

Kashmir Musharraf's Kashmir proposals

Kamal Matinuddin

President Musharraf's recent proposals, on how to move forward on reaching an amicable settlement of the lingering Kashmir dispute, have evoked a great deal of interest among all sections of the population. He has picked up the courage to say something, which was, so far, considered to be taboo. The diehards dubbed any one suggesting a solution, other than implementation of the UN resolutions, a traitor. Has the President gone back on what he has been saying so far on the Kashmir issue by breaking new ground?

There are four main points, which have been put forward by the General as food for thought. One: The State of Jammu and Kashmir could be divided into seven zones, instead of treating it as one whole political unit for the purpose of eliciting the views of the Kashmiris. Two: These zones should be demilitarised. Three: Their status should be changed. Four: The valley may be controlled jointly by India and Pakistan.

The opposition, as expected, has rejected it outright. They believe that Musharraf has made a U-turn on Pakistan's Kashmir policy. To them it amounts to a betrayal of the Kashmir cause. Saner elements in our society have taken it in the spirit in which the statement by the President was made. The proposals are only loud thinking. It is meant to start a debate on a vital issue, which has defied solution since the last fifty-seven years.

Let us examine the various elements of the President's proposals and see whether he has deviated substantially from the existing policy on Kashmir. Are these proposals against the interest of the Kashmiris and will they prejudice Pakistan's vital interests?

Before we do so let us look at the ground realities. Although 96% of the people who live in the Valley are Muslims overall they form only 69% of the population. Jammu is a Hindu majority area with Hindus being 57% of the population. True the districts of *Punch*, *Rajauri* and *Doda* are Muslim majority areas but *Doda* is not contiguous to the areas, which could fall into Pakistan. *Kargil* does have a substantive 84% of the people being Muslims but *Leh* has only 12% Muslims.

The other fact, which must be taken into consideration is that war is no longer an option as both nations are nuclear powers and cannot afford to enter into a conflict with each other any more. The APHC is divided and the Kashmiris are getting tired of militancy. After 9/11 the distinction between freedom struggle and terrorism has become blurred. There is, therefore, a need for re-thinking and looking at new ideas for settling the issue of Kashmir.

National policies are not sacrosanct or revealed scriptures, which cannot be altered, come what may. As long as the objective remains unaltered, the tactics of reaching that goal can vary in harmony with the changing internal and external situation. The cardinal point of Pakistan's policy on Kashmir was to compel India to accept that Kashmir is a disputed territory and that the Kashmiris must be given their right of self-determination. The Security Council on Kashmir adopted twenty-seven resolutions between 1948 and 1971. In all of them what has been emphasised is withdrawal of troops by India and Pakistan and the holding of a plebiscite as soon as possible after the troops have been reduced to the bare minimum required for the maintenance of law and order in the state. India was permitted to retain around 8,000 troops and Pakistan 3,000.

The suggestion that has been made by the President is in fulfilment of the UN resolutions though the manner in which they are to be implemented has been given a new angle. What are some of the options that need examining?

The Asia Study Group, the Asia Society and several think

tanks in the United States recommend that the LoC be made an international border. This may be acceptable to India but certainly not by Pakistan having sacrificed 80,000 lives and after supporting the cause of the Kashmiris in Indian Held Kashmir for fifty-seven long years, no government in Pakistan would be able to retain power if it agrees to even a modified LoC formula. It can be ruled out. Similarly, the Chenab formula will not be acceptable to India as even Jammu and Laddakh will fall into the areas coming to Pakistan.

The idea of a partition of Kashmir along ethno-religious lines had been proposed by Sir Owen Dixon and by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto when the latter drew a line on the map of Kashmir indicating areas which could come to Pakistan and those which can be retained by India during the Swaran Singh-Bhutto talks in the 60s. Several political analysts have also been suggesting the division of Kashmir along religious lines.

Another option is for Jammu and Kashmir to become independent. Amanullah Khan, Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir liberation Front (JKLF) has been demanding that the third option should be included when the Kashmiris are asked to give their choice regarding the future status of their homeland. The present slogan in the valley is *Azadi* not *Kashmir banega Pakistan*.

The United Nations resolution limits the choice of the Kashmiris to either join India or Pakistan. The third option has not been stated in the documents. India will not be amenable to such a move as it is faced with a number of secessionist movements in its North East. Giving independence to Kashmir will be a bad precedence for India, as it will encourage the northeastern states to step up their demand for independence also. Independent Kashmir will not suit Islamabad as it will sever the physical link with its most trusted ally, China. The control of the jugular vein (waters of the Jhelum river) will still be under the control of an outside power, which could at some point of time become unfriendly to Pakistan. China too would feel concerned, as an independent Kashmir being a soft state will gravitate towards a major power. Beijing would not like Washington to have a military base along its sensitive border.

The Good Friday Agreement where a joint assembly is being talked about in Northern Ireland could also be applicable to an autonomous Valley. Joint control of the valley would of course need an absence of mistrust and suspicion, which is still not present in the context of Indo-Pakistan relations.

There are some military analysts in Pakistan who maintain that the pot in Kashmir should be kept boiling as it is a means of drawing the attention of the international community towards a nuclear flashpoint. According to them, it compelled India to come to the negotiating table. Ending the militancy, they say, would reduce the pressure on India. But after 9/11 major world powers do not accept non-state actors people. It will be difficult for Pakistan to continue supporting militancy in the present international climate.

Pakistani journalists who have recently visited Jammu and Kashmir have come back with the impression that the Kashmiris are tired of militancy. While they are bitter against the Indian security forces, which are carrying out atrocities, they are also angry at the freedom fighters that engage in killing civilians.

It is time to discuss all options on Kashmir with an open mind so that our decision makers can be apprised of the points in favour and against each option. The goal remains the settlement of the Kashmir issue to the satisfaction of all the three parties concerned.

The writer is a retired Lt Gen