

J&K AND THE WORLD: INDIA'S STRATEGIES FOR INTERNAL SECURITY, TERRITORIAL DEFENCE AND DIPLOMACY WILL HAVE TO ACT IN UNISON

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

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When you create new facts on the ground especially in a contested terrain, you must be prepared for push back. As Pakistan mounts a political offensive against India's decision to alter the status of Jammu and Kashmir, there will surely be international ripples. The Indian diplomatic objective is to get the rest of the world to live with the new reality in Kashmir, if not accept it.

This is not the first time that India has created new facts on the ground. India's Pokhran tests of 1998 come readily to mind. It took about 10 years for the international system to move from a very harsh initial reaction to lifting by 2008 the four-decade-old nuclear blockade against India.

That is good diplomatic precedent for Delhi in coping with whatever Pakistan throws at India. But there should be no underestimating the complexity of the challenge. **India's diplomatic response must be at multiple levels. One is the legal dimension. Realists might scoff at legal niceties. But legal arguments are important and Delhi must present a solid legal brief about its actions, since there is little international understanding of the complex historical evolution of Kashmir. That applies more broadly to the international public opinion, where the Pakistani narrative on Kashmir continues to prevail, thanks to the nature of the international media coverage of Kashmir. Of special interest are the Western legislatures that tend to generate policy pressures on their executive establishments.**

Traditionally, Pakistan has been good at mobilising opinion in these quarters, especially in Britain and Europe. India has done quite well in the US over the years, where it has outsmarted separatist propaganda backed by Pakistan. But Delhi should note that Pakistan is learning from the Indian playbook in the US. It has mobilised the not insignificant Pakistani diaspora and won over small but key sections of the Congress.

Then comes the question of "internationalisation". Pakistan loves the idea and India deeply resents it. Going to the UNSC has been the instinctive first reaction of Pakistan. But neither

Pakistan's faith in the UN nor India's concerns stand up to close scrutiny. The UN's ability to impose solutions on disputes between nations has rarely been impressive. But for India taking the Kashmir question to it, there was no way the UN would loom so large on Kashmir. During the Cold War, divisions among major powers limited the UN Security Council's peace-making role. After the end of the Cold War, though, there was a brief moment when Russia and China seemed to acquiesce in the interventionist agenda that Western liberals had set for the UN.

Great powers are quarreling again and they are unlikely to agree on the Kashmir question. India's task is to simply prevent such an agreement.

This does not mean India's engagement with the UN and multilateral agencies is unimportant. Some multilateral activity can be quite useful. For example, the recent Indian campaign at the UN on designating Masood Azhar as a terrorist has been good at highlighting Pakistan's role as a safe haven for violent extremism. Even more valuable has been India's engagement with the Financial Action Task Force, which has ratcheted up the pressures on Pakistan to stop support for terrorism. What matters, therefore, is not the general principle of "internationalisation", but the specifics of the context and the nature of the forum.

Pakistan's proclaimed faith in mediation is touching because there is no evidence that third-party involvement in the Kashmir dispute has benefited Pakistan. Consider, for example, Islamabad's efforts to mobilise the international community for mediation in the [Kargil War](#) two decades ago. It ended up in the US compelling Pakistan to accept the sanctity of the Line of Control. Rather than getting rattled by Pakistan's posturing on mediation, Delhi should concentrate on the attitudes of the major powers to the current dynamic in the Subcontinent. Bilateralism is the key to outcomes on the multilateral domain. Consider the five permanent members of the UNSC.

China is a party to the dispute on Kashmir twice over. The border between India and China in Ladakh is disputed; China also occupies a piece of Kashmir that Pakistan ceded to it in 1963. China is certainly part of India's Kashmir problem. China, however, has problems of its own in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Beijing surely knows that those living in glass houses should not be throwing stones.

Russia, once upon a time, was India's go-to veto-wielder at the UN on Kashmir. Delhi too has stood by Moscow when it is in some difficulty, for example when Russia changed the facts on the ground in Crimea during 2011. In recent times, Russia has drawn closer to China and is often tempted to take "even-handed" positions between India and Pakistan. But dispelling all doubts, Moscow has come out last week in support of India's Kashmir move.

Over the last two decades, France has emerged as a reliable strategic partner — a sort of "new Russia" for India. In recent years, it has played a key role in the FATF as well as the UNSC on terror-related issues. Delhi can certainly bank on political support from Paris at the current juncture.

When it comes to Kashmir and Pakistan, Britain is always suspect in Delhi's eyes. There is speculation that London played a key role in facilitating the current US reset on Pakistan. As Britain defines its post-Brexit global strategy, Delhi must encourage London to take into account its long-term interests in India and end its persistent ambiguity on Kashmir.

In the end, though, it's really the US that has the most important role in shaping the international reaction to the developments in Kashmir. For nearly two years, it's been the relentless pressure from Washington that has forced Pakistan to count the costs of its support for terrorism. And it is the US decision to quit Afghanistan that seems to have emboldened Pakistan to ramp up pressures on Kashmir.

India can't quibble with the US decision not to spend more of its blood and treasure in Afghanistan. Beyond that, there is much room for discussion between Delhi and Washington on a range of issues relating to the future of Afghanistan and the sources of terror in Pakistan. It should not be impossible to find a way to secure the interests of both, especially since the India-US bilateral relationship has acquired much greater depth over the last two decades, and covers a much wider region than the Subcontinent.

The real test for Indian diplomacy, including with the US, comes when Delhi lifts the massive security blanket over Kashmir and Pakistan unleashes its terror proxies. That in turn sets the stage for a muscular Indian response, an inevitable escalation of the conflict with Pakistan and the intensification of great power interest in Kashmir. That is when India's strategies for internal security, territorial defence and diplomacy will have to act in unison.

This article first appeared in today's print edition under the headline: J&K and the world. The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for [The Indian Express](#).

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