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PAKISTAN IN 2015

Peshawar Attack as Tipping Point | Zarb-e-Azb | Military Courts | Internal
Political Interactions | Strategy towards Afghanistan and India |

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Pakistan in 2014: A Review

IPCS Forecasts

Pakistan in 2015

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Pakistan in 2015: A Forecast

Of the few good developments in 2015, over which Pakistan can be cautiously optimistic include relations with Afghanistan and the possibility of better cooperation relating to cross border terrorism and militancy. Beyond this, at the onset, there does not appear any radical turnaround, unless a dramatic development turns the tide for better or worse. Unfortunately, this year has started on a predictable note vis-a-vis India - Pakistan relations. And the most pressing domestic issue for Pakistan will remain addressing and eradicating terrorism.

Better is always welcomed, but the question is, can Pakistan afford further worsening of the situation, however pragmatic we remain? Last year (2014) has left in its wake quite a bloody and brutal trail, claiming no less than 7500 lives, with the Peshawar school attack condemned and mourned worldwide. The traditional flashpoints remained active. The eastern border with India - with sporadic exchange of fire along the Line of Control and working boundary and resultant casualties both military and civilian, worked as a political template for the bilateral relations. The Western border with Iran and Afghanistan also had its share of flare-ups, with efforts from all sides to unsuccessfully clamp cross border movement and trafficking, failing largely due to political sensitivities and divergence.

Cross border movement of non-state actors cast a deep impact on counter terrorism efforts, as whenever the respective states tried to pursue terrorists and insurgents, the porous nature of the border and sanctuaries available would provide adequate cover to these elements. This issue has been a moot point between Pakistan, Afghanistan as well as the ISAF forces. Though the barbaric school killings has not only opened avenues of better security cooperation between Kabul and Islamabad, but has also now put into practice, the realization that unless both countries tackle terrorism impartially as a common goal, this menace cannot be beaten.

Internal Politics:

Nature of Interactions between the political parties and leadership in 2015

While 2014 was the year of Dharna politics, 2015 would enforce the political parties to address pressing issues such as terrorism, law enforcement and restoring peace and order in the country from a common platform. Beyond this, the politics would remain more or less the same. This cooperation would not be a marriage of choice as much as that brought under by public pressure, which visibly brought about an all parties' national action plan. Very interestingly,

“democratically” elected political actors agreed to the establishment of military courts, making space for constitutional amendments and thus becoming sideline spectators to what is the most critical national concern. More than the military, the civilian actors have to be blamed for allowing the state of affairs to degenerate to such a point. Prior to 16 December 2014, the country appeared to be divided between pro and anti-dharna elements, leaving loud gapping voids in terms of socio-economic progress and governance.

With military now in command of counter terrorism efforts, two critical tasks before the political leaders include the following. First is to work together to carry out measures and build civilian capacity for counter terrorism. And the second involves placing the house in order. Interestingly, the protest march and sit-in by the PAT and PTI brought together all previous political actors together. Though more an effort to save themselves, than the institution of democracy, for once, all political actors stood together on a singular platform against budding democratic challenges.

Although the sit-ins and dharnas may not have been able to change the government, they have awakened and sensitized the general public to the state of affairs. Will this public awareness work as a pressure group? Will the political consensus continue against all challenges? The answer to the latter question is no, the differences however superficial, it is unrealistic to expect a unanimity of thought and action. As for the first question, the public awareness has made it difficult for political actors not to perform, and it is time for the political representatives to tackle the pressing questions of governance and statehood.

Countering Terrorism:

Will Peshawar attack be the tipping point?

The intensity and cruelty of the attack, was such that everyone home and abroad was deeply affected and shocked by it, and of the few steps taken immediately within hours certainly are a game changer. The military Chief's emergency meeting with Afghan leadership and consulting the American military command and assurance from Kabul has been first of the crucial positives required in winning the counter terrorism efforts. There have been Afghan led military strikes against militant strongholds, providing sanctuary to the perpetrators. The message sent out jointly is clear, that there are no longer any safe havens or tolerance for good or bad Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. The need is to continue with this momentum.

Immediately in the wake of Peshawar attack, the government on an emergency basis formed an all parties' committee to reach a consensus based National Action Plan to prioritize and strategize counter terrorism measures. The initial knee jerk reaction was lifting the moratorium on death sentence and setting up of military courts. However the dawn of 2015 saw these two issues being given far more centrality than any of the other twenty odd recommendations put forth.

Will 2015 see a terrorism free Pakistan as a result of the above actions? Unfortunately, this may not be the case as the situation may worsen before it starts to get better, and this too will take time. Most of the persons executed so far, though booked under terrorism act and definitely guilty of heinous actions are still not the “top category” terrorists. As terrorists (imprisoned or at large) still stand to benefit from the wide loopholes in the judicial process, lack of evidence resulting from an absent and much demanded witness protection program, life threats to the

prosecutors and judges, as well as seen recently to the families of the victims. An example is the recent attack on a Shia gathering which claimed seven lives. After a long break, educational institutions have been reopened, with governmental assurances of better security measures, yet measures such as banning cellular phones or allowing teachers to carry weapons by two of the provincial governments are not only incorrect but simply fail to address the larger question.

For the moment, the central and provincial governments should also keep in mind that the banned terrorist outfits may not carry out big strikes immediately, but they will patiently abide their time and once like all other such gruesome thresholds the Pakistani society has crossed in its long and silent struggle against terrorism, they will then strike with much gorier strategies. The time for complicity and woolgathering about the goodness in militants is long gone.

2015 will be crucial in terms of the very tough and hard decisions which not only the government must undertake, but also the civil society has to realize that these actions may also affect them. The vibrant and free media, which is ever changing its tone, also needs to be factored in. These stringent measures should not only focus on the physical security parameters, but regulating the flow of money both through formal and informal channels, the nexus between criminal and terrorist networks, curbing hate and parochial narrative and literature, reviewing of text books and a strong deliberate attempt towards depoliticizing religion. Stronger law enforcement along with a secure and impartial judiciary, policy of non-appeasement and nurturing favorites and weak politicking has to become a thing of past, if we need to put our house in order. These factors also need to be counterbalanced by treading the fine line between human and civil rights, as well as reasonable level of transparency and accountability.

Pakistan has already approached and must also prevent friendly states from sponsoring charities, seminaries and actors within Pakistan. With independent means of funding and patrons outside the country, it becomes possible for actors to defy the state. Given the complexity of the issue, countering terrorism is a daunting and challenging task yet of utmost importance, making 2015 a very tough year.

Military Courts, Zarb-e-Azab and Civil-Military Relations:

Will 2015 bring better coordination?

Overwhelmed by grief and emotions, the entire country feels safe and comforted by the establishment of special military courts. Given the critical nature of the problem as well as judicial inaction especially in carrying out anti-terrorism measures, these courts appear to be the order of the day. Secondly, they have been established for a period of two years initially. Yet such actions may carry long term consequences, that would work in contrary to civil and human rights.

Carrying out targeted military operations, such as Zarb-e-Azab though initially delayed due to lack of political consensus, are as much necessary and important as civilian led counter terrorism efforts. The delay provided a window of opportunity to terrorist elements to seek sanctuaries elsewhere, yet the Peshawar incident proved that despite their leaving Pakistani territory, carrying out strikes within Pakistan whether for their own benefit or acting as proxies to regional or extra regional actors is a harrowing possibility.

