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## **Some Cooperative Initiatives for India-Pakistan Dialogue and Risk Reduction**

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### **I. Introduction**

For more than five decades, the governments in India and Pakistan have been trying to come up with any agreed formula for resolving their bilateral disputes, particularly the one over Jammu and Kashmir. Each of these efforts have been marked by failure. Among the reasons for such recurrent failure could be the character and intensity of domestic disputes relating to nation-building problems faced by the two countries are manifested in their bi-lateral conflict.

Political constitutions in secular democracies are found to allow a space to express dissent, identify alternatives to political violence, and creates opportunities to address traditional conflicts from a broader perspective as opposed to political systems which are exclusionary in their constitutional character. In any case, lack of liberalism is a common deficit that is found in any society which has domestically turbulent political systems.

Assuming that these two countries: India and Pakistan, are moving at their own pace of change on the continuum of democracy and liberalism, the intention of the paper is not to compare or contrast their performance, but to suggest ways which may facilitate some developments in their pace of change. The paper intends to identify some ideas that could generate opportunities for a purposeful dialogue which is broad enough to encompass problems of dissent, communal distraction or political violence identified with each other.

India and Pakistan have a history of a stalled dialogue punctuated with break-down in talks as these have been developed only along a single politico-military track to Kashmir. Is it possible broaden the participation and agenda issues to give a broader perspective and momentum to this uni-linear track?

### **II. Democracy Development for Peace and Stability**

In what manner would promoting democracy help in conflict avoidance and building stable peace? The basic assumption being made here is that resolution of any conflict that has not been thoroughly and publicly debated, and accepted by a broader public and democratic consensus, is unlikely to be durable. It is very rare that conflicts have been resolved by autocratic regimes without building popular consensus. Although,

autocracies have managed to maintain a tenuous peace for a period of time, but these are either rejected or undermined by the successor regimes.

Indian leaders, duly acknowledge *real politique* and the political power of the Pakistan military. Their assumption that a political deal will stay, even if it has to be made with a military dictator reveals underestimation of public will in Pakistan, which may reject a political solution made by the dictator.<sup>1</sup> That nothing came out of Agra is understandable, since it lacked broader democratic consensus on the both sides.

It is therefore assumed that democracy development, good governance and respect for human rights in South Asia are necessary pre-conditions to achieve both peaceful resolution of conflicts and to prevent armed conflicts from breaking out. It is also assumed that examination of the barriers to democratic control of security sector will encourage questions on lack of democratic accountability encountered in other sectors of public policy-making.

There is no gain saying the fact indigenous intellectual leadership has to provide initiatives and capacities for moving public acceptance towards the idea of peace and stability that should graduate in tandem with democracy development. Unless the South Asian's security sectors are managed in a manner consistent with organizing principles of good governance, the bilateral dialogue will remain security-centric.

The solution to the vexed problem of Jammu and Kashmir will continue to elude as long as democracy deficit attends the basic socio-political conditions in South Asia. It is doubtful if the Indian and Pakistanis would be able to resolve their disputes in the next five decades as well, if not longer. Certainly, as long as they fail to acknowledge that stable peace conditions require stable democratic control over the instruments of the state and a broader public consensus to make peace deals effective in their implementation.

Holding of international symposiums and seminars in Geneva, San Francisco or in different parts of the world cannot expect international cooperation to create endogenous conditions for democratic peace and stability. However, international cooperation can contribute towards creating a public dialogue, public information and knowledge systems which develop a better understanding of necessary conditions for sustaining peace-building initiatives that may be taken up at national or international levels.

### **III. South Asian Civil Society in Public Information and Knowledge Creation**

Lack of public information and knowledge of security issues has been the bane of developing a better public understanding of pluralistic South Asian security concerns. The publicly funded think-tanks have served their governments in explaining what divides these two societies and therefore the two states. What has not been explained

and understood in public domain are common security threats faced by the two societies, which unite our concerns, and possibly our approaches?

