

CEIP-Annual Conference 23 March 2015

Conversation with General Kidwai

Opening Remarks

1. Ladies and Gentlemen. It gives me great pleasure indeed to be here for the prestigious Annual Conference of the CEIP. As someone on whom successive Pakistani Governments bestowed the unique responsibility and privilege of guiding Pakistan's nuclear programme for the last 15 years, I look forward to interaction with this elite international galaxy through the medium of a conversation. But before we do that, I would like to share a few thoughts which might help in focusing the conversation. This however is not meant to restrict the conversation in any way. Far from it, I would be very happy to attempt answers to any question.
2. Today when I scan the global environments as they have evolved over the last decade plus, I find that the early expectations and hopes generated by the end of the cold war that the world might become a more harmonious and peaceful place, have all but evaporated. Instead, what one finds today is a conflict ridden world, a revival of the cold war, with newer poles emerging from the earlier bipolar to unipolar to now a multipolar world.
3. In this multipolar world, alignments have undergone change in Europe and Asia particularly, and new equations have emerged as nations reassess their interests and readjust. While nations readjust, the global trend is on retaining focus on management of conflicts, national and regional security, and economic progress. Added to the security calculus is the universal nature of terrorism threatening to overshadow all else. The world is attempting to grapple with the phenomenon in cooperative ways.
4. South Asia too has absorbed many of the emerging global political trends of alignments and realignments. What is unfortunate though is that while South Asia attempts to remain in step with the changing global trends politically and integrate economically, and despite being aware of the fact that the region needs extraordinary efforts to develop economically and

politically in order to fight the massive threats of poverty, weak health, education and other social indicators, and terrorism, it remains oblivious to what I would like to call 'the obvious'. The obvious is not sinking in, in our regional calculations.

5. And what is this obvious? The obvious is the elephant in the room i.e. the prerequisite of creating an enabling environment for peace and strategic stability in order to focus on sustained socio-economic development of the region. The obvious is that the enabling environment for peace and strategic stability will only come through mature conflict management leading to conflict resolution. This obvious has been brushed under the carpet for decades in a forlorn hope that somehow it might go away. How can sustained socio economic progress come about if the threat of outstanding conflict, tension and recrimination hangs permanently in the air, in eye ball to eye ball stance with nuclear weapons in the back ground? Unfortunately, those who say that conflict resolution alone will lead to true peace and stability leading to economic development are dismissed as revisionists, as if seeking resolution to conflict was unnatural and nations should learn to live with conflicts and status quo. In this unstable regional environment, one nuclear power trying to teach lessons to another nuclear power through the medium of small arms and mortar shells on the Kashmir Line of Control, and bluster. I leave it to your judgment.

6. In South Asia sadly we remain prisoners to the past, frozen in time, unable to break the shackles of history. Then we expect naively that by some miracle, we shall become part of the global economic trends and benefit from these.

7. Ladies and gentlemen. If we recognize that to develop socio economically, extended periods of peace and stability are fundamental, my submission is that these will not come through miracles, bluster and zero sum games. The region and its leadership will have to rise to the highest levels of statesmanship, recognize what I called the obvious, stare this reality in the face and courageously work towards the attainment of peace and stability through the only sure footed method known to history i.e. conflict management leading to conflict resolution. There is no running away from this stark reality - conflict management leading to conflict

resolution. It is not revisionism. It is common sense. It is common interest. It is self-interest.

8. If South Asia and its leadership does not, or does not want to, or is unable to recognize this reality, well, I am afraid we would carry on as we have done for the past 68 years, for the next 68 years, and bluster and blunder our way through future generations, condemning our 1.5 billion people in perpetuity to hunger, filth and squalor.

9. Having said this, however, I would like to remain optimistic and therefore I draw your attention to an opportunity, fleeting perhaps in terms of time, for a way forward towards the attainment of the objective of permanent peace and strategic stability in South Asia. This opportunity, in my judgment, exists today. It has emerged, paradoxically, because of two independent developments or realities, which need to be recognized for their linkage, and grasped by the democratically elected leaderships of India and Pakistan – if only there is what President Clinton had called “the vision thing”. Let me flag these first and then I shall dwell on these.

10. The two realities of today’s South Asian strategic situation are: One, notwithstanding the growing conventional asymmetries, the development and possession of sufficient numbers and varieties of nuclear weapons by both India and Pakistan has made war as an instrument of policy near-redundant. The tried and tested concept of MAD has ensured that. Two, the historic coincidence of the near simultaneous emergence of two strong democratically elected governments in India and Pakistan with the advantages of comfortable majorities and the factor of reasonable time at their disposal to address longstanding issues with a sense and understanding of history. This has never happened before.

