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[Home](#) > INDIA'S PAKISTAN POLICIES UNDER THE NEW CONGRESS COALITION GOVERNMENT: An Analysis

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(The views expressed are those of the author)

Introductory Observations:

Pakistan has consistently been involved in proxy war and cross border terrorism against India at an intense pace ever since 1989. This has been an incessant phenomenon of Pakistan, irrespective of the change of governments in India, of different political hues, or the alternation of civil and military regimes in Pakistan. The proxy war against India has been a constant to this very day.

Pakistan's military adventurism against India in this period extended to the launch of the Kargil War in 1999 masterminded by General Musharraf, then only as Army Chief. The military reverses suffered by the Pakistan Army in Kargil (in which it had to be bailed out by the United States) did not deter Pakistan from its proxy war and led to the audacious assault on India's Parliament House in December 2001. The Indian Army was mobilized and was ready to strike Pakistan by January-February 2002, but the then BJP Government was persuasively prevailed upon by USA for restraint. The United States made General Musharraf to make many commitments to desist from proxy war, and he reneged on all of them.

Post 9/11 and Afghanistan, United States strategic compulsions forced it to bail out General Musharraf as a strategic necessity for the United States. In this exercise, the United States once again prevailed upon Prime Minister Vajpayee to provide an opening for General Musharraf

by agreeing to a resumption of peace dialogue with Pakistan i.e. the Islamabad Accord of January 2004.

Some tentative steps have been taken to work out the modalities and process of the peace dialogue but then India's General election 2004 intervened in April-May 2004. These elections displaced the BJP-led Government and to be replaced by a Congress-led Government which assumed office on 22 May 2004.

Leaving the diplomatic niceties and rhetoric being mouthed by India's new Prime Minister and the Pakistan leadership of building peaceful relations, the new Congress Government would have to reassess Pakistan's pronouncements and the ground realities and make the following determinations so as to evolve a realistic foreign policy towards Pakistan:

- * Pakistan's sincerity and credibility in terms of consistency of peaceful initiatives.
- * General Musharraf's untrustful nature.
- * United States-India relations and whether in this scheme of things, the Congress Party, like the BJP, would like to defer to United States' Pakistan-specific policies and priorities. (The Congress charge against the BJP).
- * Whether the Congress Party can afford to go back on its assertions on Pakistan in its Election Manifesto, which many analysts have read as being hardline.

Even before the first Cabinet meeting of the new Congress Coalition Government could take place on 23 May 2004, Pakistan's proxy war manifested itself with a damaging attack on a security convoy near the Bannihal Tunnel resulting in the loss of nearly 36 dead and several wounded including innocent women and children.

Pakistan stands emboldened by the realization of its strategic utility to the United States once again after 9/11 and the United States whitewashing Pakistan's strategic delinquencies even and including WMD proliferation.

While the central aim of India's Pakistan policies would remain the same i.e. to build a peaceful and conflict free environment in South Asia, the nuances and attitudinal approaches under a Congress government could and should change. The new Congress Government could be expected to be more firm and hardline to Pakistan's proxy war provocations for a host of reasons, which this paper attempts to analyse.

Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) and Congress Party's Approaches to Pakistan-A Comparative Analysis:

Points that need highlighting in a comparative analysis of India's two major political parties towards Pakistan are:

- * The Congress Party having been the longest in power in India has a vast and varied experience in dealing with Pakistan.
- * The Congress Party is more conversant with the deviousness and renegeing on commitments by Pakistani leaders and hopefully can be expected to be more pragmatic.
- * The BJP as a national party, when in power was expected to adopt hardline policies towards Pakistan especially in dealing with Pakistan's proxy war and terrorism.
- * BJP's approaches towards Pakistan were hamstrung by two factors which led to the perceptions of "soft attitudes" towards Pakistan.
- * Former Prime Minister Vajpayee's obsession to go down in history as a statesman who brought peace to South Asia prompted many unwarranted concessions and invitation to General Musharraf (See this author's SAAG Paper No.247 dated 28 may 2001; "India's Invitation to General Musharraf: A Policy Blunder")
- * BJP Government's approaches to Pakistan many a time were undertaken out of deference to United States promptings, for example the resumption of a dialogue after having consistently maintained for a number of years that no dialogue with Pakistan was possible till the proxy war and cross border terrorism ends. Further no strategic advantages accrued to India from the Islamabad Accord.(See the author's SAAG Paper No. 893 dated 13-01-2004 entitled; " India-Pakistan Peace Process and the Islamabad Accord: An Appraisal)

The Congress Party's charge against the BJP Government's policies towards Pakistan following a "flip-flop" pattern arises from the above contradictions. While the BJP as a political party was articulating hard-line approaches to Pakistan, and rightly too, the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister were for initiating softer initiatives towards Pakistan. This was also seemingly against the policy approaches advisories by the Ministry of External Affairs.

