

# The India-Pakistan relations from an Indian perspective

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India, once with almost singular fixation on Pakistan and South Asia, has considerably enlarged its international status in the past decade. The vision of India as a major Asian power of global significance has been bolstered by a continual pattern of high economic growth in recent years. Additionally, the Indo-US Nuclear deal represents a significant milestone in what can be called a paradigm shift in foreign policy relations with the US. The refinement in Sino-Indian relations despite an ever looming threat for potential conflict is equally important.

The Indo-Pakistan border continues to remain one of the most actively hostile and fiercely contested border regions in the world. While India is a dominant player in the conflict ridden South Asian region, its position is being increasingly challenged by the growing influence of China. In so far, the prevention of South Asia from turning into a proverbial "Achilles Heel" for New Delhi's global ambitions is vital towards serving India's best interests. Therefore, the key for India in the mid to long term is a stable Pakistan, and a reduction in tensions with the archrival, a close ally of the People's Republic of China.

The Mumbai terror attacks between the 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2008 pose a severe test of enormous proportions in terms of relations between New Delhi and Islamabad. Given that the attacks shall have a direct bearing upon the forthcoming elections in 2009, the foremost challenge presently facing the Indian government is striking an appropriate balance between taking decisive counter terrorist action on the one hand, whilst continuing a seemingly unsustainable policy of rapprochement towards Pakistan in the light of the current state of affairs.

However, according to the German analyst Christian Wagner, a forced escalation of the current crises by India could almost certainly spell a significant setback for its foreign policy, both in the regional as well as global context.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Indian security experts do not concur with this view, which represents a foreign opinion that has persisted over decades, namely, the obsolete notion of regarding Pakistan as being at par with India. This notion continues to persist to a certain degree even today. Indian Security experts have long perceived India's position as being certainly ascendant over the potentially *failed state* of Pakistan. A *détente* with Pakistan under the current circumstances is wholly unacceptable, also given the international status acquired by India over the past years. In this context, M. J. Akbar quotes Shandana Khan Mohmand's editorial in the Pakistani daily *Dawn*: "Pakistan needs to accept a very harsh reality - it is not India's equal."<sup>2</sup>

## (1) Composite Dialogue since 2003

Since 1947, interrupted only by short periods of rapprochement, the varying relations between India and Pakistan have been fraught with tensions and wars – almost culminating in a possible nuclear escalation in 2002. India's *Policy of Containment* towards Pakistan in response to the terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament on 12 December 2001 extended over the period of the general mobilization of the armed forces from 2001/02 until April 2003. Amongst other things, it included an intensified "cold war"<sup>3</sup> leaning towards an arms race with the motive of increasing the costs for the economically weaker Pakistan.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Christian Wagner: „Die Falle von Mumbai“. SWP-Aktuell 86, December 2008

<sup>2</sup> M. J. Akbar: India, Pak aren't neighbours: they are worlds apart. Sunday Times of India, New Delhi, 18/01/2009, p. 20

<sup>3</sup> See therefore Klaus Voll (2003): „Geopolitik, atomare Kriegsgefahr und indische Sicherheitsinteressen“. Band 5, Halle (Saale), Südasiawissenschaftliche Arbeitsblätter. Edited by Rahul Peter Das, Institut für Südasiawissenschaften der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. ISBN: 3-86010-708-9, 42 pages.

The peace initiative of the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, as outlined in his speech in Srinagar on 18 April 2003, and the Indian 12 point plan<sup>4</sup> for a “policy of small steps” were favorably received by Pakistan. The willingness of the Indian government to open a dialogue with the Kashmiri extra-parliamentary *All Party Hurriyat Conference* (APHC) paved the way for a crucial turning point in talks between former Pakistani President Musharraf and Vajpayee during the SAARC summit of January 2004 in Islamabad. The Indian leadership was increasingly made aware of its actual size relative to Pakistan and its growing advantage in virtually all areas – including more than five decades of practiced democracy. This time they refused an inadequately prepared meeting at the highest level, with spectacular results as expected in the 2001 Agra Summit, favoring a very gradual approach and opting for a practical improvement of relations between the two countries.

