

A ‘New’ Wave of Indo-Pak Bilateralism or Peak of Futile Talks and CBMs: An Estimate of Musharraf Era (1999-2008)

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ABSTRACT

Musharraf Era is one of the significant epochs of South Asian history. During this period, Indo-Pak relations experienced a number of ups and downs. Historically, if on one hand Kargil Issue was considered the ‘brain-child of Musharraf’, the nuclear explosion during Nawaz regime were considered a befitting response to Indian preemption. Although Musharraf started his rule in an atmosphere of distrust and blame-game, yet he gained confidence, especially after the 9/11 Incident and the status of non-NATO ally in War on Terrorism. During this period, Kashmir Issue became the focus of bilateralism between the two countries. The crux of this episode of history lies in the fact that both countries converged their energies on trust building and removing confusion on two main issues, Kashmir, and the building responsible mechanism on nuclear arms. The methodology employed is qualitative one and the events have been documented after careful criticism of the available sources with optimum impartiality. In this piece of research, an effort has been made to prove this hypothesis that if the conducive atmosphere developed was not ruined by the incidents like attacks on Indian Parliament, Mumbai Incident, Samjhota Express, etc., the CBMs developed during this golden periods of opportunities, maximum advancements could be made on the ‘roadmap’ of peace building and normality in the South Asian region.

Key Words: **Indo-Pak Bilateralism, Kargil, Kashmir, Agra Summit & Composite Dialogue.**

Background

Indo-Pak relations never remained smooth. As forced neighbors, both nations had grudges whose reasons can be traced into their centuries old history. Muslims ruled over the region around eight hundred years or so where Hindus were in majority; and with the change of masters under the British especially after 1857, Hindus found better prospects of power sharing on majority basis. Their ambitions

could be materialized in case of self-government of Indians or *Sawaraj* and the Congress leadership worked for independence of India as a “United Entity” but the fate of the historical events after the World War II led towards the partition of India into Pakistan and Bharat (Ian, 1998). Congress leadership accepted this decision with the heavy heart and there is no second opinion that the Indian leadership worked for reunion of India which was termed by their political pundits as *Akhand Bharata* (the United India). However, Pakistan tried to maintain peace with India albeit in the face of 1948, 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars. Both nations alleged each other for disruption of peace process but they have to face the “tyranny of the history” and have to go into “bilateralism” as they had some unsettled issues on the unfinished “partition agenda” including Kashmir, Siachin, Sir Creek (Ban Ganga; a tidal estuary between India and Pakistan in the uninhabited marshlands of Indus River Delta), water distribution dispute and other issues of mutual interest. This bilateralism witnessed a number of ups and downs before the advent of 21st century AD.

In this perspective, Pakistan’s foreign policy since its inception is termed as ‘India-obsessed’, mainly dominated by its security concerns, in order to save it from future subjugation (Fatima, 2016). Thus, all the futuristic apprehensions of Pakistani policy makers converge on India as the utmost danger for its security and prosperity. In regional paradigm one can say that Pakistan has been in continuous struggle to avoid any direct scuffle with its neighbors especially with India but in 1999, the Kargil Conflict made the region a nuclear flashpoint bringing Kashmir Issue once again on the international political anvil to decide its fate. Later, the same issue, among a number of others, began focal point of bilateral concern during Musharraf Regime. In this piece of research an effort has been made to evaluate all such bilateral concerns categorically in an impartial manner.

