Security Beyond Survival

Essays for K. Subrahmanyam

Editor

P.R. Kumaraswamy

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Indo-Pak Track II Diplomacy: Building Peace or Wasting Time?

Stephen Philip Cohen*

It has been my privilege to know Subbu for over 30 years; it has been my burden to have to 'explain' him to American friends for nearly that long a period. No other Indian has made such an impact on American officials, scholars, and participants in strategic dialogues between our two countries.

Invariably, some of the Americans did not 'get it'. I have heard Subbu described as anti-American, a Soviet agent, and India's Dr Strangelove. I've had to explain to my fellow-Americans that Subbu was none of these, but he was a staunch Indian nationalist who put Indian interests, rather than American ones, at the top of his agenda. Since this agenda was pursued with a formidable intellect, an unequalled mastery of facts, and a sense of humour that was not always apparent when viewed across the culture gap (most Americans expect their counterparts to be deferential and receptive to American proposals), our encounters with Subbu tended to be memorable. For many Americans India was Subbu. He might have persuaded more of his dialogue partners by shading his views—but then he would not have been Subbu.

Now the gap between America and India is closing, and Subbu's views are not that far apart from those of many Americans. We find ourselves in uncommon agreement, which makes me anxious for it was through the friction of dialogue and debate that he taught so many of us how to think strategically. Let us hope that the dialogue, debate, and the learning process will continue for many years.

* * *

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South Asia's unofficial dialogues, especially those between India and Pakistan, have a brief but complicated history.[1] Did these dialogues make a difference and were they worth the considerable private and public funding that supported them? Or, did they raise expectations that could not be fulfilled? Our major conclusion is that productive Track II and unofficial diplomacy has been quite rare; what shows some promise are long-term ties that bring together business and educational groups and efforts to enhance the quality of dialogues. However, all dialogues, whether Track II or unofficial, or 'people to people', are of marginal utility if the governments of India and Pakistan are uninterested in addressing a forbiddingly dangerous situation.

THE ORIGINS OF UNOFFICIAL DIALOGUE

Historically, monarchies, oligarchies, and authoritarian states had no need for private diplomacy. All emissaries were official, although some were secret. Nevertheless, there was always a diplomatic grey area involving private companies, merchants, and business enterprises. In some cases, notably during the era of European expansion, these nominally private contacts were as important as state-to-state relations; the British East India Company and its Dutch and French counterparts behaved as if they were states, creating their own armies and diplomatic services.

With the democratisation of politics, states not only had to deal with each other, they had to do so in a way that protected them from domestic criticism. Thus, secret diplomacy was a component of statecraft when politically sensitive issues were involved; keeping such contacts secret from one's own citizens was as important as keeping them secret from third parties.[2]

Secret diplomacy eventually encompassed non-officials. Democratic leaders did not trust their own permanent establishments, especially when they wanted to chart a new strategic direction. The distrust was (and is) reciprocated, as most foreign offices are wary of politicians who arrive on the scene, try to get a quick diplomatic fix, and leave a mess for the professionals to clean up.

By the turn of the last century a different form of diplomacy emerged. While special emissaries—usually distinguished private

individuals—were common, this period saw self-appointed individuals (or groups), trying to supplant the state's public and private diplomacy. This kind of unofficial diplomacy or dialogue is sometimes called Track II, but the critical difference among such dialogues is whether the participants privately report back to their respective states, and if they do, whether governments use this information for the basis of further official or unofficial contact.

Besides official, secret, and quasi-official diplomacy (recognised by the government or not), some non-official dialogues have tried to create extra-governmental links between the like-minded in the hope of creating an *alternative* to official or officially-blessed diplomacy. Some of these contacts were ideologically motivated, and the assumption was that workers, labourers, ethnic, or religious cohorts in different countries had shared interests. World War I disproved the notion of workers' solidarity, but 'people to people' diplomacy persists in the hope that common social, economic, and ideological interests will override the siren call of nationalism.

There are two other types of interactions. One consists of contacts between individuals and groups that are developed for purely professional or personal purposes. These may or may not acquire strategic importance. Businessmen, students, intellectuals, religious leaders, and journalists of different states may thus meet for purely professional reasons, but their meetings sometimes turn out to have larger political implications. This was the case of 'ping-pong' diplomacy between the US and China, and to some extent, the 'cricket diplomacy' between India and Pakistan—when President Zia came to India ostensibly to watch a cricket match, but really to engage in further conversations with Indian leaders.

One variation of this kind of interaction is propaganda trips by official 'cultural' delegations ranging from ballet troupes to jazz musicians, to workers, intellectuals, and farmers. These kinds of goodwill ambassadors were unleashed on the world by the Soviet Union and the US, and lesser powers, including India, emulated them.

A final type of interaction involves human rights, environmental, anti-war, anti-nuclear, and women's advocacy groups, many of whom operate globally, often with national chapters. Historically, weak claimants to power within a state often try to mobilise external support to further their goals. While some of these are 'captured' by various governments, they can, at times, help manage relations between antagonists,

or provide a forum for dialogue. For example, the Pugwash Movement, which brought together scientists and strategists from many countries, facilitated the development of nuclear risk reduction measures between the US and the Soviet Union, although it was less effective in dealing with proliferation matters. Originally viewed with hostility by both East and West, Pugwash later became a vehicle for superpower diplomacy as well as an independent source of ideas. Washington and Moscow also used other dialogues between scientists and intellectuals to explore ideas and strategies, especially in the management of nuclear weapons.

To summarise, there are many ways in which states interact besides formal, conventional diplomacy. There may be secret diplomacy by officials, secret contacts by non-officials, semi-public dialogues by non-officials, often called Track II diplomacy, and dialogues between experts and concerned citizens that seek to supplant official contacts through personal and cultural exchanges. How do these dialogues operate within South Asia and between its two major states and the rest of the world?

