in the state the government of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had been truly popular and for this reason invincible, and though his popularity might have declined in later years he bounced back in the mid-1970s when a genuine

political process began once again under a good political settlement between him and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This mantle was creditably carried by his son and successor, Farooq Abdullah, who won some good elections even when Mrs Gandhi herself actively campaigned against him in the state. In later years however he invited trouble by subverting elections to perpetuate his rule, raised a storm of protest from the people of the state, allowed the administration to be ruined by corruption, inefficiency and insensitivity, and now the wheel of democracy has finally turned against him.

So also have the fortunes of war. New Delhi had turned a blind eye on his doings in Kashmir so long as India faced a credible security threat from Pakistan through Kashmir, either a direct threat on the battlefield, as in the attack Pakistan mounted surreptitiously in the mountains of Kargil, or an indirect threat by stoking an armed insurgency against India. But Pakistan gradually lost out on both fronts. It was fought out of Kargil, and soon afterwards found itself on the wrong side of the line in the politics of Kashmir. The majority of the people of Kashmir are not looking forward to being conquered by Pakistan, whether directly by conquest or indirectly through bands of fanatical jihadis, whose idea of Islam is very different from the gentler, more eclectic version practiced in Kashmir. Most of them are united behind a desire for a peaceful life of development after the resolution of an unending dispute. They are divided only on the best way to get there and only in that sense have an interest in Indo-Pakistan problems. A small but vociferous minority does support Pakistan for what it is, and drives others by the fear of its guns. But it has been checkmated by the spectacle of Pakistan's defeat in battle and the success of the Indian security forces against the militants and terrorists.

The outcome of the latest election is a consequence, blunted though it was to some extent by the explosive power displayed by the militants on the eve and the morning of elections and at the doorstep of polling zones, particularly in some urban areas of high population density. Seeing the good voter turn out during the first round of elections in Kashmir the militants turned up the heat of their violent eruptions during the remaining two rounds. They succeeded in scaring away a higher turn out in many areas, although there were urban pockets of core support for the militants in which voters stayed away out of conviction. But even so the overall turnout in Kashmir reached 44% which, considering the circumstances, is reasonably high, compared with the turn out in the state as a whole, which was a couple points higher, and in the Hindu majority province of Jammu, which was still higher by a few points.

This may surprise those who have convinced themselves that the only question in Kashmir is whether the state should remain a part of India or leave it to join Pakistan (or at least to become independent). Even supporters of the Pakistan or the independence option never raised it up front and it did not figure in the platform of any participating party. There was nothing in the electoral rules which could have prevented them from doing so, and no one complained that he was debarred for doing it.

However, the issue began to emerge, and that it did significantly, as the campaigns got under way. And as it did it gave an added significance to the statistics of the outcome. Most of those who boycotted the election by intention, or tried to intimidate others into boycotting it, were groups and parties known to be against any election under the Indian Constitution. All those who voted or campaigned in favour of doing so were either declared supporters of the Indian connection or were declaring they were more interested in good governance than in the colour of the government. Therefore if you take away the usual abstentions from any election for non-political reasons, the percentage of those who made an anti-India statement by abstaining is significantly lower than the percentage of those who made an opposite statement by casting their votes, and decided to do so knowing full well the physical dangers they would face in doing it.

For these reasons it is even more significant than it might have been otherwise, that a large majority of the vote in the whole of the state, and a clear majority even in Kashmir was polled by parties, such as the National Conference and the Congress, and independents such as those who had jumped in as individuals only because they had been denied the ticket by either of these parties, whose support for the state's accession to India is unambiguous and unconditional. Another large chunk was polled by a significant new party, the People's Democratic Party, whose top priority is not secession but open door and open ended talks with all who are committed to a peaceful resolution of the "problem", and no political party, whether based in the state or anywhere else in the country is opposed to the essentials of the PDP position.

