English Media Commentary in India and Pakistan on Confidence-Building Measures, 1990–1997

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After heightened tensions in 1990, India and Pakistan agreed to implement confidence-building measures (CBMs) at the urging of the United States. Although the political impact and effectiveness of CBMs have been disputed, they have gradually gained currency in the Subcontinent, recognized not only for their potential utility, but also as mechanisms to move the bilateral dialogue process forward. However, the nature and content of CBMs have undergone considerable shifts in emphasis. While CBM proposals following crisis situations concentrated on military-to-military agreements in the early 1990s, initiatives in the latter half of the decade have focused on subregional trade, cultural interaction and people-to-people contacts. The commitment of India and Pakistan to implement these CBMs has depended primarily on the inconsistent, and often unreciprocated, political will of national leaders in each country. Significantly, press attitudes towards CBMs in the English language media have often paralleled the resolve of their leaders whenever CBMs were proposed, discussed, and negotiated.

Following the reduction of regional tension in 1990, Indian and Pakistani editors, security analysts, and foreign policy experts engaged in ambitious, and sometimes technical, debates in the press on the value of CBMs between military establishments and other forms of contact and communication between the two countries. These debates created a framework for alternative views on the Indo–Pak conflict, and the utility of CBMs, to be explored and discussed in a national and regional context. While commentators in both countries recognized a need for dialogue, the extent of their mutual mistrust, and the divergence between India and Pakistan regarding their security concerns and domestic considerations, made forging compromises difficult. By 1997, however, most commentators were advocating CBMs, recognizing the increasing need for subregional trade, people-to-people contact, and cross-border communication at the highest levels. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the debates over the utility and potential of CBMs during the 1990–97 period shows that objections raised in the initial press discussions have remained, and in both countries, mistrust is a sentiment not easily overcome. Despite these reservations, opinion leaders in both countries now view CBM negotiations as part of a dialogue which is more important to preserve than destroy.

This essay does not attempt an analysis of the fundamental issues of Indo–Pak conflict, nor the positions and actions of the respective governments. Instead, the purpose of this essay is to chart the changing attitudes toward CBMs found in the elite national

press over a continuum, highlighting the debates during crucial junctures of the bilateral dialogue: the introduction of CBMs in May–June 1990, an intense period of turbulence in Kashmir and a period when war between the two countries was spoken of publicly; the April 1991 foreign secretary talks; the January 1994 foreign secretary talks following which Indo–Pak dialogue was suspended; and the renewed bilateral contacts in the first half of 1997, ending with the Joint Statement on Working Groups. This essay draws from commentaries in two Pakistani papers *Dawn* (Karachi) and *The Nation* (Lahore) and two Indian dailies *The Hindu* (Madras) and *The Times of India* (Bombay).[1]

This essay seeks answers to the following questions: What were the issues that elicited divergent understandings of, and uses for, CBMs between the two countries? How have attitudes toward CBMs changed since 1990? Is the increasingly positive reception of CBMs a result of political necessity or of greater recognition of their utility? What did the cessation of talks after the bitter January 1994 round suggest about mutual attitudes toward the process? Have the ambitious agendas of the 1997 Joint Working Groups introduced new thinking on CBMs in guiding bilateral discussion between India and Pakistan? This essay examines the framework within which the idea of CBMs was introduced, understood, and evaluated in the Pakistani and Indian press. Further, this study will consider how CBMs were seen to further, or hinder, the dialogue process.

Defusing Tension with CBMs: May–June 1990

In early 1990, some Kashmiri groups dissatisfied with the policies of the Indian government turned to agitation. Other factions turned to violence. In an effort to quell this uprising quickly, and to prevent Kashmiri separatists from developing ties and receiving support from co-religionists across the borders in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Indian government deployed a large number of troops in the Kashmir Valley and along the Line of Control (LOC) separating Indian—and Pakistani—held Kashmir. Conflicts between the Indian security forces and Kashmiris inevitably arose, resulting in almost daily incidents of violence between the two parties. Pakistan accused India of suppressing the Kashmiri 'freedom fighters' and ignoring the wishes of the Kashmiri people; India countered by claiming that many of the militants had been trained in, and supported by, Pakistan. Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto and Indian prime minister V.P. Singh asked their citizens to prepare for war, threatening sweeping reprisals for any unilateral military advances.

[1] Though seeking to be representative, this study is in no way exhaustive. In looking at two of the major newspapers in India and Pakistan each, the author has overlooked the other, and potentially more diverse, outlets of public opinion elsewhere, such as the highly circulated regional and vernacular press. As this essay is an initial survey, more detailed research must await scholars with better access to other media outlets on the Subcontinent.

Fueled by cycles of misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two militaries, the Brasstacks exercises and Zarb-e-Momin appeared to clarify the need for new understanding and modes of communication.

By May 1990, additional troop deployments near the southern Indo–Pak border raised concern in the United States and elsewhere that the threat of a conventional war might lead to a nuclear conflict.[2] In tandem with the US–Soviet summit in Moscow, President George Bush sent a mission led by Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates to counsel India and Pakistan separately to exercise restraint and to encourage the parties to consider and implement CBMs. In the wake of the Gates mission, India suggested a number of CBMs to alleviate the tension and to reduce the possibility for war.[3] In the weeks following this stand-off, tensions cooled considerably.

Fears of a quick escalation were grounded, in part, on a prior war scare during 1986–7 when Indian Army chief of staff General K. Sundarji planned and executed aggressive military exercises codenamed "Brasstacks." In both scale and scope, the Brasstacks exercises were the largest held in South Asia since 1947. Given their concentration in the Rajastan desert and the Indian Punjab, and the lack of clarity about the Indian Army's intentions, the Pakistani military leaders saw these exercises as a potential threat to their territorial integrity. The immediate tension was eventually defused by top-level diplomacy between Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistani president Zia ul-Haq. Nevertheless, in 1989 Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Aslam Beg followed Brasstacks with an ambitious

[2] A *Washington Post* article written by James Adams reported that the US was concerned that a nuclear war might break out in South Asia, with Central Intelligence Agency analysts warning that it was "probable." According to these sources, intelligence reports indicated that Pakistan was "readying" its air force for a nuclear attack and that India had drastically reinforced its troop concentration along its border with Pakistan. This article, which was reprinted in its entirety or in excerpts in several of the South Asian papers, fueled speculation in the region that the two countries were, or had come, dangerously close to war. "Nuclear war threat over Kashmir," *The Times of India*, 30 May 1990.

[3] A diverse array of accounts detail these incidents, but the most notable is probably Seymour Hersh's controversial article, "On the Nuclear Edge" in *The New Yorker* (29 March 1993: 56–73) which asserted that the Indo–Pak standoff came close to nuclear war. A publication of The Henry L. Stimson Center, "Conflict Prevention and Confidence-building Measures in South Asia: The 1990 Crisis," questions many of Hersh's conclusions as well as his basic premise that India and Pakistan had truly considered a military solution to the conflict. In a roundtable discussion with some of the influential American participants in the crisis (many with a direct knowledge of the crisis, including the US ambassadors to India and Pakistan and their military advisors), they dismiss Hersh's claim that the Indian and Pakistani military were eager, or preparing, for war. (Michael Krepon, Mishi Faruqee, eds., Occasional Paper no. 17, April 1994) Former Indian foreign secretary J.N. Dixit also dismisses these speculations in his account of this period. *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance: Indo–Pak Relations, 1970–94* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1995), 130–34.

military exercise of his own, *Zarb-e-Momin*.[4] Fueled by cycles of misunderstanding and miscommunication between the two militaries, the Brasstacks exercises and *Zarb-e-Momin* appeared to clarify the need for new understanding and modes of communication.

> Brasstacks was not merely a symptom of underlying India–Pakistan disputes. Like the Kashmir problem—and other important issues that divide the two states—it was both symptom and cause. It reflected and came about because of underlying India–Pakistan mistrust and suspicion, but it contributed mightily to a worsening state of affairs between the two. It may have suggested to the Pakistanis, at least, that India was still capable of considering a "military solution" of their disputes and might again use military force to break up Pakistan.[5]

In the aftermath of these exercises, Rajiv Gandhi and newly elected Pakistani prime minister Benazir Bhutto signed an agreement to prohibit attacks on nuclear facilities in December 1988. Throughout 1989, under the guidance of both prime ministers, official interaction increased. High-level delegations met to work out agreements on railways, transport and tourism issues, while discussion resumed on the withdrawal of troops from Siachen and the demarcation of the Sir Creek boundary. In June, India and Pakistan agreed to arrange for a biannual meeting between the director-general of the Pakistan Rangers and the inspector-general of the Indian Border Security Force to discuss border issues.[6]

The re-emergence of regional tensions in Kashmir in 1990 convinced many that a dialogue addressing longstanding Indo–Pak grievances was overdue. Yet this dialogue was slow to proceed. Earlier in May, an offer for comprehensive talks by Benazir Bhutto was rejected by V.P. Singh, who called any proposal which deviated from a bilateral arena "unacceptable;" he further felt that Pakistan's interference in Kashmir precluded any substantive dialogue.[7] In April, a "frank and businesslike" meeting between Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral and his Pakistani counterpart, Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, in New York failed to

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[4] Kanti Bajpai, P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, Stephen P. Cohen, and Šumit Ganguly, *Brasstacks and Beyond: Perception and Management of Crisis in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), *passim*. One legacy of the Brasstacks exercises was the subsequent announcement by the Pakistani nuclear scientist Dr. A.Q. Khan that Pakistan had the potential to develop nuclear weapons.

[5] Bajpai, *et al.*, *Brasstacks*, 95–96.

[6] Šumit Ganguly, "Mending Fences," in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds., *Crisis Prevention, Confidence-Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 12–13. This article offers a good summary of early Indo–Pak CBM proposals. Dixit, *op. cit*., 117–18.

[7] K.K. Katyal, "Indo–Pak. ties depend on restraint," *The Hindu*, 3 May 1990.

produce any dialogue.[8] Gujral had resolved to "discuss Kashmir only in so far as such 'interference' was concerned."[9] During this time, Bhutto traveled to Islamic and Asian countries to garner support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir and mounted daily attacks on India in the press, reviving the threat of a "1000 year war" that her father had made during his tenure. In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) put intense pressure on the insecure Singh government to 'talk tough' over Kashmir. In the Pakistani press, reports appeared of Indian troop buildup, border deployments, and increased defense expenditures. The Indian press carried stories alleging similar behavior by the Pakistani military.[10]

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Although several of the op-ed pieces discussed war scenarios, most of their editorial and opinion columns, under the banners of pragmatism and peace, stressed the lack of national resolve to fight another war.[11] But suspicions remained. Commenting on the Gates mission, *Dawn* maintained, "Since war is the last thing that Pakistan wants, it cannot but welcome this peace-making mission . . . . [but] there is no shortage of Indians who have been stoking themselves into a passion of belligerence ever since the Kashmir uprising began a few months ago."[12] *The Nation* also worried that the objectives of the Gates mission would

[8] "Indo–Pak. ties," *op. cit*. Indian PM V.P. Singh declared later, "There can be no dialogue with Pakistan so long as it continues to back subversion and terrorism in Punjab and Kashmir." (Editorial, "Gates Mission," *The Nation,* 23 May 1990)

[9] Maleeha Lodhi, "Living on the brink," *The Nation,* 3 May 1990.