THE SOUTH ASIAN CONTEXT

Compared with other conflict-ridden regions, South Asia lags behind in the development of unofficial contacts.[3] Most of the India–Pakistan dialogues of the last decade echoed the pattern developed between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War and are motivated in large part by the same concern—the danger of a nuclear war. Fear, rather than opportunity, seems to be the motive, and much of the funding of these activities comes from non-regional foundations and governments.

In 1997 a Ford Foundation-sponsored study optimistically concluded that with rising levels of unofficial activity, 'non-official dialogues are beginning to generate momentum and achieve some tangible results', even though the habit of dialogue between states and between governmental and non-governmental sectors within countries was not well developed.[4] Sadly, this conclusion was premature: the years that followed the report's publication were tense and conflict-ridden, and unofficial diplomacy suffered a major setback. It was not

just the poverty of India and Pakistan, but a poverty of imagination that prevented meaningful dialogue and brought the efforts to a virtual standstill after 1998.

Beyond Boundaries listed 14 bilateral dialogues within South Asia and two involving the US (US–India and US–Pakistan). There were also 27 regional multilateral dialogues, 24 multilateral dialogues involving Europe, Japan, and the US, and four involving the UN or other international organisations.[5] What are the regional strategic and political developments that stimulated the growth of these activities?

When the two countries exchanged populations during partition, the migrants carried knowledge about each other, but their memories were bipolar. On the one hand there were horror stories of displacement and violence, and on the other, there were memories of a rich, shared culture, old friends, and even relatives left behind.

Contemporary India–Pakistan dialogues are still bedevilled by the oscillation between the opinion that the countries are so different that no accommodation is possible (often the Pakistani view), and the opinion that the two countries remain, at bottom, quite similar (an Indian view), and therefore accommodation is easy if only Pakistan's misguided elite (or its recalcitrant military) were less obsessed with India.

In the process of growing apart, the two countries developed different—and opposing—official cultures. Urdu and Hindi remain mutually intelligible in their colloquial form, but the milieu and the minds within which language lives may have become mutually unintelligible. Indians know astonishingly little about Pakistan and vice versa. The only area of some interest is that of popular culture, but this raises the concerns of the hardliners on both sides. The Pakistani *Ulema* fear Hindu cultural pollution via Bollywood films, Indian television, and even the flying of kites during the festival of Basant; and Indian chauvinists have protested visits by Pakistani cricket teams, though these India–Pakistan matches play to sell-out crowds and report very high television ratings. Both sides limit visas not so much out of a fear of spying and subversion but as part of a policy of exaggerating differences rather than reducing them. By the time unofficial dialogues expanded in the early 1980s, few states were more distant than these neighbours. During the prolonged 2002 crisis, air and ground links were severed; even after the two governments announced their restoration, there were inordinate delays.

By 1980 New Delhi and Islamabad lived in toleration of each other even though the two countries had fought three wars (one of them leading to the division of Pakistan) and the Kashmir issue was still unresolved. Both countries were on a path leading to nuclearisation. Pakistan had opened a new chapter in its relationship with the US as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, but had not yet received significant American weapons. India's Kashmir problem was still manageable, though not without problems. India undertook a massive upgrading of its forces, spurred by the expanded flow of American arms to Pakistan, internal concerns in its political and military establishment, and the willingness of the Soviet Union to sell newer and more sophisticated weapons.

Five years later, in 1986, India initiated Brasstacks, the largest military exercise in the region's history, with two contradictory results. On the one hand, it led to an important confidence-building measure (advocated by several of the private dialogues then under way), as Pakistan and India signed a treaty that prohibited attacks on each other's nuclear facilities. As part of the agreement, on the first day of every year, India and Pakistan exchange lists of nuclear installations subject to the non-attack agreement, and they did so even during the recent (2002) crisis when they were on the brink of war. The agreement means little since important data are not shared; the nuclear power plants and reactors of both states are hostage to good behaviour, and this has not prevented crisis and even low-level war.

However, Brasstacks also led to an acceleration of Pakistan's covert nuclear weapons programme and contributed to the deterioration of India–Pakistan relations. Islamabad matched Brasstacks by conducting its own mega-exercise, *Zarb-i-Momin*. It also eagerly supported a rebellion in Kashmir. This continues to the present day, providing the backdrop for one crisis after another with more to come. It also led to the conflation, in the minds of many, between the Kashmir conflict and nuclear war in South Asia. This is simplistic and many unofficial dialogues have foundered because of the complexity of both the nuclear arms race and the Kashmir problem—and their many linkages. Arguing either that the issue of Kashmir must be 'solved' before the nuclear problem can be addressed, or that nuclear weapons have made war in Kashmir more likely, and that the region must rid itself of nuclear weapons is a formula for three days of fruitless talk.

Parenthetically, Brasstacks (and the 1990 crisis, which was somewhat less serious), gave rise to their own set of dialogues and meetings in the form of several academic projects and two books.[6] A minor industry has grown up around India–Pakistan crises, with other projects adopting the methodology of the Brasstacks study, bringing together former crisis participants to explore the Kargil mini-war and the protracted crisis of 2002. Indeed, crises seem to be multiplying so fast that their chroniclers find it hard to keep up.

India bled from the Kashmir insurgency through the 1990s but Pakistan itself was in free fall with a failing economy, endemic domestic violence, and its support for the Taliban's Islamic fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan proved to be an international embarrassment even before 9/11.

Throughout this period, the thrust of American and Western policy in the region was to prevent nuclear proliferation by extending the NPT and then (in 1996) by initiating the CTBT. This produced a number of unofficial dialogues, many of them funded by American and European government agencies and foundations, including the Neemrana Dialogues, meetings at Bhurban and Nathiagali (which evolved into a young scholars workshop), and BALUSA. There was also some high level but secret diplomacy, and the first major unofficial multilateral dialogue (the 'Shanghai Dialogue') in which China, India, Pakistan, and the US explored the nuclear issue. Also, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies was established in Colombo, with a charter to promote regional dialogue and education. There was also an abortive attempt at covert Track I diplomacy, with American and Indian officials meeting in London for discussions; and this remained secret for less than a day, to the consternation of American officials.