The civilian actors must realize the importance of being equal partners and stakeholders in counter terrorism efforts, rather than leaving the efforts entirely to the military. It has taken a difficult six plus years to build grounds for a balanced civil – military equation. The military is not only aware of the uneasy consequences of a take-over and how messy it can be to meddle into civilian affairs, but also how it impacts military professionalism. The civilian actors also need to carryout stronger governance measures, so as not to leave open political voids to be filled by any other institution. The need is to implement in parallel all necessary measures necessary to strengthen and empower civilian capacity to address threats such as terrorism, law and order and other governance problems, rather than blaming the military in hindsight.

The other important area which has been traditionally considered as a moot point between civil-military leadership is improving ties with India. Yet the more restive the LoC becomes, and more aggressive the threat posturing by Indian civil-military leadership, lesser will be the space for civilian actors to negotiate peace. Or even build a domestic constituency for better bilateral relations.

Afghanistan and India: Likely Trajectory for Pakistan in 2015

2014 was an important year in terms of the Afghan transition. Eventually, the US and international community engaged in Afghanistan also after years of blaming Pakistan for all the troubles in Afghanistan. After marginalizing Islamabad's opinions and interests in a peaceful and stable post-transition Afghanistan, they have now finally admitted Pakistan's relevance and centrality in any future resolution.

In the foreseeable future, what matters most is the bilateral Afghan-Pakistan relations, which for the moment, under the new Unity government appear promising. For the US, Pakistan's relevance remained largely conditional to the former's decade and a half long war against terror, in which Islamabad's all out cooperation was deemed essential. The result of this cooperation was a death toll which has been conservatively estimated around 50,000 including military casualties, a highly polarized civil society and a visibly high anti-American sentiment, which would gain further strength with incidents such as Salala check post fire, the Raymond Davis affair and drone strikes which killed more non-combatants and civilian population, than hard core militants. The military was openly considered as an extension of the US interests in the Pakistan; the militants besides carrying out terrorist strikes against civilians to create shock and awe, also specifically targeted the military, of which the December 16th school massacre is one such gruesome example.

With regards foreign relations, US Secretary of State John Kerry's latest visit to the region is being interpreted differently by both the neighbors. Although, the US remains consistent on demanding Pakistan to keep "doing more," yet Pakistan's concern about alleged Indian involvement in cross border terrorism via afghan route, belligerent statements adding to the effect by the Indian National Security Advisor, as well as tension escalation spreading both vertically in numbers of casualties and occurrences as well as horizontally from Line of Control to the working boundary have met keen and receptive ears.

Will 2015 see any turn around in US policies towards Pakistan, more so after a changed scenario in Afghanistan? Again, it would be a case based approach, where there would remain positive engagement and interaction in certain sectors such as energy, education and micro-level health and infrastructural development, yet terrorism, nuclear and conventional build up as well as Indo-Pakistan relations would remain a point of contention. The US much to the detractors chagrin has pledged to release the \$532 million tranche under the Kerry-Lugar bill to Pakistan, which has been severely frowned upon by New Delhi and lobbyists working against the merit of this assistance. The forthcoming presidential visit by Barak Obama is going to further establish the future drift of relations by consolidating and improving the strategic relations, mainly on the economic front.

On Afghanistan, fortunately both countries share similar vision on security and future regional stability. The unity government, led by President Ashraf Ghani unlike his predecessor considers Pakistan a partner rather than a spoiler when it comes to bilateral relations. However, there is also a need to factor in the domestic constraints and stakeholders on both sides, as well as the concerns and intent of regional and extra-regional actors involved in Afghanistan, mainly US and India. The Unity government is in the initial phases of forming the cabinet, and has yet to encounter any difficulties. However the coming months will not only decide the drift of the political set up, but the shape of Afghanistan's security, its internal dynamics and how the non-state actors will respond. Last but not least, its relations with concerned actors including Pakistan and India. After a long time, Pakistan has a friendly government in Kabul, which will prove beneficial to both the countries. However one must also factor in the consequence of the unity government failing and what kind of political and security crisis would occur as a consequence.

Finally the India Pakistan relations, whether hash-tagged, hyphenated, or de-hyphenated would remain interlocked in a complex intractable chemistry. Although, the drift of Modi government at this point is not at all towards a rapprochement with Pakistan for the foreseeable months, yet at some point, both countries need to reconnect and coordinate their paths. The election manifesto, sloganeering, statements and posturing by Delhi government are more than enough to ring the alarm bells continuously in Islamabad. Complemented by the LoC violations and evidence of Delhi using anti-Pakistan elements on the Western front as a viable proxy would widen the drift between the two countries. Tough Pakistan remains cognizant of India's legitimate interests in the region, but will certainly work hard to protect and advance its own.

2015 will keep Islamabad busy, facing similar elements as before, and responding to them through the mix bag of policy options available. With pressing concerns such as terrorism, LoC firing and governance problem, the state and its institutions would find themselves through the year in handling them. Do they do a better job to the affect? Again it depends on how well we exercise our options.

Post 2014:

Pakistan's Relations with US and China

Will Islamabad's relations with China be affected in any capacity in the coming years? Beijing has always been a good and pragmatic friend to Islamabad, giving good advice when and where sought. Pakistan's recent military cooperation with Russia has been much talked about in all

quarters, yet Beijing has not shown any sign of discomfort, as the former has well established economic and infrastructural ties, that would not be affected by any new actors. For Pakistan, Beijing proves to be a reliable actor, especially in a western dominated environment, which can be extremely discriminatory and partial depending on the actors' interests.

Pakistan in its critical quest for more energy corridors and options, would remain reliant on cooperation and infrastructural help both from Washington as well as Beijing, and in this regard the civilian nuclear cooperation would again cast a shadow on Pakistan's relations with the US as well as how under the strategic cooperation, from this year onwards, New Delhi would be getting fissile material from NSG states. In this regard, not only China, but Iran is also an important neighbor, through which energy and cooperation lines would work. Iran and Pakistan both need to work better in the coming months on the sectarian concerns and support provided cross border to interest groups, as well as joint action on countering terrorism.

Pakistan in 2014: A Review

I

Internal Political Equations

Of Inqilab and the Inquilabis¹

Revolutions, like popular reality shows, have begun to appear in all fonts and colors. From the once classic connotation of Mao's Long March, bloody revolutions such as the Bolshevik or Iranian that left deep imprints on global politics to the modern soft-paddled revolutions, stage-managed by the US, supporting colorful names such as velvets or springs, the choices are unlimited. But is it fair to term every popular uprising or civic unrest as a revolution? Is a revolution possible anywhere and everywhere?

The answer is no and this simplistic take of a very multifarious socio-political occurrence has made the "revolution" game all the more problematic and difficult to explain. When selling the concept of revolution or inqilab to an eager audience, often omitted is the fact that revolution in its pure and classic sense sought ultimate sacrifice and bloodshed. There never was a promise that a revolutionary change would occur without claiming is fair share of collateral.

