

INDO-PAKISTAN COOPERATION: THINKING “OUT OF THE BOX”

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ABSTRACT

Since December 2003, South Asia appears to be moving slowly but surely towards becoming a solid regional bloc. The two major nations, India and Pakistan, have realized that the answer to strained relations is not belligerence, but dialogue and meaningful interaction. This article analyzes some of the reasons for this bilateral change in relations. What emerges is that, in addition to possessing a more mature political leadership, both countries have recognized that traditional means of integration will not work because of similar patterns of production in the region. As a result, they have begun to follow the path taken by African blocs, such as the SADC, and have initiated a move towards economic exchanges, albeit in a very minimalist form. The case study that illustrates this point most persuasively is that of the intimacy between the Indian and Pakistani Punjab.

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to analyze the various factors that have in the last few months given rise to not just an improvement in Indo-Pak relations, but also to providing a degree of depth to them: cooperation between the two countries in the near future appears to be a dream no longer, but to be inevitable. The changing and evolving nature of the global polity, pragmatic and enlightened political leadership in the two countries and potential economic gains from cooperation between them are examples of these factors [1].

One crucial factor that has played a pivotal role in giving impetus to the whole process, but which has been mostly ignored, is the realization by both India and Pakistan in general, and the two Punjab [2] in particular, that waiting for regional agreements to take shape will not benefit either side. Hence, they have both begun to think “out of the box”, paying more attention to innovative and dynamic paradigms of regional cooperation[3].

The political establishments at the federal and provincial levels in both countries are aware that:

(1) There are likely to be quite enough political roadblocks before the agreement actually takes place [4]. For example, for a very long time, religious chauvinists have been able to exploit the religious sentiments and the misguided jingoism of uneducated sections of society, thereby effectively blocking the possibility of cross-border cooperation.

(2) The models of regional integration followed by the European Union and other regional blocs of developed countries will not bring desired results in the initial stages because most South Asian countries specialize in similar types of goods and because the infrastructure for initiating trade in possible areas is poor.

This scenario clearly indicates that the theory of comparative advantage may not be applicable. This theory, first propounded by economist David Ricardo and built on by Heckscher-Ohlin and Samuelson, states that a country should produce those goods for which it has a relative cost advantage over others; and import those for which others have the relative cost advantage over it [5].

The remedy to the problems now beginning to take shape in the cooperation between East and West Punjab - of similar production negating the theory of comparative advantage and of lack of trade infrastructure - is to start the whole process of regional integration via minimalist models of regional cooperation. These models have been successfully adapted in Africa and are known as the "functional integration model" and "development integration model" and shall be discussed in detail in the analysis that follows. In brief, the "functional integration model" advocates cooperation in mutual areas of strength and areas such as infrastructure, while the "development integration model" emphasizes that project based cooperation or functional integration should ultimately lead to regional coordination in policy making [6].

There is one salient observation that should be made here. It is indeed unfortunate that the South Asian intelligentsia mostly looks towards western models of cooperation and has not paid deeper attention to Africa, a the region which has immense similarities with our part of the world, economically and to a lesser degree politically.

FACTORS LEADING TO THE CHANGE IN INDO-PAK RELATIONS

As stated earlier, there are a plethora of factors behind the sudden thaw in Indo-Pak ties, an improvement that cannot be attributed to any one input in isolation.

The first significant reason for this shift in relationship is the peculiar truth that global politics and economics are constantly changing, so that some scholars have very rightly expressed the view that "International Politics" is analogous to "complex adaptive systems" [7]

This analogy states that examples from the natural world of "complex adaptive systems" consisting of cells, organs, immune systems, colonies (e.g. ants) and ecologies have an equivalence in the human universe where they comprise cultural and social structures such as families, political parties, states, and also the system of international politics. While these systems vary from each other, it is more significant that they share several essential attributes [8].

Firstly, each of these systems comprises a network of many agents acting in parallel. In a brain, the agents are nerve cells, whereas in ecology they are species. In international politics the agents are states, and if we move beyond the realist image, different types of non-state actors come in as additional agents. No matter how you specify them, each agent acts within a structure produced by its interactions with the other agents in the system. All agents within the system, then, find themselves acting and reacting to what the other agents are doing. As a result basically nothing in their environment is fixed. [9].

Similar to complex adaptive systems, International Politics is constantly evolving: They are ever changing and reordering their building blocks as they adapt to variations in their structure or environment. Succeeding generations of organisms will modify and rearrange their tissues through the process of evolution. The brain will continually strengthen or weaken myriad connections between its neurons as an individual learns from his or her encounters with the world. A firm will promote individuals who do well and (more rarely) will reshuffle its organizational chart for greater efficiency [10].

