Securing Peace in South Asia amid the War on Terror in Afghanistan

Ishtiaq Ahmad

The renewed significance that South Asia has gained in world politics since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 in the United States has reinforced the urgency of securing peace in the region. India and Pakistan being South Asia’s two major powers, the issue of peace in the region depends primarily upon what happens in their relationship. The two countries have indeed pursued a vibrant peace process since January 2004, resulting in significant Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). However, they have not yet achieved any meaningful progress in resolving the core disputes such as Kashmir. On the war on terror in the region as well as the future of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan continue to pursue conflicts of interest. While Pakistan has offered specific new proposals on Kashmir, India has used the war on terror to shift the international focus from self-determination to terrorism vis-à-vis Kashmir. Recurrent allegations by the Afghan government regarding terrorists’ infiltration from Pakistan’s tribal regions bordering Afghanistan are also perceived by Pakistan as partly motivated by India’s growing influence over the Afghan government.

This paper argues that the terrorist manifestation of religious extremism is a threat common to both India and Pakistan, as well as to Afghanistan and the rest of the international community. It is a threat that can only be confronted jointly, with greater counter-terrorism
cooperation and by resolving conflicts such as the militancy in Kashmir and insurgency in Afghanistan through mutually conducive diplomatic compromises. South Asia is host to one-fifth of the world population. Inclusive of Afghanistan, the region has seen some of the worst humanitarian crises in recent world history. The introduction of nuclear weapons in the region has added another dangerous dimension to the quest for South Asian peace. However, factors such as India’s economic rise, harmonization of Indo-Pak ties and greater activity within the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) augur well for the future of peace in South Asia. A credible internationally-backed regional push towards conflict resolution in the region will provide the real boost to such positive trends, provided its principal players, particularly India, are prepared to put on hold their expedient, real-politick interests for the sake of South Asian peace.

South Asia’s Renewed Significance

South Asia is one of the world’s strategically most important and dynamic regions. Together the region’s eight countries (including Afghanistan, given its inclusion in SAARC) comprise 23 per cent of the world’s population—of which 19 per cent are Indians and Pakistanis. The region is surrounded by areas of great economic activity or resources, including South-East Asia, which presents a role model for economic growth and regional integration for the developing world; Central Asia, where the world’s largest untapped hydrocarbon energy resources are located for the future benefit of the region and the world; China, which is the fastest growing economy in the world for the past decade and a half; and the Indian Ocean, whose significance for global trade can hardly be under-estimated. India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are South Asia’s prominent countries. In the case of Sri Lanka and
Bangladesh, the politico-security challenges are essentially of internal dimension. In terms of regional conflict, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan qualify as countries having bilateral conflicts. Peace and security in South Asia, therefore, rests considerably on the amicable resolution of their conflicts.

India is the most dynamic of all countries of South Asia. The world’s second most populous state has a functioning democracy, a great power ambition, and a thriving economic and technological base. Despite all of its political and economic shortcomings, Pakistan remains a strategically important country, trying to compete with India for importance before the world powers, primarily the United States, and enjoying at least a nuclear deterrent relationship with India. Despite lacking in most aspects of national power, Islamabad has attempted to compete with India for influence in South Asia, even though its competitive ability may have gradually eroded due to India’s economic and technological rise and its increasing acknowledgement internationally. Afghanistan has been ridden with war for nearly three decades, and has contributed to South Asia’s renewed significance in the aftermath of the terrorist events of September 11, 2001 in the United States.

The subsequent US-led war in Afghanistan deposed the Taliban regime. Since then, a Taliban-led insurgency against the Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai has gained momentum, amid an internationally-backed process of politically stabilizing and economically reconstructing the war-torn country. The insurgency is being countered by a multi-national force led by NATO, with the US and British forces playing a leading role in it. Both India and Pakistan are allies of the United States in the war on terror, which necessitates a cooperative relationship between them. Simultaneously, the two countries are battling their own internal terrorist threats, even though they have maintained
contending visions about the relevance of this war to the
Kashmir dispute—with India attempting to highlight the
militant Kashmiri movement as terrorist, while Pakistan
trying to preserve its self-determination character. These
contending visions have a historical backdrop, largely
emanating from the internationally-acknowledged dispute
of Jammu and Kashmir, but its recent dimensions hail
essentially from what happened in Afghanistan in the
aftermath of the 1979 Soviet intervention—especially how a
succession of events there fuelled Indo-Pak rivalry.

**Afghanistan in India Pakistan Rivalries**

In the traditionally-hostile India-Pakistan relationship,
centering on the Kashmir dispute, Afghanistan has been an
important factor. With the exception of the Taliban rule in
most of Afghanistan during 1996-2001, Afghanistan
remained hostile to Pakistan. Encouraged by India, it voted
against Pakistan’s membership of the United Nations, and
laid nationalist claims on Pashtun regions in Pakistan’s
Frontier and Balochistan provinces. Facing a security threat
from India across its eastern borders, Pakistan was
concerned about the second security threat from
Afghanistan across its western unrecognized frontier, the
Durand Line—especially given Kabul’s irredentist claims on
its Pashtun regions. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan
provided Pakistan an opportunity to contain the threat from
Afghanistan, as it became a conduit of international arms
and aid to the Mujahideen, who eventually forced the Soviet
troops to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1988. In the
process, however, Pakistan was able to introduce the factor
of Islamism into Afghanistan, hoping it would marginalize
the significance of Pashtun nationalism in Afghan politics,
and, therefore, put an end to Afghanistan’s irredentist
designs on Pakistan.

