

Truth, realism and Kashmir

By M.P. Bhandara

Pak. F.R. Jindia
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AT INTERVALS the rustling pine forests of Kashmir catch our fancy. We get euphoric at the thought of high-level talks with India. Fondly, we listen to our parents' or grandparents' recollections of Kashmir on holiday visits before partition; of houseboats drifting dreamily on Dal Lake; of fabulous forests and lakes in a picturesque fairyland; fair-complexioned Kashmiris selling their winter wares of rugs and shawls, and exquisite crafts in papier mache and oak.

The Kashmir valley today is one of the saddest places on God's earth. The Kashmiris reputed for their gentleness and mild manners are at the receiving end of unspeakable brutalities. In that beautiful land is being waged a war of unending passions. In truth, having suffered unbearable punishment, the people of the valley yearn simply to be left alone. To be independent. To be the Switzerland of the subcontinent. A tourist haven with its independence guaranteed by the powers of the subcontinent.

I believe such a solution — the cynosure of the valley Kashmiris, irrespective of religious denomination — would today have overwhelming acceptance in Pakistan. If we can reduce the temperature of our relationship with India by reaching out to them in a spirit of sincerity, such a solution might also be acceptable to India. The Kashmir valley is a garland of thorns around the neck of India.

From an Indian point of view, a Kashmir solution acceptable to the valley Kashmiris is highly desirable. Overnight, India would be in the double-digit growth club with China. The creative energies that it would release in the subcontinent would be many times greater than the destructive energies of all the nuclear weapons held today by both countries.

No matter how fantastic such futurism may sound, it is no more far-fetched than the very idea of Pakistan was in 1940. An independent valley is a likely outcome in a post-nuclear war scenario, but that would be the worst of all options. The best: to make it peacefully happen in our lifetime.

If such optimism is an accepted goal, a heavy burden falls on Pakistan. Why? The moment of truth has arrived for us. Many of us have believed right from 1947 that force alone would gain us Kashmir. A tribal lashkar entered Kashmir in 1947, imposed itself on a vacillating Maharaja who was playing for independence. Seen in retrospect, our first Kashmir mistake was to frighten the Maharaja with the Lashkar — which got within four miles of his palace and switched off his electricity. This gave the Maharaja no choice but to join India. The Lashkar turned out to be a loose cannon, indulging in loot and rapine. The Lashkar called itself Jihadists. It was a different matter in Gilgit, a non-Kashmiri colony of the Maharaja where the Balti militia staged a

the saboteurs to the police. The 1965 generation of had not forgotten the rape and pillage of the Lashkar of 1947-48. "Operation Gibraltar" led to the war of 1965, which then in domino effect led to the civil war of 1971 between East and West Pakistan and the break-up of United Pakistan. If we forget this nexus of events leading to tragedy, we might repeat them.

The third attempt at using force was by guile. A Jihad supported by some Pakistan-based groups, amidst widespread Kashmiri anger commenced after repeated rigging of state elections by India. This phase, which commenced in the late eighties, continued till early 2002, and, in all probability, continues till today albeit in defiance of state policy by our Jihadist parties. According to a knowledgeable informant, the level of infiltration is between 25 and 33 per cent prior to 2001.

The time has come to face the issue of our supporting or acquiescing in the so-called jihad in Kashmir squarely and honestly. When a jihad kills women and children and unarmed non-combatants, is it jihad or plain terrorism? And who has the legal authority in Islam to declare a jihad? Should it be based on the fatwas given by mullas or on the judgment of the parliament of an Islamic state?

The fourth attempt at using force was the ill-advised and ill-fated Kargil military adventure in the spring of 1999. Even if the intruders had gained access to the Kargil road, which would have cut off Ladakh from Srinagar, it is difficult to imagine how it would have gained the control of the valley for Pakistan. At best Buddhist Ladakh in which we have little or no interest might have fallen. Our actions were reckless. Would India not have opened new fronts? Would the world powers have allowed a military intervention to break the status quo?

The time has come to face the issue of our supporting or acquiescing in the so-called jihad in Kashmir squarely and honestly. When a jihad kills women and children and unarmed non-combatants, is it jihad or plain terrorism? Are we not degrading the holy concept of jihad by giving blatant terrorism a religious cover? And who has the legal authority in Islam to declare a Jihad? Should it be based on the fatwas given by a bunch of ignorant mullas or the parliament of an Islamic state based on the learned opinion of the Islamic Ideology Council?