Pakistan – after months of fascinating sneak peeks and good marketing strategy that really kept the public engaged and interested – has been experiencing its own political reality show for nearly the third marathon week. The plot was simple but convincing: two public figures with ample public support hold onto a convincing agenda and march onto the capital city. If things were to tamper down, a bit of real-time entertainment with media going ballistic with 24/7 coverage and breaking-news tickers do damage-control. But what makes such "revolutionaries" successful? First, a public that is more than willing to give chance to new people who empathise

¹ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 8 September 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-pakistan/of-inqilab-and-the-inquilabis-4648.html>

with the latter and/or understand their daily woes and are willing to offer an alternative. Second, the ruling party that after making tall promises while electioneering, very typically severs its connection with the same public that votes it to power.

If, as South Asians, we look around the neighborhood, we find similar symptoms. There is democracy, but used and abused at will by the democrats. The process of electioneering and the various attached institutions have been abused and corrupted and this is just the tip of the iceberg. The Tahirul Qadri-Imran Khan double-march into Islamabad came with a lot of hype. Supporting complimentary agendas, both the inqilabis had their loyal supporters. 20 days on, the siege stands strong, but so does the government. One demand put forth by Qadri regarding an FIR against the prime minister, the chief minister and many Punjab assembly influentials for the killing of 14 Minhaj workers was finally lodged after much delay – exposing the biases and laxities of the justice system. Demands for electoral and legislative reforms, though being given substantial lip-service, haven't yet been given serious consideration by concerned quarters.

30 August-1 September proved to be the most happening, as not only were attempts made to clear the constitution avenue off the inqilabis who were egged-on by their imaginative leadership to march onto the parliament house – with the prime minister's residence as the next stop – which resulted in tear-gas and rubber bullet shelling by an equally bored police force brought in great numbers from all over Punjab. Islamabad, which already sported a haunted look courtesy the umpteenth confiscated containers strategically blocking one third of the city's main arteries (notwithstanding the other quarter dug-up for a mega transport project) became a battleground. Speculations of a "soft" military takeover facilitating an interim setup as well as alternate names for a new chief minister became rife. Adding spice to this political curry, alleged supporters of the two protesting parties staged a token takeover of the state television channel.

What happened next? Unfortunately for those seeking a repeat of distributing sweets when Pervez Musharraf staged a takeover, the military firmly exercised restraint, though correcting the political government, if ever it tried to entangle the former in the mess, or misquote it. For the government, with open support from its allies and opposition in the parliament, it stands strong and seems to have regained the confidence it lacked before 30 August. As aptly stated by opposition leader Aitzaz Ahsan that one good outcome of this crisis was that the prime minister finally made an appearance in the national assembly. For Khan and Qadri, the longer the siege maintains, the lesser the chances for salvaging their parties and political ideals – unless the various interlocutors facilitate a win-win situation for all parties concerned.

Does this mean the government won? A timely battle yes, but the Sharifs who were famously voted in for their better governance and financial prowess today stand severely criticised by their one-time loyal constituents for not living up to their promises.

Investing in projects that have failed to bring short to long-term relief for the common man and the entire N-League maintaining an arrogant attitude towards everything only made them more unpopular. The general public, although not fully supportive of Khan and Qadri, are unhappy with the ruling class. Unfortunately, the siege has set a precedent for any political actor to garner sufficient support and camp in front of the parliament. The demands put forth by the protestors and their leaders are not unjust; but the interlocutors must facilitate a passage for genuine reforms and changes in the legislative and electoral process to check and prevent

malpractices to ensure greater transparency as a necessary first step towards genuine democratic rule.

Pakistan: Of Messiahs and Marches²

It is both tragic and funny how the poor Pakistanis take anyone and everyone for the political messiah. All this proverbial messiah needs to do is say the right things with passion and fervour. Interestingly, the way Pakistani decision-makers run the country's daily affairs and take their subjects for fools, makes the messiahs' work easier and convenient. Whether these messiahs deliver what they promised is a matter of great debate.

The latest in this series are the not-so-new Imran Khan, and Tahir ul-Qadri. Both promise to bring revolution by leading long marches into the capital city to the added discomfort and misery of the general public – who are quite done with long marches, cordoned cities, road blocks, cellular services shut for days and the recent addition: gas stations running out of supplies. It is essentially like being in a state of emergency, with everyone anticipating the worse and wishing for stability. But there is always a segment of the population that is willing to march along.

In a way, this is all about democracy – people voicing their sentiment in a country that has not been famous for democratic traditions. The previous military rule paved way for a democratic government, albeit hinged on extremely fragile foundations. However, despite the inherent fragility, the Pakistan People's Party-led (PPP) government not only survived the promised five years but also instituted constitutional reforms that would, in the long run, strengthen the country's democratic foundations, and successfully concluded its tenure via a smooth and near-peaceful political transition. This happened despite the existence of a strong, belligerent opposition and a hyper active judiciary. However, the messiahs and marches haunted the PPP just as much, primarily because of the fact that they failed to perform on the governance meter – with a ready excuse that there was no space for them to perform.

For the current government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, however, this excuse cannot work. Voted into power with control of the most powerful province in the country, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) strength has been its strong team of technocrats, its investor-friendly vision and unlike the PPP, that was often considered the rich and corrupt boys' club and passionately disliked by the kingmakers, the former has friends and protectors in the right places and enjoys a sizeable clout. Acting as a messiah themselves, the Sharifs and their team used the right language to a roaring success in the 2013 election; and followed closely by la capitain – Imran Khan – who was considered the best thing to happen to Pakistan in a long time. The PML-N voters were a steady traditional vote base who invariably cast their fate in their party's favour. The captain's voters were the first-timers, young, vibrant, and holding onto the promise that their vote really matters, and they infused energy into skeptics to cast their votes as well.

Easily distinguishable from their youthful looks and sparkling eyes as if they were revolutionaries and not part of an evolutionary process. But this is the latest fad led by Uncle Sam, where the discourse on revolution has been reinvented and reinterpreted. So the TV-

² Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 11 August 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-pakistan/pakistan-of-messiahs-and-marches-4602.html>

angelsite Tahir ul-Qadri landed from Canada and marched into Islamabad after making strong “revolutionary” declarations at mammoth rallies across Punjab, with a large number of followers in January 2013. After a three-day sit-in seeking the end of injustice committed by the incumbent government in harsh weather, he went home in the comfort of his trailer with all promises frozen, making a mockery of everything.

Then, as now, Imran Khan was the other revolutionary torch-bearer, but not joining hands with Qadri. Once again, they will find blind followers, similar in their passion, but different in their outlook, carrying the same sentiment with which a majority of them went to vote: transforming the country into the promise these messiahs throw at them. Yet, these innocents fail to realise that these messiahs are independent in neither their thoughts nor actions. Indulging in conspiracy theories – that is a South Asian norm – their handlers have a different agenda to play. While the incumbent government’s mega transportation schemes will not change the lot and effect positive change in the lives of ordinary citizens suffering the daily brunt on gross mis-governance, these empty histrionics will too will not lead us to the Promised Land the public endlessly seeks.

