

JAWED NAQVI

INDIAN and Pakistani armies have slammed each other for violating the Line of Control.

Pakistan said Indian troops killed one of its soldiers in the Haji Pir sector after intruding into its territory on Sunday. India claimed two of its soldiers died in a firefight, one of them brutally beheaded, when Pakistani soldiers briefly crossed over the LoC in the Mendhar sector. The Indian army called it a "significant escalation" among the otherwise routine violations of the decade-old ceasefire agreement.

The Indian army's statement described a "thick fog and mist in the forested area" the Pakistanis used to ambush the Indians. A thicker fog and mist, though not necessarily of their making, shrouds the evolving ties between India and Pakistan.

Clues to the unfortunate deaths of the three soldiers — one Pakistani, and two Indians — to my mind lie in Kabul and Washington D.C., not so much in New Delhi and Islamabad.

President Karzai was preparing to fly to Washington when the alleged Indian transgression occurred. He was airborne for the visit when the Pakistanis are said to have crossed the LoC.

Two or three unfolding events linked with Afghanistan and the US could be at play here. The first is the genuine Indian fear, fuelled by Pakistan-based Kashmiri militants who predict a surge of violence in the Indian part of the disputed region when jihadi fighters from the closed Afghan conflict are assigned a new mission.

On Tuesday, when the Pakistanis are supposed to have violated the ceasefire, the Indian Express reported Syed Salahuddin, the Islamabad-backed Kashmiri militant, as recasting the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Salahuddin critiqued the moderate leaders of the Hurriyat Conference and appealed to support the more hawkish

Syed Ali Shah Geelani.

Indians would want the world to notice the threat, just as Pakistan would not mind reminding its global interlocutors of the pending and perennially simmering conflict in Kashmir.

Arguably, all this could have happened at any time, but significantly it all came together this week. Why? Other than the fact that the Afghan and American presidents are set to flesh out the contours of their responsibilities after the looming US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan two years from now, Washington is currently also drawing up a new team to steer Obama's second term in office.

Pakistan has had a head start in winning over the Americans albeit just about, though it may look like a sea change to the naked eye after the gruelling days of acrimony and mutual distrust. Islamabad's envoy in Washington Sherry Rehman is being given credit for this.

At precisely this time, American lobbyists for India and Indian lobbyists for America have been busy with some of these issues in mind, their fulminations considerably influenced by the molting under way in the new Obama team with particular attention to how it would play out for India and Pakistan. Afghanistan of course is going to be a key area of concern for the new team, they both have argued.

Shooting in the dark



Ashley Tellis, who was strategic adviser to US ambassador Robert Blackwill during the 2002 May military stand-off between India and Pakistan, this week argued for clear and firm steps by New Delhi to consolidate its ties with Washington.

His indented "second-generation reforms" should be extensive, ranging from measures to cut subsidies, changing labour laws, and manufacturing policy along with other steps. "Only a resolute defence of free markets will permit the Indian government to take the concerted action necessary to further liberalise the economy while simultaneously strengthening state capacity," Tellis stressed in his report Opportunities Unbound: Sustaining the Transformation in US-Indian Relations, released by Carnegie on Monday.

Tellis was clear that undertaking these actions would require a display of uncommon courage. He quoted former Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran as calling for openly embracing economic reforms rather than resorting to "reform through stealth" or "reform through crisis". (Some Indians would argue the government should in that case pull out the army from Kashmir to deal with the restive crowds in Delhi and elsewhere opposed to Tellis' ticket to bilateral ties with the US.)

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's second term came in for criticism. "Even though the prime minister's personal convictions on this matter remain sturdy, his party's fecklessness, the opposition's experience, and the easy addiction to statist solutions still pervasive in Indian politics makes implementing deep reforms an uphill task," Tellis said.

An Indian Express columnist, frustrated by a fear in some American quarters that the India alliance story had been oversold to Washington, railed at New Delhi's faltering attention span with its natural ally.

"Washington is discussing whether India is ready for a serious relationship," the Indian lobbyist-columnist cautioned, adding that many key decision-makers in the Obama administration who promoted bilateral relations with India in the last four years were about to depart.

"Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who enthusiastically led the Obama administration's engagement with India, will step down soon. Her designated successor, Senator John Kerry, unfortunately, has been dubbed by some (Indian) analysts as being less than warm towards India and 'soft on Pakistan'," the Indian analyst wrote.

"Such pre-emptive labelling is not of much help in the conduct of India's diplomacy. Yet, there is no denying the concerns in Delhi that America might offer too many concessions to the Pakistan Army and the Taliban as it prepares to end its combat role in Afghanistan by 2014," according to the analysis in the Express.

It was dark and misty when the soldiers in Kashmir targeted each other. Unless halted soon, the darkness seems set to intensify across the South Asian region, and possibly beyond.

The writer is Dawn's correspondent in Delhi.

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Peacocks at Sunset

How the India- Pakistani border came to be?

FRANK JACOBS

THE world's most spectacular border ceremony takes place every day before dusk at Wagah. Roughly halfway between Lahore in Pakistan and Amritsar in India, Wagah is where the Grand Trunk Road intersects with the so-called Radcliffe Line, dividing the Punjabi town between the two countries. The only official road link across the highly contentious and fairly recently fought-over Indo-Pakistan border passes through the town's monumental border gate.

As large crowds gather on either side of the gate, claps and cheers of "Pakistan Zindabad!" and "Jai Hind!" charge the air with anticipation, as if before a sports game. What follows the closing of the gate is indeed a contest between two teams. The khaki-clad ones are the Indian Border Security Forces; the Pakistani Rangers are resplendent in black. Each of the players is over six feet tall, sports fearful facial hair and carries impressive turban-cum-coxcomb headgear.

The apparent intent of the synchronized ceremony is to lower the flag of both nations before sunset. But as the sentries from either side dance their aggressive no-touch tango, the real object of the ceremony becomes clear: to act as a vent, right here on the geopolitical fault line, for the deep hostility and mutual resentment between India and Pakistan. In an unintentional side effect, the ceremony also exposes the mutual resemblance between both sides.

It's been called "carefully choreographed contempt": the soldiers mirror each other's goose-steps, thumb-thumps, martial cries and intimidating stares. This curious hybrid of battle and ballet may last up to an hour. When both flags have been hauled down, the only physical contact between both sides occurs: a curt handshake between officials, which signals that the ceremonial border gate is officially shut.

And all this for a trickle of traffic. Apart from a few border-crossing tourists, the number of locals going back and forth is no more than a few dozen each day. Such lack of interest in each other's affairs reeks of the contempt bred by familiarity. Pakistan and India share truckloads of history, but in their relationship, that heritage counts as "baggage." The half dozen wars and skirmishes fought between this South-Asian version of Cain and Abel can all be related to the moment of their conjoined birth in 1947, when they were severed by the Radcliffe Line — a hastily drawn up border that remains an open wound, even if dressed in the colorful bandage of Wagah's daily flag-lowering ceremony.

At the end of World War II, a victorious but weakened Britain realized it could no longer hold on to India, the jewel in its imperial crown. That was due in no small part to the non-violent resistance pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi, which revolutionized revolution itself. Sadly, Gandhi's vision of a peaceful, non-communal India didn't survive the British Raj; other leaders of the Indian independence movement pushed for territorial separation based on religion, notably Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Muslim League,

which feared becoming a minority in a Hindu-majority nation.

One could argue that this split in the pro-independence camp was not only to London's tactical advantage, but also at least partly of its making. When, in the first decade of the 20th century, the Indian electoral franchise was widened to include more locals, it was partitioned along confessional lines. Perhaps out of concern not to marginalize certain groups; but perhaps also with a mind toward that age-old adage, "divide et impera". If so, only the first part of the policy was a success. The post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee wanted to get rid of India in a hurry, the only sticking point being how not to get blamed for the intensifying communal conflict.

In early 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last British viceroy of India, set the deadline for independence for Aug. 15. On July 8, the British lawyer Sir Cyril Radcliffe arrived in India with a brief for a line on the map that would divide Hindu-majority lands from Muslim-majority ones in as equitable a manner as possible. Radcliffe was a brilliant legal mind, but he had no border-making experience, nor had he ever been to India though such "impartiality" was judged to be an advantage by all parties involved.

