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## IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN GLOBALLY TO STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF COMPOSITE DIALOGUE (PART II) RETHINKING ON KASHMIR

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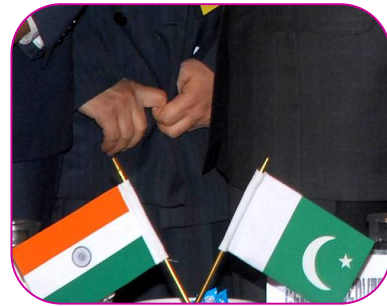
### ABSTRACT

*Later on developments were questions framed in the Interview.*

**KEY WORDS :** Kargil, soft border, Line of control, resolution, conflict .

### INTRODUCTION

Both India and Pakistan were formed out of the statutes of Britishers and that such statutes comprised such statutes comprised the constitutional law governing both India and Pakistan. The ruler acceded to India unconditionally to India as Pakistan itself was creation of the same constitutional law. It is evidence to prove that at time of accession Jawaharlal Nehru was persuaded by Mount batten disclosed in an interview that at time of accession of J&K he told PM Nehru he would sign the instrument of accession if only New delhi agreed to hold a plebiscite to determine the wishes of the people. To stop the infighting in Kashmir Mount batten directed India to United Nations Security Council and thus helplessly watch the pakistani army invading instead of vacating the occupied territory and make UNSC look the other way and made India respect the ceasefire line.



### METHODOLOGY

The interviews were email responses and coded reveal key themes in standard manner of qualitative analysis.(Neuman,2003,p442).Though email correspondence the researchers clarified and stressed that all personal information of interviewees would not be released except from the interviews would be quoted under pseudonym and all recorded materials would only be used for academic research.

### FINDINGS

Q: Why do you think that militants entered the fray and hijacked the movement? Did India botch it all up?

A: The roots of the popular uprising in 1989 lay in New Delhi's unconscionable manipulation of Kashmiri politics. A political issue was treated as a mere law-and-order problem, to be dealt with using an iron fist. Delhi's favourite despot, Governor Jagmohan, sought to crush the secular Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front and ordered the imprisonment and torture of its leader, Maqbool Bhat.

Q: Was Pakistan anyway responsible for the violence and militancy?

A: Pakistan has always sought to translate India's losses into its gains. The Afghan war was winding down, the Soviets were withdrawing, and the executives of Jihad International needed new business. And then, as if to oblige them and Islamabad, Delhi handed over a choice plum. It had by now wholly alienated the Kashmiris through brutal repression, who were now desperate for help. The fighters were raring to go. Thirteen years later we see how they, and the Indians, have brought disaster all around.

Q: Is there a way to stop the spiralling violence?

A: Pakistan must drop its obsessive insistence on Kashmir-first; it has to be changed into Pakistan-first. Pakistan has staked everything on Kashmir and achieved nothing. In 2003 the liberation of Kashmir is further off than it was in 1988, or even 1948. The world has no tolerance for Islamic militancy after 9/11. We must not try to change the status-quo militarily, nor think that nuclear weapons give it a shield for Kargil-type adventures. The bleed-India-through-jihad policy has crash-landed. India, on the other hand, must realize that its moral isolation from the Kashmiri people is total and irreversible. It must negotiate with the Kashmiris, and Pakistan. There are many non-maximalist solutions to be explored and compromises to be made by all sides; the hard-line leads straight into hell.

Q: What sort of solutions?

A: There are over 30 different solutions that have been informally talked about. One, that makes sense to me as practicable, 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 agreed upon by all three parties – Kashmiris, Pakistanis, and Indians.

Q: Would it be meaningful for Pakistan and India to engage in bilateral talks?

A: It would be better to have multi-lateral negotiations with Pakistanis, Indians, and Kashmiris on the one hand and the UN or US on the other. The role of the UN or US would be that of a facilitator. However, even bilateral talks could represent a step forward. But it all depends upon whether Pakistan and India are willing to break with their rigid stances.

Q: Do you see any change in Pakistan's stance on Kashmir?