At a time when the country is undergoing a tremendous security transformation and faces massive internal governance issues, the need is not for the rulers to act with paranoia and convert the country into a battlefield – which may, owing to their mishandling of the issue, push the country into civil unrest – but to show wisdom and insight and handle the problem at hand, manage the political crises that are much their own creation; and once settled, introspectively try and be democratic and govern the country in a manner befitting democrats; happily bid farewell to the Maulana to prepare for another march; and allow the public to lead our daily lives.

II Zarb-e-Azb

The Decisive Strike³

Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched against militants in North Waziristan by the Pakistani military on 15 June is now entering the second phase of clearing and reclaiming lost spaces. A few days ago, Miranshah, an important city, was 80% reclaimed and for the first time since the launch of the operation, the press corps was allowed a guided tour of the place. The Operation was on the cards for a very long time and a recent interview of the previous military spokesperson in which he hinted an intentional delay by the previous military chief, has added to the list of controversies as to why this decision took so long to be set into motion. The public sentiment was unanimously against the militants and terrorists and heavily in favour of a Sri Lanka type operation that brought down the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam, without realising the pros and cons of the problem. Simultaneously, a faction comprising the clergy, their supporters and empathisers as well as political parties pitched dialogue with the angry and disgruntled brethren as a means to appease and bring them back in the mainstream.

³ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 14 July 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/pakistan/zarb-e-azb-the-decisive-strike-4559.html>

Though the collateral part couldn't more be accurate, since the 1980s Afghan war, Pakistan has undergone a drastic transformation, which has affected the entire socio-political, economic and cultural fabric of the society. The decision-makers of the Cold War days, judging the geopolitical developments, made critical but misinformed decisions which served well in short term but proved disastrous in the long term. Resultantly, two generations have paid a heavy price for the militancy and terrorism that haunts their daily lives. Therefore, the argument that this is not our war is as far from the truth as the US' initial claims of innocence over state failure in Afghanistan.

The elected leadership initially favoured and opted for an almost unconditional dialogue with the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) operating in the concerned area alone, against stiff public uproar and opposition from political parties and concerned quarters. In one sense, the offer and opening a channel for dialogue was a good tactical measure; but it had two severe consequences: the military lost precious time and the militants gained advantage and crossed over to safer areas across border or any other place of choice, with their men and firepower. The militants, as they gained time, took the inaction and a general lack of consensus in the political ranks as a sign of weakness and inflicted heavy damages which included the mass killing of 26 captured security personnel, and mounted attacks on Karachi Airport.

Any harboured illusions have since been laid to rest and since mid-June, the Pakistani armed forces are engaged in the military operation. With 30,000 troops committed to clear militant sanctuaries, strongholds and hideouts from the two main areas of Miranshah and Mirali, the task at hand has been enormous. The timing was bad, given that summer could not be more unsuitable for the troops, compounded by the beginning of the Islamic month of Ramzan within a fortnight of the operation.

The herculean task of evacuation and safe passage to the local population, whose numbers according to the available data was around 500,000 but by now the authorities have a registered a figure around 833, 274 people. Furthermore, Pakistani authorities, after repeated requests, managed to secure the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul's cooperation in sealing the border – especially in Nuristan and Kunar provinces, and also disallow sanctuaries to fleeing militants on Afghan soil; but this arrangement now appears in jeopardy after a fatal strike from the Afghan side on a Pakistani military patrol, claiming several lives.

The resolve with which the military is dealing this decisive blow is evident to all, but not without skeptics and criticism. The prime criticism is that the military strike occurred too late in the day, allowing an easy and timely escape to the main culprits. Yet, the zero tolerance policy towards the TTP and its local or foreign affiliates is what was long needed. In the absence of an embedded media, the only narrative available is the military's. In response, the military provided a guided tour of the 80% cleared town of Miranshah to the media. Will the military operation be sufficient in flushing out the militants and the larger issue of terrorism? Definitely not. This is just one aspect of the larger nationwide effort, which needs to tackle militant strongholds and nurseries in other parts of the country; check the inflow of money and support these actors receive from all quarters; maintain a zero tolerance approach, and strengthen governance, law and order as well as judicial protocols in handling such issues. This won't be easy, given how despite a public demand for stiffer security measures, the Protection of Pakistan ordinance (POPO) has met with enormous criticism. To date, the authorities remain indecisive over the placement of the National Counter-terrorism Authority.

At the moment, the greater challenge is the assistance and finally rehabilitation and resettlement of the Internally Displaced Persons, supplemented by developing infrastructure and self-sustaining institutional mechanisms for the affected population. It is high time the government breaks old great game buffer myths, abolish the British made FCR, and accord full provincial status to the seven agencies. The success of the Operation will carry positive dividends for both Pakistan and Afghanistan. There is a need to stand united for a sustained, stable and peaceful future that can help assure prosperity and better regional relations.

TTP: Dialogue or Military Action?⁴

The verdict is out: instead of supporting decisive military action to break the back of insurgents, the government chose to dialogue, with umpteenth committees to name, shame, blame and footdrag. Interestingly, where the dialogue option has halted government military action as a confidence-building and reconciliatory measure, not only are the Taliban carrying out their signature strikes (such as the latest at a cinema house in Peshawar and a direct attack against security forces) but are already picking on soft targets such as the peaceful Ismailia (Shia) population in Gilgit Baltistan area to convert or scare them into vacating their homeland. This is also being attempted against the harmless Kailash tribes, as are targeted strikes against government empathisers and Aman (peace) Jirga members, to further their reign of terror and convey the message that they are still in control.

What will be the implication of these talks? Will the talks be successful? Will they usher peace? Or will negotiating with the insurgents lead to the popularly dreaded Taliban interpreted Shariah? Some feel that it is the Taliban and not the government who are at a weaker wicket, and with time the former stands to lose more than gain. This is because such violent movements are inherently self-annihilating in nature, and usually, factionalism, power struggle, and their getting too big for their size will cause their eventual downfall. However, there is little comfort in this theory, as not only will such a scenario entail heavy collateral damages, but would end up substantially destroying critical infrastructure and distort the socio-political fabric before it ceases.

So what do the talks hold, and what is their measure of success? Would they result in bringing forth a pro-government or pro-Taliban stance or a win-win situation for both? Either of the options does not promise lasting peace. Allowing insurgents and anti-state elements a platform to voice their demands and form even the governmental committee with a few members that enjoy Taliban approval not only legitimises the insurgents but has already placed them on a superior footing. To date, except for supporting the option of dialogue and a chocked demand to remain within the constitutional framework, there is apparently no other governmental stance. Any demands and preconditions placed have been entirely by the TTP, whether it be an apparent unilateral ceasefire from the government's side, seeking the release of TTP prisoners, stay on executions as well as retaining their weapons.

Since the commencement of the negotiations, besides photo-ops and Taliban interlocutors enjoying joy rides on helicopters fueled by tax-payer money, the Taliban have not even been asked to give up their weapons or put a halt to the daily dose of select killings and terrorism,

⁴ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 17 February 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/pakistan/pakistan-and-ttp-dialogue-or-military-action-4312.html>

beyond lip service by the otherwise glib interior minister. Interestingly, none of the previous accords signed between insurgents and government forces such as Shakai (2004), Srarogha (2005) and Swat (2008), could convince the militants to disarm. And as common sense suggests, if there is no disarmament there is little logic and incentive to demobilise. And as expected, very soon after the conclusion of any of these accords, the militants found an excuse to violate the peace terms and became more lethal.

