

HOW VIABLE IS TRACK II AND III DIPLOMACY BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND INDIA?

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Abstract

This article examines viability of track II and III initiatives between India and Pakistan and their contribution in creating a cordial environment for track I diplomacy. The objective is the probe whether informal dialogues pave the way for states to communicate formally or their presence is cosmetic in nature. Pakistan and India share a belligerent history of bilateral relationships. Despite four wars, diplomacy has somehow remained at work between the two. Although the two countries have been engaged in official and backdoor dialogues periodically, however, this diplomatic contact appeared fragile and felt prey of severity many times. Track II and Track III diplomacy initiatives were launched and sought as means to reach the end of cordiality in bilateral relationships. The methodology used in this article is qualitative with primary and secondary sources. Through analysis of semi-governmental and people to people initiative, it is found that unofficial contact (track II and III) between the two states has not contributed toward paving the way for track I diplomacy. Such initiatives enjoy at length in good times more, rather than converting hostility into harmony in tense times. From Neemrana Dialogue to Ashoka Theater, track II and track III were unable to substitute track I.

Keywords: Informal diplomacy initiatives, conflicts, two nations, Pakistan, India

Introduction

Modern states consider crises management as an utmost security objective that suggests possessing an ability to exert control over escalation of crises to prevent any unwanted outcomes. The next step might be to avert the eruption of armed conflict or war by exercising such measures those attempt to ensure a break before hostilities start.¹

So far as Pakistan and India are concerned, both the countries are recognized as the two arch rival neighbors. The Indo-Pak partition resulted in arms race and had given birth to armed conflicts that in return badly shook confidence on both sides and sewed deep-rooted apprehension between the two nations. Due to constant trust deficit and traditional rivalry, both the states have been failed to create any considerable gains in regard of socio-economic developments. The cost of animosities is paid by heavy defense budgets and soaring poverty levels. For India and Pakistan being two nuclear states, it is imperative to create positive atmosphere so that serious efforts could be made for peace in future course.

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¹ Track II Diplomacy and its Impact on Pakistan India Peace Process by Muhammad Sajjad Malik, *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 31/32, Winter 2011, Spring 2012, p.108-128, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48527640> (accessed November 2021)

Because if India and Pakistan get to wars, the entire region witness conflicts, and balance of power is disturbed.

Saner voices from both the sides of border continued to established informal channels of diplomacies, sometimes with the support of state/s and sometimes with global actors. Efforts were made to achieve peace and cordiality in bilateral relations. The purpose of track II and III initiatives between Pakistan and India was to establish people-to-people contact in the tensed times. Academic, social and cultural ties like Neemrana Dialogue, Aman Ki Asha, Joint Exhibitions and Art Galleries, Literary Festivals and Theatres were knotted in order to pave the way for state-level diplomacy. However, the assessments of above mentioned initiatives' outcomes remained a critical study.

Research Question

Is success in informal diplomacy initiatives between Pakistan and India directly proportional to formal diplomacy successes?

Literature Review

Intentions of normalization of ties between Pakistan and India can be seen through the prism of informal forms of diplomacy. Track two diplomacy is generally elaborated as “a process of unofficial dialogue among non-official representatives of the parties involved in the dispute. It is pertinent to mention here that non-official groups comprised of influential persons, who have either remained government officials in varied capacities, and continue to enjoy the necessary access to the government or known to have the desired ability to influence public opinion in one form or the other.”²

A theorist Waslekar has elaborated track II diplomacy “as a mechanism of informal interactions between aggravating entities happened directly or with the assistance of a 3rd party, by people those are influential who normally can reach out to their government and / or an ability to formulate the public opinion. The goal of track two diplomacy is usually to prevent or resolve conflicts or build confidence between the parties they represent.”³

Track III initiatives have been embarked on by influential individuals and civil society groups in Pakistan and India, directed to create possibilities for stability and peace which can challenge traditional practices and views. Track III diplomacy is aimed to enhance understanding at both sides through people-to-people contact, to dilute tensions by giving birth to an educated public opinion. It also mounts public pressure on governments to reshape their bilateral relations. Post-cold war period has a possibility for some breakthrough in Pakistan-India bilateral relations due to two important reasons. Firstly, New Delhi and Islamabad cannot afford to sustain their policy of confrontation owing to economic. Secondly Pakistan and India have lost their traditional support of cold war era.

