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2005-07-01

Interview with Brig Feroz Hassan Khan; Strategic Insights, v. 6, issue 7 (2005 July)

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Strategic Insights, V. 6, issue 7 (2005 July)



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Interview with *Brig Feroz Hassan Khan*

Strategic Insights, Volume IV, Issue 7 (July 2005)

by [Ms. Garima Singh](#)

Strategic Insights is a monthly electronic journal produced by the [Center for Contemporary Conflict](#) at the [Naval Postgraduate School](#) in Monterey, California. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of NPS, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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Introduction

[Brig Feroz Hassan Khan](#) retired from the Pakistan Army with thirty-one years of distinguished service. During his career, he commanded combat units in Kashmir and the Siachen Glacier and served on the Army general staff. As director in the Strategic Plans Division, he made key contributions to formulating Pakistan's security policy on nuclear and conventional arms control and has been a member of official Pakistani delegations in security-related negotiations. He has participated in several arms control conferences in the United States, Europe, and Asia, has held series of fellowships in the United States, and has published articles on strategic stability and restraint in South Asia. He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of National Security Affairs at NPS.

Q: Why do you think the Lahore Process failed? Did the Pakistan army not want to back a peace move initiated by a democratic government?

No. The Lahore process did not fail because the army did not back it. Even before the Lahore initiative the army was not satisfied with the manner in which the Nawaz Sharif government was functioning. His personalized style of decision making on key domestic and foreign policy issues, with serious implications for national security, was under criticism in many segments in Pakistan. Since 1997, when the Sharif government came to power, it began destroying systemically the basic structures of Pakistani state institutions, leading to severe crises with the Presidency, Judiciary and the Army.

The Lahore process came in this backdrop. The Army was never opposed to India-Pakistan rapprochement, which was already proceeding well before the Lahore process commenced. And the Lahore initiative came too abrupt. Given Nawaz's whimsical style of governing, disregarding major institutions, or never bringing them into the loop, made Lahore a cause of worry. It was therefore not the substance of the peace process but the manner in which the whole process was unfolding that was not satisfying to several civil and military national institutions. The PM was being advised to bring all on board, review the strategic picture in entirety, and consider all implications thoroughly.

Q: How do you view the ongoing peace process?

This is a good move by both the countries. This time the approach is more coherent and institutionalized, hence there is better scope for a sustained dialogue. There is realization in both countries that we are bound to live as neighbors and must learn to agree as well as disagree, but keep working towards settlement on the issues where we disagree. At the very onset India and Pakistan should not bluntly negate each other's stand, but make an effort to understand the intricacies involved in each issue. India should understand Pakistan's sensitivities towards Kashmir and other issues and make efforts towards their settlement.

The present peace process should be seen as "restoring engagement." A peace process cannot be triggered with deep hostility still lingering in the background. It would be better to begin with engagement with each other and then work towards a peace process. To sustain the process, the stakes have to be high on both sides. The cost of taking a half-step back can sometimes be more than taking one step forward.

Keeping in view its greater role in global politics, India should take a magnanimous stand on issues. In a larger sense the Kashmir issue should be addressed by finding a common and best settlement position of all parties—India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiris. But on some linked issues like Siachen, Baglihar and Sir Creek issues, some generosity by India can lead to much faster resolution. The economic cost of sustaining a conflict in Siachen has been extremely high for both the countries. In fact, withdrawing from Siachen would be in India's interest. Both India and Pakistan are losing soldiers there not in as a result of enemy fire, but mostly due to weather conditions. I would suggest a three-step option for the Siachen issue. One, both should agree on mutual withdrawal from Siachen and move back forces to the 1972 position. Two, try not to demarcate the present position or line of force and instead designate the whole zone a disputed area and declare it a "no force occupation zone." Three, heavy garrisons close to Siachen should be reduced to a mutually agreed level. Shoyok Valley should be maintained as a "low force zone." Other trust building factors should be encouraged like converting the Siachen battle zone into an International Science Research Center for the environment, which will be beneficial to both India and Pakistan. There are several governmental and non-governmental studies that have concluded to this effect.

On Baglihar, Pakistan has sought World Bank arbitration since the talks have so far failed to resolve the issue. The difference over Baglihar is mostly technical in nature. The design of the Baglihar dam being built by India on the Chenab River on the Indian side of Kashmir violates the Indus Water Treaty as it blocks large quantities of water meant for Pakistan. India is going ahead with the construction of the dam ignoring Pakistan's demand of suspension of work till the issue is settled though India claims the project is within the parameters of the treaty. (The 450-megawatt hydro-power project is expected to begin generation by 2006.) Pakistan is optimistic about the arbitration by World Bank as the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (The Indus Waters Treaty was concluded by India and Pakistan on September 19, 1960, with the World Bank as a signatory for certain specified purposes)"brokered" by the World Bank is working well despite several crisis. I will hope that this issue is amicably resolved

On the Sir Creek issue, I endorse the work done by Rear Admiral Hasan Ansari and Rear Admiral Ravi Vohra for the Cooperative Monitoring Center, Sandia National Laboratories. (CMC Occasional Paper, December 2003) They recommend technical as well as political Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) between the two countries in fields like shipping and trade, security of fishermen, ports and cargoes, interaction between naval and other maritime authorities, etc.

The above three issues are doable and I believe resolution of the first two will be a boost for efforts towards the final solution on Kashmir, as other more contentious issues are discussed. Sir Creek boundaries will logically lead to the next step of delineating the maritime boundaries and find pathways to related maritime issues.