Having characterized the BJP Government's Pakistan policy as "flip-flop", the Congress Government can now hardly afford to go in for any unilateral concessions to Pakistan, simply to advance the peace talks. Nor can it go against its own foreign policy stands in its Election Manifesto.

Pakistan and Congress Election Manifesto:

Only two major pronouncements on Pakistan from the Congress Election manifesto need to be highlighted for the purposes of discussion in this paper, namely:

1. Congress is of the view that Pakistan's sponsorship of cross-border terrorism must end completely, once and for all. If it continues,

then the Indian state has the responsibility to protect its citizens.

2. The BJP has failed to dispel the widely held fears that India has accepted the mediator role for the USA in Indo-Pakistan relations.

In the first assertion a hard line stance and possibly a military solution is implicit. In the second assertion, implicit is the view that the United States has no role, either as a mediator or as a facilitator in India and Pakistan relations or any peace process.

The Congress Party has made it clear that any Indian dialogue with Pakistan has to proceed under the aegis of the Simla Agreement 1972, which stipulates bi-lateral discussions only. This is diametrically opposite to Pakistan's strategy of internationalizing the issue.

With such forceful assertions having been made, the Congress Government cannot go back on them and very little space for flexibility is left for Congress Party's policy formulations on Pakistan. India is eagerly awaiting how the Congress Government responds forcefully to proxy war incidents, the first having already taken place.

Pakistan Policy Formulators Within the Congress Party:

The Congress party has on its Foreign Policy Cell panel two former Pakistan foreign policy experts, namely, Mr. J.N Dixit and Mr. Natwar Singh. Mr. Natwar Singh is tipped as the Foreign Minister (since appointed) and Mr. Dixit is tipped as the National Security Advisor. It is evident that the professional experience of these two gentlemen would go a long way in determining the Congress Party's policy approaches towards Pakistan.

Mr. Dixit as the prospective National Security Advisor would addedly bring professional experience on Pakistan at crucial junctures during Bangladesh liberation (1970-1972), Head of the Indian Mission on Pakistan (1989-1991) and Foreign Secretary (1991-1994). Mr. Dixit was perceived as "hawkish" on Pakistan and in his new incarnation he does not have to be apologetic about it.

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi as President of the Congress has visited Pakistan with her husband, the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and would have first hand impressions of the Pakistan establishment and their propensity for reneging on commitments. As Leader of the Opposition, she also stood fully briefed on this subject.

Mr. Manmohan Singh in his various capacities and earlier as member of the Cabinet Committee on Security would be expected to be fully conversant with the intricacies and pitfalls of dealing with Pakistan.

It is thus hoped that with such a combination of experienced hands on Pakistan within the Congress Government, India's policies towards Pakistan while proceeding on the basis of commitments to peace, will be firm and uncompromising on India's sovereignty and national security interests.

Contentious Issues Between India and Pakistan- The Factors Which Congress Cannot Ignore:

The peace dialogue between the two countries is likely to follow the “Composite Dialogue Format” earlier between the two countries decided at Murree in June 1997 and later allowed to lapse due to Pakistan’s intransigence. The Format covered eight issues, namely (1) Peace and Security to include CBMs, Nuclear Risk Reduction measures etc. (2) Jammu and Kashmir (3) Siachen (4) Tulbul Navigation Project (5) Sir Creek (6) Terrorism and Drug trafficking (7) Economic and Commercial Cooperation and (8) Promotion of Friendly Exchanges.

However, now as earlier, Pakistan is stubborn that the core issue is Kashmir and progress on this issue would determine progress on other issues. Even in his telephonic talk with the new Indian Prime Minister, General Musharraf harped on Kashmir as the core issue and that “freedom struggle” was going on in J & K and it was not terrorism.

