

# A Kashmir endgame?

BY HUSAIN HAQQANI

If General Pervez Musharraf means what he says in calling for a national debate on ways to resolve Pakistan's dispute with India over Kashmir, he might be taking the most far-reaching initiative of his military and political career. According to AFP, the general told a reception of government officials, diplomats and media in Islamabad that Pakistanis must discuss a "change of status" for Kashmir. "Change in status could be independent status... joint control, it can be UN mandate also," he reportedly said. "We'll have to sit down with legal experts who can give their opinion on what other status are possible, I don't know," General Musharraf added. But he ruled out accepting a settlement that would turn the line of control into an international border – a suggestion that has been around for decades and repeatedly turned down by Pakistan.

If the General's remarks are not denied or modified over the next few days, this would amount to backing away from 'demanding' a resolution of the Kashmir dispute 'in accordance with UN resolutions.' This is a step forward, albeit only a partial one. A genuinely open debate on Kashmir in Pakistan should include discussion over the pros and cons of coming to terms with the status quo. But for General Musharraf to suggest that Pakistanis need to think of alternative ways of resolving the Kashmir dispute is still wise.

The problem is, after 58 years of describing Kashmir as Pakistan's primary national 'cause', it would not be easy for an unelected military ruler to effectively manage the shift in national priorities that it entails. The general would have to brace himself for opposition from all sorts of hardliners. Pakistan's all-powerful military, on whose shoulders General Musharraf has reached the country's presidency, has traditionally been averse to any suggestions of compromise on Kashmir. The country's weak civil society, which General Musharraf has done little to strengthen, is more inclined to seek a settlement on Kashmir.

If, after declaring his desire for considering various options for a Kashmir settlement, General Musharraf expands his power base beyond the military and genuinely empowers civil society, he would be moving towards a genuine reorientation of Pakistan's national priorities. If, however, he remains beholden to the army, his initiative would turn out to be nothing more than a PR exercise. It would be like Field Marshal Ayub Khan proposing joint defence with India in the early 1960s or General Ziaul Haq calling for a no-war pact in the 1980s. Pakistan's national security establishment has too much by way of institutional interest – from ownership of expen-



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sive residential property to the 'right' of governing the country – riding on confrontation with India to accept open discussion of alternative solutions for the Kashmir problem.

That the general is conflicted in what he declares to be his vision and what he feels he needs to do to stay in power has been obvious for quite some time. In February, soon after the breaking of the news regarding Dr. A.Q. Khan's nuclear proliferation network, General Musharraf told Pakistani newspaper editors that in his view Pakistan's "two vital national interests" were "being a nuclear state and the Kashmir cause." This was clearly in keeping with the conventional wisdom of the Pakistani national security establishment. Then in September, he told a garrison Darbar in Quetta that Pakistan would not give up Kashmir. "We will not give up Kashmir," General Musharraf was then reported as saying by the official Pakistani news agency. "We have fought wars over it. Pakistan will have to ensure the interest of the Kashmiris," he had said, adding "I will meet Manmohan Singh (the Indian Prime Minister) and tell him in unequivocal terms about our stand on the issue. We will not give up Kashmir." Has General Musharraf's belief in Kashmir being a vital Pakistani national interest changed since February? Or has he realized after his meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, after his "we will not give up Kashmir speech", that he should work towards a face saving semi-solution that enables him to move forward with India on other issues? It is difficult to categorically answer either question.

But it is clearly in Pakistan's interest to start looking beyond the single-issue focus on Kashmir that has held back Pakistan's political and economic progress. Beginning with the organization in 1947-1948 of the tribal 'lashkar' to secure Kashmir, Pakistan's approach to the resolution of the Kashmir dispute has been characterized by a series of tactical moves, lacking a coherent strategy or a planned end game. Since independence, Pakistanis have complained (with justification) that the Boundary Commission

headed by Sir Cyril Radcliffe cheated them by providing India access to Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir through Pathankot Tehsil of Gurdaspur district. But more than five decades later, there is little realistic hope of redressing historic grievances. Pakistan's tactics to redress this perceived wrong—which are often ad hoc and deployed with short-term goals in mind—have varied, ranging from airing its complaints at the United Nations to participating in military adventurism. Most importantly, Pakistan has paid a heavy price for pursuing the Kashmir dream in terms of weakened state institutions, the preeminence of the military in Pakistani society and, more recently, the growth of Islamic militancy.

Pakistan's military-dominated decision-making process has resulted in combinations of short-term military and diplomatic moves without a well thought out end game for resolving the Kashmir dispute. As pointed out by retired Air Marshal Asghar Khan, Pakistan's military adventures have been launched in the "hope that world powers would come to our rescue, intervene, bring about a cease fire and somehow help us achieve our political objectives. ... All our past wars with India have been fought for no purpose (and) we have suffered humiliation as a result."

A feeling of insecurity against a much larger and hostile neighbor was the original source of Pakistani apprehensions about its nationhood. The emphasis on seeking to 'complete' Pakistan by acquiring Kashmir was directly related to this sense of insecurity. But over the years, structures of conflict have evolved, with the Pakistani military as the major beneficiary of maintaining hostility. The possession of nuclear weapons gave the Pakistani military a sense of invulnerability and increased its willingness to consider options of unconventional warfare leading to the Kargil debacle. The environment of the global war against terrorism restrains Pakistan's ability to persist with its policy of supporting Islamic militancy in Indian-controlled Kashmir. But in the absence of a sustained peace process between India and Pakistan, there could always be room for new tactics that prolong the conflict and attempt to alter the status quo. For that reason, it is important for Pakistan to go beyond its maximalist demands on Kashmir and start looking at alternatives.

General Musharraf's call upon Pakistanis to look at possible solutions for Kashmir would work only if the General is willing to put it into the broader context of Pakistan's structural flaws. Historically, countries dominated by Praetorian armies do not easily move away from conflict. General Musharraf might have to follow up his stated willingness to scale down Pakistani demands over Kashmir with a willingness to scale down the Pakistani military's extensive control over the country's political life.

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