

New facets in India-Pakistan Relations.

by G. Parthasarathy

*G. Parthasarathy was the Indian Ambassador to Pakistan. He is a
renown analyst*

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington have had profound implications on developments in India-Pakistan relations. The American led offensive against the Taliban resulted in an end to Taliban rule and the installation of a democratically elected Government headed by President Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan. But, the Taliban, the Al Qaeda and their allies affiliated to the "International Islamic Front" formed by Osama bin Laden in February 1998, retreated into safe havens across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. They set up base in Baluchistan and the tribal areas (North and South Waziristan) of Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province. While Pakistan assisted the US and its western allies in tracking down some Al Qaeda leaders, the Taliban leadership was not touched. It has now regrouped and commenced attacking American led NATO forces in Afghanistan's Southern and Eastern Provinces, adjacent to Afghanistan's borders with Pakistan.

One major impact of the removal of the Taliban from power and the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1363 was the decision by western powers to ban all those organizations affiliated with Osama bin Laden's "International Islamic Front". The organizations that were thus banned included four extremist Islamist groups backed by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) that were playing a leading role in terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) The terrorist organizations banned internationally included the *Lashkar e taiba*, the

Harkat ul Mujahideen, the *Harkat ul Jihad ul Islami* and the *Jaish e Mohammed*. While these organizations continue to operate under new names, the Pakistan Government came to realize that mere resort to terrorist violence in an attempt to force India out of J&K was proving counterproductive and that political initiatives had to be undertaken, if the international community was to be persuaded of Pakistan's commitment to ending terrorist violence and normalizing relations with India.

These developments have resulted in a sustained dialogue between India and Pakistan over the past three years, to enhance cooperation and promote confidence. An agreement has been signed on prior notification of missile tests and measures to avoid incidents at sea between the two navies are being finalized. New border routes have been opened for travel between the two countries and travel between the two sides of Jammu and Kashmir between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad has resumed after lapse of nearly half a century. It has been agreed for the first time to promote trade across the LOC in J&K. Similar travel arrangements are envisaged between Poonch in the Jammu Region and Rawalkot across the LOC. India has proposed further easing of restrictions for travel between the two sides of Jammu and Kashmir by opening bus routes between Kargil and Skardu in the isolated "Northern Areas" of the State. Most importantly, a cease fire across the Line of Control has been observed by both sides since November 2003.

It was in this background that President Musharraf stated that progress could be made in resolving the issue of J&K only if both sides explore mutually acceptable proposals. He has proposed that J&K should be divided into seven different regions, followed by the "demilitarization" of identified regions. He has specifically demanded

that Indian forces should be withdrawn from the urban centres of Baramulla, Kupwara and Srinagar. President Musharraf has also advocated "self governance" in J&K without clarifying whether such "self governance" would be equally applicable to areas under Pakistan's control. Finally, he has proposed that there should be a system of "Joint Management" of Jammu and Kashmir by India and Pakistan. While welcoming "new ideas" from President Musharraf, India's Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has proposed that while borders cannot be changed they can be made "irrelevant" or just "mere lines on a map". He has said that people of both sides of the Line of Control (LOC) in J&K should be allowed to move and trade freely across the LOC. Responding to General Musharraf's proposal of "Joint Management", Dr. Manmohan Singh has suggested that India and Pakistan should devise "cooperative and consultative mechanisms" to promote cooperation across Jammu and Kashmir.

Discussions between India and Pakistan on these proposals have been taking place in recent months. Measures to resolve the issue of J&K figured prominently for the first time when the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan met in New Delhi in November 2006. New Delhi appears to be ready to discuss General Musharraf's proposal for "self-governance" and would be quite prepared to discuss greater devolution of powers and autonomy in a manner under which there is harmonization in the nature and extent of self-governance and devolution of powers on both sides of the LOC in J&K. At the present moment, the State of J&K under Indian Administration enjoys far greater autonomy than the regions of "Azad Kashmir" and the "Northern Areas" under Pakistan's control. Both "Azad Kashmir" and the "Northern Areas" are directly administered by governing "Councils" presided over by the Prime Minister of Pakistan who wields his

authority through the Federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs. Local representatives of these areas have virtually no powers, even in the appointment of Government functionaries.

Given Pakistan's continuing assistance to armed terrorist groups functioning out of Muzzafarabad in "Azad Kashmir" under the banner of a "United Jihad Council" India cannot obviously agree to any proposal for the "demilitarization" of areas it presently governs in J&K. Moreover, J&K lies on the vital lines of communications to India's western borders with China. Free movement and deployment of India's forces in J&K is, therefore, essential for the security of its frontiers with China. But, should Pakistan effectively ban and disarm groups waging "*Jihad*" in Jammu and Kashmir from territory under its control, India could consider redeployment and reduction of its forces in J&K, provided Pakistan takes corresponding measures on its side of the LOC, both in "Azad Kashmir" and the "Northern Areas". These are issues that appear to have figured in both formal and informal discussions between India and Pakistan in recent months.

While these "new ideas" for resolving Jammu and Kashmir have figured prominently in discussions and have been the focus of extensive media attention, one has to inject a sense of caution and realism on the path ahead. President Karzai has made no secret of his conviction that the Musharraf Government is actively aiding, arming, training and providing safe haven for the Taliban on Pakistani territory. There are, similarly, strong sentiments in India that the Pakistan Government continues to use terrorism as an instrument of State policy to promote its interests and territorial ambitions. The revival of the Taliban has encouraged Pakistan based terrorist groups like the *Lashkar e Taiba* that the climate is ripe to promote *Jihad* not merely in Jammu and Kashmir, but in other parts of India also. Further, if

borders are indeed to be made "irrelevant" as proposed by Dr. Manmohan Singh then Pakistan will have to remove existing trade and economic restrictions on relations with India and join with other South Asian countries in SAARC to make South Asia and Economic Community for the free movement of goods, services and investment within the next fifteen years. Pakistan appears to be totally averse to moving in this direction.

There is thus a climate of continuing uncertainty about the directions Pakistan's policies will take in coming months. Much will depend on political developments within Pakistan in coming months. Both India and Afghanistan will have to wait and see whether the post-election political scenario in 2007 in Pakistan results in moderate elements opposed to religious extremism taking over the reins of Government, or whether the Islamist elements in the army and in the political set up will retain their hold over the conduct of Pakistan's policies.