Since the creation of both the dominions in 1947, India and Pakistan have been engaged in four total wars. The leaders regularly barter threats, and the threshold of threats even reaches to nuclear weapons as well. Violent skirmishes and strikes are norms between the

² Pervez Iqbal, Cheema, *The US and Track-Two Diplomacy in South Asia. Pakistan Journal of American Studies* (1994), 12.

³ Sundeep, Waslekar. *Track-two diplomacy in South Asia. ACDIS Occasional Paper* (1995)

militaries of two states in the territory of Kashmir and Line of Control. Moreover, proxy battles continue in Afghanistan apart from conflicts over resources beneath the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. China, Russia, and the United States have remained important actors in this on-going dispute and at times taken sides. Pakistan and India both find themselves strangled with issues like exchange of documents, compensation, Junagarh, infiltration into Kashmir, the 1965 war, the Bangladesh war, Kargil and so the list meanders on endlessly.

Not all the perfumes of Tashkent and Shimla agreements, nor of the bus yatra to Lahore could sweeten relations between the two countries. As for the present, distrust and suspicion has overtaken the two countries. There is no conflict but there is no settlement either. No hostility but no harmony either. Both continue to remain, though geographically side by side, distant neighbors.⁴ On one hand, despite Muhammad Ali Jinnah's assurance to the citizens: "You may belong to any religion or caste or creed; that has nothing to do with fundamental principle that we are citizens and equal citizens of one state." It was somehow never translated into action and the country fell prey of right-wing elements. On the other hand, India claimed to be a secular state and world's oldest democracy. However, it could not give the same status to the minorities as the majority enjoyed. The Muslims have been driven to live in separate localities, mostly slums. As the Muslim middle class had by and large migrated to Pakistan, the Hindu middle class came to develop Hindu environs uninfluenced by Muslim culture of people.

In Pakistan it was believed that India had not accepted partition and that it would do every effort aiming to undo the partition and reuniting Indian Subcontinent. Not only dream of Akhand Bharat was deeply associated with Indian nationalists but statements delivered by few Congress leaders interpreted the very intentions. The Congress party president at the time of Independence, Acharya Kripalani, said "Neither the Congress nor the nation has given up its claim of a united India." Another important Congress figure Vallabhbhai Patel once said, "Sooner than later, we shall again be united in common allegiance to our country."⁵

Meanwhile, Track II and III diplomacies were sought as paths to normalize the affairs between two countries to the level of cordiality so that officials could play a part. One of the applications of non-official diplomacy was Neerana Dialogue that was launched in 1991 and incorporated military veterans, influential ex-diplomats and academia, those enjoyed unofficial support from the Indo-Pak foreign ministries.

Dalia Dassa Kaye maintained in "Talking to the Enemy", Indo-Pak initiative, has been by and large sponsored by the U.S. government. Moreover, many peace events have also been occurred between Pakistan India which includes People's Solidarity Conference that happened in 2001, Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace,

⁴ Kuldip, Nayar. *Beyond The Lines: An Autobiography*, Random House India, 2015

⁵ Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters, A Political Autobiography*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.136

especially interactions of high-ranking Indian officials and Pakistani Prime Minister (Kutty 2004)⁶.

