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Jammu & Kashmir: India's Objectives and Strategies

by D. SUBA CHANDRAN

There are two sets of conflicts relating to Jammu and Kashmir—the *conflict in Kashmir* and the *conflict of Kashmir*. The conflict of Kashmir is primarily linked to the larger Indo-Pak conflict and its actors include India, Pakistan, and Kashmiris. In the initial decades following the 1947 partition, India's primary objective in the conflict of Kashmir was to internationalize the issue to its advantage, based on its legal claim over the entire Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) region including the Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Gilgit, and Baltistan regions. These four regions, under direct and indirect control of Pakistan, are administered through two different political entities. The regions of Mirpur and Muzaffarabad—called "Azad Kashmir"—have limited autonomy, while the Gilgit and Baltistan regions are referred as the Northern Areas and fall under the total control of Islamabad.

Withdrawal of Pakistani troops from "Azad Kashmir" and the Northern Areas—collectively referred to by India as Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK)—and its reintegration with the rest of J&K had been the primary objective of India during the initial phase of the conflict. However, this objective slowly changed in a shift that became visible during and after the 1971 War with Pakistan. A Line of Control (LoC) was established after this war, and it is widely believed that during negotiations leading to the Simla agreement that followed the war, India and Pakistan agreed to convert this line into a permanent border between the two countries. Ever since, India's primary objective in the conflict of Kashmir has been to maintain the status quo and convert the LoC into an international border.

The conflict in Kashmir refers to the relations between New Delhi and various communities and

their aspirations in Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh regions. Though the high level of violence since the 1990s has hijacked the issues in J&K, there are other serious issues from these three regions. For example, people of Ladakh have been demanding a Union Territory (UT) status within India, while the people of Jammu region have been demanding a separate state, again within India. A major section within Kashmir Valley demands complete independence from India, while another section demands more autonomy in terms of federal-provincial relations. Political manipulation, bad governance and corruption have been major issues for all three regions.

India's policy towards the conflict in Kashmir has been narrowly focused in terms of addressing the political issues of Kashmir Valley, winning the Kashmiris politically and psychologically, and integrating them emotionally into the Indian mainstream. Until recently, the other two regions—Jammu and Ladakh—have been totally neglected by New Delhi.

India's Kashmir Policies and Strategies

What are the major issues in India's policies and strategies vis-à-vis the conflict in Kashmir and the conflict of Kashmir? Though India's policies towards both these conflicts have been criticized as ad hoc and reactive, in retrospect it appears New Delhi has been clear on what it wants regarding both conflicts. Externally with Pakistan, New Delhi wants to convert the LoC into an international border and make the status quo permanent. Internally, it wants to keep the demands for independence under control, aiming to win the Kashmiris psychologically and emotionally by integrating the political elite into the mainstream. The strategies that New Delhi has adopted to secure these policies may have different guises, but the policies on these two broader issues have remained constant. These policies and the strategies adopted to secure them require a critique before commenting on the contemporary situation and making conclusions about the road ahead.

The Prism of Terrorism • Until recently, India perceived both the conflict in and conflict of J&K mainly through the prism of terrorism. Internally, the absence of militant attacks is seen as the presence of peace and political stability in Kashmir. Problems of governance are seen as an offshoot of militancy; hence, the government has believed that once the latter is brought under control, there would be better governance. Issues such as corruption and bad governance are carpeted under militancy. Counterinsurgency operations have assumed more significance, without understanding that militancy has been the product of certain political questions and that once these political questions are addressed, the militancy would automatically die down. These political

questions raised by the Kashmiris may be real or imaginary or both; but it is the duty of the government to address them politically.

Externally, cross-border terrorism was perceived as the main bilateral issue vis-à-vis Pakistan. India has long avoided discussing J&K with Pakistan and repeatedly emphasized that until the latter stops cross-border terrorism, there could not be any meaningful negotiation. Internationally, while Pakistan attempted to highlight the issue of “human rights” and “political oppression” in Kashmir by New Delhi, India attempted to flag cross-border terrorism as the main issue and hurdle in taking any further measures.

As cross-border terrorism became the highlight of India’s approach towards the conflict of Kashmir, two issues became prominent in the 1990s and in the early years of this decade. Any dialogue on demilitarization or troop relocation in J&K became a non-negotiable issue for New Delhi, as it was linked to cross-border terrorism. New Delhi repeatedly emphasized that unless cross-border terrorism is stopped, there cannot be discussion on troop withdrawal, as the latter is a response to the former.

As part of a unilateral measure to address cross-border terrorism, New Delhi decided to fence the Line of Control. The international border between the two countries has already been fenced and regularly patrolled by the paramilitary forces on both sides. The LoC until the mid-1990s was never fenced. Pakistan has always been opposed to the idea of India fencing the LoC, as it felt fencing would give an element of permanency to the LoC. As a part of not allowing the fencing, Pakistan resorted to continuous shelling whenever India undertook any efforts on the same. With a ceasefire in place since the end of 2003, India went ahead and completed fencing the LoC. Efforts are in progress to install advanced sensors and related equipments to electronically monitor this fencing.