2. Main consequences of the elections:

□A) Main consequences of the Pakistan elections for:

i) Pakistan

This election has redoubled the process which has been going on in Pakistan for a long time by which the domestic politics of Pakistan have been getting radicalised in favour of religious extremism. The process began in a milder form many years ago when Pakistan, failing to dislodge India from Kashmir militarily, in the wars of 1947-48 and 1965, stepped up Islamic fervour in South Asian politics as its roadway into Kashmir. Ignoring the entire territorial logic of the manner in which it came to be carved out of India, Pakistan began to emphasise its religious affinity with the majority of Kashmiris as the reason why Kashmir should have acceded to Pakistan in the first place, and having missed that bus must now be allowed to do so via a plebiscite. Pakistan's domestic politics were thus given a communal slant which became more and more steep with the passage of time.

On this basis Pakistan claimed victory when the UN resolutions of the late 1940s were passed. Unfortunately the simplicity of this propaganda plus its own strategic

interests in the Cold War, which had already begun, misled the United States and its Allies into believing that perhaps it would be useful for them if the strategic area of Kashmir, so close to the underbelly of the Soviet Union, went to such a staunch ally in the Cold War as Pakistan had become.

So strong was the *real politique* of this self-interest that it persuaded the Allies to ignore one basic fact about these resolutions: that India accepted them, and Pakistan killed them while pretending to accept them. The resolutions laid down three essential conditions which Pakistan must fulfill before India could be asked to hold a plebiscite. Pakistan violated each of the three conditions then, continued to violate them – and continues right up to this day – that the UN itself was driven to the conclusion that the resolutions could no longer be carried out.

But in the meantime the domestic politics of Pakistan had been cast into such a hard mould of religion that it became the fulcrum of the country's domestic as well as South Asian politics. As if that were not bad enough, the two sweeps of war that have swept through Afghanistan, one by and the other against the Taliban version of Islam, locked the whole of the north-west of South Asia into a wider arc of the same mould, and the elections in Pakistan have done more of the same to Pakistan because of the success of the extreme right wing parties, which has been described above.

It is difficult to tell how these parties will behave. Parties often behave differently when aspiring to be in the harness of office than when fated only to be in the opposition. Even so, their leaders have lost no time in floating their plans for Pakistan and Afghanistan. What one of their top leaders, the chief of the Jamaat-I-Islami, Qazi Hussein Ahmad said as recently as on October 20 should worry both Islamabad and Kabul. And Washington no less, where experts on South Asia must wonder how President Musharraf will juggle with issues of survival while trying to keep the MMA in good humour and at same time be an effective partner of President Bush in the campaign against the Al Qaida, which Bush wishes to root out in NWFP among other places. He could of course tempt Musharraf by making him a more visible partner in the unfolding American design of refashioning the whole oil rich part of the Muslim world, extending right up into Central Asia. This was also the unrealised dream of General-President Zia, who seems to be a role model for Musharraf. But that should be more of worry for those capitals than for New Delhi and Srinagar.

ii) India

What India has to watch more closely is whether President Musharraf will yield to the temptation of easing MMA's pressure upon him by letting, or even encouraging it to divert its attention to Kashmir. This had been the traditional destination of fanatical raiders from Pakistan, going all the way back to the days of the partition of India. But it was tested out more recently also when the collapse of the Taliban regime in

Afghanistan forced Pakistan to find space for the retreating Taliban who were of Pakistani origins and had earlier been pressed into service in Afghanistan. It was noticeable for instance that as their rout in Afghanistan gathered pace there was an increase in the number of militants being pushed into Kashmir from the Pakistan side.

A) Main consequences of the J and K elections for:

i) Pakistan

The elections in J&K are a far reaching political parallel to the India-Pakistan wars of 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and the Kargil conflict in 1998. Though the meaning was understood only slowly by those who needed to understand it quickest, that clear meaning of these wars was that the J&K state cannot be wrested out of India by military means. Now it has been shown by this election that subversion will not do it either whether it is practiced in the name of religion or self-determination. Nor with the new weapons of militancy and terrorism stoked in from outside, however diligently. In fact the more that the militancy in Kashmir was seen to have a foreign face the more it lost ground, and lost it faster than it had been gained. The foreign faced militancy split in the early months of 2001, and barely eighteen months later it stood disowned in this election by the majority of the people of Kashmir. The conflict between India and Pakistan will be resolved, whenever or if ever it is, through patient negotiations in which agreements arrived at every at any stage are honoured in the next, not rejected because the regime in either country has changed its colour or uniform.

