

Urgency for Inter-State Dialogue for Fighting Terrorism in South Asia

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Abstract

South Asia today is in limelight of the world again, this time due to the ongoing terrorism in the region. Amongst other states in this region are India and Pakistan, the two antagonist and nuclear neighbors. The relations between the two countries are marred with tensions, conflicts and wars. At present the ongoing bilateral dialogue and peace process has once again been disrupted due to rising tensions between the two regarding cross border terrorism. This study attempts to investigate why there is urgency for inter-state dialogue between India and Pakistan. The paper further highlights how the issue of terrorism has adversely affected the peace efforts between the two countries and also the overall peace and security of South Asia. The paper concludes with the outcome that terrorism in the region can only be curtailed with joint efforts especially with regard to India and Pakistan.

Key words: Terrorism, India, Pakistan, peace, dialogue

Introduction:

Declaration of war on terrorism by the western powers through the auspices of UNO in year 2001 had a very deep impact on the strategic postures of the two major powers of South Asia - India and Pakistan. 'President Musharaf changed the declared policy in the area of terror and even helped in the removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, in cooperation with the coalition states' (Schweitzer and Shaul, 2010: 208-209).

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'9/11 made South Asia the initial theater for the "War on Terrorism" declared by President George W. Bush and reordered US relations with the region' (Nayak, 2005: 2). The state of Pakistan which hitherto fore had formerly recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and was extending diplomatic and material support to this set up suddenly was forced to wage a war against its very close former allies. This volt face which was a fact accompli in the changed scenario world over, did not go very well with the right wing supporters of Taliban within Pakistan and resulted in a kind of armed uprising against the new policy of the government in quite a few pockets of the country and the war on terrorism which was mainly to be fought in Afghanistan drifted first towards the tribal belt of Pakistan and then to the main streets of Pakistan making the whole society and the government a hostage to the whimsical but regular strikes by the terrorist organization.

"Pakistan began as a reluctant entrant into the global war on terrorism; it has since become an active participant in the struggle" (Trivedi, 2009: 238). India on the other hand made full use of the opportunity created by the war on terror and very successfully got dubbed from the international forum the freedom fighters of Kashmir as terrorist outfits. That naturally resulted in reduced diplomatic and moral support to the freedom fighters of Kashmir from Pakistan and increased their frustration and desperation over the period.

The ever present proxy war between India and Pakistan at certain points in the sub continent now extended to Afghanistan where both have been vying for greater influence with the new regime and set up. The tribal belt of Afghanistan and Pakistan becomes the new and the hottest battle ground for this proxy war. These developments have eventually weakened both India and Pakistan as in their endeavor to bleed each other, they have become hostage to a variety of terrorist organizations and now the handle is finally in the hands of these groups who through a repeat of Mumbai like adventure can at any time ignite a round of hostilities between the two neighbors.

Background

The history of relations between India and Pakistan since their independence reveals that their relations have been tense and prone to conflicts but never cordial. 'Despite the pledge in the Simla Agreement to settle differences by peaceful means, little progress was

made towards threat objective after 1972. The settlement of Jammu and Kashmir was not even discussed. Other existing disputes confined to fester, and some new ones arose' (Sattar, 2007: 187). The two countries have never lived in peaceful co-existence. 'Pakistan's fear for its security arises not only from the historical pattern of enmity, but also from the asymmetry of power in the South Asian region. Power is dependent on many factors: one of which is the size of country, which include territory and population' (Mahdi, 1999:16).

