



Indo-Pak Relations (2014-2020): An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between India and Pakistan has been tense and contentious since the birth of the two nations from the shackles of British colonial power in 1947. A lot of confidence building measures, diplomatic endeavors, and agreements were undertaken to make a better relationship, but to no avail. There were a series of events and occasions came for fruitful talks but, both of the countries couldn't capitalize the momentum reached in the various points of time history. The bone of contention is mainly the Kashmir issue. Pakistan promotes cross border terrorism and encourages militants to cross the border to destabilize the territorial integrity of India. The two nuclear-power nations in Asia are born enemies over the Kashmir issue. The relationship from the year 2014 to 2020 has witnessed a series of remarkable events of conflicts and cooperation. The admixture ray of hope and darkness of despair engulfed the minds of millions of Indian and Pakistanis on different occasions. The article is aimed at providing the key political and diplomatic relations that have shaped the interactions between the two countries from the year 2014 to 2020.

Key Words: Kashmir Issue, Terrorism, Diplomacy, Article 370,

Introduction

The birth of two nations from the British colonial power in 1947 couldn't bring peace and brotherhood as witnessed between India and Pakistan. The perennial enmity and conflict between two arch rivals caused much damage to each other's economy and society. The rivalry and tense relations bring threat perceptions and mistrust between them. The never ending conflict brings a lot of defense expenditure for both of them. The frequent visits and diplomatic dialogue, treaties etc. couldn't bring peace and a friendly relationship. India wishes to maintain a consistent and continuous relations with the neighboring countries, as it emphasizes on 'neighborhood first' policy. But foreign policy does not flow in a straight path instead in a zigzag pattern. The formation of Pakistan was based on religious ground with blood shed and fierce competition taking the lives of many people. After partition three major wars and a numerous number of battles took place. The bone of contention of this war or clashes is Kashmir issue. In this article an attempt has been made to analyze India-Pakistan relations during the Modi era. The article is divided into four sections. In the first section the background of the dispute, in the second section the key incidents took place which derailed the somewhat normal relations, in the third section the possibility of diplomatic breakthrough for connecting the missing link between the two nations and the article ends with a conclusion.

Background of Dispute

India and Pakistan both are bitter enemies in South Asia. The relations are full of bitterness and mistrust. When we try to analyze the states surrounding India related to foreign relations, the worst thing that comes in the minds of millions of Indians is that Pakistan is the most mistrusted and unfriendly nation. According to Harsh V. Pant, Since the birth of two nations, four wars have taken place, with three of these wars directly connected to the issues of Kashmir. During the partition of India and Pakistan, the Princely states were given freedom to join either of the two nations. Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir made an independent position. But armed tribesmen attacked Kashmir and Maharaja Hari Singh sought help from Nehru and signed the instrument of accession with India in lieu of military assistance. Then in 1965, war over Kashmir took place. Pakistan was on the verge of defeat and sought China's help. An un-brokered ceasefire came into effect. Then, again in the 1971 war over liberation of Bangladesh took place and in the last war took place in 1999 in the Kargil sector of Jammu and Kashmir (Pant, 2016). The relation between India and Pakistan is deteriorating due to Pakistan's proximity to China. After the 1962 Sino-Indian war, there was a boundary agreement which recognised Chinese control of some disputed Kashmir territory and from that day onwards the ties are so strong that Hu Jintao has described the relationship as "higher than mountains and deeper than oceans." The covert nuclear program with China makes the relation between India and Pakistan more complex and bitter (Pant, 2016a). This is the brief description of the Indo-Pak bitter memory of war and conflicts. Pakistan wants to be independent of Kashmir and to be part of Pakistan. On the other hand India claimed that Pakistan belongs to India as instruments of accession signed by the erstwhile Maharaja of Kashmir. After winning a landslide victory in the 2014 general election of Indian lok sabha, there was a hope and opportunities for the newly formed BJP led NDA government to mend the deteriorating relations with Pakistan. With this ambition in mind Modi tried to make confidence building measures between the two arch rivals so that both countries take a respite from ongoing bitter relations. It is a fact that whenever both countries try to come closer, there happens to be a great mishap, in the form of

a terror attack from Pakistan aided terrorist or action that doesn't help India for continuing dialogue with Pakistan. According to India Today correspondence, Modi invited Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for the swearing-in ceremony in May 2014 first feat of its kind, followed by Ufa meeting where Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Modi met. Before that meeting in the earlier of the Ramzan month Modi wished Sharif and emphasized a peaceful and good bilateral ties and conveyed release of detained Pakistani fishermen on the occasion of holy Ramzan. The relationship started with a good move from Modi but couldn't be sustainable(IndiaToday, 2015).

