

**BALUSA VIII**  
**INDIA AND PAKISTAN:**  
**OPPORTUNITIES IN ECONOMIC GROWTH, TECHNOLOGY,**  
**AND SECURITY**

**"RESUMING THE DIALOGUE"**

**A Report of the Lahore/Balusa Group**

by  
**Shirin Tahir-Kheli**

*Based on a conference of senior Indian, Pakistani, and U.S. participants, held at the  
Lahore University of Management Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan, November 3-5, 1999*

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## PREFACE

The eighth meeting of the BALUSA group comprising senior leaders and officials from India, Pakistan and the United States was held in Lahore from November 3-5, 1999. We thank the Chancellor of the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Syed Babar Ali, for hosting the conference. We are also most grateful to both the W. Alton Jones Foundation and the Starr Foundation for their support of the project.

The group met under unusual circumstances given both the change of government in Pakistan and rising tension between India and Pakistan. Yet it was the view of the participants that the BALUSA link in particular should be sustained and that its work continue apace. There was a full airing of views about the Kargil clash and civil-military relations in Pakistan. A free-ranging discussion about the role of the media was also a highlight of the conference.

The main focus was how to get beyond these frictions and back on the path of reengagement, including a list of specific steps. It is also critical for the United States to facilitate this reengagement and to give higher priority to constructive relations across the spectrum in South Asia, a process that may begin with President Clinton's trip.

We submit this report in the hope that the parties will take into account its recommendations, especially those for "Resuming the Dialogue."



Harvey Sicherman, Ph.D.  
President

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**“Resuming the Dialogue”**

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1999**

**by**

**Shirin Tahir-Kheli**

The eighth meeting of the BALUSA Group was held in Lahore from November 3-5, 1999. It was hosted by the Chancellor of the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Syed Babar Ali.

The list of participants at the Lahore meeting:

Zafar Abbas  
Syed Babar Ali, Host  
Bharat Bhushan  
General Mahmud Ali Durrani  
Shekhar Gupta  
Salman Haider  
General Farrakh Khan  
C. Raja Mohan  
Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Quresh  
Toufiq Siddiqi  
Shirin Tahir-Kheli

The eighth meeting of the group took place as scheduled despite the changeover of government in Pakistan. Prior to the decision to go ahead, participants debated

whether the meeting should be held at all given the friction between India and Pakistan. In the end, a majority felt that groups such as BALUSA serve a particularly important role as a link between the two countries in periods of tense relations and it was more important than ever to go ahead. We were able to get non-reporting visas for the participants coming to Lahore from India. The discussions were held in the same spirit of frankness that characterizes all of our meetings.

We focused on the fact that there was virtually no contact between the governments of India and Pakistan. We examined the need for re-starting the process. Taking advantage of the fact that several editors were part of the group and present at the Lahore meeting, the group focused on the importance of resuming the dialogue. The role of the media in this process and the specifics of what needed to be done by India and Pakistan were discussed.

### **The Kargil War**

At the outset, we recognized that the promise of the summit in Lahore in February 1999 and that the talks between leaders of India and Pakistan fed a great deal of optimism regarding the future. That optimism had become a genuine casualty of the war in Kargil in the summer of 1999. The fact that both these operations took place within essentially the same time frame had made the situation harder to overcome. The opening created by the bus diplomacy in February helped contain the Kargil fall out. However, that operation led to a deep sense of disappointment by the political leadership in India who felt that they had been badly rebuffed in their genuine desire to turn a page and start afresh in the relationship with Pakistan.

The conflict in Kargil was the first electronic war between India and Pakistan. The twenty-four hour news cycle kept the conflict under constant scrutiny and unlike the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistan wars, sustained public awareness of each aspect of the operation, especially in India. In some ways, extensive coverage inflamed passions and made it harder for the political leadership to contain the damage to the relationship and to sustain forward movement.

