

Indo-Pak DGsMO Meeting: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

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In the backdrop of repeated ceasefire violations on the Line of Control (LoC), the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGsMO) of both the countries met on the Pakistani side of the Wagah border on December 24, 2013. According to the joint statement issued after this interaction¹, the meeting took place in a cordial, positive and constructive atmosphere. While that is heartening, the outcome of the meeting is a grim reminder of the fact that, at times, agreeing to talk can, in itself, sometimes be an achievement of sorts when it comes to the relations between the two countries.

According to the joint statement both the DGsMO showed commitment to maintain the sanctity of, and ceasefire on, the LoC and agreed to re-energize the existing mechanisms; consensus was developed to make the hotline contact between the two DGsMO more effective and result oriented; it was decided to inform each other if any innocent civilian inadvertently crosses the LoC in order to ensure his/her early return; it was agreed that two flag meetings between brigade commanders will be held on the LoC in near future; and, finally, both sides reiterated the resolve and commitment to continue efforts for ensuring ceasefire, peace and tranquillity on the LoC.

Shorn of its rhetoric, the only tangible outcome discernible from the joint statement is the agreement on staging two flag meetings at the LoC. Even this tangible outcome could eventually result in an intangible outcome. Ironically, the same day the DGsMO were meeting at the Wagah border, the Defence Minister of India informed the *Rajya Sabha* in reply to a question that there had been 196 ceasefire violations in 2013 till December 15, as against 96 in 2012. This information was already outdated as by that time another ceasefire violation had taken place on December 20, 2013 - just four days before the meeting of the DGsMO². It would be naive to expect that the meeting of the DGsMO will change the circumstances in which the ceasefire violations had been taking place throughout the year. To think otherwise would beg the question why the meeting was not arranged earlier if such a meeting had the potential of restoring the ceasefire.

In fact, there are some questions that need to be asked anyway. Why did the situation worsen to the extent that the DGsMO had to meet to affirm their commitment to maintain

1 E Pakistan News December 24, 2013: Pakistan, India DGMOs release joint statement at LoC

<http://enews.epakistan.com/101-pakistan-india-dgmos-release-joint-statement-at-loc/>

2 'Pak violates ceasefire, targets Indian posts on LoC', The Times of India, December 20, 2013

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-20/india/45416433_1_ceasefire-violation-indian-posts-bsf/

the sanctity of, and the ceasefire on, the LOC? If the DGsMO had been talking almost every week over the hotline³, why did the situation deteriorate to the extent that they had to meet face-to-face to evolve a consensus to energize the existing mechanism and to make the hotline contact between the two DGsMO more effective and result oriented? Has it not been a part of the existing understanding to inform each other when some innocent civilian crosses over to the other side? Why did it take three months for the DGsMO to meet after the prime ministers of both the countries agreed for such an interaction in New York in September when the tension on the LoC was at its peak? And, why did it have to wait till this meeting took place for the way to be paved for two flag meetings to be held on the LoC? These questions cannot be lost sight of amidst the bonhomie created by the meeting.

This is not to run down the effort made by both the countries to restore sanity along the volatile LoC. It is a sign of maturity that both sides have expressed satisfaction over the outcome of the meeting and, at least for the present, the situation seems to have been brought under control. The lament, however, is why the Indo-Pak dialogue has to remain perpetually mired in one-step-forward-two-steps-back syndrome? To put not too fine a point on it, why should the dialogue get disrupted so often, only to be resumed after a debilitating hiatus and without achieving anything? Why are the gains made occasionally after a constructive round of discussions allowed to be frittered away so easily? These questions are baffling, considering the fact that there is a huge constituency for peace in both the countries.

One important factor in the Indo-Pak relations is the comparative strength of the peace constituency in both the countries. The constituency favouring peace with India seems to be growing more rapidly in Pakistan, cutting across the social strata, than is apparently the case in India. There have indeed been some perceptible changes in Pakistan. In the last twenty years since KK Aziz's 'The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan' hit the stands, there has been a significant churning in that country about the school curricula which depicted Hindu India as the biggest enemy of Pakistan. There is a growing realisation that the wars the two countries fought were not the result of naked aggression by India. There is a more objective appreciation of what happened in Kargil in 1999. In the current narrative, India's short term culpability in 1971 is balanced by Pakistan's long-term culpability⁴. Some retired officers of Pakistan Army and Air Force as well as the Pakistan Foreign Service have been talking about India not being the primary threat to its existence.

This thinking seems to have percolated down the social hierarchy. The demand to rename the Fawwara Chauk in Lahore as Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chauk has a large support⁵. The Indian TV soap operas continue to be popular despite opposition to their being telecast in

³ 'A wider dialogue', Editorial in The Indian Express, New Delhi, December 25, 2013

⁴ Khaled Ahmed, 'Pakistan, 1971', The Indian Express, **December 26, 2013**

<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/pakistan-1971/1211794/>

⁵ Mohammed Wajihuddin, 'Bhagat Singh sparks a new revolt in Pakistan', The Times of India, December 22, 2013

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-22/deep-focus/45472969_1_shadman-chowk-extremists-farooq-tariq

Pakistan⁶. The success of *Dhoom 3*, which has set a record in box-office earnings in Pakistan and beat the record recently set by the Pakistani movie *Waar*⁷, demonstrates how it is becoming less and less relevant for the common folk in Pakistan whether what they enjoy comes with an Indian tag or a Pakistani tag.

One of the planks on which Nawaz Sharif fought the last elections – and won – was the promise to promote peace with India. This should put to rest any doubts about the growing constituency in Pakistan for making peace with India. In contrast, the constituency in India is stagnant, confined as it is to occasional conferences attended by the elite, occasional clamour by cricket fans for restoring cricket ties, viewers who talk nostalgically about the Pakistani stand-up comedians appearing on Indian TV channels, those who savour the Rahat Fateh Ali Khan numbers and a select group of peaceniks. A groundswell of opinion, which is a pre-requisite both in India as well as Pakistan for any lasting resolution of the bilateral issues, is yet to acquire a critical mass in India.

Three factors seem to be responsible for this. First, unlike Pakistan, the Indo-Pak relations do not evoke the same sentiments throughout the length and breadth of India. The issue is more or less confined to the northern and western parts of the country. This hinders formation of a critical mass of public opinion across the entire country. Two, there is preponderance of opinion makers who advocate suspension of talks every time something terrible happens and argue that the dialogue must resume only after some concrete steps are taken by Pakistan to curb *jihadi* activities. Display of self-righteousness and spewing venom is going to lead us nowhere. This is a self-defeating approach as the dialogue invariably resumes after a prolonged break without any of the conditions being met by Pakistan. Three, the nature of the problems besetting the two countries is such that any forward movement would require India to show greater and perceptible accommodation – be it the issue of Siachin, Sir Creek, cross-border trade or the more contentious issue of Kashmir itself. Not much of an effort has been made in India by those who have long been involved in parleys between the two countries to soften and build public opinion in India that would view any peace deal with Pakistan with equanimity.

There *is* no alternative to a dialogue to resolve the issues. It will be a folly to think that peace can prevail only after all opposition to the moves aimed at bringing about peace between both the countries vanishes completely.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.

⁶ 'Pak audiences want Indian content', The Times of India, December 19, 2013

http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-12-19/news-interviews/45339313_1_indian-films-foreign-films-pakistani-films/

⁷ 'After India, 'Dhoom 3' breaks box office records in Pakistan', The Hindu Business Line, December 25, 2013

<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/after-india-dhoom-3-breaks-box-office-records-in-pakistan/article5500562.ece>

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