A: No, I see Pakistan holding the same basic position that we have maintained since 1988. We have thought that covert war could be waged against India by jihadists based in Pakistan and, at the same time, this could be denied. This is simply not working and the world does not believe our denials anymore. Kargil destroyed Pakistan's credibility. Our army has to be persuaded that staying the course is a prescription for disaster. Its institutional interest must give way to Pakistan's national interest. Covert war is hurting us more than India, which is a far larger country. We need to compromise – not on principles, but on tactics.

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Kashmir does not have any military solution – the last decade of unremitting conflict proves this fact. Pakistan lacks the muscle to wrest Kashmir from illegitimate Indian rule, and India cannot win decisively over Pakistan in the difficult, mountainous terrains. This remains as true today as in 1989 when New Delhi's unconscionable manipulation of Kashmiri politics, and its monumental administrative incompetence, 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. Thus the bleed-India-through-jihad policy, to be simultaneously accompanied by denials of involvement, was born. This was a supposedly low-cost option that Pakistan's military establishment imagined would lead to eventual victory, a means to change and otherwise unchangeable status-quo.

Post-Iraq - and 70,000 Kashmiri, Pakistani, and Indian lives later - it is time to ask whether Pakistan is gaining or losing by single-mindedly pursuing this path. Has covert war brought Kashmir any closer to liberation? Without honest introspection, a wise future course cannot be charted for our nation. Pakistan must now decide whether it can afford the next decade to look like the previous one. With Prime Minister Vajpayee's forthcoming visit, which he dramatically describes as the "third and last" peace effort of his

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lifetime, it is essential to see how yet another failure can be averted. Rethinking Kashmir is now essential for both sides.

Pakistan's rationale for covert war in Kashmir was two-fold. The first objective was to bleed India into a state of abject weakness after which it would presumably quit Kashmir. But this goal was never met. Indian forces, both regular and paramilitary, did sustain high losses in Kashmir and the cost of maintaining large contingents remains considerable. But no evidence suggests any real weakening of Indian resolve or strength. On the contrary, as particularly evidenced during the Kargil war, an unprecedented show of national unity emerged in India. The rise of virulent Hindutva forces can be traced directly to anti-Pakistan feelings and the Kashmir situation.

More significantly, contrary to 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 Musharaf'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 sought 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 Western 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.

These damning facts call for a rethink. One wonders if Pakistan has any coherent game plan for Kashmir with any kind of time-frame. There is little evidence of this. Resistance to change has many sources - a possible backlash from the religious parties and extreme elements within the military, a large standing army that needs an enemy, and sheer intellectual laziness. Inertia, default, and adhocism 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, which in turn requires recognition that a military solution is impossible. If so, principles and pragmatism can then march together, and the two countries can abandon positions fixed half a century ago. The your-loss-is-my-gain mentality must be exchanged for one that values economic prosperity and social stability. On our side, the slogan “Pakistan First” recently offered 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. Indeed, this is exactly what reason, logic, strategic sense, and new geo-political realities require from Pakistan.

If Pakistan should offer a strategic pause then India must respond positively. But what reasons could motivate India, and what forms could the response take? 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 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. The road to peace is open, but for willing travellers only.

**AN: Will there be some sort agreement on Kashmir in the next couple of years? What form could the agreement take?**

PH: No one has a crystal ball that allows seeing that far. But some indications do point towards fairly rapid movement. Pakistani generals may still huff and puff about liberating Kashmir but, in fact, they have no stomach for fighting another war and are too enmeshed with increasing their personal wealth and power. Nevertheless, I quite agree with general Musharraf that time is running out for Pakistan. Rather than perform another Afghanistan-style U-turn, it should seek practicable ways of settling Kashmir before a solution is forced upon it. Hence the present could be a preparatory stage in which inflamed nerves are soothed and the high-pitched decades-old rhetoric is toned down. I am of the opinion that the Pakistani side of Kashmir and the Northern Areas should be formally absorbed into Pakistan. Negotiations should then be conducted with India on an LOC-plus solution that allows for some territorial adjustments and soft borders, and possibly a 10-mile deep demilitarized zone. While the division of Kashmir is unfortunate, it is better to accept this reality rather than live with endless suffering that has consumed nearly 90,000 lives since 1987.

