

America's Role in the Kashmir Crisis: India and Pakistan are Chained to Washington

By [James Gundun](#)

Global Research, July 21, 2010

20 July 2010

Region: [Asia](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [PAKISTAN](#)

Mounting unrest in Kashmir and the drivers behind it can appear endlessly complex. Simplification is needed for that reason alone, yet the conflict also breaks down naturally. The vast roots that disrupt Kashmir and Jammu were bundled together on July 8th by India's Cabinet Committee on Security when it [backed a "maximum crackdown"](#) in Srinagar, the regional capital. Omar Abdullah, chief minister of Kashmir and Jammu, argued, "I had to put a stop to this cycle of violence," a futile fallacy.

Maximum protests ensued giving way to renewed violence and casualties. Nine months ago Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chairman of Kashmir's leading political bloc, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, [allegedly met with](#) Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram in New Delhi to reignite the peace process. [Now he tells reporters](#) from under house arrest, "People have lost faith. The constituency of peace is shrinking day by day... The peace process is in tatters."

For this reason, ostensibly, India and Pakistan attempted to rekindle their strategic dialogue with foreign ministry level talks. Abdullah [succinctly outlined](#) the basic politics of Kashmir: "Whatever happens between India and Pakistan has a direct impact on Jammu and Kashmir. When relations improve, we see the benefits. After the Mumbai attacks, that was snatched away from us."

But emergency negotiations are a double-edged sword; the same conditions that make them necessary also tear them apart. Pakistan and India are too cool to each-other to make headway on Kashmir or Mumbai, and talks quickly stalled as each side's media ravaged the other. By the time Indian Foreign Minister S.M. Krishna [told reporters](#) "I am hopeful" while leaving for his first meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, the two states were already engaged in a literal rock fight.

India claims that Pakistan is [funding stone-throwing](#), the new form of protests in Kashmir.

Pakistan has denied the charges, but on top of sympathy to Muslim Kashmiris, the low-cost strategy yields a high degree of pressure on India to engage Kashmir's status. Muddying the waters further, Pakistan's higher cost strategy was thrown onto the table on the eve of negotiations. Allegations that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had funded the Mumbai operation are nothing new, but G.K Pillai, India's home secretary, kicked off the talks [by revealing](#), "They [ISI] were literally controlling and coordinating it from the beginning until the end."

Pakistan, in turn, accuses India's intelligence agency, RAW, of provoking unrest in Balochistan as a countermeasure to Islamabad's proxy militants in Kashmir, adding yet

another hot-spot to the cauldron. Hypersensitive to Balochistan accusations, India preemptively rejected blame for the recent murder of Habib Jalib Baloch, secretary general of the Balochistan National Party.

Necessary as de-escalation is between Pakistan and India, these were no negotiations but an emergency call to put out a live fire. Islamabad [reportedly demands](#) that Kashmir serve as the focus point of the strategic dialogue, considering its limbo status the root of discord, while New Dehli won't engage any other issue until Mumbai is resolved. Both cling to valid points obscured by their sins, creating the stalemate that presently exists.

"It is time for India and Pakistan to pursue the peace process, to put the peace process back on track," S.M. Krishna said. "We are handcuffed by history and chained by the future."

But they're chained by Washington too.

It's easy to blame both sides in Kashmir, and especially easy to blame America for trouble in Asia. The blame is earned in this case though and can be expressed in fundamental terms. A deadlock between two parties usually entails an arbitrator, but America as that arbitrator wants everything stacked its own way: silence on Kashmir and cooperation from Pakistan in Afghanistan. Naturally this course is pursued as ideal for US interests, but until the equation changes it will keep working against regional stability.

Kashmir may be the key to unlocking South Asia. For now it jams the system in silence, disturbed only by the violent rhythm between India security forces and Kashmiris that occasionally spills into the international media. US envoy Richard Holbrooke, arguably Washington's toughest diplomat, is afraid to mention the word "Kashmir" in fear of aggravating India - and pushing it towards Russia or China. With the status quo favoring the heavyweight India, Pakistan lacks the power to challenge directly for Kashmir and resorts to proxy warfare.

The combination ignites the streets and relations between the two states, leading to competition and potential destabilization in Afghanistan.

Apparently America cannot have it all in South Asia. It cannot cry foul of Pakistan's support for Kashmir militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), link them to Afghanistan, then refuse to speak the word Kashmir in public. The Kashmiri American Council has taken to [petitioning President Barack Obama](#) to address the crisis. There's no doubt that Kashmir affects Afghanistan, and yet while the White House hails its "civilian surge" in Afghanistan, Kashmir's streets are filled with stones, rage, and blood.

"This is a generation that is totally disillusioned with India's approach to Kashmir," Farooq warns. "They have aspirations and they're aware of what's happening in the world - in Palestine, Iran, Afghanistan. Today they are throwing stones. But if this continues, tomorrow they'll take up the gun."

It's not surprising that Obama dropped Kashmir from his vocabulary after taking office when he raised the issue two days before election day, but the loss of time is tragic nonetheless and must be rectified as soon as possible. Having arrived in Pakistan in transit to Afghanistan, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's weightiest action [may have been phone calls](#) to the Indian and Pakistani Foreign Ministries, admonishing them for their public feud and urging "side-line talks" at Kabul's upcoming conference.

Yet this act, seemingly important as it is, falls short of Kashmir's demands and merely protracts its crisis. Washington guides India and Pakistan's strategic dialogue from behind the curtains, trying to keep the two in line and from colliding, but it never brings them into line either. Hence they stay parallel and mired in the status quo. All issues aside, America still appears the best mediator to Kashmir's conflict given its relationship with both states. But if Clinton leaves the region without broaching Kashmir and if Obama stays silent as Srinagar intensifies, the time will ripen for international mediation.

That seems to be where Farooq is headed.

Kashmir does emulate Palestine in many ways: two deadlocked states, one occupier and one guerrilla, tied together and disrupted by America's bias, waging a low-intensity conflict with regional implications and no end in sight. Srinagar as Gaza. Even India's lobby is beginning to rival Israel's, and hampering US actions accordingly. Now, just like Palestinians and Arabs have grown impatient with Washington and are taking their cause to the UN, [Farooq recently wrote](#) to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, "It is high time when the UN should adopt a proactive course of diplomatic maneuver to compel India, while taking genuine Kashmiri leadership on board, to initiate talks for the settlement of the conflict."

And it may be the only way to pry America's silent grip off Kashmir's neck.

James Gundun is a political scientist and counterinsurgency analyst based in Washington D.C. Contact him in The Trench, a realist foreign policy blog, at www.hadalzone.blogspot.com.

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