**Opportunities for Pakistan and India**

[**Asif Durrani**](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/asif-durrani)

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At a time when the world is fast headed for a bipolar world overshadowed by the US and China competition, India and Pakistan seem oblivious to the myriad challenges they face because of internecine disputes. Since both are not on talking terms, they cannot adopt a common position bilaterally despite displaying common positions on many issues, including abstention at the UN General Assembly on the Ukrainian issue and non-proliferation matters. Such a callous mindset is ominous and may push them to either of the camps with grave consequences.

One is reminded of Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s famous remark that “you can change friends, not neighbours “. These pearls of wisdom reverberate whenever a situation crops up between the two belligerent neighbours. The present situation is not different from what the two countries faced after the attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001.

Fast forward, the Balakot incident of 27th February 2019 was one such occasion when India created a new normal in Pakistan-India relations by attacking Balakot and that too under the nuclear overhang. Pakistan’s tit-for-tat response must have registered well with the Indian political and military leadership that a military solution will have no winners. But what next? Well, India tried to muzzle Kashmiris and declared victory—a victory in which the victor is scared of visiting the vanquished. The question is: Indian justification of its occupation has not won laurels amongst the Kashmiris during the past 76 years; how will it happen in the coming 75 years?

[Finland's National Coalition Party wins elections in neck and neck race](https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2023/finland-s-national-coalition-party-wins-elections-in-neck-and-neck-race)

It will be four years since Pakistan downgraded its relations with India by withdrawing its High Commissioner; bilateral trade has virtually come to nought while diplomatic interaction has been minimal except for summoning each other’s charge d’Affaires to hand over demarches. The freeze in the relationship is occasionally broken at the regional or international forums when the two sides exchange barbs for inviting the world’s attention that two neighbours cannot resolve their disputes decently and maturely. (The latest barbs exchanged between Jaishankar and Bilawal at the UN in New York in December 2022).

One is reminded of Mr Vajpayee’s remarks after 9/11, in which he warned of regional tensions in a unipolar world. It was the time in late April 2003 that he extended the hand of friendship towards Pakistan. The latter grabbed the opportunity, and a new era of détente started between the two countries. But that is history; without a statesmanlike Mr Vajpayee, expecting a breakthrough would be a tall order.

[SCP to take up PTI's petition on elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Monday](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Apr-2023/scp-to-take-up-pti-s-petition-on-elections-in-punjab-and-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-monday)

Just imagine what may happen in the region if the US-China competition acquires dangerous proportions. It’s doubtful if India would militarily challenge China to please the US, or Pakistan may join the US to antagonise China or attack India at China’s behest. However, individually, both countries would be under tremendous pressure from various corners to side with one of the competing powers. This was when both countries’ strategic communities should have closeted to adopt a common strategy to deal with the renewed cold war threats. Unfortunately, a mindset frozen in the past is hampering a common position which otherwise both subscribe to.

So far, both India and Pakistan have maintained a neutral stance on the Ukraine war. India has purchased Russian oil despite American sanctions. For Pakistan, siding with the American position in the UN General Assembly resolution on Ukraine would have been an easy option as Pakistan’s relations with Russia are still in the formative stage. However, Pakistan has gradually developed a regional approach to promote its geopolitical interests. Therefore, Pakistan decided to abstain from the Ukrainian resolution, although its explanation of the vote at the UN General Assembly called upon Russia and Ukraine to resolve their disputes peacefully.

[Multiple regions of Pakistan expecting to see heavy rainfall, thunderstorms](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Apr-2023/multiple-regions-of-pakistan-expecting-to-see-heavy-rainfall-thunderstorms)

Ideally, instead of expressing an individual position, South Asia should have adopted a common position on the Ukrainian crisis. But a unified approach would require statesmanship to care for the greater good of their people. Still, India and Pakistan, the largest members of the SAARC, can work for greater cohesion while keeping their bilateral differences on the back burner. While there could be a long list of recommendations to policymakers in both countries, the following four scenarios can serve as a starting point for establishing durable peace and security in South Asia and beyond.

First, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a case in point whereby Pakistan and India gained membership simultaneously. The founding members, China and Russia, knew of the stark differences between India and Pakistan. Still, they displayed statesmanship for the region’s greater interest and were admitted into the SCO. Given the differences between China and India, the former would have delayed India’s membership but decided not to create any hurdles for strategic interests. While SCO still has a long way to go, no one can doubt the tremendous potential of such a grand regional alliance, representing three billion people with four nuclear powers and vast natural and human resources.

[Belgian ambassador hails Pakistan's role in global peace, stability](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Apr-2023/belgian-ambassador-hails-pakistan-s-role-in-global-peace-stability)

Second, India and Pakistan must realize that the emerging global climate threat, especially in South Asia, must be tackled collectively. The massive floods in Pakistan last summer were a warning signal to both to adopt a common cause to mitigate challenges in a spirit of accommodation and cooperation. The time has come to adopt a joint South Asian strategy to deal with natural calamities. Pakistan and India can propose a SAARC summit on climate change to address the issue within South Asia.

Third, China and India confronted each other militarily in June 2021. As a reprisal, Prime Minister Modi imposed sanctions on dozens of Chinese companies but realized that India would end up as a loser if India boycotted the Chinese companies. Indeed, good sense prevailed, and Mr Modi had to resume business with the Chinese companies. Consequently, the bilateral trade between India and China registered $ 90 billion in 2020 jumped to $ 120 billion in 2022. Here lies a lesson for Pakistan to pick up a leaf from China-India bilateral trade, which has flourished despite severe differences on the border issues. The Pakistani leadership will have to separate business from politics.

[PTI's disgusting mindset making public welfare scheme controversial: Marriyum Aurangzeb](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Apr-2023/pti-s-disgusting-mindset-making-public-welfare-scheme-controversial-marriyum-aurangzeb)

Fourth, instead of establishing influence to counter each other in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan can cooperate in bringing stability to the war-torn country. A cooperative strategy by the two can open up avenues for greater connectivity by activating the East-West Corridor. Such an opening would connect Nepal with Central Asia and beyond. Not only that, the two countries can launch joint ventures in Afghanistan apart from expediting work on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline to address their energy shortages. Prima facie, the above proposal may appear far-fetched for the known reasons. However, given the looming threats of the cold war, such cooperation offers the bare minimum the two countries can avail to secure their interests. Otherwise, history is replete with lost opportunities between the two neighbours.