

Beyond Incrementalism: Rethinking Approaches to CBMs and Stability in South Asia

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In December 2011, and again in December 2012, Indian and Pakistani government experts met to discuss confidence building measures (CBMs) on nuclear and conventional military issues. At both meetings, the atmospherics were “cordial and constructive;” officials from each side conveyed their commitment to uphold past agreements and to consider additional measures. Predictably, though, the meetings produced no new agreements or any other signs of progress toward reducing long-standing tensions, neither side willing to take significant risks to move beyond the current framework. One Pakistani analyst described the talks as “reflect[ing] the overall bilateral state of play rather than being a catalyst for change.”² This assessment aptly sums up the dilemma of how to pursue peace and stability in South Asia: incremental steps, designed to build trust in small bites rather than big leaps, have indeed not produced stability nor been a “catalyst for change,” yet no viable alternative approach appears to be on the table.

For over twenty-five years, India and Pakistan have sought to negotiate and implement measures to avoid conflict, reduce military tensions, improve economic ties and build the confidence necessary to normalize their relationship and, eventually, to resolve disputes like that over the territory of Kashmir that are fundamental to a lasting peace. These efforts accelerated after 1998, when the danger of military escalation took on new importance once both nations openly tested nuclear weapons and declared themselves nuclear powers. Perhaps the crowning achievement of bilateral diplomacy to institutionalize such measures was the 1999 Lahore Summit and the Composite Dialogue process that resulted. But the reality of these measures has never matched the promise.

Efforts by Pakistan and India to establish and sustain an incremental process of building stability seem to follow a predictable and cyclical pattern. The need of both parties to find means to scale back tensions during crisis or conflict, and in recent decades to assure the international community that they are responsible stewards of nuclear weapons, has tended to yield agreement on ending hostilities as well as on vague principles for resolving broader issues. As Feroz Khan has observed, “every major treaty or CBM between these countries has its origin in crisis resolution.”³ The 1972 Simla Agreement, for instance, both concluded the hostilities in East Pakistan and established a line of control in Kashmir. But if these agreements managed the immediate termination of conflict or crisis, they have not resolved or even greatly attenuated the underlying sources

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² Tariq Osman Hyder, “Building Nuclear Confidence?” *The Nation*, January 4, 2013.

³ Feroz Hassan Khan, “Prospects for Indian and Pakistani Arms Control and Confidence-Building Measures,” *Naval War College Review*, Summer 2010, p. 109.

of tension. As such, once the fanfare surrounding each agreement faded and international concerns were mollified, implementation lagged. At times, the dialogue and CBM process broke down completely, or it simply sputtered along pro forma. After some months or years, another crisis arrived and undid whatever progress and momentum toward stability might have existed. Thereafter the cycle began anew. Incremental CBMs have not led to peace, and neither have moments of stability been consolidated by further steps. This rather desultory history was adeptly captured by Dennis Kux in the subtitle of a recent work on this subject: for India-Pakistan negotiations “is past still prologue?”

The most glaring exception to this cycle is the Lahore summit, which created profound but momentary hope that a new course could be charted, based on a fundamental change in the terms of the Indo-Pakistan relationship. The reason that this summit, more than any other event in the nearly seventy years of bilateral relations between the two, raised hopes to new levels is that it comprised not just talk but also several symbolic acts by the leaders of both countries, acts which addressed directly and forcefully the aspirations and fears of people on both sides of the border. This symbolism seemed to augur new potential for peace and stability in a way not previously captured by treaties and other CBMs.

Today, the prevailing expert sentiment is that incremental CBMs remain the best hope for ending this cycle of crisis and mistrust. Despite a mixed record of success for this approach, it is common in track II fora to hear calls for a “Lahore II” in order to recapture and extend the gains made through CBMs in 1999.⁴ But the idea of a second Lahore agreement based only on small advances seems to miss what made that summit unique: a process that surrounds such increments with major symbolic and risky steps taken by the leaders of both countries.

This essay explores the notion of incremental and symbolic steps and the prospect that these can produce a different trajectory in Indo-Pakistani relations, one characterized by sustained stability rather than a cycle of crisis, momentary progress, then stasis. Focusing in particular on the Lahore Summit, it assesses the record of incremental CBMs, mainly in the political-military sphere. Second, it discusses the symbolic component: high-visibility, leadership-driven, risk-laden measures—like the “leap of trust” taken by Prime Ministers Sharif and Vajpayee at Lahore in 1999.⁵ It weighs the considerable hurdles that stand in the way of progress, and then concludes with an argument for a new approach to stabilize relations between Pakistan and India based on a mix of small increments complemented by big, symbolic leaps that can establish a new baseline for relations. If there is one lesson to be distilled from past practices in South Asia it is that faster incremental progress can be facilitated by sustained, high-level political involvement reinforced by symbolic acts. Without such high-level involvement, there

⁴ See for instance Jehangir Karamat and Shashi Tyagi, “CBMs in South Asia,” *Dawn*, March 20, 2012.

⁵ I borrow this phrase from Nicholas Wheeler, “‘I had gone to Lahore with a message of goodwill but in return we got Kargil’: The Promise and Perils of ‘Leaps of Trust’ in India-Pakistan Relations,” in Bhumitra Chakma, ed., *The Politics of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia* (Surrey, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011) p. 155-176.

seems little prospect that these antagonists can break out of the cyclical crises that frustrate progress toward peace.

Revisiting Lahore

The February 1999 Lahore Summit between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was historic for several reasons, not least because it represents the apex of Indo-Pakistan peace efforts to date. First, more so than prior summits, it had an almost cinematic quality, characterized by the symbolism attending Vajpayee's arrival on the inaugural run of the Delhi-Lahore bus service and his visit to the Minar-i-Pakistan. For the Indian head of government to traverse ground that had once been the scene of profound tragedy during the partition of India and Pakistan, and then visit the most important monument to the idea of Pakistan as an independent homeland for Muslims in South Asia— was a stunning, highly visible break with the past. Second, the public statements by both leaders seemed genuinely intended to put past enmity to rest, to resolve the most difficult outstanding issues, and to forge a new relationship built on trust. For instance, Prime Minister Sharif declared “I would like a Pakistan-India relationship that is free of tensions and based on mutual trust and confidence. ... We must bring peace to South Asia. We must bring prosperity to our peoples.”⁶ And Prime Minister Vajpayee stated his belief that “there is nothing in our bilateral relations that can ever be resolved through violence.... We welcome sustained discussions on all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir.”⁷ Third, the Lahore summit for the first time produced agreement on a comprehensive framework—the Composite Dialogue—which would allow each side to raise issues of greatest concern without prejudice to progress in other areas. The symbolism, rhetoric and structure produced by the Lahore Summit resulted from a remarkable degree of initiative and risk-taking by two otherwise quite nationalist leaders.

The summit concluded a lengthy period of discord in the Indo-Pakistan relationship that began with a sharp rise in tensions in Kashmir in 1990.⁸ Although the most threatening period of crisis in the first six months of 1990 dissipated without resort to arms, the lack of any specific resolution meant there was little basis from which to build toward an institutionalized process of relationship management. As such, the basic underlying sources of tension in Kashmir remained: Pakistan supporting “freedom fighters;” and India suppressing “terrorists” and giving no quarter on self-determination. Efforts throughout the 1990s to find common ground resulted in a framework brokered by the foreign secretaries, which eventually became the Composite Dialogue, but at the time there was no real political commitment behind it outside of the foreign service bureaucracies in both nations.

⁶ Prime Minister's remarks at the Pakistan-India Joint Press Conference Lahore, February 21, 1999, available at <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/lahore-summit/>.

⁷ Text of the speech of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee delivered at the banquet organized by Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in his honor, February 21, 1999, available at <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/lahore-summit/>.

