

flexibility if the two sides are indeed keen to address this long-standing problem.

President Musharraf's recent initiative, which raised a range of options to resolve the 57-year old dispute, must be seen in this context.

The president was very explicit that he was not making any proposal out only desired a realistic public debate on various options that could be considered to resolve the Kashmir problem. Yet, certain elements in the country have dubbed his initiative a volte-face on Pakistan's policy on Kashmir, since independence.

The main thrust of their criticism is that by floating his new ideas the president has bypassed the UNSC resolutions, which stipulate that the final disposition of the State of Jammu and Kashmir will take place in accordance with the wishes of its people. It seems that these critics have either read too much into what the president said or have deliberately indulged in polemics rather than substance on an issue of great national importance.

For obvious reasons, the only option for Pakistan would be the one that would be acceptable to the Kashmiri people. In other words, Pakistan would be supporting meaningful self-determination for the Kashmiri people in conformity with the spirit of the UNSC resolutions. By taking his bold initiative the president has showed pragmatism and political acumen. By no stretch of the imagination can an upright approach be construed as an abandonment of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination as embodied in the UNSC resolutions.

India's official reaction to President Musharraf's initiative was restrained and focused more on the procedure. The spokesman of the Indian external affairs ministry said that the on-going composite dialogue process between the two countries is the only correct forum to raise any such proposals or suggestions since Jammu and Kashmir is one of the subjects of the agenda.

While making this observation, the Indian spokesman evidently overlooked that President Musharraf did not proffer any proposal to India. He merely

Pakistan and retain the rest of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

suggested from time to time for the resolution of the Kashmir problem. The principal among them are enumerated below, briefly discussing the prospects of their acceptability or otherwise by the concerned parties — Pakistan, India and the Kashmiri people. Such an exercise is necessary to evaluate President Musharraf's seemingly innovative and thought-provoking Kashmir formula and to see the chances of their acceptance by the parties concerned or some other viable solutions have to be found.

It may be emphasized, however, that however creative option one may suggest for the settlement of the Kashmir dispute, it could prove a non-starter if the contending parties have no political will to resolve the conflict and fail to show flexibility and the spirit of accommodation needed.

One option is plebiscite. In 1947 both Pakistan and India agreed that the final accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan or India would be decided by a plebiscite to be held under the auspices of the United Nations. The demand for a plebiscite is, therefore, considered by a large number of people in Pakistan and Kashmir to be the only legal basis for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. India has, however, rejected this option categorically. As such, to place too much reliance on this option seems to be pointless and only a forlorn hope.

ii. Permanency of the LoC: In 1972, under the Shimla agreement the ceasefire line was renamed the Line of Control (LoC). India, which claims the entire State of Jammu and Kashmir to be its integral part has, however, been prepared to convert the LoC, with minor adjustments, into a permanent soft border with Pakistan permitting free movement between the two sides. Pakistan has consistently refused to accept this suggestion as it would bestow legitimacy to the status quo and also tacitly acknowledge the legality of Kashmir's accession to India in 1947.

cally opposed by Pakistan and India, as both of them would lose territory. It would also encourage sub-national tendencies in their respective countries.

China is also opposed to an independent Kashmir as it may give a boost to Tibet's demand for independence.

v. Condominium: Another option establishing a shared sovereignty by Pakistan and India over the whole or part of Kashmir seems to be a creative proposition. However, the proposed condominium may face endless problems and hurdles. Given the historical mistrust between the two countries, it is hard to believe that Pakistan and India would be able to exercise joint control over the disputed territory that would endure for a significant length of time.

vi. Musharraf's formula: On October 25, President General Pervez Musharraf floated the idea to break he impasse on Kashmir. He identified seven geographical, linguistic or religious entities in the disputed territory and proposed that either the settlement of all these regions could be discussed between Pakistan and India or only one of them, evidently meaning thereby the Kashmir valley. It is reassuring that the political analysts in and outside the country have evinced great interest in the president's initiative and a lively debate on the subject is taking place these days in the media.

As regards President Musharraf's specific proposal, mentioned above, it may be said that out of seven regions identified by him, two are already under the control of Pakistan, namely Azad Kashmir and the Northern Areas, and the remaining five are under the Indian control. The division of the state which President Musharraf has in mind is not only a viable option to resolve the Kashmir dispute on permanent basis, but is also in conformity with the very rationale of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947. Incidentally, some Indian opinion makers have also suggested that it may be best for New Delhi to cede the valley to Pakistan and retain the rest of the territory of Jammu and Kashmir with it.

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