In South Asia, India is the largest country in terms of its size and population and Pakistan comes next to it. 'India is the responsible for maintaining peace and determining the scheme of things in the region' (Ahmad, 1968:10). Pakistan shares its longest border with India and Pakistan's main security threats and concerns have mainly emerged from India. Pakistan has always felt that India having hegemonic designs has adopted hostile attitude towards Pakistan. 'The relationship has been characterized from the start by a sense of antagonism and suspicion bordering on paranoia' (Paris, 2010:45). 'For more than six decades, Pakistan has defined India as a structural threat' (Racine, 2009:55-56). Between the two there have been number of contesting issues at various times of their history but the most important and consistent is the Kashmir issue. 'In both the Pakistani and the Indian militaries, the commitment to fight for Kashmir has been reinforced over the years by the sacrifices made there: some 13000 dead on both sides in the wars in 1947 and 1965, together with around 1000 dead in the Kargil battle of 1999, and some 2400 (mostly from frostbite and accidents) in the twenty five years of the struggle for the Siachen' (Lieven, 2011:187). 'As long as the root cause, Kashmir, is not addressed, violence will continue since terrorists cannot be fully controlled by the state. The crux of the problem is absence of negotiating space on Kashmir' (Abkar, 2011:286-287). 'The barrier that stands between improved India-Pakistan relations is often called the 'trust deficit', but it would be better defined as a state of 'mutual incomprehension' The two countries do not understand one another' (Pakistan – India Relationship). Both have always looked towards each other with distrust and suspicion which remains the basic cause of hindrance towards normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. 'The biggest problem and a spoiling factor for the process from the very beginning is the trust deficit between the two. It is evident from the very beginning that both sides don't trust each other. However, nothing illustrate this point more than the Mumbai terrorist attacks. Within hours the tragic events started to unfold, New Delhi

began implicating Islamabad. It seems that the India and Pakistan peace process is suffering from a classic spoiler problem' (Zeb, 2009 - 10: 24). 'Even after more than 60 years of their emergence as two independent states, the problem remains the same, of 'image' and 'perception'. Both states still have their reservations and continue to regard each other the 'archenemy'. This has been a great hurdle in achieving peace' (Sardar, 2011: 4).

Due to the security concerns of both, they have been spending much more than their actual requirements towards defense. This is being done at the cost of the uplift and betterment of their huge population. The region remains under developed and is also poverty ridden. The conflicts between the two countries have hindered the progress and development in South Asia. India and Pakistan have upto now seen three wars. Clashes and fighting broke out over Siachin Glacier in 1984 and Kargil crisis in 1999. Since 1998 when both the countries overtly became nuclear the situation in region became highly volatile and South Asia has turned into a nuclear flash point.

Peace Process and Terrorism

Under the present situation the only option available to both India and Pakistan is to resolve their issues through peaceful efforts and for this both will have to adopt peaceful methods for conflict resolution. The peace process between them must go on, both need to sit down and discuss contesting issues including terrorism. If terrorism is to be controlled in this region, joint efforts are required by the states of South Asia otherwise this menace has the capability to engulf the whole region and completely destroy the peace and stability of South Asia. Rather than the disruptions in the dialogue process collaborative efforts are required to fight out terrorism. The concerns of both India and Pakistan regarding terrorism need to be talked out through dialogue which should never be derailed taking into consideration the interests of both the parties. Both being the two major powers of the region should act in a responsible way. A terrorism free South Asia can only bring about real peace and stability in the region which is in dire need for the uplift and betterment of its underdeveloped and poor population. South Asia has great potentials to become a prosperous and developed region provided there is peace and stability, such a situation can only be possible when India and Pakistan keep their doors open for dialogue for conflict resolution.

Urgency for Inter-State Dialogue for Fighting Terrorism in South Asia

'A peace process can be defined as concerted efforts by parties in dispute to seek a resolution of their conflict through dialogue and negotiations' (Lodhi, 2011: 319). At various times in history of both the countries there have been bilateral talks which have even led to number of agreements between the two. The peace process between India and Pakistan which began in 2004 in the form of composite dialogue has never been consistent. At number of occasions there have been break downs in the talks leading to an environment of tension in South Asia. 'Any discussion of the problems of regional cooperation in South Asia inevitably boils down to the issues, controversies, and divergence of perceptions of these two neighboring countries and their mutual relations' (Khan, 2001:242). The cause of the present disruption in the bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan is terrorism. Two main incidents of terrorism in India, led it to adopt a very aggressive attitude towards Pakistan, India fully exploited these incidents to blame Pakistan overtly of cross border terrorism and also of harboring terrorist organizations inside Pakistan especially the ones working towards the liberation of Kashmir.

On the morning of December 13, 2001 occurred a major incident in India when five armed men attacked the Indian Parliament which was in session at that time in New Delhi. Before they could enter the inside of the building of the Parliament, there was exchange of fire between the security forces and the armed men. Before these men could enter the building they were killed by the security forces. A number of security men were also killed in the exchange of fire between the two. Even though the terrorists were unable to inflict large scale damage as they were shot down before they could enter the building but this became a crucial incident of terrorism in India.

