



Background Paper

Reset in Pakistan-India Relations



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Preface

Reset in Pakistan-India Relations is authored by **Mr. Salman Bashir**, former Foreign Secretary and Pakistan's High Commissioner to India, for the benefit of participants of the Pakistan-India Parliamentarians Dialogue-VI, scheduled to be held in New Delhi on December 11-12, 2014.

The paper highlights various challenges both the countries may face while committing to a redress of the strained bilateral relations. The paper also underlines the importance of a reset, along with mentioning the factors that unite both the countries, and cut across the differences, which might facilitate improved relations between the two neighbours.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper belong to the author and do not necessarily represent the views of PILDAT.

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December 2014

About the Author



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Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan

Ambassador Salman Bashir joined the Pakistan Foreign Service in 1976. At the Foreign Ministry he served as Section Officer United Nations and OIC (1979 to 1980), Director United Nations, Economic Coordination and Non Aligned Movement (1985 to 1988), Director General United Nations and International Organizations (1995-1999) and Additional Foreign Secretary Asia and Pacific (2003 to 2005). His diplomatic assignments abroad include the Pakistan Mission to the United Nations and Specialized Agencies in Geneva (1980 to 1984), Director General for Political Affairs at the OIC Secretariat in Jeddah (1988 to 1995), Ambassador to Denmark and Lithuania (1999 to 2003) and Ambassador to China and Mongolia (2005 to 2008). From 2008 to 2012 he served as Foreign Secretary, before being appointed Pakistan's High Commissioner to India (2012 to 2014).

Introduction

Pakistan and India have been implacable rivals since the inception of the two states in 1947. Their state-to-state relations have since then remained at the very least adversarial.

At the level of the people of the two countries, there is a complex love-hate relationship. Similarities in language, custom, and culture, simultaneously, unite and divide them, as does the reality of shared history, but its divergent interpretations.

This 'divisiveness' goes beyond political differences and territorial disputes. The shared history of mutual hostility plagues the two countries and jeopardizes any measures taken to redress the shared problems. Therefore, even though the two countries have a trade potential of almost US \$ 10 billion, trade between the two stands at a dismal US \$ 2.5 billion. It could therefore be said that 'emotion' negates 'reason' and prevents the two from 'shaping' and 'working' a vision of 'shared destiny'.

Given the above context, is a reset in Pakistan - India relations possible? Would the people of the two countries support efforts at mutual accommodation and reconciliation? If so, under what circumstances can this take place? And what is required to start and sustain the required process of transformation of relations.

Importance and Challenges: Reset in Pakistan – India Relations

There is certainly the need for a reset.

Pakistan's policy of stable, friendly, cooperative neighbourhood is fully in line with its strategic priority of economic development. It is rational and has broad popular support. Main political parties in Pakistan, in principle, favour an improvement in relations with India and seek a peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir and other disputes. 'India Bashing' is no longer fashionable and relationship with India is no longer an issue raised during the election campaigns.

The Pakistani media is also not obsessed with India with the exception of the recent hostility along the Line of Control (LoC) that has become a major irritant for both the countries.

However, in India, the popular view of Pakistan is still rigid and often infused with antagonism. Pakistan continues to figure in India's domestic political discourse. 'Pakistan Bashing' is seen as a 'vote gainer'.

This was also evident in the recent Indian elections. The Indian media also mostly has a negative hardline view/approach towards Pakistan. This restricts domestic space in Delhi for taking any bold initiatives at reconciliation and mutual accommodation or even responding positively to any such move.

Despite its aspirations for a global power status, India has remained fixated to the ground realities of the region. Without stable relations with its neighbours, India will find it difficult to build the 'escape velocity' to defy South Asia's gravitational pull. This concern was clearly at display at the recently held 18th SAARC Summit in Khatmandu where Prime Minister Modi held bilateral meetings with the premiers of all the SAARC members except for Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

All the same, Pakistan-India relations have impacted adversely on prospects of promoting regional cooperation. SAARC has not been able to realize its promise of a peaceful and prosperous South Asia or deepen the processes of economic integration.

Possible Measures for a Reset

Foregoing is indicative of the difficulties as well as the importance of a 'reset' in Pakistan-India relations. Hypothetically, a 'reset' sequence should be as follows:

- i. Both Pakistan and India 'realize' the merits of good neighbourly cooperation.
- ii. They agree 'in principle' to work towards a reset.
- iii. They agree on an approach to achieve this.
- iv. They affirm 'validity' of existing bilateral mechanisms.
- v. Both agree to 'resume' working these mechanisms.
- vi. They create 'new' mechanisms, where required.

The above would mean reconciling the various viewpoints regarding the way forward. For instance, should the disputes be settled before normalization or small steps towards normalization would lead to a process for resolving differences and disputes?

However, it must be noted that essential minimum steps that could contribute to creating a 'conducive environment' for a 'reset' could be small but important. These may include:

- i. An agreement to address humanitarian issues such as of prisoners and detained fishermen on both sides quickly and humanely. This could perhaps include the implementation of the recommendations of the Indo-Pak Joint Judicial

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- Committee which is composed of eight retired judges – four each from India and Pakistan – charged with investigating the situation of civilians imprisoned in the jails of the other nation and to obtain and facilitate their release.
- ii. Visa facilitation by implementing the already signed new visa regime.
 - iii. Facilitation of exchanges between media.
 - iv. Contacts among Parliamentarians of the two countries.
 - v. Resumed meetings between Rangers and BSF and Maritime Security Agency and Coast Guards.
 - vi. Respect for the 2003 Ceasefire on the Line of Control and stabilizing the situation on the border by improving DG MOs level communications/ contacts.
 - vii. Resumption of Foreign Secretary level composite dialogue process covering all issues.

A conducive environment should facilitate leadership level contacts, which should culminate in a 'joint vision document' and an 'action plan'.

Despite the present difficulties and the intractable nature of the issues, Pakistan and India, have no choice but to work for an improvement in ties. This is an imperative dictated by their own respective national interests and of the region as a whole.

The world and in particular wider Asian region is witnessing profound transformations. New opportunities and challenges are emerging. South Asia needs to develop some sort of coherence and cooperation to avail itself of these opportunities and to overcome 'common' challenges. The challenge of intelligently 'managing' relations between Pakistan and India should well be within the grasp of the Foreign Ministries of the two countries. This would inter-alia require 'creative diplomacy' and building of 'mutual trust' on both sides. Both Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Indian Ministry of External Affairs have eminently qualified diplomats to take up this challenge.



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