

Reconciliation in South Asia?

Strategic Insights, Volume I, Issue 4 (June 2002)

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[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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High level U.S. political engagement during the last two weeks 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 all cross-border infiltration into Kashmir by Islamist militants. India responded with a set of positive diplomatic and military steps, and also acknowledged that there was a perceptible decrease in cross-border activity from the Pakistan side. During his visit to India on 12 June, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said that Washington hoped to convert this initial positive movement into a cycle of mutually reinforcing actions that would reduce tensions and create the conditions for political dialogue. Although U.S. engagement has helped to diffuse border tension between India and Pakistan, the militaries of both countries continue to be poised for confrontation. It is now incumbent upon the leaders of India and Pakistan to maintain the momentum of reconciliation that can lead to a lasting peace in the region.

India adopted an offensive military posture toward Pakistan in the wake of the 13 December terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament, which Indian officials believe were masterminded by Pakistan-based terrorist organizations. New Delhi demanded that Pakistan put a stop to cross-border infiltration by Pakistan-based terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India. Pakistan regarded the Indian mobilization as a challenge to Pakistan's territorial integrity, and 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 effort to convince the world that the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan was different from the Indian government's fight against terrorism in Kashmir was a failure. Impelled by intense international pressure and his own apparent desire to transform Pakistan into a modern democratic state along the lines of his one-time role model, Turkey's Kemal Ataturk, Musharraf made a historic speech on 12 January 2002, in which he pledged not to allow terrorist activities to take place 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. However, Indian leaders declared that they would like to see Musharraf's words translated into action. Their apprehension reflected concerns about Musharraf's commitment as well as his capability to rein in Pakistan's domestic hardliners. The Indian military momentarily softened its offensive posture, but refused to withdraw Indian forces from the border. [2]

Following Musharraf's 12 January speech, events showed that Indian misgivings 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 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 its Kashmir office. Following these actions there was a perceptible decrease in

cross-border infiltration into the Indian part of Kashmir between February and April 2002. This trend, however, reversed again from mid- April onwards. Reports indicated that cross-border infiltration had increased, and 50 or 60 new terrorist training camps had become operational on Pakistan's side of Kashmir. [3] Terrorist leaders in Pakistan even threatened openly to disrupt upcoming elections in Indian Kashmir, scheduled for October 2002. [4]

These trends indicated, first, that Musharraf lacked control over Jihadi elements in Pakistan. His decision in October 2001 to join the international coalition against global terrorism was resented by Pakistan's radical Islamic organizations, who instigated street protests and in some cases even sent their cadres to fight against the coalition forces in Afghanistan. [5] The Taliban's defeat was a setback to these groups, but they showed no sign of giving up Jihad against the West. Despite stringent measures taken by the Pakistani government, Jihadis managed to launch several 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 the JeM abducted Washington Post correspondent Daniel Pearl; despite frantic efforts by the Pakistani government to secure his freedom, the journalist 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 crimes, the militants openly challenged Musharraf's authority, and made him appear incapable of coping with such blatant acts of defiance. Reports also suggested that renegade sections of the army and the ISI, Musharraf's own power base, were continuing to support Jihadi elements including those fighting against coalition forces in Afghanistan.

Second, by continuing to insist that terrorism in Kashmir is different from terrorism in other parts of the world, Musharraf allowed suspicions about his real intentions in the fight against terrorism to arise within the international community. His decision to join the global war against terrorism had earned him respectability within Pakistan and abroad. He used this new status to bolster his political image in Pakistan, and to strengthen his hold over the military. Now cast as a moderate and visionary military dictator, he organized a well-publicized referendum that would ensure his continuation in power for the next five years. Once this exercise met with success, 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 he was the principal backer of Taliban and Al-Qaeda organizations. There are reports that Pakistani officials resisted allied operations in tribal areas suspected of sheltering Al-Qaeda and renegade Taliban in southeast Afghanistan and adjoining areas of Pakistan. 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 allow new terrorist camps to form in the Pakistani part of Kashmir. Terrorist leaders who had been rounded up in the wake of his 12 January speech also were released. [9]

Emboldened by such concessions from the Pakistani government, and receiving guidance from within Pakistan, terrorists again struck in Kashmir on 14 May 2002. 23 people, mostly women and children, many of them family members of Indian army personnel, lost their lives in a suicide attack on an Indian army camp. [9] The Indian government reacted by enhancing its military readiness to counter terrorist acts within its territory. To show its deep resentment of Pakistan's reluctance to curb cross-border terrorism, India's government expelled Pakistan's high commissioner from New Delhi. The militaries of both countries were put in a high state of readiness for war. Musharraf's unreliability had serious implications not only for regional security, but also for the U.S.-led war against terrorism. In the absence of effective border management by Pakistan's security forces, most of which were moved to Pakistan's eastern border with India, many Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters were able to escape into Pakistan and lie dormant. [10] Furthermore, the military dispute gave Pakistan's leaders a genuine excuse to reduce their military commitment to allied anti-terrorist operations, thereby placating the domestic radicals.

