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## **HOW INDO-PAK TALKS ARE DOOMED TO FAIL**

**By Dr Brahma Singh**

The Indian delegation to the Indo-Pak talks, recently held at Lahore, is back in India, disappointed and demoralised, after the failure of the much touted talks. So demoralised, in fact, that its leader, Minister for External Affairs, SM Krishna, threw diplomatic probity to the winds and berated his own Secretary Home, GK Pillai, for making an ‘untimely’ adverse comment on the role of Pakistan’s ISI in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, which, he thought, could have contributed to some extent towards the failure of the talks. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, SMS Qureshi, who was wholly and solely responsible for the failure of the talks, must have been greatly relieved at being absolved - even if partially - of his role in their failure. Frustration and demoralisation at the failure of the talks is not, however, confined to the Government circles only. It is glaringly wide spread in the country.

Disappointment over a failure is directly proportional to ones expectations - higher the expectations greater the disappointment. In the present context the nation’s expectations, whatever the reasons, had been rather high and hence the present disappointment. Viewed in the light of the recognised tenets of political science, however, there would appear to be nothing surprising about the recent Indo-Pak dialogue collapsing under its own weight.

In terms of political science, India’s eagerness for talks with Pakistan would appear to be an effort towards establishment of preconditions for permanent peace with that country through accommodation with diplomacy as its instrument. In itself the effort would appear to be most laudable. Where things seem to have gone wrong is in the actual practice of the art of diplomacy.

While the primary objective of Diplomacy is the promotion of national interests through peaceful means, the means at its disposal for achieving its objective are three viz persuasion, compromise and threat of use of force. The art of diplomacy lies in the correct assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the nation being dealt with and the employment of one, two or all the three means at its disposal in appropriate measure for maximum effect. Quite obviously, persuasion and compromise will work only when the stakes involved between the two nations are not too high and the issue of peace is of mutual benefit. In that case the weaker side could

perhaps be persuaded by the stronger to toe the line with offers of substantially lucrative fringe benefits. On the other hand some minor national interests may also be sacrificed for the sake of larger ones and in the genuine interests of peace. However, in cases where stakes involved between the two nations are high, threat of use of force would have to be the dominant factor in the promotion of national interests. Needless to say, here, that a country that intends to use the instrument of the threat of the use of force must possess sufficient military strength to make the deterrent look credible.

Against Pakistan India, after catering for its other multifarious security commitments, seems to be maintaining, at best, a balance of power, with just a precarious tilt in its favour. So precarious, in fact, is the tilt that it is capable of being miscalculated and misunderstood either way. In fact, as revealed by Mr Altaf Gauhar, Pakistan's Secretary Information in the 1960s, all Pakistan's wars against India "were conceived and launched on the basis of one assumption: that the Indians are too cowardly and ill organised to offer any effective military response which could pose a threat to Pakistan". Altaf Gauhar's remarks not only reflect the contempt in which Pakistan holds India's military power but also shows how it has all along been miscalculating the precarious tilt in the balance of power to be in its own favour.

The ignominy suffered by Pakistan during the 1971 war, rather than compelling it to abjure war as an instrument of State policy, has made its hostility towards India even more ardent and resolute. It has only changed its mode of fighting from the disadvantageous open wars to the more advantageous war by proxy - for which India is yet to find an answer. The proxy war unleashed by Pakistan in Kashmir, has already lasted more than twenty years with India remaining at the receiving end all the time. The answer probably lies for India to switch over to an open war – an option that India seems to have blocked by a self-afflicted moratorium on its present military strength.

In the light of observations noted above it would appear that India has never been in the past, nor is it today, militarily strong enough as to be able to use this strength as an instrument of Diplomacy in dealing with Pakistan. Consequently India has invariably been entering into negotiations with Pakistan under the handicap of having only two means – persuasion and compromise - available to it for diplomatic manoeuvrings. Persuasion and compromise, on the other hand, cannot by themselves succeed in ushering in peace in the region for the following reasons: -

- a) The stakes involved in the dispute are very high for both the countries with no acceptable alternatives leaving little or no scope for persuasion or compromise.
- b) The peace, which India is seeking through talks, is not of mutual benefit to the two countries involved. In fact, as the sponsor of the proxy war in Kashmir and acts of terrorism in the rest of India towards the promotion of its national policy objectives, Pakistan's interests lie more in fanning the fires in India than in extinguishing them.
- c) There is no other pressure of any sort – political, economic or moral – on Pakistan, either from India or any other member of the International community, which could compel it to roll-back its aggressive plans against India. India's new found friend, United States, that could have exerted any such pressure are presently too dependent on Pakistan over the Afghan war to risk earning its ire by appearing to side with India.