As armchair analysts, it is easy to support 'decisive' military action, with a similar stance taken by the media. However, one is reminded of 2008, when General Musharraf was urged by a majority of the people, among whom prominent media figures were the most vocal, to crush the Lal Masjid vigilante brigade. What happened next was what the General had apprehensively voiced. The security forces used their lethal might, and within minutes, the media-steered public opinion turned against the government. No one raised a question about why a holy place was stashed with weapons better-suited for a private army, and who had given the vigilantes and their handlers the permission to terrorise the people and hold the capital city hostage. What everyone focused on was how brutal the government was and that those killed inside the mosque were young Hafiz-e-Quran girls and boys. Besides this immediate and severe backlash, the biggest fallout of this operation was a chain of bombings across the country, insurgency in Swat and organised suicide attacks.

Prior to its commencement, most of the political parties supported dialogue, which has been duly initiated. Taking a cue from the TTP's actions, there is little hope for the promised peace that political actors ensure as a follow-up to dialogue. The talks will also not succeed in terms of TTP agreeing with the state perspective. In a way, the much criticised dialogue not only leaves no option unexplored but in the longer-run, also clears all doubts about what is the correct course of action to take. Usually such dialogues succeed only if the other party is at a relative disadvantage and perceives incentives in peace talks. Secondly, the call for Shariah also raises several questions: who would be the Amir ul Momineen - the elected prime minister or the head of TTP? If the TTP's version of the dialogue is successful, would it remain a Pakhtoon-dominated organisation or have the various ethnic 'chapter' lending the supreme commander their full support and allegiance? That is where one can optimistically presume the initiation of factionalism and infighting amongst the TTP cadres. But this remains a thought only. Finally, when the country's constitution is already drafted in accordance with the Islamic code, there is left not space for dissenting voices.

In case the talks fail, fully coordinated and crushing military action appears to be the only option left. There will be violations, collateral damage, killing of own population, deadly reprisal attacks and so on. Media-led debates and print analyses have a very short shelf life. Decisive military action would yield results only if there is a broad-based political consensus supplemented by public support. The military as a state institution has already paid a heavy price in this infighting, and cannot act alone unless the entire state machinery including judiciary and law enforcement agencies move in sync. The time for alternate options is closing in and the government has very tough decisions to make.

III

Pakistan and Afghanistan

Burying the Past: A New Beginning for Pakistan and Afghanistan⁵

The newly-elected President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani, while addressing a joint press conference at the end of his two-day visit to Pakistan, said “We must overcome the past...we will not permit the past to destroy the future.” It was indeed a very optimistic and pragmatic message for interested and watchful audiences not only in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but for all those keenly monitoring the transition Kabul is undergoing.

A three-pronged track that entails political, security and economic transition has already witnessed some progress on the political and security front, with the unity government finally coming into power after a months-long electoral impasse. On the security front, the signing of the US-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) has provided a sense of certainty and laid to rest the speculations that there would be a complete troop withdrawal post 2014. Though US President Barack Obama had stated that 9800 troops would remain in Afghanistan from December 2014 till the 2016 complete withdrawal deadline, the final decision was dependent on the signing of the BSA.

Pakistan had strived to stand by its pledge regarding non-intervention and non-interference in Afghan affairs, and would have whole-heartedly accepted and honoured whatever the election outcome. Yet, many considered Ashraf Ghani as a more favourable candidate, primarily due to his relatively apolitical stature and technocratic background. Now, with Ghani as the president and Abdullah Abdullah as the chief executive officer (CEO) of Afghanistan, the biggest political challenge Kabul faces is the successful power balance between the two. The entire success of Afghanistan’s internal as well as external relations hinges on this single factor. Any crack in this relationship will strengthen the negative forces that are ever on a watch to exploit such opportunities.

Correspondingly, if there is political instability in Kabul, a factor the US has and will try its level best to prevent and secure, it will impact the physical security and economic situation – a scenario that neither Kabul nor any state party linked with Afghanistan can afford, least of them being Pakistan. A stable, secure and peaceful Afghanistan is as much in Islamabad’s interest as militancy-free, secure Pakistan is in Kabul’s.

The Afghan president’s visit to Pakistan was preceded by the Pakistani Army Chief General Raheel Sharif’s brief visit to Kabul, and Pakistani National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz’s day-long trip to Kabul, during which he extended Ghani an invitation to visit Pakistan. All three visits carried a similar tenor: overcoming the trust deficit, building positive relations and a common vision for a strong, enduring and comprehensive partnership between the two counties. These are not mere words but the key to the future of stability and peace between the two countries the former Afghan President Hamid Karzai termed as conjoined twins.

While there was a lot of talk regarding improving relations, an important factor that cannot be ignored is the pressing need to enhance cooperation in areas of counter-terrorism and other security issues. Both countries have long accused each other of lack of cooperation vis-à-vis terrorism, cross-border sanctuaries for terrorists as well as on border management. The

⁵ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 18 November 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-afghanistan/burying-the-past-a-new-beginning-for-pakistan-and-afghanistan-4743.html>

Pakistani military's Operation Zarb-e-Azab has been declared successful in flushing out militants from the troubled North Waziristan agency, as well as in making the space uninhabitable for elements such as the Haqqani Network, which even the US military grudgingly acknowledged. However, with the security situation still fluid inside Afghanistan and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), despite years of training, not yet strong enough to address these pressing challenges, unless there is a coordinated approach to tackle terrorism and militancy, both countries will be at a loss; and it is by no means a simple task, given the many stakes involved.

With terror outfits now more adaptable and open to embracing emerging actors and trends such as the Islamic State whose ideology is more far lethal and destructive than all the previous non-state actors', there is very little time to lose and the need is for reducing the incentive for such elements to gain physical and ideological space. Pakistan's proposal to offer security and defence cooperation and training opportunities to Afghanistan have been received positively. As the two heads of governments together enjoyed Afghanistan win an exhibition cricket match, there also exists the realisation that better economic cooperation, joint ventures in energy and trade corridors and increased investment in infrastructural development leading to sustainable development and provides a viable alternative to conflict economy is the smart response to the poor governance indicators and the prolonging of conflict. For a prosperous and secure future, there is a need to not only overcome but also not revisit the past and work together to defeat the odds that are not only internal but have external sources as well.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: Consequences of the American Exit⁶

The announcement of a drawdown timeline for US troops from Afghanistan predictably garnered mixed reactions. However, most of the issues that brought the US-led ISAF to the region still remain unresolved. Where on one hand Osama bin Laden's killing is an ace for the US, the al Qaeda as an entity still remains. This leaves the second spoiler, the Afghan Taliban, as well as their faith brothers, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Both of them have the advantage of being sons of the soil. There is no timeline to chase, so they have the luxury to act as spoilers, keep the security profile turbulent in real time and wait for the 'foreigners' to exit. Though the Afghan Taliban has suffered significant losses, their structures, ability to recruit, and countrywide operations remain intact with new tactics and means to hold ground.

