**Indo-Pak Relations**

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Scholars, foreign policy analysts, and journalists focusing on Indo-Pak relations have long described these relations as “intractable”. Even those analysts who have highlighted the recent “unprecedented initiatives taken by individual policymakers” have been guarded against such optimism; they have noted the “dictates of state-level pressures” and “political and institutional opposition in both countries”. They refer, in particular, to the pressures exerted by allies and the opposition on weak coalition governments — the norm in India for the last two decades. This essay contends that the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government, with its massive majority, presents a real window of opportunity to interrogate and deepen diplomatic processes already at play between India and Pakistan. However, the recent resurgence of Hindutva over governance amounts to letting go of this opportunity.

Writing on the eve of the 16th Lok Sabha election results, Pranay Sharma, foreign editor at *Outlook* magazine, said that it is likely that regional parties would be part of the coalition at the centre. He also highlighted the attendant opportunities and difficulties that such an arrangement would entail for the crafting of a new foreign policy. The BJP hardly needed any allies to form government: with 282 seats, they had won over half the seats in Parliament. Commentators who tried to read between the lines of BJP’s electoral campaign and Narendra Modi’s new pan-Indian appeal argued that this was a mandate for development and governance, not Hindutva. This much was clear: the newly formed government had a solid majority to take significant steps towards transforming Indo-Pak relations.

**Squandering Away the Opportunity**

The Modi government’s early days suggested precisely this possibility. For his swearing-in ceremony, Modi invited all of India’s neighbors, including Pakistan. The symbolism of the shawl and sari that were exchanged between Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Narendra Modi (for the former’s wife and the latter’s mother) garnered much attention in the media and raised hopes of a new beginning in Indo-Pak relations. Some journalists also pointed to the fact that it had not been easy for Nawaz Sharif to ride roughshod over the army’s objections and come to India.

The tide began to turn later in the summer, after Modi took charge. There was heavy cross-border firing, which reportedly resulted in the death of five civilians and one Indian constable, across the LoC between India and Pakistan in October-November 2014. Praveen Swami, a journalist with *The Indian Express*, reported that the incident was spurred by Pakistani Rangers taking objection to Indian Border Security Force clearing undergrowth along the border.
Prime Minister Narendra Modi, military sources said, then issued orders at a June 13 meeting for ceasefire violations to be responded to in strength. And that’s just what the BSF did, firing for days at several Pakistan Ranger positions facing Pital Post, killing at least four soldiers, according to sources in the force’s intelligence wing, the G-Branch. The unusually hard response drew retaliation, with every cycle turning the heat a notch upwards. Each week after, both sides fired thousands of rounds at each other, and clashes reached levels of magnitude higher than anything seen since India and Pakistan almost went to war in 2001-02.[vi]

By the end of October over 20 civilians had died in firings across the line of control (LoC). To longtime south Asia watchers, there is a pattern to the madness: every time a democratically elected government in Pakistan speaks of peace with India, the army steps in to remind the world who is really in power in Pakistan. This is “depressing”, as former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon remarked during an extended conversation at the Brookings Institution in early October.[vii] But what has been India’s response? Recent developments indicate that India’s elected government too, has fallen prey to the machinations of non-elected institutions, such as those in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). And, contrary to the expectations of some pundits earlier this year, Narendra Modi himself has chosen to highlight Hindutva over governance. Consider the following examples from the last few months: the prime minister’s choice of a Hindu-only village as “model village”, riots in Trilokpuri and Bastar, reports of forced conversions in Agra, and the catapulting to ministerial rank of persons best known for their hate speeches — Giriraj Singh and Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti. Indeed, all of these examples tend to one conclusion: the renewed foregrounding of the BJP’s genealogical ties to the RSS.[viii] These initiatives and events have no place in an agenda for good governance or development. Whether these will reap electoral dividend is unclear: the recent assembly by-poll election results for Uttar Pradesh (UP) in September suggest that a campaign of “love jihad” did not work.

Further, the line between domestic and foreign policy, in matters south Asian, has always been blurred. Domestic developments matter, not only for India’s internal configuration of power but also because they continue to influence politics beyond “our looking-glass border”.-[viii] So it should come as no surprise that attacks on Muslims in India have led to new vulnerabilities for Pakistan’s Hindus. Says Ravi Dawani, general-secretary of the Karachi-based All Pakistan Hindu Panchayat, “what happens to Muslims in India has a direct effect on the lives of Hindus here”.[ix] These last few months have also seen Pakistanis led by opposition leaders Imran Khan and the cleric Tahir ul Qadri take to the streets demanding regime change, causing further instability in an already fragile situation. The early November blasts that occurred at the Wagah border, sheer meters away from the Indo-Pak beating retreat ceremony, was obviously a signal that groups of terrorists, seemingly engaged in bouts of competitive suicide bombings and boastings, can attack any corner of south Asia, however well-guarded and forewarned.

