**[Changing nature of protracted conflicts](https://nation.com.pk/17-Feb-2020/changing-nature-of-protracted-conflicts" \t "_new)**

Khurram Minhas February 17, 2020

The strategic nature of two protracted conflicts, i.e., Kashmir dispute and Palestine dispute has overwhelmingly changed for last six months. Since 05 August 2019, India has embarked on a dangerous journey of unilateral decision to abrogate article 370 and revocation of 35(A). After five months on January 29, 2020, the US has proposed a peace plan for Palestinians, which was endorsed by Israel. Overall, these two actions have undermined the status quo and might have daunting impact on resolutions of these protracted conflicts. Decisions related to these two conflicts have astonishing similarities.

Firstly, India and Israel have carefully calculated that the international and regional strategic environment is in favour of these countries. For India, the dysfunctional South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), severed bilateral relationship with Pakistan since February 2019, and a conducive internal political environment dominated by Hindutva ideology provided a strategic cushion to Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the unilateral act against special status of Jammu & Kashmir. For Israel, the unending inter-state and intra-state rivalries of its neighbours, rapprochement of Arab countries with Israel, Trump’s warmongering against Iran, and upcoming elections of Israel on March 02, 2020 have added confidence to Israel that the reaction from Palestinians and Arabs would likely be minimalized in nature.

Secondly, the Trump administration has relatively softer corner for both these countries due to American strategic objectives in South Asia and Middle East. India is a potential offshore balancer for the US against China in Asia Pacific and South Asian regions, while Israel is acting as eyes and ears of the US to protect its interests in the Middle Eastern region. Therefore, Trump’s self-imposed mediatory role for both protracted conflicts has dented the overall status quo of these conflicts. His announcement to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir dispute resulted in Indian unilateral action on Kashmir’s special status. Likewise, the announcement of Middle East Peace Plan led to end of a viable two state solution.

Thirdly, the basic problem with these extraordinary measures of both countries is not limited to eluding resolution of disputed territories. Rather, aggressive security strategies and warmongering of New Delhi and Tel Aviv would further increase frequency of their belligerent activities in their respective regions. For instance, BJP government and Indian military establishment has repeatedly threatened Pakistan to attack and conquer Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) since August 2019, which clearly demonstrates New Delhi’s aggressive future strategic outlook. Likewise, Benjamin Netanyahu has further extended his claim of sovereignty beyond Jordanian Valley since the announcement of Peace Plan, which clearly validates the concerns of scholars who have been pointing out that Israel, is working for establishment of a greater Israeli state in the region.

Fourthly, these two actions are undermining dozens of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on these protracted conflicts. Through such actions, the two countries would likely further strengthen their rule on disputed territories. New Delhi and Tel Aviv’s ability to govern these disputed territories has been fortified with these actions. Control over entire Jerusalem and Jordanian Valley would provide ample strategic space to limit activities of Palestinian people as and whenever desired by Israel. Likewise, the bifurcation of Kashmir into three administrative units, i.e., Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir Valley would help New Delhi to administratively control economy, politics and social activities of Kashmiri people.

Lastly, it seems apparent that these unilateral actions have increased rightwing vote bank for Netanyahu and Modi in their respective countries. On the contrary, it has added fuel into fire amongst the youth of disputed territories, who have been persistently denied from their universal right of self-determination. This is a dangerous trend which would further strengthen the concept of communal identity and would act as a precursor for vicious cycle of violence and oppression. This is why, the future of resolution of these protracted conflicts remains inherently unstable as their solution has been tried to obtain under duress and unjust manner neglecting aggrieved parties, i.e., Kashmiris and Palestinians.

Khurram Minhas

The writer is a PhD candidate at the NUST and researcher at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute.