

The Welcome Thaw in India-Pakistan Relations Is Backed by Pakistan's Army Too

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“A nation at peace and a region in harmony are thus essential prerequisites for attainment of national security in the true spirit. No national leaders of today can ignore these factors,” said Army chief Gen Bajwa, marking a significant iteration of Pakistan’s latest security policy.

“..., it is an almost universally acknowledged fact that the contemporary concept of national security is not only about protecting a country from internal and external threats but also providing conducive environment in which aspirations of human security, national progress and development could be realised.

“Surely, it is not solely a function of armed forces anymore...”

Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff **Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa** said this in the keynote address he delivered, at **the first-ever Islamabad Security Dialogue (ISD) on March 17-18**. The Dialogue was inaugurated by Prime Minister Imran Khan. The ISD was organised by the National Security Division, together with five leading think-tanks of the country, the Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Institute of Strategic Studies, Institute of Regional Studies and National Defence University’s Institute of Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis. The broad composition indicates the united political will of the Pakistani state.

[Reuters](#) from Islamabad thus reported the event, March 18, 2021:

“Pakistan’s army chief called on arch rivals India and Pakistan to “bury the past” and move towards cooperation, an overture towards New Delhi that follows an [unexpected joint ceasefire announcement last month](#) between the two countries’ militaries.... The militaries of both countries released a rare joint statement on February 25 announcing a ceasefire along the disputed border in Kashmir, having exchanged fire hundreds of times in recent months....

“The [United States immediately welcomed the move](#), and encouraged the two to “keep building on this progress”.

PTI reported: White House Press Secretary **Jen Psaki** had said on Feb 25 that the Biden administration remains “**closely engaged**” with a range of leaders and officials in the region, including those in Pakistan.”

“This is a positive step towards greater peace and stability in South Asia which is in our shared interest and we encourage both countries to keep building upon this progress,” she said.

At a separate news conference, State Department spokesperson **Ned Price** said the administration *had called on the parties to reduce tensions along the LoC* by returning to the 2003 ceasefire agreement. “We have been very clear that we condemn the terrorists who seek to infiltrate across the Line of Control,” he said.

The USA sells peace as well as war as it suits from time to time. In the eyes of the merchants of death, peace is the time between two wars. And it indulges in trade war too, which calls for shifts in policy. For India and Pakistan, *both dependent on USA, unfortunately* this nudge from the super power was needed, fortunately this time for peace.

Notably those engaged in backchannel talks with India were also associated in the ISD. Further, on Kashmir, the General simply said : “It is time to bury the past and move forward. But for the resumption of the peace process or meaningful dialogue, our neighbour will have to create a conducive environment, particularly in Indian-Occupied Kashmir.”

Who has to take the initiative? “The burden was on India” said Bajwa. Nay, the onus is on Pakistan, said India. Notwithstanding this refrain, it shows the thaw on both sides.

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Further, it was really not so “unexpected joint ceasefire,” and it is based on political economy, as this report by indiatoday.in, March 19, 2021, indicates the *chain of recent events*:

“Bajwa said that “stable” Indo-Pak relations is a “key” to unlock the untapped potential of South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia...he also said that the potential of the region has “forever remained hostage to disputes and issues between two nuclear neighbours”.

“Calling the Kashmir dispute the “heart of this problem”, General Bajwa said, “It is important to understand that without the resolution of Kashmir dispute through peaceful means, the process of sub-continental rapprochement **will always remain susceptible to derailment due to politically motivated bellicosity**”...

“Our position is well known. India desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. The onus is on Pakistan for creating such an environment,” **Anurag Srivastava**, spokesperson at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), said during his weekly briefing on February 4.

“This came in the wake of General Bajwa’s earlier offer of peace, February 2, while speaking at the graduation ceremony at the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). He had said, “Pakistan and India must resolve the longstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir in a dignified and peaceful manner as per the aspirations of

people of Jammu and Kashmir.”

“India and Pakistan had announced on February 25 that they have agreed **to strictly observe all agreements on ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC)** in Jammu and Kashmir and other sectors. The ceasefire continues to hold, which is a positive sign.

“India had last month said that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence. India had said the onus is on Pakistan to create an environment free of terror and hostility.

