

# BRIEF

## Kashmir: the Geopolitical Implications & its impact on regional peace and security

Kashmir EU week at the European Parliament  
Brussels, Belgium  
November 2013



*The Friendship Bridge on the Line of Control, the de facto border that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan*



Laura Schuurmans

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# Introduction

The Kashmir conflict has remained unresolved for more than six decades. The dispute can be analyzed from various angles, of which the following three are the most important.

Firstly, the Kashmir conflict is usually portrayed by international media, mainstream society and academia as a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan.

Secondly, to a lesser extent, the dispute is analyzed from a humanitarian angle, wherein an outright repression, violation of human rights and strong discontentment amongst the vast majority of Kashmiris indicating a humanitarian crisis within Kashmir, which over the past few decades has reached an unprecedented level.

Thirdly, the Kashmir dispute can be analyzed from a geopolitical angle and the impact it has on regional peace and security. In academic journals and mainstream media, much has been published about the bilateral dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Much less has been published on the human rights abuses of the Kashmiris, particularly in the Kashmir Valley. Reports such as "Alleged Perpetrators: Stories of impunity from Jammu and Kashmir" are important readings that the international community should not leave disregarded. Regrettably, the international community has continued to neglect the Kashmiris by failing to challenge the human rights abuses by the Indian security forces in Kashmir.

The longer the international community continues to overlook these human rights violations, the worse the impact is going to be, not only on the suffering of the people of Kashmir but have repercussions on Kashmir per se and also jeopardize the

whole of nuclearized South Asia.

The scholarly analysis of the geopolitical implications of the Kashmir dispute is another angle that the international community often neglects. There is no denying, for instance, that peace in Afghanistan does go through the valleys of Kashmir. Moreover, although the US remains the global superpower, China's reformations and opening up to the West under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, has seen it become the world's second largest economy and it is expected to overtake the United States within a decade. China has gradually been taking a more predominant role in global politics and in addition, maintains a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Although the Kashmir dispute is usually considered a conflict between India and Pakistan, China also controls a part of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, known as Aksai Chin. This region is under China's administration, but is claimed by India as an integral part of the disputed Ladakh region. While China has not actively participated in the Kashmir dispute and maintains a position that the dispute should be settled bilaterally between India and Pakistan, China does essentially lay claim to part of the Kashmir region. It is needless to point out that these three countries all possess nuclear weapons.

This brief will provide an overview of geopolitical implications of the Kashmir dispute, briefly outline human rights abuses in Indian-held Kashmir, and analyze the potential threat the conflict has on both regional and global peace and security.

## Is Kashmir a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan?

To analyze the dispute between India and Pakistan objectively, it is essential to briefly examine the historical context. During the time of partition of the British Raj in 1947, the treaty of partition was based on the 'Two Nation Theory', which stated that all areas with a Muslim majority population would become part of Pakistan, and those with a Hindu majority would join India. The Princely States that were part of the British Raj had the choice to accede to either India or Pakistan, based on their religious and geographical factors. The Muslim majority Princely States located deep inside today's India, however, did not join Pakistan even if the Muslim majority population favored it accession. The Muslim majority Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by a Hindu Maharaja (Hari Singh) and were contiguous to both India and Pakistan, thus free to join either country. At the time of partition, the vast majority of the population favored to join Pakistan, as all rivers and road links of the valley were with Pakistan.

Afraid of a popular uprising, Maharaja Hari Singh fled Kashmir and signed a controversial treaty of accession with India, which led to the Indian invasion of Kashmir on 27 October 1947 and the outbreak of war. Interestingly, this instrument of accession has still to see the daylight, as it has never been shown to the world. In January 1948 the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru took the issue of Kashmir to the United Nations Security Council and both India and Pakistan pledged to allow the people of Kashmir a right of self-determination.

Unfortunately, the 1947 war led to a deterioration in the relationship between India and Pakistan and mistrust continued to grow, with two further wars in 1965 and 1971, the latter leading to the secession of

East-Pakistan, today's Bangladesh. To add to this regional tension, both countries declared overt possession of nuclear weapons in 1998.

More than six decades later, the Kashmir dispute has gone beyond a mere struggle of self-determination. The people of the South Asian continent that used to cohabit in a relatively peaceful fashion for centuries, now remain deeply divided over Kashmir, with much ongoing antagonism at both political and societal levels. The book "Kashmir, the Case for Freedom" in which the Indian Booker Prize Winner Arundathi Roy also contributed a book chapter, illustrates the hatred of the different religions within much of Indian society. The chapter by Hilal Bhatt, narrates the brutal killings of Kashmiri students on a train ride to Delhi (Kashmir, the Case for Freedom, 2011). In addition, after both India and Pakistan declared their nuclear arsenal in 1998, peace and security of South Asia has been further jeopardized. Over the past six decades, neither India nor Pakistan have relinquished their claims over the Kashmir region, and they do not appear to have plans to make any concessions over the disputed region anytime in the near future. While, on one hand, Pakistan has made its efforts to bring the sufferings of Kashmiri people to the attention of the international community, there has been no doubt that India prefers to preserve the status quo. The longer the international community waits to bring the Kashmir dispute on its political agenda, the more the ticking time-bomb will count down towards a potential catastrophic event with far-reaching implications.

