

HANDLING PAKISTAN

TCA Raghavan

Special Lecture on 26 August 2020

Thank you very much Dr Paranjape for having invited me. I know about the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies for many years, have visited its absolutely magnificent premises and I am very grateful that I can join you even if it is virtually but I will take you up on that invitation of visiting at some stage. And thank you also for that very generous introduction. I also recall our days in Singapore. Thank you for referring to all my books. I look forward to this interaction with your very distinguished colleagues on a subject which is obviously of great interest and about which there is a great deal of quality knowledge so I don't have to go into too much detail. I really look upon this as an opportunity for sharing some thoughts and when one is with such a distinguished academic fraternity, it is also good to stretch one's thoughts in whichever direction they lead to. So I address these remarks in that spirit.

As you mentioned India and Pakistan relations have always been difficult. Two years later, we will both be approaching 75 years of our independent nationhoods. While in the past 75 years much has changed in our region and in the world around us but it would be true to say that India-Pakistan relations, despite brief periods of optimism have been in a state which is extremely tense, extremely fractious, and on the whole most unsatisfactory. This long stretch of bad relations with an immediate neighbor places an enormous burden on diplomacy and foreign policy which have been to bear a huge burden of frustration, cynicism, and the sense and the sentiment that there is something exceptional about India-Pakistan relations which condemns the relationship to stay in this very bad state for such a long period of time. To many persons India-Pakistan relations suffer from a kind of DNA or genetic problem. And of course, there

* Director General (DG), Indian Council of World Affairs, Sapru House, New Delhi.

is a great deal of literature on the DNA problems between India and Pakistan in terms of structural identity issues in Pakistan, a chronic, cartographic anxiety, etc. There are thus structural issues quite apart from the more obvious territorial issues such as Jammu and Kashmir. So, I will begin questions of whether there is almost a kind of predisposition to a deeply sub-optimal relationship between India and Pakistan. In my view we should resist the temptation to sink ourselves into a kind of India Pakistan mythology of bad relations but instead look at the world around.

When you look at the world around us, you realize that poor relations between neighbouring countries is not an exception or something unique. If you look at the situation, today you have a major situation developing between Greece and Turkey and even within ASEAN, an issue between Malaysia and Philippines has flared up over Sabah. Many people may not know about this. Nevertheless, for Malaysians and Philipinos, it is a deeply emotional and divisive issue. You have the case of Israel and some of its Arab neighbours, North and South Korea, Japan and China and there are numerous other examples of difficult neighbouring country relationship. The first point to understand, therefore, is that the most challenging issue for any country's diplomacy is neighbourhood and related issues. So, we should not by any means sink into a kind of India-Pakistan exceptionalism that there is something totally different about us or a predisposition to a bad relationship with a major neighbor. The point is that neighbouring country relationships are difficult, the challenge of diplomacy, the test of diplomacy is how you manage those differences. Now, by no means should one try to minimize the difficulties involved since the other peculiar thing about neighbouring country relationships is that you cannot address them in a linear fashion and expect results. So, there is no silver bullet or there is no easy magic solution. It is not as if India and Pakistan suddenly start trading more with each other, if trade increases, then political differences will disappear. The world doesn't work like this. We have a huge amount of trade with Nepal but that does not mean that we do not have difficult relations from time to time with Nepal. Japan and China have a large trade and investment, turnover, enormous people to people contact in terms of tourism and so on but I doubt if you can say that they have overcome the history of their own past conflicts and the strategic distrust that those conflicts have engendered and consolidated for decades. There are many other examples of this. In brief there are no easy linear solutions in neighbouring country relationships and no substitute for the hard grind of diplomacy.

I will make another preliminary observation before coming to some of the substantive issues of India-Pakistan relations. I earlier referred to a burden of cynicism, frustration and impatience. All of this has led to a sense that in some ways the problems of the present are a visitation of the past. That in the past errors were made, opportunities were missed, because of which we are saddled with a particular set of issues of Pakistan. There are many examples of this view going back to 1947 and 1948. With regard to the first war over Kashmir, Indus Waters Treaty, the Shimla Agreement, there is a sense that errors judgment but for them, opportunities were missed and these problems could have been sorted out once and for all and we would not have had to deal with all these issues which we are currently having to immerse ourselves in. I think with the lapse of time and the Shimla is soon going to be 50 years old, a certain oversimplification of issues and a stretching of facts also comes into play. However, when one goes into the details of each of these issues, a different picture emerges and you find, that in fact the interpretation which is being drawn is an oversimplification and, in many cases, totally wrong and totally erroneous. In brief, it is not as if things are the way they are today because of what happened in the past. Rather we have to closely examine the present rather than simply look back to the past to understand current situations.

