**Cutting the Gordian Knot?**

[Zafar Aziz Chaudhry](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/zafar-aziz-chaudhry/)

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In the ancient world, an intricate knot tied by Gordius, the king of Phrygia, was cut by the sword of Alexander the Great after he heard that whoever undid it would become ruler of Asia. In the modern world, the solution to Pakistan-India relations is similar to the ancient story, but there is no Alexander the Great to untie it.

Since the inception of Pakistan, Indo-Pak relations have been severely strained. There is still no hope of their improvement despite the optimistic expectations made at world forums of their prominent diplomats, who have served in each other’s country at various times. The enmity between these two nations appears severe because both are neighbours and were united at one time–culturally, socially and linguistically–the bonds of which still subsist and cannot be eliminated by any length of time. With partition in August 1947, communal riots broke out and a large migration of people took place. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was forcibly joined with India soon after the sub-continent was divided at the end of British rule.

The Jammu and Kashmir regions were the main points of dispute on which both countries claimed ownership. India and Pakistan subsequently went to war over it. Each came to control different parts of the territory with a ceasefire line in between.

Between October 1947 to January 1949, the first Indo-Pakistani war began following an invasion of Kashmir. Kashmir’s prince turned to India for military assistance, as a result of which, a ceasefire was arranged on January 1, 1949, called the Line of Control. In August 1965, the second Indo-Pakistani war was sparked by a series of clashes across the India-Pakistan border. Hostilities broke out in August when Pakistani soldiers allegedly crossed the Line of Control in an attempt to start an insurgency against India (Operation Gibraltar). The war ended in January 1966 when officials from India and Pakistan signed a declaration affirming their commitment to peace.

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The third Indo-Pakistani war took place when Pakistan erupted into civil war, pitting West Pakistan against East Pakistan, which demanded independence. This army operation against East Pakistanis, a part of their people, was a great blunder, which led inimical India in the neighbourhood to intervene and defeat the Pakistani army.

Other deplorable incidents have also occurred in the meantime, for which both India and Pakistan should share the blame. In February 2007, blasts in two coaches of the Samjhauta Express killed 68 people, most of them Pakistani nationals. In November 2008, some terrorists of the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba group(from the Pakistani side) stormed various buildings in Mumbai and killed 164 people using automatic weapons and grenades. Then again in February 2019, 40 Indians were killed in a car bomb attack. In retaliation to these attacks, both countries resorted to air strikes. Pakistan shot down an Indian aircraft and captured a pilot who was later released, and tensions were temporarily relaxed. There may be many other outrages against each other that presently escape my notice, but which further soured their mutual relations. Because of what made matters worse, I, as a conscientious Pakistani, look in retrospect and hang my head in shame. Alas! Had we learnt lessons after the first year, things would not have been as bad as they are right now! I have no more words to dilate on these issues, except to wish that we hold out an olive branch to the opponents in addition to amicably resolving our disputes. Force and violence will carry us nowhere.

Last month, when the matter was debated at the UN, China blocked a proposal by the US and India to blacklist Lashkar-e-Taiba’s Sajid Mir, one of India’s most wanted men. China has been helpful to Pakistan, but are there no lessons for us to learn to save our dwindling reputation internationally?

Disputes over the shared border and the territory of Kashmir have been a recurrent source of conflict between the two countries throughout history. However, the situation has become more difficult now due to new geopolitical alignments; changes in conventional and nuclear military capabilities and disputes on the share of water, which have cast deep mistrust and forestalled any normalization of ties.

Concerning the Kashmir dispute, in August 2019, the Modi regime played a diabolical move to take back the special status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. In a controversial and unexpected move, the Indian government revoked Article 370, which grants Indian-administered Kashmir autonomy. Article 35-A was part of the same Article, which gave some special privileges to the people of the state, and were also withdrawn. Thus, by a cruel and most inhuman legal twist, the Indian government deprived fundamental rights of a segment of its people (Kashmiris), which they inherently possessed from the British days. It is an attempt to polarize and appease the Hindu population in the valley.

The UN also does not consider the Indian claim legally valid: it recognizes Kashmir as a disputed territory. Except for India, the entire world recognizes Kashmir as a disputed territory. When the Indian emissary was asked to explain India’s commitments to UN Security Council resolutions that provide for a plebiscite in the disputed territory, he claimed that Jammu and Kashmir was “an integral part of India.” (in view of India’s perfidious scrapping of Article 370).

India must realize that Jammu and Kashmir is an UN-recognized disputed territory and NOT an “integral part of India.” Secondly, Security Council resolutions calling for a plebiscite remain in force and can be abrogated only by the Security Council itself. And thirdly, India’s unilateral and illegal actions of August 5, 2019, violate Security Council resolutions No 91 and No. 122 and are, thus, null and void.

In this background, a dialogue between India and Pakistan will be productive only if India reverses all unilateral and illegal measures imposed on and after August 5, 2019; rescinds the demographic changes initiated in held Kashmir, and halts its oppression and human rights violations in Held Kashmir. The UN had also rejected India’s illegal annexation, reminding her that the UN’s position on this region was governed by the Charter of the UN and applicable Security Council resolutions.

The UN Secretary-General reminded India that the Simla Agreement states that the final status of Jammu and Kashmir is to be settled by peaceful means, in accordance with the Charter. The Indian emissary conceded that other than the Kashmir dispute, the Indian government was prepared to discuss any issues with Pakistan and resolve them bilaterally and peacefully, as provided under the 1972 Simla Agreement.

For the final resolution of their disputes, an eminent critic observed, “If the two countries are able to revisit, and revise their revisionist policy and posture and make strides in building bilateral confidence, the toughest of issues can be resolved. In order to do so, however, both the states will have to reorient their institutional mindsets, and remould state nationalism.”

*The writer is a former member of the Provincial Civil Service, and an author of Moments in Silence.*