[10] "India ready for unconditional dialogue," (*The Nation,* 4 May 1990), reported the Indian commitment to increasing defense expenditures; on May 14 and 15th, *The Hindu* reported Pakistani troop movements close to the border ("Pak. moves tanks closer to border;" "Concern over Pak. troop concentration"); another piece in *The Nation* discussed India's claim that they "can attack at 72 hours' notice." Saqiain Imam, "India can attack at 72 hours' notice," 9 May 1990. Reflecting Pakistani suspicions of India's intentions, the influential columnist Maleeha Lodhi, writing in *The Nation,* argued, "For the purpose of Pakistan's self-defense, whether Delhi's belligerence is just intimidation or constitutes a real threat is really a distinction that is academic." "Living on the brink," *op. cit.*

[11] M.H. Aksari, "War or possible bridge to peace?" *Dawn,* 16 May 1990. Another article from *Business India*, reprinted in *The Nation,* stressed the very high economic costs of a war, even in victory. "Can India and Pakistan afford war?" 29 May 1990.

[12] Editorial, "American diplomacy and Kashmiri reality," *Dawn,* 19 May 1990.

endanger Pakistan's security and "consign the Kashmir issue to limbo."[13] In the Indian press, defense analyst Jasjit Singh claimed, "The Pakistani leadership has been at pains to emphasize that it does not seek a war with India. But it is being less than completely honest in this regard. Pakistan would undoubtedly try and avoid a classical war with India as far as possible. But in other respects, it launched its fourth war . . . against India over Kashmir many months ago."[14] Other columnists such as Inder Malhotra warned against Pakistan's reported troop movements, urging India's leaders to take a strong stance against Pakistan and to be prepared for an attack from across the border.[15] In a piece critical of the Gates mission a few weeks later, Malhotra criticized the proposed troop redeployment, arguing that it would leave India's borders far more insecure than Pakistan's.[16]

Despite this atmosphere, on May 28th India proposed a number of military-to-military CBMs to Pakistan which were to be accompanied by high-level talks. As a unilateral gesture to reduce tension, India also withdrew its troops from the Mahajan area near Bikaner.[17] Though the details of these proposals were not made public (Pakistan requested that the proposals remain confidential while their official response was considered), these CBMs were reportedly intended to reduce hostile rhetoric, increase contact between military commanders, share information on military exercises, prevent airspace violations by military aircraft, and open negotiations on a wide range of outstanding issues at a ministerial level.[18] An Indian Foreign Office spokesman declared that their object was to initiate "constructive and cooperative relations with Pakistan for peace and security in the region," with the eventual

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[13] Editorial, "Washington's special envoy," *The Nation*, 18 May 1990; Editorial, "Gates Mission," *The Nation*, 23 May 1990.

[14] Jasjit Singh, "Pakistan's proxy war," *The Hindu*, 15 May 1990. K. R. Narayanan and Arvind Kala, writing in *The Times of India*, agreed in separate pieces that though Kashmir was an important issue, and a military advance could well prove successful, it was imperative that both countries avoid war so as not to "shatter the peace of the last 18 years." Narayanan, "Another war is no solution to Indo–Pak problems;" Kala, "The only option is to choose between war and peace," *The Times of India*, 3 May 1990. The quotation is from Kala.

[15] "Spotlight on Defense," *The Times of India*, 2 May 1990.

[16] "Gates Mission And After," *The Times of India*, 24 May 1990. Armored divisions from India would have to repair to Jhansi, about 600 miles away from the border, while Pakistani divisions would halt at Kharian, only seventy miles from the border. In another piece, K.K. Katyal also maintained that such a move would "lack equivalence." "Kashmir issue: 'No role for third country,'" *The Hindu*, 17 May 1990.

[17] "Indian proposals to ease tension," *The Nation*, 5 June 1990. These initial reports were treated with skepticism, as analysts argued that India had added more troops between the Ravi and Chenab rivers and to Kashmir.

[18] K.K. Katyal, "Pak weighing response to India's proposals," *The Hindu*, 1 June 1990. K.K. Katyal, "Package to Ease Tension," *The Hindu*, 7 June 1990.

goal of building confidence and reducing tension between the two countries.[19] In their initial response to India's proposals, the Government of Pakistan assured India that while being "seriously considered," the CBMs did not "address the central issues responsible for the present tension."[20] A week later Pakistan, expressing disappointment that the Indian proposals did not take up the resolution of the Kashmir dispute and troop concentration on the borders, agreed to talks with India at the foreign secretary level.[21] In the following weeks Indian and Pakistani leaders publicly declared an end to the tension. Gujral assuaged public fears by remarking calmly that, "the question of war did not arise [in 1990]." Bhutto, "cautiously optimistic" that India and Pakistan could resolve their differences without going to war, stated publicly that the upcoming talks were a good sign.[22]

Several main themes exemplify the major differences of perspective between India and Pakistan toward CBMs specifically, and bilateral relations generally during the 1990 crisis. Firstly, at this stage, Pakistani press commentary maintained that the conflict in Kashmir was due to the inevitable manifestation of the Kashmiri people's desire for freedom. This movement was entirely indigenous in origin and had evolved without any material support from Pakistan.[23] Pakistani commentators were equally adamant that there could be no lasting settlement in the region without a final solution to the Kashmir conflict.[24] Conversely, Indian writers maintained that the real cause of the tension was Pakistan's clandestine encouragement of internal crises in Kashmir and the Punjab. For most Indian writers, no truly progressive steps could be taken to eliminate this tension until Pakistan foreswore its activist role in these regional conflicts. They also dismissed—in much the same way as Pakistanis did

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[19] V.K. Dethe, "Pakistan offers early talks," *The Times of India*, 8 June 1990. "Pakistani response received," *The Hindu*, 8 June 1990.

[20] "Indian proposals," *op. cit.*

[21] Arif Nizami, "Pakistan seeks clarification about Indian proposals," *The Nation*, 6 June 1990.

[22] "Gujral rules out war," *The Hindu*, 4 June 1990; "Benazir optimistic about peace with India," *The Nation*, 11 June 1990.

[23] Interestingly, the Pakistani disclosure to Robert Gates that they had "already closed 31 camps" for training militants, which was passed on to V.P. Singh and Gujral, made no impact in the Pakistani press. While this information was reported in the Indian press (Malhotra, "Gates Mission," *op. cit.*), it was mentioned only obliquely in the Pakistani papers. In one of the more glaring omissions on the part of the Pakistani press, the official statement was reported as follows, without comment: "The Foreign Secretary also conveyed Pakistan's strong resentment against Foreign Minister Gujral's statement . . . that Pakistan had admitted to a third country that it was sending trained intruders into Kashmir. Foreign Secretary stressed that such false claims could not help improve the situation." Nizami, "Pakistani seeks clarification," *op. cit.*

[24] Editorial, "American diplomacy," *op. cit.*

their alleged participation in Kashmir—the accusation that India was fermenting internal crises in Pakistan as civil unrest in Sindh increased drastically in late June.

The divergence between these two views was reflected in the assessment of CBMs in the Indian and Pakistani press. The concept of CBMs was greeted with skepticism in the press of both countries, yet differences over the utility and possibility of CBMs did not develop initially along national lines. Irrespective of national positions, some regarded CBMs as a potential way to augment their national security, while others felt that CBMs did not do enough to enhance security. Ultimately, though, the Kashmir dispute, and the position of their respective national governments on this highly sensitive issue, tempered press reaction toward CBMs more than any other single issue. In India, Kashmir remained 'undisputed,' 'an integral part of the nation,' an example of India's secular legacy, and the target of Pak-supported terrorism. In Pakistan's view, India's refusal to honor their political commitments over the past 40 years impelled the Kashmir people to seek a modicum of political freedom, evidenced by their resistance to an oppressive military regime.

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Predictably, no new ground was broken in discussions about the issues themselves. Commentators in Pakistan argued that the proposed CBMs were not only insubstantial, but they did not address the 'core issue' troubling the Subcontinent. Indian analysts felt that CBMs could not guarantee that Pakistan would refrain from taking advantage of troop redeployment, nor could CBMs force the Pakistanis to discontinue their clandestine support for the Kashmiri militants. They did agree, however, that the biggest obstacle to confidence-building was the legacy of distrust which marked their relationship. Commentators from both countries agreed that some sort of mechanism was needed that could create trust between the countries where immediate political solutions could not be reached. In this mileau, CBMs received the greatest attention.

Commentators in India reacted more favorably to the CBM proposals than those in Pakistan and investigated them more thoroughly. An editorial in *The Times of India* endorsed the proposed CBMs but hesitated at withdrawing troops from Kashmir:

> Confidence-building measures are needed at two separate levels to defuse tensions stemming from the situation in Kashmir and Punjab. In the first place, regular forces of the two sides deployed along the border have to be pulled back to allay the misgivings of each other about the other's intention. Following this, mechanisms have to be established, or rather augmented because some are already in place, to notify each other of troop

> movements or exercises within the sensitive zones. . . . Though Islamabad says that it is ready to respond positively, its stance is that mutual withdrawals should also cover the additional infantry units India has inducted into the troubled states to deal with the threat to its internal security posed by terrorists targeting sensitive installations and communications.[25]

Writing in *The Hindu*, Manoj Joshi suggested some highly technical and ambitious CBMs and identified trust—rightly—as the most salient issue:

> India's diplomatic gambit in proposing a series of 'confidence-building measures' has failed to elicit any response from Pakistan. . . . The CBMs and other measures seeking greater transparency of relationship seem to beg several questions. Any agreement on relocating forces or monitoring movements has to have some sort of a verification regime. . . . What would be the Indo–Pakistan version of the formidable "national technical means" that the big powers employ to watch each other? . . . More radical solutions could be reached by a direct Indo–Pak monitoring agreement that could permit some form of challenge inspections and even an 'open skies' type of an agreement on aircraft equipped with cameras that could fly over each other's territory without any restriction. . . . However . . . the bottom line in the issue of verification and confidence building is trust. It could be argued that a strong verification regime could be the process through which trust could replace the prevailing mistrust. However, the converse argument could be that unless there is a modicum of trust, there is little point in working out a verification and confidence-building regime.[26]

Other Indian analysts adopted a less enthusiastic view toward CBMs. Writing in the *Times of India*, defense analyst K. Subrahmanyam questioned the relevance of CBMs to South Asia. While conceding that war was unwelcome, he argued, "It needs to be pointed out, however, that there is no conceptual clarity on the issue of confidence-building measures in South Asia or among the many well-intentioned advocates of the propositions in the West." Although CBMs worked in Europe to some extent, "the situation in the Subcontinent is totally different. There is as yet no sense of deterrence between the two countries." Subrahmanyam continued,

> In the Indo–Pakistan context, the basic requirements for a climate conducive to CBM, namely deterrence and mutual determination to avoid even the smallest of incidents which may escalate, are thus absent. The Pakistani leadership appears to be under the impression that sustaining low intensity conflicts over a period of time in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab is to their advantage. CBMs are possible only when both sides have an equal perception of stakes and risks involved. Unfortunately, that is not yet the case in the

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[25] Editorial, "Defusing Tensions," *The Times of India*, 8 June 1990.

[26] "Is there a shared interest in promoting peace?" 19 June 1990.

