

KARPTARPUR CORRIDOR: A GESTURE OF GOODWILL OR A TACTICAL PLAN

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I have to tried to thoroughly inspect various dynamics related to the Kartarpur Corridor, which opened in 2019 during a state of sour relations between India and Pakistan. Why was the Kartarpur district left in Pakistan while Panja Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib and Nankana Sahib were given to India. It also discusses reasons for Pakistan's announcement of the corridor in 2018 like - breaking out of International Isolation imposed on it due to its sub-conventional terrorist politics and other reasons, also to influence rural Sikh citizens etc. Paper also discusses the strategic and tactical plans of Pakistan and what which wish to achieve through the corridor scheme such as to instigating Sikh militancy, to make India hostage to its behaviour etc. We will also look at its impact on South Asia's geopolitics. Finally, we address the problems of religious diplomacy.

Keywords: Kartarpur, Strategy, Geopolitics, Religion, Diplomacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Kartarpur Gurudwara is located in Narowal district of Pakistan and is considered as one of the significant religious places for the Sikh community. Guru Nanak (Founder of Sikhism) lived in the Gurudwara for 18 years before his death in 1539. This is where the Sikh community took their ethical codes and chose the next Guru for the religion. River Ravi flows alongside Kartarpur and is also Nanak's last resting place – grave and Samadhi. With thousands of followers from all faiths Sikhism, Hinduism and Muslim they even engaged in conflict over his funeral rites. With the oncoming of 550th birth anniversary of Saint Guru Nanak, the Kartarpur Gurudwara corridor was opened in 2019. The two sides decided to allow pilgrims without a Visa and return the same day.

The biggest dilemma is why did the corridor be open when the relations between India and Pakistan were in such a sour state instead of the time when the relations were good as that would have been seen more as a confidence-building measure, this sore thumb diplomacy has come not as a larger India - Pakistan relations diplomacy but instead as a strategical move by Pakistan's side - as an ISI's pet project. We will discuss the reasons for Pakistan's announcement of the corridor in 2018 also strategic and tactical plans of Pakistan and ISI in this corridor scheme. We will also look at its impact on South Asia's geopolitics. Finally, we will look at problems of religious diplomacy.

II. METHODOLOGY

Method adopted for this research was through literature sources and online articles/papers available on the issue.

III. ANALYZING THE PROBLEM AND DISCUSSING RELATED ISSUES

Why did Kartarpur remain in Pakistan following the Partition in 1947?

T.C.A. Raghavan(Former Indian envoy to Pakistan) in his book The People Next Door: The Curious History of India-Pakistan Relations, has mentioned that Australian Geographer OHK Spate was commissioned by the Ahmaddiyas sect to prepare the case for Gurdaspur and Qadian to be in Pakistan. The final partition award was to Gurdaspur to India causing several conflicts. Raghavan argues about the Gurdaspur Award that“extra consideration to the Sikh faith for the enormous loss they had suffered because many of their principal religious sites – Panja Sahib, Kartarpur Sahib and Nankana Sahib – would fall in Pakistan”. Ishtiaq Ahmed in the Friday Times 'Splitting India' series in 2013. The awarding of three out of four tehsils of Gurdaspur district to India was done by choosing the tehsil boundary and not the actual course of the Ravi-Ujh river. Ahmed writes that Radcliffe's plan was nearly identical to former Viceroy Wavell's 'breakdown plan'. Wavell's reason “for giving the three tehsils of Gurdaspur to India was to protect Amritsar from being surrounded on all sides except the east by Pakistani territory”, he stated. Unlike Gurdaspur, Kartarpur did not have a persuasive strategic element linked to Kashmir or the adjoining presence of the Golden Temple and hence wasn't pursued as aggressively as others to be made a part of the Indian Union.

Reasons for Pakistan's announcement of the corridor in 2018

Firstly, Since talks between India and Pakistan are shut down due to India's stand that - terror and dialogue cannot go together, this comes as Pakistan's attempt to initiate dialogues with India through soft diplomacy. Secondly, Pakistan is witnessing isolation in the international arena from the Middle East to the west, so this comes as a desperate attempt to break that isolation. Finally, To appease the rural Punjab population which has been demanding the corridor for a long time.

