

Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise?

Sumit Ganguly

BREAKING AWAY

OVER THE past several years, India's economic growth, diplomatic influence, and overall prestige have increased sharply. The country's new international profile adds a fresh dimension to its ongoing clash with Pakistan over Kashmir. So far, the conflict has not hindered India's rise. But the prospects that the two sides will reach a settlement on their own are dim.

Although it is unlikely that the issue will frustrate India's ambitions to emerge as an Asian—and a global—power, periodic crises over the state will distract India's leaders, and tensions with Pakistan could spark yet another war. The United States can, and should, play a role in facilitating an end to the conflict by prodding both sides to reach an accord. Doing so will require that Washington change its stance toward both India and Pakistan, but the potential rewards—peace on the subcontinent and a solid strategic partnership between Washington and New Delhi—are well worth the effort.

The dispute over Kashmir has dogged relations between India and Pakistan since the states were created by the partition of British India in 1947. The two countries have fought three wars (in 1947–48, 1965, and 1999) over the issue and related matters; twice (in 1990 and 2001–2) they nearly resorted to the use of nuclear weapons.

SUMIT GANGULY is Rabindranath Tagore Chair of Indian Cultures and Civilizations and Professor of Political Science at Indiana University in Bloomington.

Intense international concern has prompted multilateral efforts to broker a formal conclusion to the dispute. Yet neither war nor negotiation has brought the issue any closer to a resolution, and there has been no significant change in the territory's status since the two sides first exchanged shots nearly 60 years ago. (India controls approximately two-thirds of the original state, and Pakistan administers most of the remainder. In 1963, Pakistan ceded a small tract of its territorial claim in northern Kashmir to China, thereby enabling China to build a road to connect the provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang).

The conflict grew out of competing projects of nation building. New Delhi insisted on holding on to Kashmir in order to demonstrate that the province could thrive in a secular state. (India's position was aided by the Hindu monarch of Kashmir, who hastily agreed to join India in 1947 in the hope of forestalling an uprising and a Pakistani-backed incursion.) The government in Islamabad, in contrast, believed that Kashmir, whose population is mostly Muslim, belonged in Pakistan, the putative homeland of the Muslims of South Asia. Although each side's rationale for its commitment has long since either collapsed (the case in Pakistan after the secession of Bangladesh in Pakistan's 1971 civil war) or frayed (the case in India following the rise of virulent Hindu nationalism there), the two governments have refused to moderate their claims.

The dispute cooled for a time after Islamabad's decisive defeat in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war (touched off not by Kashmir but by the Pakistani civil war) and the subsequent emergence of Indian superiority in conventional arms. Between 1971 and 1989, Pakistani leaders paid only lip service to the Kashmir issue. Indian leaders assumed that the quarrel had been settled, *de facto* if not *de jure*. But these assumptions were shattered in 1989, when a mostly indigenous, ethnoreligious insurgency erupted in the Indian-controlled Kashmir Valley. The growing political awareness and sophistication of the Kashmiri populace, combined with improved educational opportunities and access to mass media, had produced a generation of young Kashmiris unwilling to accept the widespread Indian chicanery that had marked most elections in the state. (The National Conference, the dominant political party

in Indian-controlled Kashmir, had long intimidated political opponents, stuffed ballot boxes, and coerced voters—all with the tacit approval of the Indian government.) Suddenly presented with an opportunity to undermine India's position and to avenge the humiliation of 1971, the Pakistani government began aiding the rebels by giving them weapons, training, and sanctuary.

Pakistani aid transformed the uprising, as Islamabad's largess lured Islamist terrorist organizations, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad, who replaced the local insurgents. These groups in turn attracted fighters drawn less by the cause of political self-determination for the Kashmiri Muslims than by bloodthirstiness, religious fervor, and greed. During the 1990s, the insurgency in Kashmir became a well-organized, ideologically charged extortion racket and, in the process, lost the support of much of the local populace. The insurgents lost popular support because of their willingness to harass, and sometimes even terrorize, the Kashmiris regardless of their religious affiliation. Meanwhile, Indian security forces became more adept at counter-insurgency operations and managed to contain, although not fully suppress, the rebels. Once elements of political normalcy had been restored, India further undermined the insurgents' popular appeal by holding two elections in the state, in 1996 and 2002, which international observers and journalists judged to have been largely free and fair.

