

Track-2 Diplomacy In India-Pakistan Relations

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INTRODUCTION

While official diplomatic communications are the obvious way for adversaries to talk, unofficial policy discourse, or Track - Two Diplomacy, is an increasingly important part of the changing international security landscape. The term was used by Joseph Montville - an American foreign service officer to denote "unofficial conflict resolution dialogue between adversarial groups or nations" (Davidson and Montville, 1981).

Relations between India and Pakistan have been defined by the violent partition of British India in 1947, the Kashmir conflict and the problem of cross- border terrorism. Various track-two initiatives, for example - Neemrana Dialogue, Pugwash Peace Conferences, Balusa group, Chaophraya dialogue - has been initiated to normalize the relations between the two countries.

The Objective of the study is to map the trajectory of the track-two initiatives in relation to India-Pak conflict. This study would briefly provide a brief idea of Track - Two Diplomacy, followed by a brief look at the state of India- Pak relations since 1947. This would be followed by a brief literature review and analysis.

Defining Track - Two Diplomacy:

When Joseph Montville came up with the term Track - Two, he was referring to "unofficial informal interaction between members of adversary groups" (Montville, 1995). Basic idea behind second track is to distinguish it from the primary or to say principal track that is official dialogue between states. What necessitates track -two diplomacy?

The failure of the official track or in some cases even the absence of official track necessitates the existence of an alternate dialogue mechanism between states.

Others have seen it as complementary to the official track, the basic idea behind this type of reasoning is that Track two helps in changing the 'enemy images' and helps in improving the intersubjective Understanding between states. Secondly it helps in the development of a constituency of norm entrepreneurs in these countries and also prepares these societies for big changes in relations.

State of India -Pak Relations:

1947 was a big year in the history of Indian subcontinent, it marked the withdrawal of colonial powers from the region but more importantly, it was the year that changed geopolitics of the region. Partition of India and the coming into existence of Pakistan came up with new conflicts in the region and the most prominent being the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Kashmir conflict has been at the centre of the relations between India and Pakistan throughout the history of their relations. The Kashmir conflict have resulted in three wars between the two countries *i.e.* 1965, 1971, 1999 kargiletc, but with no solution, the rivalry remains alive. The conflict has seen many ups and downs, ceasefire violations are regular, withdrawal of diplomats is another regular feature of relations between the countries. In the 21st century, cross-border terrorism has been another big issue that defined the trajectory of relations between the two countries and have resulted in another big low in relations and have

stalled the peace process started by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpai in 2003.

It is evident that official channels have been largely unsuccessful and absent at the time of conflicts in making any progress in improving the relations between the two countries. In the 1990s when the two countries were able to acquire missiles and launching capabilities, the need for an alternate and sustained dialogue and confidence building measures was felt. These confidence building measures and dialogues were deployed as a mechanism to avoid the escalation of conflict between the two countries because now the escalation would have meant higher casualties. These CBMs and dialogues are what Montville called track-two diplomacy.

History of Track - Two Diplomatic processes in India- Pak relations:

The Track-two diplomatic dialogue in India - Pak relations has largely operated in the manner that was not fully un-official, at best it was quasi - official. A few retired government officials, both civil and military, dominate most activities. There has been the lack of cross-fertilization of ideas because in most of the senior level dialogues the participants have generally been the same. As per Waslekar "Track two process has been limited to retired bureaucrats, academics and retired army Generals". The most important thing is that there has been little engagement of those who can directly influence the policy making process in these countries and those who can be the real opinion makers and those who have mass support. 1990s saw the eruption of insurgency in Kashmir and a crisis followed in the spring of 1990, this development made many INGOs *i.e.* Gate Foundation to look at the India-Pak problem from a new perspective and this provided an impetus for the coming of the Track - Two processes on the ground. Another major impetus for the development of track-two channels came from the worries of policymakers in the United States who feared the consequences of nuclear crisis in the region, and to a greater extent the fears were real.

The beginning of the track two dialogues can be traced to the one started under the aegis of USIS in 1990. A series of WORLDNET dialogues were conducted by the USIS for Indian and experts from Pakistan on Nuclear Non Proliferation, economic cooperation in the region, and measures for confidence building. Over the period of time many NGOs from the United States and Germany started organising these events for example

Neemrana Dialogue, Belusa group, Kashmir Policy Group and the latest being Chaophraya Dialogue.

Literature review and analysis:

The lot has been written about the nature and trajectory of track-two initiatives in general but not about those relating to the conflict between India and Pakistan in particular. Waslekar (1995), pointed out how perceptions with regard to the utility of track-two have started changing since 1980s, earlier these initiatives were used to be seen as irrelevant western concept, but now it is becoming prestigious to be involved in such track two-initiatives.

