

Through the Dusty Looking Glass

Unless India and Pakistan learn to look beyond their perceptions, peace will remain elusive



■ **Gen. Jehangir Karamat**

Whenever Indians and Pakistanis get together at 'think tank'-sponsored seminars they invariably present perceptions that they have of each other. Since these participants are all well-informed and thinking individuals their perceptions have to be taken as representative of the public as well as the establishment. These perceptions do matter and have to be taken into consideration if there is ever going to be meaningful and progressive interaction between the two countries. Right now the scenario again looks bleak after a brief interlude of hope. From India there are statements about '85 Pakistani-run training camps' in Kashmir and from Pakistan we have reports of '18 Indian-run terrorist training camps' in Afghanistan. We seem to be moving in familiar and predictable directions oblivious of the opportunities that may lie ahead.

Much, of course, depends on how we see the evolving situation. Do we perceive Afghanistan as an area for possible future co-operation or will we have a conflict of interest there and a continuation of rivalry and hostility? The foundation of interaction there will be laid on the basis of how we answer this question. Is there ever going to be reciprocity in the steps to move away from the conflict in Kashmir and towards dialogue and a peace process, or will there be insistence on a 'you first' approach? Umpteen well funded think tanks are reaching the same set of conclusions – conclusions that are not new for us and that we can easily arrive at bilaterally. These conclusions generally are:

- The starting point has to be a dialogue
- Dialogue should be comprehensive and should be preceded by good homework.
- We should not look for an immediate resolution of disputes – options that look impossible will start looking feasible once the dialogue turns into an established peace process.
- There must be reciprocity to bring down the level of violence and eliminate it
- Kashmiris should be participants.
- Nuclear weapons in the sub-continent are a very real danger and we must discuss measures for

restraint and risk reduction on an urgent basis.

- A military solution is not possible therefore conflict must end.

The perceptions that Pakistanis voice are based on the conclusions that they have drawn. They believe that:

- India is not really interested in a dialogue. India will agree to a dialogue only when it can dictate terms.
- India is using the post 9/11 war on terror environment to bring external pressure on Pakistan. India's relations with the US, Israel, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia are being used for this purpose.
- India is developing military power to have overwhelming superiority over Pakistan.
- India is exploiting the fragmentation and turmoil in Afghanistan to create a threat for Pakistan so that it has leverage over Pakistan for Kashmir.
- The situation in Afghanistan and the US interest in a relationship with India are being exploited to create a convergence of interest scenario. The India-Israel relationship pushes this agenda.

It should not take a genius to figure out the response that Pakistan is likely to make to this unfolding Indian strategy. The more the imbalance grows in conventional military power the more the emphasis will shift to the nuclear capability. Pakistan will counter Indian designs by acquiring leverage of its own while resisting the pressures that may be brought upon it. The result will be a continuation of hostility and a total lack of trust and sincerity in the India-Pakistan relationship regardless of peace lobbies and goodwill visits from both sides. With a war, even a limited one, being a remote possibility we are looking at externally sponsored internal instability operations from both sides – a route that we have travelled often in the past with disastrous consequences for the people in both countries.

Indian perceptions revolve around the 'proxy war' in Kashmir that the freedom struggle is called there. Admitting the indigenous roots of the uprising the Indians state their perceptions on the basis of the percentage of militants that they now consider are locals and those being 'infiltrated' from across the

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PEACENIKS: A delegation of Pakistani Parliamentarians on a goodwill mission to India at Rajghat

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border. The Indian belief is that if external support is cut off they will be able to crush the struggle in Kashmir and force a political solution that suits them. The struggle in Kashmir is perceived as a 'jihad' being waged by extremists' who have state sponsorship.

The verbal exchanges that follow once these perceptions have been stated are interesting and must amuse the sponsors at whose behest the Indians and Pakistanis have assembled. To the Indian demand for an end to 'terrorism' in Kashmir the Pakistani response is that it is preposterous to expect Pakistani collusion in crushing the struggle for self-determination by the Kashmiris. The need for Pakistan to take the first step leads to a fruitless discussion on reciprocity in the steps that need to be taken. When Indians talk of the large numbers of 'Pakistan run training camps' and recovery of weapons with Pakistani markings the Pakistanis respond by asking why the training camps do not show up on satellite imagery? And why should Pakistan be so naïve as to send 'infiltrators' equipped with weapons clearly indicating their origin? When the Indians try to put Pakistan in the dock for not eschewing 'first use' the Pakistani response is that India's 'no first use' is just a ploy. When the sponsors point out the dangers of nuclear weapons both Indians and Pakistanis indicate their impeccable safety record and

extol their command and control arrangements with the Indians adding that extremism 'in certain quarters' does pose a danger. And so it goes on till time runs out and a set of mutually acceptable conclusions are drafted.

Frank Lloyd Wright said in an address in London in 1930 that, "We do not want to live in a world where the machine has mastered the man; we want to live in a world where man has mastered the machine". Indians and Pakistanis must not allow their respective perceptions to dominate and drive them into long term policies that will perpetuate hostility. They need to step back and discuss their perceptions at all levels. We may emerge reassured. Again in a public address Henry Clay defined compromise in 1850: "What is a compromise? It is a work of mutual concession – an agreement in which there are reciprocal stipulations. A work in which, for the sake of peace and concord, one party abates his extreme demands in consideration of an abatement of extreme demands by the other party; it is a measure of mutual concession, a measure of mutual sacrifice." Perhaps the time has come to educate ourselves and look at options other than the ones into which our perceptions have been leading us. ●

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