

PAKISTAN'S CHANGING OUTLOOK ON KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Having remained wedded to Kashmir as an “armed self-determination conflict” for over five decades, Pakistan under General Pervez Musharraf seems to be changing course in favor of a diplomatic settlement that would be acceptable to India, Pakistan and the Kashmiris. This changing Pakistani outlook on Kashmir is clearly reflected in President Musharraf’s advocacy of a four point proposal which seeks a settlement of the Kashmir dispute outside the framework of UN resolutions. This article describes key elements of Islamabad’s new thinking on Kashmir, analyses some of the domestic, regional and global factors underpinning this change and concludes by noting some of the domestic challenges faced by Musharraf in effectively pursuing his out of the box thinking on Kashmir.

KEYWORDS

Kashmir Issue, Pakistan’s Foreign Policy, Pakistan-India Relations.

Historically, Pakistan has viewed its dispute with India over Kashmir as the key determinant of its strategic behavior in the international arena. Advocacy of the rights of the Kashmiri people to freely determine their future has been the main plank of Islamabad's diplomatic strategy in the United Nations and other international fora. By championing the cause of the rights of the Kashmiri people, Islamabad has tried to remind the world that India's control over two third of the State of Jammu and Kashmir is not only legally untenable but morally unjust as it was achieved by means of "fraud and violence"¹ and through an instrument of accession with a ruler who had lost the support of the vast majority of his predominantly Muslim subjects. Pakistan's official stance on Kashmir can be summarized into the following six interrelated propositions.

1. The State of Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory.
2. This disputed status is acknowledged in the UN Security Council resolutions of August 13, 1948 and January 5, 1949, to which both Pakistan and India are a party.
3. These resolutions remain operative and cannot be unilaterally disregarded by either party.
4. Talks between India and Pakistan over the future status of Jammu and Kashmir should aim to secure the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people. This right entails a free, fair and internationally supervised as agreed in the UN Security Council resolutions.
5. The plebiscite should offer the people of Jammu and Kashmir the choice of permanent accession to either Pakistan or India.
6. Talks between India and Pakistan, in regard to the future status of Jammu and Kashmir, should be held in conformity both with the Simla Agreement of July 1972 and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. An international mediatory role in such talks may be appropriate if mutually agreed.

¹*Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, London: Longman, Vol. VI, 1947, p. 8931

This stated Pakistani position on Kashmir has undergone a fundamental shift under President General Pervez Musharraf who, after assuming power in October 1999 in a bloodless coup, has been, in his own words “pondering outside the box”² solutions to resolve the dispute. This paper examines various aspects of changing Pakistani outlook on Kashmir and analyses different factors underpinning this change.

Pakistan’s “New Thinking on Kashmir”

Pakistan’s Kashmir policy has alternated between force and diplomacy with the former remaining the dominant instrument until very recently. Having unsuccessfully tried wars in 1947-1948 and 1965, and different forms of sub-conventional warfare in the 1980s and the 1990s and limited war in Kargil in 1999 as instruments of its Kashmir policy to change the territorial status quo in its favor, Islamabad revived its quest for a diplomatic solution under President Musharraf. In summer 2001, two years after the Kargil conflict which nearly provoked a full-scale India-Pakistan war, President Musharraf proposed a “reciprocal action plan” to New Delhi as a first step to defuse tensions between them and to promote peace. While calling upon India to stop atrocities in Indian-held Kashmir, it said “Pakistan might recommend to the freedom fighters to moderate their indigenous freedom struggle in Kashmir.”³ In his meeting with the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leaders in New Delhi on July 14, 2001, President Musharraf advised them to “adopt a flexible approach in their dealings with the Indian government and also generate awareness about the inevitable changes which are expected on the Kashmir front”. According to one report, in his “plain speaking” to the APHC leaders, President Musharraf warned that “we all should be ready for some accommodation”⁴

²Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 302.

³Maria Saifuddin Effendi, “Pakistan India Peace Process: Summits in Focus (1999-2005,” *Regional Studies Quarterly* (Summer 2008), p.82.

⁴*The Indian Express*, July 15, 2001.