⁸ For discussion see P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), p. 80-95.

The more immediate context for the Lahore Summit was the overt nuclearization of the subcontinent in May 1998. As early as the 1987 crisis sparked by India's Operation Brasstacks, which was perceived in Islamabad and Rawalpindi as preparation for an Indian attempt to dismember Pakistan, nuclear weapons had begun to feature in the Indo-Pakistani security dynamic through thinly-veiled references by commentators on both sides. By the 1990 Kashmir crisis, officials and experts in South Asia assumed the emergence of a nascent nuclear deterrence, despite the fact that Pakistan's nuclear weapons program was still "in the basement." Prominent security officials in both countries participated in nuclear signaling through remarks broadcast by the media, indicating an awareness of the potential for nuclear escalation based on the mutual possession of nuclear arms.⁹

The May 1998 nuclear tests brought the potential for nuclear conflict into the open. Although both Indian and Pakistani leaders eschewed the possibility of an arms race or use of nuclear weapons, the rhetoric accompanying their acclamations did little to reassure the rest of the world. Then-Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani warned, for instance, that "India's bold and decisive step to become a nuclear weapons state has brought about a qualitatively new stage in Indo-Pakistan relations...[signifying] India's resolve to deal firmly and strongly with Pakistan's hostile designs and activities in Kashmir."¹⁰ A subsequent Pakistani government statement cautioned that an Indian attack would "receive a swift and massive retaliation with unforeseen consequences."¹¹ United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1172, adopted on June 6, 1998, condemned the tests and urged India and Pakistan "to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid threatening military movements, cross-border violations, or other provocations in order to prevent and aggravations of the situation."¹²

The rise in global concerns about an arms race or nuclear conflict on the subcontinent—President Bill Clinton somewhat famously remarked that "The most dangerous place in the world today...is the Indian subcontinent and the line of control in Kashmir"—resulted in intense pressure on India and Pakistan to restrain their nuclear programs, resolve bilateral issues and stabilize their security relationship through steps to reduce tension. The Lahore Summit, with the symbolism described above, assuaged some of the immediate concerns about potential conflict and nuclear escalation. In their Lahore Declaration, Sharif and Vajpayee explicitly recognized "that the nuclear dimension of the security environment of the two countries add to their responsibility for avoidance of conflict between the two countries."¹³ The Summit also held out the promise of a paradigm shift, with both sides recognizing that conflict and crisis must be resolved

⁹ See discussion of nuclear signaling in the 1990 crisis in Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Nuclear Issues: Myths and Realities," in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds, *Crisis Prevention, Confidence Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1995), p. 53-76.

¹⁰ Quoted in Paul Watson, "India Issues New Threats Over Kashmir, Minister's Fiery Rhetoric Sparks Fears in Pakistan," *The Toronto Star*, May 20, 1998.

¹¹ Quoted in John F. Burns, "Nuclear Anxiety: The Overview; Pakistan, Answering India, Carries out Nuclear Tests; Clinton's Appeal Rejected," *New York Times*, May 29, 1998.

¹² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1172, June 6, 1998.

¹³ Lahore Declaration Signed by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan on February 21, 1999, available at <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/lahore-summit/>.

through peaceful means via a balanced mechanism that allowed each side to raise issues of greatest concern (e.g., cross-border terrorism for India, Kashmir for Pakistan).

In some respects, the Lahore Summit was not the failure it seemed when three months hence India and Pakistan became embroiled in a conflict at Kargil. For certain, the Summit and the CBMs it spawned did not prevent future conflict and crisis that could have led, at least as viewed from the outside, to nuclear escalation. It also did not reward the considerable risks that both Prime Ministers took to bring about a new paradigm. Following the Kargil and 2001-2002 crises, the Composite Dialogue structure did achieve lift and some of the items elaborated in the Lahore MOU were subsequently negotiated and implemented, such as the missile test pre-notification agreement, discussed further below. That India and Pakistan have set as an objective their return to the Composite Dialogue suggests this structure retains value. But Kargil and subsequent crises catalyzed by terrorist attacks in India emanating from Pakistan laid bare some fundamental truths about the difficulty of negotiating and implementing meaningful and effective steps—political-military and nuclear ones in particular—that would reduce chances of future crisis and enhance stability.

Mixed Record of Incremental Approaches

The Lahore Summit differed from prior efforts for peace primarily due to the political risk-taking of Prime Ministers Sharif and Vajpayee and the high degree of symbolism attached to the affair. Underneath the symbolism, however, was the continuation of an incremental approach to stabilizing the relationship. Incrementalism in this sense is a long-term process that starts with small, discrete steps designed to build trust without requiring either party to take great risks, over time proceeding to harder steps which might diminish security if not reciprocated, but through reciprocation yield enhanced transparency and confidence in the intentions of adversaries. The implementation of such a process should establish mechanisms and habits of interaction that dampen the potential for crisis escalation.

The defining characteristic of the incremental approach is the inherent step function, whereby each successive action or accomplishment builds on prior steps. This process tends to be institutionalized and implemented through CBMs, though the initial steps may be rather inconsequential and not requiring formal agreement. Brahma Chellaney asserts, for instance, that CBMs “are by definition supposed to be modest steps to create the right environment to avoid new explosions and reduce tensions, and to allow political and military leadership on rival sides to communicate with each other.”¹⁴ States facing security dilemmas tend to avoid any steps that give adversaries any potential advantage, thus initial increments often necessitate a modicum of transparency or trust, not risking national security if it turns out that trust was poorly placed. Arms control as practiced by the United States and Soviet Union/Russia is an example of an incremental approach that began with narrow discussions on unverified nuclear arms limitations, was followed by formal, verifiable limits on arms development and deployment, and currently is focused

¹⁴ Brahma Chellaney, “CBMs – A Critical Appraisal,” in Dipankar Banerjee, ed., *Confidence Building Measures in South Asia* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 1999), p. 27.

on broader and deeper reductions. In South Asia as well, there appears to be consensus in favor of incrementalism. Dipankar Banerjee argues, for example, “Ideally best measures are incremental, building on earlier successes and developing and expanding on them.”¹⁵

When setting out to negotiate incremental steps, leaders face a series of choices that will structure both the process and the results. It is these choices that tend to drive the process, at least in South Asia, toward the crisis pattern observed above. The first and most significant choice is the amount of political investment leaders are willing undertake, and by extension, the level of risk they can tolerate. By and large, leaders find it difficult and too risky to invest in highly speculative and time-consuming negotiations, and therefore delegate to diplomats and bureaucrats, who tend to be highly risk averse. It is worth underscoring that this bureaucratization of negotiations is a choice that leaders make, not a default option. Second, negotiators must decide the pace of discussions and actions. Oftentimes it appears that the goal of each negotiating team, once national leaders have delegated this task, is to give away as little as possible and over as long a period as possible; negotiations become an end rather than a means. This reinforces a process that emphasizes slow, low-risk/small-reward steps without any immediate subsequent actions to take advantage of the momentum. And third, negotiators must decide which types of measures are ripe for progress—political, economic, military, nuclear, social, or cultural. The latter two areas might help create popular support for improved relations—like the “ping-pong diplomacy” between the United States and China in the 1970s—because they can break the ice and lead to major steps; they are probably less conducive to an incremental process given that they are one-shot. Others, such as military CBMs, can address a perceived security issue in a very technical manner without the high visibility of a cultural event, and bureaucracies seem to like to negotiate these type of measures since they can better control the agenda, process, and outcomes. Precisely because these types of measures involve multiple bureaucracies, however, progress tends to be slow.

