

Why Do India and Pakistan Fight

An Investigation into 25 Years of Dialogue and Conflicts

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2013 is a unique year in the history of Indo–Pak relations. The first seven months of this year witnessed eight substantive peace initiatives with agreement on visa on arrival for senior citizens, announcement of release of all Indian fishermen from Pakistan jails, Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, inviting a delegation from the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry to attend the Vibrant Gujarat Investor Summit, expression of desire to work for peace with India by Nawaz Sharif even before formally taking over as the Prime Minister; meeting of Satinder Lambah Special Indian Envoy to Pakistan and Afghanistan with Nawaz Sharif with a message from the Prime Minister of India on 27th May and return visit by Pakistan envoy Shariyar M. Khan on 6th July with a message from Prime Minister Nawaz to Dr. Manmohan Singh of “Pakistan’s sincere desire to move forward on improving relations with India”; Agreement between India and Pakistan to hold Secretary level talks on the issues of Sir Creek, Tulbul Project and Wullar Barrage in August, and an agreement for the Prime Ministers of both countries to meet during UN General Assembly in September. Enough and more for India- Pakistan peace process to appear to be on track at last- firmly and conclusively.

But this is not to be. This same period also witnesses unprecedented escalation in cross border conflicts between the two countries with a record 75 incidences of attacks and counter attacks taking place between January and August this year that is an increase of 80% over such incidences during the same period last year. This started with the killing of Indian and Pakistani soldiers between 5th and 8th January this year and continued till the recent killing of five Indian soldiers in an ambush on 5th August. Second week of August alone saw 18 ceasefire violations, cancellation of the meeting between Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan scheduled in September and the Indian and Pakistani Parliaments pass resolutions against each other. All these incidences together seem to be succeeding in stalling the peace process with the demand to stop all dialogue. Advocates of aggression once again are gaining a point that peace initiatives should not be attempted as they cannot last.

Indeed, whenever peace processes appear to show positive results, some stray incidents always seem to arise out of nowhere to derail the on-going dialogue. But why should peace initiatives between India and Pakistan always stall? What makes India and Pakistan continue their fight?

Budgets and Conflicts

There appear to be some interesting correlation between conflicts and CBMs (Confidence Building Measures) between India and Pakistan during the past 25 years from 1988 to January 2013. During this period, 18 conflicts have taken place including Kargil, attack on Indian Parliament, Mumbai terror strike along with some ceasefire violations. Of these, as many as 13 (72%) have taken place between the last week of September and first week of January - mostly winter time and a period of only three and a half months while just 5 or 27% conflicts occurred in the remaining spans of eight and a half months. The only explanation for the concentration of so many conflicts in such a short span could be the annual budget of India announced in March and of Pakistan in June every year. Escalation in conflicts during this third quarter of the financial year could produce desired levels of

insecurity among the people and create appropriate conditions for increase in defence budgets.

Further substantiation for this thesis can be obtained by the events between 2011 and 2013 when a phenomenal 31 agreements and peace measures were adopted by India and Pakistan leading to enormous confidence building and the possibility of permanent peace appearing realisable. The situation had become conducive enough for P. Chidambaram to make an announcement of reduction in the defence budget when he took over as the Finance Minister of India in November 2012. But in just over a month, with the killing of Pakistani and Indian soldiers in January 2013, followed by other conflicts along the border and in Kashmir valley after a lull of over 2 years, Chidambaram had to announce an increase of 5% in the defence budget for India in March 2013. Of course Pakistan followed with its own enhancement maintaining the traditional upward spiral for defence spending at the cost of social allocations in both countries.

The five remaining conflicts that occurred between May and July in different years also appear to have been instigated with a direct objective of disrupting specific peace initiatives. The Kargil conflict of May-July 1999 was in response to Bus diplomacy initiated by Vajpayee in February of that year destroying the whole momentum and the peace process could not be resumed for the next 5 years. May and June of 2002 also saw heavy shelling on the India –Pakistan border to coincide with the visit of David Rumsfeld of USA who had come with the objective of restoring peace between India and Pakistan. Needless to say, his mission became a nonstarter. The fourth conflict in the form of another ceasefire violation was on 30th July 2008 immediately after India and Pakistan had signed on 24th June a Joint Anti-terror Mechanism to prevent terror attacks. The final conflict outside the months of budgetary considerations was in May 2011 to impact the talks on resolution of the Siachen issue that were scheduled around the same period. Of course the talks failed and Siachen continues to remain an issue taxing and draining both countries.

Conflict now is a trillion dollar market with scope for astronomical kickbacks. Hence, all the conflicts that have taken place between India and Pakistan in the last 25 years seemed to have been instigated to disrupt some specific peace initiative or to push up the annual defence budget. History has shown that those who can profit from conflict situations could include arms manufacturers, dealers, business groups, politicians, bureaucrats, militant and terrorist groups, intelligence agencies, some senior armed forces personal, and even some sections of the media that may be advertently or inadvertently whipping up war hysteria either for TRPs and increased circulation or to serve the business interests of their corporate bosses.

But the losers in this game are the soldiers and officers stationed on the border who pay with their lives and common people who are brainwashed into surrendering the very basic amenities due to them- all in the name of providing more budgets for national security.

Moral: If we still do not understand and continue to fight, then we are fools- dumb fools.

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