> Subcontinent.[27]

In this article and others, Subrahmanyam advocated the mining of borders between India and Pakistan to enhance security, ensure mutual containment and build confidence. Though he thought war an unlikely, and unattractive route, he still favored greater militarization.[28] In sum, his attitudes toward CBMs with Pakistan were cautious; though he thought they should be explored, his hesitation was tempered by a deep distrust of Pakistan's military motives. Another observer, Inder Malhotra, also expressed a lack of confidence in Pakistan's sincerity in the process.[29]

In Pakistan, opinion on the 1990 CBM proposals and the subsequent talks varied from cautious support to ambivalence.

Diplomatic correspondent K.K. Katyal spoke for many when he asked rhetorically, "How can one talk about confidence-building without addressing the issue that is causing the lack of confidence?"[30] He added in another piece, "The core problem, according to New Delhi, is Pakistan's role in training and funding terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab. All other issues, to which Pakistan takes exception, flow from it and are thus incidental." Noting Pakistan's strongly held desire to multilateralize the Kashmir dispute and Indo–Pak discussions, Katyal accused Pakistan of rejecting the spirit of the CBMs in advocating a role for 'neutral' observers in any verification regime.[31]

In Pakistan, opinion on the 1990 CBM proposals and the subsequent talks varied from cautious support to ambivalence. Most pieces on the CBM proposals, especially in *The Nation*, were unimpressed with their substance, contending that they were routine and insubstantial. That the Indians were able to avoid discussing the 'core issue' in the conflict—the disputed status of Kashmir—provoked the greatest criticism. No doubt influenced by the recent war scare, an editorial appearing on 12 June submitted this judgment:

> There is nothing wrong with the proposals, in fact these have generally been found acceptable, but they are more or less of a routine nature. . . . For a dialogue to be a better option than war one cannot go on talking of the symptoms of the malady and keep one's

[27] "Mutual Restraint: Pak Perceptions Pose Problems," *The Times of India*, 13 June 1990.

[28] "Dealing With Pakistan: Containment Better Than War," *The Times of India*, 26 June 1990.

[29] "Beyond The 'Chess Game,'" *The Times of India*, 14 June 1990.

[30] "Package to ease tension," *The Hindu*, 7 June 1990.

[31] "A thwarted exercise," *The Hindu*, 13 June 1990.

> eyes closed to the malady itself. That is not to say that the option of dialogue should not be pursued but that it would be unwise to pin too much hope on it. The use of dialogue by the enemy can, under certain circumstances, be as dangerous a ploy as a tactical withdrawal of an armoured formation. . . . A dialogue to be meaningful has to be of a piece with a general pattern of de-escalation on all fronts. One cannot go on using threatening language and do hostile positioning of troops and also expect that a dialogue will solve anything. When India says that it is willing to talk to Pakistan under the Simla Agreement, all it wants to know is when can it march into Azad Kashmir.[32]

Columnist Maleeha Lodhi agreed:

> From what is known about the contents of this package, it does not address any of the central questions responsible for the current tensions between India and Pakistan—namely Kashmir and the deployment of troops. It consists mainly of a series of proposals that do not add up to anything substantively new. . . . In general what Delhi depicts as a comprehensive package seem to be a series of disembodied measures which have not been placed in any political context. . . . Delhi's new stance therefore is little more than public-relationing at a time when alarm bells have been set off in the world's capitals by India's belligerent rhetoric and actions of the past couple months.[33]

India's withdrawal of tanks and troops from the Mahajan training range, intended as a clarifying gesture of non-hostile intent, was also dismissed as artifice: "The Indians were allowed to attract political mileage by default since they were able to sell their 'nominal' troops withdrawal as an evidence of their honourable intentions."[34] In a subsequent editorial, Lodhi noted, "The proposal for a dialogue, preceded as it was by a military build-up, seemed to point to characteristic Indian doublespeak—proclaiming peaceful intentions while increasing military pressure on Pakistan."[35] Still later, Lodhi warned Pakistani negotiators from falling into an Indian "trap:"

> It is evident from this that the two sides will enter talks with sharply conflicting notions of what constitutes the central issue. . . . But apart from affording an opportunity to the two countries to restate their positions (which may be useful in itself) are the talks likely to yield anything at all? More importantly are the Indians intending to use the talks as a device to

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[32] Editorial, "PM's cautious optimism," *The Nation*, 12 June 1990. Another article opined, "The proposals rather attempt to divert attention from the main bone of contention which is Kashmir. . . . The Indian proposals . . . are based on five points, most of whom [sic] seem to be a rehash of what India and Pakistan have been talking during the past nine years in their quest for normalisation of relations." Nizami, "Pakistan seeks."

[33] "Delhi's latest moves: ruse or real?" *The Nation*, 5 June 1990.

[34] Editorial, "Indian proposals," *The Nation*, 6 June 1990.

[35] "India's token withdrawal appears to be a ploy," *The Nation*, 15 June 1990. This came following reports that there was a troop buildup in the Indian Punjab.

derive propaganda advantage?[36]

In contrast to the editorial commentary in *The Nation*, *Dawn* was more positively inclined about the possibility of CBMs. Shameen Akhtar wrote,

> Confidence-building measures should be extended to the political and economic fields as well. . . . The important thing is that the two sides should agree to hold talks without any preconditions while routine meetings at secretariat level and official level be resumed. Intransigence and mounting tension could prove detrimental to peace in the region. Once the tension is defused, India and Pakistan have to tackle issues such as mutual balanced force reduction, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Indian Ocean and environment.[37]

An unsigned editorial offered qualified support for a renewed dialogue between the two countries:

> By agreeing to re-start the dialogue with Pakistan, the Indian Government has at least moved a step back form the brink of the precipice. But in the given context, that can only represent one single step on the long road to de-escalation, which must be the aim if a more relaxed atmosphere is to be created. The basic cause of the present crisis is Kashmir. . . . Admittedly, the Foreign Secretaries' talks that New Delhi has agreed to hold next month will help somewhat to defuse tensions and clarify the issues, especially if some confidence-building measures are adopted. But that can only be a prelude to substantitive talks on issues that are at the root of the present Indo–Pakistan crisis.[38]

The detailed discussions of CBMs in 1990 came in response to rising tensions and insecurity. The focus on military-to-military CBMs seemed natural given the need for crisis management at this stage. Once the immediate danger of conflict disappeared, however, their differing security concerns and domestic political considerations prevented movement toward reconciliation. No agreements resulted from the bilateral talks, held in July, but negotiators agreed to meet again in August.[39] Only in the third round of talks, in December 1990, did the two sides resolve to establish a 'hotline' on which the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMO) would converse weekly.[40]

The ambivalence of Pakistan's commentators toward CBMs was rooted both in their assumption that CBMs would not address the conflict in Kashmir, and in their apprehension

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[36] "India's two track policy on Kashmir," *The Nation*, 27 June 1990.

[37] "Indo–Pakistan talks a must," *Dawn*, 19 June 1990.

[38] Editorial, "Starting a dialogue," *Dawn*, 20 June 1990.

[39] Dixit, *op. cit.*, 134.

[40] Ganguly, *op. cit.*, 13.

that the institution of such measures might give their neighbor undue advantages, both politically and militarily. As many of the opinion pieces revealed, there was concern that India would use CBMs to deflect attention away from the unsettled Kashmir dispute which Pakistan believed was the source of conflict. Many commentators were also reluctant to undertake any concrete initiatives until India withdrew its troops from Kashmir, a linkage that would prove crucial to subsequent discussions. India, on the other hand, considered the conflict in Kashmir to be an internal problem, and as such, pointed to Pakistan's interference as the cause of regional tension. Accordingly, CBM proposals by Indian analysts studiously avoided including Pakistan as a party in the Kashmir dispute, and offered ambitious programs to address other areas of tension.

Most importantly, however, discussions of CBMs were constrained by a deep mutual mistrust which made it unlikely that any serious measures could be instituted or implemented properly. And significantly, there was very little high-level political involvement in formulating or shaping public opinion on these issues. The gulf between Indian and Pakistani views toward CBMs was candidly summarized by the Indian Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey after the first round of talks in July: "While the Pakistani delegation had one notion of confidence-building measures, India had another."[41] Nevertheless, an understanding of CBMs as part of a larger mechanism of reconciliation was slowly developing.

The ambivalence of Pakistan's commentators toward CBMs was rooted both in their assumption that CBMs would not address the conflict in Kashmir, and in their apprehension that the institution of such measures might give their neighbor undue advantages, both politically and militarily.

The 1991 CBM Agreements

In April 1991, the Indian and Pakistani foreign secretaries met in New Delhi for a fourth round of talks. The ten months since the initiation of the first round of talks in July 1990 were tumultuous ones for the political leaders of both countries. In India, the BJP withdrew its support for the V.P. Singh government, bringing Chandra Shekhar to the head of a fragile minority coalition as prime minister. In August 1990, amidst continual violence in Sindh, Pakistan's president dismissed Benazir Bhutto, charging her administration with corruption, nepotism, and lawlessness. In the subsequent elections, the victorious Pakistan Muslim League candidate, former Punjab chief minister Nawaz Sharif, was elevated to the

[41] "No headway in Indo–Pak talks," *The Times of India*, 19 July 1990.

office of prime minister. This development was viewed positively by Indian commentator J.N. Dixit, who surmised that while Nawaz Sharif could not retreat from strong postures over Kashmir, he would adopt a much more "reasonable approach" than his predecessor.[42] Chandra Shekhar welcomed the renewal of the Indo–Pak talks. Following a meeting at the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Male, they agreed to set up a hotline and scheduled the next round of talks, which took place in December.[43] Expectations for the April 1991 talks, however, were modest given South Block's preoccupation with the upcoming elections called by the faltering Chandra Shekhar government, the general political malaise caused by the lack of progress in Kashmir, and the Pakistani assumption that the weak National Front government would have little to offer.

Nevertheless, the agreements signed during their tenure were the most substantial of the dialogue process. In January 1991, they ratified the pledge not to attack each other's nuclear facilities.[44] In April 1991, the main items on the confidence-building agenda were military-to-military proposals for advanced notification of military exercises and mutual respect for each other's airspace. A team of Pakistani military officials met with their Indian counterparts in the days before the foreign secretary talks to work out the details of these agreements, which were then signed by Pakistani foreign secretary Shahryar Khan and his Indian counterpart Muchkund Dubey. In addition, the two foreign secretaries promised to resume talks on the disputed Siachen Glacier which had been suspended in 1989, to discuss the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, and to demarcate the boundaries in the contentious Sir Creek region. Behind these initiatives was a commitment from Nawaz Sharif and Chandra Shekhar to push the dialogue forward, especially in areas where concrete gains could be made. Though Nawaz Sharif did promise to support the Kashmiri people, he did not link progress in the Kashmir dispute with movement on other proposals.

In contrast to the press coverage in 1990, these talks received considerably more attention in Pakistan than in India, perhaps due to the latter's preoccupation with the approaching elections. In general, press commentary in Pakistan reflected a consensus that, while overall gains were small, these talks were at least a step in a positive direction. Despite this modest support, there was still a note of ambivalence running through the commentaries in both countries. Observers understood that CBMs were worthwhile devices, but many seemed uncertain that this process would ever lead to a "final settlement" in the Kashmir

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[42] Dixit, *op. cit.*, 139. Dixit maintains that Sharif "believed that expanding economic relations and building military confidence measures might create the basis for tackling the most intractable problems."

[43] Indian and Pakistani negotiators agreed to avoid the harassment of each other's diplomats and vowed to design some military confidence-building measures which would be discussed in the next round. *Ibid.*, 140.