**AN: Agreed that Mush's sincerity is doubted by all. But then is he making all these offers under international pressure or is it because as some suggest he wants to win the Nobel Prize. I have also been told that most people in the establishment – Musharraf's inner circle – agree that something needs to be done and that Pakistan needs to move away from the “bleed India” option. But the question is why? Just because of international pressure. I can't think of any other explanation. Could you suggest one.**

Much of Pakistan's conspiracy-obsessed intelligentsia appears eager to believe that General Musharraf's initiatives – such as giving up on plebiscite, living with self-governance and de-militarization, etc

– are merely consequences of orders from George W. Bush. This is nonsense. It disallows an appreciation of some critically important, but unpleasant, facts about Pakistan's failed Kashmir policy. These considerations, rather than external pressure, have influenced the General.

First, there has been an alarming decline in international support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir. Even at the level of passing resolutions, Muslim countries and the OIC have been lukewarm. More importantly, their trade with India is many times greater than with Pakistan. Today Indian workers, particularly skilled ones, are still welcome in the Middle East while Pakistanis are finding it harder and harder. It goes without saying that Europe does not agree with Pakistan's actions in Kashmir. But more significantly, even Pakistan's immediate neighbours – Iran and China – are extremely wary of liberating Kashmir through jihad. As if to send a signal, both countries have had joint military exercises with India during the current year. Afghanistan, which Pakistani generals long regarded as no more than their backyard, now has hostile relations with Pakistan. The Taliban, even though covertly supported by the ISI against Afghanistan, are nevertheless engaged in low-level combat against Musharraf's government.

While acknowledging that India is winning the propaganda war, Pakistani hardliners continue to insist that it is merely the failure of Pakistan's diplomatic missions. This is nonsense – many Pakistani diplomats and embassy officials have tried valiantly but they could not make up for the failure of a short-sighted and indefensible surreptitious "bleed-India" policy formulated by the military establishment around 1990. One consequence was that the horrific crimes committed by India's occupation forces in Kashmir, amply documented by various human rights groups, were eclipsed by widely publicized crimes committed by the mujahideen clandestinely dispatched by Pakistan to "liberate" Kashmir. The massacres of Hindus, targeting of civilians accused of collaborating with India, killings of Kashmiri political leaders, destruction of cinema houses and liquor shops, forcing of women into the veil, and flaring up of sectarian disputes, severely undermined the legitimacy of the Kashmiri freedom movement and deprived it of its most potent weapon – the moral high ground. In an age of television cameras and instant communication, nobody believed Pakistan's denials of aiding and arming militants. Pakistan's diplomats therefore had an impossible task, especially after 11 September 2001, when jihad became the most notorious word in the political lexicon.

Second, one notes that Mirwaiz Farooq – who is not known for taking bold steps – has called this week (January 2007) for giving up armed struggle against India. Jihad will not liberate Kashmir, he says, but only prolong the agony of Kashmiri Muslims. Why did the Mirwaiz say this now? There can be no doubt that Mirwaiz is closely linked to the Pakistani establishment and he released his statement in Islamabad after due consultation. But the split in the Hurriyat Conference - originally set up with Pakistani help to assist in mediating disputes between different anti-Indian Kashmiri organizations - has sharply reduced Pakistan's influence on the Kashmiri freedom movement. Kashmiris have realized that their interests are by no means identical to Pakistan's. In a clever move, after having stubbornly resisted talking to the Kashmiri leaders for years, the Indian establishment – including the hawkish L.K.Advani and N.N.Vohra – have had direct talks with Maulana Abbas Ansari's majority faction of the Hurriyat. Pakistan does not want to be left isolated with the small Geelani faction. Moreover, by fencing off the LOC, acquiring high-tech surveillance and night-vision equipment from Israel, and increasing pressure on Pakistan to limit infiltration, India is likely to further decrease Pakistani influence in Kashmiri domestic politics.