The 1990 crisis had awakened the anti-nuclear community in the West to the dangers of a nuclear holocaust posed by these two countries. Conservatives on the right, who wanted to preserve the system of nuclear oligopoly in the world, joined the left in trying to 'cap, roll back, and eliminate' the nuclear weapons programmes of India and Pakistan.

Then in May 1998, the dam broke, sweeping away the premise of virtually all of the Western, European, and Japanese-sponsored dialogues. This premise was that South Asians could be dissuaded, via dialogue, from exercising the nuclear option, or if they did possess nuclear weapons, from testing and declaring that they were nuclear weapons states. A few months after coming to power, the nationalist

government in New Delhi conducted five nuclear tests and declared India to be a nuclear weapon state. This not only broke the existing test ban moratorium, for all practical purposes it buried the CTBT. Pakistan conducted its own tests, joining the nuclear club.

Both countries were placed under international sanctions, but the tests led to a profound revaluation of India in the US. Washington embarked on its most concerted effort to officially understand and deal with India in the form of a dozen or more talks with US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh.[7] The Talbott–Jaswant talks, as they became known, provided the diplomatic groundwork for an American review of India that ended with President Bill Clinton making a triumphant visit to India. By then there were other reasons for a new US–India relationship: the rise of terrorism in Afghanistan and the impending failure of a complicit Pakistan. The Bush Administration took the Clinton cue and elevated India to an even closer partnership. The revaluation of official ties also led to non-official dialogues sponsored by Western non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be viewed with less suspicion.

Many foundations believed that Track II and informal dialogue was a failure. Their grants and fellowships had not averted regional nuclearisation, even though their efforts were in congruity with those of the American, British, Japanese, and other governments. This reflected their exaggerated hopes for unofficial dialogue; in fact, some of their efforts may have actually strengthened the hands of Indian and Pakistani hawks, who could point to the heavy pressure as undue interference in vital national security decisions.

After the subcontinental tests, New Delhi sought to ease Western fears of an imminent nuclear holocaust by initiating talks with Islamabad. Thus began the most important known Track II dialogue of the last decade, a series of meetings between R.K. Mishra, chairman of a private Indian foundation and several Pakistani interlocutors, including former Foreign Secretary, Niaz A. Naik. This was Track II diplomacy in the sense that neither side was represented by serving government officials. They met with the knowledge of India's Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The two sides would visit each other's country under the pretext of attending a wedding or some other innocuous function. The meetings laid the groundwork for Vajpayee's historic visit to Lahore in early 1999. The Lahore summit led to a hopeful declaration and the opening of broad range of ties. However, the goodwill generated by the visit

evaporated quickly when the Mishra–Naik tie was discovered by the Pakistan army (Sharif had tried to keep it from them), and then when the Indian Army discovered Pakistani infiltrators in the Kargil region of Kashmir. India launched a highly publicised and very costly operation to reclaim lost territory, and the Kargil War became India's first televised war, rousing nationalist fervour throughout the country. When India found out, from the seized diaries of Pakistani military officers, that the Kargil infiltration was being planned even as Vajpayee was visiting Lahore, the sense of betrayal was very deep. The Kargil conflict remained limited due to good offices of the US, though in this case, Washington publicly sided with India and forced Pakistan to withdraw its troops. Kargil was followed by a military coup in Pakistan, which removed Nawaz Sharif from power. New Delhi agreed to another India–Pakistan summit meeting (held in Agra), but that failed under pressure from the growing and vocal lobby of Indian hardliners.

Track II diplomacy and most unofficial dialogues subsequently ground to a halt. People-to-people contacts were virtually suspended after Agra. Only some peace groups managed to establish contact across the India–Pakistan border, although on one occasion this contact was limited to standing on the frontier in a candlelight vigil.

Since the 1998 tests, the Kargil war, and the 2002 crisis, there has been a change in American diplomacy. Washington still nominally favours direct India–Pakistan talks, but since none has been held since 2000, it has in effect established two parallel dialogues in which both India and Pakistan talk officially and unofficially to the US.[8] The hope is that this will eventually renew direct India–Pakistan talks, but in the meantime America will pursue its diplomacy by parallel bilateralism, offering to facilitate India–Pakistan dialogue but going no further, and certainly not putting its own proposals on the table.[9]

In summary, the pattern of non-official dialogues tracked closely with India–Pakistan relations and the changing policies of the US in the region. When these dialogues began, they carried some credibility based on the positive trend in India–Pakistan relations. But as relations soured, it has required more and more external effort to get the meetings and dialogues going. Between 1990 and 1998, the anti-nuclear community in the West, which saw in South Asia a nuclear powder-keg, provided the external motivation. Now, with that battle lost they have retreated from the region, or support a limited number of dialogues to stabilise the India–Pakistan nuclear balance. Unofficial

diplomacy was undertaken under heroic circumstances, overcoming the problems associated with their lack of credibility, especially on the Indian side. In Pakistan, these dialogues were initially more fruitful as promises were made to follow India to the altar of non-proliferation. Eventually, however, these collapsed under the zero-sum nature of India–Pakistan relations.

Lastly, non-official diplomacy occurs within multilateral fora. The smaller regional states, especially Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, pushed the multilateral format to voice their own concerns, which were less about nuclear matters than with ethnic conflict and resource scarcity, particularly water issues. They were fora where these countries could press their position vis-à-vis India, without appearing to be ganging up on New Delhi. Though the most obvious multilateral forum, the SAARC has been officially moribund, the organisation has served as a core from which a large number of non-governmental institutions and networks have emerged. Among the most promising is the South Asia Regional Initiative/Energy (SARI/E), a $50 million project funded by USAID to enable energy cooperation between Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Others include specific arrangements for furthering climate change initiatives, gender and human rights, the development of law, association of media, disaster management coordination, and business. These have grown episodically depending on the availability of funding, at least some of which comes from government or quasi-government associations.

TRACK II AND OTHER CONTACTS IN SOUTH ASIA

Let us now turn to a summary evaluation of the most important Track II diplomacy and non-official dialogues in South Asia.

TRACK II DIPLOMACY: MOTIVES AND RESULTS

There are several problems with authentic Track II diplomacy and from the government's perspective, contacts with an adversary, rival, or uncertain counterpart must meet a number of tests:

(a) it must be 'serious', that is, it must deal directly or indirectly with real decision makers on the other side;
(b) it must be deniable—often the political risks of such a dialogue are tangible, governments usually want to be able to deny that real talks did take place, or that they dealt with substantive issues;
(c) it must be private, as the best way to avoid embarrassment and to back away from informal commitments made in such sessions is to keep them secret; and
(d) it must be timely, that is, geared to developments on the ground; private talks must match up with a state's own timetable of decision making and that of the other party; Track II dialogues that take place too late or too early may not be effective, and might even discredit such contacts.

Another way of viewing this is that Track II dialogues must take place when an issue is 'ripe' for new or innovative policies; that the context is such that they contribute to the process, not be irrelevant to it. But there are other reasons as well for the government's acceptance of Track II efforts. Even when an issue may not be ripe, it may be important to keep open channels of communication for, when they are needed, individuals with close government connections can interact on a regular and innocuous fashion.

Some governments have parallel decision tracks with different agencies or bureaucracies holding different policy perspectives. Track II may allow one part of the government to inch forward without requiring consensus across the board. Indeed, it may be important for one government agency to test public reception of a policy change before proposing it formally within the government. Conversely, Track II dialogues are vulnerable to premature exposure by parts of the government that do not want to move towards a real or serious dialogue. This seems to have been the case of the Mishra–Naik talks, which were sabotaged when the Pakistan Army found out about them.

Track II or unofficial dialogues may be a form of strategic deception, giving the impression of a willingness to talk; they can also be part of a strategy of inaction. This is especially likely to be the case if third parties are more eager to see a dialogue than India and Pakistan. Typically, the US, Japan, and some European nations have wanted the two countries to talk unofficially when their officials have been unable to do so. These governments and their private foundations have poured

in millions of dollars in travel, lodging, and honoraria to encourage unofficial diplomacy between India and Pakistan. Both sides have obliged by talking a great deal, yet most dialogue participants do not change their fixed ideas about critical issues, let alone try to persuade governments to review their policies. Thus, participation in many of these meetings may be enjoyable, and an opportunity to renew old friendships, and fight the battles of the past once again, but there is little impact on policy. The state's interest in ensuring that even its private citizens are kept under control is exemplified by the pressures put upon Indian and Pakistani scholars and journalists *not* to participate in dialogues at certain moments. The distinguished Indian journalist (and parliamentarian), Kuldip Nayar, has been scathing in his remarks about the misuse of unofficial dialogue by both governments and participants, and the Indian government made the point perfectly when in July 2003 it pressured a journalist and an academic into backing out of a planned conference on Kashmir in Washington, DC.

Track II diplomacy and unofficial dialogues have their critics. Some (especially in the West) have written South Asia off as a hopeless case, destined for war. Others argue that if governments were doing their job, then there would be no need for unofficial diplomacy; indeed their view of the policy process is both pessimistic and derisory. On the right, religious zealots and extreme nationalists simply do not trust the bureaucracies of their governments to protect vital national interests. Foreign offices are too contaminated by liberals or too sensitive to the concerns of other powers, especially the US. The left views foreign ministries and other state 'establishments' as elitist, conservative, and out of touch with the genuine wishes of the people. While conservatives tend to distrust the 'masses' on both sides as not really understanding realpolitik, liberals tend to assume that 'the people' want peace and that formal diplomacy circumvents the people's will. Track II diplomacy under the shadow of the government is similarly suspect.

Finally, there is a category of dialogue that resides somewhere between Track II and official talks on the one hand, and unofficial dialogue on the other. Both India and Pakistan have a number of government-funded research institutions, including the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (New Delhi), the Institute for Strategic Studies (Islamabad), and the Institute for Regional Studies (Islamabad). Such groups, were they to resume meeting with each other—or even with third countries—could be a useful channel for

unofficial talks, especially if there were officials from each country involved as participants. This practice is common in Southeast Asia, where the 'think tank' circuit is regularly joined by serving officials who participate in their private capacity. This is also a common practice among Americans; Pakistani officials have attended unofficial dialogues in their personal capacity, but it is rare for Indians.

Track II diplomacy is no panacea. It may be a way of avoiding real dialogue, which is why the interlocutors in a Track II dialogue tend to be former government officials or citizens with links to their governments. Such individuals can be trusted to stay within their brief, they can also be sent on missions which are exploratory or deceptive, without risk of compromising the reputation of serving officials. This has given rise to a number of unofficial dialogues and meetings, all of them attempting to circumvent governments seen as hidebound by tradition, excessively cautious, and not really interested in genuine peace or reconciliation.

CLASSICAL UNOFFICIAL STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

Unofficial dialogues that do not have the blessings of governments are very common in South Asia, and often involve retired civil servants, diplomats, and military brass, as well as academics and journalists, the latter often have been the delegations' most vocal members.[10] Such meetings may include third country participants such as academics, anti-proliferation activists, retired officials, and in the India–Pakistan context, individuals from other South Asian states and even from China. Most of these meetings have in the past been funded by the Western NGO sector with a view towards enabling confidence-building and nuclear risk reduction measures.