Q: What specific measures will help sustain the peace process?

Two things that will sustain the process are shunning of adversarial policies towards each other and showing generosity in political settlements. So far, policy formulation has been primarily driven more by security concerns; it is time to switch it towards an economic-oriented approach.

Q: Coming back to the army's role in the domestic politics of Pakistan, is the increasing role of the army in managing the state of affairs in Pakistan going to impinge on professionalism and lead to corruption in the army?

It is unfortunate that in the so-called decade of democracy (1988 to 1999) leaders of both the major political parties in Pakistan were found neck-deep in corruption and weakened state institutions to an extent that they were nearly non-functional. The Pakistan Army has been repeatedly forced to the rescue, bring the civil state of affairs back to the basics and bring efficiency back to at least the bare minimum. As an institution, like any other professional army, The Pakistan Army has no intrinsic desire to run the civil administration. Even during the periods of military rule, politicians and civilian bureaucrats ran the affairs of the government.

The role of army in the civil administration has not and will not affect its professionalism because the army maintains and guards its core professional values at all times. The cream and bulk of it has remained on professional duties. In a highly competitive system such as the army, there is never a shortage of highly trained and professional officers and men to replace as and when others are replaced or called for national duties elsewhere. In fact most postings to the civil administration are at the end of their career and are done to restore the efficiency of those near collapse institutions. It is not that an officer on command, or key staff and soldiers deployed at the borders, are called for dispensing civil administration. Nor is the training of the armed forces allowed to slack at any time.

However, I do agree that there is some resentment in the civil society on the increasing role of Pakistan army in the day-to-day affairs. Civilians point to the functioning of certain key organizations where military officers are posted. Perhaps, one way can be that army can be more selective in deputing a large number of serving and retired military officers to civil departments and organizations. This balance must be corrected.

Q: How will Pakistan convince the international community that its nuclear assets (both the soft and hard power) are well protected?

The international community was convinced and had never any doubt about the management of Pakistani nuclear program until reports began to emerge that two retired scientists, Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majid, had met Al Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan. Subsequently, when the A.Q. Khan saga came to public the question of nuclear stewardship began to surface. The A.Q. Khan episode was a lesson for Pakistan, too. Pakistan trusted and gave too much independence, which was misused by A.Q. Khan and to the detriment of Pakistan national security and international embarrassment. Further, Pakistan was more focused in procuring and protecting its assets and the security establishment lacked oversight of the activities that enabled A.Q. Khan to do the networking at such a large scale.

Not just A.Q. Khan, but also the case of Bashir and Majid underscored that retired scientists could move around freely with less or little for oversight of the Pakistani establishment. This problem has since been corrected and that lesson has shaken all to tighten both hard and soft technologies. Pakistan has upgraded its security and oversight. There is a new security division now responsible to the National Command Authority. Pakistan also is training and building an Emergency Rescue Team, which is very similar to Nuclear Emergency Search Team (NEST) in the U.S. NEST establishes and maintains capabilities for technical response to potential and actual threats and incidents. All personnel dealing with nuclear or strategic organization have to undergo a rigorous Personal Reliability Tests and are constantly monitored. Further, new export

control legislation has been passed that lays down stringent punishment for violators. On nuclear safety matters the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority is a very independent and active organization.

Q: According to Seymour Hersh's story which appeared in *The New Yorker* last year, the Central Intelligence Agency and the U.S. military have set up a special deep-penetration unit to seize, take out or de-fang Pakistan's nuclear weapons in case of an exigency. The commando group is also training with an Israeli outfit, code-named Unit 262. Your comments on this please.

This is too absurd to comment upon.

Q: There were reports about the United States sharing technology on Permissive Action Links (PAL's) with Pakistan. How deep is this cooperation?

Permissive Actions Links or PALs are primarily a use-control device for deployed nuclear weapons. In technical terms, it is a coded switch that controls the arming of nuclear weapons and when issued by command authority releases the weapon for use. By implication it is also an important element for the safety of nuclear weapons. First of all, such technology though helps control but also enables the use of nuclear weapon. Under international and domestic legal obligations, the United States cannot transfer such technology to either Pakistan or India.

And more importantly, installation of a PAL requires the recipient country to share its nuclear weapons design and system functioning details to develop the design. It should be obvious that in no way any country will share such secrets. Thus, there is a problem at both the supplier and recipient end. Pakistan as well as India however could benefit from the greater experience of established nuclear powers on limited and generic bases of learning especially in areas of safety and security stewardship. U.S. laboratories have developed and it is in our interest to learn the Organizational Best Practices. Without compromising our national security, it will be beneficial to gain expertise that will help enhance our safety procedures, improve materials, protection, and accounting practices and undertake personnel reliability program that is relevant to own culture and security requirement.

Like India, Pakistan is very sensitive on sharing details on nuclear matters. There is a history to it and that sensitivity about all aspects of the nuclear program continues despite overt demonstration of nuclear capability. In no way, will Pakistan be sharing with the United States or any other country any data or information about its nuclear programme, nuclear installations, or its fissile material.

The nuclear fissile material in Pakistan is very limited compared to the West and is being strictly guarded and maintained as national assets. On balance Pakistan's nuclear weapons and fissile material are very much safe and reliable and we are maturing as a nuclear weapon state.

About the Author

Ms. Garima Singh, who conducted this interview at the Maurya Sheraton in New Delhi on May 14, 2005, is a research associate at the [Observer Research Foundation's Institute for Security Studies](#) in New Delhi, India.