

# SHOWDOWN IN KASHMIR

*A fourth Indo-Pakistan war would probably start over the long-disputed territory of Kashmir, and be fought with nuclear weapons.*

BY SELIG S. HARRISON

**O**N 15 MAY 1990, AMID MOUNTING CONCERN OVER A SOUTH Asian nuclear war, President Bush suddenly dispatched a high-level mission to India and Pakistan. It was headed by Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates, his principal Soviet affairs specialist, then in Moscow, who was instructed to abandon his preparations for the impending Bush-Gorbachev summit meeting in order to proceed immediately to Islamabad and New Delhi.

What precipitated the Gates mission at a time so inconvenient for the White House were satellite photos from the National Security Agency suggesting that Pakistan, alarmed by Indian troop movements it regarded as threatening, might be preparing for a preemptive attack. Some of the photos showed unusual traffic from Islamabad's nuclear development facility at Kahuta to airfields where American-built, nuclear-capable F-16 aircraft are based. Four months after the Gates mission, there is still a serious danger of a fourth Indo-Pakistan war. But the possibility of an imminent explosion appears to have receded, partly as a result of timely intervention by Gates in Islamabad and subsequently by Soviet diplomats in New Delhi.

American leverage is much greater in Pakistan than in India because the US has long been Islamabad's major military supplier. Washington gave the Ayub Khan regime \$1.2 billion in military hardware during the Fifties in the name of deterring Soviet and Chinese aggression. When this weaponry was used against India in the 1965 war, it was cut off. But another \$1.5 billion in military assistance was agreed upon in 1981 as the price for Pakistani cooperation in the Afghan war, over and above \$2 billion in aid channeled through Islamabad for the Afghan resistance between 1980 and 1989. Then in 1986, Washington added \$1.4 billion more, which has continued to flow since the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

According to American and Pakistani officials, Gates served notice that the US would cut off aid, spare parts, and ammunition in the event of a war, as it did in 1965. More important, he warned that the administration might even suspend or terminate aid, short of a conflict, unless Islamabad's Interservices Intelligence Directorate stopped its support for Muslim insurgents in the Indian-held Kashmir Valley.

IT WAS PAKISTAN THAT PRECIPITATED THE PRESENT CRISIS BY PROVIDING funds, training and escalating supplies of weaponry to the Kashmir insurgency, inflaming Hindu chauvinist demands in India for an all-out military response. L.K. Advani, leader of the powerful Hindu nationalist faction in Prime Minister V.P. Singh's governing coalition, said that Pakistan would "cease to exist" if another war broke out. To be sure, Indian insensitivity to legitimate Kashmiri grievances over the past four decades led to the rise of the insurgency. But the problem was manageable for New Delhi until Islamabad's Intelligence Directorate began supplying Kalashnikov rifles, rocket launchers, mortars and other weapons from US Afghan aid stockpiles beginning in 1988.

To back up his warning, Gates pointed out that the administration has a variety of legal avenues readily available for cutting off aid. Congress has made military assistance conditional on an annual presidential certi-

fication that Pakistan does not "possess" a nuclear weapon. Every year, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the White House has hitherto swallowed hard and given its go-ahead for continued aid. Gates told Pakistan military leaders that certification was becoming "increasingly difficult" for the President, adding that anti-terrorist laws could also be invoked as a rationale for suspending or terminating military aid.

It is now clear that the level of Pakistani support for the Kashmir guerrillas has sharply dropped off in the months since the Gates visit. India, for its part, has moderated its rhetoric and has pulled back some of its border forces in response to Soviet as well as American pressures. Although New Delhi has developed a significant military-industrial complex in recent years, it is still heavily dependent on Moscow for spare parts for Soviet military equipment, especially its MiG aircraft.

FOREIGN MINISTER SHEVARDNADZE CAUTIONED SECRETARY OF STATE Baker in their Bonn meeting in June that any overt Soviet-American collusion in cutting off arms deliveries would merely exacerbate nationalist passions in India and Pakistan alike. However, while not directly threatening a cutoff, he said, Moscow had used strong words in New Delhi, and India was well aware that the Soviet Union could find excuses for slowing down critical arms deliveries in the event of a conflict.

Apart from American pressure, two other factors have helped to dampen Pakistani support for the Kashmir insurgent movement. One is a renewal of covert Indian support for separatists in Pakistan's key southern coastal province of Sind, designed to show that two can play at the same game. New Delhi suspended its support for the Sindhi groups two years ago in the hope that Pakistan would stop fuelling insurgent movements in the Punjab and Kashmir. But when Pakistani involvement in Kashmir escalated last year, India revived its operations in Sind, signalling its readiness to back off if Islamabad cooled it in Kashmir.

An even more significant factor that may help to prevent intensification of the fighting in Kashmir is a split between the Intelligence Directorate and the strongest insurgent group, the Liberation Front, which advocates Kashmiri independence. Until recently, the Directorate has been supporting both the Front and the Hezbe Islami, a coalition of Islamic fundamentalist factions favouring accession to Pakistan. But a simmering conflict between the Front and its Pakistani mentors has now burst into the open. Islamabad has consistently opposed the idea of an independent Kashmir, insisting on a United Nations plebiscite that would give all Kashmiris a choice between joining India or Pakistan. The state has been divided into Indian- and Pakistani-administered sectors since a ceasefire line was demarcated following the first Indo-Pakistan war over Kashmir in 1948.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said in May that independence could trigger "Balkanization" of the subcontinent by stimulating similar demands for autonomy or independence by other minorities in both countries. Behind this position lies a strategic concern that creation of an independent Kashmir would cut off Pakistani access to China. The