A discussion of the institutional framework of support necessary for continued dialogue followed. The process of normalization between India and Pakistan that had begun with the meetings in Male in the Maldives had accelerated with the addition of new items to include nuclear and security issues and inclusion of the Kashmir dispute on the agenda. While most felt that there was a disconnect between the political and the bureaucratic elements within each country on the desirability of better relations, all agreed that the aftermath of Kargil had pushed back the process of peace. It was also felt that the political leadership in Pakistan had full oversight over all elements of the policy and that the Kargil operation could not be chalked off as an operation in a political vacuum.

The relative difference in the paramountcy of the Prime Minister in India remains strong enough that there are no real checks on his capacity to make peace. However, as in past meetings of the BALUSA group, participants felt that overall, bureaucracy in both countries and the security apparatus in Pakistan added constraints against better relations.

The difference in the history of civil/military relations in India and Pakistan was discussed. Political leadership of each country was urged to develop support for better relations on a sustained basis. The Pakistani history of power sharing between the political and the military complicated the chain of decision making. The weakening of all institutions in Pakistan even through democratic periods made the problem there more acute.

The reasons for the Kargil operation were discussed and the centrality of the Kashmir issue for the military government in Pakistan was examined. The role of the new Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, as the Army Chief during the Kargil operation and the reaction in India to the takeover by the army in Pakistan was discussed. Whether the Pakistan army sees India simply as a real threat or also feels that peace with India is not in its interest at any cost was debated. Did the actual takeover of the government by the military offer a chance to involve some of the most essential actors in a political dialogue in Pakistan's relations with India? While the case was made for India to "take the bull by the horns" and engage the military, it was also said that Kargil had put the onus for any new beginning firmly on the Pakistani side.

### **Reviving the Dialogue: Getting Beyond Kargil**

Discussion then focused mainly on ways that India and Pakistan can re-start the process of engaging with each other. The substance as well as the management of the dialogue and the role of the media in the creation of the necessary political will to engage took up the remainder of the time of the participants.

India's choices in the relationship with Pakistan are: (a) benign neglect; (b) confrontation; (c) re-engagement. Debate within the country is focused on the negative results in the engagement with Pakistan. The Kargil war and the resulting loss of life hardened attitudes even in the public on the advantages of engagement or the possibility of better relations with Pakistan. The military takeover further alienated supporters of normalization in India who believe that only an elected government in Pakistan is likely to support stronger and sustained improvement in Indo-Pakistani ties.

Pakistan's options in its relations with India include: (a) sustaining the Kashmir struggle; (b) engaging with India on a variety of fronts, including Kashmir and creating a stake for India to move forward on all issues; (c) attempting to involve the U.S., China etc. to press its case on Kashmir while holding off on other issues; (d) accepting India's regional role and higher profile.

Despite recent problems, it was felt that the need for better relations remained and that the majority of the people on both sides still wanted peace between India and Pakistan. However, the vocal minority against normalization was more active and the negative images in the media that buttressed those arguments needed to be addressed and then changed. The arguments supporting engagement were weakened by the absence of any domestic constituency for the effort emphasizing the benefits of peace. The absence of a dialogue between the two governments further strengthened the hawks arguing against engagement.

### **Criteria for Reengagement**

What would it take to re-establish the dialogue? The answer seemed to lie in creating the political will which required some action from the top of the leadership in order to change perceptions of each other. However, it was felt that the 'bottom line' in India for engagement had hardened. It was also noted that even in the past, India-Pakistan talks have always been accompanied by a good dose of cynicism and a perpetual willingness to walk away.

Absence of any dialogue was a dangerous trend. It was said that relations might have been more manageable had there been no Lahore diplomacy or no war in Kargil in 1999. The two events, occurring at more or less the same time, had left a very bitter legacy. Both these events may have reflected institutional crises in Pakistan which would need to be resolved by the new authorities. The weakening of Pakistani institutions had occurred over time and their re-building would be a priority with the military government. The Pakistan Army has always been influential in Pakistan regardless of who is in power. As such, the military's views on relations with India counted. However, while the military sees India as a threat and points to various Indian actions to buttress this claim, the Army does not find that peace with India contradicts the national interest.

