

Nuclearization of the Kashmir Conflict

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The role played by the nation-states of India and Pakistan in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) echoes the animosity created during the Partition of 1947. The political and social upheaval that followed upon the creation of the two nation-states in 1947 has left legacies that continue to haunt the two countries. The Partition enabled the thunderous forces of violence and displacement to tear the preexisting cultural and social fabric so systematically that the process of repair hasn't even begun. I would argue that although the "Third-World" intelligentsia unceasingly complains about the manipulations and short-sightedness of British imperial cartographers and administrators, the onus of the calamity engendered on 14 and 15 August 1947 does not lie entirely on the colonial power. The failed negotiations between Indian and Pakistani nationalists who belonged to the Congress and the Muslim League, the blustering of those nationalists and the national jingoism it stimulated, and the unquenchable hatreds on both sides contributed to the brutal events of 1947. In the words of historian Uma Kaura, "the mistakes made by the Congress leadership, the frustration and bitterness of the League leadership, and the defensive diplomacy of a British Viceroy cumulatively resulted in the demand for Partition." The borders that were brutally carved by the authorities at the time of Partition have led to further brutality in the form of those riots, organized historical distortions, and cultural depletions with which the histories of independent India and Pakistan are replete.

One of the legacies of the Partition is the Kashmir conflict, which is now a nuclear flashpoint. For India, Kashmir lends credibility to its secular nationalist image. For Pakistan, Kashmir represents the unfeasibility of secular nationalism and underscores the need for an Islamic theocracy in the subcontinent. In January 1948, India referred the Kashmir dispute to the United Nations. Subsequent to the declaration of the cease-fire between India and Pakistan on January 1, 1949, the state of J&K was divided into two portions. The part of the state comprising the Punjabi speaking areas of Poonch, Mirpur, and Muzaffarabad, along with Gilgit and Baltistan was incorporated into Pakistan, whereas the portion of

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the state comprising the Kashmir Valley, Ladakh, and the large Jammu region was politically assimilated into India. Currently, a large part of J&K is administered by India and a portion is administered by Pakistan. China also annexed a section of the land in 1962, through which it has built a road that links Tibet to Xiajiang. Although, separatist movements have been surfacing and resurfacing in J&K and parts of Pakistani administered Kashmir since the accession of the state to India in 1947, the attempt to create a unitary cultural identity bolstered by nationalist politics has been subverted by regional political forces, backed-up by the governments of India and Pakistan. The culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse population of Indian and Pakistani administered Jammu and Kashmir has been unable to reach a consensus on the future of the land and the heterogeneous peoples of the state. The notion that social tensions and weaknesses can be redressed by an essential Islamic or Hindu culture ends up fortifying religious fundamentalism in communities. The strategic location of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) underscores its importance for both India and Pakistan.

The state of J & K borders on China and Afghanistan. Out of a total land area of 222,236 square kilometers, 78,114 are under Pakistani administration, 5,180 square kilometers were handed over to China by Pakistan, 37,555 square kilometers are under Chinese administration in Leh district, and the remaining area is under Indian administration (*Census of India, 1981*: 156). In order to make their borders impregnable, it was essential for both India and Pakistan to control the state politically and militarily.

Although Pakistan distinctly expresses its recognition of the status of J&K as a disputed territory, it dithers from doing so in areas of the state under Pakistani control. Pakistan arbitrarily maintains its de facto government in Azad Kashmir. South Asia affairs analyst Victoria Schofield (2001) astutely observes: 'There is no question . . . of Pakistan ever agreeing to relinquish control of the area, either to form part of an independent state of Jammu and Kashmir or as an independent state in its own right.' Therefore, advocating self-determination for the entire former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir would irreparably damage Pakistan's political and military interests.

In the age of globalization, India's policy vis-à-vis Kashmir has been influenced by various variables. Pakistan's formal political alignment

with the United States of America motivated the Soviet Union, in the 1950s, to overtly support the Indian stance towards Kashmir. The explicit political support of the Soviet Union in the Cold War era bolstered Jawaharlal Nehru's courage, and, in 1956, Nehru reneged on his earlier 'international commitments' on the floor of the Indian parliament. He proclaimed the legitimacy of the accession of Kashmir to India in 1947, which ostensibly had been ratified by the Constituent Assembly of J&K in 1954. Nehru's well thought-out strategy was deployed in full measure when the Soviet Union vetoed the demand for a plebiscite in Kashmir made at a meeting of the UN Security Council convened at Pakistan's behest. It was in 1953 that Pakistan initiated negotiations with the USA for military assistance.