[44] K.K. Katyal, "India, Pak. sign accords," *The Hindu*, 7 April 1991; "Talks on Siachen to resume," *The Times of India*, 8 April 1991.

conflict.[45] Moreover, editors, especially in *The Nation*, seemed to be concluding that CBMs were unlikely to attend to the Kashmir issue. This attitude foreshadowed later debates over the basic premises of CBMs as they pertained to the Indo–Pak peace process.

As with the previous talks, *The Nation*'s stance was firm:

> Given the intricate nature of outstanding problems between Pakistan and India and the lingering atmosphere of mutual distrust, the Foreign Secretaries' talks are hardly the forum to secure a major breakthrough in mutual ties. Nevertheless, it has been a useful mechanism to keep the official contact alive and put across each other's point of view on issues on which the two countries hold antagonistic positions and that need to be discussed at the highest level. . . . So long as the main source of discord, New Delhi's adamant refusal to recognize that Kashmir is a disputed matter and the Kashmiris are entitled to exercise their right of self-determination, remains unresolved, peripheral concessions to each other can merely keep the fiction of normalization alive.[46]

Both *Dawn* and *The Nation* offered measured support for the CBM agreements, but cautioned against ignoring Kashmir in the dialogue. *Dawn* editorialized, "Confidence-building measures are important and should certainly be adopted. But a prolonged unwillingness to resolve the Kashmir dispute politically could prove costly for peace and stability in the region."[47] Likewise, *The Nation* contended,

Behind these initiatives was a commitment from Nawaz Sharif and Chandra Shekhar to push the dialogue forward, especially in areas where concrete gains could be made.

> While the urge to improve relations with India and secure peace in the region is a legitimate foreign policy objective for Pakistan and bilateral talks should continue under all circumstances, there should be no move in the part of Islamabad which could be implied as casting the Kashmir issue to limbo for the sake of amity with India.[48]

Indeed, most observers concluded that the Indo–Pak dialogue must continue. M.H. Askari asserted that despite few major gains,

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[45] Editorial, "Tangled India-Pak ties," *The Times of India*, 11 April 1991.

[46] Editorial, "Foreign Secretaries' talks," *The Nation*, 29 March 1991. This editorial concluded with the prediction that Pakistan could expect little more than 'traditional hospitality' from a caretaker government.

[47] Editorial, "Heightened Tensions," *Dawn*, 10 April 1991.

[48] Editorial, "Message from Srinagar," *The Nation*, 7 April 1991.

> . . . the decision to keep each other informed of the timing and location of their training exercises, combined with the agreement on non-violation of each other's air space, would certainly avert unnecessary tension. All this indicates the will on the part of both Governments to think in terms of peace rather than war.[49]

Arif Azim added, "The parleys did not attract as much attention as had the previous round at Islamabad but the very fact that the two countries have started regular negotiations is an indication that there are chances of resolving the unsettled issues through peaceful means."[50]

Though the talks received little attention in India, the 'chattering class' was largely supportive of the dialogue. K.K. Katyal described the Indian view:

> As New Delhi sees it, the agreements will contribute to the promotion of confidence-building measures and improve the climate in the bilateral field. . . . [The] agreements—along with the earlier one on non-attack of nuclear facilities—will certainly reverse the negative trends which, not long ago, brought the two countries to the brink of an armed conflict. It will, however, be unrealistic to assume that the basic causes of the mistrust— and tension—have disappeared.

Recognizing the role of political will, he wrote, "The gap in the positions of the two sides is as wide as ever. But the significance of the fact that it did not come in the way of agreements is not to be minimized."[51] Inder Malhotra was unusually positive toward the 1991 initiatives, praising military CBMs:

> Since the two countries have to live side by side, it is better that they do so in peace and, if possible, co-operation rather than in conflict, strife and bickering. To expect dramatic strides towards this goal would, of course, be unrealistic. But to give up because of the obvious obstacles would be an act of despair. It is equally clear that the hurdles on the road to rapprochement cannot be got out of the way by either side unilaterally. Joint efforts have to be made by both. . . . The agreement on advance notice by each country to the other of military exercises of a certain size at a particular distance from the border should not be dismissed as minor. . . . It is also noteworthy that the details of the agreement on advance notice of military exercises and of that on avoidance of violations of each other's air space were settled by senior military officers of the two countries who can benefit from more frequent contacts in [the] future.

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[49] "The dialogue should continue," *Dawn*, 10 April 1991. Here he also suggests that Track Two diplomacy might be able to sustain a dialogue that official representatives cannot. H.A. Rizvi agreed, contending, "It is imperative that Pakistan and India continue to talk on the contentious issues at the bilateral and multi-lateral levels so that the chances of escalation of tension due to lack of communication or mis-communication are reduced to a minimum." "Pakistan–India diplomacy," *The Nation*, 3 April 1991.

[50] "Some progress at New Delhi," *The Nation*, 12 April 1991.

[51] "India, Pak. sign accords," *op. cit.*

Perhaps most significantly, he remarked that there had been "a return to decency in [the] dialogue."[52]

The views expressed on the 1991 talks was more positive than in 1990, especially in Pakistan. First, there was high-level political involvement on the part of Nawaz Sharif to create a positive political atmosphere for these talks to take place, an effort which was duly recognized in the press. Sharif's emphasis on increasing the dialogue with India, in turn, influenced media assessment of CBMs, and of the dialogue process in general. Moreover, Sharif did not link progress in resolving the Kashmir dispute with success on other negotiations as strongly as his predecessor. Secondly, Pakistani commentators cautioned their readers not to forgot about Kashmir, but placed no restrictions on progressing on other issues that might reduce tensions in the region. Indian analysts also focused on the evolutionary nature of CBM negotiations, supporting the process which, with significant political will, could establish a framework for future dialogue and agreements. Both sides recognized the role CBMs played in keeping the dialogue alive, encouraging official contacts, and taking small steps in expressing, and understanding, each sides' views on important issues. Yet the military CBM agreements to emerge from this round of talks, the most ambitious of the dialogues, received surprisingly little press attention. The absence of military tension no doubt contributed to their easy acceptance.

As CBMs developed into systemic components to the dialogue, their nature was increasingly debated. Conceptually, were CBMs tools to build confidence so that the substantive issues could be worked out through other methods? Or would CBMs rise gradually to the challenge of addressing the 'core issues' themselves? As the potential and utility of CBMs began to be widely discussed, the tension between these two interpretations would come to the foreground.

January 1994: The Dialogue Stops

The next round of talks which were scheduled to begin in January 1994 had very inauspicious beginnings. Benazir Bhutto, reinstated in October 1993 as prime minister in a Supreme Court ruling, made positive overtures to India in her first weeks in office. Soon, however, she came under strong domestic pressure to take a hard line against India over human rights violations in Kashmir, and to slow down the process of 'normalization' between the two countries.[53] She campaigned to internationalize the conflict on her foreign trips,

[52] "Tangled India–Pakistan Ties," *The Times of India*, 11 April 1991.

[53] M.H. Askari, "Dialogue should go on," *Dawn*, 22 December 1993.

prompting Indian accusations that she had violated the Simla Agreement.[54] Influenced by Bhutto's renewed emphasis on Kashmir, and cognizant that the previous meetings had failed to secure the Kashmir dispute as a legitimate issue in the dialogue, commentators in Pakistan viewed this round of talks as another exercise in futility.[55] In the press, Pakistani journalists and officials focused more intensely on the continuing presence of the Indian military in Kashmir. Expectations were raised in the weeks before the scheduled talks, however, when Indian prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao agreed to discuss the status of Kashmir in exchange for the withdrawal of a United Nations resolution on Indian human rights which Pakistan had tabled in September of 1993. Nevertheless, relations between the two countries appeared to plummet with heightened attention to the Kashmir dispute in Pakistan. Were the old patterns of mistrust and acrimonious disagreement again becoming hurdles to reconciliation in the Subcontinent? Had the positive overtures of the Nawaz Sharif government become a victim of domestic political considerations in Pakistan?

The newly installed Bhutto government appeared to be uncomfortable with—and politically vulnerable to—dialogue with India. Much of the momentum of the Bhutto government was invested in bringing the conflict in Kashmir to the forefront of Pakistan's foreign and domestic policy. This approach translated into a vociferous and intensely public presentation of the issue to Pakistani audiences; it also gave Bhutto means to counter opposition attacks portraying the new government as 'soft' on Kashmir. Meanwhile, the Indian government's position remained rigidly opposed to talks on Kashmir that would satisfy the Pakistani government's concerns. The historical escalation of the Kashmir issue by Pakistani officials and the media, combined with intense firefights on the ground, made it difficult, even impossible, for India to compromise its stance. In the days before the talks, the Pakistani foreign minister asked the Indian government to undertake a total withdrawal from the Kashmir Valley as a "minimum step" to prove their sincerity."[56] Other Pakistani officials, calling the dialogue "sterile," threatened to end the process if Kashmir, and the wishes of the Kashmiri people, were not seriously addressed by India.[57]

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[54] K.K. Katyal, "Benazir's hardened line on Kashmir," *The Hindu*, 1 January 1994. Katyal compiled a revealing series of quotations from Bhutto and other Pakistani officials which charted the gradual shift in rhetoric. Starting from the original talk proposals, agreed upon by Bhutto and Indian prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao just after her re-appointment as prime minister in October 1993, official comments changed in tone from measured support to pessimism and rejection.

[55] Editorial, "Tasks for Pak–India moot," *The Nation*, 20 December 1993.

[56] Nasir Malick, "Last chance for India to prove sincerity, says FM," *Dawn*, 1 January 1994. See also his statements reported in "Talks last chance for peace, says Assef," *The Nation*, 1 January 1994.

[57] "No talks in future if deadlock remains," *The Nation*, 31 December 1993.

Dawn echoed this resolve, linking the resolution of the Kashmir issue to progress in the Indo–Pak dialogue, while challenging the Indian delegation to show its goodwill:

> As the Indian security forces' suppression of the freedom struggle in occupied Kashmir becomes more and more brutal with each passing day, it appears less and less likely that the foreign secretary-level talks scheduled for January 1–3 would lead to any significant lessening of tensions between Pakistan and India. Kashmir is the core dispute vitiating the atmosphere and without a genuine effort to resolve it, the prospects of even a modicum of normalisation between the two countries would continue to be bleak. . . . There is time yet for New Delhi to prove by deed that the Islamabad talks are not intended as yet another exercise in sterile diplomacy.[58]

Given official statements on the eve of the talks, and the unrealistic and obviously unacceptable conditions they placed on India, press commentary in Pakistan appeared to be setting the stage for a suspension of the Indo–Pak dialogue.[59] Observers questioned the very utility of the talks. Many wondered if they had not been maneuvered into a process that diverted Pakistan from the 'core' issue, allowing India to present itself internationally as a constructive party while it simultaneously strengthened its position militarily in Kashmir. Threats to discontinue the talks came from "the widely held perception in Pakistan that India is going through this entire process of talks merely to buy time and break Pakistan's momentum of internationalising the issue."[60] While conceding that CBMs were a welcome part of the dialogue, and have helped prevent Indo–Pak relations from reaching a "boiling point," Nasim Zehra insisted that the talks had crippled Pakistan's foreign policy goals.