With barely five weeks between start and finish, Radcliffe had to chair not one but two boundary commissions: one for Bengal in the east, another for the Punjab in the west. Each Radcliffe Border Commission was composed of four judges, two from the Muslim League, two from the (secular, but mainly Hindu) Congress Party. The resulting deadlock left all the major decisions to Radcliffe himself. The goal of both commissions was to establish contiguous zones containing comfortable majorities of either side's co-religionists but Radcliffe was allowed to take vague "other factors" into account, including (but possibly not limited to) infrastructural and economic considerations.

Mountbatten instructed Radcliffe not to mind the military angle — the artificial borders would be indefensible anyway. Radcliffe followed existing subdivisions, generally but not precisely following the course of a few rivers, creating a very convoluted border indeed.

Understandably, Radcliffe's final proposals met with howls of disapproval from both sides. Even before he had completed his work, mutual suspicion and rumors

about the eventual course of the border led to deadly violence on the ground. To create perceptual distance between the independence of India and Pakistan and the accompanying riots and especially to deflect blame for the latter from Britain Mountbatten postponed publication of the Radcliffe Border Commissions' findings to two days after Aug. 15.

For those two days, India and Pakistan were like conjoined twins. With long stretches of the border undefined on Independence Day, some towns raised both the Indian and Pakistani flags. Following the release of the border scheme, called the Radcliffe Award, violence escalated to horrendous levels. When all was over, pogroms and ethnic cleansing had left up to 1 million dead and forced 12 million to move one way or the other across the new border.

Disgusted and horrified, Radcliffe burned all his papers and refused the fee of 40,000 rupees for his work. He left on Independence Day and never returned.

His border may have been hastily and arbitrarily drawn, but it is hard to see how any new, religion-based borderline across relatively integrated lands

Indian states of Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat. This is the least-contested part of the line dividing both countries, running through the thinly populated Thaar Desert and the Great Rann of Kutch, an enormous seasonal salt marsh.

The tricky part of the 1,800-mile line dividing Pakistan and India lies north of Punjab. This used to be the princely state of Kashmir, the ruler of which had to decide after independence whether to accede to India or Pakistan. Because of the state's Muslim majority and its contiguity with Pakistan, this should have been a no-brainer. The state's Hindu ruler had other plans. But while the maharajah was maneuvering to keep Kashmir neutral and independent from both a sort of Himalayan Switzerland — a pro-Pakistan rebellion forced him to ask for Indian assistance, which was granted only after Kashmir agreed to join India. War broke out between Pakistan and India, and the two newborn countries fought to a standstill over Kashmir in 1948, and again in 1965 and again in 1999.

Most of Kashmir is Indian-held, while the Pakistani hold a crescent-shaped eastern bit. The line dividing both is not an international border, determined by a commission, a reassuringly full line on the map, but a "line of control," the result of an armistice, represented cartographically by the much more ephemeral dotted line.

To further complicate matters, there's also a "line of actual control" in the subcontinent's High North, dividing territory held by India but claimed by Pakistan from territory held by China but claimed by India (got that?). This area, called Aksai Chin, was occupied by China during the brief Sino-Indian War of 1962. And while India and Pakistan agreed to respect the line of control by the Simla Agreement in 1972, that document left out the Siachen Glacier, subsequently occupied by India in 1984 and occasionally skirmished over (although sub-zero temperatures and avalanches claim more lives than the actual fighting).

Radcliffe's arbitration, and the subsequent subdivision of the subcontinent, has had many unintended consequences, the most important being the elevation of the British Raj's intercommunal conflict to that of an international fault line. A chilling addition to the ever-looming risk of war occurred in May 1998, when first India, then Pakistan conducted successful test explosions of atomic bombs, raising the specter of fratricide by nuclear war.

Sixty-five years after the acrimonious divorce between India and Pakistan, the border remains a throbbing wound of separation yet a wound elemental to both nations' psyche. So is there no hope for lasting peace? There is, if you believe that small steps matter: in 2010, the commander in charge of the Pakistani Rangers announced that the aggressive nature of the Wagah ceremony would be toned down to reflect the desire for improved relationship between both countries. No details are available on the specifics. Did the sentries have their moustaches clipped? Or does that curt handshake last just a bit longer nowadays?

The writer is a London-based author and blogger. He writes about cartography, but only the interesting bits.

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