

CHINA AND ITS QUASI-COLONY

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On August 16, the 15 members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) engaged in closed-door informal consultations in response to a letter written by Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to the President of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), backed by a request by Pakistan's "iron brother" China, on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

A great deal of hullabaloo has been raised about the meeting. However, informal consultations are held in the UNSC all the time. There is no official record of the proceedings nor does the informal exchange result in any outcome document. In this case, the only consensus that had the backing of the majority of members was that India and Pakistan should resolve matters bilaterally. The members of the UNSC did not authorise the rotational president for the month of August, Poland, to issue even informal remarks on their behalf to the mediapersons who stake out the chamber, let alone a UNSC press statement by the president, which needs to be negotiated in a formal meeting and must be based on consensus, at least among the five permanent members. Such a press release or press advisory is not even considered an official document on record.

But for China's request, even the closed-door informal discussion would not have taken place. China's attempts to get the president of the UNSC to issue an informal statement to the media, was curiously backed by the UK, perhaps in the hope of scoring some brownie points with the large domestic constituencies of Pakistanis. The UK might also have hoped to curry some favour with China to further its mercantilist interests in the face of an imminent Brexit meltdown.

Pakistan's Permanent Representative Maleeha Lodhi made a mendacious and propagandist statement to the media making allegations against India, claiming that "the voice of the people of Kashmir was being heard in the UNSC". Pakistan should first permit the voice of the Baloch people to be heard, along with that of the oppressed in Gilgit-Baltistan.

China's Permanent Representative Zhang Jun egregiously arrogated to himself the role of the president of the UNSC in an extraordinary breach of traditional practice and protocol, and spuriously claimed that members of the UNSC "had expressed their serious concern concerning the situation in Jammu and Kashmir". He added that "they are also concerned about the human rights situation there and also, it is the general will of the members that parties concerned should refrain from taking any unilateral action which might further aggravate the tension". He then went on to repeat the remarks of Chinese state councillor and foreign minister, Wang Yi, that "the Kashmir issue is a dispute left from colonial history. It should be properly and peacefully resolved based on the UN charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements".

The Indian government's bold step to revoke the special status of J&K, long overdue, has given Pakistan and its cohorts in J&K a big jolt. It has hurt vested interests in the Valley who, for

generations, have siphoned off the wealth of the state and waltzed with separatists at the same time. Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) emphasised in his Independence Day address that the move to revoke [Article 370](#) will bring development and prosperity to the region. Earlier, the external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, had clearly conveyed, during his visit to Beijing, that the decisions were internal to India and aimed at providing good governance, promoting social justice and ensuring economic development in J&K. He had also pointed out to the Chinese that the constitutional change in India had no bearing on the boundary issue or the Line of Actual Control with China.

While it is a known fact that China treats Pakistan as a quasi-colony and backs it on all matters, its initiative to trigger informal consultations in the UNSC may have a broader rationale. China is facing global censure for its unbridled human rights violations in Xinjiang province, the mass incarceration of Uighurs in so-called re-education camps and the razing of mosques and other historical places that give the Uighurs their distinct identity.

The daily images on television screens around the world of the mass unrest in Hong Kong must be galling for a regime that takes pride in its ability to use force to quash dissent and seeks, with vaulting ambition, to emerge as the number one power in the world. The long-drawn public protests in Hong Kong are a reaction to the progressive erosion of the special status accorded to Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the terms of its Basic Law, which protects Hong Kong's capitalist system, the independence of the judiciary and the media.

Apart from its undying commitment to Pakistan, it is to deflect scrutiny of its own actions in Xinjiang and Hong Kong that China would have decided to support Pakistan's request and also to have its permanent representative masquerade as a spokesman for members of the UNSC.

That China has never commented when Pakistan unilaterally changed the status of regions in PoK exposes its deep bias. Gilgit-Baltistan was re-designated by Pakistan as Northern Areas in 1970. In 1974, Pakistan unilaterally overturned a law of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir prohibiting outsiders from owning property, and encouraged large-scale settlement by Sunnis in predominantly Shia-populated Gilgit-Baltistan. Pakistan once again unilaterally issued the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order in 2009, without any consultation with the people.

One should recall that in 1965, when China reorganised the erstwhile Tibet region into the Tibet Autonomous Region, giving it a provincial status, India was not apoplectic, like China has been following the designation of Ladakh as a union territory. That was not necessary since the claims of the two sides and the ground situation remained unchanged, whether then or now. Based on the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs, India has always refrained from making statements concerning the internal situation of China.

It is patently wrong to claim, as vested political interests have done in India, that the scrapping of Article 370 has resulted in the "internationalisation of Jammu & Kashmir" and that the informal discussion by UNSC members is the first of its kind in six decades.

Many sections of the Indian media have erroneously claimed that the last time the UNSC discussed the issue of J&K was in 1965. First, the UNSC does not have any agenda item explicitly termed "Jammu and Kashmir". The only agenda item on its mandate is "The India Pakistan Question". Second, UNSC Resolutions 209, 210, 211, 214 and 215 of September 1965 focussed on a ceasefire during the war and demanded that the two sides cooperate with UNMOGIP. Third, the last formal resolution under the agenda item titled "The India Pakistan Question", was UNSC Resolution 307 of 21 December 1971, which noted India's unilateral declaration of a ceasefire in the western theatre during that war, Pakistan's acceptance of it,

and, demanded a durable cessation of all hostilities.

It was under Prime Minister [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) that India first brought the matter before the UNSC using Article 35 of the UN Charter, in a letter of January 1, 1948, from the Representative of India P P Pillai, addressed to the UNSC president. The agenda item was titled “The Situation in Jammu & Kashmir” until the 230th meeting of the UNSC, held on 20 January 1948. Pakistan too had written a letter dated January 15, 1948, addressed by Pakistan foreign minister, Zafarullah Khan, to the UN secretary general. As a result, the agenda item was re-designated as “The India-Pakistan Question” in the 231st meeting of the UNSC on January 22, 1948, diluting the question of “aggression” that India had taken up. The item has since remained on the agenda of the UNSC.

Pakistan’s communications to UN bodies of matters relating to J&K are not a new development. Every year, Pakistan’s permanent representative to the UN in New York writes to the secretary general requesting that the agenda item “The India Pakistan Question” be retained, lest it is struck off the agenda for lack of any formal action on the subject over the years. Similarly, in Geneva, the Pakistani mission routinely engages in propaganda about alleged human rights violations.

With the exception of Pakistan and a few of its supporters, the global community endorses the bilateral framework for resolution of differences between India and Pakistan. Pakistan will no doubt try to rake up the issue at the October meeting of the Human Rights Committee at the UNHRC, hoping to capitalise on the insidious report prepared in 2018 by former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, a Pakistan sympathiser.

The informal meeting at the UNSC may have occasioned much jubilation in Pakistan though well-informed Pakistanis must surely know that it is a pyrrhic victory. The global community will no doubt take positive note of the steps being taken by India to restore normalcy in J&K through restoration of landlines, phased lifting of restrictions and the re-opening of government offices and schools. And, as Pakistan remains mired in its medieval ways, the world will soon see visible evidence of rapid development in J&K, which will contrast sharply with the backwardness of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

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