> In this situation [continuing violence in Kashmir] the January talks are unlikely to be any different from that of the previous rounds. . . . By engaging in the Indo–Pak dialogue New Delhi remains ostensibly committed to its stated policy of finding a political solution to Kashmir through bilateral negotiations. Yet through sheer brute force it continues to pursue its operational policy of brutally crushing the movement. At the international level talks have helped New Delhi to deflect international pressure. . . . Islamabad's position on Indo–Pak talks now appears somewhat crystallized. Consensus exists between the Foreign Office and the military leadership that without tangible progress on Kashmir in the January talks no further round of talks be scheduled.
>
> Clearly from any piece-meal agreement over the Jammu and Kashmir territory much propaganda capital will accrue to the Indians. Washington and sundry will interpret an agreement over Siachen as a major confidence-building measure. Islamabad will be advised to continue the talks. Internationally India will regain some of its lost stature. In the Valley an agreement over

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[58] Editorial, "Does India mean business?" *Dawn*, 27 December 1993.

[59] Editorial, "Between hope and despair," *The Nation*, 31 December 1993.

[60] Fahd Husain, "Chances of major breakthrough extremely bleak," *The Nation*, 1 January 1994, (5).

> Siachen will be seen as a step towards a phased sell-out of Kashmiris by the Pakistanis. . . . International mediation is a must even to make the Indo–Pak dialogue meaningful.[61]

Likewise, *The Nation* added,

> The Indian thesis that the resolution of minor and more manageable issues, which the late Rajiv Gandhi had proposed during his visit to Pakistan, would prepare the right climate for tackling the major issue of Kashmir, lost whatever validity it had when the people of Kashmir rose in revolt against the Indian rule.[62]

Lonely voices in Pakistan defended the Indo–Pak dialogue. Husain Naqi felt that this was still an opportune occasion to expand on some of the CBMs already in place, recommending a broad range of cultural, informational, educational, travel and economic exchanges that would promote goodwill and understanding in less contentious spheres.[63] Overall, however, CBMs became a casualty of distrust, frustration, and the change in government in Islamabad. Although generally benign in the abstract, CBMs came to be seen as complicit in a process that allowed India to keep her commitment to dialogue, but to avoid discussing its presence and posture in Kashmir. Yet most realized that an outright rejection of CBMs by Bhutto's government would only be detrimental to Pakistan.

Conversely, press commentary in India was again low-key, restrained and favorable toward CBMs. Although journalists recognized early that Pakistan's stated position was discouraging, and that the foreign secretary talks were likely to fail, they played down the implications.[64] Deferring to the symbolic importance of the process, K.K. Katyal advised, "Public opinion in the two countries needs to avoid two extreme tendencies—of either pinning hopes on spectacular results or of cutting off the dialogue as an exercise in futility. The contact to be re-established tomorrow is to be seen as part of a process and not an end in itself."[65]

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[61] "The make or break round," *The Nation*, 30 December 1993. See also Altaf Gauhar, "*Noora kushti*," *The Nation*, 31 December 1993. Going further, Jalal-ud-Din advocated international mediation because, "Kashmir is no longer an issue that [can] be resolved between the governments of India and Pakistan. None [*sic*] of them have the necessary mandate from the people of Kashmir and neither of them can legitimately claim to represent them." "Kashmir and the nuclear issue," *Dawn*, 25 December 1993.

[62] Editorial, "Pakistan–India moot," *The Nation*, 4 January 1994.

[63] "Of the visit, Indo–Pak talks and the tussle," *The Nation*, 2 January 1994.

[64] "Subtle Pak bid to scuttle dialogue," *The Times of India*, 1 January 1994; "Benazir hopes for a positive outcome," *The Times of India*, 3 January 1994.

[65] "India, Pak. resolve to sort out issues," *The Hindu*, 1 January 1994.

Defense analyst Jasjit Singh discussed the constructive role of CBMs in the negotiations process, recommending "a politically binding pact to ensure that force and the threat of force is not used, directly or indirectly, in the future regardless of the nature and interpretation of the dispute."

> . . . [G]reater transparency, reduction of defense expenditures, deployments in peace time, and confidence building measures in conventional military postures would naturally have to be instituted to support the force reduction agreements. A conventional force reduction agreement would naturally reduce threat perception, provide a positive reassurance against war, reduce the costs of defense, and, in turn, lower the nuclear risks in the region.[66]

During the talks themselves, CBMs were overshadowed by the overwhelming attention the Pakistani media and government officials gave to the Kashmir dispute, and the linkage of this issue to the resolution of other points of contention. Both India and Pakistan restated their well-known positions and the talks concluded, unsurprisingly, with no agreements or progress. A proposal by New Delhi to turn the Line of Control into a 'line of peace' was rejected by Pakistan.[67] In a joint statement, the foreign secretaries praised the dialogue processes, and politely "agreed to find ways to move forward to resolve this problem . . . despite the very fundamental differences of opinion about the situation on the ground."[68] Suggestions by India for further talks within four months were not greeted with enthusiasm by Pakistani officials.

Despite the gridlock, Indian commentators continued to express faith in the negotiation process. J.N. Dixit reiterated his support for the dialogue: "I can say with absolute confidence that each time we back away from talks it increases tension and each time we come back to talks, it contributes to reducing tension."[69] An editorial in *The Times of India* reaffirmed the importance of continuing bilateral talks:

> The major hurdle at the Islamabad meeting was obvious: the intractable nature of the issues emerging from the manner in which the two countries perceive themselves. . . . However, by talking to each other, the two sides have at least reaffirmed the hitherto moribund Simla process and signaled to the world that notwithstanding their difficulties, they are capable of diplomatic discourse without assistance from outside.[70]

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[66] "Talks With Pakistan: Simla Agreement Still the Basis," *The Times of India*, 21 December 1993.

[67] Fahd Husain, "Pakistan, India talks on Kashmir fail," *The Nation*, 4 January 1994.

[68] P.S. Suryanarayana, "Efforts to continue to resolve Kashmir issue," *The Hindu*, 4 January 1994.

[69] Sunil Narula, "Indo–Pak talks end in deadlock," *The Times of India*, 4 January 1994.

[70] Editorial, "Talking to Pakistan," 5 January 1994.

The Hindu's sympathy for Pakistan's position was less gracious:

> To have expected very much more than a testing of waters from the dialogue . . . would not only have been unrealistic but would have placed unfair pressure on a process that indeed has very heavy stakes. . . . If Indian diplomacy has tended to work on the assumption that an incremental approach would bring more enduring results, Pakistan's strategy has been aggressively maximalist, insisting that forward movement in the bilateral relationship would depend primarily on a resolution of the 'core issue'—Kashmir.[71]

Conversely, *Dawn* and *The Nation* placed the blame for failure squarely on India.

> . . . [W]hat has actually transpired at the negotiations table is a reaffirmation of the view that there has been no real change in New Delhi's stance on Kashmir, and the offer to have talks on Kashmir was basically a ploy to hoodwink world opinion. . . . We are told by the Foreign Office that it was necessary to go through the drill of talks on Kashmir to convince our friends abroad that we were willing to negotiate with India on all outstanding disputes. But the Indians, being past masters of running international propaganda campaigns, are not likely to miss the opportunity to hold Pakistan responsible for the deadlock.[72]

Reinforcing government statements, political commentators in Pakistan expressed increased frustration that CBMs had not led to any "breakthrough" in the Kashmir dispute. Once committed to a hardline on Kashmir, concessions by Bhutto in the bilateral talks would have compromised her public posture on the dispute and given significant political mileage to Nawaz Sharif.[73] And following the posture of the Bhutto government, many felt that the Indo–Pak dialogue process, of which CBMs were a major component, could not successfully address the Kashmir conflict before other points of tension. This attitude broke from the initiatives of Nawaz Sharif. With so much emphasis on resolving the Kashmir dispute, CBMs could be discredited as introducing palliatives in the Indo–Pak dialogue.

The Indian approach to these talks was far more relaxed. Commentators in India again stressed the role of CBMs as a constructive component to an evolutionary dialogue process. Observers also remarked that the continuation of the dialogue confirmed their commitment to the process, even if substantial gains were not expected. South Block took a casually supportive view of CBMs, and did not seem pressured to make significant strides. In fact, it was this posture, many Pakistanis wrote, that had allowed India to simultaneously keep

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[71] Editorial, "A good beginning," 5 January 1994. See also, Editorial, "An opportunity missed," *Dawn*, 5 January 1994.

[72] Editorial, "Seventh round and after," *The Nation*, 5 January 1994.

[73] In a gesture to India before the talks, Pakistan withdrew its UN Resolution on human rights violations in Kashmir. The failure to secure a reciprocal gesture from India prompted accusations of India's duplicity and criticisms of Pakistan's leadership.

Kashmir as a bilateral issue—preventing international, namely United Nations, mediation—and to keep it off the agenda of the talks. Indeed, the Pakistani critique that New Delhi wanted to use CBMs to shift the focus away from Kashmir had some validity.

The Bhutto government's increasing frustration with the lack of progress over Kashmir, and the Pakistani prime minister's domestic political compulsions, limited the scope for compromise in this last round of talks. The political will of Nawaz Sharif to work toward the settlement of other disputes independent of Kashmir was absent. Press attitudes in Pakistan reflected the hardline of the Bhutto government and did not seek other alternatives within the dialogue process. Following this failed round, the dialogue took a three year hiatus. When negotiations resumed, in an atmosphere of unprecedented optimism, leaders would seek to overcome these divisions through regained political will.

The 1997 Joint Statement on Working Groups: A new beginning for CBMs?

When India and Pakistan initiated a new round of talks in early 1997, it was invigorated political will on both sides, and not a crisis, which led to their resumption. The culmination of this process, the Joint Statement on Working Groups announced following the June 1997 Foreign Secretaries' talks, was a commitment to discuss Kashmir, CBMs, and other disputed issues in an integrated bilateral fashion. The groundwork for these talks was laid in a series of opportune political developments and exploratory meetings throughout 1996 and 1997. India's national election in May 1996 returned a precarious and unwieldy coalition to the Center. The new United Front (UF) government, first under H.D. Deve Gowda, and then-Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral, immediately set a new tone to their role in regional relations.[74] The UF's chosen instrument was the much-touted 'Gujral Doctrine,' which sought to improve relations with India's neighbors through the unilateral resolution of outstanding grievances. Although this policy

It was not immediately clear whether the Gujral Doctrine's scope was to extend to Pakistan, giving rise to fears in Pakistan that this doctrine would serve to isolate it from its South Asian counterparts.

[74] In a cordial meeting, Pakistan's interim government's foreign minister, Sahabzada Yakub Khan, and I.K. Gujral discussed modest confidence-building measures at the SAARC Ministerial Conference in December 1996. Recognizing the temporal position of Khan, Gujral stated that he hoped to initiate new round of talks once a new government, presumably under Nawaz Sharif, came to power. The significance of this meeting, however, was played down by India and Pakistan who maintained that this was not a resumption of the formal dialogue. K.K. Katyal, "No commitment on Indo–Pak dialogue," *The Hindu*, 19 December 1996.

did much to reconcile India with Nepal and Bangladesh, it was not immediately clear whether the Gujral Doctrine's scope was to extend to Pakistan, giving rise to fears in Pakistan that this doctrine would serve to isolate it from its South Asian counterparts.[75] The UF also managed to conduct peaceful state elections in Jammu and Kashmir in September which many observers regarded as fair. Political commentators and government officials interpreted this development as a reflection of India's strengthened position in the state after years of battling insurgency.[76]

Contacts between the UF government and the Bhutto government were limited in the short period that their tenures overlapped; in fact several requests from the Gowda government to resume the dialogue, stalled since 1994, went unanswered by Bhutto. However, the dismissal of the Bhutto government in November 1996 and the overwhelming electoral victory of Nawaz Sharif in February 1997 led commentators to observe that new opportunities had arisen.[77] Through his campaign, Sharif spoke positively of cooperation with India. Not to disappoint, immediately after the election Sharif declared that he was "committed to improving relations with India through dialogue and not through confrontation."[78]

Echoing the sentiments of many in the Indian press, *The Hindu*'s national security correspondent, C. Raja Mohan, predicted that the election of Nawaz Sharif, and his progressive statements on Indo–Pakistan relations, was likely to usher in a pragmatic assessment of the existing situation.