“General Qamar Javed Bajwa stressed however that the burden was on India to create a “conducive environment”, and said **Washington had a role to play in ending regional conflicts.**

“Pakistan and India, both nuclear-armed countries, have fought three wars, and in 2019, tensions rose dramatically post the [Pulwama terror attack](#) and the Balakot airstrikes...”

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Dr. Tara Kartha, Former Director, India’s National Security Council Secretariat, explained and *underlined the significance of the events*. See this extract from [tribuneindia.com](#), Mar 20, 2021:

“These are stirring times in Islamabad, where the rich and the powerful gathered for the ISD....In Pakistan, the rich and the powerful are either politicians, businessmen or those in khaki, or even all three. And since it is they who run the country, what they say usually matters.

“The ISD was organised by the National Security Division, a body originally set up under Nawaz Sharif to serve as the secretariat of the Cabinet Committee on National Security which replaced the Defence Committee of the Cabinet. Later called the National Security Committee, **it was notified as the ‘principal decision-making body on national security’** in a move quite unlike the advisory role such bodies have in most countries. That it included the service chiefs hardly needs to be said...”

“The idea is aimed at bringing think-tanks and policy-makers together, in a praiseworthy effort to benefit both. Bureaucracies the world over are not very different from each other, particularly in South Asia, where there is usually a solid brick wall between the two. The first move to break that wall is the first ever advisory portal, an integrated platform to exchange ideas with universities, think-tanks and the bureaucracies. The second was obviously to get the army chief to lay down the proposals...”

“This (singular obsession with India) now seems to be changing, just a little. It started at the beginning of this year. **In February, there was talk of Pakistan prioritising geo-economics over other issues.** That was echoed by Foreign Minister Qureshi soon after Khan’s visit to Colombo where he rather surprisingly talked about Sri Lanka being part of CPEC. Now at the ISD, PM Khan is talking of comprehensive security astonishingly, saying that security is not just about defence. Unsurprisingly, he praised China’s model, as he does at every forum available...”

Then he places national security within ‘South Asia’, as the least integrated of regions...

If that's not astonishing enough, there is the offer of regional connectivity. That's not just about China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), though that is offered up as an 'inclusive, transparent' project for global and regional participation, particularly Afghanistan. What follows is best quoted in full.

The General says, "Let me also emphasise that while **CPEC remains central to our vision, only seeing Pakistan through the CPEC prism is also misleading.** Our immensely vital geostrategic location and a transformed vision make us a country of immense and diverse potential which can very positively contribute to regional development and prosperity."

In simple words, he's offering up Pakistan as a node for regional connectivity... This means that Pakistan is ready for roads, railways and shipping to cross its territory into the rest of the world, including India. That's turning South Asian politics on its head...

Delhi had better consider this connectivity push and its pros and cons rather than dither about Bajwa's hostile antecedents. Here is an opportunity. Take it up. It might mean money, and a lot of it.

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It goes against the simplistic and inobjective notions spread in India that the Pakistan army decides everything.

Bajwa spoke of "**politically motivated bellicosity**"...And it reminds former Pakistan Gen Musharaff's statement that the armed forces know better about, and suffer the vagaries of war.

In this context, it is instructive to recall words of wisdom:

"24. WAR IS A MERE CONTINUATION OF POLICY BY OTHER MEANS.

We see, therefore, that War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means...the political view is the object, War is the means, and the means must always include the object in our conception." (Carl von Clausewitz, (1780-1831), On War)

The text of Gen Bajwa's speech, given below, gives a fuller picture and deeper insights of what is going on.

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Full text of Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa's speech at the Islamabad Security Dialogue, March 17, 2021.

Worthy Guests, Diplomats, Panelists, Participants, Ladies & Gentlemen!

Assalam-o-Alaikum & Good Afternoon!

It is my profound privilege and pleasure to address this august gathering of some of the best Pakistani and global minds. "Together for ideas" is a very appropriate theme chosen by the organisers for this dialogue. I am certain that

the policy practitioners and scholars present here or participating virtually, will not only discuss Pakistan's security vision but also formulate ideas to guide us on how best to tackle Pakistan's future security challenges.

