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Strategic Insight

Emerging Reconciliation Amidst Continuing Military Impasse

by [Surinder Rana](#)

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Introduction

High level U.S. political engagement during the last two months has resulted in a visible easing of tensions between India and Pakistan. During the visit of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Pakistan on 6 June 2002, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf pledged to end cross-border infiltration from Pakistan into Indian-controlled Kashmir on a permanent basis. India responded with a series of diplomatic and military steps, and acknowledged that the level of cross-border incidents had decreased. Pakistan, however, dismissed the steps taken by India as merely "cosmetic." During his visit to India on 12 June, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that the United States would want to convert this initial positive movement into a virtuous cycle of mutually reinforcing actions that would reduce tensions and create the conditions for political dialogue between the two adversaries.

When he was in the region recently, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell emphasized the need to resume a bilateral India-Pakistan dialogue. He pressed India to ensure free and fair elections in Kashmir, which he regarded as a necessary precursor to resumption of talks. Although U.S. engagement has helped diffuse border tension between India and Pakistan, the militaries of both countries continue to be poised for confrontation. It is now incumbent upon the respective leaders of India and Pakistan to maintain the momentum of reconciliation that can lead to a lasting peace in the region.

Analysis

India's leaders had adopted an offensive military posture against Pakistan in the wake of the 13 December terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament, which many believed was masterminded by Pakistan-based terrorist organizations. The Indian government demanded that Pakistan put a stop to cross-border infiltration by Pakistan-based terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. Pakistanis in turn saw Indian mobilization as a challenge to their country's territorial integrity, and regarded the Indian demand to stop cross-border terrorism as an attempt to suppress what Islamabad claims is a legitimate Kashmiri independence struggle. President Musharraf soon realized, however, that his efforts to convince the world that the fight by a global coalition against terrorism in Afghanistan was somehow different from the Indian government's fight against terrorism in Kashmir had little support. Intense international pressure and his own desire to transform Pakistan into a modern democratic state as did his one-time role model Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, may have impelled Musharraf to make a historic speech on 12 January 2002, in which he pledged not to allow terrorist activities against any country from Pakistani soil.^[1]

He earned accolades from world leaders for his bold stand against Islamic radicalism and generated a great deal of hope for lasting peace in South Asia. India also cautiously welcomed Musharraf's speech. The Indian government nevertheless declared that it would like to see Musharraf's words translated into actions. Indian skepticism apparently was directed at Musharraf's intent as well as his capability to reign

in Pakistan's domestic hardliners. The Indian military softened its offensive posture for a short period, but refused to withdraw forces from the border.[\[2\]](#)

The events that followed Musharraf's 12 January speech showed that Indian apprehensions were not entirely unfounded. By making promises to stamp out Pakistan-based terrorist groups, Musharraf seems to have tried to placate international opinion. He took some concrete steps such as arresting leaders of the Pakistan-based terrorist organizations Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), raiding their administrative and training infrastructure, freezing terrorist assets worth \$300,000, and asking Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) to close their Kashmir office. As a result of these actions there was a perceptible decrease in cross-border infiltration into the Indian part of Kashmir during the months of February-April 2002. However, this trend rapidly reversed from mid-April onwards. Reports indicated that cross-border infiltration had increased, and 50-60 new terrorist training camps had become operational within Pakistan's side of Kashmir.[\[3\]](#) Pakistan-based terrorist leaders even threatened openly to thwart the election process in Indian Kashmir, which is due to begin in October 2002.[\[4\]](#)

One conclusion that can be drawn from this increase is that Musharraf lacked control over Jihadi elements in Pakistan. The International Crisis Group (ICG) recently echoed similar views. Musharraf's decision in October 2001 to join the coalition against global terrorism was resented by Pakistan's radical Islamic organizations, which instigated street protests. Some militant organizations even sent their cadres to fight against coalition forces in Afghanistan.[\[5\]](#) The Taliban's defeat was a setback to these radical organizations but they showed no sign of giving up Jihad against the West.

Despite the stringent measures taken by the Pakistani government, Jihadis managed to launch attacks against Western targets in Pakistan. On 17 March 2002, five people died in a suicide attack on a church located in the heart of Islamabad's high security zone.[\[6\]](#) In February 2002, members of JeM abducted *Washington Post* correspondent Daniel Pearl; despite frantic efforts by the Pakistan government to secure his freedom, Pearl was brutally beheaded.[\[7\]](#) On 7 May 2002, 14 French construction workers were killed in a suicide bomb attack in Karachi.[\[8\]](#) By indulging in such acts, Jihadis openly challenged Musharraf's authority. He appeared unable to cope with such blatant acts of defiance. Reports also suggested that renegade sections of his own establishments, i.e., the army and the ISI, were continuing to support Jihadi elements including those fighting against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

By continuing to insist that terrorism in Kashmir is different from terrorism in other parts of the world, Musharraf raised suspicions in the international community about his commitment to the fight against terrorists. He was more successful in his effort to use the respectability gained from his support for the anti-terrorist coalition to polish his political image in Pakistan, and to strengthen his hold over the military. With his new image as a moderate and visionary leader to bolster him, Musharraf organized a well-publicized referendum that extended his hold on power for five years.

Once this questionable exercise in democracy was completed, however, Musharraf returned to his recalcitrant ways. He is known to be a staunch supporter of Jihad in its various manifestations, and prior to 11 September 2001 was a principal backer of the Taliban and Al-Qaida organizations. There are reports that the Pakistani government resisted allied operations in tribal areas suspected of sheltering Al-Qaida and renegade Taliban fighters. Despite his assurances to India and the international community that he would not allow terrorists to operate from Pakistani soil in the name of Kashmir, Musharraf did permit new terrorist camps to spring up unhindered in the Pakistani part of Kashmir. On top of this, many of the terrorist leaders rounded up in the wake of his 12 January speech have been released.[\[9\]](#)

Emboldened by these concessions, terrorists carried out a suicide attack on an Indian army camp in Kashmir on 14 May 2002, killing 23 people, mostly women and children who were family members of Indian army personnel.[\[9\]](#) The Indian government reacted by enhancing its military readiness to counter terrorist acts within its territory. To emphasize its deep resentment toward Pakistan's failure to curb cross-border terrorism, the Indian government expelled Pakistan's high commissioner from New Delhi. The militaries of both countries were put on a high state of readiness for war.

There were two immediate results of this heightened India-Pakistan tension. First, anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan were hampered by the absence of effective border management by Pakistan's security forces, most of which were moved to Pakistan's eastern border with India. This allowed terrorists to escape from Afghanistan into Pakistan and lie dormant while the war continued.[\[10\]](#) Second, the crisis with India gave Islamabad a genuine excuse for reducing its military commitment to anti-terrorist operations in conjunction with allied forces. This reduction further served to placate domestic radicals. Musharraf's apparent duplicity therefore had serious implications for regional security and the U.S.-led war against terrorism.

From a regional perspective, Musharraf's recalcitrant approach toward anti-Indian terrorism served to encourage Islamic radicals within Pakistan, and were an abrogation of his commitment to reign in Pakistan-based terrorists. In a televised speech on 27 May 2002, Musharraf declared that no cross-border infiltration into Kashmir was coming from the Pakistan side. His claims of innocence are refuted by the fact that the allied forces operating in neighboring Afghanistan and in some parts of Pakistan were in a position to pick up radio intercepts originating in Pakistan that contained messages for Kashmiri militants. Even the Pakistani people are skeptical of such declarations by their leaders. A leading Pakistani economist, Akmal Hussain, wrote in Pakistan's *Daily Times*, "In an age when satellite cameras can identify the brand name of a golf ball lying on the greens of Gymkhana golf course, it is futile to expect the world community to accept any ambiguity on whether camps in Azad Kashmir are active or not."[\[11\]](#)

Under the circumstances, Musharraf's claims can only have lost him credibility, without in any way helping his avowed Kashmir cause. He already had lost the trust of Pakistan's Islamic radicals by publicly supporting the anti-Taliban forces; of Pakistan's political masses by consolidating his power through a controversial referendum; and of his neighbor India through his covert support of Jihad in Kashmir and the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the ongoing standoff with India, even traditional friends of Pakistan in the Arab world preferred to adopt a neutral stance, in contrast to the pro-Pakistan position they have always taken in earlier India-Pakistan confrontations.[\[12\]](#)

The United States and other Western governments originally applauded Musharraf's bold anti-terror initiatives, particularly when he joined them in the war against global terrorism. Recently, however, his failure to reign in domestic radical organizations, stop cross-border terrorism against India, or track down Al Qaida and Taliban leaders reportedly hiding in Pakistan, have damaged his image in the West. People in the United States and other allied countries have not forgotten images of Pakistanis burning American flags and truckloads of them entering Afghanistan to fight allied forces. During the pre-September 2001 period, the Musharraf government had repeatedly said that it was not supporting Taliban and Al-Qaida. It is widely accepted now, however, that the Pakistani army provided military leadership to the two organizations, and that the ISI was actively helping them. Musharraf's unreliability and failure to follow the advice of his western allies could result in his further isolation and will likely prove counterproductive for long-term Pakistani interests.

Musharraf's inability to control Jihadis in Pakistan has two possible explanations. He is apparently under pressure from within his own establishments (mainly the army and the ISI) to avoid giving in to international demands that he renounce Jihad in Kashmir. A leading columnist of Pakistan's Jang Group, Kamran Khan, writes that the Pakistani military leadership under General Musharraf is "absolutely confident" that the freedom struggle in Kashmir has entered a crucial phase, in which any Indian military adventurism along the Line of Control would trap the Indian army in a Vietnam or Afghanistan-like situation and hasten the granting of freedom to Kashmir's Muslims. Quoting various Pakistani officials, Kamran wrote that the infiltration of Jihadis into Kashmir is part of the Pakistani army's operational plans to trap the Indian army, if it should advance after militants into Pakistan's side of Kashmir. According to Pakistan's military sources, when he was Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) Pakistan Army in the early 1990s, Musharraf developed operational plans that continue to form the core of Pakistan's current strategy on Kashmir.[\[13\]](#)

To make things more difficult, Musharraf tends to regard India as a weak and unstable neighbor, which further compels him to pursue an aggressive Kashmir policy. This viewpoint is corroborated by Indian intelligence sources, which say that although Musharraf agreed to crack down on Jihadis under U.S. pressure, he continues to follow his Jihadi agenda, both to contain possible domestic violence by these terrorist organizations, and to maintain them as an essential instrument of his Kashmir policy. For this purpose he is reported to have set up new organizations like Jamat-e-milli, which is believed to have carried out the 14 May attack on the Indian military camp in Kashmir.[\[14\]](#)

The United States and the international community have expressed serious concerns over the continuing military standoff between India and Pakistan. U.S. President George W. Bush and many other leaders persistently exhorted President Musharraf to take concrete actions against cross-border infiltration into India. From his recent proclamations to end the border-crossings, it is evident that he is relenting under international pressure. In his self-adopted role of a soldier-statesman, however, Musharraf is trying to maintain a precarious balance between his role as chief of Pakistan's army on the one hand and his position as head of state on the other. As a statesman he is required to redeem the pledges he made to the international community and his own people during his 12 January address. As a soldier he is obligated to maintain the sanctity of his own military plans. In this balancing act the all-important issue for Musharraf should be Pakistan's long-term well-being, which requires peace and stability in South Asia. His soldierly instincts have so far dictated a military solution to Pakistan's standoff with India, and hence Musharraf has been continuing with his Jihadi policy. Experts believe that continuation of this policy will be a sure recipe for regional military conflict, which is an issue of deep concern to the international community.

It is too early to tell whether Musharraf's pledges to end support for terrorism represent a permanent shift in his Kashmir policy, or are simply opportunistic efforts to buy time. It is therefore necessary for the international community, led by the United States, to continue to impress upon Musharraf that the president as statesman will be more likely to realize his vision of a prosperous Pakistan than will the president as soldier. For its part, continued positive reciprocation by India will likely help Musharraf win over the more moderate and flexible elements within the Pakistani polity, which in turn will strengthen his resolve to take action against the Jihadis.

****See the companion piece to this Strategic Insight: [Pakistan's Challenges and the Need for a Balanced Solution](#) by Brigadier Feroz Hassan Khan****

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