

## India, China, Pakistan and a nuclear deal

*Notice that Japan is not in the export market and so is also excluded from any other nuclear deals except with the USA.*

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Proximity between New Delhi and Washington does not mean alienation with Islamabad or Beijing. I only hope that the Indo-US nuclear deal signed between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush does not cast its shadow on talks between New Delhi and Beijing or New Delhi and Islamabad.

India and China are getting closer to each other and may well be signing an agreement on the border before long. Trade between the two countries is galloping and economic ties are becoming stronger. Confidence building measures between India and Pakistan are making a steady progress. The Sir Creek dispute may be out of the way soon.

Unfortunately, both China and Pakistan have reacted adversely to the nuclear agreement. There is nothing against them in the deal, but they are drawing wrong inferences from it. China has said that New Delhi should have been a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which Beijing itself has not signed. And Pakistan wants the same type of nuclear deal which America has rejected firmly.

The first remark that President General Pervez Musharraf made after the agreement's announcement in New Delhi was that China was Pakistan's "strategic partner." Probably, they are. But such phrases bring back memories of the Cold War. It would be dangerous to revive the same type of attitudes, because they have cost the humanity more than 50 years of sterile policies, mistrust and fear, apart from several bush wars and the colossal wasteful armament race.

Musharraf's irritation is not understandable because Pakistan continues to be America's ally, the point which Bush underlined while in India. He applauded Pakistan's role in fighting terrorists, although he wanted Pakistan to do more. Some 120 terrorists were killed on the Waziristan-Afghanistan border within a few hours of Bush's visit; it was as if he had only to order and Islamabad was ready to deliver.

Musharraf himself said in a television interview that he was "satisfied" with the outcome of Bush's visit and that Pakistan's needs were different from India's. But words like the "strategic alliance" suggest some sort of confrontation. Alliance against whom? All the three have waged wars against one another. India and China fought in 1962 and India and Pakistan in 1948, 1965 and 1971. What did they gain from hostilities?

They had to sit across the table to sort out the same problems which had provoked them to go to war. Today they can decimate one another if any one of them opts for war as an instrument to settle the problems they face. There is no alternative to peace. They should have learnt that lesson by now. Both New Delhi and Islamabad, after years of talks, open and secret, have found no meeting point.

People-to-people contact has helped and there are now more channels for meeting than before. However, Pakistan is not willing to have free trade before Kashmir is settled. This is a wrong approach, because economic ties would have forged closer relations and created better atmosphere. Pakistan will be amazed to know how opinion in India is veering round to a sort of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, provided the problem is

settled once and for all. Since America has said “no” to mediation again, Islamabad should come out of the box and present a solution which does not give New Delhi the impression of territorial adjustment in Kashmir.

On China, I know we are discussing “substantial” points on how to draw a permanent border. India seems to be willing to accept China’s claim over Aksai Chin which New Delhi did not concede when Beijing vainly argued before the war that the Aksai Chin was the only link between Sinkiang and the rest of China. What is stalling the agreement, I am told, is Beijing’s insistence to have a foothold in Arunachal Pradesh. (Arunachal’s Assembly speaker was never given a visa by China.)

Defence minister Pranab Mukherjee has already postponed his visit to China. Probably, Beijing wants to know how far New Delhi has bought America’s thesis that India can be a counterweight to China. Unfortunately, this is the thesis which the US administration proposes to sell to its Congress to get the approval for the nuclear deal. The counterweight theory is, however, far from the minds of India’s policymakers.

But, ideologically, both countries are so apart that their interests are bound to collide in South Asia some day. The two “giants,” as Jawaharlal Nehru predicted, would clash one day. America’s reading too is on these lines. One clash has already taken place. Whether it can recur or not, depends both on New Delhi and Beijing.

Pakistan is sore that it did not get the same nuclear status as India has. But Islamabad should have known that Washington was using the deal to have a breakthrough with New Delhi relation-wise. American economic interests, the cartels in both the countries feel, coincide with India’s needs. New Delhi may want to go slow, but Washington’s pressure will be relentless, particularly when both the reactors and the fuel for civil nuclear energy are going to come from America. Even these reactors will earn America a lot of money.

Many years ago, a Pakistan foreign secretary told me that the way to reach Beijing was through Islamabad. Pakistan would do better if it were to go to New York through New Delhi. But India would first need to see that the training camps for the jihadis are dismantled and the ISI plan on infiltration is jettisoned as an option. Cross-border terrorism, even Bush was convinced at Delhi, remained one of the planks of Pakistan’s policy towards India. Terrorism, in fact, is withholding New Delhi’s response to Musharraf’s offers on Kashmir.

Bush’s statement that it was for the two countries to sort out the Kashmir problem, with America’s assistance if required, has not been to the liking of Pakistan. For the religious parties, the statement was such a disappointment, that Qazi Hussain of Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal said Musharraf’s request to Bush to help resolve the Kashmir issue was “a mistake,” because America would never play a neutral role. If so, where does Islamabad go? Maybe, that is the reason why Musharraf is stating that Kashmir is a bilateral issue.

I want to revert to my earlier argument: why can’t Delhi, Islamabad and, for that matter, Beijing develop a common understanding, independent of Washington? All three countries have a growth rate of more than eight per cent. All three have millions of poor people who are getting poorer day by day. All three are natural partners because they have suffered at the hands of imperialism and have been able to free themselves on their own. All three countries should realise that they only have to shed hostility towards one another to become friends.