Given its socialist credentials, India sided with the
Soviet Union throughout its intervention in Afghanistan,
despite the fact that the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan enjoyed an international support. Even though as soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, India had started pursing free market reforms in 1991 to become part of the capitalist world, it continued to back the communist government of Dr Mohammad Najibullah, until its collapse in 1992. India also supported the first Mujahideen government led by Burhanudin Rabbani, which was replaced by the Taliban in 1996. For its part, Pakistan in alliance with Saudi Arabia first backed Gulbuddin Hekmatyar’s Hizb-e-Islami against the Najibullah government and the Rabbani regime, and then assisted in the rise of the Taliban against the latter. It was during this time, particularly during the rise of the Taliban, that Afghanistan witnessed a proxy war between Pakistan and India, which itself was assisted by Iran. This war continued even after the Taliban captured Kabul, with India backing the Northern Alliance of Tajik, Uzbek and Shiite Afghan factions.

In the aftermath of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, while the Indian factor became a source of major concern for Pakistan in Afghanistan, the Afghan factor became a souring point for India in the Indian-administered Kashmir. Capitalizing on the growing political grievances of the Muslim Kashmiri people there, Pakistan started facilitating the infiltration of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri Mujahideen through the Line of Control. As the militant uprising there gained momentum at the start of the 1990s, India began a massive military operation and adopted other coercive legal and administrative measures. Over time, a number of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri jihadi organizations began operating from the Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The jihadi militancy and India’s counter-insurgency campaign claimed tens of thousands of lives. In 1998, India and Pakistan also became nuclear weapon powers. While Pakistan’s tribal regions and parts of eastern and south-eastern Afghanistan had played an
important role in generating the Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri Mujahideen for the militant uprising in Indian-administered Kashmir since it began in 1989, it was during the Taliban rule in Afghanistan that the jihadi threat to India in the disputed region assumed grave proportions. The 1999 Kargil crisis between India and Pakistan occurred in this backdrop—a crisis that could have had grave consequences, had it not been averted through US diplomatic intervention.

Soon after September 11, 2001, Pakistan took a U-turn in its Afghan policy, turned against the Taliban and supported the United States in deposing their regime in Kabul. It had no other option. However, since the Northern Alliance was supported by India against the Taliban, it was but natural for the new rulers of Kabul to be pro-India. By abandoning the Taliban, the government of President-General Pervez Musharraf had annoyed the pro-Taliban Islamist groups in Pakistan, including the Mujahideen organizations engaged in militant activities across the Line of Kashmir in the Indian-administered Kashmir. September 11 was perceived by India as a great opportunity to settle scores with Pakistan on Kashmir. It attempted to embrace the United States and isolate Pakistan. India offered the United States its airbases for its war effort against the Taliban. The Indian leaders assumed that they would be chosen as the principal partner of the US in the new scenario, which would enable them to club Pakistan with the Taliban and then jointly clobber both. However, since Pakistan was geo-strategically central to the success of the American war against Afghanistan, Washington chose it instead of India. That explains why India suddenly resorted to anti-Pakistan belligerence after September 11.

India's view was that if the United States could attack Afghanistan for hosting al Qaeda terrorists, why couldn’t India follow suit against Pakistan for sustaining Islamic groups bent on terrorist violence in Kashmir? This was essentially a wrong analogy, since the United States had
obtained UN Security Council resolutions sanctioning the war against Afghanistan. Washington also had full NATO support. In India's case, no such legal backing or world support was available. Nor could the fighting in Kashmir be classified in black and white terms, as in Afghanistan's case. The Taliban regime was not recognized by the United Nations. In the case of Kashmir, there were several UN Security Council resolutions, urging India to hold a plebiscite to determine whether the Kashmiris wanted to stay with it or join Pakistan.

India-Pakistan Standoffs, 2001-2002

India’s attitude towards Pakistan in the months after September 11 was quite irresponsible, from the standpoint of the US-led war against terrorism in the region: While Islamabad was busy assisting the US war in Afghanistan, India raised the military tempers in the aftermath of the December 13, 2001 attack on its parliament. After defeating the Taliban in northern Afghanistan and Kabul, the US had been targeting Tora Bora mountains in eastern Afghanistan to hunt down the remaining al Qaeda and Taliban fighters hiding there in a caves complex. Since this region bordered Pakistan’s tribal Pashtun regions, the United States feared that the al Qaeda and Taliban fighters might cross into Pakistan through the porous Durand Line. In order to stop the infiltration of Taliban and al Qaeda militants, Pakistan had to deploy regular army units in the tribal Pashtun belt along its western frontier with Afghanistan. Given the traditionally autonomous nature of the Durand Line, this was an unprecedented step in support of the US combat in Afghanistan. In such circumstances, sponsoring a terrorist attack on the Indian parliament was the last thing Pakistan would have orchestrated.

India blamed the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which the militant organizations could have done on its own, that provided the perfect pretext for
India to amass its forces against Pakistan. By doing so, New Delhi not only pursued a coercive strategy against Pakistan, but also tried to sabotage the US war on terrorism. Following the December 13 attack, India asked Islamabad to move against the two terrorist groups. New Delhi for the first time in thirty years withdrew its High Commissioner from Pakistan, cut off air and ground transport links with Pakistan, placed its military on high alert and moved three quarters of a million troops to forward positions along the Line of Control and the international boundary with Pakistan. India demanded immediate Pakistani action against the organisations responsible for the attack, and threatened to take matters into its own hands unless Pakistan ended cross-border incursions into Kashmir. Pakistan’s reaction was, by turns, both conciliatory and bellicose. It placed its military on high alert and moved forces toward the 1,800-mile international border and the Line of Control. Skirmishing along the Line of Control and in Siachen Glacier increased. The possibility of open warfare seemed to be mounting swiftly.¹

When Pakistan joined the US war against Taliban/al Qaeda in Afghanistan, it was clear that sooner or later the tentacles of this war would spread to the Kashmir dispute. One, in the post-September 11 world, the Afghan-jihadi connection of Kashmir had to emerge as an issue causing tension between Pakistan and India and the consequent concern by the international community about the possibility of another India-Pakistan war over Kashmir. President Musharraf’s problem in particular was how to create a firewall between a genuine thing, what he believed was the right of self determination of Kashmir, and the cause of Afghanistan which was hijacked by al Qaeda and Taliban. Two, it did not take long enough for that to happen, as the jihadi forces allegedly started to commit militant acts in India and the disputed Kashmir region with the hope of pushing India to attack Pakistan, thereby causing a full-
fledged war between the two historic rivals. The very radical religious elements, with possible al Qaeda backing, have engaged in terrorist acts in Pakistan with the aim of sabotaging the military regime and its political successor. But while changing track on Afghanistan on Islamabad’s part was relatively easy, doing the same on Kashmir has been difficult.2

After the passage of UN Security Council resolution 1373 on terrorism on 28 September 2001, Islamabad could not afford to overlook the “cross-border” infiltration of Mujahideen into disputed Kashmir region. The resolution, among other things, required from all member-states to “prohibit their nationals or persons or entities in their territories from making funds, financial assets, economic resources, financial or other related services available to persons who commit or attempt to commit, facilitate or participate in the commission of terrorist acts” It also urged the member-states to “refrain from providing any form of support to entities or persons involved in terrorist acts; take the necessary steps to prevent the commission of terrorist acts; deny safe haven to those who finance, plan, support, commit terrorist acts and provide safe havens as well”; and “prevent those who finance, plan, facilitate or commit terrorist acts from using their respective territories for those purposes against other countries and their citizens.”3

The United States tried to manage Indo-Pak stand-off by adding Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammad to the State Department list of “designated terrorist organizations”—mainly a symbolic gesture that technically froze the groups’ assets in the United States—as well as by calling upon Islamabad to shut the groups down.4 Pakistan’s government reacted to the mounting pressures by taking a number of unprecedented steps of its own. Having already renounced its support for the Taliban with one stroke and enlisted as a frontline state in the global war on terrorism, Pakistan made it clear it would not allow its territory to be used by them for
conducting their jihadi operations anywhere, including the disputed Kashmir region.\textsuperscript{5} It leadership promised that Pakistan would confine its support of the Kashmir cause to groups with roots in Kashmir.\textsuperscript{6} In a national address on 12 January 2002, President Musharraf denounced the attack on the Indian parliament and banned five Islamist extremist groups, including the Laskhar-e-Tayyaba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad. General Musharraf went so far as to say: “Pakistan rejects and condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Pakistan will not allow its territory to be used for terrorist activity anywhere in the world. No organisation will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir.”\textsuperscript{7} The Musharraf government arrested the leaders of the groups named by Washington along with several thousand of their followers.

The threat of war receded as the Indian government reacted positively to President Musharraf’s January 2002 speech and subsequent moved to curb militants in Pakistan. Nevertheless, it kept its military on high alert and in forward positions. The situation quickly took a turn for the worse after consecutive attacks by militants on a bus and the residential quarters of an Indian army camp at Kaluchuk in Jammu on 14 May 2002 that killed 35 people, mainly women and children. India quickly abandoned diplomacy and mobilised for war. In expelling Pakistan’s ambassador, India closed the last line of direct communication with the Musharraf government. Indian forces were again put on full alert and its troops and heavy arms were in place, ready to act if and when orders came from New Delhi. Following the attack, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said on 13 May, “We will not let Pakistan carry on with its proxy war against India any longer...India has accepted the challenge thrown by our neighbour and we are preparing ourselves for a decisive victory against our enemy”.\textsuperscript{8}

Fearing that the renewed standoff in Indo-Pak ties could jeopardize the US-led counter-terrorism campaign in
Afghanistan, for which Pakistan’s cooperation was crucial, the United States again intervened in the situation, by sending US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to India and Pakistan in June 2002. However, prior to sending Armitage to the region, the United States and its allies did convey a subtle message to India that it should stop behaving belligerently against Pakistan, as the United States and its allies fought the war against terrorists in the region. The United States, Britain, Australia and other Western countries started to evacuate their citizens and diplomats from India, fearing the renewed stand-off between India and Pakistan might result in a nuclear war in South Asia. The US Deputy Secretary of State may have sought assurance from Islamabad that it would adopt stringent measures to prevent the infiltration of jihadi forces across the Line of Control. He may have asked India to realize the gravity of American concerns vis-à-vis the counter-terrorism campaign in Afghanistan, especially the crucial role of Islamabad for the purpose. India, however, refused to withdraw its troops from forward positions for months, making any further diplomatic or military concessions conditional on evidence that Pakistan kept its pledge to end all cross-border terrorism. “Our response,” said the Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesman, “will be a sequential reaction to the changes taking place. We have a menu of options open.”