> One, the elections were free of anti-India rhetoric, and given the intense domestic crisis, the focus was on corruption and economic issues. Two, during the elections, Mr. Sharif talked about improving relations with India. . . . When Mr. Sharif was Prime Minister during 1990–93, there was a sustained, if not entirely successful, dialogue. Three, it is argued that Mr. Sharif represents the rising industrial and entrepreneurial classes which are more focused on economic advancement and fed up with prolonged Indo–Pakistan tensions that have been dragging Pakistan

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[75] C. Raja Mohan, "Pakistan and the Gujral doctrine," *The Hindu*, 28 March 1997; Umashanker Phadnis, "Gujral excludes Pakistan from 'doctrine,'" *Dawn*, 22 January 1997.

[76] This is in contrast to the numerous allegations that the Security Forces had coerced voter turnout in the Parliamentary elections held in conjunction with the national election in May. See Šumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1997), 154–55.

[77] Editorial, "Will dialogue break the deadlock," *The Hindu*, 9 March 1997; C. Raja Mohan, "Resuming Indo–Pak. dialogue," *The Hindu*, February 6, 1997.

[78] "Nawaz seeks closer ties with India thru talks", *Dawn*, 5 February 1997. See also, "Foreign Secy-level talks with Pakistan will resume on March 28," *The Times of India*, 7 March 1997.

> down. And finally, the acute economic crisis makes it imperative for Pakistan to de-escalate the conflict with India in order to set its own house in order.[79]

Nevertheless, Raja Mohan and others voiced reservations about the ability of the Sharif government to make the decisions which would alleviate the basic differences between India and Pakistan. Many Indian observers questioned the ability of Nawaz Sharif to engineer a new phase of bilateral relations if the Pakistani military leadership remained wedded to inflexible positions.[80]

In his first month in office, Nawaz Sharif accepted a proposal from Deve Gowda to engage in "wide-ranging comprehensive talks on all issues at an 'appropriate level.'" The prime ministers agreed that foreign secretary-level talks would be held in New Delhi from March 28–31.[81] Correctly assessing India's priorities, Nawaz Sharif provoked debate in the Indian press when he added in his reply to Deve Gowda, "I hope you will agree with me that without some progress on the core issues of Jammu and Kashmir it will be difficult to initiate meaningful cooperation in economic and cultural fields."[82] Over the next several months, the Indian press combed the statements of Nawaz Sharif and his foreign minister, Gohar Ayub Khan, for this crucial linkage, hoping that Pakistan would discontinue its 'core issue' mantra and seek a step-by-step approach—including CBMs—that was more amenable to India.[83]

In the days before the first round of talks, both India and Pakistan made unilateral and reciprocal goodwill gestures; India eased many of its visa restrictions for Pakistani tourists and businessmen while Pakistan released thirty-eight Indian children captured at sea by Pakistan.[84] Announcing their commitment to improved relations and the bilateral process,

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[79] "Resuming Indo–Pak. dialogue," *op.cit.*

[80] One commentator, M.D. Nalapat, recommended "unilateral concessions on trade culture, and other field to signal to the Pakistani people that the [Indian] desire is for reconciliation," while arguing strongly that the military's monopoly on strategic decision-making in Pakistan precluded any strategic concessions by India, such as a withdrawal from Siachen. "India–Pakistan talks: Keep your fingers crossed," *The Times of India*, 5 March 1997. S.D. Muni advocated support for the Sharif government and democratic forces in Pakistan so as to diminish the legitimacy of the "inherited" sectors of the Pakistani establishment. "Constructive engagement with Pakistan is in India's interest," *The Times of India*, 13 May 1997.

[81] "Foreign Secy-level," *op.cit.*

[82] K.K. Katyal, "Will dialogue break the deadlock?" *The Hindu*, 9 March 1997.

[83] C. Raja Mohan's, "Indo–Pak. relations: what's in a letter," (*The Hindu*, 3 March 1997) and "Resuming Indo–Pak. dialogue" explore these statements. In "Secy.-level talks will set the tone: Pakistan," (*The Hindu*, 17 March, 1997) P.S. Suryanarayana discusses the hesitant and pessimistic remarks of Gohar Ayub Khan about the potential of the new talks.

[84] K.K. Katyal, "Travel curbs on Pakistan nationals eased," *The Hindu*, 21 March 1997.

Pakistani spokesmen indicated flexibility and pledged to make progress.[85] Observers unanimously welcomed the resumption of "exploratory" talks, and while expectations were low that significant agreements might be worked out, these meetings were seen as a prelude to further progress.[86] An editorial in *Dawn*, worth quoting at length, clearly called on the two sides to turn the page:

> It would be a pity if India and Pakistan were to dissipate their energies and time in quibbling over procedural questions such as the details of the agenda, modalities and so on even before the dialogue has started. The basic need of the hour is to open the channels of communications which were broken off in January 1994 when the foreign secretaries held their last round of talks. Along with that it is important that the two sides strive to create an equation of mutual trust and confidence between them. Given the long history of suspicion and mistrust which has characterised their relations since 1947, the first step for them to take is to agree to make their talks substantive, while initiating confidence-building measures as they go along, so that a climate of understanding and friendship is created to sustain the progress. It is plain that without a change in the political and psychological climate in South Asia and without a strong-willed and sincere approach to conflict resolution, not much headway can be made towards coming to grips with complex issues of contention. . . . At times it appears their concern is more about playing to the gallery back home than negotiating with each other in right earnest.[87]

Dawn pointedly recognized that past impediments to dialogue were created by acrimonious official rhetoric, counseling Indian and Pakistani representatives to "commit themselves to a code which should require them not to issue public statements on the issues being discussed—or not being discussed—at this stage. If they refrain from indulging in a war of words on sensitive issues, they would at least avoid vitiating the atmosphere for the negotiations."[88] Notably, the dialogue process was characterized by the absence of the hostile rhetoric which had helped derail the 1994 talks. While the *Dawn* editorial focused on solutions and ways of preserving the dialogue, *The Nation* greeted the parleys with considerably more hesitation. As in the past, *The Nation* viewed the talks as "the first crucial

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[85] P.S. Suryanarayana, "Pakistan will enter talks with 'an open mind,'" *The Hindu*, 20 March 1997.

[86] Fahd Husain, "Crucial Pak–India talks start today;" Ishtiaq Ahmad, "The enemies are finally talking," *The Nation*, 29 March 1997; M.B. Naqvi, "Time to break the deadlock," 28 March 1997 (Surprisingly, Naqvi further called for the cessation of military support for the Kashmiri militants); "Pakistan and the Gujral doctrine," *op. cit.* Here, Raja Mohan challenges Pakistan to accept subregional cooperation to reduce tension and promote mutual prosperity.

[87] "Seizing a historic opportunity," 28 March, 1997.

[88] *Ibid.* Fahd Husain, in "Crucial Pak–India talks start today with cautious optimism," (*The Nation*, 28 March 1997), further praised both sides for their 'constructive rhetoric.'

step towards a good beginning," but they were not willing to abandon settling the 'core issue' of Kashmir.[89]

The first round of renewed talks, however, was overshadowed by domestic political events in India. The mounting political conflict between the UF and the Congress Party made it difficult to foresee anything other than a restatement of their well-known positions; the withdrawal of support for the Deve Gowda government by Congress on 31 March rendered the already limited focus of the talks moot.[90] The sole legacy of this round was the Pakistani suggestion that 'working groups' be constituted to take up the outstanding issues at a later date.[91]

The elevation of I.K. Gujral to the office of prime minister in April bolstered hopes that the nascent dialogue would gain momentum. The mainstream English language press in Pakistan was overwhelmingly favorable in its initial assessments of Gujral, anticipating a special 'chemistry' between him and Nawaz Sharif, two Punjabi leaders.[92] Nawaz Sharif reiterated his desire to build a foundation of peace in South Asia, encouraging journalists to speculate about the possibilities for economic and political cooperation.[93] The scheduled meeting between the Prime Ministers at the May 1997 SAARC Summit in Male inspired hopes that these two statesmen could ensure the dialogue remained on track.[94] However, the initial

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[89] "Indo–Pak talks," 28 March 1997.

[90] M.H. Askari was most hopeful, writing: "On balance, it would be reasonable to assume that the resumption of a dialogue between Pakistan and India has helped to minimise mistrust and tensions." ("With Gujral at the helm," *Dawn*, 23 April 1997)—and *The Nation*, least: " . . . that the process would not be affected by the political uncertainty which has now gripped India, sound[s] more like the triumph of hope over reality. The fact is that whichever party or combination of parties will be in power in India after the dust of the present crisis settles one way or the other, the talks process will be subjected to the necessity for a fresh beginning, perhaps with changed parameters and intent from the Indian side." Editorial, "Indian political crisis," 1 April 1997.

[91] Fahd Husain, "Indo–Pak talks take definitive shape," *The Nation*, 30 March 1997.

[92] Editorial, "Gujral's priorities," *The Nation*, 22 April 1997; M.H. Askari, "With Gujral at the helm," *Dawn*, 23 April 1997.

[93] Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Nawaz calls for solution of all issues with India," *The Nation*, 26 April 1997. In the days following these statements, India and Pakistan signed an agreement to cooperate on the prevention of drug-trafficking. Iftikhar Gilani, "Pakistan–India accord to control drug-trafficking," *The Nation*, 27 April 1997.

[94] At a broader level, the SAARC Summit served as a point of departure for reflections of India and Pakistan's economic relationship and its role in promoting regional cooperation in South Asia. Many commentators agreed that SAARC's presence had been both limited and disappointing, because, as one editorial stated, "[SAARC's] largest constituencies, India and Pakistan, have tended to assume that the best opportunities for economic integration lie outside the region. . . . There is nothing wrong in Indian and Pakistan seeking to expand their horizons in this manner but in the absence of integration at the South Asian level, little benefit is going to come their way." Editorial, "Castles in the air," *The Times of India*, 19 May 1997.

enthusiasm in Pakistan over Gujral turned to disappointment, as statements on the 'non-negotiable' status of Kashmir and the parameters and goals of the Gujral Doctrine seemed to betray his goodwill.[95] Nawaz Sharif, in turn, stated that any agreements on trade were predicated on progress on the Kashmir issue.[96] Editorials in *The Nation* cautioned against unwarranted optimism and reminded readers not to forget the 'core issue' of Kashmir—a line held throughout the 1997 talks process.[97] Despite the emerging difficulties, government spokesmen on both sides made efforts to play down negative statements and continue to support the burgeoning dialogues. Moreover, while both prime ministers, when pressed, returned to their traditional positions on Kashmir, press analysts did not immediately associate their statements with official policy. There was a tacit recognition that these position were taken as much for domestic political expediency as anything else, a courtesy rarely extended to national leaders in the past.[98]

Nawaz Sharif's role in the resumption of the dialogue was crucial. Publicly maintaining that he had an electoral mandate from the Pakistani people to improve relations with India, his overtures were seen as sincere.

