Two Roadmaps for Kashmiri Democracy

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Two nation-states debate, the world watches, and a longsuffering people await their fate.

To assert that Kashmir has been at a perennial crossroads is a gross understatement. For the good part of sixty years, Indian, Pakistani, and Kashmiri interests have been tussling over the disputed region. For the most part, though, the South Asian nation-states have been able to impose their authority on the region, many a time to the detriment of the Kashmiri people.

This is not to imply, however, that Kashmiris are or have been resigned to victimization. In April of 2013, supporters of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) in Indian-controlled Kashmir protested a court ruling that sentenced more than twenty political prisoners to life in prison, in addition to demanding the return of the remains of recently-executed Kashmiri extremist, Mohammed Afzal Guru (Safvi, 2013). These specific requests are united by the general call for long-term peace and democracy in Kashmir. As atrocities committed by India's Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) have mounted in recent years, this call has intensified considerably, with a number of political commentators and activists seeing Kashmiri democracy as the core component of any solution to the six decade-old question.
Visions of the democracy in question are far from homogenous. The various parties involved in the dispute have all produced their respective roadmaps for a peaceful and democratic Kashmiri future, which, despite overlapping in certain key respects, differ in ways that hold serious ramifications for the Kashmiri people. Drawing on a diverse range of theoretical perspectives, this paper examines two such roadmaps produced by the JKLF and an Indian parliamentary delegation deployed to the Kashmir Valley in May of 2012.

The Cartography of Peace

Appreciating the rationale behind the JKLF’s manifesto for Kashmir naturally necessitates understanding the JKLF itself. Founded in 1977 with Pakistani support, the JKLF is a secular nationalist group that seeks Kashmiri independence from both India and Pakistan (“Who are the Kashmir militants?” 2012). Several commentators acknowledge a JKLF bomb attack carried out in July of 1988 as the formal start of the Kashmiri insurgency (Ibid), and the group is unsurprisingly classified as a South Asian terrorist organization by the Indian government. Ironically, the success of the Kashmiri insurgency worked against the JKLF in the medium term, as Pakistani politicians – many of whom had initially backed Kashmiri independence after conceding defeat to India – switched to supporting groups in favor of the region’s accession to Pakistan.

“Sandwiched between Indian security forces and pro-Pakistan militants,” the JKLF suffered a significant decline in the 1990s as its leadership became factionalized, and its organizational units were “dispersed, destroyed, or absorbed into other groups” (Ibid). The group has experienced something of a reimagined resurgence in recent times, with various factions “coming together in a non-violent political movement for the reunification of Pakistani and Indian Kashmir” (Ibid).

To a large extent, the JKLF’s plan for a fully independent Kashmiri state is contingent upon the UN’s willingness to mediate fairly between the different parties involved in the dispute. But is the UN any more likely today to drive Kashmir’s transformation then it was sixty years ago?

The JKLF’s ideological reorientation is apparent in the stated purpose of its roadmap for the resolution of the Kashmir conflict, which is “to ensure a peaceful, prosperous and respectable future for India, Pakistan and Kashmir.” At the same time as the JKLF claims to be concerned with regional security, it also laments the “miseries, massacres, and continued agony” endured by Kashmiris in the past sixty years; it warns that failure to answer the Kashmir question could spell disaster for all parties concerned (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front).
The JKLF has proposed a five-phase reunification of Pakistan and India-controlled Kashmir, leading to the creation of a “fully independent state with a democratic, federal and secular system of government [...] [that has] friendly relations with both India and Pakistan” (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front). The phases are as follows:

**JKLF Roadmap for Solution of Kashmir Issue**

1. In keeping with a Security Council Resolution passed in June of 1998, the UN Secretary General would set up an International Kashmir Committee (IKC). The IKC’s members would be nominated by the UN Secretary General, permanent member countries of the Security Council, NAM, OIC, EU, Germany and Japan, with each party reserving the right to make one nomination. The IKC would discuss the JKLF’s proposal for an independent Kashmiri state, coordinating with the leaderships of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir to determine the proposal’s implementation.

2. All armed forces, civil personnel, and militant groups would withdraw or be withdrawn from Kashmir.

3. All militants opposed to and in favor of India would be disarmed. Persons displaced by the struggle would also be repatriated to their homes.

