



*Pugwash Meeting on "Prospects for Restarting
India-Pakistan Dialogue"*

Islamabad, Pakistan, 5-6 March 2009

Report

The Pugwash meeting on the 'Prospects for Restarting the India-Pakistan Dialogue' was held at the Marriott Hotel, Islamabad, Pakistan on 5-6 March 2009. Thirty-one participants from India, Pakistan, and Indian and Pakistani Kashmir attended the meeting. The participants included leaders of major political parties in Indian and Pakistani Kashmir, retired government servants, diplomats, academics, analysts, and prominent civil society actors from India and Pakistan. While the meeting was held specifically to address the emerging bilateral relationship after the Mumbai terror strikes on the November 26, 2008, it was part of the larger Pugwash track-II dialogue initiative in the region that began in 2002.

The meeting featured a healthy and candid discussion. The first day of the conference centered around the current state of India-Pakistan relations, the Mumbai terror strikes and its impact on the peace process, and the way to restart the peace process. Discussions on the second day honed in on Afghanistan and its effect on the Indo-Pak relationship.

Key Issues

1. Perhaps the most important point of unanimous consensus among participants was that unofficial interaction between Pakistani and Indian experts, like this Pugwash meeting in Islamabad, should continue uninterrupted irrespective of the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan. All participants felt that there was tremendous value added of such interactions; these could act as a genuine means to convince governments of the need for rapprochement and provide new ideas to that effect. Overall, there was support for increased track-II interaction.
2. In a show of unity, the participants decided to begin the proceedings with a one-minute silence for the victims of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai and Lahore. There was a

consensus among all participants that terrorism is a common enemy, to defeat it India and Pakistan must work together. Participants agreed that the mutual blame game was counterproductive and played into the hands of those perpetrating the attacks.

3. Pakistani participants were extremely candid about the capacity problems the Pakistani state is facing to deal with non-state actors. They agreed that Pakistan was infected by terrorism and that its instability could destabilize the whole region. They argued that Pakistan needs reinvigorated efforts to tackle militant activity within its borders, while India needs to be more understanding towards Pakistan in its posturing.
4. In line with the spirit of collaboration, participants argued that India and Pakistan should increase the number of joint mechanisms to deal with issues of common interest. These ought not to be limited to terrorism but should also include trade and commerce, among other sectors.
5. Participants stressed that irrespective of the level of tensions between India and Pakistan, Kashmir's importance could not be undermined; normalization of the lives of Kashmiris is a goal that participants felt should be pursued without disruption. There was unanimous support for enhancing interaction among Kashmiri politicians and civil society across the LoC. Participants requested Pugwash to provide a regular forum for these groups to come together and discuss means of enhancing cross-LoC interaction, which is especially when Indo-Pakistani relations are particularly volatile.
6. On Afghanistan, participants felt that future meetings should include an Afghan presence in a bid to understand Kabul's preference on Indian and Pakistani roles in ensuring Afghanistan's return to normalcy. Participants suggested that both Pakistan and India should look beyond the current zero-sum approach they have adopted in their Afghan policies. They contended that a number of areas of mutual interest existed where, by starting with modest initiatives and objectives, the two sides could complement each other's efforts. Some of the areas highlighted were women's development, institution building, and revamping the education sector.
7. Overall, despite some differences on the timing and manner of execution, most delegates expressed their desire to restart the peace process and urged India and Pakistan to create mechanisms whereby bilateral relations are not held hostage to the designs of non-state actors.