The pre-conditions of a rapprochement process have been defined by the following expectations of India toward Pakistan:

- (a) Pakistan has to give up its *Grand Strategy* to disintegrate the Indian Union (“balkanization”). For the entire political class in India, a secession of Kashmir is a precursor to war, since this first *domino stone* could initiate a process of the dissolution of the Indian Union. The same holds true for the North East.
- (b) As a pre-condition for a political dialogue, India called for an immediate cessation in cross-border terrorism spearheaded by the *Inter Services Intelligence* (ISI) agency of Pakistan, as well as the closure of terrorist training camps.
- (c) A strengthening of Pakistani democracy, with a reduction in the influence of the military in order to promote economic and civil-societal forces in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the especially difficult role of Pervez Musharraf was already then acknowledged in India. He faced far greater challenges than all his predecessors and had to conduct the negotiations from a relatively weak position. The unsettled political legitimacy of his regime and its lack of control of the various militant fundamentalist and secessionist groups raised skepticism within the Indian government as to whether lasting agreements could indeed be achieved with the regime’s military leadership. However, in 2003, Pakistan committed itself towards India to the effect that it proclaimed an end to the acceptance of using Pakistani territory for terrorist activities. Therefore, India is still rightly demanding the destruction of Pakistan’s terrorist infrastructure.

## **(2) The Indian perspective on Pakistan in the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attacks**

The November 2008 attacks have been assessed as an attempt at disrupting the Indian economy, and putting a halt to foreign investment as well as tourism. Principally the attacks were a strike at “India’s Identity”, with the intention of provoking a military conflict between India and Pakistan. They also aimed at damaging the good Indo-US-Israeli relations. For both sides, the possibility of a conventional war under the nuclear threshold has been highlighted as a “prominent option”. However, a nuclear escalation cannot altogether be ruled out. In the event of an Indian attack Pakistan could dismiss the unpopular “war on terror” in its own country. Consequently, there could be a joining of the ranks between the army and *Talibanism*, making the Pakistani Taliban (*Therik-e-Taliban*) almost socially acceptable in a political sense.

There is an assumption in India that strikes on the scale of those witnessed in Mumbai, would not have been possible without the involvement or at the very least a tacit consent of the ISI. The terrorist organization *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba* (“Army of the Pure”/LeT), founded in 1986, was originally one of the “very own” terror groups of the ISI. Among other things, the organization is transnational in nature, including fighters from Sudan and Jordan within its

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<sup>4</sup> See also Klaus Voll (2003): „Sterben oder Frieden in Kashmir? epd. Entwicklungspolitik“, December 23/24, p.20-21 including the contents of the 12 points plan.

ranks. From the Indian perspective, sections of the Pakistani establishment still consider the LeT as “a first line of defence” against India. “Today it is a state within a state that works like a well oiled multi-national company.”<sup>5</sup> The LeT forces are estimated at 20 000 strong in Pakistan and 1 000 in Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government is insistent that a ban on this terrorist organization be effectively enforced, preventing it from continued existence under any other banner, and it is demanding the extradition of the 26/11 Mumbai attack perpetrators to India.

The major international powers should jointly pressure the Pakistani army into ceasing an independent foreign policy of their own. It is improbable that India will accomplish this alone. Kanwal Sibal, a former Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, considers the Indian government lacking a decisive political measure. The current strategy is only likely to achieve an increased Indian dependence on other countries to exert pressure on Pakistan. “In the foreseeable future, there won’t be any profound political, social and religious changes in Pakistan.”<sup>6</sup>

### ***Regional dimensions and the China-factor***

According to Brajesh Mishra, former National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee from 1998-2004, the Pakistani government would try everything in its unflinching “doctrine of strategic depth” that the increasingly strengthened Taliban in Pakistan would also be successful in Afghanistan. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan would virtually cease to exist, with no heed being paid to the *Durand Line*. A united *Pashtunistan* would effectively create a division in Afghanistan with its western territories falling to Iran and the northern territories to others. Consequently, the current situation could create an altogether more powerful Taliban.

