

# What is India's game plan on Kashmir?

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**W**hile one is unaware of the contents of the reported secret negotiations between Tariq Aziz and J N Dixit, the overt talks between the leaders of the two neighbours on Kashmir has been a dialogue of the deaf, with India unprepared to listen to any kind of suggestions. The light, which General Musharraf had seen at the end of the tunnel, after meeting Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New York, has dimmed and we continue to grope in the dark trying to find a way, which will lead us to the fulfilment of the promise made by India's revered Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru, to the Kashmiri people.

Talks continue to be held on all the issues, which have bedevilled our relationship but no substantive talks on Kashmir have even begun, despite the fact that Pakistan has shown the maximum flexibility possible. Why is that so? What is India's game plan on Kashmir? What is the thinking in non-governmental circles in India? Who would eventually compel India to hand over the occupied territories to their rightful owners, the freedom fighters, the APHC or Pakistan's modified policy on Kashmir? Should we expect the United States to put pressure on India to untie the Gordon Knot?

It is true that India has at last accepted that Kashmir is a dispute, which needs resolution, though many in the South Block refer to it as a problem not an issue. Prime Minister Vajpayee did launch a so-called peace initiative with Pakistan when he visited Srinagar on April 18 2003. He even extended his hand of friendship but it was conditional on the stopping of the alleged cross-border infiltration and destruction of the alleged terrorism infrastructure. "Only then would the doors of talks open", said the former prime minister.

Musharraf clamped down on the terrorist organisations, not because Vajpayee wanted it nor totally because there was pressure from Washington, but because they had become a danger to Pakistan as well. When the infiltration died down both the BJP and the Congress agreed to talk to Pakistan on all outstanding issues, including that of Jammu and Kashmir. India did respond positively when Pakistan announced that it is unilaterally ordering a ceasefire along the LoC. The Indian government also proposed an unconditional dialogue with the moderate faction of the APHC, headed by Abbas Ansari. The Indian Chief of Army Staff agreed to withdraw 40,000 troops from IHK, as according to him there has been a substantive reduction of infiltration into Kashmir.

A peaceful environment presently prevails with a record number of people from all walks of life

being permitted to travel to each other's country. All of them go back with fond memories of the hospitality extended to them by their neighbours. But the main hurdle in the way of achieving genuine and durable peace remains unattended.

Why is that so? What are the ground realities by which we must first recognise and modify our Kashmir policy accordingly. Both the BJP and the Congress continue to maintain that the State of Jammu and Kashmir has been, is and shall be an integral part of India and any attempts to separate it from the country will be resisted by all necessary means. The BJP reject a plebiscite, calling it a Nehruvian blunder. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is reported to have agreed to look at options for the solution of the Kashmir problem he has categorically stated that any re-drawing of boundaries is not acceptable to India.

Though the Indian army has suffered more than a thousand casualties since the freedom movement in Kashmir started in 1989 its senior officers believe that they would be able to suppress the insurgency and there is no need for the political leadership to give in to the demands of the hard liners in the APHC just because the militants are still active. Pakistani journalists who recently visited IHK came back with the impression that the Kashmiris are tired of the killings both by the freedom fighters and by the security forces.

The APHC, which comprises some twenty disparate parties, has split into two factions. While the pro-Pakistan elements is not prepared to have a dialogue with the Indians, Abbas Ansari, who heads the moderate faction, is not averse to New Delhi's offer of negotiations. The present Indian leadership is prepared to satisfy the Kashmiris by offering them complete autonomy. Perhaps, even more than what is given to them under Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The sky is the limit says Manmohan Singh.

The regional solution presented by Musharraf has been rejected as, according to the Indians, it smacks of the two-nation theory as it is based on religious grounds. To them there are only three geographical divisions of Kashmir Jammu, Ladakh and the Valley. Since the Indian prime Minister was not even prepared to listen to such a suggestion it was not even brought up by Shaikat Aziz during his recent meeting with his counterpart in New Delhi. India is afraid that if the Kashmiris secede from India the separatist movements in the northeast would be even more difficult to handle. Even Punjab and Tamil Nadu might re-open their demand of leaving the Indian Union.

To the ordinary Indian, Kashmir is not a major problem worth spending one's efforts on. Poverty, unemployment, housing and village electrification

are more pressing needs as far as they are concerned. They do want normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan, especially those who have divided families and those who wish to benefit from increased trade between the two countries. They feel that if it can be achieved without waiting for a solution of Kashmir so much the better.

The international community is concerned about another conflict breaking out between India and Pakistan, which may lead to a nuclear exchange but is not willing to go beyond felicitation between the two nuclear neighbours.

It is becoming evident that India is trying to extract commercial, political and strategic benefits from Pakistan by keeping the issue alive but determined not to yield even an inch of the territory under its occupation. India is wanting to drive a hard bargain knowing that Kashmir is a core issue for Pakistan and that President Musharraf is wanting to solve it even it be a truncated Kashmir.

**M**ore specifically India wants the total stoppage of infiltration across the border and the dismantling of terrorist training camps in Azad Kashmir. It would like transit facilities through Pakistan so as to reach out to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Before it agrees to the Iran oil and gas pipeline it wants Pakistan to purchase diesel from India. Pakistan must reciprocate by giving India MFN status.

So what should Pakistan's policy be on Kashmir? The LoC cannot be accepted as an international border. Pakistan has shown enough flexibility and should insist that a solution of Kashmir is only possible if the concerns of all three parties are addressed to sincerely.

The AHC must put their own act together and resolve their differences. Work towards one accepted goal. Pressure on India can be exerted by the APHC if they first prove through an election that they truly represent the majority of Kashmiris. The freedom fighters have to win the goodwill of the Kashmiris and not carry out killings of innocent men and women. They should confine their militant activities against the security forces only.

Although some senior retired military officers believe that it is only the freedom fighters that will deliver Kashmir to Pakistan, even if it takes another 50 years, I would not go along with that assessment of the present situation in Kashmir. Use of force should gradually give way to peaceful negotiations.

Foreign Secretaries of the two countries are to meet on December 22. Hopefully they will remain firm on the movement forward of all issues, even though some may come closer to an agreement than others.

**The writer is a retired Lt Gen**