Afghanistan today is not the one left in the wake of the Soviet withdrawal and the faulty Geneva Accords. This is good news, as even in the worst-case future scenario, one cannot envision the international community leaving Kabul in the lurch. However it correspondingly gives rise to another problem: that too many actors with vested interests will turn Afghanistan into their proxy strategic playfield. For the moment, Afghans are happy with this international focus and seemingly positive attention, but the years to come may change this happy picture. A larger chunk of Afghan civil society, which is highly proactive in democratic nation-building, is drawn from the Afghan diaspora, who despite their best intentions may not be able to withstand a possible surge in militancy and violence in case a situation so arises. The law enforcement and security apparatus, ANSF, though much improved and stronger than before still has a long way

⁶ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 17 March 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/us-south-asia/afghanistan-and-pakistan-consequences-of-the-american-exit-4340.html>

to go and its performance post transition would at best remain a mixed bag, which given Afghanistan's complex security dynamics, is not at all a good news. That leaves the 'Afghan-owned and Afghan-led' democratic and nation-building process, which like many of the 'Made in US' products leaves much to be desired. In a cross-section of Afghan nationals, there exists deep skepticism about the 'Afghan-owned' component largely missing from the frame, thus once again constructing a system that has very weak foundations.

Much depends on the results of the forthcoming elections. With all the presidential candidates and their affiliates minus incumbent president Karzai consenting to the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), Afghanistan requires a strong representative government with indigenous legitimacy and capacity to extend its writ outside Kabul without external props. Will the Taliban be willing to negotiate and agree to some non-violent power-sharing? There are serious doubts. What would be the impact of these developments on Pakistan? Though the Pakistani government is already in talks with the TTP (Pakhtun faction) and there is a temporary respite from the US drones, bombings and civilian killings have not reduced and nor has the US announced a complete termination of its drone attack policy. In fact most of the Taliban high shura has comfortably crossed over into Afghanistan and will remain there for as long as it suits them. Though the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban are pursuing their independent agenda, one must not forget their past links and the strength and resilience of their networks. In addition, the history of Pak-US relations is highly checkered, and even after eleven plus years, Pakistani society remains highly divided about whether this has been Pakistan's war.

In case the talks with the TTP fail and there is a breach in the security framework that would result as a part of the agreement, would post-2014 Afghanistan be able to provide security cooperation to Pakistan, mainly in the shape of border closure, hot pursuit into 'friendly' territory to capture militants, intelligence-sharing and perceivable joint operations? With divergent perspectives and a strong sense of the other side being the spoiler, there is doubt that such a cooperative security regime could work. However, for the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban, the post 2014 timeline would actually be a welcoming notion. So long as there is an American security interest and presence, there is optimism for a better security framework. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan can conveniently dump their bad diplomacy on the US. It also acts as a balancer against a stronger Indian presence.

Though Pakistani decision-makers have reinforced the point that they have no reservations with New Delhi's 'legitimate' interests in Afghanistan, they would always remain wary of any military or strategic role India has in Afghanistan. Realistically, every country, be it the US (Monroe doctrine) or India (Nepal, Bhutan), has similar concerns when it comes to its strategic interests. Afghanistan of the future holds increased economic and commercial activity and corresponding involvement of the international community, as well as pressure for increased transit and trilateral (India-Pakistan-Afghanistan) trade. Pakistan has to prepare itself for the changing trends and pressures. Ironically, the energy pipelines still remain somewhat elusive; a problematic profile for energy-stressed Pakistan specifically. The coming months are fraught with multiple challenges that need a sustainable, well-articulated and well thought-out approach. The 2014 exit timeline in fact heralds a new chapter in the region's strategic relations, which would largely shape future dynamics.

IV

Pakistan and India

India-Pakistan Relations in 2015: Through a Looking Glass⁷

The year is about to end, and keeping true to tradition, it is time for reflection and recollection. However bad the situation may become, the end of year holds an optimism that the coming year would prove better than the previous. 2014 began on a positive note despite the cross-border firings, as India headed for elections.

Although Narendra Modi's election as the Indian prime minister did not come as a surprise, his garnering of the massive mandate was beyond expectation. Ironically, the election was highly reminiscent of the 2013 Pakistan general elections that brought former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif back into power through a massive mandate. In both cases, the heavy mandates had a lot to do with absence of a strong alternative and the anti-incumbency sentiment more than anything else. Both elections also brought a daring third option, where in India's case, the Aam Aadmi Party couldn't defeat the established political vote base, and in Pakistan, the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf has been on a justice-seeking mission for the past several months, with sit-ins and marches across the country. However, in Pakistan, Modi's campaigning and election to office was closely watched, and has been interpreted differently by different stakeholders.

On one hand, he has been alleged to be the architect of the 2002 Gujarat riots and as a result of his personal beliefs, views, ideological and party affiliations, is not viewed as someone who can deliver peace. This viewpoint gains further credence with his election manifesto that was heavily anti-Pakistan; spoke of the revision of Article 370 of the Indian constitution pertaining to Kashmir's special status; reviewing of India's nuclear doctrine with the possibility of the adoption of no NFU clause.

The second school of thought, though cautious, was more amiable to the idea of Modi being voted in specifically due to his economic vision and development agenda – and thus interpreted that he would not disturb the economic cart by engaging in conflict; rather he may actually be able to offer trade and commercial cooperation.

A possible third group was the nonchalant, indifferent category that seems to have given up on the re-engagement option. They believe Modi is for India alone and his coming to power will have no effect on the India-Pakistan situation. Finally, there is the 'silver lining' category, comprising compulsive optimists. To them, if anyone can deliver peace, it's Narendra Modi, and this is the strategic window of opportunity available to both sides to make or break.

All four are partially correct. Without doubt, this definitely is the right time, and even if New Delhi finds this clichéd, in contrast to Islamabad, the former holds the potential to call the shots – both for the better or worse. A peace offering which is substantive enough to alter the conflict spectrum will not come cheap, and will definitely extract a price. However in comparison to

⁷ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 23 December 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-audit-and-ceasefire-monitor/india-pakistan-relations-in-2015-through-a-looking-glass-4786.html>

Pakistan, India is relatively better-positioned both domestically and otherwise to be in the driving seat. The window of opportunity is strategic, given how both Sharif and Modi have a common economic vision.

There is also a strong constituency that believes in economic engagement and increased connectivity and doing away with unnecessary red tapes vis-à-vis cross-border interaction. Modi enjoys a strong mandate and is not only opening to all countries (except Pakistan) but wants to create a legacy of his own. Can an amicable settlement of relatively minor disputes such as Siachen and Sir Creek help create that space?

Afghanistan too is, for the moment, enjoying a smooth transitional path, especially in terms of security, even if it is externally backed. How long does the “unity government” stay united depends on how prudently both Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah decide their nominees and team. Afghanistan may not be the best proxy field for its eastern neighbors to settle scores. Perhaps it is simplistic to state, but the resumption of cross LoC firing and its geographical scope expanding to the working boundary should be seen as a substitute and viable alternative to open conventional hostilities.

