

From conflict to cooperation?

India-Pakistan relations and the shadows of Mumbai



DR. SIEGFRIED
O. WOLF

After 65 years of animosity leading to four major armed engagements, numerous cross-border skirmishes and at least two serious 'war-in-sight-crises', the relationship between India and Pakistan seems to be heading towards a more promising future. Today, there is no doubt that the politically utilised Hindu-Muslim antagonism, the subsequent development of two antagonised concepts of state ideology (The two-nation theory), the problematic conditions of state formation especially the traumatic, violent events during the partition of British India, and particularly the everlasting struggle over the territory of Kashmir can clearly be identified as the major reasons of the conflict between the two countries. In this context, India's refusal to divide financial and military resources of the British Raj according to the partition plan led to an intensification of tensions between an increasingly polarised 'Hindu India' and 'Muslim Pakistan'. The fact that the core and key elements of administration and infrastructure were situated on the Indian side furthermore increased the level of Pakistani frustration. These socio-political grievances combined with the fragmentation of century old economic structures (like the Jute industry of then East Pakistan), of which Pakistan was affected disproportionately, sharpened the rivalry. All in all, it seems that unfortunate colonial legacies and the emergence of an existence-threatening situation for Pakistan led to the burden of a 'negatively formulated national identity'. In other words, the Pakistani elites were convinced that their country was everything India did not want to become - the embodiment of all principles that one has to reject. Consequently, fears of Indian dominance of the subcontinent and New Delhi's refusal of accepting the country's sovereignty increased in Pakistan. To sum up, the combination of threat perception, distrust, deprivation effects and diametrically opposed self-perceptions shaped the disastrous beginning of India-Pakistan relations and seems to diminish any hopes of a peaceful coexistence.

Nevertheless, several attempts to dismantle the hostility were made over time. One of the most essential and important steps towards rapprochement were

the negotiations on regulating water-distribution of the Indus Basin in 1960 resulting in the so-called Indus Water Treaty. It did not however lead to extensive cooperation in the fields of economy or security policies. The negative implications of the Kashmir conflict and the sealing of borders as well as opposing national economy models hindered collaboration between Islamabad and New Delhi. Only after the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the 1990's and the so called "Delhi-Lahore-Bus-Peace-Initiative" in February 1999, trends of constructive economic and security policy based talks between both countries became political realities. But, the Kargil conflict in 1999 - in which Pakistan launched a major (unsuccessful) military operation in Indian administered Kashmir - abruptly ended the bilateral talks and further negotiations were postponed. Most surprisingly for many pessimistic analysts, only a few years later, probably the most far-reaching shift from conflict to cooperation was initiated by the former Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2004 by launching a Composite Dialogue between India and Pakistan. This dialogue covers a relatively broad range of issues comprising peace and security, including confidence-building measures; territorial/border issues, namely Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek and Wullar Barrage; terrorism and drug trafficking; economic and commercial cooperation; and promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields (people-to-people contacts). But most important is the move of Pakistan to give up its insistence of a solution for the Kashmir conflict as a precondition for any negotiation in other fields. In order to soften further the traditional obstructive approach between New Delhi and Islamabad, in 2005 the rapprochement was declared irreversible by both governments, which marks an important turning point in their bilateral relations towards a new era of flexibility.

But contemporary India-Pakistan relations are not only troubled because of the on-going Kashmir-conflict, the persistent cross-border terrorism threat emanating from Pakistani territory, continued to cast a gloomy shadow over all advances. No non-partisan expert would ques-

tion that elements within Pakistan have used terrorism as a tool to challenge India not only in Kashmir but also in other parts of the region. For example, in October 2001 Pakistan based terrorist groups (Laskar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed) attacked the state assembly in Srinagar (Kashmir) and in December the Indian Parliament (Lok Sabha) in New Delhi, which brought India and Pakistan at the brink of war. However, the developments after 9/11 forced the political plexus in Islamabad to take a stand against transnational terror-

ism. The rhetoric of the then head of state General Pervez Musharraf demanding a stronger grip on counter-terrorism attempted to accommodate the demands from the international community led by the US. However Pakistan's engagement against terrorism seems ambiguous. On the one hand, critics are claiming the existence of (in)formal networks between Pakistan's secret services, especially the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and militant extremist groups accused of carrying out terrorist activities; and on the other hand it is hard to determine if, or to which extent, these groups are (still) used for external operations coordinated by governmental and/or non-governmental actors. Furthermore one has to raise the question whether the Pakistani government (especially the civilian one) knows about the control and manipulation of these Jihadi groups, and the activities/involvement of security

agencies and their cooperation with terrorist activities. The bloody events of the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid, which was stormed by Pakistan security forces) in Islamabad in 2007 - a place which was turned into a hub of militant extremism and anti-government activities by religious fanatics under the very nose of the ISI headquarter - shows the complexity of the situation. It did not only bring to surface the reluctance of Pakistan's security circles in addressing the challenge of dealing with fanatic elements, but also the obscure nexus between state agencies

