

General Pervez Musharraf and Pakistan's India Relationship

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Summary

General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan's former Chief of Army Staff, who passed away on 5 February 2023, leaves behind a complex legacy on Islamabad's relations with Delhi. His tenure at the helm of Pakistan's army and polity saw a limited war in Kashmir as well as a productive bilateral peace process that came close to success. Pakistan and India can build on that legacy when conditions are propitious.

General Pervez Musharraf, the former army chief who passed away in Dubai, might go down as a tragic figure in Pakistan – as the only military dictator who was convicted for treason. Many Pakistanis wish that with his untrammelled power at home and unprecedented international support after the 9-11 attacks on New York and Washington, Musharraf had led the economic modernisation of Pakistan and put it on the path to political moderation. However, he left Pakistan in a disarray and on a course of relative decline in the subcontinent and beyond.

On the relationship with India, though, Musharraf leaves a mixed legacy that has many positive features. It is ironic indeed that he died on 5 February 2023, a date which is marked as the annual Kashmir Solidarity Day in Pakistan. A significant part of Musharraf's engagement with India was on Kashmir. The first phase of Musharraf's power saw a war in Kashmir in 1999. In the second phase of his tenure, Musharraf came close to finalising a peaceful settlement on Kashmir.

Musharraf's brilliant tactical manoeuvre to seize a part of the Kargil sector in Kashmir in the spring of 1999 ended in a strategic disaster for Pakistan. He had hoped that the prospect of a conventional war between Pakistan and India, both of which had recently declared themselves as nuclear weapon powers, would bring a quick intervention by the major powers. He had also bet that the desire of the United States (US) to prevent a nuclear escalation in South Asia [would compel India](#) to make major concessions on Kashmir.

Musharraf was right about the predicted Anglo-American intervention in the Kargil conflict. But he was wrong about what it might lead to. India refused to accept the unilateral change and embarked on a limited war to compel Pakistan to vacate the aggression across the Line of Control (LoC). Instead of forcing India to make concessions on Kashmir, the US supported [India's demand](#) for the restoration of the status quo ante in Kashmir. The Bill Clinton administration also got Pakistan to accept the sanctity of the 1972 LoC and withdraw from the Kargil sector. US diplomacy in Kargil laid the basis for building mutual trust between Washington and Delhi and a new strategic partnership in the 21st century.

Musharraf miscalculated again in 2001, when he came to Agra for a summit meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. But Musharraf's hopes of bulldozing Vajpayee into a

Kashmir settlement were dashed. Although the Agra summit failed, the peace process picked up steam soon after.

During 2001-02, military tensions intensified on the India-Pakistan border after a series of cross-border attacks, including on the Kashmir assembly in Srinagar and the Indian parliament in Delhi. The US and the United Kingdom intervened again to persuade [Musharraf to announce](#) in January 2002 that Pakistan's soil will not be used to foment terror against other countries. By the end of 2003, India and Pakistan had announced the ceasefire agreement, which set the stage for Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan to participate in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Summit in January 2004. Talks between Musharraf and Vajpayee produced a three-fold framework for a new peace process. One was a reduction in cross-border terror, the second was a dialogue on Kashmir and the third was a variety of confidence-building measures. Between 2004 and 2007, the sustained talks between both sides pointed to the many possibilities for transforming bilateral relations.

Despite occasional major terror attacks, Pakistan brought down the severity of cross-border terror. Sporting contacts and engagement between the civil societies and larger populations expanded significantly. Islamabad and Delhi also made considerable progress towards a resolution of the Siachen and Sir Creek disputes. Even more consequentially, there was progress in drafting a framework for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Meeting regularly but secretly in a [back channel](#), the special envoys of Musharraf and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh – Pakistan's Tariq Aziz and India's Satinder Lamba – came up with a paper. Although there had been a number of ideas before on resolving the Kashmir dispute, the new formula was widely viewed as the most plausible one. The Aziz-Lamba framework involved four elements. The reduced cross-border violence, reduction of Indian troops in Kashmir, devolution of power by Islamabad and Delhi to the governments in the two Kashmirs and the cross-LoC engagement between the divided parts of Kashmir. The core idea was to avoid changing the borders (LoC) in Kashmir, but rather to change the nature of that border by facilitating greater engagement between the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The ebbing of Musharraf's power in 2007 and Delhi's reluctance in seizing the fleeting opportunities with Musharraf, left the framework up in the air. Musharraf's successors as army chiefs did not seem committed to the framework. The massive terror attack on Mumbai in November 2008 and the steady breakdown of the ceasefire, set up in 2003, diminished the possibilities for peace after 2008. The Bharatiya Janata Party that came to power six years later was eager to engage Pakistan but on a very different set of terms.

However, the very purposeful negotiations on Kashmir and other issues during the Musharraf era did cover a very demanding terrain and pointed to a positive future between the two nations. These negotiations provide a sensible basis for picking up the threads of the India-Pakistan peace process at some point, hopefully, soon.

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