Let us recognize the fact that there is a strong fanatical lobby both in our military and in civilian life that believes that 'jihadist' terrorism alone can free the valley from Indian rule. Since India has at least 120 million Muslims, why a jihad only in Kashmir and not an all-out jihad against India for the benefit of Muslims residing in India? Are Muslims not killed in Indian Gujarat and elsewhere?

The militarist argument for the Kashmir jihad is that for a relatively small investment from our side we can pin down an Indian army of over half a million. The ratio of

truth. Our consistent denials have seriously eroded our credibility. For so-called patriotic reasons the press too has played down our indulgence in this regard. Jihad has never been debated in parliament.

A Kashmir solution may only be possible once we truly exit out of the trap of these unexamined and unquestioned beliefs. If we wish to come out of the closet, let jihad in Kashmir be discussed openly and decided by parliament. Our secret closet is the ISI which is the invisible maker of policy and thrives on open-ended state funding.

If we are to make India a negotiating partner in resolving the Kashmir problem, the cross-LoC movement of jihadists must be reduced to zero. The LoC must be sealed by a combination of joint patrols, UN or international force supervision and new technology such as thermal imaging wherever possible. India makes a mistake by not assisting

Pakistan in closing infiltration routes. This will of course not put an end to terrorism; the once-docile Kashmiri now have youths every bit as ferocious as the 'Tamil tigers' in Sri Lanka. They don't need Pakistani support for their own jihad.

There can be no question of equating terrorism with jihad, and those who do so do a serious disservice to Islam. There is also no question but that terrorism is morally repulsive and cowardly in intent and execution, ill-disciplined as much of its force is mercenary and counterproductive in the

long run. It stands little chance of success when pitted against an organized army.

We now come to the heart of the problem — the outlines of a Kashmir solution. We need a roadmap no matter how long the road. The recent declaration of Pakistan to front trade and travel should be extended to trade and travel across the LoC by Kashmiris. Our two countries do not have the right to prevent this. The LoC is the outcome of a subcontinental war not intra-Kashmiri strife. A soft LoC will also help end terrorism, just as it did in 1965.

India-Pakistan negotiations on substance should take place in a neutral country such as Finland, Norway or Sweden and away from the glare of publicity, with the hosts preferably sitting as silent observers. A settlement should be reached on the basis of ground realities. The inhabitants of Ladakh and the majority in Jammu are well integrated into the Indian Union, as are those of Baltistan, Gilgit and Azad Kashmir into Pakistan. These areas should form part of India and Pakistan respectively by mutual agreement. The dispute is narrowed down to the valley for which we have advocated independence as an ultimate goal in course of time. The first step in this regard is the true implementation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which concedes a special status to Kashmir. If territories can be apportioned as suggested above to the two countries, the application of Article 370 will be confined to the valley only.

If, however, the Indians are not prepared to show any flexibility on their stand, Pakistan will have to reconsider the Shimla Pact of which the Indian interpretation is a strict bilateral resolution of all disputes.

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and oak.
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The second attempt at force in Kashmir occurred in 1965. Then, as today, we were victims of our own make-believe. Our rulers bought the illusion that sending armed saboteurs would ignite a freedom struggle in Kashmir. The plan was called "Operation Gibraltar". What happened was a surprise. In many cases, the "enslaved" denounced

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The militarist argument for the Kashmir jihad is that for a relatively small investment from our side we can pin down an Indian army of over half a million. The ratio of expenditure is said to be very favourable to us: one of ours is to fifty of the enemy. However, this argument falls flat if we consider that the GDP growth rate in India at six per cent is twice ours in an economy several times larger than ours. India has the means to sustain its military terror.

Pakistan has consistently denied any aid, training or support for the so-called jihadists. In this we have been economical with the

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The key to a saner subcontinent is trade, tourism, an end of press poison and, above all, an end to terrorism.

Let us remember that an unarmed man baring his chest to the bullets of an oppressor is a hero. A sniper gunning down women, children and non-combatants, a coward.

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