4. All internal roads in Kashmir closed since 1948 will be reopened. The first national assembly will be established in Srinagar, the current capital of Indian-controlled Kashmir. The assembly will be populated by senior members of existing assemblies at Srinagar, Muzaffarabad, and Gilgit. The elected parliament will be bicameral, with the national assembly serving as the lower house and a senate serving as the upper house. In a nod to America’s Congress, the lower house’s capacity will be determined by the populations of the five Kashmiri provinces (the Kashmir Valley, Jammu, Ladakh, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan), all of which will have equal representation in
the senate.
5. Fifteen years after reunification and independence, the UN will supervise a referendum in which Kashmiris will have to opportunity to remain independent, join India or Pakistan, or “adopt any other [democratically supported] course of action.” “Implementation of the result of the referendum will settle [...] the Kashmir question forever” (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front).

The final section of the JKLF proposal highlights the most salient features of the roadmap. Many of these pertain to the positive impact that implementation of the JKLF formula will have on the relationship between India and Pakistan. According to the JKLF, the roadmap would leave the “national ideologies” of India and Pakistan intact, as neither would have to concede control over Kashmir to the other.

As such, Kashmir would become a “bridge of friendship” rather than a “bone of contention” between India and Pakistan, paving the way for diplomatic and economic gains through the resolution of other disputes. This would not only eliminate the prospect of nuclear war between India and Pakistan but also increase the international standing of the South Asian nations. As far as the Kashmiri people are concerned, the JKLF is confident that its roadmap would let them employ their “freely expressed and unfettered will” to decide their own future. Political freedom aside, Kashmiris would be spared the myriad traumas associated with continued mass migration, communal and ethnic disturbances, and overall bloodshed (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front).

Despite sympathizing with the Kashmiri people for many of the aforementioned reasons, the Indian parliamentary delegation’s roadmap for peace and democracy in the region was deployed by a number of Kashmiri figureheads. Yasin Malik, the chairman of the JKLF, avoided meeting with the delegation, subsequently stating that the report’s recommendations proved the Indian leadership’s “intellectual bankruptcy” (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

The delegation’s findings notwithstanding, the events that precipitated its visit contextualize Malik’s sentiments. In February of 2010, Kashmiris were up in arms after Indian authorities in Srinagar killed 13-year-old Whamiq Farooq Wani in controversial circumstances. Wani died after being hit in the head with a tear gas shell fired by Indian police forces attempting to disperse protestors.

Not long thereafter, protests engulfed the Kashmir Valley. Seeking to calm tensions, an Indian parliamentary delegation traveled to Kashmir, holding discussions with “all sections of the population,” calling for an end to protests, and formulating “a regional road map for peace” (Gill and Kumar, 2012). The delegation was by no means undistinguishable, with former Times of India editor Dileep Padgaonkar, academic Radha Kumar and retired bureaucrat M. M. Ansari among those tasked with the “mammoth job” of answering the Kashmir question. After meeting with 700 other delegations and around 6,000 Kashmiris over more than two years, the delegation published its recommendations (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

A New York Times article published by reporter Hari Kumar and researcher Nikhila Gill shortly after the delegation’s report identified some of its key points, contemplating the possible causes of resultant Kashmiri discontent. The report began by noting that there is a “deep sense of victimhood in Kashmir,” the citizens of which want to lead a life of “dignity and honor” (Gill and Kumar, 2012). It built on this premise by stating that the Kashmiri people desire “freedom from all forces of religious extremism, uncontrollable administration, harsh laws, judicial delays, intimidation and violence,” adding that “a political settlement in Jammu and Kashmir can be achieved only through dialogue between all stakeholders” (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

With regard to dialogue, the delegation called for increased interaction between Indian-controlled Kashmir and the surrounding areas, civilians in the two parts of Kashmir, and the Indian government and the Hurriyat Conference, an umbrella organization of separatist groups; it also recommended an exchange program for artists, students and intellectuals from both sides of the border. However, it then stipulated that Jammu and Kashmir should remain a single state within the Indian Union, anathema to most proponents of the Kashmiri cause.

