Pakistan–India Relationship in 2015

To date, it seems premature to talk about qualitative changes or significant adjustment behaviour of India and Pakistan in relation to each other. But over the last year, during the rule of Narendra Modi in the Indian government, each of the parties has had the opportunity to define its position.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), that came to power following the results of the parliamentary elections in May 2014, sharply criticized the previous government led by the Congress, stating that "a cursory look at a lost decade demonstrates the deviation and loss of direction in its relations with its neighbours, misguided diplomacy towards Pakistan and short-sightedness in the determination of foreign policy with the island states of the Indian Ocean." Exactly from this standpoint the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi built relationships in the region.

2014 was characterised by another round of tension in relations between the two countries. Islamabad emphasised the presence of "...some fundamental differences with New Delhi". According to statements of its foreign minister, "... the process of normalization was hampered by the lack of composite dialogue between the countries, but we are striving to renew it on all unresolved questions".

Adjustments of the approaches of the general line of foreign policy of Pakistan and India in 2014 - 2015 are connected with several reasons:

- Firstly, the accession to power of new leaders in Pakistan (Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif - May 2013), and in India - Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a result of the parliamentary elections in May 2014, and subsequent changes in their foreign policy vectors;
- Secondly, the modification of the general geopolitical content in the region after the completion of the combat mission of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) and the withdrawal of the major part of the coalition forces in December 2014;
- Thirdly, the military establishment of Pakistan had an impact on the development of foreign policy, particularly in the Indian direction.

In 2014/2015 Islamabad adjusted its approaches on the Kashmir issue in comparison with the former administration headed by the president Asif Ali Zardari.

The Kashmir sovereignty issue was again included as a major point in the agenda of Pakistani-Indian relations. The former ruling in 2008-2013, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) avoided to raise the issue as a priority in its dialogue with New Delhi in 2011-2013. On the contrary, the government urged to "freeze" this and settle some technical issues, visas (providing expedited visa regime for certain categories of citizens of the both countries), transportation (bus routes in Kashmir), etc.

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Narendra Modi met in May, 2014 for the first time when the head of the Federal
Cabinet of Ministers of Pakistan was invited to the inauguration in New Delhi. But the first political battles were turned by them against each other at the end of September 2014 at the UN General Assembly. Pakistan severely criticized the position of India directed at blocking the execution of a referendum in Kashmir. The main accusation of the Indian party came down to the characterisation of Pakistan, as a "main source of terrorism". A little later, in January 2015, this point was again voiced during the visit of President Barack Obama in New Delhi.

Several traditional and new "painful points" appeared in the relations between Islamabad and New Delhi in 2014 and the first half of 2015:

- armed conflicts along the Line of Control and Working boundary in Kashmir from September, 2014 to March, 2015;

- strong statements of Pakistan with the purpose of blocking plans of India for the construction of new settlements in the Indian part of Kashmir;

- further delay by Pakistan of the issue of granting India the status of most favoured nation;

- Islamabad once again accused New Delhi of using Afghan territory for terrorist attacks in Pakistan, as well as the involvement of the Indian intelligence agency (RAW) to the activities of terrorist organizations in Pakistan;

- the strengthening of confrontation between India and Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan, or so-called "proxy war".

The process of reforming the UN Security Council In 2014, Pakistan called on the UN General Assembly to prevent the creation of new permanent seats in the Security Council and at the same time emphasized the need to strengthen the role of the 193 members of the Assembly. Pakistan opposed granting India the status of a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Reforming the Security Council, according to Islamabad, should reflect the interests of the wider membership of the United Nations. He pointed out two major obstacles to India in the UN Security Council: firstly, the idea of new permanent members of the Security Council will create additional centres of power, and, secondly, India, according to Pakistan, is not eligible for special status in the Council, as it violated UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir, and the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination. Pakistan believes that a country that has violated the UN Charter is not entitled to a permanent seat in the UN Security Council.

During his visit to New Delhi in January 2015, the US President Barack Obama expressed support for India's candidature to the UN Security Council, a privileged international forum. Pakistani media very sharply reacted to this statement.

Pakistan is not opposed to civil nuclear cooperation and membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group -NSG, which have not joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. But at the same time it opposes granting membership to India in the NSG, believing that it will be a severe blow to the non-proliferation regime. The US-Indian nuclear deal in 2008, according to Islamabad, is aimed at building up the nuclear capabilities of India, that has not done much for its transparency.

Islamabad expressed concerns about the capacity growth of Indian military potential. Its defence expenditures have increased by 12% in 2014-2015 and up to $38.35 billion US. According to Pakistan, the US-India defence agreement for a period of ten years will further strengthen the existing imbalance of conventional and nuclear weapons and therefore lead to a destabilization strategy in South Asia.

In February 2015, the government of the BJP joined the rush for a conventional arms race. The Prime Minister N. Modi announced the reforming of its defence procurement policy with the priority on domestic production and cancelled restrictions on foreign investments in the defensive area.

In response, Pakistan stated that "... it has never been a part of an arms race with India and will adhere to this policy in the future. However, bearing in mind the situation in the region, Pakistan has the right to maintain a balance of conventional weapons ... and, despite financial difficulties, for the government to meet the needs of their armed forces, will continue this strategy in the future."

Islamabad has expressed concerns at the deterioration of the strategic imbalance during heightened Pakistan-India
tensions, the violation by India (according to Pakistan) of the ceasefire along the Line of Control and Working boundary.

But on a high note of the discussion of military budgets, on February 13, 2015 India made the first step towards: Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. The next step of India is the visit to Islamabad in March 2015 of the Indian Foreign Subrahmanyan Jaishankar. In other words, the parties started negotiations on the level at which they had been "frozen" in August 2014 (on August 25, 2014 a meeting was planned at the level of secretaries of the foreign ministries. But the planned scenario was disrupted. Preceding the Indian side was a meeting of the High Commissioner of Pakistan in India, Abdul Basit (the Pakistan envoy to India Abdul Basit) with leaders of Kashmir (Hurriyat Leaders), despite protests from New Delhi. In response, India unilaterally cancelled the talks. Pakistan put the responsibility for the failure of negotiations on its eastern neighbour.)

In March 2015, the main attention was paid to the discussion of bilateral issues: Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek and water issues. They confirmed that for in order to find their solutions concerted efforts are required and the resumption of the dialogue process, maintaining the ceasefire (2003), the main mechanism for the stabilization of the situation on the Line of Control and the Working boundary between the two countries. The visit of the Secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs of India in Pakistan was generally formal and was held on the eve of the SAARC summit, which will take place in Islamabad. Analysts pointed out that it had not brought much hope for a qualitative breakthrough, improvement of bilateral relations. At the same time, according to the Pakistani side, it opened the way for future negotiations. However, without a specific date of the event.

And in May 2015, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi confirmed his intention to "break the ice" in relations with neighbouring countries through the "cricket diplomacy": "... We have decided to start a series of games of cricket between the teams of the two countries, and it will be the first step towards normalization of relations." The games are planned in the United Arab Emirates, away from the unpredictable behaviour of the majority of the fans. "Cricket diplomacy" is a return to the positions of the parties in 2011-2012, when former Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani arrived in India on an unofficial visit, and together with the former Prime Minister of India M.Sindhom watched a cricket match. And so all the years of these relationships - one step forward, two steps back.

_Natalya Zamaraeva, Ph.D., Senior Research Fellow, Pakistan Institute for Near-East Studies, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”_