Strategic and Tactical plans of Pakistan and ISI in this corridor scheme

Firstly, Pakistan is unwilling to forgo the use of terrorism as a sub-conventional option against India, Pakistan intends to use the corridor hostage to India's 'good behaviour' in reciprocity and open or close it depending on whether India is cooperative. Secondly, In 1980 ISI assassinated the guru of the Nirankari sect and subsequently other Nirankaris in Punjab. (Nirankaris believe in a living Guru whereas mainstream Sikhs believe in Granth Sahib). The assassination was used by ISI to unleash Punjab militancy. In 2018, ISI attacked Nirankari worshippers in Amritsar through a grenade attack in Nirankari Bhawan, in totality one can observe that ISI is trying to revive its old strategy and open a 'second front' in Punjab after Kashmir. It is trying to establish a slow attritional policy of reviving separatism through recruitment, indoctrination and radicalization methods. Third, Khalistani groups in Pakistans are trained by ISI to keep a lookout for potential recruits who are coming from India to visit Kartarpur and establish contact with them. Propaganda of separatism would slowly seep into the rural community through these new recruits. Lastly, Like the Western front of Pakistan i.e, the Durand Line is going out of control as the Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda have repeatedly attacked Pakistan Army at the Durand line. Hence Pakistan is looking to cool off matters on the eastern border for now.

Impact on South Asia's geopolitics

It is pretty evident that the Corridor's impact in the context of South Asia's geopolitics would be significant. Religious Corridor came as a surprise to a lot of observers that it actually went ahead in spite of tensions between India and Pakistan (which have consistently deteriorated since 2019) . The strategic community, have been critical of the Corridor, arguing that Pakistan could use it to foment militancy in Punjab . The Corridor has drawn global attention. US, China and a number of other countries have welcomed the opening of the corridor, saying that it will pave the way for peace and harmony in South Asia. The UN head, Antonio Guterres, also visited the Corridor during his visit to Pakistan. He had welcomed the opening of the Corridor in November 2019. "paving way for interfaith harmony and understanding by facilitating visa-free cross border visits by pilgrims to holy shrines."

Problems with Religious Diplomacy

Several groups across political leanings have come up with a number of options that, according to them, could reciprocate Pakistan's "Kartarpur diplomacy". Sharada corridor has been suggested as the one of the major options out of many, which will allow Hindus and Sikhs to visit the Sharada temple in Neelum Valley, located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. India has already sent an official proposal to Pakistan in this regard; this is believed to have been received positively by their counterparts across the border.

The word 'religion' has its roots in the Latin word 'religionem' which means 'respect for what is regarded sacred, or respect for gods'. Such politicisation and institutionalization of faith has made religion one of the major political forces to divide society. This has a long history: faith and spirituality was politicised and used as weapons by the erstwhile colonial masters of the subcontinent; the effects of these tactics ultimately fostered hatred between Hindus and Muslims—the two major religious groups in the area—and led to the implementation of the Two-Nation Theory, which resulted in the bloody partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Due to the presence of hardline fundamentalists in both countries, friendship efforts between the two South Asian neighbours often fail due to the hatred and deep-rooted distrust sown, which has only gained strength over time. Be it the Kartarpur corridor or the proposed Sharada corridor, people-oriented peacemaking efforts are evidently centred on the religious sentiments of significant communities in both the countries. While such projects seems like a beam of light in the dark and distant relations between the two nations, they eventually suffered from political manipulation or have simply been abandoned, owing to threats from fundamentalist forces or non-state actors. Both nations need to look towards other alternative measures. They might not provide instant results but will be more likely to provide long term sustainable peace keeping results as these

religious diplomatic measures are intended to manipulate simple minded faith believing citizen rather than to provide a long term solution to the problems. One of the few long-term options, which could help find a common ground and eventually pave the way for peace in the subcontinent, would be to explore practical and positive measures that are not enveloped in political grandstanding.

IV. CONCLUSION

With the opening of the much-awaited corridor, both sides would like to demonstrate that they can smoothly operate the movement of pilgrims across an international border. While the corridor operation may not get impeded, the project itself is unlikely to lead to any improvement in the relationship under the present circumstances. The only hope is that even if relations between these South Asian NATIONS get sour, the corridor should not get tied into the conflicts leading to its termination. Pakistan's prerogative generally has been seen as 'engaging and then sabotaging' whenever the ties get sour. Pakistan should delink corridor from political developments, then it can be seen as a 'confidence-building measure'.

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