One of the most important studies relating to the track-two initiative between India and Pakistan has been done by Navnita Behera, Paul M Evans and Gowher Rizvi titled "Beyond Boundaries: A Report on the State of Non-official Dialogues on Peace, Security and Cooperation in South Asia". In their work Behera and others argue that almost all participants of these processes convey that they have been affected by the process and their thought process have been changed by interactions with the people from other side, in this regard the confessions made by General Durrani of Pakistan in his book have been highlighted by many. Behera and others (1997) argue that the composition of participants have a major influence on the influence and trajectory of any track-two initiative. In case of India and Pakistan, the involvement of the participants having military background is something that is necessary and have had a bigger influence on the success of the initiative. They highlight that military is big factor in the relations between the two countries, any change in the status quo would have to be backed by the military to be successful and in case of Pakistan even consideration of any such proposal at official levels would require a nod from the military.

Behera (2002) also argues that the composition of track-two participants is now changing and even the excluded groups *i.e.* women, parliamentarians, youth are also finding representation in terms of participation thus clearly the base of these initiatives is broadening. Many new dialogues and initiatives are now increasingly involving first generation peace entrepreneurs, regional media journalists and MPs of regional political parties. Mattoo (1999) argues that even though the military has got the absolute veto powers on the security matters in Pakistan, limiting the capacity of non-official sources to influence the security policy, the influence of these actors

i.e. journalists and intellectuals is growing day by day, allowing more new ideas from track two to filter into track one processes. Many scholars including Behera (2002) argues that, the impact of non-official thinking on the policy tends to be higher in these countries on technical issues because the officials are less aware of the complex nature of these subjects, for example Delhi Policy group, a track two initiative that works on nuclear weapons reduction and minimum nuclear deterrence used to regularly brief the officials in both the countries and later on the official process taken up the nuclear reduction question. This highlights the success of these initiatives in agenda-setting between the two countries.

Behera (2002) also pointed out the problem of status quo thinking among the participating elites that are too close to governments in their nations, this kind of attitude among the participating elite has been a major roadblock in the success of track - two initiatives in the context of India- Pakistan relations. The problem of composition of the initiative is a common problem among the track-two initiatives world over, the composition of any track - two initiative is decided by the goal of a particular track - two initiative. Track two initiatives in general have one of the two objectives *i.e.* some track two initiatives are meant to influence broader public opinion with regard to a conflict scenario and have a long term strategy and thus have journalists, civil society members, influential politicians and people with mass appeal as their members and the nature of such initiative is open; on the other hand some track - two initiatives are guided by the goal of producing policy relevant recommendations and thus aim to influence policy in short to medium term and thus have retired bureaucrats, retired diplomats, ex- army generals and influential academics and members of strategic community as their members, and the nature of these initiatives are secret, meaning that what happens within these initiatives is generally not accessible to the public or media. Owing to the nature of relations between India and Pakistan, most track - two initiatives between the two countries has been of the latter type and thus have had elite composition and secret nature. This has been both an advantage and a disadvantage for the processes, because whatever limited success these initiatives have had, it was because of the fact that elite members have had a hearing in front of their governments and the fact that these initiatives could not achieve much is also affected by this fact that participating members were close to government and could not support or discuss

radical proposals due to their allegiance to the national positions.

Various scholars including Behera (2002) have highlighted the fact that in South Asian countries with the exception of Bangladesh, Government officials see non official processes with suspicion and do not give these initiatives a hearing. Security policy in the region is the exclusive domain of few national elites from within the ruling regime with little or no impact of non-government think tanks in the policy making process. This have had and continues to have a larger impact on the success of success of track- two diplomatic efforts.

Funding of these initiatives has been another issue that have had bearing on the acceptance of these initiatives in the region. Traditionally, Indian position with regard to the regional conflicts has been that it does not accept any external or extra- regional intervention in the regional conflict, and the fact that funding for most of the track-two initiatives has been coming from western countries, mainly the US and the UK, results in what Behera (1997) and Kaye (2007) refers to as "perceptions of external interference" even if the motives behind the initiatives are genuine improvement in the relationship between the two countries.

Kaye (2007) highlights the role of strategic mindsets in both the countries which is belief on zero-sum nature of the relations between the two countries, a zero-sum understanding of conflict would be naturally averse to any confidence building measures (CBMs) and any effort to think of the conflict scenario differently. This has been another factor that accounts for the little success of these initiatives between India and Pakistan. She also highlights the hostility of domestic institutions in both the countries mainly Intelligence Services towards any CBMs that would require transparency in military budgets and policies. She argues that It would be really hard for the track two policy initiatives to progress effectively unless the domestic institutions in both the countries do not see the conflict as costly and cooperation as less costly affair (Kaye, 2007).

Jacob (2006) also looks at the problems with track - two initiatives between India and Pakistan and argues in the same line as Behera, Evans and Rizvi (1997), points out that track two initiatives between the two countries are suffering from extreme elitism and absence of younger generation in the track- two dialogues, according to him, the absence of younger generation in the dialogue processes makes these dialogue typical and non- creative.