During his summit meeting with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Agra on July 14-16, 2001, President Musharraf reassured his Indian host that he had come to meet him "with an open mind". He also underscored his desire to have "discussions with Indian leaders on establishing, tension free and cooperative relations between our two countries." The Agra Summit failed to produce a tangible outcome, but the draft Agra Declaration which both sides considered issuing at the end of their historic meeting clearly stated that "settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir would pave the way for normalization of relations between the two countries."⁵ President Musharraf outlined his four point approach to resolving the Kashmir dispute during his breakfast meeting with representatives of Electronic and Print media held in Agra on July 16, 2001. Responding to a question on how best to resolve the Kashmir dispute, President Musharraf said: "step one was the initiation of dialogue...acceptance of Kashmir as the main issue was step two....negating certain solutions unacceptable to both sides was step three...exploring remaining options was step four."⁶

In a remarkable reversal of Islamabad's verbal strategy on Kashmir, President Pervez Musharraf publicly stated on December 17, 2003 that even though "we are for United Nations Security resolutions ... now we have left that aside."⁷ A month later, in a joint statement issued in Islamabad, following his meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee on January 6, 2004, categorically pledged that he would not "permit any territory under Pakistan's control to be used to support terrorism in any manner."⁸ This statement was meant to mollify New Delhi's concerns relating to the issue of alleged "cross-border" infiltration from Pakistan.

By dropping its longstanding demand for a UN-mandated plebiscite over divided Kashmir, and by assuring New Delhi that

⁵Text of the Draft Agra Declaration in Effendi *op.cit*; p. 96.

⁶"The Breakfast that broke the Table," *Economic Times*, July 17, 2001.

⁷Syed Rifaat Hussain, "Proposals for Resolving the Kashmir Dispute," *PILDAT Briefing Paper* 19, June 2005. p. 34. Also, "Pakistan, India need to be bold on Kashmir; UN resolutions can be 'set aside': Musharraf," *Dawn*, December 19, 2003.

⁸See text of Joint Statement in *Dawn*, January 7, 2004.

Islamabad would not encourage violent activity in Indian-held Kashmir, President Musharraf tried to create much-needed political space for New Delhi to substantively engage itself with Islamabad for finding a workable solution to the festering Kashmir dispute. As noted by a prominent Pakistani security analyst, Hasan-Askari Rizvi, "The underlying motivations of the joint statement were flexibility and pragmatism on the part of the two leaders. It set in motion a process that, if pursued to its logical conclusion with consistency, could prove to be a turning point in Indo-Pak relations, hitherto marked by distrust and hostility."⁹

President Musharraf reiterated his four-point proposal for resolving the Kashmir dispute while addressing a closed door symposium organized by the *India Today Conclave 2004* via satellite from Islamabad on March 13, 2004.

According to him:

1. Centrality of the Kashmir dispute should be accepted by India and Pakistan.
2. Talks should commence to resolve the dispute.
3. All solutions not acceptable to any of the three parties are to be taken off the table.
4. The most feasible and acceptable option be chosen.

A few months later, while talking to a group of newspaper editors at an Iftar dinner in Islamabad on October 25, 2004, President Pervez Musharraf called for a national debate on new options for the Kashmir dispute. The necessity for this debate stemmed from the fact that demands for conversion of LoC into an international border and plebiscite were not acceptable to Pakistan and India respectively. To break the deadlock he suggested that identification of various zones of the disputed territory needs to be carried out followed by their demilitarization and a determination of their status. He identified seven regions in Jammu and Kashmir based on "religious, ethnic and geographical terms" for this purpose.

⁹Hasan-Askari Rizvi, "Islamabad's New Approach to Kashmir," in W.P. Sidhu, Bushra Asif and Cyrus Samii, eds. *Kashmir: New Voices, New Approaches* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006), p. 146.

Two regions – Azad Kashmir and Northern areas – are under the control of Pakistan whereas five regions are under Indian control. The first part comprises Jammu, Sambha and Katwa where Hindus are in majority.