It is also pertinent to mention that Media being an effective tool in shaping minds has also joined the efforts where media groups of the both the countries have jointly launched peace campaigns, featuring stories that reflect constructive developments. Pakistan had once gave green signal to Bollywood films screenings in local cinemas and Pakistani singers and actors visited India and even featured in Bollywood films and musical concerts. One more aspect that is mainly overlooked is the mushrooming of radio stations in Pakistan those often played Indian songs and help reduce the tensions by promoting cultural harmony. It showed that different Track two initiatives were on the roll simultaneously and made ground conducive for official level talks to discuss and resolve conflicts.

The Methodology

The research paper attempts to probe viability of informal diplomacy initiatives between belligerent neighbors Pakistan and India. Given the history of conflict between both the states and four wars being fought, I probed whether track II and III diplomacy initiatives facilitated track I or not. Ideally, informal platforms of diplomacies are expected to go directly proportional to formal diplomacy. In case of Pakistan and India, many examples of unofficial diplomacies can be quoted where hefty sums of money being invested by private/non-state entities but their viability remained a question. For this purpose, I interviewed politicians, former diplomats and journalists who had been part of such informal proposals. I collected relevant quotes from books, autobiographies (state officials) and research articles available on internet and later on matched them with current affairs. In the light of their answers – almost all of them pointed in the same direction – I toiled to formulate the conclusion.

The Results

The efficacy of informal dialogues between Pakistan and India has been hampered by official limitations. Difficulties in obtaining visa serve as a major hurdle for the participants of track II and track III diplomacy and make it an undeterred barrier. As an outcome generation on both sides of the border do not have primary or first-hand understanding of each other. This aspect resulted in defenselessness against hostile and suspicious images across the border. According to the Indo-Pak visa regimes, visitors can only enter in both the territories from specific locations. Although both the countries share ground border at length, however no road link is established between the two next door neighbors. Only Samjhota Express crossed the border at single point. Even entrance via air space and sea route is restricted and there is no direct route.

One must travel via connecting flights and voyages. Country wide visa is not given, and traveling is restricted to specific cities. Even for them the permission must be acquired in advance. On the top of it, police reporting on daily basis affects the goodwill gestures

⁶ Kutty, B. M., Pakistan-India Relations: Non-governmental Initiatives for Peace, *Pakistan Horizon*, 57(3) (2004).

between the host and the visitor. "In 1997, India made unilateral travel concessions, including (1) visas for Pakistani tourist groups, (2) One-year multiple entry visas for businessmen, who would be allowed to exit either through Mumbai or Delhi, (3) exemption from police reporting for senior Pakistani citizens, (4) and a waiver of visa fees for some categories of visitors, including journalists and students. However, Pakistan did not react with the same gesture in return."⁷ Let alone visitors those were restricted by travel and reporting restrictions; this sphere of hindrance was spread to participants involved in track II and track III diplomatic initiatives.

Their visas saw bureaucratic delays and their free movement was restricted by bureaucratic tactics. "These stern restrictions on both sides are justified by claim that unrestricted movement may threaten national security by encouraging terrorist infiltration or espionage"⁸. Illegal economic immigrants and cross-border traffic in arms and narcotics served as remaining reasons used for the justification of the former practices. The chief concern behind these restrictions is Indian allegations of cross border terrorism (via non-state actors) and Pakistan's concern of Indian state-sponsored terrorism. It is noted whenever the two countries chose to abridge gulf and strengthen ties, a terrorist activity on either side of the border diffused the air of affability or armed skirmishes on border diluted the air of cordiality or circumstances in Kashmir would go negative.

The most serious peacemaking effort between Pakistan and India was made in 1998-2007. It was initiated by then Indian Premier Vajpayee. Vajpayee and Pakistan then President Musharraf. The 2003 ceasefire and 2004 Islamabad Joint Statement paved the way for the dialogue for peace and decrease in violence in Jammu and Kashmir. Then Indo-Pak peacemaking efforts made quick successes from 2003 onwards, and followed by President Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Confidence Building Measures such as trade and travel between divided Kashmir were implemented. At the same time, a framework agreement was drafted that could have led to the resolution of the Kashmir issue. In the years to come, Confidence Building Measures were broadened, but no substantial progress was observed as far as the framework agreement was concerned. In less than a decade, due to escalation of conflict between Pakistan and India even CBMs were halted.