Many argue that these violations are routine and nothing extraordinary. While it’s a true estimation, if contextualised under current circumstances, they represent an aggressive, dismissive and proactive India, which at the sub-conventional level, is sending appropriate signals to Islamabad. Will Islamabad adopt an alarmist approach to any and all anti-Pakistan statements issued by Modi and his team? Should the 44 plus formula and the revision of Article 370 not be dismissed as paranoia, as the US insists? If there is a constitutional change in the status of Kashmir, can we afford to ignore the trigger-happy gun-toting non-state actors who are always on a look out for a new conflict?

Does this imply the proactive doctrine initiating in response to the proverbial Mumbai 2.0? If this be the case, then the pessimists have won. However, one thing is certain, that for the moment, Modi has not developed a policy to engage with Pakistan. One can only hope that that happens sooner than later, as the optimists feel that only the current set-up, given its strengths and capacity to implement change enjoys that strategic window of opportunity. Otherwise, not only will the peace process remain stalemated, but with passage of time, erode peace constituencies.

The recently-concluded SAARC summit demonstrated broad smiles, strong handshakes and applause from the interested audience. If taken seriously, through the looking glass of 2015, in the alternate universe, SAARC performs in real terms; South Asia is a prosperous region, with high development and growth rankings instead of dismal governance indicators. From Afghanistan to Bangladesh there is increased interconnectivity, and together, the leaders seek a vision of prosperity.

India-Pakistan: Working Boundaries and Lines of Uncontrolled Fire⁸

After a much-deliberated stalemate, Afghanistan finally had a new democratic government with a power-sharing arrangement. The signing of the controversial Bilateral Security Agreement

⁸ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 13 October 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/jammu-kashmir/india-pakistan-working-boundaries-and-lines-of-uncontrolled-fire-4696.html>

(BSA) provides a false sense of security to many who felt that the US military must not pull out completely as the perceived regional proxies would turn Afghanistan into a complete proxy battlefield.

Though Pakistan has time and again reiterated its policy of non-interference and non-intervention in Afghan internal affairs, the same cannot be said about other regional actors. That will add to complicating the bilateral equation further. Another moot point is the Durand line, which always carries the potential to ignite fiery exchanges of passionate and politically loaded rhetorics and on rare instances, exchange of firepower. However, the more volatile of the “unofficial” boundaries has been the Line of Control (LoC) and working boundary on the eastern border, which has over the years, successfully become a testing field of India-Pakistan relations. Like any and all bilateral arrangements between the two neighbors, the 2003 ceasefire agreement regarding the LoC has also been blatantly violated in the past several years.

With both elected governments in Pakistan and India being driven by economics, the general perception was that even if there is no substantial progress on the bigger problem areas, at least both administrations will try and maintain congenial relations and move towards progressive engagement. However the first sign of trouble was the calling-off of the August 2014 foreign secretary level talks after Pakistan’s high commissioner to India met with the Kashmiri leadership.

Interestingly, anyone familiar with the New Delhi diplomatic setup and the grand receptions held would actually find a much greater number and variety of Kashmiri leadership in attendance, brushing shoulders with all and sundry.

Sensitivities aside, if seriously committed to the process, a better approach could have been registering a well-worded protest and allowing the talks to proceed as per schedule. However, several times in the past too, much investment has been made in holding a meeting than making it meaningful. What if the meeting had proceeded as per schedule? There is little doubt that nothing substantial would have resulted from the parleys. Despite a much clearer vision regarding what Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants regarding internal growth and development and a foreign policy to match with it, there was a somewhat vague gesturing vis-à-vis relations with Islamabad. Although, during his election campaigning Modi and his party had been vocally very anti-Pakistani, yet the very brief period of positive overturing soon after elections, gave space for optimism that perhaps things might be on the mend.

The recent round of cross-LoC fire resulting in substantial infrastructural damage as well as heavy civilian fatalities on either sides of the LoC and working boundary, has again brought out media histrionics seeking death to Pakistan and dealing the enemy (Islamabad) a crushing decisive blow. Where on one hand it makes the Modi government’s policy towards its neighbor clear, it also retards the process (whatever it may be) substantially.

A recent statement by the new-kid-on-the-block, Bilawal Bhutto, regarding wresting the entire Kashmir from India got a knee-jerk reaction from across the border. Interestingly, one set of replies was hacking of the Pakistan People’s Party web site by an Indian group which posted propaganda stuff with inflammatory statements. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif too, much to New Delhi’s displeasure highlighted the plight of Kashmiris at the recently concluded UNGA session in New York. Immediately, conspiracy theorists hinted at a silent pledge between Sharif and Modi regarding silence over the K-word.

However, what has intentionally been forgotten in this entire conflict narrative is the plight of flood-affected Kashmiri population, which has suffered loss of lives and livelihood.

Cross-LoC fire has unfortunately become a barometer of India-Pakistan relations. Sooner or later the guns will fall silent, after claiming many lives both civilian and military, with unpleasant words exchanged and angry gesturing at the political level. In the worse-case scenario, it may require a higher level of deployment, but that is highly unlikely. What it will claim in its wake is a chunk of peace, and a window of opportunity to act wisely by either side and discuss the problem, rather than indulging in blind rage and provocative statements.

Although New Delhi does not accord the same status to UNMOGIP than Pakistan, the latter's proposal of making this office more proactive may not be a bad idea. Apparently, sticking to bilateralism and seeking a third party's role behind the curtains which results in crisis stability has become a norm for the two neighbors. The current crossfire, while may apparently look like a good marketing strategy – with Modi allegedly approving an all-out assault – will further fracture the already fragile base on which “conditional” peace stands. If either side is genuinely interested in peace, there is a need for reviewing both policies and postures.

Faces in the Sand⁹

Given how the economics-savvy boys in India and Pakistan have initiated their cross-border relations, looking at the next five years skeptically would be unfair. It started with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif telephoning the then Indian Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi, who impromptu asked him to visit Delhi, which was more than happily agreed to. The rest that followed was official and routine, with thumps on the backs to both leaders for putting the right step forward. Pakistan also released Indian fishermen – who are usually collateral damage, along with their Pakistani counterparts, in the India-Pakistan conflict – as a goodwill gesture.

Skeptics such as me, who after cynically observing the oft-tread pattern of South Asian politics, take lead in dismissing any massive breakthrough in unresolved conflicts, but concede over minor triumphs that help improve the atmospherics. Conversely, the detractors completely dismiss the merits of dialogue or interaction as they consider it as selling out a national ideology. Wedged between these two negatives, any positive overture is not only welcomed but often merited beyond its own essence. This hype often proves counter-productive as not only does the public pin too much expectation from these overtures, but they also deeply micro-monitor the efforts to the extent of turning them into a political circus of sorts. Elsewhere, a summit level meeting will always claim major headlines, but with realist expectations and considered more of a norm. However in South Asia's case, many ordinary norm and codes of conduct do not apply.