The second part also comprises Jammu but the areas include Dodha, Phirkuch and Rajawri where Muslim population is in majority which includes Gujars, Sudhans and Rajas who are also associated with Azad Kashmir.

The third part is the area of Kashmir Valley which also has Muslim majority. The fourth part is Kargil which has Shia and Balti population in majority and the fifth area is Ladakh and adjoining areas where Buddhists live.

President Musharraf further said that it was imperative that the linguistic, ethnic, religious, geographic, political and other aspects of these seven regions should be reviewed and a peaceful solution to the problem found.

At the end of President Musharraf's visit to New Delhi on April 18, 2005, a joint statement was issued which described the peace process between India and Pakistan as "irreversible."¹⁰ A month later in May 2005, President Musharraf stated that he agreed with India that boundaries could not be redrawn but should be made irrelevant; the LoC cannot be made permanent either.

Speaking at a conference organized by Pugwash in Islamabad in March 2006, President Pervez Musharraf renewed his call for demilitarization and said:

"His country's proposals for demilitarisation and self-governance offered a practical solution to the Kashmir dispute. An ultimate solution to the problem on these lines would make the LoC irrelevant. And such a solution would neither require redrawing of borders, nor make Line of Control irrelevant. The demilitarisation would be a

¹⁰Amit Baruah, "India-Pakistan peace process 'irreversible,' *The Hindu*, April 19, 2005.

great confidence-building measure and provide relief to Kashmir. This will also help discourage militancy."¹¹

Responding positively to these Pakistani overtures, the Indian Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, said on March 24, 2006 that while "borders cannot be redrawn" both countries "can work toward making them irrelevant" – towards making them "just lines on a map." He went on to suggest that a "joint mechanism" be set up to advance cooperation and development between the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir.¹²

In December 2006, President Musharraf reiterated his four-point proposal which suggested that Kashmir will have the same borders but the people will move freely across the LoC; self-governance and autonomy within each region of Kashmir; troops withdrawal in a staggered manner; and a joint supervision mechanism. His proposal evoked a positive response from India with New Delhi suggesting that such proposals could only be considered after the "cross-border terror infrastructure has been dismantled," as declared by the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir.¹³

In an interview given to CNN-IBN news channel in January 2007, President Pervez Musharraf proposed joint management by India and Pakistan of the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir. That arrangement would leave India and Pakistan with reduced sovereignty over the territories, which they presently control in J&K. He further said in that interview that,

"He did not agree with India's claim that there already was self-governance in the held Kashmir, and claimed that most of the people there do not accept the Indian government. If India believed there was self-governance, we keep sticking to this position, we will never

¹¹Quoted in Moonis Ahmer, "Kashmir and The Process of Conflict Resolution," *Pakistan Security Research Unit (PSRU) Brief No. 16*, 1 August 2007, p. 11.

¹²G. Parthasarathy and Radha Kumar, *Frameworks for a Kashmir Settlement* (New Delhi: Delhi Policy Group, 2006), p. 2.

¹³Cited in "Consolidating Peace and Sustaining the Improved Security Scenario in J & K," *IPCS and J & K Police Conference Report*, New Delhi, May 2007.

more forward because we do not agree. Therefore, if you want to move forward, we have to leave stated position."¹⁴

In his autobiography, *In the Line of Fire*, President Musharraf described his four point proposal as "purely personal which needed to be sold to the public by all involved parties for acceptance".

He summarized his proposal as follows:

1. First, identify the geographic regions of Kashmir that need resolution. At present the Pakistani part is divided into two regions: Northern areas and Azad Kashmir. The Indian part is divided into three regions: Jammu, Srinagar, and Laddakh. Are all these on the table for discussion, or are there ethnic, political, and strategic considerations dictating some give and take.
2. Second, demilitarize the identified region or regions and curb all militant aspects of the struggle for freedom. This will give comfort to the Kashmiris, who are fed up with the fighting and killing on both sides.
3. Third, introduce self-governance or self-rule in the identified region or regions. Let the Kashmiris have the satisfaction of running their own affairs without having an international character and remaining short of independence.
4. Fourth, and most important, have a joint management mechanism with a membership consisting of Pakistanis, Indians, and Kashmiris overseeing self-governance and dealing with residual subjects common to all identified regions and those subjects that are beyond the scope of self-governance.¹⁵