Key Incidents

The relationship between India and Pakistan over the last seven years (2014-2020) had been marked by significant tensions and occasional attempts at diplomacy. From Pathankot to Uri in 2016 and subsequent surgical strikes by Indian armed forces and later incidents derailed and froze the already cold relations. The Indian Air Force fighter jet carried out Balakot airstrike after Pulwama massacre in 2019. Pakistan Air Force (PAF) reciprocated and captured an Indian pilot. The pilot was released by the Imran Khan government after diplomatic effort and international pressure. It was a goodwill gesture. But this diplomacy and goodwill could not continue as border intrusions and cross border firing were daily affairs. In August 2019, India revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, which led to strong condemnation and diplomatic protests from Pakistan. The Line of Control (LoC) saw frequent ceasefire violations and cross-border shelling, resulting in casualties on both sides. Both countries continued to exchange sharp rhetoric at international forums, including the United Nations. Ceasefire Agreement: In February 2021, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire agreement along the LoC, leading to a period of reduced violence. The pandemic somewhat overshadowed bilateral tensions, with both countries focusing on managing the crisis domestically. Political Instability in Pakistan: Domestic political turmoil in Pakistan, including the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan, affected its foreign policy focus. The Kashmir issue remained a point of contention, with Pakistan consistently raising it at international forums. The war between the two neighbors brought so much mistrust and enmity that can not be repaired till today. According to Ian Hall(2019), in 2016 two terrorist attacks claimed by the Jais-e-Mohammed outfit took place in Pathankot in the month of January and Uri in the month of September and shook the Indo-Pak relations. India launched a surgical strike in response to the Pathankot and Uri attack (Hall,2019). In 2019 a suicide bomber ramped into the vehicle of security personnel in Pulwama of Jammu Kashmir and 40 Indian paramilitary forces were killed. The bloody killing was claimed by Pakistan based terrorists outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed. India retaliated and Balakot airstrike was carried out by the Indian air force division across the line of control and into Pakistan proper (Hall, 2019a).

Diplomatic Endeavour

Ties between India and Pakistan appeared to be off to a good start when India elected Narendra Modi, a right-wing Hindu nationalist, prime minister earlier in 2014. Modi invited Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to his inauguration in May and the rapport between the two leaders seemed to signal an impending period of rapprochement in bilateral ties and hoping this might be a new beginning in India-Pakistan relations. In fact it was a positive gesture. Despite initial hope the border skirmishes along the line of control(LOC) and other irritants continued. The scheduled foreign secretary level talks in the month of August,2014 after a period of two years was canceled due to Pakistan High Commissioner in India, Abdul Basit, meeting Kashmiri separatists leaders under the umbrella of Hurriyat Conference. India's response was sharp:

Foreign secretary conveyed to the Pakistan High Commissioner today, in clear and unambiguous terms, that Pakistan's continued efforts to interfere in India's internal affairs were unacceptable. It was underlined that the Pakistani High commissioner's with these so-called leaders of the Hurriyat undermines the constructive diplomatic engagement initiated by Prime Minister Modi in May on his very first day in office. Therefore, under the present circumstances it is felt that no useful purpose will be served by the Indian Foreign secretary going to Islamabad next week. Foreign Secretary's visit to Islamabad for talks on 25 August stands canceled(Pant,2016c).

According to Shivsankar Menon, the ceasefire agreement of 2003 is no more and prospects for cooperation in other regional forums are bleak. The terrorism and Kashmir problem are haunting their relations and could not see any hope in near future. Even if the relations between them improve it is temporary as Pakistan will try its best to quest for strategic parity with India and geopolitical tension will rise and impact on relations will be affected(Menon, 2017).

War of words between two arch rivals are almost habitual affairs and conflicts are inherent in the very nature of the birth of two independent India and Pakistan, since 1947. Arun Jaitley, the Indian defense minister, warned Pakistan against engaging in destructive and cowardly acts on the border, noting that India will do whatever it takes to defend its territory and citizens. Jaitley opined that India can cause great damage to Pakistan if it continues to destabilize India. Meanwhile, Pakistan issued a nuclear warning. Pakistan's Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Lt. Gen. Abdul Qadir Baloch warned India of possible nuclear attack if Pakistan is threatened (Panda,2014). According to MEA websites, Mrs. Sushama Swaraj, the minister of external affairs and her counterpart Mr. Sataj Aziz of Pakistan took a concrete initiative to mend the frozen relations between the two nations in December 2015. They met in Islamabad to attend the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process. In the conference convergence of views was seen when they criticized and condemned all forms of terrorism and the Indian side was assured the speedy trial of the Mumbai trial. The NSA of both the nations will work cordially to address the terrorism related issues (MEA,2015). The External Affairs Minister also took the initiative to propose a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue in December 2015. These initiatives have been responded with acts of cross-border terrorism and violence against India including the cross-border terror attack on Pathankot Airbase on 2 January 2016. Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi condemned the gruesome attack and said that enemies of humanity who could not see the progress of India carried out the subversive and heinous attack in Pathankot airbase. The Pathankot terror attack is a severe blow between the ongoing hope of good relations between India and Pakistan(The Times of India,2016) After the surprise unscheduled visit of

