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A Pakistani Vision of Peace with India¹

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Projecting a brave new vision of Pakistan, Mr Imran Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice), has portrayed a scenario in which “military means or militancy” would “no longer ... be an option” in resolving his country’s 65-year-old disputes with India.

Delivering a public lecture under the auspices of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in Singapore and answering questions during the follow-on Q&A session, Mr Khan traced a political narrative of wanting to see the crises-hit Pakistan live with peace at home and a foreign policy of friendship towards India and the United States in particular.

He undertook a two-hour-long odyssey of candid comments on the current “series of crises” in his country and its future – within the world view of his party which was now bracing for the next general election in Pakistan. At the well-attended event, he presented “A Perspective on Pakistan and The Way Forward”.

His thoughts on the possibility of a non-military and non-militant resolution of disputes between India and Pakistan, if and when he gets a chance to lead Pakistan at the helm, are of interest to researchers and policy makers for two significant nuances. One, the idea of a non-military solution is equivalent to a no-war process – different from the much-hyped proposal of a no-war pact that did the rounds in the past. This interpretation is made possible by the second nuance. His preference for ruling out “militancy”, too, as an “option” does address New Delhi’s long-standing concerns over “cross-border terrorism [in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India] from Pakistan”.

¹ This is a thematic report on some salient comments made by Mr Imran Khan, leader of a Pakistani political party, at the Institute of South Asian Studies’ (ISAS) Public Lecture on 6 December 2012 in Singapore. ISAS is an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore.

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On Pakistan's conventional concerns over Kashmir, Mr Khan sought to present a totally refreshing outlook: "Pakistan needs to develop a completely different foreign policy. Until now, we have a relationship with India which is based on [mutual] distrust. ... We have a big issue on Kashmir. The two countries should resolve that the Kashmir issue would be solved through dialogue. It should be a political settlement. No longer would military means or militancy be an option. There is so much to gain from peace that it is mindboggling how much poverty you can reduce in the [South Asian] subcontinent by developing trade and peaceful relationship [between India and Pakistan]. So, I think, [considering] the way we have viewed each other for 65 years, time has come for a completely a drastic change in our relationship, and as I said, based on trust, deciding that ... all our disputes would be settled peacefully". By developing mutual trust, he noted, Pakistan and India could ensure that the people of South Asia "realise the dividend of peace".

Political Settlement with India 'is Possible'

Specifically asserting that a political settlement with India over the Kashmir issue was now possible, through the entirely peaceful means of dialogue, Mr Khan said: "The solution has to be: meet aspirations of people of Kashmir. Because they have suffered tremendously: Since I am always against military solutions, this idea that 600,000-700,000 Indian troops will somehow [help] sort out a solution ... I think, is a completely counter-productive policy, because India is losing the hearts and minds of people – with massive human rights violations going on there."

Taking due care to try and take a balanced view, with regard to both India and Pakistan, Mr Khan said: "Wherever you send, whenever you send, armies to civilian areas, there is always going to be massive human rights violations. Always, police is the one [which] can deal with insurgent areas, never the Army. Army is not equipped to deal with insurgent areas. Every Pakistani [internal] military operation has failed, starting from East Pakistan to three in Baluchistan, one in Sindh, [in] the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) – they all ... have not produced the results. So, neither is India going to win the hearts and minds of people [in Kashmir] by adding 600,000 troops there. I think, it is in the interest of India and Pakistan to find a solution now. For India, they are alienating the people of Kashmir, and whenever they will be given a chance to express their will, I can tell you, there will be more people now wanting independence from India than even before, because they have been alienated by [the Indian Army] presence there. Therefore, it is in the interest of both the countries to have peace, Pakistan, India, and peace means the will of the people of Kashmir".

Without directly answering the question whether he would accept the Indian assertion about Jammu and Kashmir being an integral part of the Union of India, Mr Khan expressed optimism about the possibility of a political settlement with India on this issue. The basis of his optimism of this kind: "There are three ex-foreign ministers in Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf now. And, all the three ex-foreign ministers tell me that we came pretty close to some sort of a solution during not the Congress [rule in India] but [during] the BJP time. We hear that they

almost came to a solution which was actually very viable; and, I think that it is possible [in the future], because there were back-channel contacts [between India and Pakistan]. I can't tell you exactly what the [formula for a possible] solution was, but there is a [draft] solution there: it is possible, it can happen".