Nawaz Sharif's role in the resumption of the dialogue was crucial. Publicly maintaining that he had an electoral mandate from the Pakistani people to improve relations with India, his overtures were seen as sincere. In marked contrast to his predecessor, he stressed that discussions over outstanding issues should proceed bilaterally; despite obvious political confines, he vowed to end the harassment of India's diplomats in his country, suggested a reduction of both countries' defense budgets, pledged to further ease visa restrictions, and called for a "new beginning" in Indo–Pak relations.[99]

The 12 May Sharif–Gujral meeting in the Maldives was notable for its warmth and cordiality. Some commentators saw the shift in tone, shorn of acrimony and contention, as

[95] See Altaf Gauhar, "Gujral: A saint abroad, and a devil at home," and the editorial "Nawaz–Gujral meeting" in *The Nation*, 4 May 1997; Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Nawaz–Gujral meeting to be a non-starter?" *The Nation*, 11 May 1997.

[96] "Trade with India subject to withdrawal of forces from Kashmir: Nawaz," *The Nation*, 11 May 1997.

[97] "Gujral's bonhomie," 27 April 1997. Also, "Mr. Gujral on Kashmir," 29 April 1997.

[98] Dr. Maqbool Ahmad Bhatty, "New look for the dialogue," *Dawn*, 10 May 1997; Pran Chopra, "Good intentions at Male," *The Hindu*, 16 May 1997; K.K. Katyal, "Hotline with Pak. being revived," *The Hindu*, 18 June 1997.

[99] Iftikar Gilani, "Indian, Pak troops should quit Kashmir: Nawaz," *The Nation*, 7 June 1997.

a watershed in Indo–Pak relations.[100] The prime ministers vowed to release civilian prisoners, establish a hotline in order to facilitate communication, relax travel restrictions, and to institute a series of working groups to address outstanding issues, including Kashmir, for the foreign secretary talks scheduled for June.[101] *Dawn* welcomed these CBMs, stating that they "should pave the way for meaningful negotiations."

> The fact is that a dialogue can produce results only if the right framework is created for it and the political climate is cordial. Then alone can a spirit of give-and-take be brought to bear upon the process of negotiations that has long been stymied by old rigidities of approach and blind prejudices. . . . Thus an accord on a hotline between the two premiers and the easing of travel restrictions should help promote greater communication between the leaders and people of the two countries. . . . [I]t might be pointed out that an important confidence-building measure which India and Pakistan should consider is that of exchange of newspapers and magazines. There can be no better way of promoting understanding between the two countries, especially to get the people of one to see the point of view of the other.[102]

Despite the stated optimism of both national leaders, the question of linkage between improved Indo–Pak relations and progress on the Kashmir dispute remained.[103] Although the rhetoric was 'softer' and more nuanced, there was little evidence that breakthrough compromises could be brokered; Pakistani officials felt that the 'core issue' of Kashmir must be tackled alongside other issues, while India saw a step-by-step approach (then being practiced through Sino–Indian CBMs) as potentially the most rewarding in the near- and long-term.[104] The "optimism" of which commentators so often spoke was founded on the hope that the other side would make the necessary "breakthrough." While neither side wished to shut

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[100] Editorial, "One Step Forward," *The Times of India*, 14 May 1997; Editorial, "The breakthrough summit," *Dawn*, 14 May 1997. *The Nation* also praised this tone, but quickly returned to stressing the discussion of the Kashmir issue, and the withdrawal of Indian troops. "Nawaz–Gujral meeting," 14 May 1997, and "Endangering normalisation," 15 May 1997.

[101] "Accord on relaxing travel restrictions," *Dawn*, 13 May 1997.

[102] "A Step Forward," 24 June 1997.

[103] Nawaz Sharif and Indian president S.D. Sharma pledged their governments' commitment to resolving the conflict, but Sharif placed emphasis on settling the Kashmir dispute, while Sharma spoke of initiating trade and economic exchanges and promoting people-to-people interaction. "Foreign Secy-level talks with Pakistan will resume on March 28," *The Times of India*, 7 March 1997. Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmed of Pakistan, who was warmly received by Indian foreign secretary Salman Haider upon his arrival in New Delhi, stated, "We are absolutely clear that there is an urgent need to meaningfully address all outstanding issues, particularly the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir." "Time right for ending tensions: Pakistan," *The Hindu*, 28 March 1997." Furthermore, the Pakistani COAS, Gen. Jehangir Karamat stated publicly that the Pakistani forces would not be willing to withdraw from the Siachen Glacier. "COAS rules out Army pullout from Siachen," *The Nation*, 26 March 1997.

[104] "Back to the Future," 5 May, 1997.

down the talks as in 1994, it was obvious that if progress were to be made, a new mechanism had to be found to address the political and security concerns of both India and Pakistan.

Accordingly, press commentary focused heavily on the working groups as a mechanism to address these outstanding issues. In the days before the Male meeting, K.K. Katyal, apparently reflecting conversations with senior Indian government officials, suggested that India would be wise to consider the formation of working groups, a proceedural innovation that could link Pakistan's wishes for progress on the Kashmir issue with India's emphasis on other issues that would lead to improved Indo–Pak relations. Katyal drew a comparison with Sino–Indian CBM initiatives, which studiously placed the settlement of contentious border issues on the "back-burner." Suggesting that joint-working groups on CBMs could be established in tandem with promises to quell violence on the Line of Control, Katyal wrote:

> Similar working groups could be set up to deal with trade, confidence-building measures, promotion of people-to-people contacts by relaxing visa restrictions, exchange of journals and newspapers, permission for journalists from one side to operate in the other, maritime boundary and last, but not the least, the Siachen issue. As regards trade, the economic imperatives force both the countries to turn to each other in case of dire need. The occasional dealings could be made part of a permanent stable arrangement.[105]

An editorial in *The Times of India* also advocated adopting the Sino–Indian model:

> A key aspect of the Gujral Doctrine is that Indo–Pakistani relations not be held hostage to the stalemate over Kashmir. In particular, New Delhi has stressed that both countries can reap tremendous benefits from Kashmir on the back-burner and striving instead for progress on the economic and cultural fronts. Far from agreeing to shelve the Kashmir dispute, however, Pakistan has, until now, insisted that it be tackled first. The working groups formula offers a way out of this impasse. India can now look forward to concrete progress on the economic front while the
> fact that Kashmir is also being discussed will help Mr Nawaz Sharif silence those in Pakistan who do not want any improvement in relations with India.[106]

The idea of creating a large number of joint working groups seemed to be a mechanism whereby both sides could compromise and still retain their respective agendas. India could claim that its step-by-step approach was incorporated into the modalities of the

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[105] "Meaningful talks with Pakistan," *The Hindu*, 5 May 1997. Perhaps not recognizing where the burden of compromise would lie, Katyal declared, "To expect a major improvement in India–Pakistan relations in one-go is no realism but a step by step process is not only feasible but is also desirable." On a cynical level, S.D. Muni wrote that the formation of a working group to discuss Kashmir "without compromising its national interests and . . . well recognised position" would help initiate progress on such issues as subregional trade. "Constructive engagement," *op. cit.*

[106] "One Step Forward," *op. cit.*

working groups, while Pakistan could claim that the Kashmir issue was on the agenda, and indelibly linked to progress on other issues.

While neither side wished to shut down the talks as in 1994, it was obvious that if progress were to be made, a new mechanism had to be found to address the political and security concerns of both India and Pakistan.

As the foreign secretary talks approached, the emphasis on the working group mechanism overshadowed discussion on specific CBMs. One exception was a piece by Mohammad Hasan in *The Times of India* which suggested a number of CBMs, including the unilateral normalization of travel, the mutual recognition of currency, and the cessation of both countries' nuclear programs.[107] Prakash Nanda argued that the pursuit of military CBMs was futile; instead, he advocated trade as the best CBM.[108] The establishment of the hotline between the two prime ministers, which was used in the two days before the beginning of the talks, also received praise as a CBM.[109] While calling the installation of the hotline a "good augury," Pakistani commentator Fahd Husain was extremely skeptical about the success of the talks given the Indian military's threatening gestures.[110] In an editorial, *The Nation* maintained that the hardened positions of both governments, and the refusal of India to devote a working group to the Kashmir issue, would ruin "[Pakistani foreign secretary] Mr. Shamshad Ahmed's modest target of putting into position at least a 'mechanism' for the dialogue, as also would go down [Indian foreign secretary] Mr. Salman Haider's modest goal of bilateral trade."[111]

The foreign secretary talks, held on 19–23 June in Murree, Pakistan, resulted in Joint Statement which detailed their commitment to resolving outstanding issues in an integrated

[107] "Taking Pak mistrust in our stride," *The Times of India*, 28 May 1997.

[108] "It's trade that will normalize Indo–Pak relations," *The Times of India*, 19 June 1997.

[109] "Hello Nawaz, . . . This is Inder calling," *The Times of India*, 20 June 1997. They called each other to express good wishes for the success of the talks. Umer Farooq, "Nawaz, Gujral pledge to normalize relations," *The Nation*, 20 June 1997.

[110] "Talking Peace under Prithvi's shadow," *The Nation*, 19 June 1997. A story published in *The Washington Post* claimed that the Indian Prithvi missiles had been moved to storage locations in the Punjab. In turn, the South Asian press modified this allegation to report that the Prithvi had been "deployed" near the western border. While editorials in India blamed the American government for staging an "inspired leak" of this information, the alarmed Pakistani press questioned India's commitment to peace and stability in the Subcontinent.

[111] "Secretary-level talks," 21 June 1997.

bilateral manner. The two governments pledged to commission Working Groups to address peace and security, including CBMs; Jammu and Kashmir; to settle disputes such as Siachen, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, and Sir Creek; and to promote economic and commercial cooperation and friendly exchanges in other fields. However, ambiguity inherent in the term "integrated" would eventually lead to differing interpretations of pace and priority given to each of the issues in the Joint Statement.

The prominent position assigned to CBMs in the document suggested that more ambitious measures would be attempted in the future. Speaking for Shamshad Ahmed and himself, Salman Haider stated,

> It is our belief that the average citizen of both the countries desires friendly and cooperative relations and we believe that this process that has been initiated will lead us towards that goal. . . . There is no beginning and end of the CBMs. The setting up of a hotline between the two countries' prime ministers, for instance, is a big CBM. Their respective directors general military operations already have one such arrangement. This communication must be expanded by the two sides."[112]

The Times of India expressed untempered enthusiasm:

> The wide-ranging accord India and Pakistan have reached in Islamabad on improving their relations is perhaps the best present the estranged neighbors could give each other on the occasion of the golden jubilee of their founding. . . . And judging from the optimistic reactions in both countries, the opening of a comprehensive dialogue between the two augers well for their future. . . . The accord . . . reflects a sincere attempt to complete a process which began with the New Delhi talks in March. . . . Both new incumbents have started from a fresh perspective on the Indo–Pak relations, avoiding old biases and building upon the new areas of strength.[113]

The Hindu applauded the Statement, assuming in this case that Pakistan had made a concession on Kashmir.