Very soon India blamed Pakistan for this terrorist attack and took a very stern attitude. The situation became so serious that India moved its military forces on the borders with Pakistan and only with great efforts the war was averted between the two nuclear neighbors.

The peace process between India and Pakistan received the most serious set back when on November 26, 2008 Mumbai became the target of terrorist attacks which led to immediate tensions between the two capitals and resulted in the breakdown of talks between India and Pakistan, which remained disrupted even after more than two years. During this period there had been accusations and counter

accusations from both the parties, leading to an environment of tensions in South Asia.

For nearly three days Mumbai became hostage to a number of terrorist attacks and at a number of places. The metro-politan city turned into a battle field with number of bomb blasts and firing between security forces and terrorists. The horrifying scenes were watched all over the world. Among other targets the Taj Mahal Hotel became the main battle ground where the terrorists made number of hostages and cross firing continued for days between the terrorists and security forces. At the end of this terrorist episode, around two hundred people were killed including several foreigners. Only one terrorist during the operation was captured alive whose name was Ajmal Kasab who during interrogation revealed that this terrorist act was masterminded by Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is a group based in Pakistan and working for the liberation of Kashmir. On the pretext of the proofs, India adopted a very stern, antagonist, hostile and threatening attitude against Pakistan. India at many times showed intentions of military action against Pakistan.

Where at one place this tragic incident showed enormous security lapses of India whereas on the other hand India fully utilized this terrorist incident to project the image of Pakistan as a terrorist state at the international level. India in the name of cross border terrorism transmitted the image of Pakistan all over the world as a terrorism sponsoring state. At all levels questions were being raised regarding the presence of jihadi groups and their activities and their role in Pakistan and abroad. India which had been for a long time was trying to project Pakistan as a terrorist state, found a golden opportunity to defame Pakistan after this incident. Moreover the international community fully showered its sympathies for India. Even though Pakistan government kept on denying any cross border terrorism from its soils but evidence put forward by India led Pakistan to adopt a defensive stance. The relations between the two became so strained that India openly declared that if Pakistan does not take stern action against the militant groups then India could at any time go for surgical strikes inside Pakistan, targeting the bases of the groups involved in the Mumbai attacks. This was also a huge set back to the Kashmir cause.

Since the Mumbai attacks in 2008, the issue of dealing the militant organizations in Pakistan has become a grave issue. At present India

takes cross border terrorism as the main cause for the disruption of bilateral peace talks with Pakistan. The disruption in the talks has led to tensions and accusations against each other. Even though number of assurances have been given to India by Pakistan regarding militant organizations in Pakistan, Musharraf government banned number of religious militant groups, their accounts were frozen and number of their leaders were arrested but this did not pacify India as it considered that this was not enough or the groups which India took as the main culprits of Mumbai attacks were not being targeted by Pakistan government. Pakistan on the other hand insisted that at the time when Pakistan itself was a victim of terrorism why it would let terrorist organizations flourish inside Pakistan. India also on various occasions has shown concerns that the Pakistan government is showing a soft corner for the militants groups working especially for the liberation of Kashmir and these are the same groups which India wants to be dismantled. 'Ever since 1989 when the Kashmiris took up arms, India has sought to attribute the conflict entirely to cross-border infiltration sustained by Pakistan. It has exploited the worldwide abhorrence of terrorism to deceit this phase of Kashmiri struggle as Pakistan sponsored terrorism. A terrorist act within the parliament complex in New Delhi led to one of the most protracted military confrontation between the two countries in 2001-2002. The current dialogue became possible only when during a visit in 2004 to Pakistan, the then prime minister of India, Vajpayee and President Musharraf undertook to fight terrorism together' (Ahmar, 2009: 132).

Why the urgency?