I would like to appreciate the National Security Division for identifying the need for Pakistan to have its own security dialogue. I commend the NSD and its Advisory Board for putting together the first iteration of this Dialogue. I hope this trend of integrating intellectual input into policy-making continues to grow.

Ladies and gentlemen, **it is an almost universally acknowledged fact that the contemporary concept of national security is not only about protecting a country from internal and external threats but also providing conducive environment in which aspirations of human security, national progress and development could be realised.**

Surely, it is not solely a function of armed forces anymore.

National security in the age of globalisation, information and connectivity has now become an all-encompassing notion; wherein, besides various elements of national power, global and regional environment also play a profound role.

National security is thus multi-layered: outer layers being the exogenous factors of global and regional environment and inner layers being the endogenous factors of internal peace, stability and developmental orientation.

A nation at peace and a region in harmony are thus essential prerequisites for attainment of national security in the true spirit. No national leaders of today can ignore these factors. I also firmly believe that no single nation in isolation, can perceive and further its quest for security, as every single issue and security dilemma faced by today's world is intimately linked with global and regional dynamics. Whether it be human security, extremism, human rights, environmental hazards, economic security or pandemics, responding in silos is no longer an option.

Ladies and gentlemen!

The world has seen ravages of World Wars and Cold War, wherein polarisation and neglect of virtues blighted human future and brought catastrophic consequences for humanity.

On the contrary, we have witnessed how multilateral rule-based platforms contributed towards good of mankind.

Today we face similar choices; whether to stay etched in the acrimony and toxicity of the past, continue promoting conflict and get into another vicious cycle of war, disease and destruction; or to move ahead, bring the dividends of our technological and scientific advancements to our people and usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

We must not forget that the desire to achieve autarky was historically divisive and a stimulus for grabbing more, leading to "haves" and "have nots". History has taught us that the way ahead has always been through an interconnected, interdependent and collective sense of security...

Today the leading drivers of change in the world are demography, economy and technology. However, one issue which remains central to this concept is economic security and cooperation.

Frayed relations between various power centres of the globe and

boomeranging of competing alliances can bring nothing but another stint of cold war. It is naive to apply the failed solutions of yesteryears to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

It is important for the world that the leading global players must reach a stable equilibrium in their relations through convergences instead of divergence.

In this environment, developing countries like Pakistan, today face multi-dimensional challenges, which cannot be navigated single-handedly. A similar situation is confronted by other countries in our region as well, therefore, we all require a multilateral global and regional approach and cooperation to overcome these challenges.

Dear Participants!

You are well aware that South Asia is home to one quarter of world's population. **However, despite tremendous human and resource potential, the unsettled disputes are dragging this region back to the swamp of poverty and underdevelopment.**

It is saddening to know that even today it is among the least integrated regions of the world in terms of trade, infrastructure, water and energy cooperation.

On top of it, despite being one of the most impoverished regions of the world, we end up spending a lot of money on our defence, which naturally comes at the expense of human development.

Pakistan has been one of the few countries, which despite the rising security challenges has resisted the temptation of involving itself in an arms race. Our defence expenditures have rather reduced instead of increasing. This is not an easy undertaking especially when you live in a hostile and unstable neighbourhood.

But, having said that, let me say profoundly that we are ready to improve our environment by resolving all our outstanding issues with our neighbours through dialogue in a dignified and peaceful manner.

However, it is important to state that, this choice is deliberate and based on rationality and not as a result of any pressure. **It is our sincere desire to recast Pakistan's image as a peace-loving nation and a useful member of international community.**

Our leadership's vision is Alhamdullilah transformational in this regard. We have learned from the past to evolve and are willing to move ahead towards a new future, however, **all this is contingent upon reciprocity.**

Ladies and gentlemen!

The world knows that we are geo-strategically placed, to be a bridge between civilisations and connecting conduit between the regional economies.

We are a nation of significance due to our large and enterprising demography, fertile soil and adequate logistical infrastructure. We intend to leverage our vital geostrategic location for ours own, regional and global benefit.

Our robust role in current quest for peace in Afghanistan is proof of our goodwill and understanding of our global and moral obligations.