ii) India

For close upon half a century there was a debate in India between two schools of thought about the best route for reaching a solution of this “problem”, whatever it might really be. One school said “solve your problem with Pakistan and the ‘Kashmir problem’ will go away.” The other said “solve your problem with the people of Kashmir and ‘Pakistan problem’ will go away, no matter who created it and why.” This election has effectively ended that debate. It has been replaced by the realisation that “Kashmir” is no more a problem than are many other parts of this vast and varied country. Those ‘problems’, were better resolved when they were fairly handled and truly democratically, be they problems of linguistic, ethnic, political or communal ‘separatism’ than when we played tricks with the people concerned, so can the ‘Kashmir problem’ be, and then the ‘Pakistan problem’ will also fall into place, with or without any outside ‘assistance.’

This is because this election has shown, not just again but more convincingly than anything had before, that the ‘problem’ is not with the political status of the state but of democratic rights, and the right of the people to have decent governance, or at least as decent as most people have in this part of the world. The voter shed few tears over

the election being held under the overall jurisdiction of the 'Indian' Election Commission instead of under the exclusive jurisdiction of the state election as it would have been at one time. But he was glad they were fair.

C) Main consequences of the elections for the prospects of South Asian dialogue (the main subject of this conference)

If the result of the election in Pakistan is going to be an increased pressure upon India through reinforced intrusions by militants who have to be diverted out of their country, as it might be under the scenario discussed earlier, then both countries can say a long good-bye to a dialogue. Or if PDP in Kashmir, disappointed by what is happening on the political chess board as these lines are written, discovers new things to do. Then any other "South Asian Dialogue" will have to be given some other name. But that might well not be so. If the worst case scenarios which are being cooked for Iraq are really what is going to be served up, then all other debates will have to be suspended till better times. But if this is not going to be our fate and better sense does get another chance, then prospects can be a lot better and quite soon, depending upon how Indian and Pakistani authorities respond to the many good suggestions which have come from many sources. To these a few more are added below.

3. Some suggestions for improving the prospects.

A) Pakistan should now accept the advice publicly given it by its most trusted friend, China, that when an important problem proves more difficult to solve, a beginning should be made with less difficult ones. Their solution improves the chances of solutions being found for the most difficult.

B) Now that the political dimension of the Indian position is also well defended, in addition to the military dimension which has been secure for more than three decades, and both have been made safe by India by its own efforts, without depending on anyone's help and despite the present helplessness of its most proven friend, Russia, India should stop worrying about pin pricks. What remains now of raids from across the border are pin pricks. The loss of innocent lives they inflict are tragic, but do not threaten any serious aspect of the Indian position. They no longer justify India's formerly justified position that it will not talk with Pakistan unless cross border terrorism ends. India can well enough deal with, and punish as necessary, any serious military threat or political manoeuvre by Pakistan. The rest is face. Successful talks with Pakistan will only strengthen that position further and make India ready again for the position of centrality in this region which it had acquired prior to the American preoccupation with September 11.

C) If Pakistan is serious when it says it is willing to resume talks with India "at any level at any time and place" it should end the ambiguity in its present position about the Lahore Declaration and the Memorandum of Understanding. These are by far the most comprehensive and valuable bilateral agreements ever reached between the two

countries, by their own mutual efforts, without any prodding and pushing by any third party, and committing both countries to a full programme of well structured talks on all issues between them, prominently including Kashmir but also the useful economic issues which India rightly considers to be very important. If Pakistan wishes to make any changes in the suggested agenda and programme it should put them on the table and initiate discussion on them. Nor should India hesitate to initiate them if Pakistan, publicly or privately as it may choose, conveys its specific readiness to respond. If the talks can produce a better agenda no one would object.

D) Both India and Pakistan have had evidence of how the self- interest of third parties can muddy the waters instead of helping negotiations. As shown by the history of the UN resolutions, some third parties have much to be ashamed of. They should now be more sparing in their efforts.