Narendra Modi to Pakistan and meeting with Premier Nawaz Sharif from Kabul (Indian Express, 2015) there was a hope that relations between them could start with new energy and enthusiasm but the Pathankot attack poured water on it and resumption of good neighborhood dialogue doesn't see the light of the day. Though Pakistan condemns the Pathankot terror attack, it is only an eyewash. The Pathankot terror attack caused a severe blow between the ongoing hope of good relations between arch rival India and Pakistan. Though Pakistan condemned the Pathankot terror attack as a routine gesture, political analysts see it as an eyewash (m.timesofindia.com,2016) India took punitive actions against Pakistan. India withdrew the most-favored nation given to Pakistan after a heinous act of crusade on Indian security forces where 40 brave soldiers' died. The Indian move is justified on the ground that Pakistan is taking the opportunity for economic development but Pakistan is not ready to give the status. Pakistan is harboring cross border terrorism and at same time wants to take economic advantage from India. India is no longer to give MFN status and other issues may include imposing port restrictions, non-tariff measures, banning certain goods and higher duties on imports from Pakistan. Pakistan still hasn't granted India with MFN status. On the other hand, it came up with a dissimilar but globally popular Non-Discriminatory Market Access (NDMA) agreement. The reason Pakistan has chosen to adopt the NDMA with India is due to political mistrust and a history of border conflicts. India has given the MFN status for cordial relations between India and Pakistan but they have not done enough to reciprocate the same. Pakistan leaders and military bosses consider India as its most unfavorable and mistrusted nation. This mistrust has grown from the very inception of Pakistan. The enmity and divergent views of two nations are growing as time passes. Pakistan is making every effort to destabilize India by resorting to subversive activities and terrorism is one of the most heinous acts which has continued for all the time(Suneja,2019). The daily tabloid Dawn reported that the National Security Committee meeting was held in Pakistan after scrapping of article 370, the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. They had taken bold steps-downgraded the diplomatic relations with India. The Committee termed Indian actions in Jammu and Kashmir as " unilateral and illegal actions." The committee took many resolutions such as downgrading diplomatic relations, suspension of bilateral trade, matters to be taken to the United Nations, and observing August 14 as solidarity day with Kashmiris (Dawn,2019). According to Mubarak Zeb Khan of Dawn correspondence, in reaction to India's decision to revoke Article 370 of its constitution that granted occupied Kashmir a special status, Pakistan has downgraded diplomatic relations with India and suspended bilateral trade with it. The Dawn correspondent opined that underlying causes of trade ban by Pakistan was in retaliation of heavy import duty from the Indian side on Pakistan import as 200% import duty was imposed by New Delhi. Before that India revoked Pakistan's Most Favored Nation status after the Pulwama terrorist attack on Indian security forces killing 40 security personnel (Khan,2019). According to the High Commission of India in Islamabad, multiple attempts were initiated for mending the worsen relations between two warring countries. The invitation of PM Nawaz Sharif to the swearing in ceremony of his counterpart in India and meeting of Modi and Sharif in Ufa in the month of July 2015. The ground was laid down for bilateral dialogue in the last month of 2015, but terror attacks and violence in different parts of India stalled the hopeful dialogue. There was a terror attack in Pathankot air base in January 2016, Uri attack on army camp in August 2016 and a heinous attack on a convoy of Indian Security forces in February 2019 where 40 security personnel died. Modi conveyed a congratulatory message to Imran Khan after winning the election on 30 July 2018 and offered for a meaningful engagement for the benefit of the people in the region plagued by multiple problems (High Commission of India,2019). The Kartarpur Corridor was first proposed in early 1999 by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan respectively at that time, as part of the Delhi-Lahore Bus diplomacy. It was a positive move furthering the good neighborhood relations when on 26 November 2018, the foundation stone for building of Kartarpur corridor was laid down on the Indian side by Prime Minister Narendra and in response of Indian move on 28 November 2018, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan did the same for the Pakistani side. The much awaited historical day came on 12th November, 2019 when on the occasion of 550th birth anniversary day of Guru Nanak corridor was completed. PM Imran Khan emphasized on the peace process between India and Pakistan as it led to progress. Both PMs were very optimistic after completion of Kartarpur Sahib Corridor (PTI, 2021).

Conclusion

Indo-Pak relationship over the last seven years has been a mix of border tensions and occasional diplomatic overtures. Since independence, various conflicts and wars have taken place. Pulwama attack and subsequent Balakot airstrike, highlighted the persistent security concerns. India cannot afford a hostile Pakistan as its neighbor. Over the years the Pathankot attack, Uri attack, the Pulwama attack and in reply Balakot strike, India is facing the security threats and continued terrorist activities from Pakistan supported terrorist outfits. So, the relationship is deteriorating between two arch-rival nuclear neighbors. India and Pakistan, two Asian neighbors, can make a lot of progress if they abandon the hostile and competitive attitude of each other. There is a huge amount of defense expenditure that can be saved for other areas of development if they get rid of their perennial enmity. The high level political visit and fruitful dialogue can make friendly relations and avenue for further economic progress. As India and Pakistan are two economic powers, they can show the path of progress to other underdeveloped countries. The economic resources and technological knowledge of India can be capitalized for development of infrastructure and industry in Pakistan. The ceasefire agreement in 2021 showed a ray of hope and stability, but the Kashmir issue and political tensions between two countries continue to pose a challenge for peace between two neighbors. Dialogue and confidence building measures to address the issues for a sustainable peace is the need of the hour.

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