**Prelude to Indo-Pak Peace Process**

In the aftermath of Armitage’s visit, the infiltration of militants across the Line of Control indeed declined. India reciprocated by removing restrictions on flights to and from Pakistan and redeploying warships from the Arabian Sea to the Gulf of Bengal. New Delhi may also have calculated that its belligerent attitude towards Pakistan could prove counter-productive to its economic rise and great power ambition—an eventuality that could have been realized with
the threatened withdrawal of US and Westerner investors and citizens from the country. For its part, in the aftermath of the May 2002 standoff, Islamabad realised the urgency of adopting stringent measures to prevent infiltration of jihadi forces across the Line of Control. Besides banning *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Jaish-e-Mohammad* and a number of other jihadi and sectarian Islamic organizations, it placed restrictions on the activities of the United Jihad Council, a 14-member umbrella group of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri Mujahideen factions based in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir—including two leading jihadi organizations, *Hezb-ul-Mujahideen* and *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen*.

Meanwhile, the stalemate in Indo-Pak relationship continued until the spring of 2003. On 18 April, 2003, the Indian Prime Minister Vajpaee offered to resume talks on Kashmir with his Pakistani counterpart Zafarullah Jamali, who had earlier phoned his Indian counterpart and invited him for a state visit to Islamabad. During a visit to Srinagar, Mr Vajpayee said India was ready to resolve Kashmir for the sake of *Insaniyat* (humanity). New Delhi decided to resume full diplomatic, transport and sports links with Pakistan, which it had suspended unilaterally after the December 2001 attack on its parliament. Following suit, Pakistan went a step further by removing its unilaterally imposed restrictions on trade between the two countries. Islamabad and New Delhi also decided to exchange new High Commissioners, thereby paving the way for full resumption of diplomatic ties at the highest level. In May 2003, Mr Armitage again visited India and Pakistan. While addressing a press conference in Islamabad, he said President Musharraf assured him that there was no infiltration across the Line of Control, and that “if there were any camps they would be gone tomorrow.”

In the subsequent months during 2003, Indian and Pakistani leaders showed flexibility on Kashmir. In October, President Musharraf proposed demilitarisation and joint
administration of Kashmir by India and Pakistan. In November, India began to withdraw some of its troops from the portion of Kashmir under its administration. On October 22, India offered Pakistan a number of CBMs, including the resumption of sports, air and shipping links, and a bus service between the capitals of Indian and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. While Pakistan agreed in principle to these proposals, on the issue of bus service, it insisted that UN personnel oversee the border crossing and that Kashmiris who use the route entry carry UN documents. For its part, on November 23, Pakistan unilaterally announced a cease-fire along the Line of Control. India followed suit, extending the cease-fire to the Siachen Glacier area to north of the Line of Control. On December 2, 2003, President Musharraf offered to pull back troops from Pakistan-administered Kashmir, if India did likewise in its part of the disputed territory. On January 1, 2004, the two countries’ airline over-flight and landing rights were restored and trains and bus services across their international border crossing point at Wahga were back in service. It was amid this climate of growing thaw in Indo-Pak ties that the foundations of the Composite Dialogue that started between Islamabad and New Delhi in January 2004 were set.

The Composite Dialogue: A Review  
On January 6, 2004, President Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee met on the sidelines of SAARC summit in Islamabad and decided to resume the long stalled process to normalise relations between the two countries. In the historic Islamabad Statement, they agreed to “commence the process of the Composite Dialogue in February 2004” in order to carry the process of normalisation forward. They expressed confidence that “the resumption of the composite dialogue will lead to peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of
both sides.” The two leaders also agreed that “constructive dialogue would promote progress towards the common objective of peace, security and economic development for our peoples and for future generations.” They welcomed “the recent steps towards normalisation of relations between the two countries and expressed the hope that the positive trends set by the Confidence-Building Measures would be consolidated. In February, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar met with his Indian counterpart Shashank in Islamabad. In a Joint Statement, they agreed to approach the Composite Dialogue with “sincere desire to discuss and arrive at a peaceful settlement of all bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, to the satisfaction of both sides.” The Composite Dialogue was to cover eight unresolved issues, including: peace and security, Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Sir Creek, terrorism and drug-trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation, and promotion of friendly exchanges.