India and Pakistan have negotiated and implemented a diverse array of incremental CBMs to date.¹⁶ Some of these small steps have achieved their limited objectives, for instance the “cricket diplomacy” practiced by India and Pakistan most recently in the mid-2000s, which was helpful in improving overall relations between the two states, but in this instance the goodwill did not portend any big breakthroughs on hard issues and there were no follow-on actions to build on the exchange. Others, such as military hotlines, are used with regularity. Ideally, these measures could narrow the range of contingencies and instill and reinforce patterns of behavior that would moderate tendencies by either party to escalate in response to provocations. But none of these incremental measures, mainly negotiated after the 1971 war, prevented crises in 1986-7 (Brasstacks) and 1990 (Kashmir), conflict in 1999 (Kargil), and further crises in 2001-2 (“Twin Peaks”) and 2008 (Mumbai). The primary contemporary hurdle to the successful

¹⁵ Dipankar Banerjee, “Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia: Role of Research Institutions,” in Moonis Ahmar, ed., *The Challenge of Confidence-Building in South Asia* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2001), p. 87.

¹⁶ A reasonably comprehensive list is available at <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/confidence-building-measures-in-south-asia/>.

implementation of incremental steps in South Asia is discontinuity resulting from the mass-casualty attacks and subsequent frequent crises; if these steps grew out of crisis resolution, they were undone by the next crisis. Momentum is not sustained and initial trust-building steps do not beget subsequent ones.¹⁷

Reflecting this pattern, the agreements reached in Lahore reveal the considerable distance that both parties must travel to stabilize the security aspect of their relationship, in particular, as well as the difficult politics of doing so through political-military CBMs taken in small increments and at a slow pace. The three documents agreed during the Summit largely left the technical details of incremental steps to the foreign secretaries, while the prime ministers focused on higher-level issues. The Joint Statement and Declaration released by the prime ministers referenced this technical work, but placed higher priority on other issues of peace and security, such as Kashmir and trade policy. This division of labor, for better or worse, consigned the negotiation, implementation and review of incremental steps to government bureaucrats, without sufficient built-in supervision by elected officials, yielding the attendant inertia problems described above. Meanwhile, the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Foreign Secretaries Krishnan Raghunath and Shamshad Ahmad demonstrated significant agreement on principles, but left most of the details to further negotiation, such as on notification of missile tests and nuclear weapons accidents. Technical details are the crux of security CBMs, and in this respect the agreements deferred a lot of difficult work to the future without a clear sense of urgency or demand for additional increments.

This is not to say that some incremental CBMs have not been effective, or at least more consistently implemented. Military hotlines between India and Pakistan reportedly are used routinely.¹⁸ There has been a gradual expansion of trade across the Line of Control in Kashmir. And the bus service inaugurated at Lahore continues to operate. But even here, progress has often been episodic, has lost some of its strategic value, or has failed to build a platform for subsequent measures. Two of the most-frequently cited successes among South Asian CBMs—the agreement on pre-notification of ballistic missile tests and the agreement to declare and not attack nuclear facilities—make the limitations of these types of measures abundantly clear, as discussed below.

Missile Test Pre-Notification. The proposal for an agreement on pre-notification of ballistic missile flight tests was contained in the 1999 Lahore MOU signed by the Pakistani and Indian foreign secretaries. Under the agreement, both sides commit to provide three days' notice of the commencement of a testing window, to not launch or land missiles within certain geographical proximity to the International Border and Line of Control, and to ensure the trajectory of the missiles neither transects nor is directed

¹⁷ There are other probable reasons that progress is not sustained. Kanti Bajpai, for instance, offers a laundry list of additional reasons, including among them a feeling that incremental steps enshrined in CBMs do not get to the heart of security problems in South Asia, and in any case they take too long to negotiate. Kanti Bajpai, "CBMs: Contexts, Achievements, Functions," in Dipankar Banerjee, ed., *Confidence Building Measures in South Asia* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 1999), p. 15-17.

¹⁸ See for instance Chari, Cheema and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, p. 93.

toward the same borders.¹⁹ Though a relatively simple agreement—none of the articles is longer than two sentences—it took six years to negotiate the document that was finally signed in October 2005. This delay presumably was caused by the disruptions in relations following the Kargil conflict and 2001-2002 crisis, though, an entirely different but plausible cause was suggested by Suba Chandran: “the official faith, especially amongst the civilian and military bureaucracies on deterrence makes them believe that [nuclear] CBMs are not high priority. Both countries believe nuclear deterrence exists and view the Kargil conflict and the 2002 border confrontation as a proof of this.”²⁰

Yet, development of improved nuclear delivery capabilities and an evolving deterrence environment underscore the utility of an agreement that intends, as noted in the preambular paragraphs, to prevent misunderstanding and misinterpretations. Though not explicitly stated, it was quite obvious that missile tests hold the danger that the non-testing side might perceive an unannounced test as the opening salvo in a disarming or decapitation strike. (South Asia, of course, is no stranger to potential escalation based on misperception, as both sides experienced as a result of India’s 1987 “Brasstacks” military exercises.) By all accounts, the measure has been implemented faithfully. At least, there are no public accounts suggesting that either country failed to notify the other of a forthcoming test.

As a measure to avoid potential conflict, particular nuclear conflict, the missile test notification regime is a highly important and meaningful step. It is also a good example of a tactical, conflict-avoidance measure that is strongly linked to a strategic objective. As noted above, the agreement stipulates a desire to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation, as well as to promote a stable environment. To the extent uncertainty or misperception are potential concerns in an evolving deterrence environment, measures to reduce such concerns can be exceedingly beneficial. It is also a good increment on which to build additional trust, for instance by adding cruise missile test notifications, joint verification or observation of missile launches, and in the long-term perhaps also restraints on missile development or stockpiling. Until now, however, there have been no subsequent agreements that advance the agenda, which is an opportunity lost given the consistent implementation of this CBM.

Nuclear Facility Non-Attack. A new wrinkle in the pattern of Indo-Pakistan crisis emerged in the mid-1980s, when word about Pakistan’s uranium enrichment plant at Kahuta started to spread. In 1984 and again in 1985, Pakistani officials went public with concerns that India (possibly in cooperation with Israel) was planning to attack Kahuta in an effort to stop Pakistan’s nuclear program. Subsequent reporting suggested that India had in fact engaged in such planning, but it was not clear that these were serious efforts given that Indian nuclear facilities would have been vulnerable to Pakistani reprisals.²¹

¹⁹ Text of the agreement is available at: <http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/agreement-between-india-and-pakistan-on-pre-notification-of-flight-testing-of-ballistic-missiles/>.

²⁰ Suba Chandran, “Indo-Pak Nuclear CBMs: Looking Beyond the Pre-Notification Agreement on Missiles,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, August 22, 2005, available at: <http://www.ipcs.org/article/military/indo-pak-nuclear-cbms-looking-beyond-the-pre-notification-agreement-1827.html#comment>.

²¹ These episodes are recounted in Chari, Cheema and Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process*, p. 23-28.

Chari, Cheema and Cohen argue that “a state of virtual deterrence already existed, even though no nuclear weapons were deployed or were probably even available at the time.”²²

During the second of these periods of tension, in July 1985, prominent Indian defense expert K. Subrahmanyam proposed that India and Pakistan negotiate an agreement prohibiting such attacks.²³ This idea was taken up by both governments and was given provisional approval by Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Zia ul-Haq when they met later that year. Following the resolution of the Brasstacks crisis, the Agreement between India and Pakistan on the Prohibition of Attack Against Nuclear Installations and Facilities was signed by the foreign secretaries of each on December 31, 1988; it was ratified and entered into force in January 1991.²⁴ The agreement commits both sides to refrain from any action that would cause damage or destruction to nuclear facilities in the other state, and to exchange lists of these facilities along with their geographic coordinates on January 1 of each year.

