**Kashmir: Policy or politics**

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Once the UN Security Council’s proposed plebiscite is held under the auspices of the United Nations and the people of Kashmir decide to accede to Pakistan, they would still have the option to be independent or stay with Pakistan. By reiterating his promise, PM Imran Khan has added a new dimension to Pakistan’s principled stand on the Jammu & Kashmir dispute.

The statement presumes that one day a free and fair plebiscite will be conducted under the UN auspices and the people of Kashmir will vote for accession to Pakistan. Soon, Islamabad will unilaterally conduct a sort of referendum for the people of Kashmir to decide whether they still wanted to stay with Pakistan or be an independent entity. The statement also assumes that Pakistan would have the support of other stakeholders like India and China in giving the independence option to Kashmiris. It further supposes that the Parliament, Executives, Judiciary, Armed Forces, Media and the over 220 million people of Pakistan would have no objection to live along side an independent Kashmir.

[Azerbaijan says Armenia targeted army positions in Nakhchivan](https://nation.com.pk/03-Aug-2021/azerbaijan-says-armenia-targeted-army-positions-in-nakhchivan)

To begin with, this ‘pledge’ needs to be understood contextually to realise if it was a policy announcement or a mere political statement. Responding to the opposition’s apprehension that he would perhaps make Azad Jammu & Kashmir a province, PM Imran Khan has spelled out a roadmap of sorts for the final disposition of the Kashmir dispute. Ostensibly, it was a political statement that actually served the purpose. Notwithstanding the numerous ifs and buts attached to it, the ‘pledge’ has arguably proved to be the deciding factor in the recently held elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. PTI’s decisive victory speaks volumes about the magic that this ‘pledge’ latently possessed.

Politicians all over the world seem to have a license to issue any number of statements in order to address certain matters of immediate concern, leaving the outcome to be handled by future generations or to be quoted and misquoted at appropriate times. Following Gandhi’s guideline, it was Indian PM Nehru who pledged to conduct a plebiscite in Kashmir in 1947, a promise never fulfilled either by him or several of his successors. Has any heaven fallen just because a Prime Minister made a promise that was not fulfilled during or after their lifetime? Remember all those promises and pledges of reconstruction of Afghanistan and their fate?

[UEFA European Conference League playoff round does draw](https://nation.com.pk/03-Aug-2021/uefa-european-conference-league-playoff-round-does-draw)

Absence of a clarification from the Foreign Office does not help in confirming the nature of the ‘pledge’. Hence, those who might consider it a policy statement would be right in their assessment as well as raising numerous questions to its timing, raison d’état, practicality, authenticity and relevance particularly in the context of India’s actions audaciously taken on August 5, 2019. Does Pakistan have the requisite support from India, China, America and the UN to transform this roadmap into a reality? What are the factors that would make the existing muted international community suddenly amenable to Pakistan’s stand on the Kashmir dispute? After taking decisive action on the status of the Occupied Jammu and Kashmir two years ago, how would India agree or be persuaded to conduct a plebiscite, a legitimate demand that New Delhi has adamantly not met in the past seven decades? Why wouldn’t the Kashmiris insist on having the third option at the time of the UN sponsored plebiscite if they knew this choice would be given to them in any case? Following the emergence of an independent Kashmir, what if other provinces of Pakistan also demand a similar prerogative? What will the status of Gilgit Baltistan be? Would the people of Azad and the Occupied Jammu and Kashmir think alike? What if they do? What if they don’t? Last but certainly not least, can the Prime Minister of Pakistan announce a policy change on a settled matter of foreign policy on his own entirely without holding a national debate or reaching a consensus in Parliament?

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During PTI’s present governmental set up, undeniably, Pakistan has remained steadfast on its principled stand on Kashmir; persistently reiterating it throughout this period while offering its unflinching and unwavering support to the people of Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, PM Imran Khan himself has pleaded the Kashmir case at every possible forum. Not only has Islamabad unequivocally condemned India for its illegal acts committed particularly since August 5, 2019, but also urged New Delhi to offer a roadmap for the reversal of its decision to pave the way for initiating bilateral talks. Hence, it is difficult to deduce that Islamabad has made certain fundamental changes in its Kashmir policy or whether the promised third option is a policy statement. Secondly, the ‘pledge’ does not say anything on what Islamabad’s stand on Kashmir would be from now until the desired plebiscites are held. Neither has it specified the timings of the first and the second plebiscite nor does it visualise which political parties would be managing the affairs of Pakistan and India when the two plebiscites were to be held. In all probabilities, it was a political statement.

[Coronavirus cases top 60 million in European region, says WHO](https://nation.com.pk/03-Aug-2021/coronavirus-cases-top-60m-in-european-region-says-who)

PM Imran Khan is aware that the third option on Kashmir contravenes and negates the UN Security Council’s relevant resolutions as well as Article 257 of the constitution of Pakistan and means practically giving up Islamabad’s decades’ old principled stand on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Hence, if it was not a political statement, such a massive change in the most important pillar of Pakistan’s foreign policy must be having some solid foundation and reasoning. Issuance of a statement of such enormity cannot possibly be based on some academic exercise either. That brings us to a more serious question. Conspiracy theories and apprehensions of outside influence to modify Pakistan’s principled stand on Kashmir aside, has Pakistan actually reached some kind of an understanding on permanently addressing the Kashmir dispute through some outside the box arrangements? If the Kashmir dispute is resolved during the PTI’s government, PM Imran Khan is set to be the third Nobel Laureate from Pakistan.