Now that the South Asians have become technologically capable of exterminating themselves with their own '*desi*' genocidal technology, the state structures have failed to educate and prepare the future generations for a possible nuclear exchange that can take place in South Asia. The question what will be the effects of such an exchange on its future populations does not need South Asian scientists to work at international institutions to identify the magnitude of death and destruction caused in Bombay, Delhi, Islamabad or Karachi,? It needs public acceptance to promote such investigations.

Mere extrapolation of data developed on models of western cities may be irrelevant or inaccurate at best in the South Asian context. Considering the nature of South Asian agrarian society, the need is to build up public education at the levels of village-communities to understand the devastation and damage from a nuclear exchange to the common agronomy. Better quality of public knowledge is needed to understand the effects of nuclear radiation on our genetic-make up, water pollution, public health, certain collapse of our fragile medical and eco-systems.

As long as our expert perceptions remain rooted to the nuclear damage modeling and decision-making methods developed in the US, the level of ignorance of the general public is understandable, as much as the intellectual vacuum in South Asia. The situation continues as one of the greatest absurdities of our times, which in some ways, explains the logic of the on-going animosity.

#### *Ways to Address Limitations in Public Knowledge*

In order to address limitations in public knowledge, there is a need to examine feasibility of establishing an international university in South Asia dedicated to peace and democracy building under the aegis of the United Nations. It should preferably be located on the international border between the twin cities of Lahore and Amritsar. A broader public access to and capacities of such an institution will make a useful contribution in broadening people to people and political dialogue between the two antagonists in the region. If organized and administered as a United Nations university to advance public information and knowledge to promote the values of democracy and good governance; peace, security and conflict resolution; human rights; and international development cooperation, it would make a meaningful contribution to Asia in general and South Asian region in particular,

Among the issues that reveal an inadequate understanding in South Asian public domain include the following aspects:

- ✧ The common security problems faced by the two countries in terms of broader threats to the societies, the risks of nuclear self-destruction, and ways to secure stable security. When compared with security opinion making

processes that have been developed in other parts of the world, one wonders what happened to alternative thinking in South Asia? There is a deafening silence on issues that broader than politico-military conception of South Asian bureaucratic elite.

▲ The needs of the new world order has to be met by a system of education that emphasize global awareness. It questions the logic of military capacity building against each other, while the two societies face common threats from poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition, corruption, maladministration, violations of civil rights and human rights, environmental degradation, pollution, bigotry, and unequal access to justice. We are well aware that these kinds of threats or problems will not be overcome by raising national military capacities. A new thinking is therefore needed in South Asian education system to enlighten the future elite, and broaden the understanding of future generations of South Asians in building up their societal and international responsibilities.

▲ There is evidence of an active trade till 1965 between the two countries. Would a local-level dialogue between the twin cities Lahore and Amritsar help in reviving trade and broadening public contacts? Would such contacts provide new ideas and momentum to the stalled political-security dialogue? A dialogue process between the two principle cities of the Punjab, without reference or prejudice to the country's position on their political dispute, may generate sufficient public will to encourage examination of more creative CBMs.

#### *Some Priorities in Public Knowledge Needs*

The following are some of the politico-security issues which are under researched and therefore inadequately understood in South Asia because investigations of this kind are not encouraged:

- i) Identify dangers and threats to peace, democracy and human development in India and Pakistan that use ethnicity and religion as a tool by the political regimes. Identify counter-measures that could be taken in the two societies and at national levels to advance democracy.
- ii) Identify opportunity costs of military burden in social development sectors and barriers to stable civil-military relations in the two democracies. South Asia, in terms of human poverty is comparable to sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup> Would our elite and the media like to acknowledge this fact? South Asian elite need to take a serious look not only at the UNDP human development indicators, but at themselves, as people who are intuitively blind to such facts.
- iii) Identify public neglect of victims of political and communal violence in India and in Pakistan resulting in ethnic cleansing, terrorism and riots which has led to internally and externally displaced victims and refugees groups.
- iv) Development of peace education at the grass roots and promotion of role of vernacular media in building public dialogue and trust. It would require the following

long term initiatives:

- △ Offer an education programme on the above aspects and other similar issues for publication in the vernacular media, and involve elected representatives and activists at the grass root levels;
- △ Develop a peace and democracy education curriculum for the primary and religious schools;
- △ Develop research material for news reports for publication in the vernacular press, for elected representatives at the level of state assemblies and village Panchayats, human rights groups, democracy think tanks in India and Pakistan.