Three recent crises have brought renewed international attention to the dispute. First, in 1998, both India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons. Although observers had long suspected that both countries had active nuclear weapons programs, the tests nonetheless shocked the world. Then, in 1999, Pakistan provoked an undeclared war with India in an effort to refocus international attention on Kashmir. Calculating that Islamabad's demonstrated nuclear capability had effectively neutralized India's marginal superiority in conventional arms, the Pakistani leadership sent troops disguised as local tribesmen across the de facto border in Kashmir (known as the Line of Control) to occupy three remote but strategically important positions. To Islamabad's surprise, Indian forces mounted a vigorous counterattack. The United States

and the international community condemned the Pakistani aggression and openly supported India. After a personal intervention by President Bill Clinton, the Pakistanis withdrew their troops. Despite its defeat, Islamabad was proved right in one respect: the nuclearization of the subcontinent had inhibited New Delhi from either launching a full-scale war or escalating the conflict horizontally (for example, by attacking across the international border in Punjab or Rajasthan).

The third recent crisis revealed the power of Pakistani-backed terrorist groups. On December 13, 2001, heavily armed members of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad attacked the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi while members of both houses of the legislature were inside. To convey its growing frustration and demonstrate its resolve, India embarked on a massive exercise of coercive diplomacy. Its effort included a dramatic mobilization of troops and armor along the Indo-Pakistani border that brought the two sides perilously close to the brink of war in the late spring of 2002. It took international pressure, including an official U.S. declaration that Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad were terrorist groups and Pakistan's outlawing of both groups (albeit only on paper), to reduce tensions.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT?

AFTER THE attacks on India's Parliament, India and Pakistan resumed talks. The discussions have produced a few tangible accomplishments, including a cease-fire along the Line of Control, the establishment of a new bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad (the capitals of Indian-controlled Kashmir and Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, respectively), and permission for members of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, or APHC (a loose agglomeration of Kashmiri political parties opposed to Indian rule), to travel to Pakistan. Despite such measures and a series of high-profile meetings, however, there has been little progress on the core territorial issue. Notwithstanding its initial hints of flexibility and some cosmetic efforts at improving bilateral relations, the Pakistani government under General Pervez Musharraf has



CORBIS

On the road again: guarding the new cross-border bus service, Amritsar, India, January 27, 2006

retreated to well-worn boilerplate positions. Most important, Pakistan has refused to stop supporting the insurgents. India has also been dragging its feet, although the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has expressed willingness to begin direct discussions with the APHC about questions of political representation and autonomy.

Although rates of infiltration from Pakistani-controlled Kashmir into Indian-controlled Kashmir have apparently declined in the past two years—and the level of violence in the state has indisputably fallen—the insurgency has yet to be snuffed out. Indian security forces regularly apprehend and kill would-be infiltrators. Despite the existence since 2002 of a government in Indian-controlled Kashmir that was elected fairly, India still stations large numbers of troops there (about 250,000 regular soldiers and over 100,000 irregulars in paramilitary units) to maintain security and public order. And

although the situation is a far cry from the mayhem of the early 1990s, conditions are hardly tranquil. Occasional demonstrations against Indian rule, bomb attacks, and firefights between the security forces and insurgent groups continue. Furthermore, large segments of the population, especially in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley, remain profoundly alienated from Indian rule. At the same time, they are deeply skeptical of Pakistan's intentions and thoroughly disgusted with the Pakistani-backed insurgent groups. Left to themselves, significant numbers would probably opt for some form of self-rule, if not outright independence.

Meanwhile, Musharraf is under pressure from radical Islamist clergy and their allies in Parliament and the military to show progress in Kashmir. Accordingly, the Pakistani government continues to support the insurgents, although more subtly than before. But what the Musharraf regime and its more intransigent Islamist allies fail to recognize is that Indian patience with Pakistani-sponsored violence in Kashmir and elsewhere in India is nearly at an end. Although largely ignored by the U.S. media, bombings during the festival for the Hindu holiday of Diwali in New Delhi last November, in which Pakistani-based groups were implicated, almost precipitated another major crisis, which was averted only by the Indian leadership's restraint. But it is far from clear whether such forbearance could survive another attack. Furthermore, in contrast to the 2001–2 crisis, when the Indian military lacked viable plans for responding to a Pakistani-based terrorist attack, the Indian army is now well prepared to undertake swift and decisive action by retaliating against targets in Pakistan at times and places of its own choosing. Unfortunately, the Pakistani leadership appears to be oblivious to India's growing frustration. Consequently, although another Indo-Pakistani war is not likely, it remains possible.

THE ART OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

NEITHER THE dispute nor the insurgency has had a significant effect on India's rise to international prominence. In the 1960s, commentators openly discussed the possibility that India would

collapse because of unbridled population growth, sluggish economic expansion, nascent communist movements, and cleavages along ethnic, religious, and caste lines. Nonetheless, the Indian state has proved remarkably resilient, and apart from a brief suspension of political liberties in the late 1970s, it has managed to handle crises without abandoning its commitment to democratic practices.

