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# Padlocks and posturing

Brian Cloughley

**B**ower-birds are notorious for collecting objects that are of no particular use to them, but they pick them up and decorate their environs with them because they like unusual things, and why shouldn't they? I am a bower bird, and my study is full of things I consider fascinating but which many people would regard as dust traps (a view subscribed to by Control, I might add). One collection is of old brass padlocks, many with dates and names on them; and it is one of these that brought me to write this piece, because it is inscribed in shaky but deep capital lettering:



KARTARSINGH  
SARDARSINGH  
JHELMUM

This is hardly earth-shattering, one might imagine, but when one thinks about it, the history of the Sub-continent for the past fifty-five years is bound up with that inscription. I have the padlock beside me as I write, and wonder, as I often do, just who were the Singhs of Jhelum? Merchants? Farmers? Retired soldiers of the Raj? And what happened to them in 1947? Were they stabbed to death, or hanged by their turbans, or did they manage to escape across the newly-delineated border to Sikh Punjab? Perhaps they managed to flee eastwards by train, only to be hacked to bits on board - just as so many Muslims were murdered coming the other way.

It is all very well for people to say that the atrocities happened over half-a-century ago and that passage of time should have eroded horrible memories, but the plain fact is that they haven't disappeared. Far from it, because India and Pakistan still consider themselves enemies. The years since the period in which the Singhs lived in peace in Jhelum (when there were Sikhs and Hindus in Qazetta, for example; and Jews in Karachi) and the present day, in which one cannot even fly directly from one country to the other (how absurd), are dotted and defiled by wars and atrocities. There can be no question of instant harmony and it would na ve to imagine this happy state could be attained. But this does not mean that efforts toward a modus vivendi cannot be made. They should be made, and that right soon, because the world has changed enormously in the last century. The

struct the other about what should be done, and the result is deepening intransigence. The refrain "You cannot clap with only one hand" has been run to death by both sides, but, alas, other deaths have occurred and, apart from making propaganda out of tragedy, no practical suggestions have been made following the massacre at Nandimarg in Indian-administered Kashmir last month. (The world at large barely heard of this brutal, senseless, wicked killing of 24 defenceless civilians by terrorists, because the equally vile slaughter of very many more defenceless civilians was taking place in Iraq.) Mr Advani said "this is an act of our neighbour, and violence in the state is continuing only because of them", which was a singularly unhelpful observation.

Nobody could seriously propose that Mr Advani should embrace Islamabad following a filthy act of mass murder that was carried out most probably by a Pakistan-oriented terrorist organisation. But cannot he see that such rhetoric plays into the hands of the wild men on both sides? President Musharraf was quick to condemn the massacre, as well he might, because the very fact it took place - apart from being an atrocity only the lowest and most disgusting beasts could carry out and support-produced yet more problems for Pakistan. Musharraf has pointed out that incidents like this work mightily against any moves towards talks between India and Pakistan, and indeed he is right. But what can he do about it?

His best move would be to request the help of the United Nations Security Council. No: not to again seek a plebiscite as provided for by UNSC resolutions, for such a tactic would only intensify New Delhi's resistance to movement towards a Kashmir solution. In fact Islamabad should realise that if a plebiscite were held it is unlikely the inhabitants of Indian-administered Kashmir would vote for accession to Pakistan. They have had their fill of terrorism supposedly in the name of Islam and have experienced quite enough brutality from what they regard as an army of occupation. Valley Kashmiris were never anything but practical about religion (during my fourteen months in Srinagar I bought alcohol openly - and even on a visit two years ago could have a Scotch or three in a hotel), and they look with genuine and justified apprehension at possible

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It is no longer possible to seek international justice in any case involving America or an American citizen, as the International Criminal Court is not recognised by the Bush administration. Justice, or what passes for justice, will be meted out by America or by countries approved by Bush, and nobody else. If Bush America decides that a binding international agreement is unsatisfactory it will be abrogated unilaterally. There is no question, now, of compromise or negotiation with interested parties. Bush ignores findings of the World Trade Organisation, and regards the Geneva Convention as a vehicle for expostulation when convenient (showing pictures of US prisoners on television) and an out-dated piece of liberal trivia when inconvenient (as in US treatment of the non-persons in its Guantanamo Gulag). So countries wishing to retain self-respect and a modicum of independence should sharpen up and decide what their posture is going to be: autonomous nation or dormant doormat.