'Peace in South Asia is crucial to pursuing the cause of peace in the world, including and especially the Islamic world. The Indo-Pak dispute is a hindrance to socioeconomic cooperation and development in South Asia. There is no military solution to our problems. The way forward is through diplomacy.' (Musharraf, 2006:297). 'India-Pakistan relations have deteriorated further which will make the resumption of bilateral dialogue more difficult' (Dixit, 2004: 31). For a sustainable process of bilateral talks between India and Pakistan, it is imperative for both to show flexibility in their attitudes. Both have seen that there have been wars between them which did not bring any results, rather resulted in devastation, burden on economies and stronger hatred towards each other. 'Indian meaningfully seeking a practical compromise on the issue with Pakistan has become even more important and critical due to the nuclear weaponization of both the

countries' (Dixit, 2004: 24). 'The main security threat perception of Pakistan continues to emanate from India, with which it is involved in an arms race, both conventional and non-conventional' (Khan, 1999:19). The conflicts and wars have led both to acquire more weapons, increasing military capacity and indulging in an arms race even to an extent of both becoming nuclear. This has all been done at the cost of social and economic development of their huge population. The people of the region are being denied of their right to basic facilities. Both countries are ridden with poverty and to eradicate and lessen this, there is a dire need that there should be normalization of relations between the two, so that funds may be diverted from defense expenditures towards the uplift of the people of South Asia. 'The Indo-Pakistan dispute is a hindrance to socio-economic cooperation and development in South Asia' (Musharraf, 2006:297).

Terrorism is a menace, which needs to be eradicated, for this both Pakistan and India will have to take this issue jointly. Both need to avoid points scoring in their blame game towards each other, as terrorism is directly related with peace and stability in South Asia. Unless and until there is peace in the region there are minimal chances of development and collaboration.

It has been seen that terrorism has the potential not only to destabilize Pakistan but can even threaten the region and global security as well, with all the developing states in South Asia mostly confronting and economic problems cannot afford terrorism to further damage them. 'A prosperous and strong Pakistan holds the key to the peace and security of South Asia as a whole' (Arif, 2010: 339).

Both the countries will be well advised to view the old and perennial Kashmir issue separately from the rather recent phenomenon of terrorism. Pakistan should ensure that no group in the name of Kashmir cause launches an act of terror against India while using the soil of Pakistan.

India on the other hand should not club the popular resistance of Kashmiris with the acts of other groups, whether internal or external to avoid falling into an uncontrollable hysteria of the Kashmiri people from within Indian boundaries venture on a suicide mission of the sorts. 'There are intricacies in Kashmir dispute. There is no one-track solution. A complex problem entails a complex solution. The major

issue is not Kashmir but Indo-Pak relationship' (Datta and Sharma, 2002:204).

It would be necessary to check any attempt to pitch India and Pakistan against each other by any irresponsible and recalcitrant groups and to ensure that the Kashmiri struggle does not take this heinous course, it would be important to engage them in meaningful dialogue. Both the Pakistan and India should keep the Kashmir issue out of the terrorist basket as otherwise some internal or external actors would get them entangled into unforeseen troubles.

India at many times after the Mumbai attacks has adopted a very threatening tone towards Pakistan regarding cross border terrorism. India claims that if there is any incident in future related to terrorism on its soil it will not hesitate to take drastic action against Pakistan, which may include military action like surgical strikes or even a war. This scenario will be explosive not only for the two neighbors but also for the whole South Asia. As both the powers of the region are nuclear and use of nuclear of capability by any one in desperation will lead to destruction of unthinkable magnitude which South Asia can not in any case afford. 'In the wake of the Mumbai attacks the relations between India and Pakistan have worsened. There is an urgency for them to realize that both countries have an equal stake in peace. It should not be confined to the leadership sphere; the people of both countries should also be brought into this domain.' (Sardar, 2011:45).

Conclusion

'Terrorism has been playing a crucial role in bilateral relations in South Asia. In these times India – Pakistan relations present the worst case of terrorism spoiling bilateral relations' (Saravanamuttu, 2003:328). 'Indo-Pakistani tensions will continue to constrain US security ties to both countries, despite Washington's determination to use counter terrorism cooperation to develop independent bilateral relations with each' (Nayak, 2005:12). 'Consequently, presence of American troops in the region will enhance political and economic instability in Asia and South Asia and ultimately it will deteriorate cultural and environmental concerns' (Awasthi, 2009:29). India and Pakistan must keep the channels of bilateral cooperation and dialogue open to have an objective view of the situation and to deny the terrorist organizations the benefit of communication gap between the two atomic powers of South Asia. 'Both India and Pakistan hoped to leverage the terrorism

issue to their benefit and to the detriment of the other, judged by this standard, both states have been frustrated' (Hayt, 2006:289).

Terrorism is no doubt a common threat to both India and Pakistan, understanding this reality, joint efforts and collaboration is required to deal with terrorism.