With those preliminary remarks I will talk a little about the substance of India-Pakistan relations. I will look very briefly at the period we are in and at the last 20-25 years just to get a sense of where we are positioned today to try to understand where we are and what are the possibilities which exist at this point of time. If you look at the past quarter century, if we go back to roughly the early and mid-90s, in India we have had in this period six Prime Ministers, five different governments and five general elections. If I were to sum it up, I could say that virtually the entire political spectrum that exists in the country has either been in the government or has supported the then government in the past quarter century. In Pakistan, in the same period, there have been 10 Prime Ministers, five general elections and there has been a long period of military rule between 1999 and 2008. And again, as in India, virtually the entire political spectrum at some point of time has either been in the government or has been supported it.

The other feature about the last 25 years is that there has been a binary of engagement and disengagement. There are many examples of this. We are presently in the midst, deep in the midst of disengagement phase. A few years ago, we were in the midst

of engagement. So, there has been this binary of engagement vs disengagement and if we were to look at the last 25 years, this binary also has been pretty consistent. If you put this binary alongside the fact that the entire political spectrum has been party to this binary what you come up with is the fact that this engagement-disengagement binary has very deep structural roots both in India and in Pakistan.

Let me explain further. It is not as if we have moved from engagement to disengagement because of changes in government. During the tenure same government we have seen phases of engagement followed by disengagement. The first NDA government between 1998-2004, they began with the engagement, went into disengagement, went into engagement again, again into disengagement and finally ended on a high note of engagement following Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan in 2004. Similarly, the UPA government began with engagement, then after the Mumbai suburban terrorist attack there was a period of disengagement, then engagement again, the Mumbai terrorist attack of 2008 led to disengagement and finally it ended on a phase of neither engagement nor disengagement in a very uneasy kind of relationship. The current government in its first term began on a note of very high engagement. I think people tend to forget or we tend to overlook because of the poor state of relations just now as to how why a high end note of engagement the government began when the Pakistan Prime Minister was invited to the swearing in of the new government. This was optically, possibly one of the most powerful gestures you have seen in India-Pakistan history since 1947. Both Prime Ministers were consciously jumping across multiple barriers in the invitation being extended, in it being accepted and finally in the presence of the Pakistan Prime Minister during the swearing in ceremony of the Indian Prime Minister. There were all kinds of issues which were being surmounted by the fact of a largely ceremonial visit.

My point is that the entire political spectrum has participated in the process of dealing with Pakistan in much the same way in the last 25 years. I had mentioned that there have been six Prime Ministers in the past 25 years and it would also be fair to say that each of them has gone out if the way to try and address and improve relations with Pakistan. You can begin with Prime Minister Gujral to Shri Vajpayee to Dr Manmohan Singh to Shri Narendra Modi. In fact, in many ways Prime Minister Modi has probably tried harder than any of his predecessor. It is also a fact that notwithstanding all these efforts, things have not really improved which itself leads to conclusions drawn from the enormous failure which has accompanied Indian

policy initiatives. One conclusion is that if you keep doing the same thing and expect that the result is going to be different is a kind of a lunacy. This is one conclusion which is often drawn and the general view is that there is no point engaging with Pakistan because you know that a breakdown is inevitable and disengagement will follow. So why make the effort at all? And the corollary of that is you are also inviting risks by embarking upon a particular initiative. This leads to the same kind of reasoning as about a DNA problem in India Pakistan relations. It is very similar kind of debate to which that used to take place in the United Kingdom around the middle of the 20th century about Germany and Europe's German problem. After the First World War there was a view about Europe's German problem—that is something fundamental to the German character which makes for aggression. The well-known historian AJP Taylor crafted a number of epigrams about this and one of them, superficially at least applies to Pakistan also. He said:

“Every German frontier is artificial. Therefore, impermanent. And that is the permanence of German geography.”

