
Interview with His Excellency Ambassador Ashraf Jehangir Qazi

Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States

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Ashraf Jehangir Qazi became ambassador of Pakistan to the United States in September 2002. Previously, he had served as high commissioner of Pakistan to India (between 1997 and 2002), ambassador to the People's Republic of China (between 1994 and 1997), ambassador to Russia (between 1991 and 1994), ambassador to East Germany (between 1990 and 1991), and ambassador to Syria (between 1986 and 1988). He has also held a variety of diplomatic assignments in Copenhagen, Tokyo, Cairo, Tripoli, and London. In July 2004, he was appointed United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Ambassador Qazi spoke to The Forum's Emma Belcher about the Pakistan-India relationship—in terms of prospects for peace over Kashmir and stereotyped perceptions of each other—the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and Pakistan's former top nuclear scientist, A.Q. Kahn, and his recently-uncovered illicit proliferation network. This is an edited version of the interview.

FORUM: First we'd like to ask you about India-Pakistan relations. Recently Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was quoted as saying, "I don't think we will ever fight again. This peace will be permanent; the friendship will last." Do you believe that Indian-Pakistani relations are entering a new phase at the moment?

QAZI: I dearly hope so. And I have reason to believe that this is now more possible than it had seemed, because [inaudible] both countries to deal with the problems that their respective perceptions of the depth of the relationship—from our point of view, it was the outstanding issue of Jammu and Kashmir, from India's point of view, the bases—then this is to the yearnings of many peoples. This has been made quite manifest recently with the reception of the Indian cricket team,

received in Pakistan. While winning most of the matches against us, and stunning the hosts, they nonetheless received an extraordinarily warm applause from the people. So, we shouldn't take things for granted, we'll have to work for progress, and it will have to be something both sides will have to work at. If for any reason one side were to assume that it is for the other side to accommodate itself to realities, that could endanger this very promising process. So we hope that both sides will recognize ... and ultimately work for what we say is a win-win outcome acceptable to all concerned: for the two main parties, India and Pakistan, and the primary people concerned, the people of Kashmir.

FORUM: I believe that since the joint statement was released, there has been some disagreement as to the importance of recognizing Kashmir as the central issue, or the first issue that should be dealt with.

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How important is it for Pakistan that India realizes that Kashmir is probably the most central question?

QAZI: That's a very apt question. After the joint statement, the two foreign secretaries met and they also issued a joint statement. And there is a road map that they, in broad terms, outlined, which would sort of address the items on the agenda of talks between both countries. And there's a sched-

ule of meetings, which will take the dialogue up to the political level. I think the issue that you are referring to is an Indian comment on our president's statement, where our president had said that Kashmir is the central subject. I think India right now maybe has some difficulty with publicly acknowledging what might be seen as a shift in its former position. But the fact of the matter is that unless we, both of us, are able to address what the other regards as a core issue and, as I said that, for us, movement towards a win-win and just, principled outcome on Kashmir, and for India wherever it states is its primary concern, these have to be core issues. Because between any two persons, if one person were to say, "For us to restore our friendship, it's very important for us to discuss such and such an issue," and the other says, "Well, I want to be friends, but I won't discuss that subject," well, you abort the process before you get underway. So actually for an issue to be a core issue, it's sufficient for one party to say, "This issue is important," provided both share the aspiration of becoming friends, or share the vision of a normal relationship between states. So, while India might be concerned that its public opinion should not immediately perceive a movement on its position towards Kashmir, I do believe they recognize—and we've had a number of informal contacts with

them—that there would have to be movement by both sides, from their former position in order to ultimately reach a position which both can live with.

FORUM: Speaking of both India and Pakistan educating their publics as to where they see the two countries going and the peace process going—there’s been a recent report, you may or may not be aware, by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, which examined History, Civics, and Pakistan studies textbooks used in school curricula around the country. It found them to “contain major distortions that foster an ‘artificial identity and ideology’ on the basis that Muslims and Hindus are enemies, the former righteous and the latter conniving, deceptive and cruel.” Do you agree with this?

QAZI: It’s true, I agree with it. In textbooks on both sides there are these stereotypes which are reinforced. We have a common history, which is differently interpreted in many ways. Because actually, the story of India-Pakistan relations is a story of the encounter between Islam and Hinduism—the two great civilizations which come into contact with each other. And that contact has many aspects, including struggle, including conflict, but also including mutually influencing each other. Much of the subcontinental culture, particularly in terms of music, or poetry, etcetera, is a flowering of the script, coming together, mixing, of influences. I presume to say it is among the greatest poetic traditions of the world today. It also has entailed conflict. You know, in this dynamic there have been so many factors of the British presence, and then the struggle for independence with historical memory providing the context led two separate independence movements: the movement by the majority community of British India for independence and the movement by the minority community for not only independence but also separation from the majority because there’s the perception that history would be avenged, in a way. So this gave rise to the birth of two countries, it gave rise tension between the two countries, it gave rise to conflict of which Kashmir is the most [inaudible].

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So all of this went into people’s perceptions which are reflected in the textbooks, which they have published and written. The heroes of one side have often been seen to be the villains of the other side. If you take the great Mogul emperors—Akbar is perceived by many Indians as the greatest Mogul emperor because he was eclectic in his approach and he borrowed from many strands, whereas Aurangzeb often appeals to a more puritanical, or purely Islamic point of view because he refused to compromise, to allow Islam to be modified beyond a certain extent by indigenous or Indian or Hindu influences. And of course, the empire of Aurangzeb reached its greatest extent, but maybe the seeds of its future

weakening were also sown. And Abkar, of course, promised the prospect of everyone coming together, but in order to bring everyone together, he sought to develop a philosophy, if not a religion, of his own, called Din-e-alahi, which was neither Islam nor Hinduism. So it probably was something that wasn't very realistic and had no real future. As long as he was the emperor, everyone said, "What a splendid idea." Once he was gone, they said, "Well, so much for that."

FORUM: Well, given these different histories and the teaching about the "others" as the "enemy" or the "villains," how does the Pakistani government propose to justify or to sell a peace plan to the Pakistani people that they might feel is a peace plan with the "enemy?" How does the government propose to do that?

QAZI: I should hasten to add that that was part of the mixing, because people lived together also, and they worked together and in the evening they sat together, conversed with each other were great personal friends. On the other hand, the traditions were sufficiently apart, and the Hindu philosophy of life—the organizing principle of Indian social life, the caste system, which categorized people and outsiders in a specific manner—was also an impediment. So, people had a mixed view of each other: heroes may be villains at one level, but personal friendships were

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there too. But there were frustrations also: two friends, they could be fast friends, two guys working, maybe playing football together, so they're fast friends, and as long as they were kids, they were kids, but it wasn't easy for them to eat at each other's homes. Now it's less of a problem, if I may

say so, at the Muslim home, where, philosophically, we don't entertain the idea of people being inherently belonging to one category or another. But there was a different tradition elsewhere, which was a very entrenched tradition. It wasn't easy for people to take a personal decision to transcend it, especially when they were parts of families. It took urbanization in India for the caste system to gradually give way to other forces which came up. But within the traditional milieu, people met and were friendly and yet were apart, and separate.

So when it came to India and Pakistan, there was a recognition that, politically speaking, we were opposed to each other, even though we shared a lot of culture—language, humor, dress, cuisine—with each other. But politically, the memories, the historical memories, were interpreted differently. So Mr. Jinnah—Quaid-i-Azam, the great leader, the founder of Pakistan—he sort of operated on the principle along the lines of "Good fences make good neighbors:" we are destined to be friends, but given the situation and our histories, maybe the best way we can be friends is for us to be apart, and yet, part of a larger whole, maybe South Asia etcetera. But we probably have to be apart in order not to be at each other's throats

all the time. You might say the analogy would be Europe, you see, where Europe is bringing people together without the French becoming less French, or the Germans being less German, or the English less English, etcetera. That principle was there. But because of the antagonism between the Congress philosophy and the Muslim League philosophy, there was tension.

And then, of course, the two events which were largely unanticipated that became the source of bitterness between the two countries: one was the extent of the transfer of population and the scale of violence that accompanied it. This, nobody could anticipate. People knew there would be a certain amount, but it was not expected that west and east Punjab would be emptied of their minorities, which is what happened. And that, of course, was accompanied by loss of life on a vast scale, it's estimated maybe a million people died, and the exchange of population involved both sides adding up to, I'm told, 11 million, which is the biggest so far. And the other unanticipated problem was the Kashmir problem. I think there was the anticipation that if there was going to be any problem it would be resolved sooner or later, in one way or the other, and out of the five hundred odd states ultimately this was the one state that defied a solution. There were two other states, Hyderabad (Dettan) and Junagardh, which were also problem states, where the faith of the ruler and the faith of the majority of the people were different. But in both those cases—Junagardh and Hyderabad (Dettan)—the majority faith was that of the Hindus, and the Indian army resolved that problem, which legally may have been dubious, but politically speaking, the solution was in accordance with what the majority wanted.