Today, India is justifiably self-confident. Although some challenges left over from the 1960s still haunt the country, such as Maoist guerrillas in eastern and central India, religious extremism, and rural poverty, India has achieved impressive economic growth rates since the 1980s, has abandoned its antiquated policies of nonalignment and Third World solidarity, and has dramatically improved relations with the United States. Notably, most of this progress has taken place even as the insurgency in Kashmir has continued and even as violence elsewhere, especially in India's long-troubled northeastern region, has flared from time to time. Consequently, there is little reason to believe that India cannot continue to pursue its new foreign policy, maintain its domestic stability, and promote economic growth, even if it cannot resolve the conflict over Kashmir.

Saying that the dispute over Kashmir will not block India's progress, however, does not mean that the issue is immaterial. A continued insurgency in Kashmir and poor relations with Pakistan will distract New Delhi, thereby imposing significant political opportunity costs. And continued political tensions in Kashmir will tempt Islamabad to foment further discord. As a result, the dispute will remain a potential flashpoint for yet another Indo-Pakistani conflict, in which Washington would once again have to try to stop tensions from escalating. The possibility of such a crisis might also deter investors, although it is easy to exaggerate that risk: investors have not shied away from China despite domestic instability there, its recurrent tensions with Japan and occasional violent anti-Japanese protests, and even several crises in the Taiwan Strait. Investment in India should also be able to withstand periodic political storms.

It is easy to argue that it is in India's interest to bring the insurgency in Kashmir to a close and to settle its dispute with Pakistan as

quickly as possible. However, sketching out a set of viable options is an extraordinarily difficult task. Scholars and policymakers alike have proposed no end of solutions, ranging from regional plebiscites to the creation of an autonomous region to outright independence for Kashmir. The vast majority of these proposals, however, have been dashed on the shoals of political feasibility.

Any accord would have to balance the competing demands of justice and power. Ideally, all Kashmiris, be they Muslims (both Sunni and Shiite), Hindus, or Buddhists, should be able to exercise their right of self-determination. But there is no practicable method for bringing about such an outcome. Even a plebiscite on the region's final status would fail to address the needs of the region's minority groups. Few Kashmiri Hindus, Buddhists, or Shiite Muslims would readily join a Sunni-dominated independent Kashmir, even if its government professed a commitment to protecting minority rights. The tragic experience of minorities in Pakistan—and the Sunni-Shiite violence in Iraq—would rightly give them, and the rest of the world, pause.

The best result for Kashmir's minorities would be Kashmir's continued existence as part of India's multiethnic, multireligious, secular state. But such a solution would fall short of Pakistan's goal: the separation of Kashmir from India and its complete integration into Pakistan. Failing that, Islamabad would prefer to see the establishment of an independent, Muslim-dominated Kashmir sympathetic to Pakistan. But both normative and structural forces militate against that outcome. Pakistan, the most vocal advocate of Kashmiri rights, has an abysmal record on minority rights and democratic rule: Bangladesh seceded from Pakistan because of Islamabad's gross maltreatment of its Bengali population. (Ironically, it is the unrepresentative, and often outright dictatorial, regimes of Pakistan that have been the foremost champions of the political rights of Muslims in Indian-controlled Kashmir.) Moreover, given the utter lack of democratic institutions or practices in the Pakistani-controlled part of Kashmir since 1947, it is far from clear how a consolidated, independent Kashmir could function politically. In addition, the Indian government simply will not make any meaningful territorial concessions. Singh, arguably the

Will Kashmir Stop India's Rise?

most enlightened Indian leader in decades, has made it clear that he will not countenance any territorial adjustments in Kashmir. India faces many secessionist movements and fears the demonstration effect an independent Kashmir could have. (China quietly opposes independence for Kashmir for the same reason.) Any negotiations must accordingly begin with the presumption that there will be no territorial changes.

For an accord to be viable, it would need to address the genuine grievances of the Kashmiri Muslims in Indian-controlled Kashmir without granting them territorial sovereignty. It would also need to guarantee the rights of all ethnic and religious minorities in the state. Finally, it would have to move toward making the Line of Control a permanent international border while allowing contact between communities across the divide. Without some form of subtle but firm outside intervention, such a settlement is most unlikely.

THE BEGINNING OF A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP?

PAKISTAN HAS frequently relied on the assistance of external powers, most notably the United States and China, to bolster its position on the dispute over Kashmir. Despite its sometimes deft and always persistent efforts, it is no closer to dislodging India from Kashmir than it was in 1948. Today, China is neither willing nor able to offer anything more than rhetorical support to Pakistan, and so the United States should act now to dispel whatever illusions Pakistan may have about its position.