Subsequent to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India lost its powerful ally (Kodikara 1993). India's relations with the US reeked of distrust and paranoia at the time. This worsened when senior officials in the first Clinton administration questioned the legality of the status of Kashmir as a part of the Indian Union (Battye 1993). The nonproliferation agenda of the US in South Asia actively undermined India's proliferation strategy in the early and mid-1990s (Perkovich 1999: 318–403). Washington's agenda was propelled by the fear that South Asia had burgeoning potential for a nuclear war in the future. Pakistan's overt policy of abetting fanatical elements in Kashmir and Afghanistan led to its political insularity and seemingly legitimized India's proactive approach.

The US adopted the policy of persuading both India and Pakistan to actively participate in the nonproliferation regime by agreeing to comply with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and to an interim cap on fissile-material production ('Interview with Strobe Talbott', *The Hindu*, 14 January 2000). The insurgency in J&K, which has extracted an enormous price from the people of the state, was generated by the systemic erosion of democratic and human rights, discrimination against the Muslims of the Valley, socioeconomic marginalization, relegation of the right to self-determination to the background, etc. While the rebellion may have been incited by India's political, social, and economic tactlessness, it has been sustained by military, political, and economic support from Pakistan. Proponents of the independence of the state of J&K are just as stridently opposed to Pakistan's administration of Azad Kashmir as they are to India's administration of J&K. During the ongoing insurgency, the Indian military has been granted *carte blanche* without an

iota of accountability. Custodial disappearances and deaths continue to occur, and official orders regarding the protection of detainees are brazenly rubbished. The introduction of other severe laws by the Government of India has made it further non-obligatory to provide any measure of accountability in the military and political proceedings in the state. Despite these highly discriminatory and unpopular measures, the support enjoyed by some of the militant organizations in the early 1990s abated by the mid-90s. Pakistan has won the disapprobation of international powers by adopting the policy of fighting proxy wars through radical Islamist groups, which has reinforced New Delhi's confidence that the internationalization of the Kashmir dispute would not get unwieldy. India also believes that the restraint it exercised during the 1998 nuclear tests has given it the reputation of a responsible nuclear power.

Despite international pressure, the India–Pakistan crisis has not been defused; on the contrary, it is highly volatile. Given their interests in South Asia, Russia and China have expressed their concern about the brinkmanship between the two countries. In order to facilitate a rapprochement, President Vladimir Putin of Russia offered to play the role of mediator between Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee and Pakistani President Musharraf at the scheduled regional summit conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Both Putin and the Chinese President, Jiang Zemin, held talks with Vajpayee and Musharraf in order to create a space for political negotiations. But the two heads of state continued to remain aloof and uncompromisingly condemned each other's belligerence. The one positive outcome of the summit talks, however, was the proposal of the Indian government for joint patrolling of the Line of Control (LOC) by Indian and Pakistani forces. But the Pakistani government was quick to reject this proposal and expressed the requirement for building a third-party force instead. Subsequently, the lethal and hitherto readily adopted practice of maneuvering a dangerous situation to the limits of tolerance mellowed, due to Vajpayee's and Musharraf's judicious approach to nuclear warfare. But the simmering grievances between India and Pakistan, and the distress of the Kashmiri people remained unredressed.

The Pakistani military reinforced western concerns regarding nuclear proliferation in South Asia. In reaction to Pakistan's aggressive transgression of the LOC India exercised political tact and restraint, winning international support for its diplomacy. Washington's political volte face became apparent when it explicitly demanded that Islamabad withdraw from occupied Indian positions and maintain the legitimacy of

the LOC in Kashmir. It was implicit in this demand that it saw Pakistan as the egregious aggressor. The attempt by the US to mitigate Pakistan's aggression also implied that it would not reinforce the status quo in Kashmir (Kampani 2005: 171). Washington's incrimination of Pakistani aggression mitigated New Delhi's fear that internationalization of the Kashmir dispute would spell unambiguous victory for Pakistan. India's strategy of diplomacy and restraint increased the international pressure on Pakistan to withdraw its forces from Indian Territory. India took recourse to limited conventional war under nuclear conditions, prior to President Clinton's March 2000 visit to New Delhi. This issue further receded to the background during the Bush administration. The neo-conservatives in that administration zeroed in on India as a country in the Asia-Pacific region that would offset China's burgeoning economy ('US-South Asia Relations under Bush' 2001). US strategic ties with New Delhi were further consolidated in the wake of 11 September 2001, when the links between militant Islamic groups and Pakistan's military and militia forces were underscored.