Trust deficit is etched so much that even state actions are seen with suspicions at both the sides. Recently, the announcement of a ceasefire in February 2021, by both the belligerent neighbors was taken with great cautions and skepticism. The concerns appear deeper especially when Indian Government revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, and locked down the disputed territory. The timeline suggests that after that

⁷Ashraf, Mian Tahir, Md. Nasrudin Md. Akhir, and Javaid Akhtar Salyana. 2017. "Mapping of Track Two Initiatives: A Case of Pakistan-India Conflict (1988-2001)." *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)* (ResearchGate) 37, No. 1 (2017): 16-29.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323127369_Mapping_of_Track_Two_Initiatives_A_Case_of_Pakistan-India_Conflict_1988-2001.

⁸ Samina Ahmed, Suranjan Das, "Movement of People, Ideas, Trade, and Technology: Toward a Peaceful Coexistence of India and Pakistan." *Cooperative Monitoring Center Occasional Papers/3* (Sandia National Laboratories, 1998), pp.1-30.
https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc697670/m2/1/high_res_d/589206.pdf.

episode about 7,000 incidents of crossfire across the Line of Control were recorded, accompanied by rising invective by the two countries' leaders.⁹

Discussion

Here, I will try to probe possibility of peace between next door neighbors – Pakistan and India – in 21st century via informal means of diplomacy.

Post 9/11 scenario was the time when the urge of solving conflict between Pakistan and India was much felt. Studying through previous two decades, it is found that viability of non-official diplomacy was at its optimum level while Pakistan was ruled by Gen. Musharraf. But first, let us take a deep dive on the efficacy of these mediums of “*Talking to the Enemy*”.

Explaining Track III diplomacy Dr. Moonis Ahmar stated,

As far as Track III channel is concerned, it is primarily limited to the interactions of common people. Keeping in view India and Pakistan, the significance and relevance of Track III initiative revolves around three logics. First, unlike Track I and II, in Track III process, popular segments of the society like workers, artists, poets, musicians and others are involved. The segregation of semi elite from Track III diplomacy gives a credible image of activities launched under its umbrella. In this form of informal diplomacy, vested interests do not matter and finally, extensive participation from different walks of lives is ensured, which makes it easier to remove mistrust and suspicion at the grass-root level.”¹⁰

The Neemrana Dialogue is considered as one of the most notable India-Pakistan Track II initiatives. It was first held in 1991 at Neemrana in Alwar district of Rajasthan. Pakistan hosted the next round at Nathiagalli. Later on, the venue kept changing shifted between the two countries in years to come.

“The U.S. Non-Governmental Organization Ford Foundation sponsored the Neemrana Dialogue, which included military veterans, influential ex-diplomats, media persons, and academia those had the unofficial support of New Delhi and Islamabad.”¹¹ From the Pakistan side the people to people contact was initiated by Dr. Mubashir Hussain. He was joined by Asma Jahangir, Jugnu Mohsin and I.A. Rehman. Subsequently, Aitzaz Hussain, his wife Bushra, Iqbal Haider and Chaudhary Manzoor have joined the movement. On Indian side Manak, Romesh, Gogi, Rajinder Sachaer, and Mahesh Bhatt are some of the persons who push the caravan of peace dispute all odds; Girls students from both sides have joined in and Nandita Das' efforts to get children from both sides to play cricket has also contributed to improve relations. However, the governments are not enthusiastic

⁹ Khurshid Kasuri, Radha Kumar, *Ideally, Pakistan and India should move to pick up peace negotiations from where they left off in 2007*. (March 24, 2021) <https://www.dawn.com/news/1614187>.