Third – and most important – is the inescapable fact that India, with its hugely abundant scientific and high-tech manpower, is set to emerge as one of the world's largest economies while Pakistan's educational and scientific institutions continue their decline. India has penetrated into America's industrial core, providing it with scientists and engineers, and even drawing work away from US companies into India. Income from just one source – outsourcing and IT services – is expected to swell to an annual export industry of \$57 billion by 2008. This far exceeds Pakistan's GNP, current and projected. A strong US-India strategic partnership has emerged after the conclusion of the US-India nuclear deal. The recently concluded agreement on space and nuclear cooperation is one indication of things to come. It is clear that the US no longer regards Pakistan as being in the same league as India.

**AN: Have the two sides moved closer to defining what they exactly the shared sovereignty will be? Any specific rules or mechanisms or are we basically saying that they both have come around to agreeing that land will not change hands, and that we need to give up our maximalist positions and hence we are left with shared sovereignty. It sounds nice and politically correct.**

PH: If you ask me, there is no choice. India is categorical about land not changing hands or a “second Partition”. This throws out even the “Chenab Formula”. So a softening of the LOC is all that Pakistan can realistically hope for. Self-governance and de-militarization are admittedly a fig-leaf. Unfortunately for Kashmiris, extremist Islamic groups have irreversibly eroded the moral high ground held by Kashmiris. They allowed India, the occupying power in Kashmir, to successfully portray itself as a victim of covert terror. So, in spite of rhetorical denials, Musharraf was forced to put Kashmir on the back burner. He’s got away with it, thereby demolishing a myth that no Pakistani government which compromises on Kashmir can survive.

**AN: Why does India need to move at all?**

PH: The undeniable fact is that India is an occupying power in Kashmir, and that comes with considerable costs. It continues to bleed, albeit less than in previous years. 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 could demonstrate to the world that it, too, seeks a peaceful resolution to the situation. Its efforts to create a secular state and have religious harmony, and to become the third biggest economy in the world by 2050, could all come to naught if there’s yet another war with Pakistan.

Q 4- Do you think China Model is applicable in the case of India and Pakistan? (Do you think that concentrating on trade and business relationship will lead to the resolution of political differences in India-Pakistan case or there are subtle differences between Sino-Indian and India-Pakistan case?)

*Pakistan is a far less secure state than China. There is a feeling that it will become a satellite of India if the doors to trade are opened too wide. Therefore trade is likely to be limited in the future, although hopefully it can grow substantially beyond the present size.*

Q 7- Do you think that right wing elements in both the countries are a factor that it is difficult to adopt China Model in India-Pakistan case?

*With the current government in power, India should make a strong push to establish trade, communications, tourism. The next government may not be so favourably inclined.*

Q 8- Do you think, Pakistani industry is in a position to face the onslaught of Indian economic force? What will be the political implications of free trade between India and Pakistan?

*Sooner or later globalization will force Pakistan to become competitive. Enlarging the list of traded items will be good for Pakistani industry and economy.*

Q 9- According to you, what are the impediments in the path of improving business relationship between India and Pakistan? For which country the free trade will be more beneficial?

*Pakistan will be the greater beneficiary. The reluctance comes partly from those businessmen who stand to lose, but mostly from hostile religious right-wingers and people in the army.*

Q 10- What reasonable role the improving business relationship can play between India and Pakistan?

*Economic interdependence may not solve all problems, but it will be a major step forward. More people-to-people contact is essential for better future relations.*

Q 11- Kindly offer few suggestions for India-Pakistan rapprochement?

*Accommodation on Kashmir is crucial. Spending on weaponry must decrease. Exchange of academics, teachers, students would be very good.*

When Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage made his swing through South Asia last week, he sounded cautiously optimistic. He welcomed Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's overture to Pakistan on Kashmir, calling it a "far-reaching act of statesmanship." But he also acknowledged that it would be a "long trip" to resolving conflicts between India and Pakistan over the region.

