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Rethinking Kashmir
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India's Prime Minister has taken a welcome initiative to open a way out of the tragic, bloody and painful morass that passes for relations between India and Pakistan. It is an overdue recognition of the fact that Kashmir does not have any military solution - Pakistan lacks the muscle to wrest Kashmir from Indian rule, and India cannot win decisively over Pakistan in difficult, mountainous terrains.

This remains as true today as in 1989 when New Delhi's unconscionable manipulation of Kashmiri politics led to a popular uprising. Pakistan was quick to translate India's losses into its gains. The Afghan war was over, fighters were aplenty, and large numbers of Kashmiri refugees flowed onto the Pakistani side. Pakistan's military establishment hit upon the bleed-India-through-jihad policy, to be simultaneously accompanied by denials of involvement. It was imagined as a low-cost option leading to eventual victory, a means to change an otherwise unchangeable stalemate.

70,000 Kashmiri, Pakistani, and Indian lives later - and post-Iraq - it is opportune for Pakistanis to ask whether this unacknowledged strategy is working. For the last decade this has been considered an off-bounds question. Therefore it was to my considerable surprise that Pakistan's president, General Pervez Musharraf, met with a diverse group of Pakistanis, that included myself, for what turned out to be an intense session focussing largely upon Kashmir policy. That the president was willing to listen to dissenting voices was encouraging, although real change is still a distant possibility.

Traditionally, the Pakistani military's rationale Pakistan's rationale for covert war in Kashmir has been two-fold. The first objective of the long-term, low-intensity war was to "bleed" India so that it would cut its losses and quit Kashmir. But although Indian forces did sustain high losses in Kashmir and the cost of maintaining large contingents remains considerable, no evidence suggests any real weakening of Indian resolve or strength. On the contrary, an unprecedented show of national unity emerged in India in response to Pakistan's infiltration of troops and jihadis across the Line of Control.

More significantly, confounding the expectation of Pakistani strategists, India's economy did not collapse but, instead, boomed. Indian foreign exchange reserves currently stand at over \$70 billion and IT companies alone earn India a solid \$10 billion a year, more than Pakistan's total foreign exchange holdings. This figure is expected to double in the next 2-3 years. Indian scientific institutions are now being counted among the world's best. Pakistan's re-born economy, on the other hand, owes more to the General Musharraf's adroit handling of the 9/11 attack than to any inner strength. Its industry is barely crawling while education and scientific research seem incurably ill. In a technologically driven world, this is a devastating weakness.

The second Pakistani rationale was, and is, to keep Kashmir in the news. The implicit hope is that a high level of tension between two nuclear-armed states will eventually alarm the international community - most particularly the United States - and so force a recalcitrant India to see reason. To raise fear levels Pakistani leaders sometimes deliberately worked to cultivate an image of Pakistan as a defiant, nuclear-armed state ready to commit suicide. But, at other moments, they seek to project an image of being calm, assured, and responsible. Though confusing, such signals made the

threat of nuclear apocalypse sufficiently real to keep a steady stream of foreign leaders coming to Islamabad and Delhi at the peak of the tensions last year. Pakistan felt pleased - the world was now not forgetting Kashmir, and would now rush to solve the dispute.

This turned out to be a fatal miscalculation. In fact, the principal alarm evidenced by the world in general, and the US in particular, has been in relation to the Kashmiri mujahideen and Pakistani nuclear weapons. This attitude preceded the 9/11 attack, but now dominates all thinking. The US State Department's recent declaration of 30 jihadist organizations as terrorist includes the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, the largest mujahideen group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, with no history of attacking US interests. This sends a clear message to Pakistan that violence in Kashmir, whether caused by indigenous groups or by Pakistani-supported militants, will boomerang. In the international press Pakistan now frequently stands accused of inciting violence, and of using the nuclear card to provoke fear, while India is blamed less frequently now than in the past. To be in the news is now no longer a good thing. Are Pakistani strategists ready to accept this hard fact?

The consequence of waging covert war has been steady loss of international support for the Kashmiri struggle. This fact is known to all Pakistani diplomats who represent Pakistan's position in the world's capitals, including those of Muslim countries. The moral high ground - the most potent weapon of the weak - erodes ever more sharply after every massacre of Hindu civilians in Kashmir. This has led many mujahideen groups to sharply condemn these incidents and to blame Indian security forces, but these denials and condemnations receive little acceptance. On the other hand, India, the occupying power in Kashmir, has successfully portrayed itself as a victim of covert terror.

In spite of these damning facts, there is little to suggest that Pakistan has any new game plan. Resistance to change has many sources - a possible backlash from the religious parties and extreme elements within the military, and a large standing army that needs an enemy. Inertia and default dominate planning and design. As the late Eqbal Ahmad passionately argued, although India's leaders bear much responsibility for Kashmir's tragedy, Pakistan's defective Kashmir policy had repeatedly "managed to rescue defeat from the jaws of victory".

Where should new directions point? Surely, any significant change will require a spirit of compromise as a pre-requisite. The two countries must abandon positions fixed half a century ago and the your-loss-is-my-gain mentality must be exchanged for one that values economic prosperity and social stability. The slogan "Pakistan First", recently popularized by President Musharraf and Prime Minister Jamali, offers rich potentialities. Suitably interpreted, this requires Pakistan to live up to its officially stated position - Pakistan shall provide only moral, diplomatic, and political support to Kashmiris struggling against India but no more.

If Pakistan should offer a strategic pause then India must respond positively. Why and how? The undeniable fact is that India is morally isolated from the Kashmiri people and incurs the very considerable costs of an occupying power. Its industry, capable of double-digit growth, needs stability to grow. And - of no small importance - Indian soldiers do not want to die in Kashmir. By formally acknowledging Kashmir as a problem that needs a solution, releasing political prisoners from Kashmiri jails, and agreeing to a mutual reduction of hostile state-sponsored propaganda, India would appropriately acknowledge its part of the deal.

Logic and pragmatism require India and Pakistan to explore non-maximalist long-term solutions. Minus the two obvious ones, Kashmir watchers have counted over 30 possibilities. One, that makes particular sense, envisages two reconstituted Kashmiri entities possibly straddling the Line of Control with their own respective governments and constitutions. These two non-hostile entities, one associated with Pakistan and the other India, would have soft borders allowing for easy transit of people and goods. The details need to be worked out by all three parties: Kashmiris, Pakistanis, and Indians. The United States could serve as a facilitator.

Pakistan and India must now decide whether they can afford the next decade to look like the previous one. Their conflict is like a cancerous growth, an organism with its own logic of

development, within which deadly hatreds flourish and nourish each other. With Prime Minister Vajpayee's forthcoming visit, which he dramatically describes as the "third and last" peace effort of his lifetime, it is essential to see how yet another failure can be averted.

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