¹⁰ Moonis Ahmar, “Relevance of Track III Diplomacy”

¹¹ Shantanu, Chakrabarti. 2003. "The Relevance of Track II Diplomacy in South Asia." *International Studies* (ResearchGate).
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/250961654_The_Relevance_of_Track_II_Diplomacy_in_South_Asia.

about encouraging people to people contacts although they pay lip service to the initiative.¹²

“Here are some significant initiatives those can be deemed as products or means of informal dialogues.

- **Amanki Asha (News Media):** A joint campaign for peace between the Jang Group of Pakistan and the Times of India Group, the two leading media companies of India and Pakistan.
- **Joint Exhibitions and Galleries (Fine Arts):** My East is Your West (2015) is an example of a joint Indian-Pakistani exhibit that is being displayed at the upcoming Venice Biennale. Galleries featuring Indian and Pakistani artists include: Experimenter (Kolkata); Latitude 28 (New Delhi); Nature Morte (New Delhi); Project 88 (Mumbai); Lakeeren (Mumbai); Jahveri Contemporary (Mumbai); and Art Chowk (Karachi).
- **Lahore Literary Festival and Jaipur Literature Festival (Literature):** With a wide range of audiences, the annual Lahore Literary Festival and Jaipur Literature Festival celebrate both Indian and Pakistani authors and feature panels discussing India-Pakistan relations.
- **Tehrik-e-Niswan and Ajoka Theatre (Performing Arts):** Tehrik-e-Niswan and Ajoka Theatre (est. 1983) are Pakistani dance and theater groups that perform in India and promote exchanges between Indian and Pakistani performers. Ajoka’s Theatre for Peace program, for example, allows Indian and Pakistani theater groups and institutions to collaborate on productions, festivals, and workshops. Both groups work closely with their partners in India, such as ManchRangmanch, VirsaVihar, and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.”¹³

Likewise, Kartarpur Peace Corridor between Pakistan and India is also said to be an outcome of Track Two Diplomacy between both the next door neighbors. The Kartarpur Peace Corridor will allow Sikh pilgrims visa-free access from India to the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur in Pakistan. Recently organized Rotary International Peace Conference 2020 was attended by “Track II Walas” from Pakistan and India as well. Mani Shankar, a former Indian diplomat, silver-lined the Covid-19 induced crises. “I am happy that now I can enter Pakistan without having visa but via Zoom. Why do we have to go to Amsterdam to talk about resolution of our bilateral issues? We should sit in Karachi or Mumbai, Lahore, or Calcutta, Delhi or Islamabad. But now I can talk to my friends in Pakistan while sitting in India”, he said.

Whereas the Pakistani senators Mushahid Hussain Syed and Javed Jabbar, lamented the ineffectiveness of SAARC due to callow behavior of Indian state but emphasized

¹² Kuldip, Nayar. *Beyond The Lines: An Autobiography*, (Random House India, 2015)

¹³ Michele Bornstein, Reece Garrett Johnson, Shahrzad Mohtadi, Sarah Park, and Benjamin Weiss. 2015. "CIVIL SOCIETIES: EMPOWERING PEACE CONSTITUENCIES IN INDIA & PAKISTAN." *Columbia SIPA: School of International and Public Affairs* (SPRING 2015 CAPSTONE PROJECT).
file:///C:/Users/SARMAD%20ALEEM/Downloads/US%20State%20Dept%20CapstoneReport-Final-5.17%20(1).pdf.

continued track II and III diplomacy. According to Amir Rana, Director of Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies;

If the political environment is not conducive between both the countries, it (track II and III diplomacy) cannot cause any breakthrough. In such circumstances, these channels end up as mere communications. At this time around 12 such initiatives are proceeding but lockdowns have contributed to their stale state.” While answering to a question he said, “During Musharraf regime, track 1.5 diplomacy was at full swing and then some efforts were made in PPP government from 2008 to 2013.