One question that has often been asked of Pakistanis in the recent months is what do we think about Modi as a prime minister? My counter question is do we as neighbors get to choose who is elected to office in New Delhi or elsewhere? No; but what we can do is aim towards setting realistic goals instead of drawing rosy pictures or trying to thread the string from where the last Bharatiya Janata Government (BJP) government left it at: the Lahore

⁹ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 9 June 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/pakistan/india-pakistan-faces-in-the-sand-4500.html>

Declaration or the much talked about Chenab river plan. Narendra Modi is not Atal Behari Vajpayee, and despite being elected from the platform and being Kar Sevaks of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the two could not be more different. They have very different visions and orientations, and are set almost a generation apart. In very realistic terms, we should not expect Modi to act like his predecessor, as Vajpayee had a vision, which was baptised by the hardcore realities that he himself was a participatory to, and wanted to leave a legacy of peace between the two neighbors despite stiff opposition from his party cadres and policy makers. Much has changed over the last decade, with more interest groups favoring the constituency of conflict than peace.

At best, what Pakistan would see is some positive movement on the economic front. At the micro level, this would prove beneficial and may indirectly strengthen the somewhat vocal trade and commerce constituency that has constantly pressed for enhanced bilateral trade. In fact, in December 2011, Modi, as the Chief Minister of Gujarat, was invited by a visiting delegation of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry to visit the city and showcase the successful "Gujarat Model." But the trip did not materialise for various reasons – one amongst them being, Modi's alleged role in the 2002 riots where several Muslims were killed.

If the two prime ministers come together on the economic front, there would be enhanced bilateral trade, and increased Afghan transit trade as well. The second benefit could be increased cooperation in the energy sector, as speculations point towards a potential 500 MW electricity transmission line from India to Pakistan – that would bring some respite to the energy-stressed country. However, on the economic front, Pakistan also needs to keep in mind that changing regional dynamics entail shifting politico-economic priorities, and with Modi being touted as South Asian Shinzo Abe, all the world powers would be keen to pursue better commercial relations with New Delhi.

Regrettably, however, positive development towards resolving key contentious issues is unlikely. Those issues will remain stalemated, and when bilateral talks will finally be scheduled and rebooted, the pattern would be the same: talks for the sake of continuing with talks. However, the more concerning notion is the possibility of New Delhi revoking Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which accords special status to the Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir. Not only would such an action hold drastic consequences for the occupied valley and its relations with New Delhi, but across the Line of Control, it could trigger a similar move, creating a political compulsion for Pakistan to react in a similar fashion. In Pakistan, Kashmir's final legal status lay pending under Article 257 of the Pakistani Constitution. Although it would not be very easy to repeal Article 370, most of its provisions have already been violated over the years. Lastly and most dangerously, it will also give credence to right wing elements to oppose any bilateral ties, promote armed agitation and violence by militants and indigenious Kashmiri resistance groups.

As for other areas of discord, there would not be much beyond occasional releases of fishermen and prisoners. I am reminded of Sudarsan Pattnaik's beautiful sand sculpture of Modi and Sharif at Puri beach, Odisha, with the message that peace gets a chance, yet these remain faces in sand, that face the danger of being swept away by strong winds and water currents. For peace to really stand a chance, it should not be sculpted in sand but built on solid realistic grounds for mutual growth and benefit.

Nuclear Weapons and Crisis Diplomacy¹⁰

18 May, 2014, will mark the 40th anniversary of India going nuclear. ‘Buddha smiled’ mightily for the first time, in the scorching desert of Pokhran, India, in May 1974 and then again, in 1998. In reciprocation, Pakistan too entered the nuclear club with a series of tests that somewhat changed the destiny of the entire region.

The tests were hailed as a symbol of prestige and honour by domestic actors in both countries. Though the programs were initiated under different circumstances in either nation, one common motivation both countries had was the security threats originating from across the border – The 1962 Sino-India war for New Delhi, and the breakup of Pakistan for Islamabad. This motivation resulted in the creation of a security dilemma that had a singular answer: weaponising their nuclear programs. Although introduced as force-enablers and viable deterrents to a superior threat, the inclusion of nuclear weapons into the South Asian conflict trajectory thus transformed the dynamics of relations between the neighbours. Since then, intentionally or not, all forms of crisis between the two neighbours have been coloured by the nuclear dimension alone, regardless of whether the nuclear status is ambiguous or declared.

At the time of the creation of these two countries, flawed border demarcation and colonial biases resulted in many problems. Some of those problems got settled, while the others – such as the settlement of migrant population, distribution of pre-partition resources etc. – underwent transformation over the time.

Over the decades, there were several incidents that led to a war-like situation and even war, which took mutual belligerency up a notch. However, interestingly, external interventions were employed to mitigate all these hostile situations. Still, some larger issues – such as the Kashmir issue, unsettled border demarcations, and water sharing – still remain a moot point between the two neighbours.

Timely interventions, whether through silent or open signaling by either concerned party can be termed as successful examples of crisis diplomacy. According to a Princeton University [project](#), “seemingly independent crises that evolve in a geographically confined space over a period of time have a propensity for mutual interaction, reinforcement and intensification. In a strategically important region already in upheaval and flux, such developments could clearly influence the international system and attract the intervention of neighboring and outside powers that might exploit the crises for the advantage of their respective interests.

Furthermore, great powers’ interests can have the potential to aggravate the ramifications of such crises and to challenge regional and international crisis management capabilities and efficiency.” This situation is further affected by the domestic concerns and problems of the key actors, which have an adverse impact on both crisis diplomacy and stabilization efforts. A combination of time, costs, stakes and perceptions, which can lead to several scenario rising out of unintended consequences, wild cards, accidents and particular policy options can trigger inadvertent chain reaction that inevitably leads the belligerents to a downward spiraling syndrome.

¹⁰ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 12 May 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database/india-pakistan-nuclear-weapons-and-crisis-diplomacy-4432.html>

Similarly, in case of India and Pakistan, none of the crises that have erupted from time to time have an independent origin. In fact, their roots lie deep in the conflict which dates back to the creation of these two states, and in certain respects, prior to it. So long as the main sources of conflict are not properly dealt with, crises and resulting diplomatic efforts will remain the norm. Many consider meaningful interventions towards crisis management by neighbouring or outside powers as a hallmark of success. However, such interventions, at best, only deal with the symptomatic occurrences, and instead of offering a permanent or lasting solution to the main problems, freeze the issue. This stalemate holds until the next crises surfaces in another shape, and with more intensity.

With the inclusion of nuclear weaponry, the India-Pakistan conflict equation has become more complicated and more intervention heavy, as each time both countries inch closer to a confrontation, external actors remain watchful and wary of the implications an inadvertent escalation could hold. Yet, once the crisis is settled through cooperative or coercive diplomacy, the focus shifts to other issues instead of deliberation on a permanent or lasting resolution to the underlying causes.

Instead of advocating for comprehensive nuclear disarmament, which is not possible, all concerned actors (domestic and international) need view South Asian conflicts and crises through a wider lens and not through the nuclear prism alone. Undoubtedly, these strategic assets have achieved the purpose they were created for: primarily to increase the cost of armed exchange and stakes involved to a level where deterrence ensures that war, even of a conventional nature, remains a least favorite option. However, crises still take place, limited conflicts have taken place, and the two countries have, over time, inched closer to more confrontational attitudes than cooperation.

Nuclear weapons are considered to be a source of problems and not force-multipliers and enablers which they actually are. Cooperative and meaningful diplomacy that brings positive dividends is always good and welcomed, but crisis diplomacy must not become a norm and/or a substitute for routine diplomacy and lasting conflict resolution measures.