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Transforming India-Pakistan Relations

By [Sreeram Chaulia](#) and [Stephan Richter](#)

Since their independence from British rule in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought over the disputed territory of Kashmir, among many other issues. But as Sreeram Chaulia and Stephan Richter explain, the Obama Administration might be able to help the two countries develop peaceful relations in the face of growing Taliban influences in Pakistan and rising costs of war in India.

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The recent admission by the government of Pakistan that the terrorist attacks on the Indian metropolis of Mumbai in November 2008 were indeed committed by Pakistani Islamists offers a thin ray of hope.

If Islamabad carries forward this spirit to the point of eschewing sponsorship of jihad as a foreign policy instrument, it might augur a constructive turn in relations with New Delhi, relations that have been fraught with bitterness and war for more than 60 years.

While there are other outstanding issues in the multi-dimensional India-Pakistan conflict, terrorist attacks have taken center stage in recent years due to their ferocity and shock value.

As long as generals rule the roost in Pakistan, the sub-continent will keep simmering the way Europe did for so long.

So frequent and life-consuming have the attacks become that their importance in the media and in policymakers' agendas in both countries has overshadowed the territorial dispute over Kashmir.

From the dawn of independence in 1947, Pakistan has referred to Kashmir as the "core dispute" with India.

But the rapidity with which Islamist forces are "Talibanizing" entire parts of Pakistan with the tacit blessings of the army and the intelligence apparatus has created an even bigger preoccupation for the country, namely home-grown and

home-bred Islamists who, in the words of President Asif Ali Zardari, are "trying to take over the state."

Zardari indicated a shift in his priorities as early as March 2008 by saying that Kashmir can be "set aside" (or put on the back burner for future generations), while

relations with India are improved in other issue areas.

Through his latest comment that “we’re fighting for the survival of Pakistan” against fast-spreading Islamic fundamentalism, Zardari has signaled a concurrence with India’s point of view that the immediate threat facing the entire subcontinent is jihadi violence.

The big question, however, is whether Zardari matters at all, since he is seen to be doing the Pakistani army and intelligence services’ (ISI) bidding in policy.

With the security establishment still dominating the country in spite of the presence of elected civilian leaders, peace with India is a long shot. That there must be a deep restructuring of Pakistan’s polity to downsize the power of the security agencies vis-à-vis civil society is an imperative for reduction of tensions with India.

Historically, there are parallels between the perpetual India-Pakistan enmity and Franco-German *revanchism* from the Thirty Years’ War of 1618-1648 up to 1945.

Before Germany democratized sufficiently after World War II and gave up futile territorial claims over Alsace-Lorraine, it fought several wars with France, leaving a trail of millions of dead and wounded in the heart of Europe.

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The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community through the Schuman Plan in 1951 to “make war not only unthinkable but materially impossible” between France and West Germany could only transpire in a propitious/suitable geopolitical context. But so it was.

At long last Paris was confident that Bonn had relinquished claims over French territory and embraced a liberal democratic political system to counter communism. As long as conservative Prussian *junker* militarism had dominated German politics, there was no question of a Coal and Steel Union with France or closer integration of Europe.

In many ways, the same logic sets the preconditions for lasting peace between India and Pakistan. As long as generals rule the roost in Pakistan, promote cross-border terrorism and continue scheming to snatch Kashmir from India, the sub-continent will keep simmering the way Europe did for so long.

The United States played a crucial role in encouraging post-World War II France and West Germany to shed their old antagonisms. Washington was concerned in the early 1950s that Europe might consume the Marshall Plan funds, but never recover economically if France and West Germany continued

to spar with each other.

U.S. President Harry Truman encouraged rapprochement between France and West Germany as the linchpin to free Europe from American aid dependence and to counter the Soviet Union.

Even more importantly, no country did more to strengthen liberal forces inside West Germany than the United States, which oversaw the election of Konrad Adenauer in 1949 with U.S. troops in occupation.

To return to the analogy: Can the United States under Barack Obama play a constructive role in changing the balance of political forces inside Pakistan and nudge the country into a non-antagonistic relationship with India?

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The Obama Administration would be better off doing everything possible to help restructure the political system of Pakistan.

The remarks of Obama's transition team in late 2008 indicating his interest in acting as a broker over the Kashmir dispute raised eyebrows in India as unwarranted meddling. However, the appointment of Richard Holbrooke as Obama's envoy only to Pakistan and Afghanistan, leaving out India, has partially allayed the forebodings of India's strategic elites.

If the West German comparison is carefully deciphered, the Obama Administration would be better off doing everything possible to help restructure the political system of Pakistan rather than bringing the spotlight back to the Kashmir issue.

Since the war in Afghanistan in October 2001, the Pentagon-driven foreign policy of the Bush Administration banked on close friendship with the Pakistani army as the guarantee to fulfilling U.S. interests in the "war on terrorism."

If the Obama Administration strengthens liberal and progressive elements within Pakistan, the wheels of peace with India would turn.

Washington's strategy of molycoddling the military dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf proved most counter-productive for peace with India because it further entrenched the power of the jingoistic and jihad-sponsoring elements — and "Talibanized" much of Pakistan.

There is a direct correlation between increased terrorist attacks in all parts of India since 2001 and the entrenchment of the Pakistani military's hegemony with U.S. assistance.

For genuine civilian rule to strengthen and de-jihadize Pakistani society, the Obama Administration has to strengthen liberal and progressive elements within Pakistan and get rid of Washington's unholy alliance with the army and the ISI.

Should that happen, the wheels of peace with India would turn and possibly create the momentum for economic integration of the subcontinent.

The lingering political conflict between Pakistan and India has derailed well-intentioned regional agreements like the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), which was signed in 2004, and the South Asian Economic Union (SAEU), which was floated in 2007.

With the world's largest concentration of people living below the poverty line, South Asia can ill afford the eternal state of war between Pakistan and India that hinders beneficial economic exchanges.

But for a transformation or a breakthrough to materialize, a West German-style wholesale revamping of Pakistan's polity and society to empower moderate forces will be needed.

The Obama Administration should involve the United Nations and think of creative ways such as international custodianship for Pakistan to be de-jihadized and readied for peace with both India and Afghanistan.

Peace between Pakistan and India will not "break out" suddenly or easily. Franco-German conflicts subsided only after both countries paid a severe price in blood and treasure and when a reorganized Germany realized the fruitlessness of territorial aggrandizement.

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