Musharraf's unwillingness to crack down on terrorism against Indian targets served to encourage Islamic radicals within Pakistan, in violation of his commitments to rein in Pakistan-based terrorists. In a televised speech on 27 May 2002, Musharraf declared that there was no cross-border infiltration of Indian Kashmir from the Pakistan side. Such an emphatic declaration could be attributed either to poor information (which

is improbable) or the government's willful acquiescence to such raids. Pakistan's leaders consistently have claimed that they provided only moral and diplomatic support to Kashmiri freedom fighters and that no cross-border infiltration ever took place. Allied forces operating in neighboring Afghanistan and in parts of Pakistan, however, have been able to pick up radio intercepts originating in Pakistan that contain messages for Kashmiri militants, making it unlikely such claims will be given much credence by the international community.

Even in Pakistan, people are skeptical of their leaders' declarations of innocence. As 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] The U.S. government repeatedly asked Islamabad to end cross-border infiltration into Kashmir because it ultimately hampered U.S.-led allied operations in Afghanistan. The Pakistani president already had lost credibility with Islamic radicals by supporting the anti-Taliban alliance; with Pakistan's polity by consolidating his power through a controversial referendum; and with neighboring India through his support for Jihadis in Kashmir and the Taliban in Afghanistan. His insistence that nothing was going on despite hard evidence to the contrary lost the Musharraf government even more credibility without helping its much-vaunted Kashmiri cause. In Pakistan's continued standoff with India, even some of its traditional friends in the Arab world preferred to take a more neutral position than the unabashedly pro-Pakistan stance they had held in the past. [12]

The United States and other Western governments gladly acknowledged Musharraf's bold initiative 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-Qaeda and Taliban leaders who reportedly are hiding in Pakistan have damaged his standing in the West. People in the United States and other allied countries have not forgotten the television images of Pakistanis burning American flags, or truckloads of Pakistani militants entering Afghanistan to fight allied forces. Before September 2001, the Musharraf government had maintained that it was not supporting the Taliban or Al-Qaeda. It has become widely accepted since then, however, that the Pakistani army provided military leadership to both groups, and that the ISI actively helped these renegade organizations. Musharraf's culpability in the 11 September 2001 attacks against the United States probably has remained a dormant issue because he sided with the U.S. and its allies in October 2001. If he persists in contributing to instability in South Asia against the advice of his western allies, however, he will damage not only himself, but also Pakistan's long-term interests.

There are two possible explanations for Musharraf's inability to control Jihadis in Pakistan. He apparently is facing opposition from within his own establishment (mainly the army and the ISI) toward compromise 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 will bog the Indian army in a Vietnam- or Afghanistan-like quagmire and presumably hasten independence for the Kashmiri Muslims. Quoting various Pakistani officials, Kamran says that the infiltration of Jihadis into Kashmir is part of the Pakistan army's operational plans to trap any contemplated advance by the Indian army into Pakistan's side of Kashmir. According to Pakistani military sources, when he was Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) Pakistan Army in the early 1990s, Gen. Musharraf himself had developed operational plans that continue to form the core of Pakistan's current strategy on Kashmir. [13]

Musharraf apparently persists in seeing India as a weak and unstable neighbor, which propels him to pursue an aggressive Kashmir policy. This attitude 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 an Islamist 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]

Almost the entire international community has expressed serious concerns over the continuing military standoff between India and Pakistan. President Bush and other world leaders persistently have exhorted President Musharraf to take concrete actions to stop cross-border infiltration into India. It is evident from his recent proclamations on the subject that Pakistan's president is bowing to international pressure. As a self-styled soldier-statesman, however, Musharraf struggles to maintain a critical balance between his role as chief of Pakistan's army and his role as head of Pakistan's government. President Musharraf is obligated to redeem the pledges he made to the international community and his own people during his 12 January address, while General Musharraf feels compelled to preserve the sanctity of his own military plans. What is at stake in this balancing act is what he perceives to be the long-term benefits for Pakistan, which include peace and stability in South Asia. His soldierly instincts so far have dictated a military solution to the Kashmir problem, and hence a continuation of his Islamist policy. Experts believe that further pursuit of such a course will be a sure recipe for regional military conflict, a danger of deep concern to the entire international community.

Musharraf's pledges to end cross-border infiltration, combined with reciprocal military and diplomatic overtures by India, have raised fresh hopes for peace and reconciliation in South Asia. It is too early to say, however, whether or not this represents a permanent shift in Musharraf's Kashmir policy, and by implication the ascendance of the statesman over the soldier. The international community, led by the United States, therefore must continue to impress upon Musharraf that it is as a statesman that he is most likely to realize his vision of a prosperous, developed Pakistan. India's continued positive reciprocation of Pakistani overtures also will help Musharraf win over the more moderate and stable sectors within Pakistan, which in turn will strengthen his resolve to take resolute action against the Jihadis.

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