Kashmir was the great exception, where the ruler was Hindu, but the majority of the people were Muslim. And Nehru felt confident enough at the time to say that he would go to the people, because his good friend Sheikh Abdullah, who was the outstanding politician there, assured him that the people didn't believe in a communitarian solution and wanted a pluralistic participation in India. Well, it only was few months later when Abdullah informed Nehru that, "I can take these people along on any question, on any issue, except this. If we put this question to them, they will not vote in accordance with what I recommend to them and they will vote for Pakistan." And that was what complicated the situation.

So once again, when the prospect of friendship with India looms right now, India is not a purely enemy state. India is a state with which we have a lot in common. But there have been grave differences, which date from the time of our coming into being as a modern country, and also from history, and also perceptions of conflicts we've had with each other. So there are pluses and minuses, some of them quite intense, but I think that there's also a new perception present in the post-9/11 world. There are also development aspirations, and there's a recognition on both sides, in Pakistan also, that there's no way we can get the sustained high

growth rates in a state of confrontation with India. It doesn't mean we walk away from principle, but it is that we certainly try the reconciliation route, the peace route, the negotiated solution route. And if India proves adamant—worst case scenario, and there's no possibility of progress on Kashmir—it will tend to undermine the present good developments.

FORUM: Looking at that relationship and, more broadly, in general, what would it take for Pakistan to renounce its nuclear weapons?

QAZI: For India to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. We have now gone nuclear. We went nuclear in response to India going nuclear. Before we went formally nuclear, or conducted our nuclear explosions in 1998, it was our position that the NPT—that's the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—was a flawed treaty in the sense [that] its biggest flaw was that it divided the world into nuclear haves and nuclear have-nots. India was more garrulous on the subject. We shared India's opinion, but our position was that despite its flaws, we were willing to join it, but not as long as India refuses to join it. Come 1998, when we both went nuclear, we now say that's history. There's no question of us joining the Nuclear Non-

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Proliferation Treaty, as a non-nuclear weapon state, that's the position of India also, that's our position. So we don't go into the argument of what if India were to join it, because that would make an assumption which is unrealistic. India certainly is not going to roll back its nuclear weapon status, and neither are we. So the question now is that there is a certain incompatibility between the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the reality that exists. And this is

a very serious incompatibility because, in effect, the world, while not legalizing, or not seeing as legitimate, actually has accepted India and Pakistan as nuclear weapon states. It would not be practical policy for them to seek to roll back their nuclear weapon status. And in contrast to their policy towards other countries which are in the news nowadays, they don't tolerate the prospect of those countries becoming nuclear. Of course Israel is always in a category by itself.

FORUM: If India were to join as a nuclear weapon state and Pakistan were to join as a nuclear weapon state, would it be a condition that Israel had to somehow be involved?

QAZI: If we were to be invited as nuclear weapon states to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, then we might still make an argument about Israel—we actually don't make too much of a fuss about Israel—but it is a problem that the international community has to take account of. The Arabs do talk about it, and

they see double standards, and we would share that argument, but again, we aren't very loud about making this argument. But I mean, it's not that we don't share that argument, but Pakistan would certainly join the Non-Proliferation Treaty if it were accepted as a nuclear weapon state.

FORUM: What are the prospects for that, do you think?

QAZI: For the time being, no; for the time being, no. But I think many people are beginning to recognize that the NPT requires revision, if only for the reason that it hasn't prevented proliferation. Now when that time comes, it will need also to have its membership accord with reality. And the reality is that you have, apart from Israel—now Israel is in a special category because it doesn't declare itself as a nuclear weapon state, the rest of the world knows that it is a nuclear weapon state, it doesn't speak on the subject. India and Pakistan are self-declared nuclear weapon states and have conducted tests openly. So were the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to recognize that reality, which is that we are nuclear weapon states, that would make it much more relevant too. And then, of course, it could strengthen its nonproliferation provisions and the regime to ensure that instead of five, it remained at seven or eight [nuclear weapon states].

