**Kashmir: A forgone conclusion?**

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

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Is the recent stop-gap response from New Delhi to the extended hand of peace from Islamabad just an act of expediency? If the talk of a détente is a mere storm in the South Asian tea cup, are the ensuing debates on the future of regional peace and stability worth our time? Are we going back to the drawing board to reach back to square one? Or, as Sun-Tzu observed centuries ago, should we find an opportunity in the midst of chaos?

The ray of hope for a possible engagement between the two nuclear states provided mysteriously by the renewal of the 2003 ceasefire agreement and other bilateral military understandings has practically engulfed the thinking minds of South Asia. To many realists, the genie of some meaningful dialogue and substantial talks is still entangled in the bottle of realpolitik. To some optimists, the reality-stricken India has finally learned the meaning of peaceful coexistence. The authors of conspiracy theories are not only questioning the timing of this apparent breaking of the ice between the two archrivals but are also challenging the modus operandi used in reaching this fresh understanding.

[Socially-distanced Grammy ceremony welcomes winners, sets records](https://nation.com.pk/15-Mar-2021/socially-distanced-grammy-ceremony-welcomes-winners-sets-records)

Nevertheless, those few who have read and understood the history in its true perspective, are fully aware that unless the political will and a military nod on both sides completely resonates with the idea of resolving issues, nothing substantial could be achieved. Here, the people of both countries would be justified in asking a rudimentary question; do we have the requisite political will to address and resolve the core issues and live peacefully as two independent sovereign states? Sadly, at least for the present, the answer is not in the affirmative.

On the other hand, certain recent statements on Kashmir and South Asia, emanating from the US State Department, are not pointing towards any change in the status quo. The mention of Jammu and Kashmir as a ‘union territory’ or ‘India’s Jammu and Kashmir’ was taken in New Delhi as a pat on the back for its actions of August 5, 2019. Islamabad on the other hand was seen protesting against America’s tacit approval of India’s virtual subjugation of an internationally accepted disputed territory. The subsequent announcement stating, “We continue to support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other areas of concern”, was a reference to the ‘unchanged’ US policy on the region as a whole.

[Pakistan records 2,253 new coronavirus cases in 24 hours](https://nation.com.pk/15-Mar-2021/pakistan-records-2-253-new-coronavirus-cases-in-24-hours)

Reading between the lines might reveal certain known but hitherto unclear facts. To begin with, it is established now beyond any reasonable doubt that the US considers the Jammu and Kashmir dispute a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and would wish to completely overlook Pakistan’s principled stand thereon which is anchored in the UN Security Council’s relevant resolutions. Secondly, the US has no desire to mediate between the two rival states on Kashmir or any other areas of their concern. It is a lucid message of ‘count us out’ and ‘sort your issues out yourselves’. Thirdly, that India’s actions of August 5, 2019 were not strong enough reasons to effect any change in Washington’s policy in the region thereby tacitly endorsing the recently emerged legal status of Jammu and Kashmir. Fourthly, the absence of any reference to the alarming human rights’ situation in the valley also verified the fact that human rights could not possibly be violated by a friendly country. Fifthly, the State Department clearly announced that the recent change in the White House, from President Trump to President Biden, had no effect whatsoever on the US policy on South Asia and it remains firmly unchanged. Lastly, to bring a smile to Islamabad’s face, the US made it known to all concerned that after all it did consider Jammu and Kashmir a ‘dispute’ thereby giving Pakistan some space to continue dialoging with India to address ‘all areas’ of concern.

[Ireland suspends Oxford vaccine rollout over clot fears](https://nation.com.pk/15-Mar-2021/ireland-suspends-oxford-vaccine-rollout-over-clot-fears)

How do we move forward after the ceasefire at the Line of Control (LoC) is achieved? Persuading India to discuss Pakistan’s matters of concern seems a far cry. To bring India to the negotiating table without having Jammu and Kashmir as an agenda item and without the participation of Kashmiris would be meaningless. India is not likely to reverse the events of August 5, 2019 either before or during the talks. Nor would it agree to the participation of Kashmiris in the talks. No one in Islamabad is perhaps looking at the situation from India’s point of view. What is there for India to gain from any future talks with Pakistan except for showing to the world its willingness to normalise relations with the latter, if at all it agrees to sit and talk? Why would India reverse the events of August 5, 2019 and receive the wrath of hardliners at home just to appease Pakistan or the people of Jammu and Kashmir?

What is there for Pakistan to offer to India for a meaningful discussion on Jammu and Kashmir? Does Islamabad know that changes in respective principled stands on Jammu and Kashmir will have to be effected from both sides if at all some space for agreement was to be created? How far is Islamabad willing to go without disappointing the Kashmiris and the people of Pakistan? On the other hand, how would Islamabad revise the standard talking points to include the ‘aspirations of the people of Kashmir’ in the face of having no recourse to the status of Jammu and Kashmir that emerged after August 5, 2019?

[Billion-years old Meteorite found in Sahara: suspected protoplanet fragment](https://nation.com.pk/14-Mar-2021/billion-years-old-meteorite-found-in-sahara-reportedly-suspected-to-be-extinct-protoplanet-fragment)

The bilateral talks, as almost always, will not produce any substantial results—if at all there was a negotiating table available to the two arch rivals. Although, it is worth noting that India’s refusal to talk would perhaps only serve the purpose of exposing New Delhi’s façade. Under the circumstances, Islamabad may have to find some other ways and means to address matters of its concern.

In the absence of the requisite political will on both sides of the border or the availability of a negotiating table to discuss Kashmir, the key to normalisation of relations between Pakistan and India may well be found in Afghanistan. In case Pakistan desires to again explore the possibility of the US support on Jammu and Kashmir, the compass needs to turn from the Pak-India negotiating table to the Afghanistan chessboard, peace process and the war gaming room.