The agreement itself is both short and simple, consisting of just three articles that prohibit attacks on nuclear facilities, define those facilities, and promise an annual exchange of lists. The public record suggests that Pakistan and India have faithfully exchanged facility lists each year, even during periods of crisis such as in 2001-2002 and after the Mumbai attack in 2008, though there were periodic questions about the completeness of the lists.²⁵ As such, this agreement constitutes one of the longest-running CBMs between the two.

The value of the agreement may be less relevant now than when the nuclear programs in both India and Pakistan were still undeclared and there was some very real chance that a facility with nuclear material could be attacked, either accidentally or on purpose, thus causing a nuclear disaster. Today, with both programs declared and the location of many (and probably even most) “strategic” facilities in both countries known with some certainty, this scenario seems remote. As such, the list exchange has become pro forma and devoid of real strategic meaning in the context of the current nuclear dynamic between India and Pakistan. And here, too, there have been no follow-on agreements that would have increased the value of this agreement in building trust or encouraging restraint—such as technical exchanges to demonstrate the security of nuclear facilities against terrorist attacks that might be blamed on either party.

So what do these two agreements suggest about incremental CBMs in general and military-nuclear ones in particular? First, if a CBM is clearly-written, technically-precise, and easy to monitor, then implementation can be carried out consistently, as in the case of the missile pre-notification regime. Second, however, even small and relatively simple increments can take a very long time to negotiate, and much of this

²² *Ibid*, p. 27.

²³ C. Raja Mohan and Peter R. Lavoy, “Avoiding Nuclear War,” in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds, *Crisis Prevention, Confidence Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1995), p. 28.

²⁴ Available at: http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/aptindpak.pdf?_=1316555923.

²⁵ Mohan and Lavoy, “Avoiding Nuclear War,” in Krepon and Sevak, *Crisis Prevention*, p. 28.

delay is due to bureaucratic process. Third, if these are two of the most “successful” CBMs, then the record on incremental agreements in South Asia is neither particularly useful nor promising in terms of building long-term stability, let alone a foundation for peace.

For a variety of reasons—bureaucratic inertia, military stonewalling, aversion to risk, lack of political will—India and Pakistan seem unable to break out of the constraints of existing frameworks despite no shortage of good and workable proposals. As former Pakistani Foreign Secretary Tanvir Ahmed Khan recently noted, “the negotiating habits of both the states have produced cyclical conversations with little forward movement.”²⁶ By the same token, it is also fair to assess that those politico-military measures that have been implemented with some consistency, such as the missile notification regime, the nuclear facility list exchange, and even the use of hotlines between the Directors General of Military Operations established after the 1971 war, have lost significance over time. In the case of the latter, there is evidence that the hotline was at first used to convey misinformation but not to notify military exercises. Many reports indicate this channel was not used during the 1990 crisis because it was perceived by the militaries on both sides that to initiate use would be perceived as a sign of weakness. Today, apparently, the hotline is used weekly to convey routine information, but of course it is during a crisis that hotline use is most important.²⁷ In none of these examples, then, have incremental steps been effective at ameliorating some of the dynamics that drive periodic crises in South Asia. Quite simply, these agreements have not built a sustained process of incremental progress. They may be functional in the sense that they help diminish misperceptions, but they have neither helped avoid crisis or conflict, nor encouraged restraint or additional transparency.

This is not to argue that incremental, functional approaches that build from enhanced communications to eventual transparency are not valuable or workable. The case of the missile test notification regime demonstrates that some measures can be used to avert highly dangerous misperceptions, and the record of implementation suggests room to build further trust. But incremental, halting steps taken in isolation or without sustained support from high-level leadership are unlikely to stabilize or fundamentally change security relations between Pakistan and India.

Lahore as a Model of Symbolic Change

The Lahore Summit did not bring about the “durable peace and development of harmonious relations and friendly cooperation ...” that Prime Ministers Vajpayee and Sharif sought.²⁸ Yet, as a model of how future efforts to promote peace and stability might be pursued, Lahore is an interesting case, not for the incrementalism discussed above, but for the potentially game-changing symbolism of the Summit. In the event, of

²⁶ Tanvir Ahmad Khan, “Talking with the Indians,” *Dawn*, May 8, 2012.

²⁷ See C. Raja Mohan, “Crisis Management and Confidence Building,” p. 198, and John Sandrock, “Prerequisites for Success,” p. 210-211, in Sumit Ganguly and Ted Greenwood, eds., *Mending Fences: Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in South Asia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

²⁸ Lahore Declaration.

course, the potential was lost and the game did not change because the Kargil conflict nullified the gains made at Lahore.

By most accounts, and as discussed above, graduated steps are widely viewed as the most feasible approach to building stability, even though the record thus far such suggests that it is difficult for such steps to be catalysts for change. Incrementalism is by definition risk averse. Though the specific measures agreed at Lahore were incremental, the Summit and the structure it created were actually rather radical departures from past practice, and in many ways defied international expectations at the time. By the end of May 1998, few experts or observers would have predicted that in just nine months the path toward peace in South Asia would look radically more positive. Like the 1972 Moscow Summit between Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev, at which the two leaders cemented the new *détente* between the United States and Soviet Union through CBMs and arms limitation agreements, the Lahore Summit signaled the promise of a major evolution in the basic terms of their bilateral relationship: India and Pakistan for the first time appeared ready to bury the past and establish a new understanding (e.g., *détente*) to govern relations. As such, the symbolic steps taken by the two leaders formed an interesting and important complement to the incremental measures negotiated by their bureaucracies. This suggests a different model for thinking about how to improve stability and work toward peace in South Asia: high-level symbolism layered over and reinforcing ongoing incremental CBMs. Before assessing how this layered approach might work, it is worth exploring separately the function and importance of symbolism and what might be thought of as a “symbolic” model in counterpoint to the incremental.

A symbolic approach has as its objective a fundamental change in the baseline condition of a relationship. The pattern of events that describes the symbolic model is perhaps similar to the punctuated equilibrium theory of evolution or policy change: a period of stasis or very slow change is interrupted, through a confluence of factors that often includes some major precipitating event (e.g., a nuclear test), by a significant but momentary change in the trajectory of development that establishes a new equilibrium.²⁹ Instead of building only in a graduated fashion on past efforts, a symbolic approach to change thus seeks to establish a new, more positive basis for stability not based explicitly on the old paradigm. Past efforts (both successes and failures) may be set aside in order to effect this new status quo. A framework based on a shared vision for the future can provide a foundation for new approaches to solving problems.