The India–Pakistan Neemrana initiative began in 1991 and lasted for six years. Twelve meetings involving about a dozen Indians and Pakistanis were held. Funded by the US government, with an American convenor, it explored nuclear, military, trade, and media issues in addition to Kashmir. It was an effort to explore whether Indians and Pakistanis could develop the kind of back-channel meetings that became part of the US–Soviet détente in the 1970s and 1980s. The superpowers had made significant progress, vetting and dissecting arms control proposals including the ABM (Anti-ballistic missile) Treaty and START (Strategic Arms Reduction Talks) and later the Treaty

on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and US-Soviet Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF) agreements that brought peace back to Europe. But the Neemrana talks never reached the point where substantive agreement was possible on any of these areas. After the American convenor fell ill, the group met once or twice but never produced a joint study or moved beyond pious generalities.[11] It, like the Shanghai initiative, discussed later, was overtaken by the nuclear tests of 1998.

The Shanghai initiative (1994–99) was a four-country dialogue, involving six to seven retired diplomats, scientists, and military officers each from India, Pakistan, the US, and China. Its focus was exclusively nuclear, and many of its Indian and Pakistani members were also part of the Neemrana group; one, Abdul Sattar, became Pakistan's foreign minister. Funded by the Alton Jones Foundation, it held four meetings, one each in China, India, Pakistan, and the US. While group conversations were straightforward and informative of each country's perspectives and priorities, and private conversations between members were quite honest and direct, and were often communicated back to their respective governments, the foundation decided that the group was unproductive.[12]

The BALUSA (knowledge) group has been organised by an American, Dr Shirin Tahir-Kheli, and has issued several public reports as well as studies of prospective areas of India–Pakistan cooperation, such as oil and gas pipelines. Now in its sixth year, it has met in a variety of locations, including the Maldives, Italy, and the US. Like the Neemrana and Shanghai dialogues, it has an element of Track II diplomacy since most of BALUSA's members are well-connected in their respective governments. Funding has been from American sources, including the US government.

Even though most of these dialogues included extremely high profile Indians and Pakistanis, they accomplished little or nothing, and over the years the hawks from both sides used the meetings to score propaganda points. Both sides also used the dialogues to show Americans that the *other* side really was intractable. There were private behind-the-scenes efforts, but given the tenor of the meetings themselves, these had to be invisible. Ultimately, failure to embark on joint projects, failure to agree on fundamentals, and failure to push any common agenda meant that the only agreement coming out of the meetings was that the situation was so intractable that future meetings

were necessary. Often, these meetings were a parody of the oft-heard joke, that 'CBM' meant 'conference-building measure', as each dialogue concluded that more study and another meeting was necessary.

There were two other specific India–Pakistan unofficial initiatives that included influential individuals. Their exchange was extraordinary because it was conducted in the realm of security and led by people implicated in the security establishments of both countries. The first was conducted under the umbrella of the Royal Indian Military College (RIMC) Old Boys Network and a new group, the India–Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace (IPSIP), enabled the second. The RIMC was a British–Indian military cadet training school located at Dehra Dun and was attended by a significant number of senior and influential officers in both militaries. Sons of British Indian Army officers, heirs of the landed aristocracy, and other elite classes were sent to RIMC in preparation for entry into the colonial army, where as the most dependable elements of Indian society they would rise to senior positions. After Independence, many RIMC old boys went to both the Indian and Pakistani armies where many reached brass positions, including rising to become service chiefs. Though the two armies fought each other, RIMC old boys retained some affinity across the border, at least off the battlefield. In 1996 and 1997, the RIMC Old Boys Network organised two exchange visits, where old friends were able to catch up after a long period.

The second group, the INSIP, was formed in Karachi in 1999 by the Pakistan Peace Coalition, which gathered retired military officers from both sides as 'soldiers of peace'. For who they are and what they aim to influence, these were remarkable exchanges, and though they may not have had a direct impact on India–Pakistan relations, they engendered greater familiarity between the two militaries, which had taken vastly different trajectories since 1947.

Perhaps the most successful South Asia unofficial dialogue was between India and Bangladesh, initiated in 1994–95. The meetings between politicians, diplomats, academics, journalists, and others were believed to have facilitated the resolution of the Farakka Barrage dispute, which had corroded relations between New Delhi and Dhaka for over two decades. The success of this effort because of its narrower mandate and more cordial relations between the countries indicates that traditional dialogues of this type need to be focused, breaking down existing disputes into manageable parts that can be negotiated

one by one. The role of the RIMC Old Boys Network and the success of the India–Bangladesh dialogue points to the next major category of non-official diplomacy, people-to-people exchanges.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE DIPLOMACY

People-to-people exchanges and 'peace activist' groups have their own dialogues, and the nuclear tests of 1998 accelerated them, as did the crisis of 2002. These include the now moribund India–Pakistan Friendship Society (started in 1987), the Pakistan–India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (started in 1994), the paired Indian SANE (an anti-nuclear group, modelled after the American 'Stop All Nuclear Weapons Everywhere') and Pakistani 'Invitation to Think' groups (also started in 1994), and the 'People's of Asia' forum (1996).

'People-to-people' diplomacy consciously *avoids* governments, although the objective may be to influence governments, and they always have a large publicity component. Designed to educate and influence the larger public in the relevant states, they are reminiscent of the mass contacts of leftist movements, and are often guided by left-liberal, anti-war sentiments.

What has become more institutionalised—and arguably with some long-term success—are the people-to-people contacts and education, training, and collaborative ventures that were enabled by the push towards non-official diplomacy. Indeed the success of these activities can be attributed to their distance from official diplomacy.