As a matter of fact, Musharraf Regime (1999-2008), experienced a new wave of bilateral relations as at start India had a number of curiosities to accept Musharraf’s regime until 2001 when he managed to become the President of Pakistan (20 June 2001). Consequently, Musharraf was invited by Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s government in July 2001 which culminated into undecided Agra Summit. Earlier Mr. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General had stressed upon both nations to retain the spirit of Lahore Declaration (February 1999) and hoped for vision and constructivism from both sides. This scenario although set a stage for revival of Indo-Pak peace process but the curiosities overwhelmed the situation and Agra Summit remained inconclusive. Reportedly, the joint declaration was ruined by the ‘Indian Hawks’ (Dawn, 2001). One can notice clear contradictions in the designs of Indian leadership. At first, it “temporarily set aside its stated view on Pakistan military regime” (Idrees & Irfan, 2001) and invited President Musharraf on talks, and then they ended in fiasco. There are some apparent reasons behind the failure of this peace process which are as follows:

1. Musharraf’s stand and insistence on Kargil issue that it was a very successful operation which put any deal at stake.

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2. He also considered Kargil adventure quite helpful in bringing Kashmir Issue into international spotlight by refusing that the results of this adventure went against both Pakistani and Kashmiri viewpoint in the longer run.

However, this visit of Musharraf which was considered a failure at first instance later brought a number of benefits for normalization of relations, especially for bringing the people of two nations closer, with the following indicators:

1. Travel between the two countries became easy as they soften the visa conditions.
2. Bus Service was revived on Lahore-Delhi, Nankana Sahib-Amritsar, and Muzaffarabad- Srinagar routes.
3. Train Service was resumed between Karachi and Rajasthan.
4. Likewise, air service, both national and private was also expanded between important cities.
5. Sikhs and Hindus were provided with more facilities during their visits to their sacred places like Gurudawara Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib and Katas Raj Temple

India-Pakistan relations during the period under investigation 1999-2008 have been studied to support the hypothesis that both the countries should ensure conditions and strategies which can lead these two countries towards the revival of peace which, in turn, would ensure economic development and progress for their masses (Sarfraz, 2009). This study would bring forth the measures to ensure how relations can be kept normalized in the face of decades old pertaining problems between two nuclear countries.

Politics of 'nuclear deterrence' and Pak-India Bilateralism

The post nuclear-test phase had been the most stringent phase in the history of Pakistan. Under the Glenn Amendment, a number of sanctions were imposed on both Pakistan and India. Pakistan had to suffer to a great extent as the economic assistance and arms sales were proscribed to Pakistan. The Anti-American sentiment that had been fomenting since the end of Afghan war now reached its highest point. Despite the fact that the international image of Pakistan was inevitably damaged abroad, the nuclear test did help Pakistan to achieve a number of its regional foreign policy objectives (Afshan, 2020). Kashmir issue that has always catalyzed India-Pakistan confrontation was gradually sinking into oblivion due to the active Indian propaganda (Sumaira, 2015). After the nuclear explosion it was highlighted as never before. Kashmir which had once been the meeting point

of three civilizations was now the meeting point of three nuclear powers making it one of the most volatile regions of the world (Sapna, 2019). Even though the security of the region was now more precarious than ever, the hegemonic designs of India to become the leading power of South Asia were thrown in abeyance.

The foreign policy experts suggest that the Pak-India bilateralism can better be understood under a secular paradigm of ‘conflict of designs’ between a hegemonic state in pursuit of regional domination and a less powerful defensive neighbor aspiring to secure its identity as a free nation. This led to an uneven conventional arms race at first and acquisition of nuclear and missile technology later. However, in Pakistan’s point of view, the nuclear tests in 1998 helped a lot in attaining the ‘balance of power’ against India and minimizing the possibilities of conventional physical adventure. Not only this; the presence of nuclear arsenal on both sides created a sense of responsibility and as a result both nuclear powers tried to take a number of serious measures to make their nuclear programs safe and of international standards in terms of safety, command and control. Under such bindings both governments, moving a step ahead, exchanged lists of nuclear installations in order to avoid attacks on nuclear installations under the Article 2 of the bilateral agreement on 1st January 2002 (Sarfraz, 2009). Moreover, General Pervez Musharraf tried his level best to defuse the tense situation on India-Pak borders.