That just about sums things up. India's current approach to Pakistan is welcome, but it's not going to be easy to undo hostilities dating back to 1947. The current round started in 1989, when New Delhi's unconscionable manipulation of Kashmiri local politics led to a popular uprising of Kashmiris, which Pakistan moved quickly to exploit.

The Afghan war had just ended, which freed up Pakistani fighters, and large numbers of Kashmiri refugees were pouring across the border. Pakistan's military establishment hit upon a bleed-India-through-jihad policy, in which jihadists were enlisted to wage a cross-border guerrilla campaign. Pakistan, of course, denied involvement.

The strategy was imagined as a low-cost option leading to eventual victory, a means to end a military stalemate. But over the years, through all the flare-ups and border confrontations, which have taken 70,000 Kashmiri, Pakistani and Indian lives, it has become clear that the troubles in Kashmir cannot be resolved militarily. Pakistan lacks the muscle to wrest Kashmir from Indian rule, and India cannot win decisively over Pakistan in difficult, mountainous terrain.

And so Vajpayee's overture is welcome. There is indication that General Pervez Musharraf is also looking for a way out of the Kashmir morass. Recently, he met with a diverse group for what turned out to be an intense session focusing largely upon Kashmir policy. That the president was willing to listen to dissenting voices, including mine, was encouraging although real change is still far off.

Pakistan's rationale for its covert war in Kashmir has been two-fold. The first objective of the long-term, low-intensity war was to "bleed" India in hopes that it would eventually cut its losses and quit Kashmir. But although Indian forces sustained high losses in Kashmir, and although its costs in maintaining large contingents have been considerable, India's resolve and strength have not been weakened. 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 was not harmed. Instead, it boomed. Indian foreign exchange reserves currently stand at more than \$70 billion and Indian scientific institutions are now being counted among the world's best. Its high tech companies alone last year brought in \$10 billion--more than Pakistan's total foreign exchange holdings. This figure is expected to double in the next 2-3 years.

By contrast, Pakistan's economic resurgence, such as it is, owes more to General Musharraf's adroit handling of the U.S. after the Sept. 11 attacks than it does to any real economic strength. The country's industry is barely crawling along. Education and scientific research seem moribund, which, in a technology-driven world, is a devastating weakness.

The second Pakistani rationale for the Kashmiri conflict has been to keep Kashmir in the news. The implicit hope has been that a high level of tension between two nuclear-armed states would alarm the international community -- most particularly the United States -- which would then force a recalcitrant India to see reason. To raise international fear levels, Pakistani leaders have deliberately tried at times to cultivate an image of Pakistan as a defiant, nuclear-armed state ready to commit suicide. At other moments, though, they have sought to project an image of being calm, confident and responsible.

Nevertheless, these mixed signals have made the threat of nuclear apocalypse seem sufficiently real to keep a steady stream of foreign leaders coming to Islamabad and Delhi. But Pakistan's assumption that keeping the world focused on Kashmir would work to its advantage turned out to be another miscalculation.

In fact, once the world in general, and the U.S. in particular, fully assessed the situation, the reaction was not at all what Pakistan had in mind. The idea of Jihadists active in a nuclear-armed state set off alarm bells in Washington, where the State Department recently declared the largest mujahideen group fighting Indian rule in Kashmir, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, a terrorist group.

This should send a clear message to Pakistan that continued violence in Kashmir is unlikely to win international sympathy. In the international press, Pakistan is now frequently accused of inciting violence and 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 for Pakistan.

The consequence of waging covert war has been a 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 every time Hindu civilians are massacred in Kashmir, despite the attempts of mujahideen groups to blame the killings on Indian security forces. On the other hand, India, the occupying power in Kashmir, has successfully portrayed itself as a victim of covert terror.

There has been movement on both sides lately, but there is still little to suggest that Pakistan actually has a new game plan. The Pakistani government fears a backlash from the religious parties and extreme elements within the military. Moreover, a large standing army like Pakistan's needs an enemy. Inertia dominates planning and design. As the late Pakistani writer and scholar Eqbal Ahmad passionately argued, although India's leaders bear much responsibility for Kashmir's tragedy, Pakistan's defective Kashmir policy has repeatedly "managed to rescue defeat from the jaws of victory".