A general mobilization of the Indian armed forces, as in 2002, would have given Pakistan the opportunity to withdraw six divisions from its border with Afghanistan. However, India is keen on the Pakistani army remaining committed at the Afghan front, given that the instability facing Afghanistan and Pakistan has the potential to encroach on India. This may have been another motive behind the attacks on Mumbai. According to former Indian general Afzal Karim, the accusation has been made from the Pakistani side that Afghanistan and India would increasingly try to work together. Islamabad fears an “encirclement by India” through New Delhi’s increased engagement in Afghanistan. This has been disputed in India, and it has also been pointed out that India’s foreign intelligence service, the *Research and Analysis Wing* (RAW), has stopped previous operations in Pakistan since many years.

China has officially echoed the Pakistani position. The Chinese press uncritically reproduced Pakistan’s denial of involvement in the Mumbai attacks. As the world’s only media outside of Pakistan, they named the so-called *Deccan Mujaheddin* as the alleged perpetrators behind the attacks. The party press described the attacks as originating from within India and that they would represent a “severe blow to India’s superpower ambitions.” India is at odds with the possibility of China acting as a mediator in South Asia, as discussed in some European circles. Such a scenario would represent for India the proverbial “putting a fox in charge of the hen house”.

China fears losing its strategic position in Pakistan in the event of a more pronounced US involvement in South Asia. However, Beijing has an interest in the fact that the US and its partners play a significant role in combating terrorist strongholds in the region – not least because of the existing connections to the *Uighurs* aspiring for independence from Beijing. Yet, China has thrice vetoed the passing of a UN Resolution in the Security Council favouring a ban on the *Lashkar-e-Tayyeba*. It was only in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks that Beijing finally changed its former position.

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<sup>5</sup> India Today, 22/12/2008, p. 29

<sup>6</sup> Kanwal Sibal: Combating Terrorism Jointly. Mail Today, 11/12/2008, p. 12

### **Indian policies towards Pakistan after 26/11**

India witnessed a widespread public outrage against Pakistan following the Mumbai attacks, although no “communal” clashes between Hindu and Muslim communities took place. Besides, the risks of an external conflict escalation could have been dealt with, in spite of the obvious tensions in the region. Thus, in the wake of criticisms labeling India a “soft” state, what are the options available to India?

- (a) V. P. Malik, a former Army Chief, has criticized the lack of a government policy directed against terrorism. The main loopholes were an inadequate infrastructure and a failure in the system. India should have the military means at hand to decisively counter its opponents. Only a limited confrontation would not serve towards eliminating cross border terrorism. It is apparent that India possesses few means at its disposal – in retaliation against Pakistan or unilateral actions against terrorist organizations operating within Pakistani territory – short of going to war, which in turn could lead to a nuclear escalation. According to V. P. Malik, counter measures beyond the merely superfluous would be: (1) air strikes against terrorist training camps in Pakistan; (2) captures through surprise attacks; and (3) a sea blockade. A Pakistani backlash should be expected, even the threat of a conventional war.
- (b) An internationally-oriented initiative of *coercive diplomacy* should exert pressure on Pakistan to destroy the terrorist infrastructure and isolate Islamabad in case of refusal. Critics of this strategy argue that it would produce no significant results and receive no real cooperation from the Pakistani side. Moreover, according to Kanwal Sibal, this strategy could also have consequences for New Delhi: “Any international coalition promoted by India could invite an international intervention on the Kashmir issue.”<sup>7</sup>
- (c) According to Naresh Chandra, former Cabinet Secretary and Ambassador to the United States, India faces the long-term choice of either seeking an outright confrontation and possible war or affecting a more balanced approach with Pakistan. Gauging the changes within Pakistani civil society would therefore prove to be vital. Furthermore, the US would continue to largely depend on Pakistan regarding its operations in Afghanistan. The Pakistani army would in turn take advantage of this so long as the US remained engaged in Afghanistan. Therefore, K. Subrahmanyam, the *doyen* of Indian Security Policy, proposes that India should be consulted concerning American strategy in Afghanistan.

A forum of former Secretaries of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs called for the suspension of all bilateral negotiations and dialogue mechanisms. Realistically, a more nuanced Indian approach is required. India would need a long-term political-military strategy to meet the challenges presented by Pakistan, which uses “terrorism as an instrument of state policy”, according to Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. Despite almost outnumbering Pakistan’s armed forces twice, India is militarily not in a position to decisively defeat Pakistan, especially since a quarter of the Indian army is bound in fighting insurgency movements in the interior and a substantial number are based along the border with China.