Narendra Modi’s electoral victory in May raised expectations not only on the economic front, but also in the realm of foreign policy. However, where Indo-Pak relations are concerned, the goodwill he earned while inviting South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) heads of states to his inaugural appears to have dissipated in the face of the impulsive decision to cancel foreign secretary level talks between India and Pakistan when Pakistan held its routine, de rigueur talks with Kashmiri leaders in Delhi. At the 18th SAARC summit in Kathmandu in late November, India and Pakistan were the only countries not to hold bilateral meetings. Such petulance does not serve
On Regime Change: The Rhetoric and the Reality

Foreign policy experts on India and Pakistan are unanimous in their unwillingness to predict the shape and substance of Indo-Pak relations, and with good reason. For Sumit Ganguly “the most important challenge” for India’s defence community is that of developing a “long-term strategic vision ... that is not subject to the vagaries of regime changes, minor, adverse developments within the country’s immediate neighbourhood”. This appears especially difficult with regard to Pakistan because the two major political formations in India — the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) — have projected very different ways of approaching their difficult neighbour. Moreover, in the last decade, Pakistan too has been a crucible of nervous and intemperate change, with neither its civilian nor military governments able to control the numerous non-state actors that sprout up, proliferate, and unleash havoc on its own minority populations while also attacking India or Indian interests in Kashmir.

Yet projections and rhetoric, however useful for electoral purposes, can be quite misleading from ground realities. Between former NDA Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s visit to Pakistan’s iconic Minar-e-Pakistan and the meeting of former UPA Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of a cricket match at Mohali in 2011 lies a continuum of strategic thinking across “regime change.”

It is important to underline that the advances made in the composite dialogue process between diplomats and leaders in India and Pakistan during the UPA government (2004-2014) were built upon the goodwill and initiatives of the previous Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government. It was Vajpayee who said at the Minar-e-Pakistan, built on the site of the historic 1940 Lahore declaration, that “a stable and prosperous Pakistan was in India’s interest”.

As the BJP begins to celebrate Vajpayee’s 90th birthday and confers the “Bharat Ratna” on him, it is his legacy in the realm of India-Pakistan relations that must be remembered and built upon. How distant the Modi administration appears from Vajpayee’s acceptance of, and good wishes for, Pakistan in 1999 may be gleaned from this recent attempt at “deciphering the Doval doctrine”:

The survival of the artificial entity called Pakistan will be left to itself. India will not do anything in terms of throwing a lifeline to this entity or the set of power elite that controls that entity to ensure its survival. Indeed, should the entity or the power elite there continue to act against Indian security or export terror, India will retaliate and ensure everything possible is done to hasten the implosion.

If there is any truth to this “doctrine”, far from attempting any kind of continuity between regimes, or building on its parliamentary strength, the Modi administration appears all set to squander away this long-awaited opportunity to finally set India and Pakistan on the road to lasting peace. Whether Modi’s India is willing to acknowledge it or not, a stable Pakistan is a desideratum for a strong India. If Modi is serious about his promise of “acche din” (good days), he will have to realise that there is no substitute for the real work of foreign policy making; that is, long hours of dialogue and negotiation at multiple levels. A trigger-happy and reactive foreign policy hardly bodes well for India’s aspirations on the world stage.
Notes


Koithara, p. 12-13; Basrur, p. 24-25. According to Basrur “a set of informal principles crystallized to mark the new character of the India-Pakistan relationship. It was understood that the LOC would not be altered but in a sense transcended by expanded communication; there would be a new focus on self-governance on both sides; military forces would eventually be reduced substantially; and India and Pakistan would work together to build a mechanism for implementing the process...both countries shed their old inflexibility and agreed not only to negotiate on all major outstanding disputes, but to discard their non-negotiable and mutually exclusive positions on Kashmir.”


Doval refers to Ajit Kumar Doval, India’s new National Security Advisor. This quote is from Rajaram Muthukrishnan, ‘Deciphering the Doval Doctrine’, *Swarajya*, 4 December 2014. [http://swarajyamag.com/world/deciphering-the-doval-doctrine/](http://swarajyamag.com/world/deciphering-the-doval-doctrine/), accessed 10 December 2014. For a sense of the depth of Indian anxieties about Pakistan’s very existence, see Krishna Kumar, *Battle for Peace*, Delhi: Penguin, 2007, pp. 29-34. This essay was written before the 16 December attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. News reports say that Ajit Doval has pledged Delhi’s help in countering terrorism in Pakistan. As noted above it will take more than symbolic gestures and sound bytes to put India-Pakistan relations on firm ground.