With official diplomacy stuck in unyielding positions and the official Track II also constrained by the close connections of the participants to their regimes, the greatest divergence in attitudes and preferences from the government emerges from people-to-people exchanges. Because of the vast differences in the agenda of these efforts and government policies, officialdom has been more comfortable in allowing these dialogues to continue, both to showcase the freedom of dissent allowed in their own countries and to neutralise the positions themselves in practical politics. These exchanges are driven by grassroots or civil society organisations seeking to build relationships across the border in the hope of influencing long-term attitudes and thereby affecting change in government policy. Most of these groups come from the left and carry the peace agenda. They believe that if the

resources expended by governments on war preparation could be diverted to development, both India and Pakistan would stand to benefit. Unlike the funding of traditional Track II diplomacy, however, the people-to-people contacts are usually funded indigenously—though clearly some have received support from Western NGOs with similar long-term interest. The opportunity of political action afforded to these peace activists may be cynically viewed as redirecting their energies from protesting government policies. Their association with 'the enemy' further makes the public take them less seriously than they would have if they had maintained nationalist purity.

Among the most notable of these efforts is the Pakistan–India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFD), which was started in 1994–95 as a mass-based advocacy group for peace in the region. The forum has held five conventions involving hundreds of delegates from both sides and the PIPFD has active chapters in Indian and Pakistani cities. The second major effort of this kind is the Action Committee Against Arms Race (ACAAR), which was formed in 1998 in Islamabad to develop a programme to mobilise public opinion against nuclearisation of the region and the conventional military competition between India and Pakistan. The third such group is the Pakistan–India People's Solidarity Conference, which focuses on nuclear matters, democracy, and Kashmir. In 2001, it organised a joint declaration on peace with 200 other grassroots organisations from the region. Fourth, the Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation was founded in 1994 to encourage regional cooperation through greater exchange of civil society associations. Lastly, within this group, but somewhat driven by notions of gender justice is the Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia, which is led by Indian Nirmala Deshpande and eminent Pakistani lawyer Asma Jehangir. The exchanges of these groups have attracted wide media coverage.

The peace agenda is also driven by strong developmental, gender, and human rights concerns. Thus, for instance, this category of non-official diplomacy includes the South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre, which was established in 1989–90 to keep track of human rights violations and provide human rights activists the ability to coordinate their activities. The South Asia Forum for Human Rights was set up to promote international standards of human rights and monitor their enforcement. The growing public concern with human rights led to the governments to set up statutory human rights

commissions that could investigate violations and advise recourse. Gender-driven efforts have been initiated by the South Asian Gender Network and Women's Initiative for Peace in South Asia. The Refugees and Migratory Movement Research Unit in the Department of International Relations in the University of Dhaka pursues other development-related agendas such as migration and internal displacement. There is an effort to coordinate and network for disaster relief under the banner of Duryog Nivaran.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE DIALOGUES

Finally, a number of regional dialogues, meetings, and conferences are organised for non-strategic/security purposes. They meet (or attempt to meet) economic, educational, and cultural purposes. There is no question that governments, especially in India and Pakistan, have placed obstacles in the way of such groups—they are hostage to the strategic situation, no matter how much value they might produce, or how apolitical and non-strategic the content of their meetings may be.

Business and Industry

One subset of fairly continuous non-official interactions has occurred between the business and industry associations. While official trade between India and Pakistan is negligible, unofficial trade routed through Dubai and Singapore—and in the past Kabul—is quite large. A number of highly visible meetings of businesspersons have been organised by the Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the Karachi Chamber of Commerce, Joint Business Councils and the like. These meetings may have made a marginal impact on relations between the two countries, especially when Nawaz Sharif (a businessman) was prime minister.[13] Pakistan's decision to expand its import list for India in the early 1990s was arguably the result of ideas exchanged during these meetings as well as Pakistan's democratisation, which brought into prominence Punjabi business families, which stood to gain most significantly from direct trade between the two countries.

Dialogues as Education and Training

Lastly, and perhaps most successfully, there has been growing interaction between the citizens and officials of both countries as part of education and training programmes. In the last decade-and-a-half these programmes trained a new generation of strategists and international affairs specialists across a range of ideologies. This capacity-building exercise portends the most significant long-term effect of non-official dialogues. Most of these efforts have been funded by external organisations, most importantly the Ford Foundation and others such as the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Several German and Japanese foundations have made important contributions. Surprisingly, one American government agency, the Department of Energy, has been one of the largest funders. It made a commitment, several years ago, to develop South Asian expertise in arms control. The Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratory has a Cooperative Monitoring Centre, which might be characterised as a solution looking for problems; it has brought together many South Asians to study cooperative monitoring and joint arms control strategies, complementing its work in the Middle East and elsewhere.

One of the most successful efforts was the organisation of the annual summer school/workshop on national security and arms control. The British and American organisers of the event invited young Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese scholars, journalists, and on occasion, government officials, to participate in a 10-day workshop, held in India and Pakistan every year between 1993–96, until restrictions by both countries made this impractical. Subsequent sessions were held in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and China, and the workshops have never returned to India or Pakistan.

The workshops focused on military hardware, the technology of arms control, and strategy, including the physics and engineering of advanced weapons systems. The summer workshop spawned a winter workshop which dealt with 'soft' security: ethnic conflict, resource scarcity, and environmental damage. Eventually, the organisation of both workshops was assumed by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), based in Colombo. The RCSS also awards fellowships and small research grants to individual scholars, and has networked the region's security and arms control programmes and established contacts with counterpart centres in Southeast Asia.[14]

Unfortunately, support for the workshops has declined, and they may be cancelled in 2003.

Academic Conferences and Crises Studies

More episodically, studies of crisis have brought together former government officials who might have been involved in these crises, thereby enabling oral history. There have been efforts to draw lessons from past crises in order to design mechanisms for averting future ones.[15] The most comprehensive and analytically rich comparison of peace processes in South Asia and the Middle East was conducted under the direction of Professor Moonis Ahmar of Karachi University, a recipient of grants from the RCSS.[16] New institutions have emerged from the push provided by these efforts, most notably, the International Centre for Peace Initiatives (ICPI) in Mumbai, which produced the most extensive study of Pakistan by any Indian organisation and has actively promoted discussion of cross-border trade. Outside the region, the US-based Kashmir Study Group has sponsored original research, facilitated dialogue between India and Pakistan and Kashmiris, and has put a number of interesting ideas before the public.