### **(3) Views about the Pakistani civilian government and scenarios after the Indian elections in 2009**

Pakistan as a “failed state” is generally not in India’s interest. Cautious Indian commentators advocate patience with Pakistani democracy. Prior to the attacks, Pakistan’s President Asif Zardari initiated “a completely new narration of the relationship with India.” According to him, India wouldn’t represent a threat to Pakistan, the armed groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir would be declared terrorists, and Pakistan would renounce the option of a nuclear first strike. Zardari referred to the attacks as “a chance to cooperate with India and to put the relationship with India on a higher level.”

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

### ***A civilian but “powerless” government in Islamabad***

Generally, the change of government through an electoral process in Pakistan in 2008 was welcomed in India. However there are complaints regarding the multiple power centers still in place – a veritable conglomerate of institutions and individuals – a stark contrast to the era of military dictatorship under President Pervez Musharraf. Above all, it seems that the civilian government in Islamabad is barely capable of exercising control over the army and military intelligence service.

Since he took office, even general Ashfaq Kayani, chief of the Pakistani army, officially opines the withdrawal of the military from politics. But the general interference and domination of the Pakistani military in governmental affairs remains conspicuously present. From the Indian perspective, the army is only too willing to end waging the unpopular war against its own people. In recent years, large portions of the US military aid package – originally intended to support “the war on terror” in Afghanistan – have been siphoned off to fund the purchase of weapons, which could be launched against India, such as radar and aircraft for use against submarines. According to Bharat Bhushan, chief editor of *Mail Today*, growing tensions with India contribute “to increase the importance of the armed forces within the ruling classes of Pakistan.”<sup>8</sup>

G. Parthasaraty, security expert and former Indian Ambassador to Pakistan, is of the opinion that the democrats in Pakistan play a subordinate role to the military. According to him, Zardari unwittingly played into the hands of the military. The country was bankrupt and dependent on American military aid. Given the differences within the Pakistani establishment, “holding talks with the Pakistani’s would lead to no tangible results”, merely resulting in a prolonged game of cat and mouse. There can be no doubt that sections of the Pakistani government have had a hand in planning the Mumbai attacks. Harming these sections is therefore a necessity of the highest priority. Naresh Chandra: “The army and the ISI are a curse for the Pakistani people itself.” The Pakistani army has ceased being a professional army and has lost its international standing. Like the ISI, it must be placed under civilian control.

According to Indian security experts, “Pakistan is a country at war with itself.” A *Jihadisation* of the Punjab would have immediate and long term implications for India, too. The *Jihadis* are intent on establishing *caliphates* in India, and the Pakistani army is keen on exacting revenge for its defeat in 1971 and the division of Pakistan. The very existence of Pakistan as a relatively moderate Islamic state is seemingly at stake. The Pakistani leadership has developed a veritable “culture of denial” towards Indian claims and proofs. Under the guideline “always blame the others”, a successful Pr-campaign has been practiced, even vis-à-vis European decision makers.

### ***Scenarios before and after the Indian elections in 2009***

The outcome of the *Lok Sabha* (Lower House) election in 2009 remains completely open. There are three possibilities of forming a government:

- (1) The current government of the *United Progressive Alliance* (UPA) remains in office and co-opts further coalition partners.
- (2) A coalition of the *National Democratic Alliance* (NDA), led by the Hindu-nationalist *Bharatiya Janata Party* (Indian Peoples Party/BJP), replaces the UPA.
- (3) A so-called *Third Front*, without Congress and BJP, takes over the government and co-opts some parties from UPA and NDA as well.

Despite the fierce attacks by the BJP, whose president demanded military action against Pakistan, the UPA government has the chance until the forthcoming elections to occupy the

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<sup>8</sup> Mail Today, 10/01/2009

issue of internal and external security by presenting a tough stance with regard to Pakistan, and by a decisive reform of the security apparatus as well as better coordination between the various branches of the military, which lack a unified command. Interestingly, voters did not especially favor the belligerent BJP in regional elections at the end of 2008 following the Mumbai attacks – quite to the contrary. Positive results of India's *coercive diplomacy* could even dispossess the Hindu-nationalist camp of its seemingly promising trump.