The defining characteristic of the symbolic model is the risk-taking behavior of the leaders involved, what Nicholas Wheeler has described as a “leap of trust,” and what Michael Krepon termed “risk-taking for peace.” What makes such behavior unique is that it cuts against the grain of “normal,” security-seeking behavior. If incrementalism seeks to ameliorate the security dilemma through a series of steps with graduated risk, a symbolic approach is based on a calculated but significant acceptance of up front risk—political, economic, national security—by one or both parties. The large body of

²⁹ See Stephen J. Gould, *Punctuated Equilibrium* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Frank Baumgartner and Brian Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

literature on trust and psychology in international relations tends to treat such risk-taking behavior as anomalous; realist models of international relations, and the concept of the security dilemma in particular, expect military balancing based on actual or misperceived mal-intent or weakness. States therefore tend to avoid steps that might initiate confidence building if such steps could be exploited for military gain by the other side. In describing the difficulty of demilitarizing the Siachen Glacier, for example, retired Pakistani Air Vice Marshal Shahzad Chaudhry captured this dilemma when he lamented, “So what is the hurdle? It’s actually the fear that if one side withdraws, the other could occupy its positions.”³⁰

The only manner in which states can ameliorate the security dilemma, according to Jervis, is for both states to realize that they are caught in a predicament neither desires. On this basis, “one side must take an initiative that increases the other side’s security. Reciprocation is invited and is likely to be forthcoming because the initiative not only reduces the state’s capability to harm the other but also provides evidence of its friendly intentions.... The end result is not that the state has given something up, or even that it has proposed a trade, but that a step is taken toward a mutually beneficial relationship.”³¹ In Wheeler’s formulation, “Rather than the dramatic moves that would signal a state’s trustworthiness coming *after* trust has been built up, as in the gradualist approach, the aim of a leap [of trust] is to signal one’s potential trustworthiness to an adversary in a frame-breaking conciliatory move.”³²

But such risky, conciliatory steps are rare. Legitimate differences of interest drive states to pursue strategies that perpetuate rivalries; bureaucracies enshrine these strategies in their missions and therefore have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. It is quite difficult for leaders to recognize that their security-seeking behavior, even if purely defensive in orientation, might be perceived by others as threatening. Empathy is complicated by pervasive negative images of adversaries that tend to dominate strategic cultures. With this kind of motivated bias, Jervis asserts, “once a person develops an image of the other—especially a hostile image of the other—ambiguous and even discrepant information will be assimilated to that image.... If they think a state is hostile, behavior that others might see as neutral or friendly will be ignored, distorted, or seen as attempted duplicity.”³³ Stein goes further: “Hostile imagery must change if conflict is to be reduced and resolved. Interstate conflict has been managed and routinized without edification in elite, much less public images, but neither civil violence nor interstate conflict can be resolved unless images change and leaders and publics learn.”³⁴ In South Asia, Navnita Chadha observes, “The most fundamental aspect of Pakistan’s enemy

³⁰ Quoted in Richard Leiby and Simon Denyer, “India and Pakistan Remain Frozen On Glacier Border Dispute,” *Washington Post*, May 2, 2012.

³¹ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 82.

³² Wheeler, “I had gone to Lahore,” in Chakma, *The Politics of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia*, p. 161.

³³ Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, p. 68.

³⁴ Janice Gross Stein, “Image, Identity, and Conflict Resolution,” in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler Hampson, with Pamela Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), p. 103.

image of India is that New Delhi is unreconciled to Pakistan's independent existence ... [while] India views Pakistan as a recalcitrant neighbor that has refused consistently to accept regional power realities."³⁵ Explaining how these images contributed to the Kargil conflict, for instance, Peter Lavoy argues that "each side has adopted very negative interpretations of each other's motives and objectives and very benign interpretations of their own motives and objectives. Even though many Indian and Pakistani mutual perceptions are wrong, or at least partially flawed, they are rarely modified by the course of events, even over long periods of time."³⁶ With bloodshed an indelible image of the birth of both countries, the subsequent history of crisis and conflict, as well as enduring territorial disputes, it is little wonder that leaders in India and Pakistan, as well as their broader security establishments, retain hostile images that make any overtures toward peace both difficult to offer and even more difficult to reciprocate. This is in addition to their differences over regional interests in Afghanistan, and further complicated by India's global ambitions and Pakistan's resort to unconventional and nuclear means to counter the growing military asymmetry between them.

After the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests in May 1998, and the very heated rhetoric that followed, Prime Minister Vajpayee appears to have made three important calculations: first, that future security on the Indian subcontinent would be better secured through peace with Pakistan than through a continuation of past behavior that had resulted in periodic crisis and conflict; second, that he was in a position to take significant personal and political risks to alter the negative imagery in both countries; and third, that Prime Minister Sharif was someone he could trust to be a partner in this effort. He made these decisions despite considerable uncertainty. He could not have known whether his bold proposal to establish a new framework for peaceful relations and invitation to meet would be reciprocated, though Sharif had signaled publicly his interest in taking some kind of big step. He also did not know whether Pakistani leaders would interpret his proffered hand as genuine or as an exploitable sign of weakness borne out of Pakistan's achievement of parity in the nuclear realm. The record now makes clear that Sharif did in fact share Vajpayee's vision and was willing to shoulder his own political risks in order to proceed, though his understanding of what the Pakistan Army was contemplating in Kargil remains in question.³⁷

The prerequisites for success with incremental steps are probably also necessary conditions for a symbolic approach, but with one major difference. Not simply political will, but risky, powerful, affecting symbolism is the *sine qua non*, backed by sustained, high-level involvement in follow-up steps. This can only be undertaken by leaders at the apex of government, not by bureaucracies. It is by definition bold and courageous, rather than risk averse. It may be easier for leaders with a conservative or nationalist pedigree to take such bold steps, as they are less likely to be attacked from the right. It is notable,

³⁵ Navnita Chadha, "Enemy Images: The Media and Indo-Pakistani Tensions," in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds., *Crisis Prevention, Confidence Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1995), p. 172.

³⁶ Peter Lavoy, "Introduction: The Importance of the Kargil Conflict," in Peter Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 27.

³⁷ See John H. Gill, "Military Operations in the Kargil Conflict," in Lavoy, *Asymmetric Warfare*, p. 95.

for instance, that nearly all of the US-Soviet/Russian arms control treaties were negotiated when Republican administrations occupied the White House. And broad domestic support, including from security agencies, is particularly important. Krepon observes that bold steps often “energize opposing forces, and opposing forces in tense regions often resort to violent means.”³⁸ In the case of Lahore, Sharif held his nerve and proceeded to take big steps with Vajpayee despite a lack of support from the Pakistan military and vocal and violent protests by groups such as Jamaat-e-Islami that opposed accommodation with India.

The rarity of successful “leaps of trust” is telling: the confluence of factors that seemingly must align to make such bold steps both possible and politically feasible is most difficult for leaders to achieve. Yet, there are examples of such efforts that have succeeded to fundamentally redefine previously conflictual relationships, such as Richard Nixon’s surprise visit to China in 1972, Anwar Sadat’s trip to Israel in 1974, and Mikhail Gorbachev’s efforts to reform the Soviet image in the United States.³⁹ The US-China and US-Soviet examples are instructive, if not perfectly analogous: these initiatives were not produced by third-party intervention, rather through direct engagement, and they were successful principally because of the sustained commitment and follow-through by the leaders of both states. Of course, such epic changes may not happen without considerable effort to lay the groundwork, often including backchannel discussions, though the available record seems to indicate that there was not a high degree of choreography involved in the lead up to the Lahore Summit. But what is striking about these examples, as well as the Lahore Summit, is that they did not directly build or rely on previous trust-building efforts. These were organic initiatives, not simply extensions of trust that had been sought through prior incremental approaches.

Prior to Lahore, there had been little agreement between Pakistan and India on how to define problems, let alone on approaches to resolving them. The nuclear tests and subsequent bilateral diplomacy gave no suggestion that such a momentous change in the terms of the relationship could be possible. Yet, at Lahore, Prime Ministers Vajpayee and Sharif not only agreed to put all issues on the table, which allowed each side to raise their principal concerns—cross-border terrorism and Kashmir, respectively—but also to establish a new, relatively flexible structure for handling these discussions, with both formal (the Composite Dialogue) and informal (the Kashmir backchannel) mechanisms. This result was conditioned by few if any of the CBMs that had been adopted previously (though the Composite Dialogue structure had been discussed over the preceding five years) and was agreed in a relatively short period of time, compared to the years it took to negotiate some of the incremental CBMs described above. This established the potential of a new baseline in the relationship, discontinuous from the previous trends.

³⁸ Michael Krepon, “Conflict Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” in Michael Krepon, Michael Newbill, Khurshid Khoja and Jenny S. Drezin, eds., *Global Confidence Building* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), p. 10.