For a New Paradigm in Pak-US Ties

Discounting the perceived value of Pakistan's long-standing policy of wanting "strategic depth" in Afghanistan for the purpose of facing India, Mr Khan said "This idea of strategic depth! We should back whatever government is chosen by people of Afghanistan, by themselves. That is how the Baluchistan problem [of 'insurgency' within Pakistan] will be solved, once we have [good] relationship with our neighbours, because there is a lot of outside interference in Baluchistan, [which] has complicated the solution [in that province]".

With the US, his prescription: "Pakistan should be friends, but Pakistan should never again have this client-master relationship. The moment you take aid [from as Pakistan does from the US], the moment you beg and borrow for your existence, you lose your dignity and self-respect". Maintaining that he was "not anti-American" in his political impulses, Mr Khan said he would rather like Pakistan becoming "an ally [of the US] in having peace in Afghanistan". But "we will not become an ally in fighting an unwinnable and insane war [the ongoing US-led 'war on terror']", he said, placing a premium on his chances of becoming Pakistan's next Prime Minister in due course. The US, he suggested, "should no longer patronise stooges [in Pakistan as its leaders]. The last stooge they [the Americans] patronised neither served them – certainly not served the people of Pakistan".

A Series of Crises in Pakistan

Discussing at great length, Pakistan's numerous current crises at home, he paraphrased them with a snippet from *Alice in Wonderland*: when you don't know where you're going, it does not matter which road you're taking. He advocated structural economic reforms, restoration of law and order, and the declaration of an education-and-development emergency, among other measures. He also suggested that the current "frenzy of fanaticism" in Pakistan could be rolled back through the divorcing of the "Jihadi narrative" from the political agenda of the extremists by winning the hearts and minds of the foot soldiers of the so-called "Punjab Taliban". He advocated an end to the US-led "war on terror" which was, in his view, providing the oxygen for extremism [not Mr Khan's words] in Pakistan at this stage. This, in his perception, could bring about a positive climate change [not his phrase] in Pakistan's politics and society at large.

On the Pakistani Army's long-standing image as the clinching X-factor in the country's affairs time and again in the past decades, Mr Khan said: "Pakistan will have to be run as it has never been run before. Completely different: That of course means the relationship between the Pakistan Army and the civilian government [as well]. One of the reasons why the

Army has interfered over the previous decades is because there [was] political vacuum [time and again]. Political governments had failed, and the Pakistan Army had come in and filled the void. The reason why, I think, this will no longer happen is because Pakistan has moved forward. The thought process has moved on in Pakistan. ... Today ... if a democratic government fails, no one now thinks that the military can come and solve the problem. Because we have finally realised that the military interfering in civilian affairs is like trying to cure cancer with dispirin (a palliative medicine for a minor ailment). You feel better for a while [but] the cancer spreads. So Pakistanis will replace poor democratic governments with better democratic governments. ... [In fact], if the Army was going to interfere at any time, it should have been in these past five years, because never was governance as bad as now. ... The [Pakistan] Army ... realises that it does not have the answer to Pakistan's problems".

Drawing a parallel of sorts between Pakistan and Turkey, Mr Khan said: "[Pakistan now needs] a civilian government with a mandate which ... has the moral authority to [make] the reforms that are needed in the country. The Turkish Army's record is almost the same as the Pakistan Army's record. The difference in the last 10 years has been that, in Turkey, they had a democratic government which performed, which had the moral authority, which the people back, has the people's mandate; and we have seen ... gradually the [Turkish] Army moved to the position it should be. ... I feel [in regard to] the Pakistan Army: the moment there is a government that performs, the same will happen in Pakistan [also]".

On the role he might want China, Pakistan's "all-weather friend", to play in helping the Pakistanis tide over their current crises, Mr Khan said: "There is nothing that China can do right now. We have to sort out our affairs ... The problems we are facing in Pakistan can only be sorted out by Pakistanis". He would, however, want Pakistan to turn to China for help in addressing the challenges of poverty alleviation and mega-city management, in particular.

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