Another lacunae of track two initiatives have been highlighted by Jacob (2006), the absence of business community from the track two dialogues between the two countries. Both the countries have immense potential for bilateral trade and it can be a big source of fostering cooperation and independence between the two countries but surprisingly most of the track two initiatives are not discussing trade in these dialogues. The general tendency in this regard has been to start with hardcore security issues and not to touch the soft issues *i.e.* water or energy or trade.

Jacob (2006) also highlights the disconnect between the track two initiatives and the grass roots level, he argues that there are no real beneficiaries of peace between the two countries; the track two has not been able to capture the imagination of the civil society that can be a harbinger of change in the relations between the two countries. With the dominance of right-wing parties in both the countries it would be increasingly difficult for track - two initiatives or any other process to come up with any suggestion that is different from the national mainstream.

One contributing factor to the failure of track -two or any other peace process in the region is the "lack of an urge for peace within the minds of the general public" (Jacob, 2006), this argument is contrary to the popular assumption that people on both sides of the border want peace.

Another important aspect that Jacob (2006) talks about is that involvement in the track - two initiatives has become the "post retirement religion" of many, who while in their official category supported hardline positions. This implies that most of the participants in these processes are not genuine peace lovers and taking these processes as a business or as a public show off affair.

Future prospects:

Track two initiatives in general are always useful in the sense that they can always come with agendas that can be pursued by both sides, this holds true in the case of initiatives relating to India and Pakistan as well. The future trajectory of these initiatives in the Indian continent would depend on both structural factors *i.e.* regional security environment, regimes in the countries and leadership; and modalities of the track - two processes concerned. The structural factors are beyond control but the modalities can be changed to make the track - two processes work. There are a number of changes that can be made to positively change the track - two initiatives

between India and Pakistan.

First of all composition of the participants require a big change. There should be more involvement of political leaders from both ruling and opposition parties from both the countries, due participation of regional and national media is required because these people have a broad constituency, representatives from the trading communities should be inducted as participants in these processes. Secondly, non-contentious issues *i.e.* the traditional low politics issues should be taken up in the priority basis for the discussions, directly talking security and Kashmir have proved counterproductive many times previously, thus the contentious issues must be taken up after these low politics issues such as trade, energy, water etc. Third, these initiatives should be locally based and supported, so that there are no apprehensions regarding outside interference. Sources of funding should be made transparent and if possible, should be local, that would enhance the public image of these processes and would make transfer of ideas to broader constituencies easy. Also, these dialogues should be organised within the region itself. Lastly, the focus of these initiatives needs a shift from the objective of transferring ideas to official channels, the focus should be on influencing public opinion, this would go a long way in changing the conflict situations between the two countries, because the nature of conflict between the countries is such that even a strong political will would not be able to make bold decision without the backing of domestic public opinion due to the compulsions of democratic politics.

Conclusion:

Track - two diplomacy is becoming an important way to deploy CBMs in conflict situations to avoid escalation and to keep the dialogue between the adversaries open. Many track two initiatives have been at place in relation to the Indo-Pak relations as well. These initiatives have had their successes at times, in the sense of providing agendas to start a reconciliation process between India and Pakistan. These initiatives have had their own weaknesses that prevented their success in terms of change in conflict scenarios between the two countries. The future prospects of these initiatives in the region would depend upon the structural imperatives and the ability of these initiatives to do away with the current weaknesses. If the structural environment is ripe for cooperation, track two initiatives would make a big impact in improving the relations between India and Pakistan.

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Pakistan and India though never agree on any point but at least opinion makers and influential elements of both the countries have decided to initiate Pakistan India talks behind the doors for restoration of trust between the two nuclear nations. The back channel diplomacy talks are being held by a London-based-independent organization, Conciliation Resources. The purpose of the body is to prevent violence, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful societies. Although, the participants congregated to discuss the ideas to improve the bilateral relations and examine the notions to create confidence building measures to initiate government-level talks but they openly and deeply discussed current political changes in Pakistan. Pakistan and India have agreed to revive Track II diplomacy and endeavour to improve their relations, according to Indian media. A report published on Times of India states that the Track II initiative, known as Neemrana Dialogue, received a fresh start after a high-level Indian delegation held meetings with Pakistani officials in Islamabad from April 28 to April 30. The Pakistani delegation, headed by former foreign secretary Inamul Haque, met with the Indian delegation which was headed by former India MEA secretary Vivek Katju. The meeting participants decided that India will wait to see the outcome of the upcoming elections in Pakistan before taking any call on official talks with Islamabad. Track Two diplomacy pertains to policy oriented discussions that are non-governmental, informal and un-official in nature, but which are quite close to governmental agendas and often involve participation of the people who are close to governmental quarters and influential in policy matters, such as retired diplomats, retired civil and military officials, public figures, and policy analysts. India-Pakistan relations have been intricate and strained following independence from British colonial rule in 1947.