#### *Some Specific Research Issues for the proposed UN University for Peace and Democracy*

In more specific and practical terms, the proposed UN Peace University could begin examining some of the following specific initiatives:

- △ Investigate ways that civil society in the two countries could contribute towards conflict conciliation and risk reduction. It may not be feasible to conduct this kind of research in a politically charged water-tight compartments of Indian and Pakistani academia. But it may be feasible to conduct such studies at a UN University for peace and democracy, if it is located on the international border between Lahore and Amritsar, with equal access to analysts from both sides of the border.
- △ The limitations in developing stable regional security policies in the Indian Sub-continent are marked by the lack of progress in resolving Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Are such difficulties also contributed by resistance in the executive branches to any new initiatives on Jammu and Kashmir; and a lack of space in domestic politics to develop alternative thinking on security issues? How should participation of the civil societies in India and Pakistan enhance the role of the legislative branches to develop constructive ideas on security opinion-making? In view of the foregoing, if a conciliation commission is set up comprising of Indian and Pakistani parliamentarians, independent-minded human rights activists and political analysts, the civil society could become involved in developing at least three important processes, namely: (i) conciliation building; (ii) risk avoidance; and (iii) conflict prevention.
- △ A UN university located on the border between Lahore and Amritsar would also help in broadening the political dialogue, people to people exchanges on social, cultural, trade, democracy development and economic dimensions. Which, in the long term, would provide an enduring quality to any resolution to the bi-lateral conflict.

#### **IV. Examine Possibilities of Cooperative Monitoring of Line of Control**

The potential risks remain high in the cases of un-resolved South Asian borders and possible consequences of such a conflict would be devastating. The problems are deadlocked, insofar as the Indian claim to the legal title to the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir, and Pakistan's preference for plebiscite according to the UN

Resolutions of 1948. Till such time conflict claims on trans-border violations are resolved, it is important that new initiatives are taken to reduce the military and political risks of these disputes and prevent an outbreak of an open conflict. For instance, the lines of control between India-China dispute in Kashmir is being stabilized through a process of bilateral dialogue. To what extent such experience can be relevant to reduce risks on the India-Pakistan line of control in Kashmir, remains a question that merits examination.

Joint studies comprising Indian and Pakistani experts along with scholars from other countries could identify ways and means for reducing risks based on humanitarian concerns. In this respect, some studies have been conducted at Sandia National Laboratories by individual military and political experts from the two countries. However, joint studies are required with a multi-specialization experience comprising political, military, and technical experts, as well as analysts and activists in civil liberties and human rights issues.

Should the Indian leaders assume, that military in Pakistan may not be able to end cross-border terrorism, as these groups are far more powerful than the instruments of control at the command of the state. Such an assumption is not very far from that fact that no state in the world has been able to eradicate crime without public support. Would it then be feasible to commission joint studies to examine practicability of technical monitoring of the line of control to avoid risks of misjudgment and miscalculation, at political, technical and operational levels. Additionally, it will reduce the growing acrimony between the political leadership of the two countries because of lack of cooperation in monitoring the line of control.

Interestingly, at the SAARC foreign ministers' meeting in Kathmandu, the Indian foreign minister indicated that Pakistan may not be fully in control of elements infiltrating into Kashmir, while the Pakistani foreign minister, in describing India's proposal for joint patrolling as premature, nevertheless, did not dismiss the idea, saying it could be considered if certain conditions were met. Among the uninvestigated questions are identification of conditions expected by the two sides, which if met, would reduce the risks along the Line of Control in Kashmir and between India and Pakistan.

