

Why there can be No Peace?

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Relations between India and Pakistan go through cycles of relative deterioration and improvement. At the conclusion of each cycle, the hostility between the two countries remains essentially unaltered. Pakistan asserts that the Kashmir dispute is the “core issue” and that its resolution on the basis of “self-determination” is a vital prerequisite for normalization of relations with India. India asserts that “cross border terrorism” is the preeminent issue, although normalization in a variety of areas, such as trade and “people-to-people contact”, can proceed even if the Kashmir dispute is allowed to fester. Like the global financial markets, the mood in the two countries swings from irrational exuberance to irrational pessimism. In substantive terms, however, nothing changes.

Pakistan wants India to cede territory as the price of peace. India wants Pakistan to accept the status quo in Kashmir and normalize relations. Pakistan lacks the ability to remove Indian forces from Kashmir. India lacks the ability to unilaterally stamp out the insurgency in Kashmir. As both countries possess nuclear weapons, neither can risk a general war, though geographic proximity, primitive surveillance capabilities, and nuclear arsenals sufficiently underdeveloped to risk being incapacitated in a first strike, increase the possibility of accidental or premature use of nuclear weapons.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that proposals¹ ranging from a “Third Option” for Kashmir, the “Chenab Option”,

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and various forms of plebiscites, have been rejected by one or both of the disputants. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of Kashmir is that many really believe that its resolution will reduce tensions in the subcontinent and bring lasting peace. However, neither the Kashmir dispute nor the “cross-border infiltration”, are the core issues that divide India and Pakistan. Rather, they are the principal symptoms of a division grounded in geopolitical and historical-cultural realities.

At the geopolitical level, the conflict can be likened to the grinding of tectonic plates into each other. The plates in the context of the India-Pakistan dispute are the Central and West Asian, and the South Asian. Geopolitical tectonics over centuries have exhibited two broad patterns of movement. One is that the Central and West Asian plates push into India. The other is that the South Asian plate pushes northward into Central and West Asia. The Aryans, Scythians, Huns, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and Afghans, represent the human dimension of the first pattern. The Indus Valley Civilization, the Mauryas, Guptas, Mughals, and the British Empire, represent the second pattern.

These tectonics did not produce isolated results. For instance, the Mughal Empire was founded by Turco-Mongols from Central Asia in the sixteenth century. Once the Mughal Empire stabilized, by the late sixteenth century, it pressed relentlessly upon Central and West Asia. After the death of Aurungzeb, in 1707, invaders from Central and West Asia once more broke into South Asia and wreaked havoc until the advent of the British Empire in India. The British, in turn, pursued a “forward policy”² towards Central and West Asia that shadowed the southward and eastward expansion of the Russian Empire, and would have been easily intelligible to a Maurya, Gupta, or Mughal, ruler. The alternation of push and pull is motivated principally by the geography of the region. South Asian empires seek to gain control of “natural frontiers” to keep

1 Particularly relevant is Owen Dixon’s report in which proposals such as the partition of Kashmir and a plebiscite were made, and rejected, for one reason or another. See, *Reports on Kashmir by United Nations Representatives* (London: Kashmir Centre, n.d.), pp.13-41.

2 For an interesting account of the causes and consequences of the drive towards Central Asia, see, Charles Allen, *Soldier Sahibs* (London: John Murray, 2000).

invaders out, while Central and West Asian empires seek to breakthrough these natural frontiers or neutralize resistance through alternate means. Successive generations of rulers on both sides of the fault line have realized that the defence of a warm food producing plain fed by navigable rivers is most effectively made at its frontiers. Nearly all of the periods of relative peace and prosperity in South Asia have occurred under the domination of empires that successfully controlled its natural strategic frontiers.

The Indian and Pakistani leaderships are aware of the underlying tectonics at a genetic level. It was partly this innate awareness that impelled the Congress to reject the principle of partition even as it forced the Muslim League to partition Bengal and the Punjab in the belief that the moth eaten Pakistan that emerged could be reabsorbed in a matter of months. Re-absorption rendered impracticable by Pakistan's survival and relatively faster development, was replaced, by the early 1960s, by proposals for a "confederation", which continue to be advocated to the present day.