Test of Pak-India Bilateralism: Kashmir issue as a nuclear flashpoint

In 1997, Nawaz Sharif met IK Gujral, the Indian PM three times but no real development on resolving bilateral issues was made. Likewise, with the arrival of Atal Bihari Vajpayee into power in March 1998, again high hopes were attached but only resolve reached to discuss all controversial issues only at foreign secretary level which clearly showed that India was interested only in continuing the dialogue; actually not interested in settling any of the issues. On Kashmir, India agreed to talk, but there were sharp differences between India and Pakistan as to what constituted the core of the Kashmir problem. The October 1998 round of talks did not produce any positive results, although both sides reiterating their desire to work towards promoting peace and promised stability in the region and that they would continue to hold talks. It may also be pointed out that Pakistan agreed to sell electricity to India. But this deal could not go through because India offered a very low price which was not acceptable to Pakistan. (Sarfraz, 2009)

Though India agreed in the Maldives SAARC Summit (12-14 May 1997) that for the implementation of SAARC Preferential Trading Agreement (SAPTA) under the SAARC reconciliation on the Kashmir issue was needed to promote an environment of trust, its obsession establishing its ‘dominance’ in South Asia did not dissipate. India’s procurement of nuclear-specific submarines from Russia, together with sophisticated aircraft submarines and nuclear weapons, were noted with alarming concern by Pakistan. These symbolized its ‘dominance’ in the region and threatened Pakistan’s security (Ashley, Christine, et al, 2001). The test

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firing of Prithvi-II with a range of 250 km capable of delivering warheads, followed by the test firing of Agni ballistic missile with a range of 2000 to 2500 km, and finally the bomb explosion in the desert of Rajasthan on 11 and 13 May 1998, sent a shockwave in Pakistan. Now, it was Pakistan turn. Pakistan test fired its Ghouri Missile in April and blasted six bombs in Baluchistan on 28 and 30 May 1998. Before Pakistan's decision to test its nuclear devices, India started issuing threatening statement against Pakistan, pressurizing Pakistan to change its policy towards Kashmir because India was now a nuclear power. There were also reports that India was planning a pre-emptive strike at Pakistan's nuclear installation. Since no credible security guarantees were available to Pakistan, it decided to go for 'matching' nuclear explosions. (Altaf, 2012) These short quick overview of the events of pre-Musharraf times will help in understanding why Kargil adventure, following the nuclear explosions and Vajpayee's goodwill visit occurred and to what extent it benefited or otherwise to the Kashmir Case (Kashmir Cause in Pakistan's point of view).

As the course of history proposes, the Kargil Crisis can be termed as "the last attempt" to highlight the Kashmir Issue internationally as both nuclear rivals were ready to fight a decisive war on the decades old brining issue of Kashmir, but the US President Bill Clinton's timely intervention controlled the situation. After that the 9/11 Incident totally changed the situation on the name of War against Terrorism. The freedom struggle of Kashmiris went on hindsight and remains at stand still even today. In this changed situation there was no option left for both Musharraf and Vajpayee to resume bilateral relations. Additionally, they adopted 'backdoor diplomacy' in order to ensure some Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) for continuation of the peace process and a workable roadmap in this connection (Shahid, 2019); (Sujnay, Anurag, et al, 2016).

There is no dearth of such pieces of readings on both sides which try to explore the real reasons behind the conflicts like Siachin and Kargil. Some of them take these events as a result of 'challenge and response' (Zehra, 2018). Some of these readings also suggest that the Pakistani establishment was fully convinced that the Kashmir could be made spotlight of world's attention through a limited military activity across the LOC and international intervention would be, at the neck of time, fair enough to stop India from fulsome retaliation. In this connection, some writers also present another hypothesis that if the Nawaz-Vajpayee's CBMs were given time to bring fruit, the Kargil Crisis would not happen which destroyed the already developed conducive atmosphere of trust and hope, Musharraf-Nawaz tussle would not lead to the subsequent military coup, the results of peace process would definitely be different. Some Indian writers like Arjun Subramaniam, J. N. Dixit and others blame Musharraf responsible for Kargil and the policy makers in India which were termed in the days of Agra Summit as 'Indian hawks' who destroyed any further advancement between Musharraf and Vajpayee. They also blamed Musharraf for encouraging Jihadi groups on the other side of Line of