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS

This discussion prompts five major conclusions and an observation about the future of unofficial dialogue in South Asia:

(a) India and Pakistan have not made much use of Track II diplomacy and when they did, the results were disappointing. Perhaps both governments fear the independent actors just as they are drawn to use them to bypass their own unimaginative bureaucracies. A greater failing is their inability to use, for Track II purposes, the institutions that they *do* control, especially the various think tanks, research centres, and even their own intelligence agencies. These may be slightly more trustworthy than private efforts or dialogues funded by outside states or foundations. Using these institutions runs some risk: in some cases officials who allowed dialogues to get out of

hand have been disciplined, and intelligence agencies are always suspect until proven otherwise. Nevertheless, giving their own think tanks and strategists more latitude might improve the quality of regional dialogue (when and if it returns to normal). It would certainly improve the quality of dialogue with other states, some of which have found the 'official' dialogues to be unproductive.

(b) As for dialogues which are non-official and those funded by non-regional sources, they need to be more purposeful and their time-frame must match regional needs, not the whim of a programme officer or the availability of unexpended funds. Most of these dialogues wind up being one-shot talk fests; while enjoyable and diverting they tend to be a waste of time and money. Two models for sustained dialogue present themselves: one is Balusa, whose failure to show results is more a function of regional tensions than conceptual shortcomings. The other model is the Kashmir Study Group. While not an India–Pakistan dialogue, it has made an impact through studies, meetings in India, Pakistan, and outside the region, and contacts with government officials in a number of countries. The KSG has become the gold standard for reasoned discussion and the development of new and creative ideas; and it also has the advantage of being able to contribute to a wider understanding of the issues.

(c) South Asia needs more discussions of technical issues that improve regional expertise, especially in the area of nuclear technology. To some degree the ill-fated Neemrana dialogue was moving in this direction—it had military, economic, and political expertise, and had added journalists to its membership. A revived Neemrana, with specific project goals, with or without a foreign facilitator, might be useful in exploring prospects for cooperation or even unilateral steps, that would promote trade, reduce the risks of accidental nuclear detonation or war, and address the issue of Kashmir. Such a group should not attempt to cover all problems, but should focus on one issue. Balusa's recent study of pipelines is a model of its type.[17]

(d) Enhancing the expertise and capabilities of younger generations of Indian and Pakistani experts and strategists is extremely important. If the region can avoid catastrophe, and

if the political circumstances permit, the *next* generation will be called upon to grapple with extremely complex technical and political issues. This is one area where South Asia has surpassed many other regions, and the RCSS workshops on arms control and non-military conflict are superb examples of a low-cost, intense programme aimed at this generation. They have the added benefit, now that they are in their ninth year, of developing regional and national informal alumni associations. Continuing these dialogues should be RCSS's highest priority.

(e) While Track II diplomacy may be the last refuge of a desperate political leadership, people-to-people diplomacy is often the last resort of angry and frightened citizens. As the region's crises grew in amplitude and frequency, these people-to-people dialogues multiplied. Many are naïve, all are dismissed by hardliners on both sides of the border, but they represent an important dimension of South Asia—one does not see spontaneous people-to-people diplomacy by the Chinese, the Saudis, or by citizens of a dozen other wealthy but unfree states. Instead of denigrating them, the governments should be more attentive to NGO efforts. Alas, the mindset in official India and Pakistan is that of the British Raj—reflecting a situation where the people are more democratic than their elected governments. The region's dangerous position suggests more, rather than less NGO diplomacy, and India and Pakistan should be held to their own public commitments to the free movement of ideas and people.

THE DANGEROUS ROAD AHEAD

The uncontestable fact is that the Indian and Pakistani governments share the honour of being the greatest obstacles to effective unofficial dialogue. New Delhi's haughty disdain, and the Pakistan' army's faith in force as a means of promoting dialogue, effectively mean that no Track II or unofficial dialogue will amount to much. In the words of *Beyond Boundaries,* 'the Indian government has not played a strong leadership role in promoting bilateral or multilateral dialogues in the region'.[18] The same could be said of Pakistan. This disinterest is

especially striking when compared with Indonesia's approach to ASEAN after the *confrontasi* period and the subsequent Indonesian and Chinese willingness to participate actively in the quasi-official Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).[19]

The authors of *Beyond Boundaries* wrote that official and unofficial diplomacy and dialogue are mutually supportive, but that without pressure from below 'track one is not likely to move at all'.[20] Again, this is a polite way of saying that the governments involved do not want to move, that they are content with the present arrangement whereby they dominate (and control) contacts between their citizens.

From a friendly foreign perspective, India and Pakistan are heading in the wrong direction—digging themselves into a deeper hole. While India's recent economic achievements have been significant and its democratic system—for all of its flaws—seems able to contain new and disruptive forces, the dream of an Indo-centric security system in South Asia is still beyond reach, although India operates in a far more dangerous environment. Part of that danger stems from a Pakistan that, while economically enfeebled and confused about its identity, remains capable of hurting India through its nuclear capability and wounding it over the Kashmir issue.

Ironically, the problems of each state give credence to the views of the hawks on both sides that they only need to wait a bit longer for the other side to collapse, and India–Pakistan relations describe a perfect hurting stalemate. There is some resemblance to the Cold War, where both sides endured decades of crisis and a terrific arms burden, until the Soviet Union crumbled. The obvious parallel in South Asia would be the decay and collapse of Pakistan, except that too many states, including India, would face catastrophic risks if Pakistan collapsed. Indian expectation that the rest of the world would mange a 'soft' landing for a decaying Pakistan is nothing but wishful thinking and a gamble on the future of India as well as Pakistan.