India’s Narrow Focus • The “political” approach vis-à-vis the conflicts in and of Kashmir that New Delhi has pursued has, until recently, always been narrowly focused. Within India, successive governments in New Delhi have carried out a strategy based on organizing periodic elections for the state legislative assembly of Jammu and Kashmir and sustaining an elected government at the state level. Elections, whether rigged or free, are seen as an “end” in J&K; the party or coalition that forms the government subsequently in Srinagar is expected to adhere to the existing provisions and maintain the status quo, without any demands on changing the nature of union-state relations. In the late 1990s, the Union government relied completely on the National Conference (NC) government led by Farooq Abdullah, and now seems to be continuing the same with

the Congress-Peoples Democratic Party coalition government.

Once the state government is in place in Srinagar, the Union government’s approach towards Kashmir is limited only to the former, irrespective of its popularity. Until recently, any further political engagements outside this sphere have been ad hoc and were without any focus; the Union government failed to initiate any substantial dialogue with those sections that fall outside the mainstream political parties, especially the separatists led by two factions of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and other independent leaders.

Only recently did the Union government initiate efforts to address all of the groups concerned. Two Round Table Conferences (RTCs) have been organized since 2006, and five working groups have been formed on different issues, which include the following: New Delhi’s relations with the State, increasing relations across the Line of Control (LoC), boosting the State’s economic development, rehabilitating the victims of violence, and ensuring good governance. These Working Groups have submitted their reports and New Delhi is yet to initiate follow up actions on these recommendations.

Vis-à-vis Pakistan, India has long refused to initiate a meaningful dialogue on Kashmir. As mentioned above, cross-border terrorism became a major issue in the conflict of Kashmir with Pakistan. However, since the end of the 1990s, for the first time India had agreed to include J&K as a part of various other bilateral negotiations including those over Siachen, Tulbul Navigation/Wullar Barrage, Sir Creek, elimination of terrorism and illicit narcotics, economic and commercial cooperation, and exchange of friendly visits.

Since 2004, two slogans have become the catchwords of India’s approach towards Pakistan on Kashmir—“soft borders” and “making borders irrelevant.” Atal Behari Vajpayee, the previous Prime Minister, took bold measures in addressing the conflict of Kashmir. Efforts were made to make borders “soft” in terms of breaching it legally through more crossing points and a liberalized visa regime. These efforts witnessed the introduction of the first bus service between the two countries from New Delhi to Lahore, and talks being initiated on opening the international border in other areas. As a result, today there is a new rail link between Sindh in Pakistan and Rajasthan in India and another bus service between Amritsar and Nankana Sahib across the international border. Although both these connections became functional under the Congress government, efforts were taken under Vajpayee’s administration to make borders soft.

Manmohan Singh, the current Prime Minister, came out with a new slogan—making borders irrelevant. This caught people’s imagination especially

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after the devastating earthquake in October 2005. A few months before the earthquake, a bus service was introduced between the two Kashmirs—between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar—marking the first time such travel was possible in six decades. The opening of the LoC in the Jammu region followed this step; today there is another bus service between Poonch and Rawlakot.

Resolving the Conflicts: Challenges Ahead

Undoubtedly, in recent years India has taken significant measures to address both the conflicts in and of Kashmir. Further progress would depend on the following. First, in the past and even today, there has been no consensus at the national level on what could be India's game plan in Jammu and Kashmir and how far it could go in terms of a final resolution. The existing Parliamentary Resolution signifies India's maximalist position and not what is feasible and practical. The Union government has been reluctant to create such a consensus both inside and outside the Parliament. There is a clear difference between the secular moderates and the extremist Hindu Right in India. For a final resolution, a national consensus is essential inside India.

The same is also true inside Pakistan. There is no consensus inside Pakistan on what could be the final settlement of Kashmir. Though Pakistan has been insisting on the rhetoric of "what is acceptable to the people of Kashmir," in reality, both the State and its people will be unwilling to let go of territory under its control. While it would be agreeable to Pakistan to continue with the present set up in Muzaffarabad, it would be unacceptable to change the status quo, especially of the Northern Areas. The recent package announced by General Musharraf in October 2007 on the Northern Areas is cosmetic and a part of Islamabad's larger plan to keep this region under its perpetual control. The Northern Areas are strategically important to Pakistan today for various reasons. Among them, the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and the water resources of the region are significant. With Pakistan having plans to expand the KKH and construct a road-rail-gas pipeline link from Gwadar port in Balochistan to Kashgar in China, this region is of enormous importance.

Second, clearly whether it is making borders soft or irrelevant, India's strategies are aimed at not redrawing the existing boundaries, whereas Pakistan's efforts for six decades have been aimed at altering the status quo. Much would depend on how successfully India can be in convincing Pakistan on this issue.