In his convocation address to the Jammu University in July 2007, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh articulated his vision "to build a naya [new] Jammu and Kashmir which is symbolized by peace, prosperity and people's power." Besides, Jammu and Kashmir can "become a symbol of India-Pakistan cooperation rather than conflict;" while "...borders cannot be changed, they can be made irrelevant. There is no question of divisions or partitions, but the Line

¹⁴"Musharraf floats joint management plan for Kashmir," *Dawn* (Karachi) January 10, 2007.

¹⁵Pervez Musharraf, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

of Control can become a line of peace with a freer flow of ideas, goods, services and people.”¹⁶

Factors Driving Pakistan's New Thinking on Kashmir

There are a number of factors driving Islamabad's new thinking on Kashmir. First, there is a clear recognition of the inefficacy of war in the wake of Pakistan's overt nuclearization in 1998 to resolve the central issue of Kashmir. In early 1999, troops of Pakistan's Northern Light Infantry, disguised as Kahmiri Mujahedeen, crossed the LoC and occupied strategic mountain peaks in Mushkoh Valley, Dras, Kargil, and Batalik sectors of Ladakh. Through this military incursion Islamabad sought to “block the Dras-Kargil highway, cut off Leh from Srinagar, trap the Indian forces on the Siachin glacier, raise the militant's banner of revolt in the Valley and bring the Kashmir issue firmly back to the forefront of the international agenda.”¹⁷ Angered by Pakistan's military incursion, which endangered its vital supply routes to Leh and the Siachin, New Delhi launched a counter military offensive and threatened to impose a war on Pakistan in order to restore the status quo.

India also effectively mobilized world opinion against Pakistan. The G-8 countries held Pakistan responsible for the military confrontation in Kashmir and described the Pakistani military action to change the status quo as “irresponsible”. They called upon Islamabad to withdraw its forces north of the LoC. The EU publicly called for “immediate withdrawal of the infiltrators. The United States also depicted Pakistan as the “instigator” and insisted that the *status quo ante* be unconditionally and unambiguously restored. Caving in to mounting international pressure for withdrawal, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif made a dash to Washington on July 4, 1999 and signed a joint statement with President Clinton, which called for the restoration of the “sanctity” of Line of Control in accordance with the Simla Agreement. The Kargil War exposed the inherent

¹⁶“LoC Can Become a Line of Peace,” *www. Outlookindia.com* accessed on July 15, 2007.

¹⁷Navnita Chadha Behera, *Demystifying Kashmir* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution Press, 2006), p. 84.

limitations of Islamabad's strategy of sub-conventional war against India in a nuclear environment and forced Pakistan into negotiations to resolve the core issue of Kashmir. Islamabad realized that war scares were neither good for its image as a nuclear weapon state nor for its economic development and progress.

Second, there has been a sustained American pressure on Islamabad to bury the hatchet with India over Kashmir. The Kargil war and the 2001-2002 India-Pakistan military stand-off made Washington realize that without enduring peace, South Asia would remain a nuclear flashpoint and therefore, to use President Clinton's phrase "the most dangerous place on earth." Islamabad faced strong American diplomatic pressure against its policy of supporting armed Islamic militancy in Kashmir after the terrorist attacks on the Indian parliament on 13 December 2001. Despite Pakistan's swift condemnation of these attacks, New Delhi accused Pakistan-based Islamic extremist groups for the attack and held Pakistan responsible for their action. In the wake of this incident, the Department of State added to its list of designated terrorist organizations two Pakistan-based groups and sent strong message to Islamabad of its growing dissatisfaction with Islamabad's Kashmir policy. Following his June 2002 visit to Islamabad, Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, managed to extract a pledge from President Musharraf of a "permanent end" to Islamabad's support of terrorist activity in Kashmir.¹⁸ Washington also realized that American strategic goal of peace and stability in Afghanistan could not be achieved without moderating India-Pakistan competition over Afghanistan. Pakistan's main worry in post-Taliban Afghanistan, is the reconstitution of relations between Kabul and New Delhi. Following the downfall of the Taliban in November 2001, India has forged excellent ties with Afghanistan, much to Islamabad's dismay. India has an extensive diplomatic presence in Afghanistan with consulates in Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar and Jalalabad, in addition to the embassy in Kabul. Pakistan has often accused New Delhi of fomenting trouble in