Pakistan's policies during the Cold War were animated by the fear that it would, quite literally, be ground to dust by the southward movement of the Central and West Asian plates, represented by the USSR and Afghanistan, and the northwards movement of the South Asian plate, represented by India. That Pakistan's closest allies include the United States, communist China, and the Saudi monarchy, is a testament to inherently un-ideological dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the pattern of tectonic movements underwent unexpected shifts. The collapse of the Soviet Union deprived India and Afghanistan of their principal source of military hardware and logistical support. The emergence of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and the overthrow of the pro-Moscow government of Najibullah in Afghanistan left a vacuum that Pakistan attempted to fill. The advent of insurgency in Indian controlled Kashmir in 1989, and its intensification in subsequent years, furnished Pakistan and opportunity to push into India.

The historical dimensions of the India-Pakistan conflict are equally important. Prior to the arrival of the Turks, South Asia was invaded many times. Largely, however, the early invaders settled

down, lost contact with their ancestral homelands, and were assimilated into Hindu culture. The Muslim invaders, however, were different. Neither the Turks nor the Mughals assimilated into Hindu culture. They remained a martial ruling class continually reinforced by fresh arrivals from Central Asia, Persia, and the Middle East. Ibn Battuta, for example, observed that the majority of Muhammad bin Tughluq's officers and relatives were foreign born.³ During the Mughal, period 50-70% of the bureaucracy comprised Turks or Persians born outside India.⁴ Furthermore, Muslim rulers, with a few notable exceptions, such as Muhammad bin Qasim and Jalaluddin Akbar, took great satisfaction in the humiliation of their Hindu subjects.

Although most South Asian Muslims are descended from native converts, looked down upon by the ruling class of Central Asian Caucasians, in time, insults, injuries, and inequities were forgotten, and many Indian Muslims identified themselves with the Turks, Mughals, and Afghans. Many Hindus, in the pursuit of their own national mythology, came to regard all Muslims as culpable for the humiliation visited upon Hindu India. In India Shivaji is upheld as the original Indian nationalist who bravely stood up to the Mughals and sought *swaraj* and *Ram-raj*. In Pakistan, voluntary identification with Turco-Persian, Turco-Mughal, or Turco-Afghan, invaders, finds expressions in the names of missiles (the Ghoris, the Ghaznavis, the Abdalis), replicas of which are installed in public places as objects of fascistic adoration. Never mind that between 1000 and 1800, much of the territory that now comprises Pakistan was invaded more than 70 times⁵ and frequently devastated by the same rulers now venerated as heroes, or that the history of the Mughal Empire in northwest India was written with the blood of what the Mughal historian, Khafi Khan,

3 Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-54* (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1929; reprint Lahore: Services Book Club, 1985), p.182.

4 See Abu'l Fazl 'Allami, *A'in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann (Calcutta: Calcutta Madrasah, 1873; reprint, Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003), for a comprehensive account of the Mughal bureaucracy. See also, M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurungzeb* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1970), for an analysis of the internal dynamics of the Mughal bureaucracy.

5 Andrew J. Major, *Return to Empire: Punjab under the Sikhs and British in the mid-Nineteenth Century* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.1.

called “the wretched Afghans”.⁶ India has a deep-seated urge to avenge the humiliation of a millennium of Muslim conquests and rule. Pakistan, by enthusiastically identifying with Hinduism’s nemeses, serves as an ideal target for India’s quest for historical catharsis. India, in turn, serves as an ideal target for Pakistan’s historical megalomania.

Within the broader historical framework, there exist trends specific to the past generation or so. The first is the expansion of global trade and communications and regional economic integration to the detriment of economic nationalism. Many in both India and Pakistan believe that unless the countries move forward on trade normalization, the entire region will be left behind. The second is that the balance of power in South Asia has shifted in India’s favour and shall continue to do so for the near future. Pakistan’s nuclear weapons ensure a rough strategic balance, but the lessons of the Cold War must not be lost on its leaders. Communism collapsed due to its *long-term* inability to compete with the economics, technology, and cultural appeal, of the industrial democracies. That said, if India is to play a truly international role, it must amicably resolve regional disputes, such as Kashmir. Rhetoric aside, Indian claims to great power status cannot be taken seriously so long as four-fifths of its military potential is kept pinned down by Pakistan, a country one-seventh its size in terms of both GNP and population. The third trend is the intense pressure exercised by the Bush administration upon India and Pakistan to reach a settlement. This pressure, some believe, may be enough to encourage the two countries to show some flexibility. The last, and least important, is the relationship between cultural convergence and the prospects for peace.

