



# BULLETIN

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## Resumption of Bilateral Indian-Pakistani Talks

Patryk Kugiel

*For the first time since the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks India and Pakistan held official diplomatic talks on 25 February. Although there were only limited results of the meeting, it was an important step towards full resumption of the Indian-Pakistani peace dialogue. The future of this process still depends mainly on Pakistan's policy towards terrorist organizations operating in the country and attacking targets in India. Any potential improvement in India-Pakistan relations could have a major impact on security in Southern Asia and help the task of stabilization of Afghanistan.*

**Composite Dialogue.** Following the serious crisis from 2001–2003 triggered by the terrorist attack in New Delhi in December 2001, in January 2004 the leaders of India and Pakistan agreed to start composite peace dialogue in order to return to normal relations in the long term and find solutions in the most important areas of dispute. Eight subject areas were established: peace and security (including confidence-building measures CBM), Kashmir, disputes regarding borders on the glacier in the Himalayas and in the Arabian Sea, terrorism and drug trafficking, water projects on common rivers, economic and commercial cooperation, and intensifying of contacts. Although a breakthrough was not achieved in any of these areas, continuation of talks (there were four rounds of negotiations) improved relations between the countries and had a positive effect on security in the region, and also reduced the level of terrorist activity in Kashmir.

The peace process was broken off in November 2008 following terrorist attacks in Mumbai by a group operating from Pakistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba.<sup>1</sup> India's condition for a return to talks was "dismantling of the terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan." Among its other demands were the handing over of several dozen persons wanted for terrorist and criminal activity hiding in Pakistan. Due to their interest in resuming dialogue the Pakistan authorities admitted in later months that the attack was planned and carried out partly from their territory by "non-state actors" and detained a number of Pakistanis suspected of preparing the attack. In the end the trial, which was conducted in secrecy, was formally started before a Pakistani anti-terror court in November 2009. India claimed however that the measures taken by Pakistan were inadequate, citing among other things the fact that the leader and de facto head of Lashkar-e-Taiba—Hafiz Saeed—was not among the accused.

**Attempts at Resumption of Dialogue.** The first attempt at a return to normal relations was made at the meeting of the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, Manmohan Singh and Raza Gilani, at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Egypt on 16 July 2009. It was unsuccessful, mainly due to protests from India's domestic opposition. Bilateral talks continued to be suspended but a strategy of continued isolation of Pakistan did not however bring about the expected results. The Pakistani army launched on the one hand the campaign against Pakistani Taliban forces, and on the other did not take any new measures against those groups that are organizing attacks against India. Successes in the military operations and arrests of Afghan Taliban in turn made it possible for Pakistan to improve relations with the USA and gain more influence in the region. As a result, India's further avoidance of talks with Pakistan had a negative impact on their capacity for action in the region and cooperation with other countries, namely the USA. As it was escalating its level of commitment in Afghanistan, the

<sup>1</sup> See: P. Kugiel, "Long-term Consequences of the Terrorist Attacks in Mumbai," *Bulletin* (PISM) No. 2 (534) of 9 January 2009.

US was concerned at the lack of progress being made in Indian-Pakistani relations and was putting more and more pressure on both sides to return to the peace dialogue.

**Resumption of Talks.** Although neither side officially announced the initial conditions for commencing talks, they revealed differences in their expectations. India said it would concentrate on the issue of terrorism, while the most important subject areas for Pakistan were the Kashmir dispute and use of the common rivers. The decision to hold the meeting from 12 February this year remained unchanged despite the first terrorist attack in India for more than a year, which occurred on 13 February in Pune, in which fifteen people were killed and for which a little-known Pakistani organization admitted responsibility. Indian diplomats stated that they would not allow terrorists opposing dialogue to dictate state policy, adding that in the current situation they would pay even more attention to the issue of terrorism at the meeting.

The talks were held in New Delhi on 25 February at the Foreign Secretary-level. The atmosphere at the meeting was good but it was confirmed that there was a great distance between the two countries. India raised its concerns on terrorism emanating from Pakistan and submitted additional dossiers regarding the attacks in Mumbai, the fugitives sheltered in Pakistan and anti-Indian speeches made by Hafeez Saeed. India's Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao announced that a resumption of full composite dialogue would depend upon a restoring of trust and confidence and said that the meeting was the "first step" towards that goal. Foreign Secretary of Pakistan Salman Bashir admitted that the fight against terrorism was the top priority for Pakistan, but that both countries should renew composite dialogue to resolve all of the areas of dispute, including the "core issue" of Kashmir. Other problems discussed were India's engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan's accusations that India was aiding separatists in Baluchistan. No date was set for the next meeting, and there were only assurances that the parties "remain in touch."

**Analysis.** The meeting shows that both parties return to negotiations primarily to ease international pressure and with cautious confidence in any breakthrough in the major areas of dispute. Nevertheless the mere resumption of talks should be seen as an important achievement which may in the long run be a factor contributing to a return to full peace dialogue. Both countries agree that prolonging the status quo in their relations will be damaging, and that the only way to resolve the current problems is through bilateral talks. These could concern not only the issues touched upon in the previous composite dialogue, but also new issues particularly valuable for Pakistan (for example Baluchistan and Afghanistan). In this sense the latest measures can be seen as preparations for the envisaged meeting between leaders of both countries at the SAARC summit in Bhutan in April.

The fundamental issues defining whether progress will be made in the return to normal relations shall remain terrorism and Pakistan's policy towards extremist groups accused of anti-Indian activity. The taking of decisive action by Pakistan against those organizations (for example closing their training camps) is rather unlikely in the near future. It cannot be ruled out however that Pakistan will perform single actions for the sake of appearances (for example detention of Hafiz Saeed, convictions of those responsible for the Mumbai attacks) which can improve the atmosphere in relations and allow the Indian government to justify resumption of dialogue before its domestic public. The position of the Pakistan army will be key for development of the situation. Traditionally, keeping up tension in relations with India has given it considerable influence in the country. Although the governments of both countries agree as to the need to fight terrorism, the Pakistani military and intelligence services may prefer a more ambiguous policy towards extremist organizations.

India's return to the negotiating table after a 15-month interval without significant concessions from the Pakistani authorities could be interpreted as a prestigious success for Pakistan. But this might reduce its readiness to reach compromises and lead it to demand major concessions from India in the key issue of Kashmir. This policy would probably lead to another impasse in talks and an increase in tension. Another danger that also cannot be ruled out and which could derail the rebuilding of relations completely would be another major terrorist attack in India.

An improvement in Indian-Pakistani relations would be positive for the situation in the region, particularly for stabilization in Afghanistan. In this sense this would mean an important change in the conditions in which operations are being carried out by the countries now in Afghanistan, for instance Poland. The USA is hoping that a normalization of the relations would enable the Pakistani army to concentrate more forces in the fight against the Taliban in the west of the country, making easier ISAF operations in Afghanistan. Another notable effect of this process could be the signing of an agreement allowing transit of goods from India to Afghanistan through Pakistan, which would give impetus to development of trade in the region.