¹⁸Robert Wirsing, "Great-Power Foreign Policies in South Asia," in Devin T. Hagerty, ed. *South Asia in World Politics* (Boulder, Co: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), p. 144.

Baluchistan by "training several hundred Baluch tribal dissidents".¹⁹ Islamabad has also claimed that Indian commandoes are operating in Pakistan. Renewal of India-Pakistan rivalry for influence over Afghanistan was deemed bad news for peace in that war torn country. Islamabad feels hemmed in by the growing Indian diplomatic and economic presence in its strategic rear and therefore extremely reluctant to let the pro-Indian, Tajik-dominated dispensation in Kabul gain ground. Long standing proposals for building Trans-Asian-Gas Pipelines would become feasible only through India-Pakistan cooperation in Afghanistan and also allow trade to replace war as the primary interaction between Afghanistan and its neighbors.

The third factor pushing Pakistan toward peace with India is the need to display responsible nuclear custodianship. In the aftermath of the Iraq war, which was waged, to remove a "rogue" regime with potential for having weapons of mass destruction, Islamabad feels obligated to reassure the world community about its nuclear weapons and growing missile capabilities. Resumption of India-Pakistan dialogue with its focus on nuclear risk reduction measures seems to be the only credible way of easing world concern over the safety and security of Pakistani nuclear arsenal which after the A.Q. Khan episode, are being viewed by the international community with great deal of apprehension. Articulating this concern, Bruce Reidel, the former senior director for South Asia on the National Security Council told *Newsweek*: "If you were to look around for where the Al-Qaeda is going to find its bomb, it is right in their backyard."²⁰ Countering this alarmist line of thinking, Islamabad has stated time and again that its nuclear assets are in safe hands and Western fears of their outward leakage are misplaced and exaggerated. Addressing the weekly press briefing on September 3, 2007, Ms. Tasnim Aslam, spokesperson for Pakistan Foreign Office, tried to reassure the world by pointing out that "Pakistan's strategic assets are under strong multi-layered decision-making, organizational, administrative and command-and-control structure. Pakistan also has

¹⁹Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, "The Search for Security in Post-Taliban Afghanistan," *ADELPHI PAPER* 391 (London: IISS, 2007), p. 20.

²⁰Ron Moreau, "where the Jihad Lives Now: Islamic militants have spread beyond their tribal base, and have the run of an unstable, nuclear-armed nation," *Newsweek* online edition accessed on October 24 at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/57465/>

in place exports control that conforms to the most stringent international standards.”²¹ Despite these assurances, Western worries about the safety of Pakistani nuclear assets due to mounting political violence continue to persist. These worries have been reinforced by spate of recent suicide attacks against Pakistani security forces in the North-West Frontier Province which contains elements of Pakistani nuclear infrastructure.²² Joe Biden, Chairman of the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, recently described Pakistan as “potentially the most dangerous country in the world” which “has a significant minority of jihadists with nuclear weapons.”²³ Subsequently, he recommended dispatching US troops to Pakistan to secure the country’s nuclear assets in the event President Musharraf is assassinated by terrorists.²⁴ To address these mounting Western worries about the safety and security of its nuclear assets, Islamabad has concluded a series of nuclear confidence-building measures with India. These include an agreement to establish a permanent hotline between Islamabad and New Delhi, an agreement with technical parameters on pre-notification of missile flight tests and an eight-point agreement on “Reducing the Risk from Accidents relating to Nuclear Weapons” that includes information sharing initiatives.²⁵ The Joint Statement issued at the end of the first round of India Pakistan Expert level talks on nuclear CBMs held in New Delhi in June 2004 clearly stated: “both sides recognized that “respective nuclear capabilities of the two countries are based on their national security imperatives and constitute a factor for stability”.²⁶ Former Prime Minister and leader of Pakistan’s People’s Party, Benazir Bhutto said in an interview on November 5, 2007, that while President Musharraf says he is firm control of the nuclear arsenal, she is afraid this control could weaken due to instability in the country. Responding to these fears, President Musharraf stated on November

²¹“Foreign Office rejects charges against Pak N-plan,” *Times of India*, September 4, 2007.

