

India's Kashmir Crackdown Poses Risk of War

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On August 5, India's Hindu nationalist government unilaterally revoked the autonomy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, while flooding the region with troops, imposing a curfew, and shutting down all communications.

The state is to be broken in two, with the eastern portion (Ladakh) under direct rule by New Delhi.

The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi shut down Internet connections, mobile phone services, and land-line phones in the besieged region. The fragmentary news that has trickled out speaks of arrests of leading politicians and widespread fear among the region's 12 million inhabitants.

Presenting the stunning news to India's parliament, India's Minister of the Interior, [Amit Shah](#), [stated](#) that these moves would bring "better government, a flood of outside investment, and peace."

The government of mostly Muslim Pakistan has contested for influence in the region with mostly Hindu India. Pakistan now occupies the northern third of historic principality of Kashmir. Pakistan reacted to the August 5 measures with angry condemnation.

Modi heads a "fascist regime," government minister [Fawad Chaudhry told the Pakistani parliament](#) on August 7. Another war over Kashmir was not off the table, he added. "Pakistan should not let Kashmir become another Palestine," Chaudhry stated. "We have to choose between dishonor and war."

70 Years of Rivalry

Pakistani-Indian rivalry in Kashmir goes back more than 70 years. In 1947, "British India" divided into two independent states: Pakistan and India. Jammu and Kashmir was the only state allocated to India with a majority Muslim population. Muslims made up only 15% of India's post-independence population; their fellow believers in Kashmir felt isolated and vulnerable.

Leaders of Left parties burn an effigy of the Modi government in India.



Acknowledging strong support in Kashmir for self-determination, the United Nations provided for a referendum on the region's status, but this never took place. Nonetheless, the terms for region's incorporation into India did include addition of two clauses in the constitution, providing for wide-ranging autonomy for the state of Jammu and Kashmir (Article 370) and banning ownership of land by non-Kashmiris (Article 35A).

The Muslim population considered autonomy plus the land-ownership protection as essential to protect them from being swamped and sidelined by India's Hindu majority. These measures stood as a barrier against the danger of a colonial settler invasion from outsiders that would convert the Muslims into a marginalized minority in their own land.

Both these safeguards were swept aside by the Indian government on August 5, 2019.

Palestinian Parallel

The Muslims' present status, as the Pakistani government minister noted, has an uncanny resemblance to that in west-bank Palestine, where a hostile Israeli occupation has in fact turned into a colonial settler project to marginalize the indigenous Palestinian population in their own land.

Given that India has abolished the land-protection clause, the prediction of its Minister of the Interior, Amit Shah, that Kashmir will experience "a flood of outside investment" could well signify a plan for extensive colonialist dispossession of Kashmiri Muslims through land purchases by outsiders.

An Urgent Danger of Nuclear War

Even during the decades in which constitutional safeguards existed, Jammu and Kashmir have known little tranquility. Frictions with the central government have been frequent; New Delhi's incursions into regional governance have provoked resistance. There have been armed clashes on the Pakistani border, and on two occasions the Pakistani and Indian armies fought brief wars. An armed resistance in the 1980s seeking Kashmiri self-determination met strong Indian military retaliation. Casualties were heavy, a low-level conflict has persisted, and security forces have often attacked unarmed popular protesters.

And now the armies of both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons. Both countries possess more than 100 nuclear warheads, each one capable of causing incalculable slaughter of civilians on the other side.

In February this year, following on a bomb attack that killed 40 Indian security personnel, India and Pakistan each carried out an air raid against the other's territory. Under these

conditions, India's crackdown in Kashmir could very possibly result in a military conflict escalating into nuclear war.

Voices of Opposition in India

Although many press reports speak of strong popular support in India for the government crackdown, opposition parties were quick to criticize these measures.

Speaking for the largest Indian opposition group, the Congress Party, [Ghulam Nabi Azad stated](#) that "the Bharatiya Janata Party has murdered the constitution. It has murdered democracy."

Five left-wing parties issued [a joint statement](#) condemning Modi's measures as "an assault on federalism, a fundamental feature of the Indian Constitution" and called a joint national protest for August 7.¹

"It is universally acknowledged that the unity of India lies in its diversity," the [Communist Party of India \(Marxist\) stated August 5](#). "They are treating Jammu and Kashmir as an occupied territory."

A Role for the United Nations?

Given that Kashmir's disputed status was originally established recognized by the United Nations by calling for a referendum, the UN would seem to have some responsibility to assist in overcoming the present crisis. This point is strongly made in an August 7 appeal by the [Kashmir Scholars Consultative and Action Network](#) to UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The UN should appoint a Special Rapporteur, the Kashmir scholars state, to work toward an end to violence against Kashmiri civilians and a restoration of human rights.

A year ago, on June 14, 2018, the UN High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR) [submitted a report](#) calling for an investigation of human rights violations in Kashmir.

The UNHCHR described credible reports of massacres, gang rapes, abductions, and "wilful blinding using pellet guns" by Indian security forces, which have not met with any official response.

The Indian government opposes UN mediation over Kashmir and refused to admit UNHCHR researchers into the region. It denounced the UNHCHR report as fallacious and prejudiced.

Canada's Role in Kashmir

Zafar Bangash, director of the Toronto-based Institute of Contemporary Islamic Thought, [has pointed out](#) that the UNHCHR decision to look into the Kashmir conflict resulted in part from a UK-based petition with strong backing from Canadians resulting in some 50,000 signatures worldwide. This is perhaps the only significant Canadian contribution to Kashmir peacemaking in recent years.

During the two-month Kashmir war between India and Pakistan that followed on their independence in 1947, Canada's government played an active role in shaping the terms of armistice, and for a time a Canadian general, Andrew McNaughton, headed the armistice commission. Even today, that fact is remembered with gratitude by Kashmiri self-determination activists. But in recent years, Canada has abstained from such initiatives, and

its government is now an obedient ally of both the US and Israel, both of whom are closely aligned with the Modi government. •

This article first published on the JohnRiddell.com website.

Endnotes

1. The five parties are: Communist Party of India (Marxist), Revolutionary Socialist Party, All-India Forward Bloc, Communist Party of India, and the CPI(ML) Liberation.

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