FORUM: On the nuclear nonproliferation issue, I'd like to raise Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan—one of Pakistan's top nuclear scientists—who has been accused proliferating knowledge and selling on the clandestine nuclear network. Why did President Musharraf pardon Khan after having, several weeks earlier, declared that he would deal severely with people caught to be proliferating this type of knowledge?

QAZI: First, let me explain. Initially we had sort of suspected that Dr. A.Q. Khan and some of his colleagues were involved in these activities. We had no compelling evidence or proof.

FORUM: For how long were you suspicious?

QAZI: We were suspicious for maybe the past three or four years. There may have been rumors before, but these suspicions were fairly strong at that time. The United States and Pakistan, and also the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) and Pakistan, and Pakistan and other countries discussed, but particularly with the United States, we had discussed this issue. The United States had suspicions also. But the United States is the first to admit that it didn't have anything approaching compelling evidence with respect to Abdul Qadeer Khan. Nevertheless in 2001, we removed him from his laboratory, the Khan research laboratories, and he was, as it were, kicked upstairs to become an advisor to the president on nuclear affairs or atomic energy. He had nothing really much to do, he had an wonderful office etcetera, but it was only last October, after the *BBC China* was intercepted—the ship which was on its way to Libya and intercepted by the Italians...

FORUM: Was that through the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)?

QAZI: Well, I'm not so sure whether it was, because it was the Italians who interdicted the ship. And whether it was part of the PSI, I'm not sure of that—that's a good question, I don't have an exact answer to that—but it certainly comes within its framework. So you could sort of say that it was part of that international initiative. Once that was intercepted, then a lot of information came to light which was conveyed to us, and it was compelling enough for us to send our own investigation teams to Libya, to Iran, which supported those findings. And then we began formal investigations of A.Q. Khan and his colleagues. Initially he

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was in denial. Because when he went out, he was supposed to be going out with respect to maybe acquiring whatever we needed to put together a nuclear-weapons capability in response to India having developed it.

FORUM: That was decades ago?

QAZI: Yes, decades ago, and even up to a certain..., he used to travel abroad. But he used to travel very frequently, earlier where, after India had conducted its first nuclear test in 1974, and we had determined that we would match that because our security required that, and the world might not have

approved of it and therefore we had to do it in a clandestine manner, in a covert manner, and A.Q. Khan proved to be an invaluable person in pulling everything together. So he had a lot of license, a lot of autonomy, a lot of funding. And down the road, he also developed a network, which might have been useful for the acquisition that later on became the basis for a proliferation network, which was established outside Pakistan, around Dubai.

FORUM: And this is something about which the Pakistani government had no knowledge?

QAZI: The Pakistan government had no knowledge. And this is something which is, even in current testimony by the current U.S. administration on [Capitol] Hill, they back us. They said that there is no reason to believe that President Musharraf or his government had any knowledge. Now this is met with some skepticism on the Hill, or by opponents, and when I was talking with the *Wall Street Journal* yesterday, I told them, we have to recognize that maybe there is a layer of irreducible skepticism as far as this is concerned, but we have to just live with that, because the fact is that we didn't: the fact is that you still are somewhat skeptical on it. But the more prominent and important and relevant fact is that since this event surfaced, our cooperation with the IAEA and with the United

States in eliciting information from A.Q. Khan and his colleagues has been hugely important and useful in rolling up, rooting out, the proliferation network that was there, which is now not functioning. And our main concern is to see that it doesn't reconstitute itself, and we have passed laws to ensure that nobody tries to be another A.Q. Khan because the deterrent punishments are going to be severe enough. And we have wide-ranging discussions with the Americans on many subjects, including upgrading our export controls and our control systems.

The important fact to take note of is that—while a proliferation network was established by A.Q. Khan outside, which was embarrassing to us, there's no doubt about it because we did deny that this was the fact because we thought this was not the case, and then we were ultimately provided the kind of compelling evidence: we had earlier shifted him because there were suspicions, but nonetheless we had nothing—no strategic assets were ever exported from Pakistan, in terms of nuclear materials, or nuclear equipment as such, or any of the nuclear arms that we have. None of those have been exported. We have accounting procedures to account for materials and account for those.

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FORUM: I believe we have to stop there. Thank you very much, Ambassador Qazi. ■