²²Hassan Abbas, “Pakistan: Instability raises nuclear safety concerns,” *Oxford Analytica* August 2007, p. 2.

²³*Times of India*, August 21, 2007.

²⁴*Dawn*, October 22, 2007.

²⁵*Strategic Survey* (London: IISS, 2007), p. 348.

²⁶*Dawn*, June 21, 2004.

13 that Pakistan's nuclear weapons are under "total custodial controls."²⁷

The fourth factor underpinning Islamabad's new approach to Kashmir is the "boomerang" effect of Jihad as an instrument of Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Emboldened by its pivotal role in Afghan resistance movement which culminated in Moscow's military defeat in 1988, Pakistan turned its attention toward Indian-held Kashmir where a Kashmiri "Intifada" broke out in 1988-89 against Indian repressive policies. Backed by the ISI, several Jihadi groups prominent among which were the Hizbul Mujahideen, the Al Badr Mujahideen, and the Harkat-ul Mujahideen (previously known as Harkat ul Ansar) and the Lashkar-i-Tayyiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed "found a new cause in Indian administered Kashmir where an insurgency had erupted in 1989." Their involvement in the Kashmiri Intifada transformed it from a domestic insurgency (conducted via the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front) into a low-intensity conflict between India and Pakistan. As Islamabad's forward policy in Indian-held Kashmir began to take its toll on the Indian security forces and along with them those of the innocent civilians, New Delhi accused Pakistan of waging a proxy war against India from Azad Kashmir. Indian and foreign media reports identified at least 91 insurgent training camps in Azad Kashmir "the bulk of which lie contiguous to the Indian districts of Kupwara, Baramullah, Poonch, Rajuari and Jammu."²⁸

The Jihad strategy became an untenable proposition for Islamabad after the terrorist strikes against the United States on September 11, 2001, followed by suicide attacks against the Jammu and Kashmir state assembly in October and the Indian parliament in December 2001. These cataclysmic events changed the rules of the game and led to the blurring of the moral distinction between freedom fighters and terrorists. Under the new rules for a state's responsibility for terrorist groups operating inside its borders, Pakistan could no

²⁷"Pakistan nukes under control: Musharraf," *Agence Frances Presse* November 13, 2007.

²⁸Amir Mir, "Cap the Camps: US," *Weekly Independent*, (Vol. 1, No. 18) 25-31 October, 2001.

longer allow Jihadi groups to use its territory with impunity, nor could it completely absolve itself of the responsibility for the violence perpetrated by them beyond its borders. Between December 2001 and July 2002, India threatened to wage a limited conventional war against Pakistan unless Islamabad terminated its support for what New Delhi portrayed as cross-border terrorism. Leveraging effectively its threat of war against Pakistan, New Delhi forced Islamabad to crack down on some of the fundamentalist Islamic groups waging war against the Indian government in Kashmir. Pakistan banned some of the Jihadi groups in January 2002 and promised to permanently end its support for armed militancy in Kashmir provided New Delhi agreed to find a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute.

These Pakistan moves caused huge disappointment among the Kashmir militant groups and some radical elements associated with them were recruited by Al-Qaeda to assassinate President Musharraf in December 2003. With Pakistan's pro-Jihad Kashmir policy turned on its head, armed militant groups turned their guns and anger against the Musharraf regime. They assumed the role of "peace spoilers" by joining hands with the resurgent Taliban-Al-Qaeda forces operating out of the "lawless" borderlands along the Durand line between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These developments led the Pakistan Army to re-think its relationship with the militant Islamic groups.

