

Core issue on centre-stage

Kashmir has once again come to occupy centre stage, one way or another. First, there was the visit of the Pakistani journalists to Indian Occupied Kashmir on Indian visas with all the repercussions. Then there was the issue of what was reported from there by this group and what was omitted - and the differing approaches to reporting that became clear within this group. Whatever the case, clearly for Pakistanis there was reason to take note and update ourselves on the views from the Occupied territory - especially in terms of the Kashmiris' perceptions/misperceptions of Pakistan and its policies. That the alienation of the Kashmiris in the valley from India was complete was reaffirmed, but so was the growing mistrust of the Kashmiris towards Pakistan. With the return of the journalists, a series of informal meetings and discussions have been set in motion - all of which are needed.



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be on the whole state of Jammu and Kashmir or primarily on the Valley? What would comprise the former during negotiations? Here again, the Kashmiris need to be taken into confidence if decisions are to have long-term validity and acceptability.

Once these issues are resolved, there are some existing models that can provide ideas for a Kashmir solution. Most of them were discussed in an earlier column. A most interesting and relevant model that needs closer study is the Andorra model of joint sovereignty over a largely autonomous territory that has gradually moved towards greater sovereignty and is represented in the United Nations as a member state! The joint Spanish bishops-French sovereignty worked well enough to allow the territory to become a most affluent, tax-free entity.

Solutions are there, but mindsets have to alter on both sides of the divide. However, one cannot alter the nature of the dispute from being one of a people denied their legitimate right of choice to being one of merely disputed territory. In Pakistan, the debate on Kashmir has existed for a while now but in India there is almost no discussion beyond the confines of the official position. The present London conference focusing on Kashmir has highlighted this most glaringly. Indian scholars/analysts showed a reluctance to participate. The Indian analysts approach to dealing with the Kashmir issue continues to remain primarily confined within the bounds of the official Indian position.

Within this context, then, it was refreshing to hear an Indian speak outside of this posture, as Gautam Navlaka, a political analyst from New Delhi, did. He accepted that most of the human rights abuse - eighty percent as he put it - was perpetrated by the Indian security forces. Of course, he then went on to echo the Indian position on the freedom fighters - that while the *Hizbul Mujahideen* were an indigenous Kashmiri group, the trouble arose from fighters and groups from outside. He had little to say when it was pointed out that support for struggles does come from outside but that does not alter the indigenous nature of the struggle - with Americans of Irish descent giving money and weapons to the IRA, Britishers fighting against Franco in the Spanish civil war, Muslim fighters fighting in the Afghan war against Soviet occupation, to name just a few historic examples.

The conference also highlighted the multiple strands of the Kashmir issue and Kashmiri groups with all their strengths and weaknesses. The tragedy of most Kashmiri families is overwhelming for the Kashmiris; but they have failed to reach out effectively to the civil societies of the West. Kashmir has not caught the imagination of these civil societies and their medias as the Palestinian issue has done - especially in Europe. After over fifty years of struggle, the Kashmiris' just cause remains largely unknown or, after 9/11, largely misunderstood. Yet, the Kashmiris fight on and shed their blood in the wake of Indian occupation. That is why it is imperative to find a just and viable solution.

Once again, President Musharraf has, through his proactive approach, put the ball firmly in India's court. Let us hope India will respond more positively this time round than it did when we declared a unilateral ceasefire along the LOC and moved our forces away from it. India's response then was to try and complete its illegal fencing along the LOC. India must not mistake Pakistan's national confidence and security to suggest bold and pragmatic approaches to conflict resolution as weakness.

Pragmatism is surely a prerequisite towards moving in the direction of resolving the Kashmir issue. But we, for our part, must not confuse pragmatism with capitulation or abandonment of all norms of justice. That is why a debate within the country is a rational starting point - but our minimalist postures must be clear even as they remain unstated. And, in the final analysis, pragmatism requires a recognition of the fact that at the end of the day it is the relentless struggle of the Kashmiris that is compelling both Pakistan and India to move towards seeking a resolution of the conflict - and any solution requires acceptance by these brave and suffering people. Anything less will not only be unworkable, it will be an insult to all those who have laid down their lives for a just cause and in that list of primarys is present the sacrifice of many Pakistanis also.

The views expressed by the writer are her own

Following from this, though totally unconnected, came a conference on *Stability, Peace and Security in South Asia* organised in London, on 25-26 October, by three groups - the Justice Foundation-Kashmir Centre London, the Kashmiri American Council-Kashmir Centre Washington, and the International Council of Human Rights - Kashmir Centre European Union Brussels. And, coincidentally, in the midst of this conference, has come the most important development on the Kashmir issue - the statement of President Musharraf on the 25th of October that specifically talks of an alternative solution to Kashmir in contrast to the traditional positions of both Pakistan and India. President Musharraf has categorically declared Pakistan's traditional position demanding a plebiscite as impractical and India's position of wanting the LOC as the international border as unacceptable to Pakistan. He has also laid the base for a possible division of Kashmir by stating that the seven regions of Kashmir differ from each other on the bases of geography, ethnicity and religion. This of course calls into question the primacy of the notion of the predominance of a single "Kashmiriyat" identity. President Musharraf has gone on to suggest a national debate on finding an acceptable solution for the Kashmir dispute and then also suggested one such option premised on demilitarisation, autonomy and possibly either joint Pakistan-India control over the territory or some form of UN supervision. Presumably, in terms of autonomy, President Musharraf must be seeing it outside of the framework of the Indian Union, given his rejection of the LOC-as-a-border solution. And, given the fact that the Kashmir issue is not simply a territorial dispute but an issue of the right of a people to self-determination, self-rule under some initial international supervision - either jointly by Pakistan and India or by the UN - may be a more viable context for the promotion of autonomy.

Beginning with the notion of demilitarisation, one could foresee a scenario with the following steps: To begin with, the ground needs to be laid for moving towards a viable solution. As preparation for this, demilitarisation could be a first intermediate step, but this can only come about once there is a simultaneous ceasefire between the *mujahideen* and the Indian security forces in Occupied Kashmir. So, a ceasefire within Occupied Kashmir would be a necessary first step, to be followed by demilitarisation of both sides of the divided state.

Accompanying this, there should be a UN-supervised preparation of a register of Kashmiris and the Kashmiri region they belong to. This process would allow Pakistan and India to negotiate the choices they would allow the Kashmiris - for no agreement can be lasting without its acceptance by the Kashmiris.

In order to ascertain the views of the Kashmiris, options need to be presented to them and their views ascertained through some form of a referendum - perhaps premised on regional divides. This would be different from the plebiscite envisaged in the UN Security Council resolutions.

Another important intermediate step would be to allow greater movement between the people of the divided state - but on Kashmiri identity papers, not passports and visas of either Pakistan or India. After all, in the fifties the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus service operated without passport requirements.

However, these would merely be intermediate steps - albeit every critical steps in influencing a final settlement of the issue. Coming to an actual solution, some facts have to be clarified before any solution can be affected. For instance, would the focus