

# The ultimate weapon for Kashmiris

By M.P. Bhandara

*Kashmir Dawn 6-3-05*

THE failure of India to reach an accommodation with Pakistan on the Baglihar Dam dispute rekindles the old ghost of our perception of India which lives through our political nightmares.

India the bigger, India the militarily more powerful, India the economically resurgent, India the institutionally secure, but India with a small heart when it comes to Pakistan. Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and particularly in the last months of his stewardship, we clutched at straws of hope.

Here was an old political horse who had transmogrified into being a statesman with a vision and strength to transcend the calculus of narrow self-interest. But, this was not to be. The triumvirate that rules India's policy on Pakistan today is politically soft. It consists of a lady of foreign origin, an honest gentleman economist without a political base, and a foreign minister known to be a hawk on Pakistan.

A vulnerable leadership in New Delhi bodes ill for Pakistan. An agreement on Baglihar or a bus connection in Kashmir are resolvable matters. But the window of political expediency apparently does not permit much flexibility, let alone serious talks on Siachin or on Kashmir. President Musharraf has shown courage in going against the wind repeatedly over here; his wages for such bravura is a determined effort by the extremist elements to remove him from the scene. The current Indian leadership can fall like a house of cards against a right-wing BJP-RSS onslaught on any perceived real concession to Pakistan.

Where do we proceed from here? The future is a land without any maps. We are all subject to the law of unforeseen consequences. What we can do and should do is to keep our nose clean and bide our time. And by this one means we should satisfy India and the world that Pakistan has bidden adieu finally, irreversibly and irrevocably to promoting any form of violence in Kashmir.

We have learnt the hard way that assisting violence in Kashmir is a double-edged sword. The flip side is that inevitably these very guns get trained to our foreheads. The

Does this signify a policy shift on Kashmir? Certainly not. It is for the Valley Kashmiris to fight their battle for self-determination by peaceful means and for us to give them moral support. I want to propose to the Valley Kashmiris a weapon more deadly than terror and far more effective: it is civil disobedience, non-payment of taxes, non-cooperation, a willingness to go to jail in thousands and to bare their breasts to police bullets.

As we well know, this very weapon was forged in India by Mahatma Gandhi. In recent times this was the chosen weapon against one of the most morally repulsive regimes that ever ruled any country; apartheid. Nelson Mandela has proved that civil disobedience is a viable weapon against regimes as murderous and cruel as the Indian forces of occupation in the Kashmir valley.

Vicious dogs, powerful water

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hoses and steel-tipped batons were used against peaceful protesters in South Africa. But the world was watching. Even though the apartheid people had European blood in their veins, Europe joined the rest of the world to treat the white South Africans as pariahs deserving total isolation until the regime imploded under its own weight.

Any alienated, sullen and defeated people are difficult to govern. You can take a horse to the water but cannot force it to drink. The satraps chosen by the oppressor demand and usually obtain astronomic sums of money to bribe, cajole, contain and corrupt an alienated people. In practice, these millions get lost in corruption or are otherwise salted

off the oppressor. It is the syndrome of its degradation.

Even more telling than the financial drain is the power of the international media to shape the future. An epochal event in history of British India was the shooting at a defenceless crowd in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, by General Dyer in 1918 which shook the world; a similar event was the shooting of unarmed people in Sharpeville, South Africa in the 1960s. These events changed the political climate of the times; but when terrorists kill innocents in retaliation the reaction is different. The cause is then forgotten and in its place is loathing of the means adopted.

In the recently released memoirs of Mohammad Aslam Khan Khattak (A Pathan Odyssey), who for a short time was the 'honorary treasurer' of this scheme, he says: "The tribesmen started going to Kashmir. They were under their own chieftains and

there was no discipline or coordination. I was shocked one day to find operational headquarters for the movement in the Chief Minister's small office attached to his house."... but, the Tribal liberators had other thoughts in mind before proceeding to free the Kashmiris.

"At Muzaffarabad valuable time was wasted while two chiefs contested who would be Amir of Kashmir when it had been conquered."

As a consequence of this needless violence and loot in 1947, Operation Gibraltar launched by the Ayub government in 1965 in Kashmir was a failure when this band of "liberators" were identified and handed over to the local police by the Kashmiris themselves.

I mention these facts in passing to make the point that the Kashmiris have been traumatized not only by India but by Pakistan as well. Their current cry for independence or autonomy guaranteed by both India and Pakistan is very understandable in this historical context.

The upshot of it all is that we have to change our means, our view of the Kashmir dispute and, at the same time, keep our resolution tight as do the Chinese, who have never attempted to invade Taiwan. The Chinese confrontation with the US over Taiwan has the interesting aspect that China has never allowed politics to come in the way of economics and busi-

comes to Pakistan. Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and particularly in the last months of his stewardship, we clutched at straws of hope.

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We have learnt the hard way that assisting violence in Kashmir is a double-edged sword. The flip side is that inevitably these very guns get trained to our foreheads. The righteousness of a political cause is drowned by the sheer ugliness of terror. Historically, terror has seldom achieved its aim and where it has, it has murdered its own children. There is much wisdom in the saying that the quality of the means determines the ends.

If indeed we decide to end supporting militant groups in Indian held Kashmir from our territory, we may help the Indians fortify the fence they have built along the LoC and even point out any lacuna that might exist. And if there are complaints about any militant camps in Azad Kashmir or Pakistan, we might go to the extent of inviting Indian observers to check the ground realities for themselves.

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Something similar also happened in Kashmir. Between 1988 and the present day billions of rupees have been spent by New Delhi to gain the affection of the Kashmiris. The Farooq Abdullah government as most Indians will concede was corrupt and rotten to the core. A subjugated state becomes a virtual parasite living

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The Chinese confrontation with the US over Taiwan has the interesting aspect that China has never allowed politics to come in the way of economics and business. China has broken all records on economic development generating a fantastic GDP growth of 10 per cent per annum for a decade or more and accumulating foreign exchange reserves of \$600 billion. It does not hesitate to accept investment from Taiwan or the US. The Chinese view is that politics does not mix well with business. They take the long view of the inevitability of economic, military and political strength changing the dynamics of confrontation where the adversary is stronger for the time being.

Let us learn from China.

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