Third, relating to the conflict in Kashmir, as mentioned above, New Delhi has taken significant measures. However, two important steps are not being addressed convincingly so far. One, the dialogue inside India, between New Delhi and various

groups of Kashmir, even today remains unconvincing. The separatist groups, led by the two factions of the Hurriyat Conference, are yet to be taken into confidence. For various political reasons, both factions of the Hurriyat Conference have so far refused to enter into any meaningful dialogue with New Delhi. True, the Hurriyat certainly cannot be considered as the sole voice of the Kashmiris, for its support base is narrowly based inside Kashmir Valley and has no representation in the Jammu and Ladakh regions. However, undoubtedly, it does represent a segment of opinion inside Kashmir Valley.

Besides the separatists, the Union government has also not been able to initiate any dialogue with the militant groups. Today, the non-State armed groups fighting in Kashmir can be clearly divided into two groups. The first one, led by the Hizbul Mujahideen, has ambitions that are more political and limited to Kashmir. Cadres of Hizbul are primarily Kashmiris and have been fighting for a political cause. The second group is led by the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, with both political and religious ambitions aimed at a larger cause—beyond Kashmir—of destroying India. Cadres of Jaish and Lashkar are primarily drawn from Pakistan. The Indian security and intelligence forces have been successful in forcing the cadres of Hizbul to surrender or eliminating them considerably, thus weakening their base. However, Lashkar and Jaish have been fighting a bloody battle against the Indian security forces. Besides, the control of Pakistan's security forces over Jaish and Lashkar in recent years has been questioned seriously. The important question that needs to be addressed here is: what if a compromise acceptable to India, Pakistan, and a section of Kashmiris is not acceptable to these jihadi forces?

Finally, India has to take proactive and if needed even unilateral measures in increasing the cross-LoC interactions. In September 2007, both India and Pakistan agreed in principle to trade across the Line of Control. Ever since the LoC opened for the bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar in 2005, people living in all five parts of J&K—Jammu, Muzaffarabad, Northern Areas, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh—have been demanding the opening of the LoC for economic and cultural interactions. While the Chambers of Commerce and Industries, both in Jammu and Srinagar, have pressured New Delhi to open the LoC for trade, people in the these five regions have been putting pressure on both governments to open more routes and allow more people to cross the LoC. The apple and carpet industries in Kashmir Valley in particular have been demanding the opening of the LoC for trade. Today, Kashmiri apples go from the valley by truck via Jammu to Delhi and then beyond. If the LoC is opened for goods, the apples from Anantnag and Sopore could

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reach Rawalpindi via Muzaffarabad faster than they could reach New Delhi.

So far the cross-LoC interactions have been narrowly based in addressing the interests of only one region—the Kashmir Valley. The regions of Jammu and Ladakh have been largely ignored. There are numerous divided families in the Kargil region, who have relatives across the LoC in Skardu and Gilgit and also in the Jammu region. India should take active measures to open Kargil-Skardu and Jammu-Sialkot roads for the movement of divided families. There is a need to expand the interactions along the LoC and this enlargement should address all five regions—Jammu, Muzaffarabad, Kashmir Valley, Northern Areas and Ladakh.



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Pakistan's Changing Outlook on Kashmir

by SYED RIFAAT HUSSAIN

Historically, Pakistan has viewed its dispute with India over Kashmir as the key determinant of its strategic behavior in the international arena. Advocacy of the rights of the Kashmiri people to freely determine their future has been the main plank of Islamabad's diplomatic strategy in the United Nations and other international fora. By championing the cause of the rights of the Kashmiri people, Islamabad has tried to remind the world that India's control over two-thirds of the State of Jammu and Kashmir is not only legally untenable but morally unjust, as it was achieved through an instrument of accession with a ruler who had lost the support of the vast majority of his predominantly Muslim subjects. Pakistan's official stance on Kashmir can be summarized into the following six interrelated propositions:

1. The State of Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory.
2. This disputed status is acknowledged in the UN Security Council resolutions of August 13, 1948 and January 5, 1949, to which both Pakistan and India are a party.
3. These resolutions remain operative and cannot be unilaterally disregarded by either party.
4. Talks between India and Pakistan over the future status of Jammu and Kashmir should aim to secure the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people. This right entails a free, fair and internationally supervised plebiscite as agreed in the UN Security Council resolutions.
5. The plebiscite should offer the people of Jammu and Kashmir the choice of permanent accession to either Pakistan or India.
6. Talks between India and Pakistan, in regard to the future status of Jammu and Kashmir, should be held in conformity both with the Simla Agreement of July 1972 and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. An international mediatory role in such talks may be appropriate if mutually agreed.

This stated Pakistani position on Kashmir has undergone a fundamental shift under President General Pervez Musharraf who, after assuming power in October 1999 in a bloodless coup, has been, in his own words, “pondering outside the box” solutions to resolve the dispute. This paper examines various aspects of the changing Pakistani outlook on Kashmir and analyzes different factors underpinning this change.