As I and others have argued, South Asia needs a peace process that would avert these apocalyptic scenarios and permit a negotiated settlement to the Kashmir conflict as well as a joint approach to the problem of stabilising regional nuclear forces and preventing an all-out arms race. Unofficial diplomacy would be an essential component of such a peace process, but cannot substitute for it, nor can it be a substitute for the determination of sovereign states to address these issues.

POSTSCRIPT, FEBRUARY 2004

In 2003, Brajesh Mishra, India's National Security Adviser and Tariq Aziz, a senior civilian adviser to President Pervez Musharraf engaged in intensive back-channel diplomacy. Their secret talks led to the successful meeting between Musharraf and Vajpayee during the January 2004 SAARC meeting in Islamabad. This held out the promise of expanded road, rail, and air contacts, people-to-people exchanges, a new look at regional economic cooperation and even a discussion on Kashmir.

Subsequently, a number of unofficial dialogues sprang up, including a revival of the Neemrana group, a visit of high-level Indian businesspersons to Pakistan, and the prospect of cooperation between Bollywood and Lollywood—India's and Pakistan's film studios in Mumbai and Lahore respectively.

A notable feature of both the back-channel official talks and the summit meeting in Islamabad was that each side was cautious in its public statements. This demonstrated that genuine diplomacy was possible between them, rather than the diplomacy-by-press-conference that had characterised earlier summits. This change in style and method is just as important at this stage as any changes in substantive positions. It also put Track II diplomacy and unofficial dialogue in proper perspective. These can be useful and even vital, but they are no substitute for government-to-government exchanges. While the prospects for a settlement of Kashmir still seem remote, it would be a major accomplishment if India and Pakistan could get through the remainder of 2004 without another crisis, and even more remarkable if they can sustain unofficial dialogues that prepares the way for a settlement of the Kashmir problem(s) that is acceptable to Indians, Pakistanis, and the Kashmiris themselves.[22]

NOTES

1. For overviews see Sundeep Waslekar, *Track-two Diplomacy in South Asia*, (University of Illinois Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security [ACDIS], second edition, October 1995), and Navnita Chadha Behera,

Paul Evans, and Gowher Rizvi, *Beyond Boundaries: A Report on the State of Non-official Dialogues on Peace, Security, and Cooperation in South Asia* (Toronto: York University-University of Toronto Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies, 1997), and Navnita Chadha Behera, 'Overview of Non-official Dialogues in South Asia' (unpublished MS., 2001).

2. For a pioneering study of secret diplomacy in the Middle East see Aharon Klieman, *Statecraft in the Dark: Israel's Practice of Quiet Diplomacy* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies Series no. 10, 1988).
3. For an Indian diplomat's survey of non-official diplomacy see Kishan S. Rana *Bilateral Diplomacy* (Geneva: Diplo Handbooks, 2002).
4. Navnita Chadha Behera et al., *Beyond Boundaries*, p. 14.
5. Ibid.
6. On *Brasstacks* see Kanti Bajpai, P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Stephen P. Cohen, and Sumit Ganguly, *Brasstacks and Beyond: Crisis Perception and Management* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), and for 1990 see P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Cheema, and Stephen Philip Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 1990* (London: Routledge, 2003).
7. Talbott, now President of the Brookings Institution in Washington, is in the process of writing a book about these talks.
8. These now include parallel dialogues between the National Defence University of Washington and counterpart organisations in India (IDSA) and Pakistan (National Defence College).
9. This was repeated by the then Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, just after President Musharraf made a lengthy plea for American sponsorship of a 'peace process' in South Asia. Press Trust of India, 28 June 2003.
10. The term 'delegation' is often used to describe the participating sides; it implies an official link, even where there was none. In many of these dialogues, former government officials continue on as if they were still in government; not a few have found 'formers' from both sides again sitting across the table from each other, now professing an earnest desire to bring peace to the region. As one journalist-participant commented after witnessing the effusive professions of peace and goodwill from former Indian and Pakistani officials, 'perhaps we should extend the age of retirement, since all of these gentlemen seem to have discovered peace and reconciliation only after a certain age'.
11. Neemrana was funded by the United States Information Service and its convenor, Paul Kreisberg, was a former US official. Its ground rules prohibited publicity and its members never could agree on a joint statement or project.
12. Several years later (in 2001) the foundation reorganised, closing down its security and arms control activities, thus removing a major source of funding for unofficial dialogue.
13. Unofficial and illegal trade flourishes, and one consequence of official constraints on the various chambers and economic groups is the growth of criminals and smugglers who manage this trade.
14. See, for example, Dipankar Banerjee, (ed.), *South Asia Security Futures: A Dialogue of Directors of Regional Strategic Studies Institutes* (Colombo: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 2002).
15. For example, Kanti Bajpai et al., *Brasstacks and Beyond* and P.R. Chari et al., *Perception, Politics, and Insecurity*. Professor Peter Lavoy of the US Naval Postgraduate

School organised a series of conferences and meetings dealing with the Kargil mini-war.

16. Moonis Ahmar, *The Road to Peace in South Asia: Relevance and Irrelevance of the Middle East Experience* (Karachi: University of Karachi, Department of International Relations, 1999).
17. Toufiq A. Siddiqi, *A Natural Gas Pipeline for India and Pakistan* (Washington: Balusa, 2003).
18. Navnita Chadha Behera et al., *Beyond Boundaries*, p. 32.
19. For a discussion see Mohamed Jawhar bin Hassan, 'CSCAP: Its Evolution and Activities', in Dipankar Banerjee, *South Asia Security Future*, pp. 214 ff.
20. Navnita Chadha Behera et al., *Beyond Boundaries*, p. 37.
21. Stephen P. Cohen, 'Kashmir Must Not Fall to the Saboteurs of Peace', *The Financial Times*, 16 January 2004.