

Review: India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms

By Amit Ranjan

India-Pakistan: Coming to Terms. Ashutosh Misra. Palgrave Macmillan Publications: New York, 2010. 288 pages. ISBN: 978-0-230-61937-1.

Lots of books, research articles and editorials focusing upon the need for good relations between India and Pakistan have been written, but the two South Asian, nuclear-armed neighbors are still adamantly hostile to each other. The root cause of their conflict is their claim and counter claim to the entire region of Jammu and Kashmir. They have even fought three full wars, one limited war and a series of proxy wars but are yet to resolve this issue. No formal or informal talks between India and Pakistan can be concluded without raising the subject of 'Kashmir'. Thinking rationally, one feels that the two countries, for the time being, should put this issue into political cold storage and focus on other bilateral conflicts between them. In the event they resolve those issues they could apply the same mechanism and methods to address Kashmir. Ashutosh Misra's work is a step in that direction. Unlike others, he has tried to cautiously avoid the Kashmir issue and focuses upon the negotiations and dialogue process over resolved and non-resolved conflicts between India and Pakistan.

Leaving aside a detailed analysis of the Kashmir question, the author has talked about the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) of 1960, the Siachin dispute, the Sir Creek dispute, the Rann of Kutch and the Tulbul/ Wular barrage. On the basis of his research, Misra has described the conflict between the two as an "enduring conflict," a term used by many, including T.V. Paul, to describe India-Pakistan dispute. But despite such disagreements, on certain issues both countries follow the defensive neo-realist dictum that even traditional rivals cooperate if they find that cooperation is in their mutual interest. The Indus Water Treaty of 1960 is one such example.

The author has taken into account the theoretical aspects of negotiations, and talks about how negotiations proceed, about ripeness of the dispute, pre-negotiations, negotiation and agreement. India and Pakistan have followed this process but the relationship is so delicate and complex that one untoward incident negates all the hard work done by an individual or group of individuals. Mr. Vajpayee's and

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Nawaz Sharif's intentions were mowed down by the Kargil episode, then Dr. Manmohan Singh's and Pervez Musharraf's step forward faltered due to Mumbai carnage. Once these types of incidents take place the relationship goes back to zero and for any further political engagement one has to start from scratch. There is an absolute lack of continuity in bilateral dialogue, which is a must for resolution of any ensuing conflict.

Talking about the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), the author is correct to argue that they are just short term arrangements. People sometimes become hysterical and start expecting the unexpected, but in the end, these arrangements end up nowhere and come to an abrupt end. Many CBMs and treaties to encourage people-to-people contacts and increasing trade have been signed, but they have failed to add even a spoonful of sugar to their bitter relationship. But two important CBMs have been honestly carried out—the Indo-Pakistan agreement to not attack each others' nuclear installations and the exchange of nuclear lists on the first of January each year. One of the major reasons for the failure of other CBMs is that the government elite and private sector elite from both countries want the relationship to remain, so that their self-interests can be properly served.

Referring to the previously-mentioned Indus Water Treaty (IWT) of 1960, Misra has given a detailed analysis and description of the treaty and the problems cropping up now. In an abruptly concluded chapter, citing B.G.Varghese, he has supported the idea of having a new treaty—Indus-II. But it must be kept in mind that it's not possible for the two countries to sit together for such a long period and re-negotiate the entire water-sharing treaty. A few clauses of the IWT may be amended but the treaty, as a whole, must be kept intact. Like the IWT, the boundary issue in Rann of Kutch was resolved through arbitration in 1968.

Problematic areas between India and Pakistan continue to be Siachin, Sir Creek and the Tulbul/Wular barrage. Though talks have taken place to resolve these conflicts, they have not been fruitful. Manning and maintaining posts at Siachin glacier is responsible for large number of peacetime casualties. It also puts extra stress on the already burdened defense budget because a lot of money is spent by both countries to maintain their strategic posts at Siachin. But still the two sides are not ready to withdraw from there and declare it a no man's land. Many rounds of talks have been held to discuss the issue but were of no use. Sir Creek is a marshy land and is a storehouse of hydrocarbon materials. According to UNCLOS it was to be declared as international water by 2009 in case India and Pakistan did not agree to resolve the issue, but the United Nations still has not

taken any action regarding its status. The Tulbul/Wular project over the river Jhelum is a cause of tension between India and Pakistan too. Talks have been held to resolve differences over this project but those talks are yet to yield any result. Kishenganga, another controversial run-of-river hydroelectric project, was referred to arbitration court in April 2010.

It's not that these above mentioned problems cannot be resolved between the two countries, rather they could be, if there is a strong political will among the powerful elites to do so, otherwise the world is going to witness more decades of political tension between India and Pakistan.

Islamic terror groups were raised and trained by the Pakistani army to fight the USA's war against the former USSR in Afghanistan. Once the US's interest was served those groups were orphaned. Later on they were directed by the Pakistani government to fight Pakistan's low intensity proxy war against India, in Jammu and Kashmir. Now, like the Frankenstein monster, these groups are ready to engulf even Pakistan and are a worry for global security. They are responsible for carrying out many bomb blasts in major Indian cities, but the author has not taken note of the involvement of Indian Mujahidin and Hindu terror groups, which makes for an egregious disparity. Indian Mujahidin came into action after post-Godhra mayhem while Hindu extremist groups were formed in response to the Islamic groups. The Samjhauta Express bomb blast and the Mecca Masjid blast, among others, were carried out by the newly emerged Hindu terror groups.

In a few places the author has also made factual mistakes. He has written that "meetings of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with General Musharraf in Islamabad" (22), whereas as Prime Minister, Dr. Singh has yet to pay a visit to Pakistan. In places he has cited an incorrect date, for example the meeting of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee with General Musharraf in 2006 (39), whereas Dr. Manmohan Singh has been India's Prime Minister since 2004. The author, like many, has used the term Indo-China (several wars involving Indo-China between the 1950s and the 1990s) for the Sino-India war of 1962 (96).

Despite the occasional oversight, this book has carefully looked into the often neglected issues between India and Pakistan. The author has done good work to make readers aware of the multiple reasons why the India and Pakistan peace process negotiations have failed.