



More Sign Posts for Peace in South Asia

Fortunately India and Pakistan have stepped back from the brink of war and nuclear holocaust, for the time being. But the danger remains, and both countries remain at the mercy of events that they cannot fully control. Fundamentalist elements in Pakistan, bent on violence directed at India and matched likewise by extremist right wing groups in India, both of whom aim to provoke war between the two countries, hold the future of the region in their hands. They will continue to do so unless the two Governments institute further measures to de-escalate the current confrontation and get down to a dialogue.

The following objectives are interlinked and need to be achieved :

- 1. To stop permanently the infiltration from Pakistan into Indian controlled part of Jammu and Kashmir resulting in terrorism and violence there.**
- 2. To stop all forms of human rights violations by militants and security forces alike.**
- 3. To resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully, keeping in mind the legacy of partition and ground realities at present – namely the existence of the Line of Control as a virtual boundary since the Simla Agreement of 1972.**
- 4. To identify a process for ascertaining the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir regarding their future.**
- 5. To defuse nuclear tensions and eliminate the risk of nuclear war**
- 6. To open up the two countries to normal movement of people and trade and create a climate, socially and politically that would promote good relations especially between the peoples of India and Pakistan, and South Asia at large.**

The immediate elements that would open the way to resolving these long-festering issues could be as follows, keeping in mind the history of the various agreements that India and Pakistan have signed or almost signed, but have so far failed to implement. The approach also explicitly factors in the new and overwhelming reality in South Asia – that the establishment by India and Pakistan of nuclear arsenals means that the threats of conventional and nuclear war are now inextricably linked. If Indian and Pakistani leaders want peace – which is more than the absence of war, then resolving the issues of the relationships between the people and in the communities within countries, with equality, tolerance, and friendship is necessary to a sustained peace.

Cross-border infiltration:

Pakistan has pledged to stop such infiltration permanently. This will require monitoring. India has proposed joint patrolling of the border. This has not been agreed to by Pakistan. The situation is further complicated by India's `allergy' to any big power/third party interference in the entire Jammu and Kashmir question. However, we are already witnessing a substantial role being played primarily by the USA, and others, in facilitating communications between the leadership of the two countries! It is therefore proposed that a monitoring force drawn from among the members of SAARC countries under mutually agreed leadership, could provide the necessary compromise for the monitoring to be established.



This force could be provided with technical data gathered by other countries, including the United States, to better perform its duties. As a first step, India should show its goodwill by beginning to reduce its forces along the border and restore all communication including road, rail and air traffic between the two countries. The aim should be to bring forces at the border to pre-December 13 levels as rapidly as possible.

Jammu and Kashmir:

There are three parties to the Kashmir question, namely, India, Pakistan and the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and it is essential that India recognize this. By the same token, both India and Pakistan must understand the ground reality of a de facto partition of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir by the acceptance of the Line of Control as the international border between the two countries.

There is no denying the fact that the people of Jammu and Kashmir have suffered a great deal due to the Indo-Pak 'tug of war' over the past half a century. The levels of disillusionment and alienation amongst the people of Jammu and Kashmir from both India and Pakistan have reached an all time high. Most importantly they seek peace and cessation of all forms of violence. As a first step in this direction and as a gesture of honest intent, both Pakistan and India must reduce the levels of their security forces on both sides of the border in Kashmir, including the closing down of all militant training camps by Pakistan.

Many solutions have been proposed over the years for the 'Kashmir Problem' by eminent persons, peace groups and 'think tanks'. Central to any solution must be a process of ascertaining the wishes of the people of the entire erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, keeping in mind the ground realities of the de facto partition of the State.

In order to facilitate the emergence of Peace in the region as early as possible, the following process as a via media could be considered by all parties concerned:

- **First, the people of Kashmir on both sides of the border would be given the choice of whether they want to be citizens of India or Pakistan, and, if they want to move from one side to another, be given the opportunity to do so in peace and security. To implement this, both countries should agree to some form of international supervision . This role could perhaps be performed by a SAARC monitoring team as proposed earlier.**
- **Second, the people who have been displaced from their lands and homes by the current conflict, such as the Kashmiri pundits from the Valley, should be allowed to return to their homes and lands in peace and security.**
- **Third, the border between India and Pakistan in Kashmir should be kept porous to enable Kashmiris on both sides to cross it for personal, family, and business reasons without too many hassles. This porous border could become the exemplar of a similar opening between India and Pakistan all along the border, since millions of people have family members on both sides of the border.**

In this way we can facilitate the expression of the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The Line of Control in Kashmir, with minor modifications to allow for the terrain and other requirements of both



sides, could be regularised as the international border between India and Pakistan. In other words, it would be recognized as the de jure result of what has been a de facto partition of Jammu and Kashmir. Surely such a partition cannot be anymore or any less discriminatory or painful than the partition of the erstwhile states of Punjab and Bengal in 1947? The only saving grace now being that there will be controlled and secure movements of the population unlike the holocaust of 1947.

Conventional weapons and nuclear weapons:

Both countries should reaffirm the pledges to negotiate all outstanding issues **between them peacefully and not resort to war, proxy or otherwise**. This formulation should meet the concerns of both India and Pakistan adequately. This means, first of all, a cease-fire along the Line of Control. Pakistan would agree to a policy of no-first use of nuclear weapons, which India has already adopted. **This is the equivalent of a nuclear cease fire.**

India and Pakistan could tap their best and deepest traditions and not only avert war but make a real peace between them at last. They could verifiably de-alert all nuclear weapons with bilateral or SAARC monitoring and, in that context, invite all other nuclear weapons states to do the same and **together take up leadership in the cause of global nuclear disarmament.**

People-oriented regional policy: Both countries would:

1. Encourage people to people contacts.
2. They would discourage expressions of hostility and enmity between religions or sects within their own countries, and between India and Pakistan.
3. Liberalize visa requirements for personal and business needs with the aim of rapidly abolishing them altogether, making the Indo-Pak border akin to the U.S.-Canadian border.

Only sustained peace can lift the clouds of war and the threat of nuclear incineration of South Asia. At the horrific dawn of the nuclear age, Albert Einstein called on humanity to develop a new way of thinking or perish. The leaders of the West have recklessly failed to heed that warning and remain on the edge of the nuclear abyss, with the United States and Russia maintaining between them more than 4,000 nuclear warheads on hair-trigger alert, though they claim to be friends and at peace.

In a recently concluded and unique workshop ‘Initiative for Peace – Focus on Kashmir’ at the United World College in Singapore, forty young people from India, Pakistan came together for a week, and agreed on an inspiring Statement of Common Ground. The final paragraph of the statement reads : We believe that we have the power to make this generation and the generation to come, the best ever in the history of humanity, or the worst. The choice is entirely ours; we have made the choice for a better and peaceful world.” This, rather than the perpetual state of quasi-war that the countries are now maintaining, would benefit the region that gave the world Badshah Khan and Gandhi and the most unique freedom movement the world has known.

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See an [Op-Ed in the Hindu](#), based on this piece (external site)