In the same way, states will enter new trading regimes or realign themselves in new alliances. For example, with the end of Cold War came a fundamental change in the international system. As a result, states have had to adapt themselves to the emerging structure of international politics, at least if they are to survive [11].

A careful study of recent strides in Indo-Pak cooperation in general and of the two Punjabs in particular confirms the above observation. A few years ago, it would have been difficult to foresee

the possibility of the following events taking place, some of which have already taken place, some likely to take shape in the future:

(1) The construction of a highway connecting the cities of Amritsar in Indian Punjab and Nankana Sahib in Pakistani Punjab and the inauguration of bus services between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib. Similar bus services are likely to commence between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad [12].

(2) Trade between India and Pakistan increased by almost 150 percent last year, pointing out one of the quickest gains from the fledgling peace process between the South Asian neighbors. Between April 2004 and November 2004, the total trade between the two countries stood at US\$381 million (€286 million), up from US\$155 million (€116 million) in the same period the previous year [13].

However, while the political dynamic is constantly evolving, it is not automatic. There are variables that also influence this change. The case of Indo-Pak relations is not unique in that an amalgam of various factors has led to the current improvement. These other main influences on the thaw have been:

1. Committed and enlightened leadership in both countries
2. Sustained, well targeted and meaningful Track Two exchanges between both countries

Committed and enlightened leadership in both countries:

India is led by a skilled economist and statesman, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The Pakistan establishment is headed by a pragmatic soldier, President General Pervez Musharraf, and a banker with international experience, Prime Minister Mr. Shaukat Aziz [14]. Coincidentally and interestingly, Dr. Manmohan Singh was born in Pakistan, while General Pervez Musharraf was born in India.

A global outlook has led these individuals to the realization that India and Pakistan cannot shape a bright future by harping on the past. This is evident from Dr. Manmohan Singh's statement to a delegation of senior political leaders from Pakistan led by former Prime Minister Shujaat Hussain, "history obliges us to seize all opportunities to pursue peace. We cannot change borders, but in a globalized world, borders should not matter". [15].

He further went on to express the view that it is imperative for both countries to take advantage of ever-dwindling geographic boundaries and ever-blurring political entities [16]. The urge to break the shackles of the past is also evident from an Urdu couplet that Prime Minister Singh recited during the course of his meeting with President Musharraf last year (2004) in New York [17].

Kuch aisey bhi manzar hain tariq ki nazron mein/
Lamhon ne khata ki, sadiyon ne saza payee.

(History is witness to incidents where mistakes were made during split seconds for which entire generations had to pay a price).

A concern for the future is also manifest from Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's keynote address to the India Today conclave, held recently in New Delhi [18].

"South Asia faces the challenge of envisioning an alternative future for itself. Fundamental changes in both thinking and behavior necessitate making bold choices and taking difficult decisions.... and it (Pakistan) is prepared to take chances for peace".

While the Kashmir issue may not have totally disappeared from view, it is now thought of as an issue of disagreement rather than of dispute. From time to time it does become prominent, but

more as the result of political compulsions as opposed to the overall political atmosphere and sentiment prevalent in the two countries.

Sustained, well targeted and meaningful Track Two exchanges between both countries: Another pivotal reason for the reduced tension between the two countries is the recognition, by politicians on both sides, of the significance of sustained non-governmental exchanges, collectively referred to as "Track Two diplomacy" [19]. Originally an American concept, Track Two diplomacy is referred to in simple terms as the 'back door channel' to improving relations and includes interactions between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other forms of civil society [20]. It has begun to attract attention and respect internationally, even in developing regions such as the Indian sub-continent [21], not least because such exchanges result in people to people contact, arguably the best approach to understanding one another. Furthermore, track two exchanges, especially in the case of India and Pakistan over Kashmir, have brought about the realization that the solution to disputes lies not in "policy fiats" issued by domestic groups but in political strategies that accommodate the views of all stakeholders. While this does not imply that tensions will wither way at once, it might mean that more attention will be paid to each other's sensitivities [22].

Good examples of track two initiatives between India and Pakistan are the India-Pakistan Friendship Society, the India-Pakistan Neemrana Initiative and the India-Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace. The India-Pakistan Neemrana Initiative was established in 1991 to provide a forum for annual discussions between retired diplomats, academics and military personnel. The India-Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace was formed in 1999 in Karachi by retired military personnel from India and Pakistan to offer opportunities to meet political leaders from the government and opposition [23].

Many social scientists tend to define all non-government exchanges as "track two", so that sports exchanges and business- or media-based efforts are clubbed together with political interactions. This diversity of Track Two diplomatic efforts resulted in a subdivision into four further tracks. The term "Multi Track Diplomacy" has emerged to distinguish between the different types of exchanges, including those at both inter-governmental and non-governmental levels. Multi Track Diplomacy therefore has five components [24].