So is there hope? Yes, but it will require a spirit of compromise as a prerequisite. The two countries must abandon positions fixed half a century ago. They must abandon their your-loss-is-my-gain mentality in favor of one that embraces economic prosperity and social stability for all sides. The slogan "Pakistan First," recently popularized by President Musharraf and Prime Minister Jamali, could offer an out. Properly interpreted, the words could suggest that Pakistan should provide moral, diplomatic, and political support to Kashmiris struggling against India, but nothing more. Military tensions, after all, drain Pakistan's coffers and damage its international reputation, and are therefore not in keeping with a "Pakistan First" philosophy.

If Pakistan pulls back from the brink, it will be important for India to act quickly and positively. The undeniable fact is that India is an occupying power in Kashmir, and that comes with considerable costs. 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 could demonstrate to the world that it, too, seeks a peaceful resolution to the situation.

In the end, both India and Pakistan will need to explore long-term solutions that go beyond the obvious. One proposal that may make sense envisions two Kashmiri regions, each with its own government and constitution. These two neighboring entities, one associated with Pakistan and the other India, would have soft borders allowing for easy transit of people and goods. Something similar was surely in the minds of the Pakistani and Indian prime ministers in 1999 when, as a consequence of secret negotiations whose details became public only very recently, they privately agreed to the Chenab river, which forms a natural boundary, as the international border. This, or a similar deal, would need to be worked out by all three parties: Kashmiris, Pakistanis, and Indians, but it would be helpful if the United States served 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, a malignant organism growing unchecked. 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 understand how yet another failure can be averted.

By declaring that "we have left aside" the United Nation Security Council resolutions for a solution to Kashmir, General Pervez Musharraf shattered a long-held taboo. While the General had given some confusing hints during his 2001 visit to India and spoken of the need "to move away from stated positions", never before had a Pakistani head of state made an explicit public admission that Pakistan cannot



realistically hope for a plebiscite to end the Kashmir dispute and, therefore, is willing to explore other ways. Subsequent attempts by the Foreign Minister, Mr. Khurshid Kasuri, to dilute Musharaf's remarks have been insufficient to control outrage and accusations of treason from those in the Pakistani military, political, and jihadist establishment who remain convinced that Kashmir can someday be liberated by force. Interestingly Pakistan Television, which slavishly follows rulers around, did not cover the General's speech.

Mr. Kasuri need not apologize for the General, nor go overboard to placate those who insist on the impossible. It is true that plebiscite was indeed the solution mutually agreed upon in 1948 and that India had reneged on a solemn commitment. But the passage of five decades, and drastically changed geo-political circumstances, demand a reappraisal. Today, plebiscite is no longer the obvious way of determining the wishes of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. For example, it clearly excludes a major section of Kashmiris that would opt for independence today but which, in 1948, may not have wanted it. More frightening is the likelihood of a plebiscite igniting communal passions leading to horrific Gujarat-style bloodbaths across the subcontinent. Moreover, at a practical level there is no agency, including the UN, that is capable and willing to implement a task that all nations (except Pakistan) see as impossibly difficult. Therefore to insist on plebiscite is the surest way of guaranteeing that a bloody stand-off continues.

Why the change? Unfortunately, much of Pakistan's conspiracy-obsessed intelligentsia appears eager to believe that the General is merely obeying marching orders received from George W. Bush. But the simplistic world view that everything comes from Washington disallows an appreciation of some critically important, but unpleasant, facts about Pakistan's failed Kashmir policy. One hopes that these considerations, rather than external pressure, have influenced the General.

First, there has been an alarming decline in international support for Pakistan's position on Kashmir. Even at the level of passing resolutions, Muslim countries and the OIC have been lukewarm. More importantly, their trade with India is many times greater than with Pakistan. Today Indian workers, particularly skilled ones, are still welcome in the Middle East while Pakistanis are finding it harder and harder. It goes without saying that Europe does not agree with Pakistan's actions in Kashmir. But more significantly, even Pakistan's immediate neighbours – Iran and China – are extremely wary of liberating Kashmir through jihad. As if to send a signal, both countries have had joint military exercises with India during the current year. Afghanistan, which Pakistani generals long regarded as no more than their backyard, now has hostile relations with Pakistan.