Control (LoC) which was, as per them, the real reason behind the worsening of the bilateral relationship and stalemate of dialogue. However; some facts suggest that huge geographic and demographic, economic and military asymmetries that mar the Indo-Pak peace process have yielded, in the long run, profound differences in such a manner that both of them blame and defame each other and pursue it accordingly and this attitude further make the possibility of positive and conducive bilateral talks inexorably floundered (Nabiha, 2004).

It is also a fact that the Kashmiris continuously insisted on being heard. They also hoped that their “real” leadership must be invited in bilateral talks between India and Pakistan (Abdul, 2007). They also stuck to decades-old claim of illegal accession of Jammu and Kashmir with India and think it illegal which cannot be considered valid by the cannons of International Law and bid for its solution under the resolutions of UN Security Council. They are adamant that the issue in itself cannot be sidelined. More bitterness added to the fact that the history of the Kashmir Case has made it clear that the time has only aggravated it, not healed; and the current state of *status quo* is in no way acceptable to Pakistanis and Kashmiris. The History also suggests that this Indian mindset to linger the issue on complicated the situation in 1990s and this resulted later in Kargil happenings, and the military takeover in Pakistan.

Finding the common grounds: the Agra Summit

On first January 2001, Indian PM Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, through a newspaper article stressed upon addressing the ‘outstanding’ issues with Pakistan including Kashmir and the demolished Babri Mosque in Ajothhya. He also stressed upon a meeting with President Pervez Musharraf in this connection. He, later, sent an invitation and consequently on 15-16 July a summit was held at Agra comprising of several sessions of composite dialogue and debate. President Musharraf urged for earnest efforts to resolve the Kashmir issue and the transformation of a fifty-year old confrontation into good neighborly relations. (Altaf, 2012) On the second and last day of the summit both leaders through their foreign ministers made it public that they had found the common ground for resumption of the dialogue, and they would declare it formally at the end of the session that day.

Although the communiqué could not be sought for yet they hoped for the continuation of bilateral understanding through a series of such summits in near future. However, the summit was not a total failure. Both Musharraf and Vajpayee appreciated the development towards the confidence building and pledged for future cooperation (Daily Dawn, 2001). In response to Indian foreign minister’s goodwill message, positive gesture was given by Pakistani Foreign Minister who termed this summit *Na Tamam* [Urdu; indecisive] not *Nakam* [failure]. These gestures on both sides marked the visible ‘détente’ between Pakistan and India. It was also observed from this newly arose situation that post 9/11 scenario demanded an exculsive treatment of the events. So, international realities forced both countries to come out of their traditional mindset and work for a better

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working atmosphere. Both countries especially India, the staunch power broker of the region could not afford third party mediation, especially of US that was in dire need of cooperation from Musharraf on smoldering Afghan War Front.

As a matter of fact, after 9/11 there had been a 'turning point' in Pakistan's Afghan Policy and Pakistan was declared frontline ally of US campaign against terrorism, and India was forced to adjust itself to the fact that Pakistan's new role, although indigestible, would continue for a long time and US administration was currently siding with Pakistan (Nabiha, 2004). India through writing to Bush Administration made them convinced that the normalization of relations with Pakistan was in the greater benefit of the region and the PM Vajpayee took the initiative twice for restoring the Indo-Pak dialogue, going to Pakistan in 1999 for signing with his counterpart Nawaz Sharif the Lahore Agreement, and inviting General Musharraf to Agra for a summit that failed in 2001. Exacerbated by new terrorist attacks against civilians in Kashmir, India's line was more than ever focused on one pre-condition for a fresh round of talks; Islamabad should rein in the terrorists, and stop the infiltration of militants into Jammu and Kashmir and Musharraf's declaration of 12 January 2002 was a turning point in word but not in act.