- "Track One: Official government-to-government diplomatic interaction;
- "Track Two: Unofficial, non-governmental, analytical, policy-oriented, problem-solving efforts by skilled, educated, experienced and informed private citizens interacting with other private citizens;
- "Track Three: Businessman-to-businessman, private sector, free-enterprise, multinational corporation interactions;
- "Track Four: Citizen-to-citizen exchange programs of all kinds, such as scientific, cultural, academic, educational, student, film, music, art, sports, and youth exchanges, to name a few;
- "Track Five: Media-to-media based efforts designed to expose and educate large segments of the population in conflict to the philosophy, ideas, culture and needs of the other national, society, or ethnic group with who they are in conflict."

For a very long time, neither East nor West Punjab really laid much emphasis on going beyond "track two" opportunities. Thus, this is the first time that the leadership on both sides has tried to convert goodwill gestures into deeper economic cooperation [25]. While increasing cooperation is tough, it is even tougher to initiate and talk about cooperation, especially between countries that have only talked of conflict. Both Captain Amarinder Singh (Chief Minister of Indian Punjab) and Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi (Chief Minister of Pakistani Punjab) have shown immense conviction and foresight in initiating the process of Track Two exchanges with the ultimate aim of increasing

economic cooperation [26]. Their drive to propel outreach into economic collaboration was demonstrated during both the Punjab Games at Patiala in December 2004 and Captain Amarinder Singh's visit to Pakistan in March 2005 [27]. The following examples illustrate this point further:

(1) At a press conference Captain Amarinder Singh asked visiting Pakistani businessmen "Why are you buying wheat from Russia? We have huge reserves and can supply it immediately," and "If the Berlin Wall could be demolished, what stops us from breaking barriers"[28]. Markfed (the Marketing Cooperative of Indian, Punjab) is awaiting clearance from the external affairs ministry to supply 2 million tonnes of wheat to flour mills in Pakistan through the Wagah border [29].

(2) While in Pakistan to lay the foundation stone for the road between Nankana Sahib and Amritsar, Captain Amarinder Singh addressed the members of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) and expressed the view that both India and Pakistan could take advantage of infrastructure available on both sides, such as Lahore Dry Port or Special Export Zone (SEZ) coming up in Amritsar. He said in order to facilitate both sides, a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) at Wagah could also be considered [30].

(3) In his first meeting on January 2004 in Lahore with Captain Singh, Pakistani Punjab Chief Minister Pervaiz Elahi discussed the potential for joint agricultural research, marketing and trade between the two Punjab [31].

Clearly, there is a commitment by both sides to a long-term relationship beyond mere rhetoric.

A crucial reason for increasing interaction and talk of cooperation between the two countries is that their regimes have come to understand that South Asia - especially India and Pakistan, the two big players in the region - has not been able to make optimum use of the phenomenon of globalization because of involvement in petty conflict and lack of foresight. While South Asia is home to approximately 1/5th of humanity, it is also home to 2/5th of the world's poor. Important players in global politics, such the developed countries, have totally different problems and can only provide short-term solutions to poverty in South Asia [32]. Even multilateral bodies like the World Bank or the IMF cannot provide any short-term recipes for economic prosperity and sustained growth.

Ultimately, a long-term solution to the problem of poverty will only be possible if there is regional cooperation, however limited, which makes use of mutual strength [33]. If the two major players in the region, India and Pakistan, begin to cooperate in areas such as agriculture, then basic economic problems, such as unemployment, can be tackled. For instance, Chopra estimates that:

"Liberalized India-Pakistan trade in the agro-sector itself, would generate around 2.7 lakh (hundred thousand) jobs in India and 1.7 lakh (hundred thousand) jobs in Pakistan. The food and agri-business industry has a significant impact on the regional economy. This industry has one of the highest economic multiplier effects among the various industries, even ahead of the telecom or power sector." [34].

While there is an eagerness to increase cooperation, there is also an understanding of the fact that South Asian economies produce and trade in similar commodities. This has led to the awareness that initial cooperation will be limited to areas such as infrastructure and agriculture, where joint cooperation will definitely give an impetus not only to holistic and sustained growth, but also to development.

This brings us to the next point, which makes the present phase of cooperation between India and Pakistan and between the two Punjab unique in the history of South Asia. For the first time, cooperation in the region is being thought of as a realistic and sustainable paradigm. There is a realization of the fact that, while both India and Pakistan - like other South Asian countries - have

similar production capacities (though India has better production capacities in technology), cooperation in the sphere of infrastructure should facilitate at least minimal trade in agricultural commodities (where both countries do complement each other) and joint cooperation in agricultural research projects [35].