While acknowledging that India is winning the propaganda war, Pakistani hardliners continue to insist that it is merely the failure of Pakistan's diplomatic missions. This is nonsense – many Pakistani diplomats and embassy officials have tried valiantly but they could not make up for the failure of a short-sighted and indefensible surreptitious "bleed-India" policy formulated by the military establishment around 1990. One consequence was that the horrific crimes committed by India's occupation forces in Kashmir, amply documented by various human rights groups, were eclipsed by widely publicized crimes committed by the mujahideen clandestinely dispatched by Pakistan to "liberate" Kashmir. The massacres of Hindus, targeting of civilians accused of collaborating with India, killings of Kashmiri political leaders, destruction of cinema houses and liquor shops, forcing of women into the veil, and flaring up of sectarian disputes, severely undermined the legitimacy of the Kashmiri freedom movement and deprived it of its most potent weapon – the moral high ground. In an age of television cameras and instant communication, nobody believed Pakistan's denials of aiding and arming militants. Pakistan's diplomats therefore had an impossible task, especially after 11 September 2001, when jihad became the most notorious word in the political lexicon.

Second, the recent split in the Hurriyat Conference, originally set up with Pakistani help to mediate disputes between different anti-Indian Kashmiri organizations has sharply reduced Pakistan's influence on the Kashmiri freedom movement. Kashmiris have realized that their interests are by no means identical to Pakistan's. In a clever move, after having stubbornly resisted talking to the Kashmiri leaders for years, the Indian establishment – including the hawkish L.K.Advani and N.N.Vohra – now has had direct talks with Maulana Abbas Ansari's majority faction of the Hurriyat. Pakistan is now left isolated with the small Geelani

faction. Moreover, by fencing off the LOC, acquiring high-tech surveillance and night-vision equipment from Israel, and increasing pressure on Pakistan to limit infiltration, India is likely to further decrease Pakistani influence in Kashmiri domestic politics.

Third – and most important – is the inescapable fact that India, with its hugely abundant scientific and high-tech manpower, is set to emerge as one of the world's largest economies while Pakistan's educational and scientific institutions continue their decline. India has penetrated into America's industrial core, providing it with scientists and engineers, and even drawing work away from US companies into India. Income from just one source – outsourcing and IT services – is expected to swell to an annual export industry of \$57 billion by 2008. This far exceeds Pakistan's GNP, current and projected. The outline of an emerging US-India strategic partnership is beginning to emerge. The recently concluded agreement on space and nuclear cooperation is one indication of things to come. It is clear that the US no longer regards Pakistan as being in the same league as India. Therefore any expectation of equal treatment would be a delusion.

Time is running out for Pakistan. Rather than perform another Afghanistan-style U-turn, it should seek practicable ways of settling Kashmir before a solution is forced upon it. In effect this could mean a preparatory stage in which inflamed nerves are soothed and the high-pitched decades-old rhetoric is toned down. Subsequently, the Pakistani side of Kashmir and the Northern Areas should be formally absorbed into Pakistan. Negotiations should be conducted with India on an LOC-plus solution that allows for some territorial adjustments and soft borders, and possibly a 10-mile deep demilitarized zone. While the division of Kashmir is unfortunate, it is better to accept this reality rather than live with endless suffering that has consumed nearly 90,000 lives since 1987.

By dropping its insistence on plebiscite, Pakistan has now put the ball in the Indian court. If Mr. Vajpayee is the man of peace that he says he is, he must respond to a move that is breathtakingly bold. The move carries additional personal risk for General Musharraf, whose narrow escape from an assassination attempt shows the dangers of the line he has taken. The forthcoming SAARC summit in January 2004, to be held in Islamabad, provides an opportunity that India should seize upon.