Our close collaboration and crucial support for the peace process has led to the historic agreement between Taliban and US and paved the

way for intra-Afghan dialogue.

We will continue to emphasise on a sustained and inclusive peace process for the betterment of people of Afghanistan and regional peace. Moreover, besides offering our all-out support to Afghanistan peace process, we have also undertaken unprecedented steps to enhance Afghanistan's trade and connectivity by:

- Re-energising Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and also providing access to Afghanistan to export her goods to India
- Improving economic and trade environment along Pak-Afghan border by establishing border markets and development of infrastructure
- Being part of energy and trade corridors binding Central, South and West Asia through land routes and inviting Afghanistan to be part of CPEC.

Dear Participants!

Stable Indo-Pak relation is a key to unlock the untapped potential of South and Central Asia by ensuring connectivity between East and West Asia. This potential however, has forever remained hostage to disputes and issues between two nuclear neighbours.

Kashmir dispute is obviously at the head of this problem. It is important to understand that without the resolution of Kashmir dispute through peaceful means, process of sub-continental rapprochement will always remain susceptible to derailment due to politically motivated bellicosity.

However, we feel that it is time to bury the past and move forward. But for resumption of peace process or meaningful dialogue, our neighbour will have to create conducive environment, particularly in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

Ladies and gentlemen,

today we are a nation with tremendous geo-economic potential. In order to carve a promising future for our people, it is important for us to embark upon a solid economic roadmap, backed up by infrastructural developments and regional integration. Our choices with respect to the same have been clear and explicit.

This geo-economic vision is centered around four core pillars:

- One: Moving towards a lasting and enduring peace within and outside
- Two: Non-interference of any kind in the internal affairs of our neighbouring and regional countries
- Three: Boosting intra-regional trade and connectivity
- Four: Bringing sustainable development and prosperity through establishment of investment and economic hubs within the region

Pakistan has been working towards all four aspects with unity of purpose and synchronisation within the various components of national security.

We had realised that unless our own house is in order, nothing good could be expected from outside. Now, after having overpowered the menace of terrorism and tide of extremism, we have begun to work towards sustainable development and improving economic conditions of under-developed areas.

Pakistan Army has contributed tremendously towards this national cause by rebuilding and mainstreaming some of the most neglected areas through massive development drives besides ensuring peace and security.

Our long campaign against the tide of terrorism and extremism manifests our resolve and national will. We have come a long way and yet we are a bit short of our final objective but we are determined to stay the course.

Dear participants!

CPEC has been at the heart of our economic transformation plan and we have left no quarter to declare its necessity for addressing our economic woes.

Our sincere efforts to make it **inclusive, transparent and attractive**, for all global and regional players, with the aim of bringing its benefits to everyone.

Let me also emphasise that while CPEC remains central to our vision, only seeing Pakistan through CPEC prism is also misleading.

Our immensely vital geostrategic location and a transformed vision make us a country of immense and diverse potential which can very positively contribute to regional development and prosperity.

This vision however remains incomplete without a stable and peaceful South Asia. Our efforts for reviving Saarc, therefore, are with the same purpose. Our efforts for peace in Afghanistan, responsible and mature behavior in crisis situation with India manifest our desire to change the narrative of geo-political contestation into geo-economic integration.

While we are doing our bid, a major contribution is to be made by the global players through their cooperation.

I am sure that an economically interconnected South Asia is much more suited to them instead of a war-torn, crisis-ridden and destabilised region.

We also see hope in the form of incoming **US administration which can transform the traditional contestation into a gainful economic win-win for the world in general and the region, in particular**, South Asia can be the starting point for regional cooperation.

I have firm belief that economic and sustainable human development can guide us into a future, full of peace and prosperity.

And finally, it is time that we in South Asia create synergy through connectivity, peaceful co-existence and resource sharing to fight hunger, illiteracy and disease instead of fighting each other.

I thank you.

Courtesy : Dawn.com, March 18, 2021.

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In conclusion, Dr. Tara Kartha's words are worth repeating:

"Delhi had better consider this connectivity push and its pros and cons rather than dither about Bajwa's hostile antecedents. Here is an

opportunity. Take it up. It might mean money, and a lot of it.”

Hope jingoists in India are listening and will heed.

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