



## **Pakistan and the Failure of the NSA Level Dialogue**

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Pakistan pulling out of the NSA level talks, claiming that the conditions set by India for the meeting were not acceptable, shows the lack of approach and using flimsy alibi to escape commitment on the part of the Pakistani decision makers in initiating dialogue. India had stressed that it wanted terrorism to be the main item on the agenda, as agreed upon by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as per the Ufa Joint Declaration in July, where they agreed then, that their top security officials would meet to “discuss all issues connected to terrorism”. But now Pakistan has retracted and wants to discuss the dispute over the Kashmir region as well as to meet the separatist Hurriyat leaders in New Delhi during the talks, which was the principle reason, dialogue between the two foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan got cancelled last year as well.

From the very beginning of India Pakistan relations, with the dawn of Pakistani independence, initiating the process of nation-building, creating an identity of its own, separate from its larger neighbour, the Pakistani decision makers imbibed a regional security policy that was misguided by anti-Indian psyche. It gave more importance on Kashmir, building their understanding on the feeling of being duped by India and the British during partition, forcibly usurping geographical, natural, economic and strategic resources which should have belonged to Pakistan's. Such a political mentality of the Pakistani leadership seriously undermined the nation's needs of literacy, development

plans and projects and infrastructure building, which the nation was in dire need of. In view of the present domestic political instability and the ostrich mentality that the Pakistani decision makers have always adapted to it, the present failure of NSA level dialogue can be attributed to such mentality.

Pakistan in the last decade has been witness to deadliest terror attacks throughout the country, which has shaken the very fabric of the nation. The policy of state sponsored terrorism that it had adopted in the 70s and 80s has got manifested in the social sphere; boomeranging on itself; challenging not only the political machinery but also the gargantuan Pakistani defence structure. They still live in the dilemma of identifying the distinction between good and bad terrorists, where thousands of lives are lost in terrorist attacks. But when India wants to discuss on all the aspects of terrorism in a joint platform, Pakistani leadership shrugs off such a visit, in fear of being caught in the wrong foot.

Here it can be noted as well about some facts of the recent rise of terrorist activities in India. The manner of terrorist attacks that have taken place in the last one and half months shows significant lack of logistical support, professionalism and training within the terrorist groups. Amateurish planting of huge amount of RDX on train tracks, which does not explode, *fidayeen* being taken captive by unarmed hostages, who voluntarily and candidly makes statement to the press: about his nationality, his *modus operandi*, his intentions of killing as many Hindus as possible, the economic imperatives for him to join such an organisation, and his connections with other terror organisations, all shows the lack of finesse that previous terrorist attacks in Kashmir, and in the cities of Mumbai, Delhi and elsewhere bore signature of. But that does not mean that these terrorist organizations has lost their edge, and can bring significant harm to the peace and stability of the region.

One should need to assess the importance that was provided on the NSA level dialogue by Pakistan. Between 2003 and 2007, Tariq Aziz, the then NSA and secretary of the National Security Council (now defunct), and also a close aide to the then president, General Pervez Musharraf, held various rounds of talks with his Indian counterparts, first with Brajesh Mishra in the Vajpayee government and later with J N Dixit, NSA during the Manmohan Singh government. The Tariq Aziz-Brajesh Mishra talks paved the way for the January 2004 Islamabad joint statement, issued after the meeting between President

General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister (PM) Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit.<sup>i</sup> It was the same joint statement in which President Musharraf reassured Prime Minister Vajpayee of not allowing any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner. And it is clear all through, how such reassurance was flouted by Musharraf as well as his later governments. "The composite dialogue, with its eight specialised groups and expert level talks, continued till November 2008, only to be interrupted by the Mumbai attacks"<sup>ii</sup>, which shows how little the Pakistani leadership, gives importance to such dialogues.