³⁹ For more on these examples, see Stein, “Image, Identity, and Conflict Resolution,” in Crocker et al, *Managing Global Chaos*, p. 99-104.

Importantly, the symbolic measures discussed by Sharif and Vajpayee at Lahore, gestures and promises that they entailed, were the part of the agenda that could be controlled by the leaders themselves. Their statements reflected a recognition that past efforts had failed and that both sides needed to commit to changing negative images of each other in order to find accommodation. Such symbolic statements are a necessary agent of change, but not sufficient. Neither Vajpayee nor Sharif was able to translate words into follow-on actions through some irreversible steps.⁴⁰

This dependency of the symbolic model on action, of turning promising words into recognized facts on the ground, means it probably cannot operate on its own. Just as incrementalism alone is not likely to be a “catalyst for change,” neither can symbolism alone sustain a breakthrough and establish the new baseline. In this sense, the failure of the Lahore Summit was a lack of commitment to an initiative that changes the game in real terms, as well as the inability of the civilian leadership in Pakistan to overcome actions by the Army (in Kargil) that would undermine progress, a dynamic that any civilian leader will have difficulty resolving. But the summit did help foster a general improvement in relations and established the Composite Dialogue to manage differences, so as a model for thinking about symbolic change it holds promise.

The kind of actions that might help translate such symbolic efforts into a new reality are most likely non-military in orientation. Social, cultural and, in particular, economic actions are easier to negotiate, quicker to implement, and far more visible to ordinary citizens and political elite alike. Sporting matches, music and theater exchanges, and arts exhibits are examples of some low-hanging fruit that leaders can use to demonstrate changing relations. Of more lasting value, though, are economic steps that facilitate commerce and communications, and potentially even interdependence over time.

Historically, it appears that economic and trade initiatives in both Latin America in the 20th Century and Europe after World War II played a key role in reducing tensions in those regions, despite very different political and security interests among states. Though it is not clear that this relationship is causal, it is certainly correlated. Granted, the loosening of trade restrictions and easing of border inspection procedures can take time to negotiate and implement and may still be held hostage to bureaucratic politics, but this sort of top-down initiative is better-suited to the symbolic model for several reasons. First, leaders can speak about trade in both aspirational and concrete terms in ways that will resonate with the public, creating a powerful affect. These initiatives may lack theatrics, but they can still be quite risky for leaders to undertake. Second, this type of initiative comes with built-in constituencies. While there are questions in both India and Pakistan about who stands to gain more from increasing trade, there is little question that any efforts to improve the economies in both countries through trade is win-win overall and a benefit to general consumers.⁴¹ Recent studies have shown, for instance, there to

⁴⁰ Stein, “Image, Identity, and Conflict Resolution,” in Crocker et al, *Managing Global Chaos*, p. 104.

⁴¹ One recent study World Bank study found that that under a full free trade regime both India and Pakistan would increase bilateral imports by over \$1 billion each. Eugenia Baroncelli, “Pakistan-India Trade Study: Economic Gains and the “Peace Dividend” from SAFTA,” unpublished World Bank report, quoted in “Implications of Liberalizing Trade and Investment with India,” Report by the State Bank of Pakistan, p.

be a strong basis for intra-industry across the border, not just trade among different sectors.⁴² Business communities in both countries will lobby their governments extensively to continue trade liberalizations. And lastly, economic initiatives may strengthen interdependencies that will support restraint during crises and might check the tendencies (and power) of the security services to dominate the debate. Cross-LOC trade in Kashmir, for instance, seems to have helped reduce hostilities there. One recent report on the prospects of growing Indo-Pakistan trade found that “The buy-in of local communities has helped to sustain this initiative and has kept LOC trade insulated from tensions between Pakistan and India.”⁴³

Taking all this into consideration, the Lahore summit failed to achieve the lofty goals it set in part because the symbolic steps were largely declarations of intent, not concrete measures with substantive content or built-in follow-on steps. Moreover, in considering the views of domestic constituencies, it seems clear that the Pakistan Army did not buy into the strategic vision and process that Prime Minister Sharif delivered, and indeed none of Pakistan’s military chiefs accompanied Sharif to welcome Vajpayee in Lahore. In their view, leverage was needed to achieve proper outcomes vis-à-vis India: the Army had its own tactical objective to establish new facts on the ground in areas around the Line of Control, and perceived an opportunity to seize advantage (as, Pakistani experts claim, India had done previously on the Siachen Glacier and in other instances).⁴⁴ Such divergence of tactical and strategic objectives, despite the introduction of nuclear weapons, remains a significant hurdle to peace efforts, as does the prospect that different actors within Pakistan’s security establishment continue to pursue parochial interests not favorable to the sustainment of incremental steps. A similarly-troubling divergence between strategic orientation and tactical reality is often evident in India, whose leaders seem at times to continue to prefer to look with aspiration at China as its peer competitor and to simply wish their “Pakistan problem” away. It is abundantly clear that there must be constituencies arguing for the continuation of stabilizing measures in both countries for them to survive the frequent security crises characterizing the Indo-Pakistan relationship.

The Troubled Path Ahead

States in deterrence relationships will find it difficult to place significant trust in their adversaries sufficient to negotiate meaningful steps that can help them avoid future crises and conflict, unless and until there is a shift in the balance of thinking among top leaders and security establishments about external enemies. Incremental steps negotiated when

62, available at: <http://www.sbp.org.pk/publications/pak-india-trade/> See also Aisha Chowdhry, “Real Talk: Perceptions of India-Pakistan Trade,” *Foreign Policy AfPak Channel*, May 2, 2012, available at: http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/05/02/real_talk_implications_of_india_pakistan_trade.

⁴² Pradeep Mehta, “Trade Relations Between India and Pakistan,” *PILDAT Report*, January 2012.

⁴³ See for instance Sayem Ali and Anubhuti Sahay, “Pakistan-India Trade – Peace Dividend,” *Standard Chartered Global Research*, June 7, 2012, p. 3.

⁴⁴ See for instance Zafar Iqbal Cheema, “The Strategic Context of the Kargil Conflict: A Pakistani Perspective,” in Peter R. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 47-55.

deterrence is the dominant behavioral pattern, and when the states involved have very divergent strategic interests that do not give priority to stability, tend to have limited practical value and a short shelf life. Big, symbolic steps, accompanied by some smaller increments to lock-in progress, on the other hand, may help facilitate and lock in this change of frame. Leaders willing to take greater risks to break this pattern in a sustained way may be rewarded with bigger gains, and ultimately a change in the relationship status quo. But their efforts may also attract determined opposition, and violent opposition at that, as the Mumbai attacks in 2008 demonstrated.

Prior to November 26, 2008, Indian and Pakistani officials invested a great deal of time and effort in the Composite Dialogue, as well as in a very active backchannel on Kashmir. Several of the Dialogue's subgroups—primarily devoted to security and territorial issues, such as Sir Creek, Siachen, and terrorism—met regularly to discuss implementation of existing measures and to try to identify additional incremental steps. This process received regular personal support from Pakistan's then-President and Chief of Army Staff Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf, who presumably also had the backing of Pakistan's military services. In his 2006 memoir, Musharraf argued that "There is no military solution to our problems. The way forward is through diplomacy."⁴⁵ Accordingly, he made great efforts to establish relationships with Prime Minister Vajpayee and his successor, Manmohan Singh. Despite the institutionalization of dialogue and high-level support, the process suffered periodic setbacks—cross-border firing along the Line of Control, and an attack on the Indian consulate in Afghanistan by militants assessed to receive support from the ISI—and by 2008 had started to drift again toward stasis. The spectacular November 26, 2008, attack on Mumbai by Lashkar-i-Taiba militants brought the process to a standstill and, as with previous peace efforts, undid prior incremental progress.