> It is interesting to note that while India might have agreed to a working group on Kashmir, Pakistan appears to have dropped its traditional objection to discussing confidence building measures "until the core issue of Kashmir is resolved" by agreeing to a working group on peace and security, including CBMs. . . . The very fact that the different issues that have been specifically earmarked for discussion between the two sides are to be addressed in 'an integrated manner" indicates that Pakistan has moved radically away from its Kashmir-centred agenda to a broader spectrum of engagement with India. . . . The other issues listed for discussion are of

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[112] Umer Farooq, "Foreign Secretaries confident of fruitful results," *The Nation*, 24 June 1997. Subsequently, *The Nation* published op-ed pieces dismissive of people-to-people contacts and suspicious of subregional trade. Abu Tahir, "Gujral doctrine: building trade ties," 28 June 1997; Tarik Jan, "Peace has no wrappings of surrender," 25 June 1997.

[113] "Hope from Murree," 25 June 1997.

> course the usual contents of Pakistan's bag of grievances—Siachen, Sir Creek and Wullar Barrage. Yet there are also Indian concerns which have been put on the agenda—terrorism and drug trafficking, economic cooperation and the promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields. Indian diplomacy should build on the potential in these arenas, ensuring that the process of normalisation is primarily anchored on freer cultural and economic exchanges between the people on both sides of the border.[114]

K.K. Katyal saw a victory for India in the compromise and hinted that an integrated approach to all issues might not be forthcoming:

> Islamabad's action agreeing to an eight-item approach is a welcome departure from the rigidities of the past. . . . The key to success (or otherwise) of the dialogue is held by two factors. Will Pakistan be agreeable to the talks on different items proceeding at various speeds? And will the spirit of compromise, evident lately, permeate the next crucial phase? . . . In case Islamabad lets the dialogue on other subjects take its course, it would mean a leap towards the goal of cordial, tension-free relationship. . . . There is the promise of continuity of the dialogue, of a pause in the rhetoric which could help generate a helpful momentum. Let this process not be thwarted by hang-over of the past.[115]

In Pakistan, editorial commentary was less enthusiastic, but still positive. Despite significant reservations, *Dawn* supported the establishment of the working groups. Conceding that the hotline contact between the two prime ministers "may also have helped in getting the talks off to a promising start," it nevertheless reminded readers of the endemic mistrust between the two countries and of the long and uncertain journey ahead. The editorial further implored the two sides to immediately attend to the "impressive" opportunities for cooperation and dialogue.[116]

Although suspicious, *The Nation* praised India's willingness to discuss Kashmir along with CBMs:

> In the earlier meetings at this level, the talks used to break down because India insisted on confidence-building measures, such as trade and tourism, to precede even before Kashmir

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[114] "A Significant Moment," 24 June 1997.

[115] "The triumph of pragmatism," *The Hindu*, 30 June 1997. For another analysis, see also Amit Barua, "Enormous challenges ahead of India, Pakistan," *The Hindu*, 25 June 1997. For an assessment of the working groups from the Pakistani side, see Afzal Mahmood, "Need for innovative approach," *Dawn*, 28 June 1997. Here, Mahmood claims that Pakistan had agreed to "delink" progress on Kashmir from other issues as part of a compromise. Writing in *The Times of India*, Rajeshwar Dayal also favored the step-by-step approach, advocating CBMs before discussions of Kashmir. "Progress in talks depends on Pakistan's reasonableness," 8 July 1997.

[116] "A Step Forward," 24 June 1997.

> was considered as a dispute. The option to discuss Kashmir or not, remained with India. And no sooner had the talks ended, statements issued by the Indian leaders that Kashmir was an integral part of India . . . killed the prospects of initiating even the confidence-building measures. Having remained stuck in this blind alley for years, India seems to have relented a little. It still has its priority pegged to the confidence-building measures, but Kashmir figures prominently enough after that.
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> . . . [T]he setting up of a hotline between the Prime Ministers of the two countries, the decision to release each other's prisoners and fisherman and the expected revival of communication links between the Formation Commanders on both sides of the border, are all measures in the right direction and would probably help dispel the scepticism, widely expressed about the future of the peace process initiated by Mian Nawaz Sharif in Male.

Showing great prescience, the piece concluded, "If India fails to show any accommodation on Kashmir in the meetings to follow, the entire edifice of hot lines and joint committees, etc. carefully built by the two sides, will easily come tumbling down."[117]

The Joint Statement of 1997 gave commentators in both countries unprecedented hope and expectations for the dialogue process. Analysts expressed confidence that the other side was sincere, flexible, and committed. Indian observers spoke of the potential to build on these agreements, and highlighted the spirit of compromise and trust which characterized the proceedings. Moreover, the 1997 exercise was significant because Nawaz Sharif and I.K. Gujral took steps to create a positive atmosphere for the negotiations, and these efforts were reflected in the optimistic and predominantly encouraging attitudes of the press. The working groups institutionalized the resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan. Both countries thought they might have brokered a compromise which served their separate interests, and fashioned a new forum for sustained negotiation.

However, the ambiguities within the Joint Statement emerged soon after the end of the talks, creating familiar fissures and divergent interpretations. Upon his return to New Delhi, Salman Haider corrected himself, explaining that as far as India was concerned, Kashmir was on the agenda only to discuss its Pakistani occupation and their support for the militancy. Haider's interpretation of the Kashmir working group was obviously disappointing to Pakistan, but the Foreign Office gave only a "muted reply."[118] Leaving no question as to what Pakistani priorities were, *The Nation* revealingly commented, "There is a point up to which Pakistan can go in search for peace. It cannot abandon Kashmiris to their fate because

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[117] "An edifice for peace," *The Nation*, 24 June 1997.

[118] Umer Farooq, "Pakistan disappointed at Haider's statement," *The Nation*, 27 June 1997.

of trade and some visa facilities."[119] Haider's statement in New Delhi cast doubts on the commitments made only days before, and signified the influence of domestic political considerations in any future negotiations.

In contrast to 1991, when very technical military-to-military CBMs were worked out, CBMs proposals in 1997 focused instead on trade, tourism, and people-to-people contact. This shift in emphasis reflected an absence of military confrontation and a mutual recognition of their immediate policy needs and priorities. This shift also demonstrated that CBMs had become flexible devices to reduce conflict in the Subcontinent, as leaders advocated particular CBMs that had the greatest chances of success. The working groups themselves were a new form of CBM, institutionalizing a commitment to keep the dialogue going.

In contrast to 1991, when very technical military-to-military CBMs were worked out, CBMs proposals in 1997 focused instead on trade, tourism, and people-to-people contact. This shift in emphasis reflected an absence of military confrontation and a mutual recognition of their immediate policy needs and priorities.

Nevertheless, support for the use of flexible CBMs had limits. While the Joint Statement committed India and Pakistan to address outstanding issues through an "integrated" approach, government officials and press commentators remained attached to their traditional positions. Reflecting the views of national leaders, Pakistani commentators held that progress on Kashmir was linked to all other issues. Conversely, Indian observers assumed that they could reap the dividends of increased trade and cooperation without addressing Pakistan's concerns over Kashmir. This basic conflict frustrated attempts to institute concrete CBMs in a period when political will favoring such agreements was higher than it had been since 1991.

Conclusion

This survey of the Indo–Pak dialogue process between 1990 and 1997 has illustrated several main themes in Indo–Pak relations. First, CBMs have shifted from being controversial, yet provocative and often misunderstood devices designed to reduce conflict in the region, to widely-supported components in the architecture of the Indo–Pak dialogue process. Analysts, politicians, civil servants, and military officers paved the way for a more

[119] Editorial, "Foreign Office responds," *The Nation*, 28 June 1997. Later, Sharif declared that "It was not possible to have meaningful progress on trade and other issues between the two countries unless there is progress on the Jammu & Kashmir dispute." Amit Barua, "Sharif links trade to progress on 'J&K' issue,"*The Hindu*, 5 July 1997.

comfortable and supportive use of these measures through debates and discussions in the national press.

Second, the potential utility of CBMs became evident as the focus of CBMs shifted to suit the changing security concerns, and the domestic political compulsions, of each country. Early CBM proposals advocated by the United States focused on military-to-military agreements to counter rising tensions in the Subcontinent. The reduction of confrontational relations, and the increase of subregional economic arrangements gave rise to calls for increased Indo–Pak economic and cultural exchanges. Press commentary on both sides reflected this new emphasis. Accordingly, assessments of CBMs grew gradually more positive, especially as their focus shifted from difficult-to-implement military-to-military agreements to broader cultural and economic imperatives. One theme critical of CBMs, K. Subrahmanyam's argument that CBMs were a Western imposition and inappropriate for the South Asian context, largely disappeared as commentators discussed adapting CBM proposals to the changing environment.

Third, and most important, support for CBMs in the press was directly related to confidence in the political will and commitment of national leaders toward the dialogue process. Shorn of the bitter and acrimonious rhetoric which characterized Benazir Bhutto's approach, the two Nawaz Sharif governments have been politically and ideologically more comfortable with engaging India. Moreover, the United Front governments in India, despite their difficulties as an unwieldy coalition, have demonstrated a willingness to improve bilateral relations at the periphery, even if progress was not always possible. Nawaz Sharif has taken a more active role in pursuing cooperative Indo–Pak agreements, notwithstanding continued difficulties with India on the Kashmir issue, a posture his predecessor Benazir Bhutto was at times both unwilling and unable to take. Similarly, but to a lesser extent, in their efforts to distance their policies from those of the Congress Party, UF governments were committed to more flexible arrangements than their political opponents. Recognizing the promise Nawaz Sharif and the UF brought to the dialogue, and trusting the sincerity of their positions, press commentators presented a comparatively more optimistic and supportive attitude toward the dialogue process than at other times.

Despite the gradual acceptance of CBMs, forging agreements and brokering compromises has still been difficult. If political will has consistently been a factor in spurring the dialogue thus far, considerably more commitment will be required to marshal support for more far-reaching agreements. Looking back at their ambivalent attitudes toward CBMs in the press during the 1990 and 1994 rounds, Pakistani commentators saw them as a surrender of the initiative—and high moral ground—in Kashmir. Because the CBMs proposed in the previous rounds did not address the Kashmir dispute directly, many Pakistanis saw an agreement to work toward CBMs as substantiating India's claim to Kashmir. They argued that the 'core issue' of Kashmir must be addressed before any reconciliation between the two

countries could occur. Indian commentators, on the other hand, found CBMs to be a legitimate way to address long-standing disputes that had the benefit of public support and allowed them to keep Kashmir off the center stage.

If political will has consistently been a factor in spurring the dialogue thus far, considerably more commitment will be required to marshal support for more far-reaching agreements.

Compared to CBMs implemented elsewhere, CBM proposals in South Asia have been comparatively modest. No major CBMs have been thoroughly implemented in recent years. However, at the time of the 1990 talks, few thought CBM initiatives could be anything but modest. In 1991 and again in 1997, political will and elite press opinion elevated CBMs to a systemic component of the Indo–Pak dialogue process. Ultimately, as many analysts readily admitted, the rightful target of CBMs—trust—remains the single greatest impediment to normal relations. Commentators in both countries agreed that the dialogue was needed to remind them of their mutual investment in reconciliation.

This essay has sought to chart the changing attitudes and understandings of a small cross-section of the Indian and Pakistani English language media toward CBMs. A more systematic study of this topic is needed to assess media attitudes towards CBMs and Indo–Pak bilateral relations. Broader surveys that include studies of both the English language and vernacular press will tell us more about the links between political will, press analysis and opinion-formation toward foreign policy issues such as CBMs at a national level.