## **V. Conclusion**

The Indian and Pakistan governments have difficulties in talking with each other without recriminations. Indians want Pakistan to end its support for the insurgency in Kashmir and the cross border infiltration as a pre-condition for talks, while Pakistani's find an emotional chord in their concern about the human rights abuses faced by the Muslim community in Kashmir.

To find that elusive 'perfect solution for Kashmir problem' and check the relations from deteriorating further, a dialogue is needed. Whether the agenda for such a

dialogue should exclusively focus on Kashmir, or should Kashmir be among the issues to be discussed along with other outstanding problems,<sup>3</sup> the fact remains that the two governments have been unable to even craft a dialogue agenda rather than building a process to find the ultimate solution. Given the level of distrust between the two bureaucracies, it therefore stands to reason that civil society view point should be included to broaden the dialogue. The recent elections in Pakistan and those held in the state of Jammu and Kashmir provide the regimes in the two countries new opportunities to demonstrate wisdom, statesmanship and a democratic commitment.

A dialogue between India and Pakistan, which is broader than politico-military issues will help ease tensions and create greater confidence among the people of Kashmir, on one hand, and between the public in the two countries on the other.

In that respect, it may be worth considering the barriers and limitations of the following four issues that were discussed in this paper:

1. *Peace and stability through democracy development*: barriers would be in terms of the military government in Pakistan and conservative thinking in India and Pakistan
2. *Public information and knowledge creation in South Asia*: barriers would be put up by the same interests as described above. The difficulties would be in terms of questions relating to management, location, sovereignty, security, finance, legislative ratification required to ensure access to citizens from both the countries as well as by regional and international researchers.
3. *Civil society initiatives for risk reduction and crises avoidance*: Difficulties are a lack of democracy development in the region. The executive branches would find the very idea rather alien and encroaching their turf.
4. *Examine possibilities of cooperative monitoring of Line of Control*: Barriers would be in terms of lack of clarity in the required political-military pre-conditions expected by the two sides; technical and operational feasibility; the doubtful nature of its political value.

The paper does not suggest that the official dialogue should be neglected. A two plus six agenda accepted in the Lahore Declaration of February 1999 or the elements that were agreed upon in Agra could form the basis of renewing the dialogue. The paper recommends an approach for a more inclusive and a broader public and societal dialogue.

A view in India suggests that that political pre-eminence of Pakistan's military rests on the popular notion of the country's enmity with India, therefore a solution to their bi-lateral problems, including that of Jammu and Kashmir, would deprive the military of its pre-eminent position. On the other hand, India's handicap in deepening its democratic institutions for control of its military, particularly in relation to management of counter insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir, has led to Pakistani

criticism of the Indian military's lack of compliance with human rights concerns.

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## **FOOTNOTES:**

1. Expectations during the Rajiv Gandhi's government of a possible 'deal' on Kashmir with President Zia-ul Haq. New York Times 27 May 1991. The Indian government's thinking, while inviting Gen. Musharraf to Agra for a 'deal' on Kashmir, yet again ducks the question: what if the deal is jettisoned by his successor?

2. According to World Bank, South Asia is the poorest region of the World, even poorer than sub-Saharan Africa. In 1990, the percentage of population which consumed less than US \$30 in purchase power parity terms was: South Asia 59%; sub-Saharan Africa 53%; Latin America 28%; and East Asia 15%. The Hindu 24 June 1996.

3. According to one observer, India agreed to discuss all outstanding issues, including Kashmir, Pakistan insisted it should be Kashmir first and all other issues later. Pakistan's apprehension are that under the garb of all other issues, India would dilute the primacy of Kashmir. Ghosh P. 'From Legalism to Realism in Kashmir: Internationalizing the Line of Control', Dept. of Political Science, Heidelberg University, Working Paper No. 7, October 2002.