From the Indian side, proxy war and cross border terrorism are important issues, as these have not ceased effectively. Any progress or approaches to a peace dialogue with Pakistan will be weighed heavily by the following factors which the Congress Government cannot ignore.:

- * The Congress party’s assertion that the Simla Agreement 1972 has to be the basis of an India and Pakistan dialogue. Its clear enunciation that negotiations have to be “bi-lateral” excludes any mediatory or facilitatory roles by Pakistan’s external patrons.
- * The unanimous “Special Resolution of the Parliament on Kashmir, 1994” cannot be circumvented. Some in the polity claim that this can be by-passed. The Indian public opinion intensity on this issue can best be described by the lead editorial of the “Indian Express” of 24 February 1994 which made the following assertions:
 - “After this Resolution, it is beyond the scope of any Government, present or future to flirt with outrageous proposals aimed at eroding national sovereignty in J & K”.
 - “But after this show of national solidarity, the private agendas of Track II diplomacy will no longer be able to masquerade as representative Indian opinion”.
 - “The capitulationists should be certainly listened to but with the same degree of seriousness reserved for the lunatic fringe in democracies”.

It must be noted that when this Special Resolution of Parliament was passed in 1994, the BJP was not in power and therefore it cannot be

dismissed as a Right-Wing resolution. It was a National Resolution binding on all successive Indian Governments.

Proposals floating from Pakistani funded projects in Washington think tanks like “shared sovereignty”, “full autonomy” etc for Kashmir or any territorial adjustments should be unthinkable for any Congress Party policy formulators. The Congress Party or any other political party would fall from power when seen comprising on these issues.

Bound by its own forceful assertions on approaches towards Pakistan and the Special Resolution of the Parliament discussed above, the Congress Government is hardly in a position to make compromises in any peace dialogue with Pakistan. The Congress Government may on the other hand be forced to take a hard line approach on contentious issues that will figure in any dialogue with Pakistan.

External Factors Impinging on India’s Policies Towards Pakistan:

Externally, three actors impinge heavily on India’s policies towards Pakistan and these are (1) United States (2) China and (3) European Union. Each of them has vested strategic and political interests in Pakistan and have been putting disproportionate pressures on India to compromise on Kashmir without corresponding pressures on Pakistan. The Congress Government will need to resist such pressures.

With United States-India relations likely to be of a different tenor (See this author’s SAAG Paper No.1002 dated 17-5-2004 entitled “United States-India Relations Under the New Congress Government: An Analysis) the United States may not be in a position to exercise its persuasive diplomacy in favour of Pakistan with a Congress Coalition Government. The Communist Marxists as the predominant partner in the Congress Coalition Government can hardly be expected to espouse China’s strategic interests in Pakistan at the cost of India’s national security interests. With Europeans eyeing India’s vast defence purchases market, they will have to respect India’s sensitivities.

If for nothing else, the Congress Government can be expected to exhibit a hard-line approach on Pakistan so as not to be accused of the infirmities which it charged the Vajpayee Government with.

Domestic Factors and Pressures on Congress Government Policies Towards Pakistan:

In terms of the tenor of Congress Government’s policies towards Pakistan, three distinct influences or factors or pressures, whatever one would like to term them, will come into play, namely:

1. Indian public opinion.
2. BJP in the role of principal Opposition Party.
3. The Indian Media

The Congress Government would come to recognize soon, if not already, the force of Indian public opinion. An unexpected change in their

opinion has brought the Congress into power, and the force of this same Indian public opinion would demand of the Congress Government. that the determinants of its Pakistan's policies should be:

* Good relations with Pakistan are desirable, but not at the cost of compromising on India's sovereignty which includes J & K and national security interests.

* Kashmir is non negotiable as per the Special Resolution of Parliament, 1994.

* Pakistan's proxy war and cross border terrorism need a military response, as it is strategic factors which shape this Pakistani strategy against India..

In the view of Indian public opinion, proposals like the Chenab Formula, "shared sovereignty" over Kashmir or trading territory for peace are irrelevant and unacceptable. It is unlikely that the Congress Government can go against the sentiments of the Indian public opinion on these proposals. It follows that Kashmir is not the 'core issue' as Pakistan claims.