**Because the Lahore Declaration of February 1999 offered the most promise for improved relations, a re-affirmation of the declaration by the new government in Islamabad could make the case for India to reengage with Pakistan.**

Notably, while the Kargil operation did derail the progress made at Lahore, there was no attempt by the new government in Pakistan to bring it up as a major failing of the previous government. As such, perhaps an opening existed given that there is no choice but to deal with each other and there is the reality of the military government in Pakistan and a past history of political engagement -- including Pakistan's periods of martial law.

On the questions of why the two countries would re-engage, the participants felt that there was little alternative, even though it may take a little time before the chill of Kargil could be overcome. Some of the reasons given in favor of resuming the dialogue were:

#### **For India:**

- \* India's role as a regional power suffers from the problems and distractions of the tense relationship with Pakistan
- \* An openly hostile and nuclear armed Pakistan is not in India's interest
- \* Given the Indian emphasis on the bilateral context of any discussion with Pakistan on Kashmir, some dialogue is necessary in order to deal with Pakistan's push for internationalizing the Kashmir issue
- \* Despite the worsening of the situation after the casualties in Kargil, the people want peace
- \* India has dealt with military rulers in Pakistan in the past and there are some voices within India that say that Pakistan's internal problems have to be sorted out by Pakistanis and that lowering of tensions is needed
- \* Deteriorating conditions inside Pakistan do not serve India even though there is a new body of opinion in India that feels that Pakistan is doing its worst and that India is learning to cope

#### **For Pakistan:**

- \* The absence of a dialogue with India increases tensions and raises the need for military vigilance at a time when the competition for resources is acute
- \* Tensions with India exacerbate domestic choices which require the return of stability and lowering of the role of the various groups fighting for Kashmir
- \* Tensions with India isolates Pakistan
- \* While frustrations over the non-resolution of the Kashmir dispute brought about Kargil, the absence of a dialogue leaves the military option as the only option which is dangerous for Pakistan and India
- \* Spiraling downward, the relationship with India creates complications in Pakistan's immediate neighborhood and in the international community
- \* All parts of the domestic agenda, i.e. economic revival, foreign confidence, de-weaponization, dealing with sectarianism, Madrasa reform, require a period of engagement if not an active peace with India
- \* 'Hawks' within Pakistan are strengthened by the absence of productive relations with India

#### **The Process of Re-engagement:**

Recognizing the difficulty of the loss of faith on the part of the political leaders in India, the hardening of attitudes amongst the public and the officials, it was still the case that India and Pakistan were both better off when they were able to deal with each other more productively. The group focused on what needed to be done, i.e. how could the two countries move forward from their current negative fixed positions?

Because the Kargil war was a result of changed policy in Pakistan and followed by the military takeover, Pakistan will need to reach out to India. At the same time, the Indian rhetoric against Pakistan (after Kargil, the military coup and then



the hijacking of the Indian airliner) will also have to be toned down before any engagement takes place. The debate inside India has hardened with some advocating a final blow against Pakistan despite the danger of a nuclear conflagration. In this view, Pakistan has forced the issue and is now alone, having lost the argument that Kashmir is a potential nuclear flashpoint that merits international mediation. There is also a strong Indian belief in the role of Pakistan in fostering terrorism and that recent events offer a unique opportunity for India to make the case at the international level. To overcome these arguments and to proceed with rapprochement, both countries will have to undertake a number of steps, some unilaterally and others bilaterally. These are:

- \* Creation of political will for re-engagement and lessening of the mood of triumphalism and negative mood in Delhi
- \* Recognition in Pakistan that engagement and good relations with India are in the Pakistani enlightened self-interest
- \* Toning down of the rhetoric on both sides
- \* Meetings of the DGMOs
- \* Reaffirmation of the Lahore Declaration by the Government of Pakistan
- \* Curtailment of the various groups inside Pakistan espousing war with India
- \* Reaffirmation by Pakistan of the dialogue process on all issues, a 'package deal' similar to the 'composite dialogue' agreed to earlier
- \* End to shelling of civilians along the Line of Control
- \* Convincing the leadership in India that a willingness to engage gives it a greater aura of leadership internationally while refusal detracts from that aura
- \* Putting international pressure on Pakistan to make genuine gestures towards engagement, reaffirm the Lahore process and seek economic interaction
- \* Push for re-engagement via track II-efforts
- \* Re-establishing contact between the officials of the two nations at international and regional forums
- \* Reviving functional cooperation, e.g. on narcotics smuggling