As one of the consequences of the decision of the Bush administration to eliminate Al-Qaeda and its supporters in Afghanistan, Pakistan's General Pervez Musharaff found himself with no option but to sever ties with the Taliban. Following this drastically changed policy decision to withdraw political and military support from the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Islamabad found itself unable to draw a clear line of distinction between 'terrorists' in Afghanistan and 'freedom fighters' in Kashmir. Islamabad's quandary proved New Delhi's trump card (Chaudhuri 2001). New Delhi was able to justify its military stance vis-à-vis Pakistan in the wake of the terrorist attacks on the J&K State Assembly in the summer capital, Srinagar, in October 2001, and then the attacks on the Indian Parliament, New Delhi, a month later, in November.

New Delhi's strategy was validated by US military operations in Afghanistan, and the deployment of US forces in and around Pakistan to restrain Pakistani aggression. India was assured by the US that it would stall any attempt by Pakistan to extend the Kashmir dispute beyond local borders, which might disrupt its operations against the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Also, deployment of the US military in Pakistani air bases strengthened New Delhi's confidence that Islamabad would hesitate to initiate nuclear weapons use (Kampani 2002). The result of India's policy of coercive diplomacy was that the Musharraf regime was pressured by the US to take strict military action against the mercenary and militant

Islamic groups bolstering the insurgency in Kashmir. New Delhi was successful in getting Islamabad to both privately and publicly renounce its support to insurgents in J&K. The Indian administration decided that in the event deterrence measures failed, the Indian army would have to fight a limited conventional war under nuclear conditions. The possibility of fighting a war has driven the Indian government to contemplate a nuclear response to Pakistan's deployment of nuclear weapons (see Chengappa 2000). But Indian leaders have threatened Islamabad with punitive measures if Pakistan resorts to nuclear-weapons use (Tellis 2001: 251–475). India and Pakistan routinely brandish their nuclear capabilities to intimidate each other. The two countries have also resorted to direct nuclear signaling through ballistic-missile tests. Such strategies emphasize the military and political volatility in South Asia. Pakistan's nuclear arsenal has given its military the prowess it requires to exploit the disgruntlement of the Muslim population of the Kashmir Valley. India's cautious stance is however dictated by multiple factors. Its primary concern is that a limited war will not enable it to accomplish substantive political or military objectives; that such a war might spin out of control and would be impossible to cease according to the wishes of the administration and the military; that India might find itself in disfavor with and spurned by the international community, and that a war might beef up nuclear armament. The impending menace of precipitative nuclearization has been one of the many factors underlining the necessity to maintain a quasi-stable regime in the South Asian region (Kampani 2005: 177).

Pakistan's explicit aiding and abetting of insurgents in Kashmir has created misgiving about its strategies, and enabled India to prevent UN mediation. New Delhi managed to diminish the threat of internationalization of the Kashmir dispute in 2001–02 by threatening a nuclear exchange unless the US intervened to prevent Pakistan from fomenting cross-border terrorism (ibid.: 178). The insurgency in Kashmir, India and Pakistan's ideological differences and their political intransigence could result in the eruption of a future crisis. The atmosphere of paranoia and mistrust is exacerbated by the frightening attempts of Hindu fundamentalist groups to rewrite Indian history and the recasting of Pakistani history by Islamist organizations: efforts to radically redefine Indian and Pakistani societies in the light of ritualistic Hinduism and Islam, respectively.

In the wake of Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007, the politically chaotic climate of Pakistan, the belligerence of the military,

and the tenacious control of fundamentalist forces basking in the glories of a misplaced religious fervor, can India and Pakistan produce visionary leaders capable of looking beyond the expediency of warfare, conventional or otherwise? Preparing to lead the new coalition government in Pakistan, co-chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party and Benazir's widower, Asif Ali Zardari, condemned the distrustful atmosphere created in the Indian subcontinent by the Kashmir imbroglio. While underwriting the importance of fostering amicable relations between the two countries, Zardari said that the Kashmir conflict could be placed in a state of temporary suspension, for future generations to resolve. In the age of globalization, will the besieged populace of the state of Jammu and Kashmir remain beholden to a leadership that doles out crumbs to them while dividing the spoils amongst themselves?