As prior to the signing of the historic Islamabad Statement, Kashmir remained the focus of peace overtures by the leaders of India and Pakistan. On January 22, in a radical departure from the past, the Indian government also held first ever talks with the leadership of an umbrella organisation of Muslim Kashmiri separatists, the All- Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC). On February 16, the peace process over Kashmir received further impetus when the foreign ministers of the two countries agreed in Islamabad to start a landmark bus service across the Line of Control between Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, and Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Meanwhile, the elections in India brought a new Congress-led government in power, with Manmohan Singh as prime minister. Despite that, the Indo-Pak peace process continued. On April 7, the Kashmir bus service resumed as scheduled, reuniting Kashmiri families
divided ever since before India and Pakistan fought their first war over Kashmir in 1947.17

On April 18, in a move widely termed as “cricket diplomacy,” President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh declared on the sidelines of a cricket match between India and Pakistan in India that the peace process between the two countries was “irreversible.” In their joint statement, the two leaders agreed to set up a joint business council to improve trade; launch a rail link between the Indian state of Rajasthan and the Pakistani province of Sindh by January 1, 2006; increase the frequency of the bus service across divided Kashmir; allow trucks to use this route to promote trade; open a new bus link between Poonch in Indian Kashmir and Rawalakot in Pakistani Kashmir; reopen consulates in Mumbai and Karachi by the end of the year; begin a bus service between Amritsar and the Pakistani city of Lahore.18 However, despite undertaking such significant initiatives during the year, both sides remained far apart on finding a final solution to Kashmir. India was unwilling to accept a redrawing of boundaries in the disputed region; Pakistan contended the Line of Control could not be made a permanent border.19

While India and Pakistan moved forward in transforming the Line of Control (LOC) into a “soft border,” there remained a potential risk of militants stoking the insurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir upsetting the process through a spectacular act of terror in Kashmir or inside India. For their part, however, the leaderships of the two countries seemed committed not to let militant attacks impede the peace process. In their April 16 joint statement, President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh jointly condemned the April 6 grenade attack by Kashmiri militants to kill passengers on the inaugural bus service. This was a radical departure from the past—whereby India would accuse Pakistan of sponsoring militancy in Kashmir and Pakistan would deny involvement in it. President
Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh seemed to show similar personal rapport that had brought the Pakistani leader closer to India’s former Prime Minister Vajpayee. However, since Mr Singh headed a coalition government like his predecessor, perhaps the domestic political factor constrained his ability to be as enthusiastic about pursuing peace with Pakistan—especially over Kashmir—as President Musharraf was. This was evident in the disappointing outcome of their meeting on the sidelines of the 60th UN General Assembly summit session in New York. Instead of responding positively to Pakistan’s proposal of limited withdrawal of Indian troops from the Indian-administered Kashmir, the Indian premier spoke about ‘cross-border’ terrorism and ‘territorial indivisibility’ of the disputed region in his speech before the General Assembly. During his meeting with President Musharraf, Mr Singh did not agree to any Kashmir-specific CBMs, as was being widely expected.

Then, in October 2005, a devastating earthquake hit both sides of the Line of Kashmir, especially the Pakistan-administered Kashmir. This was a humanitarian tragedy, which provided both countries an opportunity to move beyond their respective real-politic interests and resolve the dispute urgently. While the entire world came to Pakistan’s help, India offered to provide helicopters flown by Indian Air-Force personnel. Pakistan refused to accept the Indian offer, citing security reasons. Pakistan asked India to open five points on the Line of Control to facilitate the earthquake relief effort, which it reluctantly accepted. President Musharraf also proposed the idea of “demilitarization” and “self-governance” of the disputed region. It was probably on Pakistan’s asking that Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, the APHC Chairman, floated the idea of the ‘United States of Kashmir. However, again, New Delhi did not bother to respond. While there was no progress on Kashmir, the second round of talks between the foreign secretaries of India and
Pakistan held in early 2006 did produce additional CBMs, especially in the field of conventional arms ties between the two countries. Progress was also made in furthering Indo-Pak communication and transportation links, including a hot line between the foreign secretaries, as well as enhancing trade and people-to-people contacts.

The third round of these talks was scheduled for July 2006, but India postponed it after the terrorist bombings of commuter trains the same month, which claimed scores of innocent lives. India alleged that Pakistan-based jihadi organizations, still having links with Pakistani security agencies, were responsible for the terrorist bombings. Pakistan denied the Indian claim, while offering its help to jointly investigate the terrorist incident. Both Indian and Pakistani leaders were committed to the irreversibility of the peace process, which was at risk following the Mumbai bombings. The peace process was revived in September, when Indian and Pakistani leaders, while meeting on the sidelines of the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Havana, agreed that “the peace process must be maintained and its success was important for both countries and the future of the entire region. In this context, they directed their foreign secretaries to resume the Composite Dialogue Process at the earliest.”

They also decided to “continue the joint search for mutually acceptable options for a peaceful negotiated settlement of all issues between India and Pakistan, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, in a sincere and purposeful manner.” However, the most important outcome of the Havana meeting between President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh was their decision to “put in place an India-Pakistan anti-terrorism institutional mechanism to identify and implement counter-terrorism initiatives and investigations.” In their Joint Statement, the Indian and Pakistani leaders “strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and agreed that terrorism is a scourge that needs to be dealt
with.” During the November 2006 and January 2007 rounds of foreign secretaries-level talks, the two countries took the initial steps for creating such an institutional mechanism for counter-terrorism, the modalities of which are yet to be worked out.