What advocates of trade and interaction ignore is that neither is a necessary condition for peace. Between 1947 and 1971, India and Pakistan had official trade relations, though they fought three wars during that period. Since 1972, with official trade suspended, only a handful of limited engagements, such as Siachen and Kargil, have been fought. The fact is that while most countries regard trade relations as important, nowhere in the world, except perhaps the

6 Khafi Khan, *History of Alamgir*, trans., S. Moin-ul-Haq (Karachi: Pakistan Historical Society, 1975), p.232.

United States, do the interests of the “counting house”⁷ dictate terms to the palace.⁸ Furthermore, the projected benefits of trade for Pakistan are highly questionable. Certainly, trade with India has not helped other South Asian countries very much. It is apparent, from, for example, water disputes with smaller neighbours, that India, far from being interested in free or fair trade, seeks a protective ring of captive markets from which it can derive excessive profits.

The argument that South Asia is a single geo-economic unit and that overall market efficiency requires regional economic integration is not particularly convincing either. Under British rule, for example, the territories that formed Pakistan in 1947 were highly efficient producers of raw materials for factories and service providers in Hindu-majority territories. For example, in the mid-1940s, there were 111 jute mills with an installed capacity of 69,000 looms in India.⁹ Of these, only two mills, with a total installed capacity of 650 looms, were owned by Muslims, even though most of the jute was produced in the Muslim-majority areas of East Bengal.¹⁰ In terms of economic growth there appears to be no clear link between increased tensions and decreased growth. Between 1948 and 1970, and 1980 and 1988 Pakistan sustained an impressive economic growth rates while the Indian economy

7 In 1895, Winston Churchill, on his first trip to the United States, was struck by the contrast between the quality of communications in New York and the rather unimpressive currency. He observed, capturing one of the essential elements in the American culture of power, “The communication of New York is due to private enterprise while the State is responsible for the currency: and here I come to the conclusion that the first class men of America are in the counting houses and the less brilliant ones in the government.” Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (London: Minerva, 1992), p.57.

8 For a sobering account of the management of the American economy see Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties: Seeds of Destruction* (London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 2003). “America pushed the ideology of the free market and tried hard to get access for U.S. companies overseas.” *Ibid.*, 204. Later, in the context of the notorious Dabhol II power project, Stiglitz notes that “The United States put on political pressure. Enron officials joined a cabinet trip to India, and direct pressure was put on India by the American ambassador.” *Ibid.*, 259. The subordination of state interests to corporate or market interests is one of the most conspicuous and alarming features of America’s unique, and otherwise admirable, culture of power.

9 Sikandar Hayat, *Aspects of the Pakistan Movement* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1998), p.252.

10 *Ibid.* “...there was not a single mill installed in the Muslim Bengal area.”

languished. Even the shock of defeat in 1971 was absorbed with surprising rapidity. Since 1990, Pakistan experienced relatively low growth and a mounting debt crisis, while India enjoyed impressive economic growth rates. Since 2001, both countries have enjoyed impressive growth rates, given the global slowdown, and macroeconomic stability, while tensions have waxed and waned. The lesson, therefore, is that, Pakistan *can* outpace India in economic growth if it manages its domestic policies properly *with* or *without* normalization of economic relations.

The balance of power in South Asia also raises uncomfortable questions for the “peace perspective”. The fairy tale is that once the Kashmir dispute is resolved, India and Pakistan will reap a “peace dividend” in terms of economic growth and reduced military expenditure. The greatest problem with this argument is that regardless of how the Kashmir dispute is resolved, Pakistan will have to deal with India’s military capacity for aggression. India, however, has embarked upon a programme of military upgrading ostensibly motivated by considerations that are not Pakistan-specific, though the new assets could be used against Pakistan. Pakistan’s security planners, given the history of the two countries, and India’s contemptuous behaviour towards smaller neighbours, of whom Pakistan is the only one not yet a strategic dependency, are unlikely to assume that Pakistan is safe because India no longer has a reason to exercise military pressure. With or without a resolution of the Kashmir dispute Pakistan will have to maintain its military spending at 5% of GNP, conceivably more. India’s intentions are as irrelevant as its capabilities are pertinent. Pakistan’s security rests on its counter-capabilities, the development of which are best secured by the cultivation of what Nehru, as he dismissed Jinnah’s offer of a Congress-League coalition after the 1937 provincial elections, called “inherent strength”.