Looking back, the achievements of the Composite Dialogue and improvements in the overall relationship apparently were not sufficient to alter the Pakistan military's image of and calculus on India, its concerns about Indian conventional military strength, and therefore its use of asymmetric tactics, specifically through Inter-Services Intelligence relationships with militant proxy groups that continue to pursue actions against India. Following the Mumbai attack, the options available to India to retaliate against what it perceived as state or military-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan included kinetic ones, such as military strikes against terrorist camps or intelligence facilities in Pakistan, as well as political steps, such as breaking off talks on subjects of interest to Pakistan. It chose to pursue the latter and exercise restraint on the former. Many experts worried, however, that with political options exhausted and punitive economic leverage virtually non-existent, India would have confronted a much narrower set of options had there been a compound crisis in 2008 as in 1990 and 2001-2002; an Indian military reprisal was not out of the question.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Pervaiz Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 299.

⁴⁶ Daniel Markey, "Terrorism and Indo-Pakistani Escalation," *CPA Contingency Planning Memo #6*, January 2010, available at: <http://www.cfr.org/india/terrorism-indo-pakistani-escalation/p21042>.

Political CBMs could still play this “firebreak” role in the future. Interestingly, after the Mumbai attacks the bus lines between the two countries stayed open, though there was a marked diminution in trade in both directions and in cultural and sports exchange. But it was primarily the political-military sphere that saw the interruption of relations, ironic considering that it is through those channels that crisis management takes place. An expansion of social, cultural and economic CBMs could in theory provide still greater insulation in the relationship to future shocks.

The politics of future steps, both small and large, suggests continued frustration. The particular formula that resulted in the Lahore Summit may not be replicated again soon. Even high-level support for the Composite Dialogue did not prevent the Mumbai crisis. One critical variable is the extent to which a change in preferences among Pakistan’s security elite to prioritize stability and economic growth yields a different national security strategy. (Considering that the Pakistan military is a major economic actor, it has substantial incentives to promote trade and investment that will benefit its subsidiaries.) At this time, Pakistan’s weak civilian leaders do not appear to have the support of the military to undertake a risky peace effort with India, while Indian politics also do not favor accommodation with Pakistan that does not begin with some concessions on terrorism. There is some potential for leadership changes in both countries in the next year that may present new opportunities, or may reinforce these trends to the extent that governments in both countries continue to be politically weak.

Beyond political circumstances, two other trends militate against a big breakthrough at this time. The first is the continued orientation of the Pakistan military toward India, despite or perhaps because of internal instability. With India the long-term existential threat, the primacy of the Pakistani security establishment in the affairs of government was assured. But the US raid in Abbotabad in May 2011 brought unwelcome questioning of the military’s competence and criticism that threatened to undermine its preeminent role in the Pakistani system. Prevalent and populist anti-Americanism may presage a lowering of temperatures with India, but Pakistani military leaders still have incentive to focus on India as a unifying point of reference. The apparent growth in Pakistan’s nuclear and missile capabilities is one reflection of this focus.

The second trend is India’s continued emergence as a global power, and its concomitant diminution of interest in bilateral issues. With stable and sustained economic growth their first and foremost objective, Indian leaders seem disinterested in going out of their way to negotiate with Pakistan. China is the bigger prize, both in economic and strategic terms, and India is increasingly focusing its trade and national security policies toward its neighbor to the north, not the west. When problems with Pakistan flare up, there is a strain of thought in India that explains these away as immutable problems that come with living in a dangerous neighborhood. To the extent that such an attitude becomes more prevalent among Indian leaders, they will be less interested in bargaining or taking risks with Pakistan that might tarnish them politically or divert focus from more important objectives.

Finally, and specific to nuclear CBMs, important civil-military differences between India and Pakistan have emerged as an impediment to dialogue that might mitigate the uncertainties that challenge deterrence stability. For instance, despite the commitment contained in the Lahore Memorandum of Understanding to initiate a dialogue on nuclear doctrine, the very different philosophies and approaches of the two states to operationalizing their nuclear arsenals has been an obstacle progress. The military officers in Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division, who have custody of nuclear weapons and serve as the secretariat for the nuclear decisionmaking body, have no military analog in India's civilian-run nuclear hierarchy, and therefore no partner they believe suitable for such discussions. More broadly, Indian and Pakistani experiences and command and control structures are different, as are the views of strategic elites on deterrence and the value of nuclear weapons. In India, Ali Ahmed notes, "nuclear weapons are [seen as] political weapons and not for war-fighting. . . . For the military, being historically little integrated at the nuclear strategy-making level, the interface between the conventional and nuclear doctrines and strategy is limited. As a result the two are undertaken autonomous from each other."⁴⁷ Pakistan, on the other hand, tends to have a tighter linkage between nuclear and conventional doctrines, postulating first-use of nuclear weapons, including in operational and tactical roles. This mismatch results in divergent agendas for nuclear talks. Maleeha Lodhi asserts that India and Pakistan have such different objectives—restraint and dialogue, respectively—that there is no intersection of interests from which to start.⁴⁸

This is a rather bleak outlook for any steps, big or small, to stabilize security in South Asia, at least in the short-term. Notwithstanding the failures of incremental approaches in the past and the long odds of new successes, it is still worth considering a future agenda for the long-term promise of better relations. For that matter, there appear to be few other means currently on the table or over the horizon for nurturing peace between Pakistan and India, so such measures will retain focus. In fact, there are also a few seeds of hope, particularly in the area of trade and investment, on which to build.

Implementing a New Approach

The analysis presented here suggests two ways of thinking about steps to promote peace and stability and some choices contained therein. One approach – incrementalism – is the status quo in South Asia. The other – symbolic acts coupled with small steps – is an alternative method. The Lahore Summit is an example of this latter approach, for it combined the big, risky initiative of the two leaders with the narrow, technical understanding on CBMs agreed by the foreign secretaries. Even though the immediate success of the Summit turned quickly to failure and did not yield the promised fundamental change in relations, it points to this different path.

⁴⁷ Ali Ahmed, "Cold Start: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back?" *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Article 3563*, January 2012, available at: <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/cold-start-one-step-forward-two-steps-back-3563.html>.

⁴⁸ Maleeha Lodhi, "Confidence Building Needs Bold Approach," *The News*, January 11, 2012.

The difficult road ahead aside, it is clear that India and Pakistan will continue to pursue steps toward peace and stability. Given that the incremental approach alone has not brought relations between the two much closer to lasting stability, a new approach that combines incremental and symbolic changes seems preferable. Such a model could help avoid the pitfalls and discontinuity that plagued past efforts. In assessing how the lessons of Lahore might inform more effective work on future Indo-Pakistani CBMs, four seem most prevalent.