Moving towards a resolution of the dispute is essential to bringing back peace to the Kashmiris and the wider South Asian region.

# The Afghanistan quagmire

Durable peace in Afghanistan can never be achieved without a resolution to the Kashmir dispute. World powers and the United Nations will have to seek an amicable solution to the Kashmir conflict through legal and moral mechanisms instead of political rhetoric and commercial interests. Several solutions to the problems facing Afghanistan pass through the valleys of Kashmir where the Indian armed forces indulge in serious human rights violations. The world must take notice of Kashmir if it genuinely hopes to see stability and durable peace in Afghanistan, the South Asian subcontinent and consequently the whole world (Schuurmans, 2010).

From 1979-1989 the Afghan-Soviet War brought Afghanistan to the global spotlight. This proxy war initiated by the United States laid the foundations for today's Al Qaeda's terrorist network and the so called jihad or holy war. In 2001, following the tragic September 11 terrorist attack that changed the world, the US and its allies once again ventured into Afghanistan to topple the Taliban regime that brutally oppressed its people, as well as to dismantle the Al Qaeda terrorist network. More than a decade later, the US and its coalition forces have not succeeded in their mission to return stability to war-torn Afghanistan, and much of the country has mostly been left in ruins while the US and its allies have been preparing for exit in 2014. Sun Tzu, a famous Chinese war strategist quoted in what is probably the oldest study of military strategy in history 'the Arts of War' that 'in practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact: to shatter and destroy is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it, to capture a regiment, a detachment or a company entire than to destroy them' (Sun Tzu). In other words, the repercussions of the with-

drawal of the foreign troops in 2014, is yet to be seen. Moreover, today's Afghanistan has been left with significant obstacles. Rampant corruption, opium growth and a fragmented society are just a few examples. An undeniable fact that has often been overlooked is the ongoing struggle for strategic influence in Afghanistan by some regional countries that has halted the success to bringing peace back to war torn Afghanistan. Let's briefly analyze the India-Pakistan-Kashmir nexus and the struggle of both countries for exercising influence in Afghanistan.

Historically, India and Afghanistan have enjoyed close relations. India was a Cold War ally of the Soviet Union and never objected to Soviet's presence in Afghanistan during the war from 1979-1989. After the tragic 9/11 attacks India became a staunch supporter of the attempts to topple the Taliban regime, dismantle the Al Qaeda network, and eradicate militancy in Afghanistan, which after the end of the Afghan-Soviet War was used as a hub, sanctuary and training ground for Kashmiri militants.

Secondly, within the Afghan society, the human rights abuses against innocent Muslims in Indian-held Kashmir have not been left unnoticed. Presently, 700,000 Indian security forces are keeping a population of 7 million Muslims in the Kashmir Valley under tight control. An estimated 50,000 – 80,000 people have been killed in the Kashmir conflict over the past two decades and at least 6,000 – 8,000 innocent civilians remain missing in Kashmir. Ongoing human rights abuses in Indian-held Kashmir will continue to radicalize an angry youth in Afghanistan, and will undoubtedly stir militancy in the wider region. It is important to highlight that the Mumbai attacks of 2008 were allegedly carried out by the

Kashmir based, and Afghan trained, Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group.

Lastly, Pakistan and India have been archenemies since their creation in 1947. Pakistan claims it has strong evidence that India has been using Afghanistan as a 'strategic backyard' to encircle Pakistan from both its eastern and western borders and to use Afghanistan as a hub aimed to destabilize Pakistan by fueling the problems of the Baluchistan separatist movement and to destabilize its tribal areas. The question could be posed as to why India needed to open 12 consulates throughout Afghanistan, which is, in fact, more than they have in any other country in the world. Pakistan has claimed that these consulates are used as a cover by RAW, India's intelligence agency, to plan and execute covert operations to destabilize Pakistan. The longer the fact that both India and Pakistan are struggling for influence in Afghanistan is ignored, the worse the overall impact will be on regional peace and security, particularly following US withdrawal in 2014.

## China's growing influence

An important fact that has been overlooked in western circles is that another nuclear power has its claims over Kashmir. In 1962, following a short but brutal border war with India, China took full control of Aksai Chin. This disputed region has been claimed by India and is located in the far western part of China adjacent to Xinjiang province, home to the Uygur Muslim minority that has been prone to social unrest.

Following this Sino-Indo border war, China developed an all weather friendship with Pakistan. China supported Pakistan in the wars against India in 1965 and 1971 and staunchly supported Pakistan in its stance over Kashmir. However, after Deng Xiaoping's policies of opening up and political reform in 1978, during which period China was in the process to normalize relations with India – and other countries – after almost three decades of revolutionary diplomacy, China has increasingly been balancing its relations with both India and Pakistan, and has gradually been adapting its stance over Kashmir. Following the end of the Cold War, China chose to adopt a neutral stance on the dispute and still maintains today that the dispute should be resolved peacefully and bilaterally through negotiations (Garver, 2001). Although China solved many of its land border disputes with neighboring countries, the boundary issues with India remain unresolved (Shirk, 2007).