On many occasions the statements of India need to tone down. The threatening attitude of India towards Pakistan should be avoided by India, as this kind of attitude and threatening remarks only lead to more tensions and suspicious eventually moving towards trust deficit between the two states. India needs to realize that these threats will not help in dealing with terrorism. India knowing the ground realities should not have given strong anti Pakistan statements on the incident of killing of Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan by United States on 2 May, 20011, when Indian leaders and officials gave remarks that Pakistan has become a 'terrorist sanctuary' and that India is capable and can do the same kind of operation inside Pakistan to destroy the terrorists wanted by India. At the occurrence of a major incident of terrorism at Mehran Naval Base in Karachi in May 2011 when a severe blow to its security was being faced by Pakistan when some terrorists took over the base for sixteen hours, India never hesitated in giving statements when Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave a statement that 'And as Pakistan's neighbor , we have great worries about the terror machine that is still infact (there)' (Dawn, 2011).

India as a matter of fact is not or does not want to fully understand the position in which Pakistan is today regarding terrorism. Pakistan today present the case of worst hit country due to terrorism. Due to terrorism both internal and external security of Pakistan has come under threat.

'Turning distrust into mutual trust, it was thought, would help in resolving the bigger issues that have been awaiting resolution. There is no choice for the two countries, but to go on talking to each other until they are able to settle for durable peace, irrespective of the issues involved. Patience is the name of the game' (Dua, 2011).

'In a fresh friendly gesture to Pakistan, India has decided to resume the bilateral cricked series which was put on hold in retaliation against the 26/11 terror attack on Mumbai' (The Times of India, 2001). 'The semi-finals of the World Cup at Mohali turned into a good innings for the fledging peace process. The first India-Pakistan match played in

the subcontinent since the Mumbai incident afforded an opportunity for the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and India to meet and talk about a broad range of issues. This marked a new thaw in relations' (Lodhi, 2011). 'The current initiative by India to resume talks with Pakistan is a good omen. It might be indicative of the realization on India's part that a joint stand with Pakistan is a better way to deal with the serious internal and external problems the region is faced with' (Hasan, 2011).

'Pak-India dialogue, although widely anticipated, has of late not been taken seriously because of the terrorists' sabotage of any real progress. While progress is still a long time coming on many issues of the past such as Kashmir, the real immediate problem is the struggle against terrorism. Terrorism has held the region hostage. It has obliterated any real developments, whether on economic and trade cooperation, or people-to-people contact' (Daily Times, 2011).

'Pakistan and India agreed on Tuesday to set up a 'terror hotline' to warn each other of possible terrorist attacks, a move to build trust as the two countries get their peace process back on track. The two sides also reiterated their commitment to fighting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and reaffirmed the need to bring those responsible for such crimes to justice' (Daily Times, 2011).

India and Pakistan being the largest states in South Asia need to act in a very responsible manner, both need to adopt accommodating attitudes towards each other. India needs to consider that at present no other state in the whole world is affected by terrorism as much as Pakistan is. Pakistan itself is the greatest victim of terrorism. The ongoing suicide attacks all over Pakistan are a consequence of government's crack down against terrorist elements, who retaliate back with more force against the people and security forces. Pakistani security forces are already involved in counter terrorism and are facing security threats; it becomes very difficult to open new fronts of confrontation with in Pakistan.

'As India and Pakistan have been locked in an intractable conflict for a very long time, it is essential to have continuous, persistent efforts that would bring about a constructive change in relationship which is the pre-requisite for conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence' (Sardar, 2011: 45). The results which can be achieved through collective efforts cannot be achieved by a single state. Only collaboration and

cooperation amongst the two can bring about positive results in combating terrorism in South Asia.

Taking into consideration the present prevalent volatile situation regarding terrorism in South Asia, the urgency for peace talks between India and Pakistan has become even more crucial. Terrorism is not only a matter for Pakistan but it should be a concern of all other states of South Asia, as terrorism has the ability to spread out to other states and engulf the whole region.

It is now for the statesmen on both sides to fully capture and capitalize on the pre-dominant passion for peaceful neighborhood. They will have to rise above the shallow point scoring and vying for the short time gains. The upper hand approach pursued hitherto shall need to be changed into an even-handed rapprochement to combat terrorism jointly.

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