The situation has completely changed after the rise of BJP in India. Although India and Pakistan share common history and heritage, and their tastes are also uniform from Bollywood to the cuisine, but both the states have worn national identities those are entirely in stark contrast,” said Raza Rumi. “The idea behind these informal channels is to form policy and that is not possible without involvement of governments. Both the forms (official and unofficial) of diplomacy reinforce each other but informal ways act more as a catalyst.

It is also imperative to discuss cricket as far as Indo-Pak relationship is concerned as it has played a vital role. Faizan Lakhani, a seasoned sports correspondent Geo News, recalled how sports diplomacy has abridged the gulf between two nations. “From last 8 years, Pakistan and India have not played any bilateral cricket series. While India toured Pakistan in 2004, a lot of Indians came and met their relatives at this side of border. Similarly, when team Pakistan toured India in 2005, it was reciprocated. It even allowed me to my relative in Ahmedabad from Sorat (Gujrat). Thanks to cricket. We made friends.”

Daily Dawn published the reflections of 26 writers and poets of Pakistan and asked them “Should Pakistan and India Bury the Hatchet?”

All of them overwhelmingly supported the peace move, which shows the presence of considerable constituency of peace on both sides of the divide. But still there are heavy barriers to peace due to the existence of hard-liners and extremists in the two countries and unofficial channels should involve them at some level to bring peace in the region. To achieve this end, both India and Pakistan must make a concentrated effort to bridge the trust deficit between the two nuclear states, increase cooperation to combat common enemies such as terrorism and work with sustained zeal to resolve outstanding strategic issues like Siachen and Sir Creek.”¹⁴

Conclusion

Pakistan and India share turbulent history of bilateral relationships. The consequences of this belligerence are bore by people dwelling at both sides of the border. Right from the creation of once-two dominions, there were problems: exchange of documents, compensation, Junagarh, infiltration into Kashmir, the 1965 war, the Bangladesh War, Kargil, Mumbai Attacks, Pulwama Attack and Operation Swift Retort. Furthermore, proxy fights being fought in Afghanistan apart from conflicts over resources beneath the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf. China, Russia, and the United States have remained

¹⁴ “Should Pakistan and India Bury the Hatchet”, Daily Dawn, August 10, 2003.

important actors in this on-going dispute and at times taken sides. Despite all odds, some of the notable track II and track III initiatives were rolled on. Starting from Neemrana Dialogue in 1991 then stretching over Aman Ki Asha, Joint Exhibitions and Art Galleries, Lahore Literature Festival, Jaipur Literature Festival, Ajoka Theatre and Tehreek-e-Niswan, such applications of track II and track III diplomacies made their presence felt. Informal diplomacy was used as a mechanism of informal interactions between ranged entities conducted directly or with the assistance of a 3rd party, by people those are influential who normally can reach out to their government and/ or an ability to formulate the public opinion. The ideal goal of track two and three diplomacy between Pakistan and India is usually to prevent or resolve conflicts or build confidence between the parties they represent. However, its viability has proven to be short-lived and fragile.

The efficacy of informal dialogues between Pakistan and India has its own limitations. First, difficulties in obtaining visa serve as a major hurdle for the participants of track II and track III diplomacy and make it an undeterred barrier. Second, visas for specific cities affected adversely on the mobility of visitors and lessen the spirit of free movement. Third, the mandatory police reporting procedures for visitors annihilate remaining goodwill gestures for the visitors. Trade and commerce between the two countries must be accelerated. Communications and transport facilities should be restored and people to people contacts must be encouraged. Informal diplomacy initiatives like Track II and III cannot be proven as an alternate to Track I diplomacy rather it offers support to state actors in managing and resolving conflicts through possibilities probable solutions. Unlike Track I, Track II and III are not responsible in solving the issues of grave concern however they contribute preparing grounds for the two sides for high level engagements.

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