So far as India and Pakistan are concerned the message is that if you don't set your regional house in order there is likely to be movement by America to take action about it. It is of course a wider message, and countries in the fatuously-titled 'Axis of Evil' and beyond can expect even more robust treatment - if they are weak, militarily and politically. Bush will never dare take on a country that can fight back, so India and Pakistan will be spared the Shock and Awe liberation option. But there could be unpleasant means of bringing pressure on both countries to reach agreement about their differences, and, given the proclivity of modern-day Washington for meddling in other countries' business in the most aggressive and insolent fashion, it is to be hoped that the Sub-continent can avoid the vulgar attentions of such as Rumsfeld, whose grotesque antics have ceased to be even mildly amusing. The question for India and Pakistan, as ever, is: What do we do next about Kashmir? In an interview with Reuters last week I said "People have become accustomed to living with [the threat of war over Kashmir], and one of these days it is actually going to happen". This is a terrifying prospect.

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is unlikely the inhabitants of Indian-administered Kashmir would vote for accession to Pakistan. They have had their fill of terrorism supposedly in the name of Islam and have experienced quite enough brutality from what they regard as an army of occupation. Valley Kashmiris were never anything but practical about religion (during my fourteen months in Srinagar I bought alcohol openly — and even on a visit two years ago could have a Scotch or three in a hotel), and they look with genuine and justified apprehension at possible imposition of a strict regime such as demanded by extremists and terrorist groups, few of which have a genuine Valley Kashmiri on board. A pox on both Islamabad and Delhi say the gentle artisans and peaceable lake and country-folk of the Valley and outlying areas. The Jammu region and probably Ladakh would vote for accession to India, but the plurality would be for independence. If that came about there would be even more disaster, for the loonies would fight amongst themselves.

Pakistan should choose the pragmatic approach and take advantage of the fact that responsible members of the Security Council, determined to neutralize American arrogance, can help India and Pakistan move forward to a Kashmir solution. To demonstrate good faith (and common-sense) Islamabad should accept the inevitable and declare, as a major concession, that it is willing to sacrifice its former insistence on the plebiscite resolutions in the cause of movement towards rapprochement. The price of such a significant offer of compromise should be made clear beforehand. It should be suggested (not 'demanded') that the UNSC should decide on adjustment of the Line of Control to reflect reality. An independent Commission would then realign the LOC. This could not possibly reflect what should have been decided in 1947 - the obvious solution of having an Indian State of Jammu, divided from a Pakistani State of Kashmir by the southern Panjal Range - but could adjust territorial anomalies, notably in the Siachen region. The mutual condition would be that India and Pakistan would accept the neutrally-decided Line as their international border and agree to UN involvement to a degree to be determined by the Council.

To even begin an approach to UN discussions there would have to be agreement between Islamabad and Delhi to conduct preliminary talks without posturing for domestic political advantage. This is the likely sticking point, but given international guarantees that Indian and Pakistani territorial integrity will not be sacrificed, it should be attractive for both sides to come to the table. The Simla Accord, after all, adjures both parties to arrange "a final settlement of Jammu and Kashmir". The descendants of Sardar Singh and Kartar Singh may never see Jhelum, and perhaps it is too much to hope that India and Pakistan could become true partners; but the door to peaceful coexistence should not remain closed and padlocked.

E-mail queries and comments to: [beecluff@nation.com.pk](mailto:beecluff@nation.com.pk)