

Kashmir Imbroglia Resolved

Strategic Options for Pakistan

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Kashmir is one of the most beautiful places on this earth. Sufi mystic poet Aamir Khusrau Dehlavi described Kashmir as a “paradise on earth.”¹ Originally inhabited by Hindus and Buddhists, Islam arrived in the thirteenth century,² and over the following centuries all three religious communities prospered in peace and harmony. Kashmiri society formed a distinct syncretic secular and religiously inclusive ethnonationalist cultural identity called *Kashmiriyat*.³ Consequently, for centuries, Muslims in Kashmir adhered to the far more tolerant and syncretic Sufi form of Islam, in contrast to those forms more prevalent in modern Pakistan, which are much more fundamentalist, called Deobandi, Wahhabi, or Salafi.⁴

Although the rulers changed, Kashmir’s syncretic sociocultural fabric continued. It was only when the British partitioned India in 1947 that the issue of Kashmir’s destiny with either India or Pakistan arose. Soon Pakistan initiated an attack to acquire Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by force, despite having signed a Standstill Agreement with J&K’s ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh. To deter the Pakistani attack, Hari Singh signed an Instrument of Accession with India,⁵ after which, Indian forces repelled the Pakistani forces, but one-third of Kashmir remained under Pakistan’s control.

However, facts are being interpreted differently by scholars like Usman W. Chohan and Omer Aamir in their article “Kashmir: Beyond Imbroglia,”⁶ written in riposte to the article “Kashmir Imbroglia: Geostrategic and Religious Imperatives” by Dalbir Ahlawat and Satish Malik.⁷ While Chohan and Aamir have made a bold claim to present a more nuanced, sober, and grounded perspective to shed light on the Kashmir imbroglia,⁸ somehow, they have actually overlooked some significant occurrences. In their narrative, they forgot about Pakistan orchestrating an attack by irregular forces on J&K in October 1947, followed by the Pakistan Army launching a full-on war. While repeatedly making fervent demands for plebiscite, Chohan and Aamir have completely forgotten the precondition laid down by the United Nations for Pakistan to first withdraw from the entire J&K. They also forgot about Pakistan ceding the Shaksgam Valley to China in 1963 from its forcibly occupied region, subsequently launching Operation Gibraltar in 1965 to foment an insurgency that failed miserably because of lack of

support from the local Kashmiris, and later the capturing of the Kargil heights in 1999, which only led to Pakistan suffering yet another loss of face.⁹ More importantly, the authors entirely forgot about Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence engineering a proxy war through cross-border terrorism since the late 1980s, comprising several diabolical terror attacks that have placed Pakistan on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Grey List. So much of forgetfulness does not serve the purpose of truth.

Our aim is not to present rebuttals. However, to prove the point, we pick up just one of the myopic views: that people of Gilgit Agency had revolted against the governor,¹⁰ only to unveil the truth of a British conspiracy in which Pakistan was used as a willing pawn. Similarly, while these scholars have questioned the manner and legality of accession of J&K with India, we recall the way in which Pakistan forcibly accessed the sovereign state of Balochistan and has treated it unfairly ever since, aptly illustrating what could have been the plight of Kashmiris had J&K too acceded to Pakistan. Decades have passed since these events. Pakistan has tried to get accession of J&K but has not succeeded. Meanwhile, the State of J&K has been fully integrated into India with the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A of the Indian Constitution. It is time for Pakistan to take a realistic stock of the ground realities of post-imbroglio Kashmir.

British Conspiracy

The narrative that the people of Gilgit rebelled against their governor, Brigadier Ghansara Singh, and as a result, British Army Major William Brown mutinied on 1 November 1947, which led its people to declare Gilgit as a part of Pakistan, sounds most improbable if not naïve. The moot point is why Major Brown, serving the State of J&K, did not report the rebellion up in the hierarchy, much less suppress it? Recent research brings out that it was actually a British plan.¹¹ Apparently, behind Lord Mountbatten's back his Chief of Staff, Lord Hastings Ismay; the Governor of North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Sir George Cunningham; and important functionaries of Pakistan had hatched the conspiracy that Gilgit Agency should continue as a vital British listening post in Central Asia. In case J&K ruler joined India, it should be accessed to Pakistan as an Agency of the NWFP, directly under the British Governor.¹²

In a well-orchestrated plan, Lord Ismay positioned trusted officials in key appointments. Sir Cunningham was recalled from the United Kingdom as the third-time Governor of NWFP. In turn, he had one of his confidantes, Lt Col Roger Bacon appointed as the political agent at Gilgit, whose task was to prepare the local vassal rulers for the changes to follow and their continued loyalty to British rule.¹³ Colonel Bacon brought Major Brown to Gilgit from Waziristan to

take over as the Commandant of the Gilgit Scouts, as Brown too held similar views about control over Gilgit Agency. These cabalists considered it as their duty to have Gilgit Agency placed directly under the Governor of the NWFP, despite the partition, to ensure continuity of British administration.¹⁴ Brown was ideally suited to his role, as he had previously served in Gilgit as the assistant political agent from 1943 to 1946 and had developed close ties with the ruler of Chitral, the Mir of Hunza, the Raja of Yasin, and the Raja of Puniyal.¹⁵ Capt Jock Mathieson was posted as Major Brown's deputy in Gilgit. Shockingly, both these young officers were asked to resign their coveted King's Commission of the British Army—a clear indication that they were to undertake some questionable tasks in their personal capacity as private mercenaries. Obviously, if it ever came out that serving British officers had conspired to execute the Gilgit rebellion, it would cause a monumental scandal.

As Lord Mountbatten suddenly decided to return the entire Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja on 31 July 1947, Colonel Bacon had to move out. But in the days preceding it, Bacon and Brown held a series of closed-door meetings with the local rajas and mirs to apprise them of the events that were to unfold if Maharaja Singh were to accede J&K to India. Even a day after Brigadier Singh assumed the governorship of Gilgit, Commander-in-Chief of J&K state forces, Maj Gen Henry Scott, Colonel Bacon, and Major Brown reportedly fine-tuned the various options of their Gilgit rebellion.¹⁶ Subsequently, even Lord Ismay remained in radio contact with Bacon, who in turn maintained radio contact and exchanged cipher messages with Brown to crystallize plans to stage a coup d'état, code-named Operation Datta Khel, to get the whole Gilgit Agency acceded to Pakistan.¹⁷ This was bizarre, because Lord Ismay was serving India; Colonel Bacon, a British Army officer, was now the political agent at Peshawar in Pakistan; whereas, Major Brown was no longer a British Army officer and was instead in the service and pay of the State of J&K at Gilgit. In fact, just days before the coup, Brown had vowed, "If the Maharaja acceded to India, then I would forego all allegiance to him and I would not rest content until I had done the utmost in my power to ensure that not only the Gilgit Province joined Pakistan, but the whole of Kashmir also."¹⁸ Even Capt Charles Hamilton, the assistant political agent, had openly declared at Chilas that within six months, it would be part of Pakistan.¹⁹

Major Brown initiated Operation Datta Khel on the night of 31 October 1947 by laying siege to the governor's residence, followed by a fierce gun battle, forcing a surrender.²⁰ Brown and his military junta carried out this entire rebellion—neither the people of Gilgit nor any of the mirs or the rajas had any role to play. No wonder then that Brown sent a frantic message to Peshawar authorities that Pakistan authority has been established at Gilgit and they must take it over.²¹

However, a few days later, he discovered that the interim administration was planning to establish a sovereign state of Gilgit-Astore. An independent state was never part of the script—only a strong Pakistan under British influence was part of the plan—and so, Brown again sent a secret telegram to the Pakistani authorities to come and take over.²²

Major Brown had deserted and mutinied against the maharaja. Since the State of J&K had acceded to and been accepted by India, which was then a dominion of the British empire, Brown's actions amounted to high treason and waging war against the Crown. Not only Major Brown, but Captain Mathieson, Colonel Bacon, General Scott, Sir Cunningham, Lord Ismay, and many others had committed high treason against the throne while conducting Operation Datta Khel. In the words of Brown himself, "I had contracted to serve the Maharaja faithfully. I had drawn his generous pay for three months. Now I had deserted. I had mutinied. My actions appeared to possess all the ingredients of high treason."²³

After briefing the new political agent from Pakistan, Major Brown was flown to Peshawar on 25 November 1947 in a Harvard aircraft of the Royal Pakistan Air Force. Here he met Colonel Bacon, after which both of them briefed the NWFP governor, Sir Cunningham, and subsequently, Pakistan's Defence Secretary, Lt Col Iskander Mirza. Brown later met Charles Duke, the British deputy high commissioner in Peshawar and handed over a copy of his detailed report with maps of ground positions, which in turn was forwarded to Whitehall, the military headquarters in London.²⁴ Finally, on 3 December 1947, Brown briefed the Pakistan prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, at Rawalpindi, who personally congratulated and thanked him for all that he had done at Gilgit.²⁵ However, the story does not end here. Within six months, in July 1948, Brown was awarded the Member of British Empire (MBE) by the King Emperor! The act of honoring Major Brown with the MBE, even though he had resigned his King's Commission in the Army and had waged war against the British Crown, completely confirms that Operation Datta Khel was essentially the brainchild of the British deep state in league with the Pakistani leadership.²⁶ Such was the treachery in the execution of Gilgit rebellion. To rectify this wrong, the British Parliament passed a motion on 25 March 2017 stating, "*Gilgit-Baltistan is a legal and constitutional part of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, India, which is illegally occupied by Pakistan since 1947, and where people are denied their fundamental rights including the right of freedom of expression.*"²⁷

Drawing Balochistan and J&K Parallels

After failing to annex the entire State of Jammu & Kashmir, Pakistan shifted its focus onto the similar State of Kalat, which formed the bulk of Balochistan.

While J&K was one of the 564-odd princely states of undivided India, Kalat was actually an independent sovereign state, duly recognized by the British government as per the Treaty of 1876. Accordingly, unlike the princely states, Kalat was placed on par with Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim. Kalat and J&K possessed great similarities. To begin with, both aspired to remain as independent states. Similarly, with their important strategic locations and deposits of vast natural resources, Pakistan desperately wanted both these states in its possession.

In a striking resemblance to J&K, the majority population of Balochistan is Muslim and has a similar secular outlook of cohabitation with other religions, just as the famed *Kashmiriyat*. Historically, the Balochs embraced a more secular and pluralistic view on religion and have been averse to mixing religion with politics. Here the Shias, Zikris, and Hindus have all lived in harmony and without prejudice, fear, or hatred until recently.²⁸ In fact, during the communal carnage of the partition in 1947, it was only in Balochistan that the Hindu community was untouched and continued to live in peace.²⁹

Additional similarities are found in that both states had signed a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan, were attacked by the Pakistan Army, and forcibly annexed—Balochistan fully and J&K partially. Ironically, it was none other than Muhammad Ali Jinnah, then Kalat's lawyer, who had argued with the Cabinet Mission in May 1946 that Kalat was not an Indian state and as such, it should become a fully sovereign and independent state. It was once again Jinnah who, as late as 4 August 1947, assured Kalat of its independent status, which it had legally possessed since at least 1838.

Accordingly, Kalat was declared an independent nation, and both houses of its parliament categorically rejected accession to Pakistan and voted for a sovereign State of Kalat.³⁰ However, that was unacceptable to Pakistan and the British as well, who had plans to have a base in Balochistan to guard against the rising influence of the Soviet Union.³¹ As such, Jinnah demanded that the Khan of Kalat accede immediately to Pakistan. The Khan relented to hand over the matters of defense, foreign affairs, and communication—but not the independent status of Kalat. Disregarding such a compromise, Pakistan began with accession of Kharan and Lasbela. These princely states were actually feudatories of the Khan of Kalat, and so, as per the Standstill Agreement, he was responsible for their foreign policy. Even more surprising was accession of Makran, which was a district of Kalat and, thus, had no separate status.³² Finally, on 27 March 1948, the Pakistan Army invaded Kalat and forced the Khan of Kalat to sign the Instrument of Accession.³³

This exposes the hypocrisy of those who question the circumstances and legality of the Maharaja of Kashmir signing a similar Instrument of Accession. Pakistan first promised sovereign status to Kalat and then invaded it; India neither

promised an independent status to Kashmir nor invaded it. Pakistan signed a Standstill Agreement with Kalat as well as Kashmir to give a false hope of independence—only to violate these agreements later; India neither gave such false hopes nor breached them. Kalat wanted to remain independent, but Pakistan did not allow it; J&K also aspired to remain independent, and India allowed it as long as it could. Kalat was forced to sign an Instrument of Accession with Pakistan; J&K signed it with India on its own accord. The Pakistan Army invaded Kalat to defeat the khan; the Indian Army entered Kashmir to help the maharaja save his State.

The biggest harm done by that forced accession was not the loss of an independent Kalat State but the loss of Baloch identity. It is this blow to which the Balochs have not reconciled till date. Pakistan was founded on the identity of Islam, and so, its rulers insisted on the entire nation having a common Islamic national identity. What they failed to understand was that, just like the Kashmiris, the Balochs had separate history, culture, and languages. As such, while Islam was a common thread among all the provinces, it was not the Balochs' only identity. For the Balochs, their tribal traditions, secular outlook, centuries-old culture, and attachment with their territories and languages are more important indicators of their identity than their religion.³⁴ This loss of identity is precisely what the Kashmiris would have suffered had they acceded to Pakistan, because they too proudly consider their belief in *Kashmiriyat*, Kashmiri culture, traditions, and languages to have primacy over their religion.

This thrusting of a Pakistani Islamic identity upon the unwilling was followed by systematic discrimination and economic exploitation, especially by the dominant Punjabi community.³⁵ Even in mega projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Gwadar Port, the Balochs have been excluded from any tangible benefit.³⁶ Actually, Balochistan presents a very dismal picture. Its share of the national gross domestic product has continuously dropped. It has the highest poverty rate, lowest literacy rate, and highest infant and maternal mortality rates in Pakistan. Being warriors and pushed to the wall, the Balochs have picked up weapons to challenge the Pakistani state five times since 1947. In retaliation, thousands of Baloch political activists have gone missing, while hundreds of them have been killed and dumped across Balochistan. The Supreme Court of Pakistan is on record that intelligence agencies and security forces have been involved in these extrajudicial arrests and killings.³⁷ The Balochs had to suffer all this because they dared to preserve their identity, traditions, and customs. The Kashmiris also would have been in the same circumstances, for they too proudly wear their unique identity on their sleeves.

Revocation of Articles 370 and 35A

In the seven decades since accession, the status of J&K remained complicated, as the United Nations Security Council failed to implement its resolutions. India had unilaterally provided a special status to J&K by including Article 370, a “temporary” provision in the Indian Constitution.³⁸ As this Article had led to rampant corruption, lack of development, rising unemployment, increasing cross-border terrorism, and inefficacy of the successive state leadership, on 5 August 2019, India revoked Article 370, essentially to enhance development in J&K on par with other states. Similarly, for mobility, development, and investment in the state, Article 35A of the Indian Constitution—which defined “permanent residents” of the state for employment, scholarships, ownership of land and property purposes—was also diluted, as it denied such rights to residents from other states. Additionally, the J&K state was split into two separate Union Territories—namely, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—and in fact, its earlier avatar, the Jan Sangh—since its formation in 1951, had consistently mentioned in its election manifestos the intention to revoke these articles. This demand became sharper after Hindus were targeted, killed, and forced to flee the Kashmir Valley and become refugees in their own country. Article 370 not only posed a challenge to “Indian nationhood”³⁹ but also to J&K’s integration with the rest of the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was convinced that Pakistan used J&K’s special status as a weapon against India to inflame the passions of some people.⁴⁰ Furthermore, he stressed that Article 370 has “not given anything other than terrorism, separatism, nepotism and big corruption” to the people of J&K.⁴¹

Notwithstanding the above, Pakistan appeared to caught off guard with the revocation and in a dilemma as to how to deal with the changed status of J&K. On the doctrinaire basis, Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reinforced its traditional stance that J&K “is an internationally recognized disputed territory” between India and Pakistan.⁴² Therefore, a unilateral decision by India was illegal from the ministry’s perspective. Operationally, the leadership appeared ambiguous. To begin with, Prime Minister Imran Khan exclaimed: “What do you want me to do? . . . Should I go to war with India?”⁴³ He condemned India’s action as “unilateral and illegal” and aimed at ethnic cleansing in India’s only Muslim-majority state at the hands of the Modi-led “Hindu supremacist” BJP government. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi feared “genocide and ethnic cleansing” by India in Kashmir.⁴⁴ Later, both Khan and Qureshi called upon New Delhi to reverse its decision immediately. After finding that these initial overtures to pressure New Delhi had no impact, Islamabad initiated several hasty measures.

First, Pakistan downgraded its trade and diplomatic relations with India. It expelled the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad and barred its own newly appointed High Commissioner from proceeding to New Delhi. This measure appeared more a symbolic gesture, as the diplomatic presence continued, although at a reduced level. Similarly, Pakistan formally suspended all bilateral trade. However, considering the huge trade deficit, Pakistan suffered more than India. The former was unable to survive even for three weeks without importing lifesaving medicines and raw material from India, thus, forcing Islamabad to lift the ban unilaterally.⁴⁵

Second, to pressure India, Pakistan approached the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for an immediate meeting to discuss the Kashmir issue. However, Saudi Arabia reportedly turned down the request. Notwithstanding being a founding member, Pakistan received limited support from the organization. With Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) having 121.34 billion USD⁴⁶ trade with India as compared to 19 billion USD with Pakistan, the calculus was in India's favor. The UAE and Bahrain even conferred their highest civilian awards on Modi within three weeks of the revocation of Article 370.⁴⁷ In fact, except for Malaysia and Turkey, no other country supported Pakistan.⁴⁸ Even during the recent OIC Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Niamey, Niger, in November 2020, Pakistan was unable to garner support even to place the issue of Kashmir on the agenda.⁴⁹ This indicates that OIC countries have moved beyond the Kashmir issue, finding succor in the emerging Indian economy.

Third, Pakistan sought mediation from its long-time ally, the United States. Initially Pres. Donald Trump offered to do so; however, after considering Indian sensitivities and seeking to strengthen bilateral relations with India, Trump placed a rider that both parties should invite him for mediation, knowing full well India's stance on resolving the Kashmir issue bilaterally since 1972. Pakistan played a pivotal role in signing the US–Taliban peace deal in February 2020 on the presumption that the United States would mediate on Kashmir. However, during his visit to India in February 2020, Trump did not even make reference to the revocation of Article 370—instead pressuring Pakistan to ensure that “no territory under its control is used to launch terrorist attacks.”⁵⁰

Fourth, after failing to procure the desired support from its allies, Pakistan turned to its “all-weather friend,” China. On China's insistence, revocation of Article 370 was discussed at the informal UNSC closed-door meeting; however, under international pressure, no formal statement could be issued. Even Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had to adopt a conciliatory approach, asserting the Kashmir issue should be handled in line with the relevant resolutions of the UNSC and bilateral agreements between Pakistan and India.⁵¹ What is clear

from this is that considering the regional geostrategic circumstances, China could not neglect India, and Beijing's support for Pakistan would be conditional and subjected to deterring India from rising as a great power.⁵²

Fifth, Pakistan has been waging a proxy war since 1989, but Kashmiris have shown aversion to the outsiders as well as the jihadis. In this regard, Ashley Tellis states, "The Pakistanis have discredited themselves with their use of jihadi terrorism as a means to change the status quo" in Kashmir.⁵³ In response, since 2014, India has conducted cross-border strikes in Pakistan that have placed Islamabad in a tight corner. In desperation, Prime Minister Khan even threatened the world with the specter of a nuclear war if the global community did not pay attention to Islamabad's dispute with New Delhi over Kashmir.⁵⁴

These actions by Islamabad neither yielded international support nor any substantial gains, rather Pakistan remains on the FATF Grey List. In other words, India's growing economy, markets, and military clout overshadow Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Prime Minister Khan lamented this fact: "Will these big countries keep looking at their markets only?"⁵⁵

A Way Forward for Pakistan

Today, Pakistan's major grievance in Kashmir is the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A by the Government of India. Prime Minister Khan has put up a brave front, declaring, "Whether the world joins us or not, Pakistan will go to any lengths and its people will support [Kashmiris] till their last breath,"⁵⁶ and nominating himself as the ambassador of the Kashmiris to raise their voice at the international level. While he made it clear that Pakistan will not initiate military conflict with India, he warned the world of the risk of a nuclear war if tensions rise. Later, his Ministry of Foreign Affairs contradicted him that "there was no change to Pakistan's nuclear defensive posture."⁵⁷ Overall, there is lack of a clear policy, and Pakistan appears to be opportunistic in its policy postures toward Kashmiris. Given the predicament in which Pakistan is currently placed, Islamabad should shift its focus from Kashmir and concentrate on domestic challenges facing the nation.

First, since September 2014, al-Qaeda has established a foothold in the region with the inauguration of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent, which considers Pakistan part of its area of responsibility. In addition, Pakistan's support of the United States—especially in providing land routes and air facilities that caused heavy casualties to al-Qaeda and in capturing and handing over terrorist leaders to American forces—has enhanced al-Qaeda's acrimonious sentiments toward the state of Pakistan. Similarly, although Pakistan has been supporting the Taliban since its inception, when Islamabad insisted on US mediation on Kashmir

during Taliban peace talks, Taliban leaders rebuffed Pakistan, stating, “The issue of Afghanistan is not related, nor should Afghanistan be turned into the theater of competition between other countries.”⁵⁸ Thus, both al-Qaeda and the Taliban have their own agendas to transform Pakistan into a sharia state and a cadre base—a threat that Pakistan cannot deal with on its own.

Second, in 2014, the Islamic State (IS), in the 13th issue of its online magazine, *Dabiq*, warned that “it will not be long before Kashmir is run by the organization.”⁵⁹ However, the Indian Security Forces neutralized several pro-IS modules in India. Since, the IS has failed to establish a foothold in Kashmir, it plans to establish a *wilayah*, or governate, in Pakistan. It is likely that following a US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the IS will face pressure from al-Qaeda and the Taliban there, and as a result, IS cadres will have a spillover effect and will probably establish a base in Pakistan for both logistical support and cadre recruitment. Thus, Pakistan faces imminent threats to its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and radicalization of its society.

Third, as a geostrategic ploy, some Pakistani experts support handing over of Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PAK) to China on a 99-year lease. Such an arrangement may make China an active stakeholder in the Kashmir conflict, and Pakistan may receive a large sum it could use to repay its mounting loans and offset the chilling relations with the United States and Middle Eastern countries. From Beijing’s perspective, it would be lucrative for China to have a stronghold in the PAK region to implement the CPEC projects more vociferously and upgrade Skardu Airport to balance the Indian Air Force’s strategic advantage. However, this arrangement would be a major gamble for the democratically elected government of Imran Khan to compromise on Pakistan’s sovereignty. More so, considering the fate of the Uighur Muslims in China, the residents of PAK may revolt against the leasing, fearing Chinese rule and perhaps opting instead for integration with J&K from whom they were separated in the 1940s.

Where does Islamabad stand now? It faces the possible specter of al-Qaeda, Taliban, and IS establishing their outfits in Pakistan, turning the country into a sharia state and recruiting the unemployed youth. Externally, Pakistan continues to be listed on the FATF Grey List, faces a severe debt crisis, and grows increasingly marginalized in regional and international fora.⁶⁰ Internally, it faces unemployment, radicalization of its youth, and a weak institutional framework. However, despite such dire fiscal concerns, its military budget increased by 70 percent between 2010 and 2019.⁶¹ As a Pakistani analyst aptly commented, “The path to . . . progress lies through peaceful economic development, not though a perpetual wartime economy.”⁶² Pakistan cannot sustain such exorbitant military spending over the long term. For decades, Pakistan has heavily

drained its blood and treasure but has been unable to liberate Kashmir from India. Rather the support it previously garnered from the United States, OIC, China, and others is waning with the rising of India. In sum, Islamabad faces serious challenges both internally and externally.