In other words, there is a predisposition towards geopolitical aggression in Germany and you cannot do anything about it. There is a similar perception in many circles about Pakistan today and as I said its cartographic anxieties are such that it makes for a certain pattern of aggressive behaviour. If you look at Pakistan as a cartographic entity today you see artificial boundaries throughout. You have an artificial separation between Baluchistan in Iran, Baluchistan in Pakistan at the Iran-Pakistan border. You have an artificial separation between the Pathans in Afghanistan and the Pathans in Pakistan at the Durand Line. You have a boundary with China which is entirely ambiguous because of Pakistan's own stand on Jammu and Kashmir and finally you have the Radcliffe Line. You get an insight into Pakistani behaviour if you realize that the most stable border with Pakistan has today is in fact the Radcliffe Line. Everywhere else is a border which is either ambiguous or is prone to conflict. As compared to the ambiguities of the Pakistan China border, the frictions on the LOC, on the Durand Line and on the Iran Pakistan border. The most stable border that Pakistan has today is in fact the Radcliffe Line or the international border between India and Pakistan which, totally stable and controlled on both sides and because of that it is entirely peaceful.

So where does that leave you today? One thing which is very clear is that whatever else may change your neighbours will not change

and that is the one stable marker that you have. The second stable marker is that your region will also not change and the region has a huge influence on your neighbourhood. If you look at the history of India-Pakistan relations in the last 30 years you will realize that there are certain seminal events in the region which transformed the bilateral relationship; 1979 was one such year. The year saw the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the beginnings of Islamic radicalism in Saudi Arabia because of the takeover of the Grand Mosque by radicals and a decisive setback for the forces of democracy in Pakistan with the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. All these factors happened in 1979 in our immediate region. Alongside there were other major changes were taking place with the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States, the beginnings of the rise of China as an economic and military power etc. If you come 10 years later to 1989-1990, again you see cluster of changes in our region which have an immediate impact on India-Pakistan bilateral relationship which is the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the coming down of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, and finally the beginnings of the Pakistan led insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir with the eviction of the Kashmiri Pandits from Srinagar which began in end 1989 – January 1990. It does not require a very deep analysis to see the connections in the events. Now these are all regional developments which have had a great impact on your bilateral relationships. So, in brief when we look at the future ahead the only stable markers are that your neighbourhood is going to remain the same and secondly your regional environment is going to have a great impact on your neighbourhood.

Today when you look at a post-Covid world, hopefully so, while we know that at some stage this virus pandemic will come to an end, it will have a devastating impact on economies and on the global economy. There is alongside the rise of second global hegemony in the form of China and a further consolidation of the Pakistan-China concert. Each of these factors are going to have an impact on bilateral relationships and therefore we have to think about how we are going to deal with our neighbor in the period ahead. Do you have any readymade template for this? Because this neighbouring country relationships is difficult it will have to be therefore viewed both in tactical terms or what the military calls, kinetic terms but also in larger strategic terms and in foreign policy terms. What we have been through in the last two or three years is I think a kinetic phase of our relationship which is the action which we had to take

post Pulwama, or earlier the action we had to take after the terrorist attack on Uri – these are kinetic responses, or tactical responses. Because of an emergent terrorist threat, these are things which have to be done and are part of the numerous actions required for dealing with difficult neighbours. Does this constitute the whole of a policy? It obviously does not. Because you also need alongside a larger vision of how you are going to interface with your neighbours. And if we look at recent history you will be able to find elements of that larger vision. In the midst of a very poor state of the India-Pakistan relations, possibly one of the worst periods in the last 50-60 years, there was a breakthrough which nobody expected or planned for in the form of the Kartarpur Sahab visa free corridor. Now implementing a step like that even at the best of times would have been difficult. The fact that it was done at the worst of times tells you something about the differences between a tactical vision and a strategic vision. A foreign policy has to be made up of both these dimensions. You cannot just deal with Pakistan as an issue to be dealt with at the LOC or on the border. A Pakistan policy also requires a larger view of India not just as a country but also as a civilization. It is only as a civilization that you realize that you have intrinsic strengths which your nationhood by itself does not reveal to you.

So, I think if we are talking about addressing the issue with Pakistan, we have to combine both. This really brings me to my last point which is that we have to deal with our neighbours not just in terms of a security paradigm but also in terms of a desecuritization approach. It would be fanciful to think that you can address issues with Pakistan only on the basis of desecuritization. Obviously, you cannot as there are serious security and military issues which are embedded in that interface with Pakistan. But we have to constantly think how do we enlarge the desecuritized element in your relationship. This is something you can't do in the short term and it something you have to address without being fanciful or without suspending reality. Realism requires that security and geopolitical and aspects are in-built into your approach but my point simply is that we also have to think of the other large chunk which is the non-security or the desecuritized elements. There is no better time for doing so than today engrossed as we are all in the midst of this black swan biological event which has left even the most advanced economy and the most advanced military power with no real defences. Looking ahead we cannot predict in certainty all that will change because of this pandemic. But traditional geopolitics as we know it will continue and a new hegemonic contest is already unfolding. In the years to

come how we position ourselves in that hegemonic contest will be a real test for our foreign policy. But having said all that what is also clear is that the space for non-traditional security issues, which otherwise command a smaller part of the geopolitical spectrum, will grow. Just yesterday we had the Reserve Bank of India talking about the dangers of climate change and the grave threat which climate change poses to fiscal stability. When a central bank governor talks in language like that then it means yes you have to think much more seriously about climate change and environment issues than you were doing. So, what we can predict is that the spread of non-traditional security issues, in our interface with Pakistan may increase a little. How much it will increase, we don't know. But certainly, our effort should be to try to increase it to the extent possible without, as I said, being fanciful about it. And there are many examples of how this possibly may already be happening. SAARC which was moribund suddenly got a wake-up call and a flurry of activity because of our Prime Minister's initiative for a SAARC leadership meet on how to deal with the pandemic.

There are other examples of this. In general, we look at the non-traditional security approaches in an India-Pakistan context we find that there have been three major attempts to desecuritize India-Pakistan relations. Out of these three attempts, two have been failures as it looks right now and one has been a partial success or perhaps a reasonable success. The success was in the case of the Indus Waters Treaty as a major effort to find a non-security answer to a very contentious issue of water sharing between the upper and lower riparian states and the answer we came up with was in the Indus Waters regime in 1960. It is a very good example of you know how you expanded at that time half a century ago, the non-security part of the India Pakistan spectrum. The two failures have been firstly in the area of trade which at one stage everyone thought was the magic bullet to resolve old enmities. Our trade initiatives with Pakistan have failed so far. And another very very interesting idea which failed was the idea of energy security through an Iran Pakistan India gas pipeline. There are multiple reasons for that failure.

But my point was that you have these three major examples of desecuritizing India-Pakistan relations and out of which two have failed and one was a reasonable success so far. Are there other areas of non-traditional security where India and Pakistan should now start to think about? I think so. But the process will not be easy because many of these traditional non-security areas are contentious in the India-Pakistan context. So, issues such as addressing climate change

is difficult because climate change in South Asia is related to issues such as glacial melt. Anything to do with glaciers is geopolitical as far as India and Pakistan are concerned. Similarly, environmental pollution or groundwater levels, all of these are *ipso facto* contentious issues. There are, however some non-contentious issues also. One of these has seen a surprising amount of cooperation between India and Pakistan notwithstanding the poor relationship politically. This is true in the area of cooperation on locusts. It is very interesting and in the past 30-40 years, despite some periods of very high tension between India and Pakistan, one small niche area cooperation has gone on uninterrupted is locusts prevention. Every year around September-December which is the locusts' breeding season in Sind, South Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat, you have scientists and agricultural specialists meeting at the border regularly. This is one small niche area which has somehow managed to insulate itself from the larger negative dynamics of the India-Pakistan geopolitics.

In my sense, one takeaway from this pandemic may be that public health which has otherwise very little conflict with the traditional areas of geopolitics could possibly emerge as an area of cooperation between India and Pakistan as indeed in South Asia as a whole. How this will happen, whether this is possible in the short term or in the medium term, these are unanswerable questions presently but certainly those we should be thinking about. My point is that we cannot think about ourselves and we cannot think about India and the world without first thinking about India and our neighborhood. The Prime Minister is quite right in saying that neighbours first and neighbourhood first. In the end, whatever people may say to you in fact they judge you on how you manage your neighbors and neighbourhood. This is the unfortunate responsibility which is posed to a great power in the region. So, this is the thought I wish to leave with you.

As we look ahead in India Pakistan relations while the past is a guide, I do not think we should be bound by it. Certainly, this idea that you can deal with Pakistan at a tactical or kinetic level or security issue alone is not something which you will be able to have indefinitely or bring into conformity with the rest of your external policy.

Thank you very much again Professor Paranjape for inviting me to share my thoughts with you today. Thank you.