On 18th April 2002, the Prime Minister Vajpayee, in a speech made in Srinagar during his first visit to the valley after the elections, decided to extend the hand of friendship to Pakistan for the third and last time. As there was a general perception that the threat of war was imposed by India and the on-border activity if upheld for longer time would destroy the hard work of last three years. (Sarfaraz, 2009) So, it was the call of the time to step forward and restore all channels of connection and cooperation which were suspended after 2001 Indian Parliament Attacks. Some independent analysts attached hope to the arising normalization of the relations and aspired that a new wave of 'optimism' would definitely dismantle old rivalries in 21st century and both countries would take a restart without compromising their interests. Moreover, with the revival of diplomatic relations, the chances of war would be consumed and if the gulf of deficit of trust got bridged, it would result into better prospects of trade and transportation. (Gulzar, 2013)

The Agra Summit though remained inconclusive, yet it opened the door for future dialogue and leadership on both sides had realized the fact that solution of every issue lay in the peaceful negotiation and the decades-old issues could not be settled in one day. However, if sincerity prevailed, the result would definitely bound to come out.

The call of the time: attaining peace in Indian held Kashmir

As per Indian view, the elections held in Jammu and Kashmir in September-October 2002 were recognized everywhere, except in Pakistan, as much more 'free

and fair' than the previous ones, and the participation percentage or voters' turnout (around 40% as an average, despite a very low turnout in the towns of the valley). New Delhi took it as a positive signal albeit it was boycotted by the Hurriyat Conference and the Jammu and Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party of Shabbir Shah (Afshan, 2020).

Since April 2003 when the Indian PM lent a friendly hand towards Pakistan, it really mattered for rebuilding of mutual trust which could help further the public related matters of interest, sports or say Journalism. Even the Cricket series held, contrary to previous practice, was called a 'friendship tour' (Daily Dawn, 2003). On Continuum, in Islamabad SAARC Summit held in January 2004, ensuing of fresh peace proposals were offered by the Indian PM Vajpayee but these were not more than the CBMs in implication. They included talks on technical level on the previously proposed Muzaffarabad-Srinagar Bus Service and new Munabao-Khokhrapar bus link. Moreover, both countries pledged to resume the process of composite dialogue that was suspended three years ago (Kardsoud & Umbreen, 2017). Foreign Ministers of both sides however expressed hope that the proposed composite dialogue would surely help sort the commonalities for peaceful solution of the Kashmir Issue but unfortunately no time frame or level of meetings was clearly announced.

Indo-Pak talks which had got an awesome pace till May 2004 had to face an interception as the BJP Government was overthrown by the coalition Congress Government in May 2004 General Elections. However, the new Congress administration assured that the peace process would not be interrupted with the arrival of new set up in New Delhi. In response Pakistani High Commission sent a goodwill message by saying that they had no apprehension with the Congress-led administration. (Richard, 2007) Later; in October 2004, President Musharraf devised his own scheme as a 'roadmap' for resolving the Kashmir Issue and disseminated it for debate. In his views, the viable solution of this old issue lied in the practical and pragmatic approach and after resizing and redistribution of different regions, they could be annexed to Pakistan and India, and those regions where complications pertained could be mediated through UN. This scheme, although not new, could be considered as a workable alternative to the previous demand of plebiscite in Kashmir region (Gulzar, 2013).

India and Pakistan had too much at stake to allow the Indo-Pak Bilateralism to drift further. The time, it seemed, had come for the political leaderships of the two countries to give rapprochement between them a new charter of life.

The most crucial event on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit was the meeting between President Musharraf and PM Vajpayee. Following that it was announced that India and Pakistan would resume their composite dialogue comprising Kashmir plus seven other issues from February 2004 (Altaf, 2012).