During the latest visit of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to China in October 2013, the two most populous nations and neighbors, signed the Border Defence Cooperation Agreement to maintaining peace and tranquility on the border and to make preliminary progress toward the settlement of their boundary issues (Li, Zhang, 2013). This border agreement, however, only preserves today's status quo. Resolv-

ing the boundary issues between the two Asian giants has remained a difficult task to achieve. This does not mean, however, that one cannot move forward towards negotiations and seeking the possibilities to improve the overall living conditions of the people in disputed regions that are a breeding ground for a disillusioned youth that often finds no hope for a better, alternative future.

China has also been dealing with terrorist related issues in its far western Xinjiang province bordering with the disputed Kashmir region. As recent as October 2013 the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) launched a suicide attack in Beijing's Tiananmen Square that killed two people and injured another 40. Ma Pinyan, a senior anti-terrorism researcher and deputy director of the ethnic and religious study center at the Xinjiang Academy of Social Sciences in Urumqi, has stated that border areas with China in neighboring countries have become hotbeds for its activities, aims to provide continuous training for people in Xinjiang and masterminding attacks (Cui, 2013).

The international media, however, has criticized China for this terrorist attack and in article published on the CNN website "Tiananmen crash: Terrorism or cry of desperation", the author Sean R. Roberts felt compelled to ask the question whether the alleged attack was a well-prepared terrorist act or a hastily assembled cry of desperation from a people on the extreme margins of the Chinese state's monstrous development machine (Roberts, 2013).

There undoubtedly are problems within China's borders especially among the minority groups that are fundamentally different than the majority Han Chinese, but those, that are really desperate

in this world, are the people of Kashmir. In its strategy to contain China, the international community does not hesitate to criticize China's human rights record, but the world has continued to look away and close its eyes to the human rights violations that are taking place in Indian-held Kashmir. The stories of abuses, rape and torture practices by Indian security forces will keep awake each and every individual at night.

## Geopolitical implications

The geopolitical implications of the Kashmir dispute are grave. Although the conflict is often considered a dispute between India and Pakistan, China also has its claims over the Kashmir region indirectly affecting overall peace and security of its western Xinjiang province home to the Uygur Muslim minority. This region which borders with both Afghanistan, Pakistan and the disputed region of Kashmir has been prone to social unrest, tensions and terrorism related activities. Peace in Afghanistan will never be achieved if no concrete steps towards a resolution of the Kashmir conflict are made. Furthermore, beyond the scope of this brief, the case is the same for Iran.

Generally, the boundaries of South Asia are looked at those of Pakistan and India only. A settlement of the disputed Kashmiri boundaries, however, will enhance South Asian peace and security. The Line of Control has divided Kashmir between Pakistan and India, and the Line of Actual Control separates Kashmir from China. These de facto borders have often been the subject of border incursions and skirmishes between military forces.

As recent as this year, cross border firing between Indian and Pakistani soldiers increased tensions between the two nuclear giants. The conflict over the Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir has either been ignored, forgotten, or its potential dangers to regional peace and security been mostly underestimated.

Whilst China has stated no intentions to become embroiled in the dispute, it effectively is part of it per se. A resolution for Kashmir will benefit not only the South Asian states and Afghanistan, but also boost peace and security in the most western parts of China and beyond. For more

than six decades, the people of Kashmir have been waiting for their promised plebiscite. Their hopes have been continuously dashed, the desperate youth growing increasingly angry and the people of Kashmir forced to exist in a state of darkness in their own communities and homes. Equally important, three nuclear giants claim Kashmir. The Kashmir dispute can no longer be considered a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan only, but one with real geopolitical implications of which the repercussions will have long-term effect on regional peace and security.

## Conclusion

If human rights, equality and democracy genuinely matter to the West, it is now time to address effectively the issue of Kashmir. The only way to move towards a resolution on Kashmir is to touch the root cause of the conflict and to prioritize above all the overall dire living conditions of the Kashmiri people who have been deprived of their right of self-determination.

During the occupation of East Timor when the Indonesian armed forces were condemned for their human rights violations in this disputed territory, European leaders, human rights activists and the international media repeatedly rang alarm bells and demanded a move towards a resolution of the conflict. During those turbulent years, the whole of Europe stood united to defend the rights of the East Timorese, and no single country averted its eyes to the human rights abuses, oppression, and suffering of the people. The case of East Timor, on one hand, never posed a serious threat to regional peace and security. Kashmir, on the other hand, has and will remain a threat with geopolitical implications for the wider South Asian region.

Europe must stand up for the rights of the Kashmiris which will ultimately deliver effective results for both regional peace and security and that of the entire world.

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**Author:**

**Laura Schuurmans**

Writer & Research Analyst

Research expertise:

Kashmir, Afghanistan, Sino-Iran relations, nuclear geopolitics

Website: [www.lauraschuurmans.com](http://www.lauraschuurmans.com)