The second factor is that, BJP as the principal Opposition Party can now become a strong deterrent for any Congress Government soft-line approaches towards Pakistan. Indian nationalism comes to the fore forcefully when matters and policies pertains to Pakistan. Any compromises under the fig leaf of "flexibility" as desired by Pakistan's external patrons would stir and ignite the nationalist urges, otherwise latent. And when that happens, the BJP would be ready to take the lead in opposing any compromises on Kashmir or other issues.

The senior league of the Indian media community has always taken a utopian view of friendship between India and Pakistan. This senior league is an active part of India's "delusionist liberals" and has always gone awry on the wings of artificial media hypes that they generate. They have been wrong on every major development of the conflicts between India and Pakistan as they have been wrong in their opinion polls and exit polls of General Election 2004. They are strong protagonists of the Chamberlain variety of "peace at any cost". It is contrary to what the Indian public opinion feels: "Peace, yes; but not any cost". The Congress presumably would like to give a wide berth to such advocates, if it has to demonstrate to the Indian public opinion that they have not fallen in the same rut as the BJP Government had fallen on misleading perceptions of Pakistan and the sincerity of intentions of its military ruler, General Musharraf

Further, it needs to be brought out that while India's public is appreciative of the average Pakistani's yearning for peace with India, the Indian public opinion is strongly distrustful of the Pakistan Army and its leader General Musharraf, who is personified as the wrecker of the Lahore Accord and perpetrator of Pakistani military adventurism in Kargil War 1999.

In terms of domestic political support for any compromises or bargaining on contentious issues with Pakistan, the Congress Government will neither have the support of Indian public opinion nor of the political Opposition. In these equations the Indian media becomes irrelevant.

Concluding Observations:

The crucial point that gets sorely missed in all political discourse pertaining to promotion of peace and harmony between India and Pakistan is that Kashmir is not the “core issue” so vehemently maintained by Pakistan and seconded by its external patrons. **The “core issue” in all Pakistan’s approaches to India, whether in conflict or peace dialogues is “civilisational”.** It is this, which led General Musharraf to assert, not a long time back, that even if Kashmir is solved, there will be many more Kashmiris. This is reflective of the Pakistan Army mindset and the Pakistan Establishment.

To keep General Musharraf in power and the Pakistan Army as a potential strategic ally, Western protagonists of this approach vehemently argue that India should make substantial concessions like agreeing to the “Chenab Formula”, “joint sovereignty” of Jammu Kashmir and even territorial adjustments.

Let it be said clearly to such Western advocates and their supporters in the Indian media and academia, that it is not in India’s national security interests to perpetuate the military rule of General Musharraf or the Pakistan Army’s potential as strategic ally.

The Congress Coalition Government would be well advised to take serious note of the above and reject with all seriousness, outlandish proposals which compromise India’s national sovereignty in even the remotest form.

The Congress Government if it intends to remain in power on the strength of Indian public opinion should then reject in its policies and dialogue with Pakistan, the proposals of compromises with Pakistan forthcoming “from the lunatic fringe in democracies” as stated in the Indian Express editorial of 1994.

This fringe may like to ponder over some serious observations quoted below from Mr. JN Dixit's (likely National Security Adviser) book: “Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance” based on his experience as High Commissioner of India in Pakistan:

* “Any analysis covering any segment of Pakistan’s policies towards India leads to the inescapable conclusion that there is an atavistic compulsion in its power structure mindset which believes that its survival and security can only be assured by the fragmentation of India”.

* “ Since 1965 and more so since 1971 defence strategists and the military establishment of Pakistan have cultivated an self- inflicted masochistic aspiration that its martial traditions and military credibility can only be retrieved by the conflict with India though for a limited duration which should result in a decisive victory over India, and that Kashmir provides the catalyst and the opportunity for the purpose”.

(Musharraf's military misadventures in Kargil (1999) has to be seen in this light).

* "There is also an abiding intellectual and ideological conviction that a successful, plural multi-religious, democratic and united India is a permanent question mark against the logic by which Pakistan was created"

Peace dialogues with Pakistan can therefore only be fruitful when Pakistan carries out a drastic re-orientation of the above mindsets of its establishment. Till then, Pakistan's adversarial relationship with India (peaceful rhetoric notwithstanding) has to be managed with resolute firmness and with no compromises on India's national security interests or its sovereignty.

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Topics:

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