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Discussion Paper on Kashmir

Kashmir: A concise background

Kashmir is a land-locked region in South Asia found between the borders of India, Pakistan, and China. The region is enveloped by the Himalayas, with the Indus River and its tributaries flowing across its land. It intersects South Asia (India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan) and East Asia (China)—which gives it great geopolitical importance. Due to its strategic geography and resources,¹ Kashmir has been the subject of a decades-long dispute which is testimony to one of the biggest and bloodiest military occupations in the world.²

The post-colonial belligerents: Pakistan and India

After the British withdrawal from India and Pakistan in 1947,³ control over Kashmir was contested by India and Pakistan.⁴

In the same year, the region became a battlefield for control: first in 1947–1948, which effectively led to its partition—with India controlling the formerly princely states of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, while the provinces of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit–Baltistan going into the hands of Pakistan.

The war between the two countries erupted once again in 1965, 1971, and 1999, with the brief Kargil War. This intermittent war subjected the region and its native population to perpetual unrest and low-intensity conflict for nearly 80 years.⁵

When India launched airstrikes in Pakistani-controlled territory in 2019, Pakistan retaliated, escalating the threat of another full-blown war.⁶ Pakistan released a captured Indian pilot later on which pacified the situation.

[1] Pranav Asoori, *A Look into the Conflict Between India and Pakistan over Kashmir* (2020).

[2] Pankaj Mishra, *Kashmir: A Case for Freedom* (2011).

[3] Collectively referred to as the “British India” under the British Crown’s colonization.

[4] Azra Sayeed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[5] Junaid Mohammed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[6] *Ibid.*

As of 2020, around 750,000 Indian soldiers are stationed in Ladakh.⁷ Pakistan on the other hand has around 100,000–200,000 forces in the two areas that it controls. Constant skirmishes between the 2 forces along the borders make Kashmir the most militarized region in the world.⁸

A not-so-new contender: China

China and India have had their own history of border disputes. Most of these are in Arunachal Pradesh and in Aksai Chin, the Chinese-governed part of Kashmir bordering Ladakh.⁹ Since 1962 Indian and Chinese troops have had skirmishes and standoffs on the border.

In August 2019, the Indian government led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) passed a resolution subverting the autonomy of Kashmir and in effect threatening areas governed by China in Aksai Chin.¹⁰ Months after, the Sino-India border dispute reignited as both forces clashed in Galwan Valley.¹¹

The face-off between India and China signaled the entry of the latter as a third player in the Kashmir conflict. This situation has made the region even more volatile and has subjected its population to more violence.¹²

There are many views explaining the entry of China into the battlespace concerning Kashmir. But against the backdrop of the US Pivot to Asia Strategy and its "improving relations" with India, China's position, at the very least, can be assumed to be defensive.

US involvement

In many overseas conflicts, the US has involved itself sometimes as the self-appointed global "peacekeeper" or the "torchbearer of democracy" (e.g. during the last phases of the Vietnamese liberation war) or as the instigator and agent provocateur of the conflict itself in the guise of supporting "democratic" regime changes (as in Indonesia and Chile, among others). In South Asia, it seeks "to prevent conflict between India and Pakistan from escalating."¹³

Although it maintains a diplomatic position¹⁴ towards both countries, the US has helped Pakistan increase its military capabilities since 1948.¹⁵ Initially, it aimed to ensure that the country served as a foothold in the periphery of the then-Soviet Union. By 1979, however, the US aid to Pakistan substantially increased when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan.¹⁶

Although India is more aligned with Russia¹⁷ even after the latter's dissolution of its social-imperialist state, it has been developing its military relationship with the US as well.¹⁸ Its Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) membership is an obvious and clear indication.¹⁹

[7] Ibid.

[8] Stand With Kashmir, *Militarization, Surveillance, and Silencing: The 75th Year of Indian Occupation in Kashmir* (2023).

[9] Alyssa Ayres, *The China-India Border Dispute: What to Know* (2020).

[10] Fayaz Bukhari, Devjyot Ghoshal, *Asif Shahzad, China, Pakistan slam India's move to change Kashmir's special status* (2019).

[11] Junaid Mohammad, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Congressional Research Service, *Congressional Research Service, Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments, and US Policy* (2020).

[14] Ibid.

[15] Sayeed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[16] Alexander Cooper, *The Afghan-Soviet War: The US and its Covert Cold War* (2012).

[17] Santosh Mehrotra, *India and the Soviet Union: Trade and Technology Transfer* (1990).

[18] David Vergun, *US, India Rapidly Expand Their Military Cooperation* (2023).

