

Front demands that the projected new state encompass not only Indian-held areas of Kashmir but also the Pakistan-occupied areas of Azad Kashmir, Gilgit, Hunza and Baltistan, as well as pockets of territory ceded by Pakistan to Beijing. Half of Pakistan's hydroelectric generating capacity and the headwaters of the Chenab, one of its major rivers, would lie within the new entity. Moreover, the creation of an independent, Muslim-majority Kashmir would invalidate Pakistan's own *raison d'être* as the homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims, a rationale already undermined by the Indian-supported secession of Bangladesh.

Although Pakistan insists that any aid to Kashmir comes from private, not governmental sources, the Front exposed the Islamabad connection in a detailed attack on 26 April, stating that the insurgency was directed from Azad Kashmir by "Brigadier Imtiaz," chief of the Intelligence Directorate's "Cell No. 202." Reaffirming its goal of "an independent Greater Kashmir," the Front declared that "anyone who allows himself to be used by the Pakistani intelligence authorities for promoting their own narrow purpose of bringing all of Kashmiri territory under their control, would be looked upon as a traitor by the Kashmiri people."

The Intelligence Directorate, manned by fundamentalist officers installed during the regime of the late Pakistani president Mohammed Zia Ul-Haq, helped to build up the Liberation Front in the mistaken belief that Hezbe Islami would dominate a unified insurgent movement and would force the Front to shelve the independence demand. Kashmir, in this perspective, would be engulfed by the fundamentalist wave already spreading in the Middle East and nearby Soviet Central Asia.

Still embittered over the loss of Bangladesh, many Pakistani leaders saw in Kashmir a low-risk opportunity to get even with their more powerful neighbour. Acquisition of the nuclear option and a continuing flow of American weaponry induced a mood of heady confidence. On visits to Islamabad in July 1988, and October 1989, I was repeatedly assured that India would not launch a general counter-attack in re-sponse to subversion in Kashmir, as it did in 1965, because Islamabad's nuclear deterrent had made such a course too dangerous.

TO THE SURPRISE AND DISMAY OF THE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE, THE Liberation Front is now stronger than the Hezbe Islami. Islamic fundamentalism is a recent implant in Kashmir, claiming a fervently dedicated but limited band of adherents. The Front makes a much broader and deeper appeal to the historically-rooted aspiration for autonomy in the Kashmir Valley, a mountain-bound region with its own language and a strong sense of separate identity. Long before their current struggle against absorption by Hindu-majority India, Kashmir Valley Muslims have resisted incorporation by Muslim rulers, notably the Mogul Emperor Akbar in 1586 and Ahmad Shah of Afghanistan two centuries later.

India granted nominal, limited autonomy to its sector of Kashmir in 1950 under a special constitutional provision but promptly nullified this provision in practice. Kashmiri leaders who have attempted to exercise autonomy have been either jailed or replaced by corrupt local opportunists willing to accept Indian dictation. Adding insult to injury, India has spent little on the economic development of the state.

Relations between New Delhi and Kashmir are complicated by the fact that the state is an artificial conglomeration inherited from the British period. The Muslim-majority Valley is lumped together with Hindu-majority Jammu and Buddhist Ladakh, each of which has sizeable Muslim minorities. Autonomy would place the Jammu Hindus

under Muslim dominance, and to avoid this fate, they have frequently enlisted the support of Hindu nationalists in other parts of India to block autonomy moves.

For India, one possible way out of the present impasse might be to split the state, integrating Jammu and Ladakh with the Indian Union while giving an autonomous Kashmir Valley special confederated status within the Indian defence and foreign policy sphere. Such a strategy, accompanied by large-scale economic developments, might well win over significant elements of the Liberation Front who recognize the futility of the independence objective in the face of combined Indian and Pakistani resistance. At present, however, Prime Minister Singh, constrained by his hard-line Hindu coalition partners, shows no sign of moving in this direction. Indian policy is to crush the insurgency militarily before pursuing a political solution.

India, like Pakistan, sees control of its part of strategically located Kashmir as militarily vital and fears that autonomy there would set a precedent for demands by others. The controversy in India over what to do in Kashmir is part of an ongoing debate over whether the entire Indian federal system, with its linguistically-defined provincial boundaries, should be more decentralized.

THIS DEBATE IS DIRECTLY LINKED TO THE SENSITIVE problem of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Contrary to the widespread image in the West, the 1947 partition of the subcontinent did not produce a tidy division in which Pakistan got all of the Muslims and India, all of the Hindus. India has ninety million Muslims, nearly as many as Pakistan. Nominally, India is a secular state, but the secular principle is under attack from the Hindu right. Advocates of secularism fear that an autonomous, Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley would end up seeking independence or accession to Pakistan, thus exposing Muslims in other parts of India to continuing attack as potential traitors.

While important in itself, Kashmir has become the focus of a broader unresolved struggle,

going back more than seven centuries, between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority in South Asia. Invading Muslim armies conquered perennially feuding Hindu kingdoms and gradually established a series of strong dynasties culminating in the Mogul Empire.

For the Hindu right, independence from Britain was a chance to dominate the subcontinent at last. Partition was a trauma, and it was accepted reluctantly on the assumption that Pakistan would become a deferential junior partner within an Indian sphere of influence. Indian leaders did not bargain for the Cold War and the inflated power that Pakistan would acquire through three decades of American military aid. Above all, they did not foresee a nuclear-armed Pakistan. As the Hindu right grows ever more powerful in India, pressures are likely to intensify for a showdown before Islamabad perfects an operational nuclear capability with sophisticated delivery systems. The growth of Hindu nationalism is accelerated, in turn, by the increasing assertiveness of Islamic fundamentalist leaders in Pakistan and their military allies following the dismissal of Benazir Bhutto in August.

For the foreseeable future, the prospect of a nuclear war is marginal barring major political convulsions in New Delhi or Islamabad. But by the same token, the unprecedented process of political instability and decay now developing on both sides of the border make long-term scenarios of nuclear Armageddon all too credible. □