**Pakistan’s Quest for Kashmir Resolution**

As for the progress regarding resolution of the Kashmir dispute, it is essentially Pakistan that has continued to offer “out of box” solutions after forsaking its traditional stand on the dispute based on the UN-supervised plebiscite option. The rationale President Musharraf has given for the purpose is exactly what the Indians had been offering for years: that the UN resolutions on Kashmir were passed decades ago, and, therefore, they had become irrelevant to the new ground realities in the disputed region. While unilaterally surrendering the plebiscite option, and agreeing to a number of CBMs on Kashmir as desired by New Delhi, President Musharraf has presented a four-point formula for Kashmir settlement, including demilitarization of the disputed region, establishment of self-governance in it, no change in its borders and the region’s joint supervision by India and Pakistan.

In December 2006, President Musharraf went a step further by telling an Indian television that Pakistan was willing to surrender its claim on Kashmir if New Delhi agreed to his four-point formula. This was followed by Pakistan Foreign Office spokesperson’s proclamation that Islamabad never claimed Kashmir to be its part. The Indian leadership’s reaction to such radical pronouncements on Kashmir by its Pakistani counterparts has been rather measured. Just as it did in 2004, New Delhi contends that they have not been communicated through official channels. However, both Prime Minister Singh and his Minister for External Affairs Parnab Mukherjee have stated publicly that India has to make adjustment in boundaries if Kashmir has
to be resolved, and that there is nothing sacrosanct about Kashmir being an integral part of India as stated in an Indian parliamentary resolution. Alongside the foreign secretaries-level talks, Islamabad and New Delhi are also engaged in back-channel diplomacy being conducted by President Musharraf’s special envoy Tariq Aziz and Indian Prime Minister’s special emissary S K Lambha. It is possible that domestic compulsions may have forced the Indian leadership to confine its Kashmir initiatives only to secret parleys.

However, the fact remains that India has so far not budged from its traditional stand on the dispute: that Kashmir is an integral part of India, and, therefore, non-negotiable. Meanwhile, in the past couple of decades, the Indian leadership has considered the Line of Control as a permanent border, as clear from its repeated reference to “cross-border infiltration.” No change in borders in the disputed territory and the non-negotiable nature of the Indian-administered Kashmir constitute India’s publicly expressed principled position of the government of Prime Minister Singh. While Kashmir officially remains non-negotiable for the Indians, yet the dispute is an important item, at least in Pakistani perceptions, on the agenda of the Composite Dialogue process. India’s position is, therefore, self-contradictory. If Kashmir is non-negotiable, then how come it is included in the agenda of peace talks? The implication for Pakistan of such a contradictory Indian stand is, indeed, grave. What is the use of pursuing a peace process where one party is wholly committed to resolving the fundamental issue, while the other gives a damn about its resolution?

**India’s Stress on Counter-Terrorism**

As clear from the last four rounds of Indo-Pak foreign secretaries-level talks, the Indian strategy remains to shift the focus from the national liberation aspect of Kashmir to
the a terrorist dimension of the Kashmiri movement. This is done essentially to buy time and delay the movement towards conflict resolution. The more a settlement on Kashmir is delayed, the more its resolution becomes complicated and the lesser international attention it receives. For its part, Pakistan has kept on floating newer, more radical initiatives for settling the Kashmir issue, essentially with the intention of keeping it alive internationally. If seen in this backdrop, the recent step to create a joint counter-terrorism setup is problematic. Will the intelligence agencies of the two countries—which up to now have been arch rivals, with each allegedly trying to undermine the other’s territorial integrity—sit together to cooperate against an enemy perceived to be common?

India and Pakistan have each signed scores of bilateral counter-terrorism agreements with other countries, which have entailed close intelligence cooperation and strict abidance of inter-state arrangements like mutual extradition of terrorists. India has a list of such terrorists such as Dawood Ibrahim, the main accused in the February 1993 terrorist bombings in Mumbai who, it thinks, is residing in Pakistan. Islamabad has always denied such Indian charges. How will the Indo-Pak joint counter-terrorism authority resolve such disputable cases? In terms of already operative joint counter-terrorism pacts between Pakistan and other countries, two are worth-mentioning: Islamabad has been cooperating very close with the United States since 9/11 in arresting and extraditing al-Qaeda militants. The pact must have entailed day-to-day intelligence cooperation. Otherwise, the arrest and extradition of hundreds of Taliban and al-Qaeda militants from Pakistani soil since September 11, 2001 would not have been possible. Similarly, the United States, Pakistan and Afghanistan have a trilateral counter-terrorism arrangement, which—despite Pak-Afghan tensions over the infiltration of Taliban from Pakistan’s tribal belt into Afghanistan—has involved close intelligence
and information sharing among the three countries to counter terrorism.

The question is how can a similar bilateral arrangement between India and Pakistan work, with Pakistan suspecting Indian hand in the nationalist tribal nationalist insurgency or uprising in Balochistan? India’s interference in Balochistan has met strong Pakistani reaction, as well as counter-accusations that India was sponsoring militant Balochi nationalism through its intelligence operatives in Afghanistan. Such accusations and counter-accusations have each time threatened the very “irreversibility” of the peace process. Even if the two countries have agreed to create such a mechanism, how can it succeed in effectively countering terrorism unless a sea change is visible in India’s perceptions about Pakistani territory being a staging post for terrorism in India?