Due to the massive public criticism toward the entire political class because of its failure in matters of internal security and defense – especially with regard to terrorism originating from within Pakistan – no Indian government will be in a position to grant Pakistan any un-earned laurels, even not in the supposed interest of strengthening its democracy or tackling possible crises scenarios in the neighboring country.<sup>9</sup> Without Islamabad's acknowledgement of this new mood in India, through a fundamental change of its previous stance on terrorism and terrorist organizations such as the LeT, and the provision of visible results matching both Indian and international demands, a new phase of a long-drawn *Cold War* with Pakistan may be imminent.

#### **(4) Excursus and Outlook: Indian views on the new US Administration and Europe**

K. Subrahmanyam considered the terrorist attacks in Mumbai as an attempt to lure India into a war and to thwart in advance the plans of the new American President Obama in Afghanistan. The Americans should have been tired out there. A possible victory for the *Jihadis* in Afghanistan would pose a threat to many countries. Although the Americans would realize that Pakistan has beguiled them regarding the issue of prosecuting *al-Qaeda*, the Pakistani military remains a part of the solution in Afghanistan. According to Vikram Sood, a former head of RAW, "material and financial assistance to Pakistan should be bonded to the requirement of an effective and verifiable resolution of the *Jihadi* apparatus. Equipping the Pakistani army with weapons would encourage them to continue their intransigence towards India."<sup>10</sup>

The fight against terrorism of "Islamic" provenance represents a commonality between New Delhi and Washington. Additionally, India plays a significant role in the concept of an *Asian balance of power*, which is not only advocated by America. Regarding the impact of Barack Obama's presidency on India as well as on South and West Asia, it may be noted that India can substantially aid America, in terms of supporting the restoration of normality in Afghanistan, preserving stability in South and Central Asia, and securing the shipping lines in the Indian Ocean. Thereby, West Asia is of particular strategic interest to India. Given its traditionally good relations with Iran, New Delhi could even play a role in the reduction of the American-Iranian conflict.

The British Foreign Minister David Miliband critically urged the Indian government in New Delhi in January 2009: "I have said publicly that I do not believe that the attack was directed by the Pakistani state and I think it's important to restate that."<sup>11</sup> In doing so, he questioned the opinion of Manmohan Singh's already cited statement that Pakistan uses "terrorism as an instrument of state policy". It remains to be seen how far Miliband spoke representatively for the rest of Europe, and whether that implies further considerations regarding the alleged link between the Kashmir issue and terrorism.

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<sup>9</sup> This view is substantially different from that of Christian Wagner who said: "On the one hand, it [the government of Manmohan Singh] has to demonstrate harshness against Pakistan, if it doesn't want to relinquish the issue of internal security to the Hindu-nationalist BJP. On the other hand, they can not have an interest in an escalation of the situation possibly promoting a crisis with Pakistan." („Die Falle von Mumbai". SWP-Aktuell 86, December 2008, p.2)

<sup>10</sup> Mail Today, 09/01/2009, p. 10

<sup>11</sup> UK says Pak state agencies didn't direct Mumbai attack. Mail Today, 14/01/2009, p. 8

## **Outlook**

The region from Iran through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India will come closer together. The contours of the American West, South and Central Asia policy, even in dealing with the divergent interests of the relevant powers, including the People's Republic of China, are partially visible, and will continue to unfold more precisely. But to what extent will be India and Pakistan challenged in their traditional views and practices and, for example obliged to adopt a more consistent cooperative approach? Much will depend on the systematic and temporal consistency, with which the new US Administration will engage itself in this geopolitical area with its various conflict zones and terrorist networks.

The Pakistani leadership has gambled away its last good will in India by its non-cooperative conduct after the terrorist strikes in November 2008. Only a fundamental change of Islamabad's course toward India, especially with regard to the existing terrorist networks on Pakistani territory, could lead to a truly constructive new beginning of the bilateral relationship. However, considering the current abysmal state of affairs between their countries, both the elites in India and Pakistan are far away from the well-informed geopolitical view by the erstwhile Mughal dynasty (1527-1857) at the peak of its power toward this region.

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