

UNDERSTANDING INDO-PAK RELATIONS

Ali Ahmed*

A resumption of the 'paused' peace process between India and Pakistan was mandated by the two Prime Ministers on the sidelines of the last SAARC summit at Thimpu in April 2010.¹ As a result, the two foreign ministers met in mid July 2010. But the state of the 'cold war'² or 'cold peace' that passes for 'normal' in Indo-Pak relations was in evidence in the joint press conference at the end of the meeting.³ While to India, this state of affairs owes to Pakistan reneging on its promise of ending state-sponsored terrorism; to Pakistan, India has a 'go slow' approach to addressing what it sees as the 'core' issue, the 'dispute' over Kashmir.⁴ It is likely that frayed relations will continue into the middle term. This is fraught with escalatory consequences. Therefore, even as conflict management requires attention, more critical are conflict resolution efforts. Towards this end, arriving at an understanding of India-Pakistan relations is crucial.

The problem of understanding Pakistan, and in turn India-Pakistan relations, is complicated not only by the adversarial and complex historical experience, but also by the aspect of cognition or perceptual lenses adopted - by individuals and institutions - to view international relations. This paper attempts to demystify India-Pakistan relations by looking at the perceptual lenses that influence political elites. It explains the two approaches - 'hard line' and 'soft line' - in both states as a result of the political contention between the two major perspectives, realism and liberalism. First, it takes a brief theoretical look at foreign policy theory, in particular the influence of cognition. Thereafter, it a brief sketch of Pakistan and India. Lastly, it surveys relations between the two.

* Ali Ahmed is a PhD candidate in International Politics at JNU. He is currently Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi.

¹ John Cherian, 'Bridging the Gap', *Frontline*, 22 May-24 June 2010.

² Rajesh Basrur draws analogy from the cold war to describe Indo-Pak relations as a Cold War in his 'Nuclear weapons and India-Pakistan relations', *Strategic Analysis*, May 2009, p. 336.

³ Verghese George, 'How SM Qureishi hijacked Indo-Pak press meet', *Hindustan Times*, 24 July 2010.

⁴ Text of India-Pakistan Joint Statement of the January 2004 meeting between Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf at Islamabad on the sidelines of the SAARC meeting is at <http://archives.dawn.com/2004/01/07/top2.htm>

Theoretical Prelude

It is generally assumed that central to policy and decision-making is 'rationality'.⁵ Rationality is the conscious balancing of ends and means and engagement in value maximizing behavior. The state is taken as a unitary actor that formulates the 'vital, essential, and desirable;' conceives alternative courses of action, evaluates courses for consequences; exercises the power of choice; caters for contingencies; apportions resources; and, thereafter, directs and controls its instruments. The process involves an extensive search for relevant information; a through canvassing of a wide spectrum of views; conscious inclusion of expert opinion to the contrary of the conventional view point; re-examination of assumptions for their validity; and detailed provisions for execution of chosen course to enable judgement of practicability.⁶ This is the traditionally favored manner of explaining state behavior under the conceptual model Rational Actor Model.⁷ However, the Rational Actor model does not explain state behavior in its entirety. That states behave differently even in similar straits is a fact. This owes to several factors such as nature of polity, institutional depth and reach, maturity of leadership, policy capacity etc.

However, of considerable significance is how an individual, institution and in turn a state comprehends reality. Its perception largely determines its decisions and policy.⁸ Perception is in turn a function of perspective. It has been well-established in international relations theory that the 'belief systems' held by political decision makers in the ruling elite influence the behavior of states.⁹ The 'belief system' can be defined as the lenses through which information concerning the physical and social environment is received. It has the function of orienting the

⁵ M Clark, 'The Foreign Policy System: A Framework for Analysis', in M Clarke and B White (eds.), *Understanding Foreign Policy: The Foreign Policy Systems Approach*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1989, p. 45.

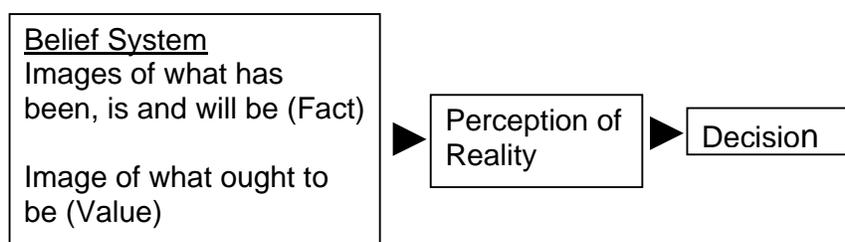
⁶ I. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1972, p. 142.

⁷ In his book *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York, Little Brown, 1971), Graham Allison critiques the rational actor model. Also see the second edition with P Zelikov (1999).

⁸ See Ashok Behuria, Culture in International relations and foreign policy: Overemphasising the obvious, *Journal of Peace Studies*, July-Dec 2008, on IR theory and constructivism, pp. 3-5.

⁹ See R. Little, and S. Smith, (ed.), *Belief Systems and International Relations*; London: Basil Blackwell, 1988.

individual, institution or state, and enables preferences and ordering of goals.¹⁰ Therefore, it is germane to the strategic posture adopted by a state. A model explains this relationship:¹¹



The belief system, also called ‘operational code’, ‘cognitive map’, ‘perceptual lenses’ etc. are largely determined by the political philosophy subscribed to. This ranges across the spectrum from radical to reactionary. The dominant philosophies are conservatism and liberalism¹² that occupy the central segment of the spectrum. They colour strategic rationality as realism or rationalism respectively.¹³

¹⁰ Also see J Volger, ‘Perspectives on the Foreign Policy System: Psychological Approaches’, in *Understanding Foreign Policy*.

¹¹ T. Coulombis, *Power and Justice*; New Delhi: Prentice Hall, 1986, pp.109-112.

¹² The basic liberal assumptions are a positive view of human nature, belief in the promise of cooperation and in the possibility of progress. Differing emphasis is placed by theorists making for distinct strains within this school. Sociological liberals alight on human behaviour for their analysis; interdependence liberals on economic ties; institutional liberals on organised cooperation; and republican liberals on the importance on liberal democratic forms of government for inducing cooperation between states (Robert Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, New Delhi: OUP, 2008, p. 97). In international relations theory the leading contributors include Jeremy Bentham, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Karl Deutsh, James Rosenau Keohane and Nye.

¹³ For the theory on realism, see H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*; New York: Knopf, 1973, and Waltz, K., *Theory of International Politics*; New York: MacGraw Hill, 1979. For the theory on liberalism, see the Nye, J., and Keohane, R., *Power and Interdependence*; Boston: Little Brown, 1977, and Gilpin, R., *The Political Economy of International Relations*; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. On the convergence between conservatism and realism, see Rothstein, R., ‘On the Costs of Realism’; *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol LXXXVII, No 3, 1972, pp. 347-62.