**Indo-Pak Competing Interests in Afghanistan**

Since September 11, 2001, India and Pakistan have again started competing for influence in Afghanistan. In Islamabad’s perception, the Afghan government led by President Hamid Karzai is cultivating Indian interests in Afghanistan, and, therefore, undermining Pakistan’s security. A similar perception about the Rabbani regime had led to Pakistan’s support for the Taliban movement in the 1990s. On July 27, 2003, Islamabad expressed its “deep” concerns about the Indian government’s activities along the Pakistan-Afghan border. Pakistan has accused India of setting up networks of “terrorist training camps” located inside Afghanistan, including at the Afghan military base of Qushila Jadid, north of Kabul; near Gereshk, in southern Helmand province; in the Panjshir Valley, northeast of Kabul; and at Kahak and Hassan Killies in western Nimruz province. On August 13, 2004, Jam Muhammad Yusuf, the Chief Minister of Balochistan, stated that the Indian secret services were maintaining 40 terrorist camps all over Baloch
territory. Pakistani media has frequently reported such accusations, claiming that proof had been found of the Indian consulates’ involvement in Balochistan’s troubles. In May 2003, Pakistan launched more accusations against India, accusing India of fomenting troubles in Waziristan, where the Pakistani army was meeting significant resistance from the local Taliban and al Qaeda.22

It is reasonable to assume that the last thing that Pakistan would like to see is an Indian presence on both its eastern and western borders. Pakistan quite naturally will not allow any other regional neighbour of Afghanistan, in particular India, to gain a preponderance of influence in Afghanistan. The Indian factor explains only partially Pakistan’s interventionism. Pakistan’s attitude in Afghanistan is essentially the result of its fundamental security dilemma. Too weak to confront India directly, Pakistan needs to avoid isolation and maintain international engagement at all costs. In particular, it constantly seeks US protection. Pakistan’s interest is vital at a time when India’s growing political, military and economic ties with both Afghanistan and the United States lead many Pakistanis to believe their country is being marginalized. 23

Kabul has its own share of accentuating Pakistan’s security dilemma. While the causes of growing insurgency in Afghanistan may have been emanating essentially from a multitude of historical and current factors indigenous to the country, the Karzai government has singled out Pakistan for causing the insurgency by ignoring or sponsoring the rearming and regrouping of Taliban in its tribal belt and their infiltration across the Durand Line into Afghanistan. For its part, while denying the allegations of the Karzai government, which have won growing international recognition, the government in Islamabad has started to partially fence the Durand Line and appeased the pro-Taliban Pashtun tribesmen in its tribal belt. Indo-Pak rivalry vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Pak-Afghan tensions on the issue
of Taliban infiltration consequently constitute a major factor impeding the quest for peace and stability in South Asia.

Concluding Remarks

Being an anti–status quo country, Pakistan has shown flexibility in the Composite Dialogue—especially on the issue of Kashmir—in the manner in which the status quo could or should be revised. Since the status quo favours India, New Delhi has not shown any discernable change in its approach towards the peace process with Pakistan, particularly over the dispute of Kashmir. Since the start of the Composite Dialogue, the Indian and Pakistani leaders have met four times. The foreign ministers of the two countries have also met a number of times. Their foreign secretaries have already held four rounds of negotiations within the framework of the Composite Dialogue. Such high level diplomacy between Islamabad and New Delhi has indeed produced results, but only in the shape of several CBMs, particularly covering trade, transportation, communication and cultural links. Since the promotion of these links potentially enhances the regional clout of India as South Asia’s major political, economic and cultural power, New Delhi has been willing to conclude more of such CBMs as the Composite Dialogue moves forward.

It is India’s reluctance to solve major disputes with Pakistan—whether it is the issue of Kashmir or its by-product, the Siachen dispute—at the diplomatic platform, which forces Pakistani leadership to use the media for expressing the country’s willingness to make radical compromises on these unresolved issues. Islamabad does not wish Kashmir to be put on the back-burner, and, therefore, its leadership attempts to internationalise the dispute through media statements, even if they undermine its traditional standpoint on the dispute. For its part, India wants Kashmir to either move away from international limelight or be depicted internationally as a dispute fuelled
by nothing but terrorism. Whenever Pakistani leadership attempts to internationalise Kashmir through the media, New Delhi urges it to use the official diplomatic channel for floating new initiatives on the dispute. When the new initiatives become a part of the Composite Dialogue, India virtually shows no interest in making its own compromises required for their realisation. While the Indian talk on Kashmir is based upon generalizations such as achieving peace and harmony in South Asia or institutionalizing more cosmic CBMs in its ties with Pakistan, without doing anything about settling the Kashmir dispute; Pakistani discourse depicts specific policy options from self-governance to demilitarization, even joint supervision. That is where the peace process stands currently, insofar as the resolution of the most important issue in India-Pakistan relations—namely, the Kashmir dispute—is concerned. Their approaches to the peace process are at cross-purpose. India is clearly pursuing a bottoms-up approach—that of promoting the conclusion of CBMs as a means to resolve broader political conflicts such as Kashmir. Pakistan, on the other hand, prefers a top-down approach—that of resolving the fundamental dispute of Kashmir and its by-product, the Siachen dispute—even though it is willing to incorporate India’s preference for the CBMs in the peace process.