[19] Junaid Mohammed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

In the context of these countries' fight over Kashmir, the US through its military maneuvers in the Indo-Pacific has been negating its own position of diplomatic conciliation. Its military support to both countries serves as an impetus to an intensified conflict, not for the pursuit of peace. Thus, it disregards the lives and welfare of Kashmiris and their right to self-determination.²⁰

Nuclear arms race: South Asia edition

Drawing lessons from the end of World War II and impelled by the pressure of the Cold War's arms race, many countries pursued nuclearization in energy and weaponry, despite the global condemnation and resistance to nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, and war in general.

Pakistan and India's nuclear programs date from the 1950s to the 1960s. In 1974, India detonated its first nuclear warhead called Smiling Buddha²¹. Pakistan followed suit and held two nuclear tests in 1998.²² Before these tests, the two countries aggressively increased their military expenditures.²³

Over the years, the two contending powers have built their nuclear arsenal. India currently possesses 160 warheads²⁴ and Pakistan has 165.²⁵ Kashmir is vulnerable to a potential nuclear crisis and total annihilation for it is the main reason behind the conflict.²⁶

At the same time, both countries are forced to ease up and avoid the use of nuclear weapons realizing the possible extent of damage that they may cause. In 2004, India implemented its low-intensity conflict called Cold Start.²⁷ with the aim of limiting the front in the borders and having its "strike forces" ready in case of Pakistan's hostilities.

Kashmiri self-determination movement

The history of the Kashmiri self-determination movement can be traced back to the 1960s when the Kashmiri collective consciousness or *Kashmiriyat* emerged.²⁸ The Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Front (JKNLF) was the flag-bearer of this struggle.

It recognized that historically, Kashmir is home to Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, and other traditions, and hence demanded an independent democratic state.

A decade later, founding members of the JKNLF formed the Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) which, aside from involving the Kashmiri diaspora, aimed to bring the issue of Kashmir to the global level.²⁹

With the renewal of the Kashmiri self-determination movement in the 1990s, aggression in the region intensified.³⁰ The parallel rise of Hindu nationalism with the BJP's ascent to power plays a significant role in this matter.³¹ The Indian government's degeneration from a democracy to a

[20] Azra Sayeed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[21] http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/timeline/timeline_page.php?year=1974

[22] Ahmed Samina, *Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Program: Turning Points and Nuclear Choices*, (1999).

[23] Toby Dalton & Jaclyn Tandler, *Understanding the Arms "Race" in South Asia* (2012).

[24] Hans M. Kristensen & Matt Korda, *Nuclear Notebook: How many nuclear weapons does India have in 2022?*

[25] H. Kristensen & M. Korda, *Nuclear Notebook: How many nuclear weapons does Pakistan have in 2021?*

[26] Junaid Mohammad, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Maryam Raashed, *Future of Kashmir's Self Determination Movement* (2021).

[29] Ibid

[30] Junaid Mohammed, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[31] Ibid.

clerico-fascist totalitarian state incited hate and war-mongering against the Kashmiris and Islamic populations³²

Despite successive UN resolutions ordering that a free and democratic plebiscite be held in Kashmir, the two countries continue to fan the flames of conflict. As of 2023, it is estimated that over 100,000 Kashmiris were killed by the occupying Indian forces.³³ India and Pakistan, however, equally violate civil and political rights in the respective Kashmiri areas that they currently control.³⁴

Moving forward

The settler colonial governments of India and Pakistan, with the help of global superpowers, turned Kashmir into a warzone, complicating the situation in their territory. As people with their own history and culture, the Kashmiris' fight for self-determination and freedom is righteous and just.

As the most militarized region in the world, a global movement to support Kashmir is needed—in calling for its independence and exacting accountability for the violations of Indian and Pakistani governments alike.

With the risk of a nuclear war involving India, Pakistan, and now China, governments and the people of the world should press for:

- The end of all hostilities between India, Pakistan, and China in the respective Kashmiri territories they occupy
- Halt the nuclear warmongering of involved countries
- The US to keep its hands off the conflict in any form (e.g. military support or alliance)
- Hold the Indian and Pakistani governments accountable for their historical violations against the Kashmiri population
- The democratic and free plebiscite for Kashmir's dominion

Like in Palestine, West Papua, and anywhere else in the world where people are fighting for freedom and independence, everyone has a role in advancing the struggle for just and lasting peace.

[32] Sharanya Nayak, *Impacts of US Nuclear Posture in South Asia* (2020).

[33] Stand With Kashmir, *Militarization, Surveillance, and Silencing: The 75th Year of Indian Occupation in Kashmir* (2023).

[34] UNOHCHR, *Update of the Situation of Human Rights in Indian-Administered Kashmir and Pakistan-Administered Kashmir from May 2018 to April 2019*.



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