Washington should unequivocally convey to Islamabad that, as Clinton said in 1999, "borders cannot be redrawn in blood." Washington should also inform Islamabad that its Janus-faced policy in the war on terrorism is intolerable: Pakistan cannot continue its policy of limited cooperation with the United States in fighting al Qaeda while supporting terrorists in Kashmir. The principal terrorist organizations operating in Kashmir neither command loyalty in the Kashmir Valley nor stand for democracy. Without an end to terrorist violence there, no leadership in New Delhi will be in a position to make significant concessions. Instead,

Indian negotiators will take only incremental steps designed to placate domestic public opinion, which in turn will spur the more radical elements within Pakistan's political and military establishment to continue to sow discord in the region.

Peace in Kashmir will require a new U.S. policy toward Pakistan. The United States has repeatedly aided stable but authoritarian governments in Pakistan in the name of expediency. This policy was first adopted by the Eisenhower administration, which supported the seemingly anticommunist dictator General Muhammad Ayub Khan, and it was resurrected by the Reagan administration after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Its latest incarnation is the Bush administration's championing of the Musharraf regime. The roots of authoritarianism in Pakistan run deep, but it is also the case that U.S. assistance to autocratic governments has undermined the country's democratic institutions and enabled the military to emerge as *primus inter pares* within the Pakistani state. As a result, even when civilian regimes have taken power in Islamabad, the military has exercised an effective veto over any moves toward relaxing tensions with India. If the United States continues its uncritical support of Musharraf's military regime (or similarly supports its probable successors), it will foreclose the possibility of any meaningful rapprochement between Pakistan and India. The time has come for the United States to uphold the democratic principles that it espouses. Equivocation will simply prolong authoritarian rule in Pakistan.

The United States will not make much headway with India on other issues unless it changes its Kashmir policy. Both Democratic and Republican administrations have in recent years recognized India's potential role as a strategic partner of the United States. Yet memories of the United States' willingness to overlook Pakistan's misdeeds in Kashmir weigh heavily on the minds of Indian policymakers and cast doubts on U.S. professions of friendship. Few issues in U.S.-Indian relations are laden with so much emotional baggage. To forge a robust and durable partnership with India, the United States will have to stop ignoring Pakistan's efforts to wrest Kashmir from India.

ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

THE ECONOMIC, military, and political disparities between India and Pakistan are increasingly stark. Different estimates place the size of India's middle class at 100 million to 300 million people, and despite a dramatic rise in oil prices in 2005–6 (India is dependent on external sources of oil), India registered its highest ever GDP growth rate in the final quarter of 2005, reaching a projected annual rate of 8.1 percent. Pakistan's economy, although buoyed by substantial expatriate remittances and U.S. aid, is projected to grow 6 percent next year. India's military is steadily modernizing, while Pakistan's military, even in its attempts to acquire new aircraft, faces significant financial constraints. And despite their flaws, India's robust democratic institutions stand in marked contrast to the institutions of Pakistan's military dictatorship, even with its civilian façade.

For these reasons, the future favors India, whether or not it reaches a settlement with Pakistan over Kashmir. The country's growing prosperity will enable it to more easily bear the costs of maintaining a substantial military presence in the region even while also improving its military's training and equipment. Furthermore, as India's counterinsurgency tactics have become more effective, its human rights record has improved, and its security forces, unlike Pakistan's, are not routinely censured by international bodies—a trend that will make it easier for India to win over the Kashmiri populace.

Pakistani policymakers—most notably the key members of Pakistan's military establishment—can keep pursuing what they refer to as a “war of a thousand cuts” against India. But their strategy has failed. India's economic, military, and political rise makes it less and less likely that the Pakistani-nursed insurgency in Kashmir will sap either India's resolve or its resources. More to the point, since the end of the Cold War, much of the world has lost interest in Pakistan's *idée fixe* about Kashmir. As India's markets beckon, its trade expands, and its military might grows, the world will care even less. Worse, from Islamabad's point of view, Pakistan's future looks even grimmer than does its present.

Islamist radicals continually threaten to rend the country's already frayed social fabric, and the long-term unity of the state cannot be assured: separatists in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, on the Iranian border, are now on record as saying that they hope to create a "second Bangladesh." Such internal threats have tied down substantial Pakistani military resources. The dispute over Kashmir may end up being settled not by negotiation but by Pakistan's exhaustion.

The United States and India failed to engage each other during much of the Cold War, but today they have set aside many past differences and have embarked on a path toward a viable and multi-faceted relationship. It would be unfortunate if the subcontinent's colonial past were now to hinder the development of a mutually beneficial bond. 🌐