It is clear that for settling Kashmir or any other unresolved dispute between India and Pakistan, the two countries have to compromise their traditional official stands on the unresolved issues to find a mid-range workable solution. India’s economic and technological rise is a reality Pakistan has to accept. Pakistan’s realistic course on Kashmir, marked by unilateral compromises, suggests it has accepted this fact. A major lesson of the 2002 standoff in Indo-Pak ties for India was that its very economic and technological growth is directly linked to peace and security in South Asia. Recurrent tensions in ties with Pakistan, which have emanating essentially from the non-resolution
of the Kashmir question, threaten India’s quest for economic and political prowess at the international stage—since they may dissuade the United States in particular and the Western world in general from investing in India. Given that, India should use Pakistan’s willingness to make radical compromises on Kashmir as an opportunity to resolve this long-standing dispute. After all, it has already made important gestures in this regard; for instance, the 2003 decision to enforce ceasefire along the Line of Control and the 2004 step to directly talk to APHC leadership. President Musharraf’s four-point formula is essentially an attempt to find out a via media for the Kashmir settlement. It has potential advantages for India even in its growing quest for having a direct access to Afghanistan. For instance, the idea of joint control of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir may permit India to use the Ghizer district in Northern Areas to gain territorial access to Afghanistan. There could be difficulties on the way, as both China and Pakistan consider the Northern Areas as strategically significant, but there is no harm in exploring such unique opportunities by India.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, it also has to understand why New Delhi does not fully trust on the issue of terrorism on the Indian-administered Kashmir or within India itself and its origin from Pakistan-administered Kashmir or within Pakistan itself. The Musharraf regime may have dissociated itself from supporting any Mujahideen group involved in such terrorism, and it may have adopted a policy of zero tolerance for such groups, it has to understand that India’s continuing concerns on the matter have a genuine historical context. For almost a decade and a half, India has paid a great price as a result of jihadi militancy across the Line of Control, and the memory of this jihadi militancy will take time to fade away from Indian mindset. This is not to say that Islamabad has not done enough to reassure India and the international community.
that it will not allow its soil or that of the Pakistan-administered Kashmir to be used for acts of terrorism across the Line of Control in disputed Kashmir or within India. The Musharraf government has, indeed, adopted stringent measures for the purpose. However, for the sake of peace in the region, it needs to do more to convince India about the sincerity of its intentions in reversing the same jihadi wave in whose growth Pakistan itself played a considerable part. Islamabad’s willingness to partner with New Delhi within an institutionalized counter-terrorism platform is an important gesture in this respect, which needs to be duly recognized by India.

Finally, it is in the interest of India and Pakistan as well as Afghanistan that the US-led international campaign against Taliban-led insurgency in Afghanistan succeeds. By instigating the Afghan leadership against Pakistan, or using the Afghan territory as a staging post for launching subversive activities against Pakistan, India will only aggravate Pakistan’s security dilemma in the region. Yet another proxy war between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan will harm them, Afghanistan as well as the international peace and security mission in Afghanistan. A secure and stable Afghanistan will be an essential bridge between Central Asia, with enormous sources of energy, and South Asia, faced with the enormity of energy crisis. Pakistan itself has to be more proactive in tackling the sources of extremism and terrorism emanating from its soil, particularly the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan. And, instead of trying to internationally isolate Pakistan on the issue of Taliban infiltration, the Karzai regime has to take the government of Pakistan in confidence so as to create a joint strategy to fight the internal and external sources of growing insurgency in Afghanistan.

The role of the international community, particularly the United States, is extremely crucial in making the peace process between India and Pakistan a success as well as in
preventing the recurrence of Indo-Pak rivalry over Afghanistan. Both India and Pakistan desire ever closer relationship with the United States. A mutually-beneficial settlement of Kashmir should not be a hedge against India’s strategic relationship with the United States. Nor should Pakistan feel threatened from India’s strategic ties with the United States, if it is convinced that these ties do not threaten its own legitimate regional ambitions—for instance, the quest for access to Central Asian market and energy resources through Afghanistan. It was wrong on India’s part to be jealous about Pakistan’s emergence as a frontline state in the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and pursue a bellicose attitude towards Islamabad. The consequent stand-off in Indo-Pak ties until the summer of 2002 would have jeopardized the future of South Asia as well as that of India’s own economic growth, had the United States not attempted to defuse the crisis or had the leaders of India and Pakistan not learned from it or not embraced peace in the subsequent months and years.

South Asia’s foremost irony is that the regions and ocean surrounding it are areas of major international economic activity or concern, and yet the region continues to be embroiled in unnecessary inter-state conflicts despite its tremendous human and natural resource potential. India’s economic and technological rise is the most positive development in the region. However, South Asia as a whole does not depict a promising scenario. The SAARC may have moved beyond the preferential trading arrangement to a free trade regime, to be realized in successive phases on the basis of the member-states’ respective economic constraints, but the non-resolution of major disputes such as Kashmir between India and Pakistan and the Durand Line question between Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to cast a dark shadow over its future viability. A detailed narration in this paper about the areas of conflict and concern of India,
Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the main events reflective of their respective competing and clashing interests provides a rational context for realizing a grand transformation in South Asia from conflict and tension to cooperation and integration, obviously with requisite input from the international community, particularly the United States.
Notes and References


7. Text of the speech is available at the official web site of the government of Pakistan, www.infopak.gov.pk


11. For details on the Deputy Secretary of State’s visit to South Asia in May 2003, see Mariana Babar, “Kashmir Infiltration Down: Armitage,” The News, May 9, 2002; and “US Not to Act as a Mediator, Says Armitage” The News, 7 May 2003.