It is apparent that the best interest of Pakistan lies in becoming a normal country. A more practical and viable solution would be to take some time to settle the emotions of its people, accept the revocation of Article 370 as a reality, and conciliate with India. Imran Khan contested election for a “New Pakistan.”⁶³ This Pakistan should be democratic, progressive, and peaceful. For this, Islamabad must concentrate on acquiring economic strength, making the polity truly democratic, confining religion to the private lives of the faithful, and guaranteeing justice for all.⁶⁴ The government should focus on its demographic dividend of more than 50 percent of the population under the age of 25, inculcate a scientific temper among its youth, and protect them from radicalization. To build a new Pakistan, there must be normalized relations with India, with which the country shares almost all spheres of life. Also, there should be a renegotiation for the most-favored nation status that India granted to Pakistan but withdrew in the wake of the Pulwama terrorist attack. Pakistan must come out of the Cold War mentality, instead of continuing to consider New Delhi as an existential threat, Islamabad should take stock of India’s strong institutional framework, emerging market, modernizing military, geostrategic positioning, and rising global status. Therefore, Islamabad, taking cognizance of the ground realities, should chart out its own path, commensurate to its capabilities and resources, regional and global dynamics, to achieve development, peace and harmony.

Conclusion

Let us look at the Kashmir imbroglia in its entirety. The State of J&K acceded to India through an Instrument of Accession that was absolutely legal, as per the Government of India Act 1935, Indian Independence Act 1947, and international law. Lord Mountbatten, as the Governor General of India, accepted the Accession as unconditional and complete.⁶⁵

No one at that stage demanded a plebiscite—it was entirely India’s magnanimity—a unilateral decision taken immediately after the accession, and well before the UNSC issued Resolution 47 on plebiscite. However, Pakistan declined to meet the precondition to withdraw its forces from the occupied areas of J&K before any plebiscite. Since then, although Pakistan has repeatedly asked for a plebiscite, in reality, Islamabad has not been serious in honoring its legal commitments or resolutions.⁶⁶ Now with the passage of seven decades and Pakistan making substantial alteration in the demography of PAK, the possibility of a realistic

plebiscite is lost forever. Also, with the Simla Agreement of 1972 and Lahore Declaration of 1999 mandating that all issues including J&K must be resolved through a bilateral dialogue, the UNSC resolutions have now become irrelevant.⁶⁷

To initially provide a special status to J&K, India had included Article 370, on its own accord, as a temporary provision in the Indian Constitution. No multilateral body or agreement had mandated Article 370. It was entirely an internal decision concerning the Constitution of India, and therefore, its modification or repeal is the sovereign right of India. At the time of the Article's adoption, as well as when it was subsequently modified, Pakistan had no say in the matter. Therefore, Pakistan's current stance is inexplicable.⁶⁸

Despite this position, Pakistan has done all that it could during the past 73 years to acquire J&K and, yet, has not succeeded. Islamabad's decades-long policy of meddling in Kashmir has only complicated the problem. Pakistan's official rhetoric of extending moral and diplomatic support for Kashmir has actually been its support for Islamist militant groups in the region.⁶⁹

What is required now is a drastic change in Pakistan's outlook—especially, a shift of focus away from J&K. Pakistan must adopt a pragmatic view and realize that the revocation of Article 370 is the beginning of India claiming its rightful, legal, and sole accession of J&K. Islamabad's aggression toward India has drained Pakistan financially and socially and isolated it internationally. Pakistan military's patronage of terror groups has only landed the country on the FATF Grey List and created an environment rife for the radicalization of Pakistani youth, which could well lead toward a sharia state. This was neither the dream of Quaid-e-Azam Jinnah nor the vision of Imran Khan. And so, Pakistan should consider move away from Kashmir rhetoric to build economic muscle, strengthen democratic values, spread secular culture, ensure justice for all, and invest in its youth. This one major comprehensive push is all that is required to place Pakistan on a path to prosperity and overcome the post-imbroglio Kashmir mania forever. ☪

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Air Cmde Kedar Thaakar, Indian Air Force, Retired

Air Commodore Thaakar is a veteran Indian Air Force Officer with 35 years of distinguished service. He participated in several major operations of the IAF, including Operation Vijay (1999) and Operation Parakram (2001–02). In addition to being the commanding officer of two premier IAF Provost and Security Units, he was appointed as the provost marshal of the IAF, heading Air Force police, security, and vigilance departments. On the aviation front, he is an experienced Category 'A' ATC officer and senior instructor at the Indian Air Force Academy. He has also been a member of a UN peace-keeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He holds master's degrees in defence and strategic studies and is an alumnus of India's prestigious Defence Services Staff College and College of Air Warfare. Currently, he is the dean, School of Police and Security Sciences at the National Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar (India). His areas of interest include strategic affairs, defense studies, homeland security, and airpower.

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