The present Pakistani National Security Advisor, Sartaj Aziz, who failed to stick with the Ufa Joint Declaration cancelling the NSA level dialogue, would not have been coming to Delhi to attend such talks for the first time. He had headed the Pakistani delegation during the Kargil crisis as well, making an attempt to mitigate the tension between the two nuclear powered states. During that process of dialogue, Pakistan believed and still remains to be in a veil of self gloating that in Kargil it played a winning card. In a telephonic transcript, between General Pervez Musharraf and Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz, his then Chief of General Staff on May 29, 1999, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz stated: "Aziz Saheb (Sartaj Aziz) has discussed with me, and my recommendation is that dialogue option is always open. But in their first meeting, they must give no understanding or no commitment on ground situation."<sup>iii</sup> True to the brief given by Lt. Gen. Mohammad Aziz, then Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, made no commitment on the ground situation in Kargil, while visiting New Delhi during the Kargil crisis, completely subjugating himself to the Pakistani Army.

Aziz was also earlier in the advisory board for Operation Gibraltar against India and went against it stating that the economic repercussions will be detrimental for Pakistan, and stated to the President in the meeting, "Sir, I hope you realize that our foreign [p]olicy and our economic requirements are not fully consistent, in fact they are rapidly falling out of line".<sup>iv</sup> However, Aziz's request at that period was not given heed to. But it is clear the manner in which he has always abided by the wishes of the Pakistani Army, and this time too, it was no different.

Inviting the Hurriyat leaders was more of a strategic move to test the patience of the Indian leadership as well as to bring back the Hurriyat leadership in the forefront providing

it more relevance which it had lost recently. Sending a strong message to the Hurriyat leadership, the Indian government detained them so that such a meet would not have sufficed.

The hypocrisy of inviting and meeting the Hurriyat leaders periodically by the Pakistani High Commissioner is clear as they cancelled the 61st Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), which was going to be held in Islamabad from September 30 to October 8, 2015, by clearly stating their inability to invite the speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir legislative assembly. Delegations from Jammu and Kashmir have travelled to Pakistan before in 2007, when General Pervez Musharraf invited them to Pakistan. But the present government of Pakistan, can cancel an international summit, avoid inviting democratically elected people from Jammu and Kashmir, but can jeopardize a peace process by inviting leaders of separatist groups. It shows the lack of will to have any dialogue that would bring peace between India and Pakistan.

Instead of identifying the challenges that ISIS and Al Qaeda presents itself as a credible threat for the nation, Pakistan has blamed India and its intelligence agencies of instigating violence and terror in the different provinces of Pakistan. Pakistan is also going through serious domestic turbulence, which includes sectarian political conflict, rise of political assassinations, major child sexual abuse cases that has recently surfaced, the growing tension between the civilian political leadership and the Pakistani Army and growing consensus against the ruling government. Prime Minister Sharif, also has refrained from making any statement regarding the failure of the NSA level dialogue.

Pakistan needs to understand that sponsoring terrorist, separatist and extremist groups are going to bring them more instability and disarray within their own country in the future. It needs to take concrete steps in tackling such menaces rather than making distinction between them. Only then, India and Pakistan should seriously discuss more on initiating dialogue to find ways of sub-regional integration, that might ease the process of creating a better environment to converse on lingering issues, making an attempt to walk towards a period of detente than aggressive posturing, which is detrimental to the entire region.

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## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Muhammad Faisal, "Talks and terrorism", *Daily Times Pakistan*, August 20, 2015,

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/20-Aug-2015/talks-and-terrorism>

<sup>ii</sup> Muhammad Faisal, "Talks and terrorism", *Daily Times Pakistan*, August 20, 2015,

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/20-Aug-2015/talks-and-terrorism>

<sup>iii</sup> Telephonic Conversation between Lt. General Mohammad Aziz Khan and General Pervez Musharraf, May 29, 1999, Appendix 2, Gen. VP Malik, *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2006), p. 412

<sup>iv</sup> Sartaj Aziz, *Between Dreams and Realities: Some Milestones in Pakistan's History*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 408