### **The Role of the Media**

Participants felt that more than ever, the role of the media will be critical in India-Pakistan relations. Given the loss of political will, the media can help generate the point of view that, in the end, there is no alternative to better relations.

The importance of the media was obvious in the coverage of the Kargil war, which was a victory for the Indian electronic media. In a sense, by reporting on the war in real time and showing the actions of Pakistan in starting the war and then in covering the funerals of the soldiers who died in the war, the Indian electronic media carried the war into the households in all parts of India. One important consequence of the coverage was to turn Indians in parts of the country traditionally more amenable to better relations against normalization with Pakistan. Indian newspapers offered frontline coverage of the war with pictures.

The Pakistanis did not. The jingoistic language on both sides needed modification.

Some coverage of the reality of the change in government in Pakistan had begun in the Indian media of the new government. More extensive coverage of Pakistan pointing out the acceptance by the people of Pakistan and the need for improvement of conditions inside Pakistan will help. However, in order to do so, Pakistan will have to make it less difficult for Indian journalists to be based in Pakistan. **Some of the Indian newspapers had visa applications pending with the Pakistani authorities for more than four years. Approval by the government of Pakistan for these applications is needed.**

**Greater access to the leadership of each country by the news media is needed.** Fuller coverage of events other than conflict will result in an improved mutual understanding.

Given the change in news coverage, the role of the electronic media and the longer news cycles, there is a greater interest in what is happening behind the scenes not just what each government is saying. **Thus an increase in the number of reporters present on the other side and greater access to these journalists can help make the case to the political leaders and help create the requisite political will for dialogue.** However, this is predicated on the hope and belief that familiarity will bring reasonableness!

The media acts as a check on public policy and prevents the debate from being limited only to insiders. Issues of importance to both countries such as nuclear doctrine, are a case in point.

The control of the media by essentially three families in Pakistan creates problems. The owners develop a stake in existing political attitudes and reflect these in a negative sense. While the press has become lively and free, the attitudes regarding India are similar to those touted by the government of the day. However, such a tie also means that a changed perception of the need for better relations by the government will also find ready acceptance by some of the media, although in a free media, not everyone will be on board with a given policy.

Given the role of the Lahore Summit and the Kargil war in first raising expectations of a positive nature and then the negative fallout after Kargil, **a joint study by media leaders of both sides on how relations were helped and then damaged is needed.**

Exchanges between students and academics can help make the case for reaching out and promoting better understanding.

**Regular off-the-record briefings to the journalists of the other side can create a climate for greater understanding among the journalists present in the other country and offer an opportunity for journalists to begin to travel to the other country on a routine basis.**

**None of the above procedures will work if the governments do not cease the harassment of the journalists from the other side and do not liberalize their respective visa policy.**

Given the declared statements of the military government on the need for getting the Pakistani house in order, one can expect some role for Indian media in explaining the official position. **There needs to be even more exchange on some of the crises that are yet uncontroversial, e.g. the non-official members of the national security establishment who are in a position to talk unofficially on nuclear issues.** It was agreed that some of these members should be asked to participate in the next meeting of the BALUSA group.

The meeting ended after these and other exchanges over an intensive period of three days with hope to reconvene in India for the next meeting. The extraordinary hospitality of Syed Babar Ali Saheb and the Lahore University of Management Sciences was acknowledged by members of the group. The Pakistani participants once again welcomed the participation of their Indian colleagues despite the general deterioration in the relationship between India and Pakistan. The need for dialogue in times of trouble and the need for keeping the lines of communication open was noted by all participants.