There is a general tendency, in both India and Pakistan, to overestimate American influence. For instance, the United States has been unable to coerce the Palestinians into acceptance of a Carthaginian peace with Israel, notwithstanding decades of military pressure, and billions of dollars in aid to Israel. Fidel Castro continues to rule Cuba in the face of unremitting American pressure. With the United States tied down in Iraq and

Afghanistan, its enemies, such as Iran and North Korea, know that any further military adventures will be accompanied by unbearable domestic consequences. From Latin America to East Asia, public opinion is hostile to US policies, while leaders are suspicious and non-cooperative. By and large, America's "allies" in the war on terror are either undependable, such as the Philippines, which withdrew its troops from Iraq to secure the release of hostages, lack the demographic base to contribute effectively to a land war, such as Denmark or Australia, or mercenaries that do not share the values and long-term goals of the American neo-conservatives, such as Egypt and Pakistan. The US economy¹¹ continues to run up unsustainable deficits¹² while confidence in the dollar is steadily being eroded by an erratic hyper-power living off borrowed brains¹³ and borrowed money. It is unlikely, therefore, that Pakistan, which has stood up to the United States under far more unfavourable conditions (1976, 1990, 1998),¹⁴ will cave in to pressure. Even if, however, Pakistan does resolve the Kashmir dispute based on the status quo, geopolitical and strategic factors will prevent lasting peace with India.

Nothing, however, is more frightening to conservatives on both sides of the border than the progress of what is perceived as cultural convergence. In Pakistan, there are fears that Hindi movies and music, both of which, interestingly, are actually expressed in Urdu, Pakistan's national language, or the celebration of the pagan spring festival of *Basant*, have corrupted the youth. In India, the increasing popularity of the *shalwar kameez*, Pakistan's national dress, amongst women is regarded with distaste in certain circles. Cross-border tourism, which involves bus and rail links, is also viewed with suspicion by many in both countries.

The fact is that historic enemies are often neighbours that share many of the same cultural and social norms. France and

11 Between 2000 and 2002 \$ 8.5 trillion were "wiped off" the American stock exchange. Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties*, p.6.

12 *Ibid.*, p.17. The US borrows from abroad at a rate in excess of \$ 1 billion *per day*.

13 "American students made up less than 50 percent of the graduate students in science and technology at our best universities", and thus, the United States was "borrowing ideas and people." *Ibid.*, p.311.

14 See, for instance, Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan 1947 – 2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

England, for example, enriched each other's culture while remaining political and economic rivals for eight hundred years. The popularity of French dresses and art in English high-society never deterred England from waging military and economic war upon France. Similarly, the popularity of English gardens in France, or French admiration for English philosophers, did not prevent France from doing all it could to defeat that "nation of shopkeepers", *perfidie Albion*. On occasions, there was intellectual cross-fertilization. Montesquieu¹⁵ and Voltaire¹⁶ were profoundly influenced by their experiences in England, while Adam Smith drew upon the ideas of the French physiocrats (proto-modern economists), whom he met during his visit to France, in his *Wealth of Nations*.

The arguments given above are at present unfashionable. A few months or years from now, when relations deteriorate, both Indians and Pakistanis will bewail the failure of the present *détente* to develop into a durable peace. The failure will be attributed to the "lack of magnanimity", "neurosis", "psychosis", "short-sightedness", etc., of the other side, which "squandered" yet another "historic opportunity" for "peace and development" in South Asia. If one is serious about reducing tensions and managing conflict in South Asia, it is important to understand the greater geopolitical and historical forces that generate a dynamic that ensures that there can be no peace.

15 Montesquieu's conception of the separation of powers, draws upon his experience of England. Charles de Secondat, Baron of Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002), pp.152-153.

16 Voltaire was a great admirer of the liberty and reason that prevailed in England and contrasted painfully with the often irrational and arbitrary behaviour of the French state. Ben Ray Redman, ed., *The Portable Voltaire* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) "Selections from the English Letters", pp.512-46.