**Is anyone listening?**

[**Najm us Saqib**](https://nation.com.pk/Columnist/najm-us-saqib)

February 15, 2021

The fact in issue is not whether Islamabad was aware of India’s ‘nefarious designs’ of revoking the status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2020. For in a fait accompli, the action matters and not the reasons thereof, let alone its forewarning or forecast. Nor is it the silence of the international community on a brazen act of complete subjugation of unanimously declared disputed territory as the silence of friends has ceased to spring any surprises any more. Nor is it the continued restraint exhibited by Islamabad to avoid an all-out war between two nuclear states as ‘war does not determine who is right—only who is left.’

The fact in issue is also not the buzz in Islamabad of taking similar actions with regard to Azad Kashmir or Gilgit Baltistan as leadership in Pakistan is acutely aware that the UNSC resolutions talk of addressing the whole of Kashmir and not just Jammu and Indian Occupied Kashmir (IIOJK). Correspondingly, the news that Prime Minister Modi’s image is regularly taking a global bashing is not in issue either, as his tarnished image would certainly not help solving any issue between Pakistan and India.

[Pakistan accuses India of nuclearizing Indian Ocean](https://nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2021/pakistan-accuses-india-of-nuclearizing-indian-ocean)

Whether Prime Minister Imran Khan’s offer of February 5 for the people of Kashmir to decide on their future once the UN sponsored plebiscite is undertaken—even for independence—is in conformity with any of the clauses of the constitution of Pakistan and is at best, a misleading debate.

The fact in issue is how to bring peace and security in the beleaguered South Asian region when issues like Kashmir and allegations of terrorism keep creating multidimensional tensions between two nuclear states. Add India’s quest of strengthening its foothold in Afghanistan, you will have a recipe for a long drawn South Asian battleground. Include in this scenario the wilful neglect of the West to play its overdue role in helping to create a congenial environment of sorts for peace in the region and you are looking at an avoidable nightmarish military disaster.

Three factors need serious consideration if the stakeholders are aiming at achieving a certain level of peace and security in South Asia. Firstly, both India and Pakistan need to realise that they cannot change the geography of South Asia. They have to live as neighbours. The pre- and post-1947 checkered history of the sub-continent cannot be forgotten and forgiven by a stroke of miracle. The unique trajectory of bilateral relations has hardly seen both countries on the same page even at non-political forums like SAARC. Over the years, India has seen its diplomacy failing in substantiating its allegations against Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistan has seen the ineffectiveness of numerous resolutions passed at various international forums, urging India to address Kashmir and stop violating human rights in the valley.

[Myanmar deploys military tanks amid anti-coup protests](https://nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2021/myanmar-deploys-military-tanks-amid-anti-coup-protests)

Taking belligerent stances against each other and endeavouring to pay the other in the same coin has not worked either. For that matter, let us realise that practically nothing has worked: from leadership level interaction to the long-stalled Foreign Secretaries’ level talks to failure of mediation efforts to Track diplomacy to Breakfast diplomacy to Cricket diplomacy to novel proposals put forth by national and international political jurists over the years to the respective leadership’s rare impulsive initiatives taken to normalise relations. Even the real time wars, alarming standoffs, events of 5 August 2019 and getting equipped with the state-of-the-art arsenal could not bring any change in their respective standpoints on Kashmir.

Addressing the complicated or core issues may not be aimed at straightaway. Let us not bark up the wrong tree. Realise that the region has already seen the burning of a number of bridges. This time, let the diplomats of both sides burn the midnight lamp and come up with concrete but doable options. Under the prevailing circumstances, the mere fact that both sides met to address bilateral issues would not only serve as a confidence building measure between the two states but also convey a message to the international community that sanity had finally started prevailing in South Asia.

[Nigeria’s Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala named new WTO chief](https://nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2021/nigeria-s-ngozi-okonjo-iweala-named-new-wto-chief)

Pakistan and India need to create the desired ‘conducive environment for normalisation of relations and meaningful engagement’ while not putting the onus of doing so on each other. If the desire on both sides is to normalise relations in real terms, the onus can become an easily avoidable hitch—provided New Delhi demonstrates the requisite political will and sincerity of purpose to address issues substantially and meaningfully. The sincerity of purpose alone could address the intricacies of setting up the agenda for talks or the level of interaction or the meeting place. India must take the initiative of moving towards the normalisation of relations.

Secondly, the US must realise that an unattended nuclear South Asia could pose serious challenges to peace and security of unmitigated proportions for the whole world. In addition, the energy rich Middle East and Central Asia would perhaps be the first to face the aftermath of an all-out war between India and Pakistan. The US must not wait for the number of ‘Abhinandans’ or ‘Kulbushan Yadavs’ increasing to act as it might be too late by then. As the neighbour of all countries of the world with the status of the sole superpower, the US must realise and play its due role in preventing a future South Asian military debacle either through its good offices or through the UN. The US must also realise that an Indo-Pak détente may also prove to be a better beginning of addressing the Afghanistan rigmarole. Let this be the first feather in President Joe Biden’s cap in the realm of foreign policy.

[Lavrov accuses EU of breaking ties with Russia](https://nation.com.pk/16-Feb-2021/lavrov-accuses-eu-of-breaking-ties-with-russia)

Lastly, without a détente between Pakistan and India, followed by the normalisation of bilateral relations at least for a peaceful coexistence, South Asia is presently running a mini global catastrophic risk. The solution does not lie in using diplomatic language and expressing ‘grave concerns’ or urging the parties to discuss issues or offering mediation ‘if both parties agree.’ If not for South Asia, the international community, in particular the US, must make an action-orientated policy to save the world from a potential war of unmitigated proportions. Is anyone listening?