- The first, and most obvious, lesson is on the importance of sustained and high level commitment from the top political leadership. If prime ministers or presidents are “all-in” (to borrow a gambling term), change is possible. Absent such an investment of political will, with responsibility for negotiations delegated to the foreign service and security bureaucracies, halting incrementalism will result without any guarantee of progress past the first increment. Support from the civilian bureaucracies and militaries in both countries is also necessary—no national leader can devote time to bird-dogging implementation of agreements by unsupportive bureaucracies.
- Second, negotiating teams require the right mix of technical expertise and political heft. Leaving negotiations to bureaucrats in both countries is likely to produce very narrowly-construed agreements that do little to actually reduce strategic uncertainties; the inclusion of elected officials could break this dynamic. By the same token, political gestures that lack specific, concrete and observable follow-up actions undertaken by government agencies will most likely be honored in the breach if implemented at all. The missile prenotification and nuclear facility non-attack agreements were blessed by top leaders in both countries, providing the high-level political cover bureaucrats needed to negotiate in good faith.
- Third, there is a balance to be struck between symbolism and incrementalism in the content of agreements. The Lahore process was highly symbolic and appeared to have the potential to usher in a fundamental change in the bilateral relationship, but it lacked a detailed foundation of specific, functional, and achievable agreements in the areas most ripe for symbolic change, principally in the economic and social sphere. (The bus service at Wagah was a great start, but opening transport and communication links at other crossing points would have greatly expanded the symbolism). Institutionalizing the vision through concrete steps can make it concrete and visible. Too much focus on function without sufficient symbolic political acts, however, yields modest incremental agreements that may be additive but are insufficient to bring about fundamental changes in the relationship.
- Finally, for symbolic acts to be realized, they must be married with appropriate content and tactics. For this reason, economic and socio-cultural CBMs fit better with a symbolic change strategy. These types of steps are more compatible with the emotion of symbolic acts and can have tangible effects on the lives of ordinary

citizens, turning the vision of a changing relationship into concrete action. Politico-military CBMs, on the other hand, are better suited to incrementalism. To be credible, these steps require heavy involvement by security establishments, which have a tendency to be averse to risky measures and to take their time in working through difficult security challenges.

One indirect lesson from Lahore, but clearly a critical element of a symbolic approach, is the need to tackle enemy images. This is true of both India and Pakistan, and probably weighs more significantly today on officials in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, though the initiative is India's to take. Pakistan's shattered economy, chronic energy shortages, and growing violent extremism provide powerful impetus for change; Delhi can facilitate this change by challenging Pakistani images of India through concrete and risky acts designed to improve Pakistan's security. Interestingly, an intervening variable in this equation is the rise in anti-American sentiment in Pakistani popular opinion, to such an extent that the United States now ranks above India in some surveys of threat perception. Accommodation with India may be more palatable for Pakistani leaders if the negative imagery solidifies against Washington. This of course brings a different set of problems, but is interesting to contemplate.

Drawing on these lessons, a future framework and agenda for a new approach to Indo-Pakistani negotiations could look like the following:

1. Through existing channels and mechanisms, representatives from the security establishments of both countries can (and presumably will) continue to seek incremental progress in areas not ripe for big changes and which require careful technical and legal negotiations, mostly in the security field. Such negotiations will keep the bureaucracies busy and focused. For instance, the two sides could try to negotiate a broadening of the missile test notification regime to include cruise missiles, an idea that has been proposed on numerous previous occasions. Security officials on both sides could also look for opportunities outside of formal bilateral negotiations to advance cooperation. The participation of both countries in the nuclear security summit process is one such opportunity that could facilitate a broadening of the range of issues for discussion. For instance, both countries could host reciprocal regional training courses on topics discussed at the summit, perhaps in radiological security and safety. Relationships formed between technical communities in both countries during such exercises could be quite useful in future crises or contingencies, and the little bit of transparency involved might build confidence in the practices of both states.
2. While the security establishment remains focused on incremental politico-military steps, elected officials could plant the seeds of symbolic changes in other fields, such as trade and energy cooperation, which are ripe for major progress but do not require the same level of formality as security CBMs. For example, politicians might try to help business communities in their districts to grow into organized constituencies that would gain from expanded trade opportunities. Pakistan's decision to grant India most favored nation trade status and its work to curtail its

negative trade list is one opportunity. India could also consider removal of many other stifling non-tariff barriers to trade. The expansion of the trading zone at Wagah is an important and creative step in the right direction, but other steps surely are possible.⁴⁹ These are the kinds of initiatives that suspicious security agencies will find harder to block; successful implementation of these steps may in fact improve flexibility in considering incremental security steps, particularly if security agencies also gain from trade. And, as economic opportunities through trade expand, the built-in constituencies that gain from enhanced bilateral cooperation can become louder voices arguing for progress and stability.

3. Government leaders in Delhi and Islamabad, who see the problem at a higher level of abstraction than their bureaucracies, can be opportunistic in looking to build good will. For example, periodic natural disasters in both countries provide openings for symbolic aid and cooperation in an emotional context that can change opinions. Following the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan, for instance, India was lauded for its efforts to send relief supplies through Kashmir. Regional regimes, such as SAARC, might be used for training on disaster relief that would bring militaries and relief agencies together in common cause. Additional cricket diplomacy at the right time might help create the conditions for symbolic change.
4. When the political stars align and sufficient political will exists, Indian and Pakistani heads of government can seek to build on the incremental progress with a significant leap. Summitry, including emotional and visionary rhetoric, is one means of facilitating symbolic change, but the content and follow-up to the summit requires risky and image-changing steps. A major deal to build and share electric power generation is one example of the kind of step that could consolidate symbolic gains by leading to a change in frame in how Indians and Pakistanis view each other. A major overhaul of bilateral visa requirements (beyond the important but limited “liberalization” begun in 2012) and opening of multiple and regular transportation routes are other steps that could be taken reasonably quickly. A solution to long-standing territorial issues (Sir Creek, Siachen, and, most prominently, Kashmir) is the major prize that might result from such an effort, though not as a first measure. Here the security agencies would have to be full partners at the outset.
5. For interested parties outside the region there are some opportunities, albeit rather limited, to influence the process and prospects for this approach. Rather than focusing on improving security and political relations between the states, which appears to not be welcomed by either or both India and Pakistan depending on the outside party, interested governments can look for means and opportunities to bolster economic initiatives like those described above. Bilateral aid and multilateral lending programs could be directed at improving competitiveness of some industries in both states that would gain from enhanced bilateral trade, or toward facilitating bilateral energy development projects. Outside parties could

⁴⁹ Aditi Phadnis and Shahram Haq, “Major Strides: India Opens Door to More Trade with Pakistan,” *Express Tribune*, April 14, 2012.

also host bilateral delegations of business leaders, conduct joint technical trainings in various public works sectors, and establish regional forums to share best practices for achieving and monitoring industrial standards, all efforts that would create opportunities for Indian and Pakistani counterparts to build ties, identify opportunities for trade and investment, and hopefully implement new ideas to enhance bilateral ties when they return home.

An approach that stresses both formal and informal incremental progress while laying the groundwork for big leaps forward seems like the best route forward in South Asia given the political hurdles and difficulty of sustaining trust. A crisis could erupt at any time; this type of framework might limit the damage of the next crisis, break the cycle that has prevented progress, and sustain stability. This idea already seems to have the support of at least some key officials. Indian National Security Advisor Menon argued recently that India and Pakistan

“should build the economic and other links that we can, while attempting to resolve the political and security issues that divide us. This does not mean that we ignore the political and security issues. In fact it means the opposite.... In the meantime, we should move also move forward much more rapidly on the connectivity, including energy and grid connectivity, tourism, people to people, trade and economic links that can make such a major contribution to improving our future.”⁵⁰

Similarly, a recent editorial in *Dawn* argued “Even solutions to long-running disputes — from Siachen to an issue as big as Kashmir — may receive a boost through the normalisation of trade ties, so the general understanding goes.”⁵¹

Although there is a decidedly mixed record on steps toward stability in South Asia to date, there are positive signs, including sentiments such as these. With focus and dedication of national leaders and elected officials, security establishments, business communities and civil society in Pakistan and India, with well-timed and -directed support from outside parties, fundamental changes in the relationship are achievable, both in increments and big leaps.

⁵⁰ Speech by Indian National Security Advisor Shri Shivshankar Menon at the Asian Relations Conference, March 9, 2012, available at: <http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/NSASpeechARC2012.pdf>.

⁵¹ “Pakistan-India Trade,” *Dawn*, May 9, 2012, available at: <http://dawn.com/2012/05/09/pakistan-india-trade/>.