The peoples in the subcontinent are fully aware of the fact that the normalization of Indo-Pak relations is contingent upon a time-lag forward movement towards the final settlement of the Kashmir issue. This specific

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approach is called for due to the historical experience of the partition as well as the cultural and religious variations in the subcontinent.

Pakistan's efforts for a sustainable 'Bilateralism'

Musharraf went to every extent in resolving the unsettled issues with India in spite of the fact he was not easy both on internal or external political fronts. On one hand if he was working for highlighting the 'soft image' of the country through his ideologue of 'enlightened moderation' and championing of the women rights, while confronting the percept of Islamic radicalism on the other. His measures faced storm of criticism internally, especially his proposed Kashmir Plan was taken with some grain of salt by some hardliners, but he managed it adroitly. Leaders of the Hurriyat Conference endorsed Pakistan's efforts on the roadmap for peace. They also underlined the fact that the people of Kashmir had made immense sacrifices and the CBMs would lead to a situation where the case of Kashmir could be addressed on political lines (Shahid, 2019).

In this situation, India demanded the revival of 'economic relations' first, coupled with free trade, investment, cultural amity and people to people contacts. India was of the view that it could become instrumental in stabilizing the Indo-Pak Bilateralism and the recent potentials of economic relations would objectively and ultimately result into appeasing and persuading India to come to negotiation table thereby meaningfully ensue the dialogue process on more contentious issues. Furthermore, it was put forward that Pakistan should not remain away from investing more capital in ensuring the continuity of the process begun in 2004 (Sunjay & Samir, 2018).

The year 2005 brought a number of challenges for Pakistan. Along a number of issues on the anvil, especially the Baghliar Dam Issue (also known as Baglihar Hydroelectric Power Project) whose construction started on Indian side of the Chenab River in 1999 dominated the scene, as Pakistan thought that there were some anomalies in its design parameters which were against the terms of reference of Indus Water treaty (1960). In other words, the tyranny of history still persisted and factually things could not be normalized without addressing the causes at the core of issues. Pakistan expressed its reservations right after the first inspection of the site and pointed them out time and again. Nonetheless, after resumption of bilateral relations in 2001, Musharraf government also focused on this issue but whatever the reasons might be, like other issues on bilateral agenda, became complicated and indecisive. Pakistan showed its resolve that ongoing composite dialogue process would not be derailed, and the same positivism remained intact after the February 2007 Samjhota Express Incident (Daily Dawn, 2007).

The bilateral relations and continuity of peace process during Musharraf regime witnessed a number of ups and downs. The Taliban Attack on Indian Embassy in Kabul on 7 July 2008 (Daily Dawn, 2008) and later Mumbai Attacks

on 26 November 2008 (Ibid) provided a fair opportunity to sabotage the pace of the events as India media alleged Pakistan even not bothering for the initial investigation. Every earnest effort from Pakistan to normalize the situation was taken with suspicious eyes. The hype created, especially by India media further worsened the situation.

Conclusion

The close observation of the events during Musharraf regime, one can reach to safe conclusion that India's bilateral engagement with Pakistan clearly revolved around the Kashmir Problem and the corresponding Cross-Border Terrorism (as India points finger towards Pakistan behind any untoward happening in the Indian held Valley) and in reality, they posed a serious challenge, especially it always remained the test of mettle and acumen for the leadership of both sides. It also called for a strong political will to continue and sustain the dialogue and discussion even in hot waters. The compulsion of the historical process provided a golden opportunity to both Musharraf and Vajpayee to infuse a new energy to break the tyranny of the decades-old *status quo*, thereby putting aside their differences and ignoring the black side of geostrategic and geopolitical upheavals. Besides all the discrepancies and follies on both sides, the world witnessed a 'new' wave of bilateralism between the ever-belligerent nations, and if that wave continued its positive impact could totally change the course of history.

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