Apart from this, the moves of the East Punjab government show great maturity, demonstrating recognition that cooperation should be begun in areas which have a wide impact on the economy and which are strong on both sides; hence the call for cooperation in agriculture by way of joint research projects, the twinning of the fruit and vegetable markets of Ludhiana and Lahore and trade in wheat reflect a great degree of foresight as opposed to wishful and unrealistic thinking of the past [36].

MODELS OF INTEGRATION: AFRICA AND INDIAN/PAKISTANI PUNJAB

The steps outlined above follow the path of “functional integration” which first came into force, albeit not deliberately, in countries which were members of the South African Development Community bloc (SADC)[37]. This approach, whose main proponents are Haas, Oden and Ravenhill [38], demonstrates that relevant ideologies are, in fact, available for scholars and intellectuals of the developing world.

Functional Integration is a prelude to formal integration (which includes trade and a single currency); it is a sensible and cautious way to begin economic cooperation by trying to overcome the obstacles to formal economic integration. It has also been termed a “project based” approach. Its main characteristic is that countries choose specific areas of cooperation like aiding each other in improving infrastructure facilities and means of transportation and communication between each other.

A good instance in Africa of this approach is the case of the Beira corridor, between Mozambique and Zimbabwe together with Malawi, Zambia and Botswana [39]. These SADC Countries chose special areas of cooperation in infrastructure, one such area being the Beira Corridor, which is opening up of borders for trade and more contact.

The two Punjabs have replicated this example by building a highway connecting Nankana Sahib and Amritsar; while the primary purpose here was to make it easier for Sikh pilgrims to visit Nankana Sahib (a historical Sikh shrine, the birthplace of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith) this road could become an important trade route in the future [40].

The two Punjabs have also realized the significance of agriculture in their respective economies, as a result of which they have decided to lay emphasis on agricultural cooperation. The second stage of economic integration, development integration lays emphasis on greater cooperation in the realm of policy making. While it may seem unrealistic to think in terms of policy coordination between India and Pakistan, it should be borne in mind that a few years ago the strides that have recently been made were unanticipated. Hence, the gradual emergence of potential areas of policy coordination, especially with reference to areas like agriculture, environment and the exchange of water resources, may be expected once the Indo-Pakistan relationship arrives at functional cooperation [41].

It should be emphasized that the above models are not perfect; they may just lay the foundations for greater and deeper economic cooperation. However, solid foundations are very important in our part of the world: they enable us to understand each other's psyches and also provide an opportunity to do away with misgivings of the past.

CONCLUSION

The fact that India and Pakistan have begun to talk about economic cooperation is no guarantee that actual Indo-Pak collaboration will be a totally smooth process. It should not be forgotten that “International Politics” behaves like “complex adaptive systems”; just as certain actors contribute positively there are bound to be actors who have a negative impact on the overall dynamics. The key lies in not allowing negative elements within the “complex adaptive system” to shape ideologies or trends. It is hoped that, once cooperation begins to show results, peace will prevail over violence and mutual respect over hatred [42].

It is important that the current exchanges and talk of cooperation produce substantial and concrete results. While very high expectations should be guarded against, it is crucial for both government and academia to conduct periodic appraisals of progress achieved in both political and economic terms. The Indo-Pakistan Joint Study Group on Trade and Economics, established at the level of commerce secretaries, is a good move in this direction [43].

Government, private sector and academia must also keep in mind that for regional trade and cooperation to show results, innovative thinking is a must. Using comparative studies on similar situations in other parts of the world, as for example regional cooperation in Africa, cited above, recommendations should be made for giving a further thrust to cooperation between the two countries.

It is vital not to get discouraged by “economic pundits” who measure economics only in terms of “growth figures” (which should be treated as “indicators” not “report cards” of progress). The overall emphasis has to be on holistic economic growth and amelioration of poor human development indicators within the region.

It is imperative for the political establishments in both countries to think of cooperation not as a means of garnering votes but as a means of taking the region to greater heights. It is also important for the citizenry in both countries to think of relations between the two countries as a means of economic growth and development and not just a few exciting cricket matches.

For the relationship to become dynamic and productive it is of pivotal importance that grass root actors be involved in the process. Greater interaction and exchanges between grass root actors will tend to curb the tendency for religious chauvinists to exploit the religious sentiments to the detriment of regional cooperation [44]. In fact, civil society must be encouraged to come up with recommendations and suggestions for governments of both sides.

To conclude, an expert on South Asian affairs very succinctly summarizes what India and Pakistan need to do to improve their relationship and, ultimately, transform the Subcontinent into a peaceful and prosperous region of the world:

The ideologies of adversity and diplomacy of stalemate will have to be abandoned in favor of understanding, flexibility and accommodation. We live in a ruthless world of unilateralist, globalization and militarization and cannot survive, nor find a respectable place in this world of great imbalances, without first putting our own South Asian house. Those who do not understand it will learn it on their own peril after the loss of this opportunity [45].

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