and militant (religious) extremism in order to protect the general public in Pakistan as well as the international community from extremism. Despite large scale military campaigns against 'terrorists' on its western borders with tremendous casualties (more than 3500 deaths) for the Pakistan Armed Forces (PAF), transnational terrorism still remains one of the greatest challenges for India's security, subsequently for substantial peace between both states. Basically Pakistan efforts in the context of the 'war against terror' are positive signals for New Delhi, but of India-Pakistan relations this is gaining momentum with focus on the 'Af-Pak policy' of the US-administration, which will be most likely continued since President Barack Obama got re-elected last week. The fact that India is partly integrated in the US outlook on Afghanistan raises serious concerns in Pakistan. Old fears are reemerging in Pakistan, that India is trying to encircle the country with destabilising impacts on tribal territories situated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former FATA) and Baluchistan, as well as using Afghanistan as a 'second front' in case of another armed confrontation ('pincer movement'). Third, there are not much information or success stories about activities against terrorist groups targeting India. The never-ending story of attacks on Indian cities with involvements of elements from Pakistan, like the attacks on New Delhi in 2005, Varanasi in 2006, Mumbai in 2006, 2008, and Jaipur in 2008 are evidence enough that terrorists groups are still operating from the territory of its western neighbor.

Having this specific case of cross-border terrorism in mind, one must state that Pakistan's troubled civil-military relations resulting in a nebulous, not-accountable decision-making process in the areas of domestic and foreign policies has been a crucial roadblock for improvements in India-Pakistan relations until today. It is evident, that policy making in Pakistan is characterised by the supremacy of the traditional security paradigm which dominates the definition of national interests since the country came into existence. But it seems that things are changing. There is also a rising awareness within the military top brass that they are increasingly involved in severe internal security missions.

This is a fact which forces the PAF to face a 'double burden' and to undertake a new assessment of the national security situation. On one side, the soldiers have to carry out unconventional anti-secessionist and counter-terrorists activities; on the other side, they want to be able to deal with India in a conventional manner. Therefore, one could state that the Army's hands are tied up and will definitely try to avoid an open confrontational policy towards India to 'keep the eastern front quiet'.

In this context, Pakistan's

establishment has started to recognise that the notion that state survival is exclusively dominated by security matters needs to change, from security towards a more socio-economically guided perspective. The deteriorating commercial situation and economic imbalance with India is convincing Islamabad that it has to drive towards threat reduction, particularly in its relations with New Delhi. Furthermore, the civilians and military leadership perceive that the current revenues are just enough to cover the basic expenditures of the government administration and the defence expenditure. Here, it seems that there will be a new understanding of the importance of economic cooperation with India. Therefore a more narrow security view, especially a less India-centric one, on national interest is an essential condition.

To conclude, the struggle for power between the military and civilians since the existence of Pakistan has not only hampered domestic political developments but also paralysed the rapprochement with India. However, realising that the 'armed adventures' against India paid no dividend, today the military seems to be willing to grant civilians more room to manoeuvre in negotiating cooperation with New Delhi in fields which are not recognised as exclusive domains of the soldiers. Several events in 2012, like the reducing of trade barriers, the easing of the VISA regime, the latest visit of President Asif Ali Zardari in India, can be seen as expression of the political will to nudge at least socio-economic matters. But besides the fact that Islamabad is obviously willing to break with historical paths, one must be aware that Pakistan's political system is in a perpetual transition, still experimenting, which makes every kind of twist and turn possible. Therefore it is most significant, that even the most dramatic terrorist attack on Mumbai in 2008, was only temporarily slowing down the 'peace process' but didn't completely check-mate it. This must be interpreted as the greatest, but also not the final, defeat of religious extremism in Pakistan yet.

The writer is a lecturer of Political Science and International Relations as well as a senior research fellow in the Department of Political Science, South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University



The evening flag lowering ceremony at the India-Pakistan International Border near Wagah

ism. The rhetoric of the then head of state General Pervez Musharraf demanding a stronger grip on counter-terrorism attempted to accommodate the demands from the international community led by the US. However Pakistan's engagement against terrorism seems ambiguous. On the one hand, critics are claiming the existence of (in)formal networks between Pakistan's secret services, especially the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and militant extremist groups accused of carrying out terrorist activities; and on the other hand it is hard to determine if, or to which extent, these groups are (still) used for external operations coordinated by governmental and/or non-governmental actors. Furthermore one has to raise the question whether the Pakistani government (especially the civilian one) knows about the control and manipulation of these Jihadi groups, and the activities/involvement of security

and Jihadism.

Having this in mind, one can state the following: first of all, militant groups in Pakistan have increasingly tried to implement their own political domestic and internal agenda to challenge the state. Therefore, if they were guided by government authorities at some time, one must wonder to what extent they are still under the control of Pakistan's security agencies. Secondly, it seems that there is a puzzle regarding the ability and unquestioned commitment in implementing the 'expressed' political will of eradicating extremist groups as well as to tackle the fundamentalist tendencies among the radicalised sections of the country's society. Therefore one must realise that the Pakistani security forces see their main objectives in defending their country from India as well as maintaining the country's territorial integrity and not in combating domestic/international terrorism

one has to put them in perspective. First, it seems that Pakistan's military operations are intensively directed against separatism, and having less the character of counter-terrorist measures. Second, they are aiming at Pakistan-based Taliban and allies operating in Afghanistan (doubtless because of US-demand). However, additional goals of PAF activities in its Afghan border region are to undermine claims of Pashtuns on both sides of the boundary for a 'greater Pashto tribal region', in other words to prevent the creation of a new autonomous trans-border entity 'Pashtunistan'. Furthermore, it also aims to be better placed regarding its efforts to convince the Afghan government to accept the current common border (the so called Durand-Line). Consequently, it is obviously that the PAF finally realise the need to get their insecure border with Afghanistan under control. In the context