To stem the rising tide of extremist violence in the country in which at least 1,896 people including 655 civilians, 354 security forces personnel and 887 terrorists died in 2007 alone, Islamabad intensified military operations against the Jihadi elements in the tribal areas and stormed the radical Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in the capital city of Islamabad in June 2007 on the suspicion that suicide bombers linked to Al-Qaeda had taken refuge in the mosque. More than 70 militants died in the assault on the Red Mosque. Soon after the reopening of the Red Mosque, extremist cleric Maulana Aziz delivered an incendiary sermon that called on his followers to start a revolution. He noted: "the nation should be ready for jihad because only jihad can bring a revolution... The students of schools, colleges and universities should spread in the nook and corner of Pakistan and work for bringing Islamic revolution." Describing those who were

killed as "dear to Allah" he declared that "every mosque in the country is Lal Masjid."²⁹ Echoing Maulana Aziz's call for Jihad, Al-Qaeda urged the "Pakistani public and the army to rise against Musharraf for his submissiveness to the United States."³⁰ To avenge the military assault on the Red Mosque and to protest the intensified military operations against pro-Taliban forces in North Waziristan, armed militants scrapped a peace deal signed with the government in July 2007. In August they captured 280 soldiers including a colonel and nine officers after intercepting a military convoy in South Waziristan. On September 13, 2007, a suicide bomber killed 20 elite SSG (Special Services Group) soldiers and injured 41 when he blew himself up in the dining compound of the Army base located in the high security zone in Ghazi in district Haripur.³¹ In October 2007, armed militants ambushed an army convoy in North Waziristan in which 20 soldiers and 45 militants were killed. Over 20 soldiers of the Frontier Corps were captured by local Taliban militants on October 7 after they successfully assaulted a military checkpoint in Spin Wam, adjacent to Hangu district in troubled North Waziristan.³² Reacting to these developments, President Musharraf told Dawn News TV that the prevailing conditions in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) were "extremely precarious" and described the threat from religious extremism as the primary security challenge facing the country. Pakistan's domestic politics took yet another violent turn on October 18, 2007 when over 136 people died and 500 were injured in Karachi, in a suicide bombing attack on the homecoming public procession of former Prime Minister Benazir's Bhutto's return to Pakistan.³³ Militant elements linked to pro-Taliban warlord Baitullah Mehsud were widely believed to be behind this atrocity. In his condolence call to Benazir, President Musharraf

²⁹Farhana Ali and Mohammed Shehzad, "Pakistan's Red Mosque Return," *Terrorism Monitor*, October 25, 2007, p. 4.

³⁰*Ibid.*,

³¹Mazhar Tufail, "ISI and MI to probe into Ghazi Blast," *The News* (Islamabad) September 15, 2007. Also, Ismail Khan and Muhammed Sadaqat, "Suicide blast at command base: 15 soldiers killed, 18 injured," *Dawn*, September 14, 2007.

³²"North Waziristan militants capture 28 soldiers," *Dawn* (Karachi) October 7, 2007.

³³"Bhutto survives mid-night carnage," *Dawn* October 19, 2007.

described the attack as part of a “conspiracy against democracy” and expressed his deepest sorrow over the terrorist attack and vowed to arrest the culprits.³⁴ A week later, on October 25, a suicide bomber killed 18 soldiers and two civilians and wounded 35 persons including nine civilians in the Swat district of NWP.³⁵ In retaliation, Pakistan Army bombed the militant’s hideouts in Swat and killed over fifty people. On October 30, a suicide bomber blew himself at a security checkpoint near the residence of General Tariq Majeed, Chairman Joint Chief of Army Staff, and killed eight people including two police men.³⁶ This rising tide of terrorist violence in which suicide terrorism has emerged as a new trend aimed at the Pakistan military, has forced Islamabad to rethink its relationship with militant religious groups. The Kashmir Jihad is now being viewed as a double edged sword with Islamabad holding the sharper end of it due to its devastating “blow back” effects.

President Musharraf’s new thinking on Kashmir has evoked a mixed reaction at home. Religious right led by Jammāt-i-Islami has vociferously opposed his decision to ban the Jihadi outfits and questioned the wisdom of his moves to seek a settlement of the Kashmir dispute outside the framework of the UN Security Council resolutions. Islamists have debunked the ongoing peace process as a ‘one man show’ and have rejected Musharraf’s proposals as a “U-turn”, and a ‘roll-back of Pakistan’s principled position on Kashmir. They have decried summit meetings between President Musharraf and Indian leaders as a “national humiliation.”³⁷ Supporters of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Group) have also accused President Musharraf of taking a U-turn on the Kashmir issue and neglecting the people of Kashmir in his efforts to normalize relations with India.

The Pakistan People’s Party led by Benazir Bhutto, while supporting President Musharraf’s efforts to seek a rapprochement with India, has demanded greater transparency about discussions being conducted through the back channel links between Islamabad

³⁴Ashraf Khan, “A-Qaida linked cited in Bhutto Bomb,” *Associated Press*, October 19, 2007.

³⁵*Daily Times*, October 26, 2007.

³⁶*Daily Times*, October 31, 2007.

³⁷Navnita Chadha Behera, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

and New Delhi. Significantly, on the eve of her return to Pakistan after eight years of self-imposed exile abroad, Benazir Bhutto publicly stated that if voted into power in the January 2008 elections, her party would continue the dialogue process with India and “work sincerely towards resolving the Kashmir issue.”³⁸

Prominent Azad Kashmiri leaders including former President and Prime Minister of Azad Kashmir, Sardar Abdul Qayyum, have also endorsed President Musharraf's general stance that there is no scope for militancy in their freedom struggle and a solution is only possible through negotiations and peaceful means. It is worth noting here that India Pakistan peace process, contrary to prevalent public perceptions of slow progress, seems to have made considerable progress in the backchannel discussions between Islamabad and New Delhi. This progress led Pakistan's foreign minister, Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri to claim in April 2007 that both countries were extremely close to reaching a settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Media reports indicated that using backchannel links New Delhi and Islamabad had reached a broad agreement on five elements of this settlement. The agreed points are: 1) No change in the territorial layout of Kashmir currently divided into Pakistani and Indian areas; 2) the creation of a “softer border” across LoC; 3) greater autonomy and self-governance within both Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of the state; 4) a cross-LoC consultative mechanism and finally; 5) the demilitarization of Kashmir at a pace determined by the decline in cross border terrorism.”³⁹ How this emerging consensus will get sold by Islamabad and New Delhi to their respective wary publics, determined peace spoilers and vested interests associated with entrenched positions would largely depend on the vagaries of domestic politics in each country. The imposition of emergency in Pakistan on November 3, 2007 by President Musharraf suggests that domestic political issues will remain the central preoccupation for Islamabad for next few months, leaving little time and energy for vigorously pursuing the new Kashmir policy. In his televised address to the nation after the imposition of emergency rule,

³⁸“I will work to resolve the Kashmir issue: Benazir,” *The Times of India*, October 18, 2007.

³⁹Farhan Bokhari and Jo Johnson, “Political wrangles dim the prospect of a deal with India,” *The Financial Times* (London) May 29, 2007.

President Musharraf said Pakistan was at a “dangerous juncture, its government threatened by Islamic extremists. He said: “The extremism had even spread to Islamabad, and the extremists are taking the writ of the government in their even own hands, and even worse they are imposing their obsolete ideas on moderates.” President Musharraf blamed the Supreme Court for punishing the state officials and said this “judicial activism had “semi-paralyzed” the government.⁴⁰ The severe adverse global reaction to President Musharraf’s decision to impose emergency in the country and the stiff resistance to this measure by all political parties including the threat to boycott the January 2008 national elections, has weakened his grip on power. With his reduced international popularity and fast eroding internal legitimacy, it is doubtful that he will have the necessary political will and the clout to vigorously pursue his “out of the box” thinking on Kashmir.

⁴⁰“Musharraf promises to defeat extremists, Opposition activists rounded up,” AFP quoted in *Daily News* (Colombo), November 5, 2007.