11. These then are the two self-evident realities or givens of the South Asian situation today. When we look at the linkages of the two realities, “the vision thing” would make it seem that this just might be the historic opportunity of a lifetime waiting for the two leaderships to grasp, sit together, explore the possibilities of conflict resolution and, in a supreme statesmanlike act, go for it, in a manner that all parties to the conflict end up on the winning side. No zero sum games. No one-upmanship. History and circumstance beckon. Whether history can be grasped remains to be

seen, an opportunity exists. Needs vision, statesmanship and guts. Vision of Nixon and Chou En Lai, and Anwar Saadat and Menachim Begin.

12. Ladies and gentlemen. There was a time in the aftermath of the nuclear tests of 1998 when some people unwisely experimented with the idea that despite the nuclear overhang in South Asia, there was space for limited conventional war and therefore, one nuclear power might be able to overwhelm another nuclear power. It could be attributed to an inability to grasp the changed strategic environments of a nuclearized South Asia, a learning curve perhaps. Besides being dangerous thinking, it was also naïve as the experience of the last 17 years has shown. The idea didn't work in the escalation of 2001-2002 not during the tensions of 2008 nor is it likely to work in the future.

13. The naivety of finding space for limited conventional war despite the proven nuclear capabilities of both sides went so far as to translate the thinking into an offensive doctrine, the Cold Start Doctrine, equivalent to a preprogrammed, predetermined shooting from the hip posture, in quick time, commencing at the tactical level, graduating rapidly to the operational-strategic level, strangely oblivious of the nuclear Armageddon it could unleash in the process. It was clearly not thought through.

14. Of course Pakistan took the doctrine seriously because it had a direct bearing on our security as well as to prevent destabilization in an environment of conventional asymmetry. We were the affected party. The doctrine was meant to be unleashed against us. We could not ignore the effects being generated by the offensive doctrine. Therefore, in order to deter the unfolding of operations under the new doctrine, Pakistan opted to develop a variety of short range low yield nuclear weapons, also dubbed Tactical Nuclear Weapons. This was a Pakistani defensive deterrence response to an offensive doctrine. But, in an attempt to do one better on the escalatory rung, some people responded by a massive retaliation bluster, without thinking through the consequences in a nuclear parity situation. We think it is time to get real.

15. For 15 years, I and my colleagues in the SPD have worked for deterrence to be strengthened in South Asia comprehensively, so as to prevent war, to deter aggression, and thereby for peace, howsoever uneasy, to prevail. We have worked to create road blocks in the path of

those who thought that there was space for conventional war despite nuclear weapons of Pakistan. I strongly believe that by introducing the variety of Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Pakistan's inventory, and in the strategic stability debate, we have blocked the avenues for serious military operations by the other side. That the debate has been hijacked towards the lesser issues of command and control and the possibility of their falling into wrong hands is unfortunate, because it has distracted and diverted attention from the real purpose of the TNWs, that of reinforcing deterrence, preventing war in South Asia, ensuring peace, thereby creating an enabling environment for politics and politicians to reassert, lead the way towards conflict resolution, and give South Asia and its people a chance, a peace of the brave that they deserve. I suggest the debate be refocused to the objectives.

16. Now therefore, when we juxtapose the situation of a near military stalemate, if I may, with the political results thrown up by the elections of 2013 in Pakistan and of 2014 in India where two political parties with strong electoral mandates have emerged, one sees the opportunity for statesmanship and vision to trump petty short sighted objectives. No weak coalitions, strong nationalistic credentials and credibility. And to top it, availability of time to work things out in the remaining respective terms before the next elections. Will 'the vision thing' prevail?

17. The initiative does not lie with Pakistan. There are people who need to climb down from a high horse and get real. Well-meaning nudges from well-meaning friends would be most helpful in the larger interest of international peace and stability in a region dubbed as a nuclear flashpoint. A hands-off approach will be neither here nor there and of course the fleeting opportunity of history would have slipped.

18. And my submission to friends who want to be helpful. Please note the inadvisability of aggravating the existing delicate strategic balance in a troubled South Asia by one sided and discriminatory overtures. Even handed and non-discriminatory approach to South Asia alone will contribute towards peace and stability. Discriminatory approach on issues like NSG exemption and NSG membership is already proving to be counter-productive, it will never be acceptable to Pakistan, and will in no

way contribute towards peace and stability. Let us desist from taking short sighted measures today that would be regretted later.

19. I would like to conclude by holding out an assurance to this audience on something I know worries the international community all the time. The safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons in the disturbed security environment of our region. For the last 15 years, Pakistan has taken its nuclear security obligations seriously. We understand the consequences of complacency. There is no complacency. We have invested heavily in terms of money, manpower, equipment, weapons, training, preparedness and smart site security solutions. I say with full responsibility that nuclear security in Pakistan is a non-issue. You have all your NTMs to verify, but you might also take my solemn word for it. Pakistan's nuclear weapons are safe, secure and under complete institutional and professional control.