



In brief: Kashmir – still no end in sight

Standard Note: SN/IA/5773

Last updated: 10 November 2011

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Section: International Affairs and Defence Section

In May 2010 tentative hopes were being expressed that a resumption of peace talks on Kashmir might be in prospect. However, these hopes, like others in the past, were quickly dashed. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Srinagar in June 2010 but, to the disappointment of many Kashmiris, did not – as some had suggested he would – bring with him significant new proposals on security and governance. Within a matter of days, the death of a 17-year old boy at the hands of the Indian security forces triggered another major escalation of unrest and violence. During the rest of 2010 large crowds of peaceful protesters repeatedly took to the streets of Srinagar and other towns in the Kashmir Valley, regularly clashing with the security forces. There was a succession of shutdowns and strikes.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sent a ‘peace delegation’ comprising Home Minister Chidambaram and a group of Indian MPs to the Kashmir Valley in September 2010. The delegation acknowledged that the protests were ‘home-grown’, rather than fomented by Pakistan. In late September, Singh announced that the establishment of a high-level panel, chaired by an ‘eminent person’, to begin a process of sustained dialogue with Kashmiris. He was also announced that protestors who had been detained would be released from custody, the families of civilians killed during the unrest would be compensated, and that there would be moves to reopen schools, colleges and universities.

In mid October 2010, the Union Government announced that the composition of the panel (also known as the ‘interlocutors’) would be journalist Dileep Padgaonkar (Chair), academic Radha Kumar and economist MM Ansari. The panel was given a one-year mandate. Few had high expectations of it. The panel quickly caused controversy by saying that Pakistan had a role to play in resolving the Kashmir dispute and that the dispute should not be understood solely through the prism of terrorism. It began a series of consultative visits to Jammu and Kashmir that continued into 2011. The panel handed their report to the Union Government in mid October 2011. It has not yet been published, so nobody knows for sure what the conclusions and recommendations of the report are. However, reportage suggests that it is proposing a permanent political settlement that would involve maximum autonomy for the state of Jammu and Kashmir, of which Indian Kashmir is a part. 2011 has seen the level of protests significantly reduced, with many crediting the work of the panel for helping to lower tensions. Whether this fragile calm will be sustained could in part depend on what it has recommended and how the Union Government responds. The wounds still run deep amongst Kashmiris. The Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission has recently published a report identifying unmarked graves, in which over 2000 ‘disappeared’ Kashmiris are believed to have been buried. DNA profiling of the bodies is set to get under way. In recent weeks, the Union Government has bowed to army pressure not to repeal the

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controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in some parts of Kashmir.

Peace talks (known as the composite dialogue) between India and Pakistan stalled in 2007 (when many felt the two sides got quite close to a deal) and then deep-froze following the Mumbai attacks of November 2008. But, in another hopeful sign, they were finally revived in June 2011, when the foreign ministers of the two countries met in Islamabad. Some modest confidence-building measures (CBMs) were agreed. Talks have continued since then and received potentially a big boost in November when the Pakistan Government offered India 'Most Favoured Nation' trading status, belatedly reciprocating India's 1996 gesture. Kashmir has long been the main lens through which both India and Pakistan have viewed their bilateral relations. But it remains possible that some of the key elements of a possible deal on Kashmir could fairly quickly be put back 'on the table' if negotiations go well: demilitarisation on both sides of the border and political arrangements that go far beyond limited autonomy but stop short of full independence. A public opinion survey conducted by Chatham House in 2010 suggested that the vast majority of Kashmiris in the Kashmir Valley want independence but that in Jammu, this option has very little support, reflecting the Muslim-Hindu divide across the state. There also remain unresolved differences between the two countries over Indian plans to develop hydroelectric power capacity on its side of the Line of Control – most recently, over the Kishanganga dam project – and potentially combustible territorial disputes over the Siachen glacier and Sir Creek.

The US and British Governments view a resolution of the Kashmir dispute as a potentially important element in building peace and security across the wider region, including in Afghanistan, where India and Pakistan are competing for influence. Pakistan – and most Kashmiris – would like the US to mediate; India is implacably opposed. President Barack Obama, who said when standing for election that helping to solve the Kashmir dispute would be one of his "critical tasks" if elected, visited India in early November 2010 and said that the US remained ready to assist if both sides wished. But the main purpose of his trip was to strengthen business ties and cooperation against terrorism. Kashmiri separatists organised a three day general strike to coincide with his visit.

The most recent discussion of Kashmir in the British House of Commons took place on 15 September 2011 in a debate entitled, "[Human rights on the Indian sub-continent](#)". Alistair Burt, Minister of State in the FCO, responded for the UK Government (c1290-1):

The position of successive British Governments has consistently been that any resolution must be for India and Pakistan to agree, taking into account the wishes of the Kashmiri people. As India and Pakistan are currently making efforts to build confidence in all aspects of their relationship, I believe it is important that they be given space to determine the scope and pace of that dialogue. No matter how well intentioned, any attempts by the UK or other third parties to mediate or prescribe solutions would hinder progress [...] we welcome the renewed engagement by the leaders of India and Pakistan to grope towards, perhaps for the first time in a long time on a personal basis, answers to this issue. We also note that the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that human rights abuses by security forces in Kashmir would not be tolerated, and we welcomed his appointment of three interlocutors to engage with a wide range of interested parties to help to resolve the situation in Indian-administered Kashmir. We understand that those interlocutors will publish their recommendations soon.

Further reading: [Kashmir: An update](#), SN/IA/4829, 10 September 2008; [Pakistan's political and security challenges](#), RP 07/68, 13 September 2007 [pp. 28-33]; [Kashmir](#), RP 04/28, 30 March 2004