This recommendation did come with certain caveats: for instance, India’s central government would require the state’s assent to pass laws in most regulatory areas, with all central government acts and articles of the constitution related specifically to the state being reviewed by Constitutional Committee; residents of other states would also not be allowed to purchase land in Kashmir. Needless to say, these concessions did little to reassure Kashmiris, who almost unequivocally see continued Indian political authority of any kind as unacceptable (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

In addition to looking into Kashmiri wishes, intercultural dialogue, and state regulation, the delegation explored economic avenues for cooperation and ruminated on migration issues and the release of Kashmiri prisoners. It stated that tourism across the Line of Control that divides Indian and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir should be encouraged, and that the state should create special economic zones to encourage investment, provide export incentives for handicrafts and horticulture, and complete pending rail and road projects (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

The delegation also stipulated that “the government should facilitate the return of Kashmiri Pandits, Hindus from the area who fled decades ago under threat of violence, and of groups who migrated from Jammu and Kargil” (Gill and Kumar, 2012). Finally, “jailed stone throwers and political prisoners should be released, and the government should facilitate the return of Kashmiri youths stranded across the Line of Control. A judicial commission should be appointed to look into the unmarked graves [...] which hold thousands of bodies” (Gill and Kumar, 2012).

Theories of International Relations: Contextualizing the Roadmaps

The prevailing theory of contemporary international relations, realism makes three guiding assumptions about the international realm. First of all, the state is the “main [international] actor” for realists, and it operates by the principle of sovereignty (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 93). The state thus reserves the right to assert and exercise its legislative authority over its citizens (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 93). Secondly, states compete for power and security in working towards their ultimate goal of survival, which is “held to be a precondition for attaining all other goals” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 94). Realism sees the state as the “supreme good.” As such, it gives state leaders guided by the “ethic of responsibility” the right to protect the state “at all costs” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 95). Last of all, the assumption of self-help holds that there is “no higher authority” then the state to “prevent and counter the use of force” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 95).

Classical and structural realism constitute two influential schools of realist thought. Classical realism traces its roots back to fifth century Greek historian Thucydides, who saw power politics as a law of human behavior (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 89). In line with this notion, “classical realists argue that it is from the nature of man that the essential features of international politics, such as competition, fear, and war, can be explained” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 89). Structural realists, conversely, “attribute security competition and inter-state conflict to the lack of an overarching authority above states and the relative distribution of power in the international system” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 91). The opposing ideas of prominent structural theorists Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer are particularly relevant here. While Waltz framed the theory of defensive realism by arguing that states merely use power to achieve their ultimate end of security, Mearsheimer gave rise to offensive realism by contending that “all states are continuously searching for opportunities to gain power at the expense of other states” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 92).
Woodrow Wilson’s pioneering liberal notion of collective security is also important for our purposes here. As Dunne explained, “The First World War shifted liberal thinking towards a recognition that peace is not a natural condition but one that has to be constructed” (2011, p. 105). In keeping with this, then-US President Wilson called for the creation of a League of Nations based on collective security, the idea that “each state in […] a system accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and agrees to join in a collective response to aggression” (as cited in Dunne, 2011, p. 105). Although the League failed in its mission to prevent the outbreak of a second global conflict, collective security continues to be integral to the purpose and operation of the United Nations, which became the world’s premier international body after the end of the Second World War.

The intellectual hegemony of realist and liberal outlooks has not gone unquestioned. A body of work “primarily and explicitly concerned with the ethical dimension of world politics,” normative IR theory “engages with, explores, and extends” many of the assumptions that underlie realism and liberalism (Erskine, 2013, p. 38). Normative IR theory itself abides by three central principles: first of all, norms have moral weight, as they serve as guides to “what is required, permitted, or prohibited” (Erskine, 2013, p. 46).

Some normative IR theorists question the validity and even the existence of international norms, although Mervyn Frost’s recognition of the unwillingness of international actors to transgress certain principles – at least, not “without pointed justifications and excuses” – serves as a valuable counterpoint to these perspectives (Erskine, 2013, p. 47).

Moving on to the second central principle, our “sites of value” – or “moral starting points” – determine the inclusiveness of our professed moral norms and thus “affect how far our duties to others extend” (Erskine, 2013, p. 48). Last of all, normative IR theory depicts actors in world politics as “moral agents,” who are “defined by their capacities for deliberating over possible courses of action and their consequences” (Erskine, 2013, p. 48-49).

Ethical cosmopolitanism, communitarianism, consequentialism, and deontology are all seminal IR theories and highly relevant to the focus of this paper. Ethical cosmopolitanism asserts that “we have duties to all others as human beings,” and so we must “bracket, or abstract from, particular ties and loyalties” to “achieve a perspective from which no one is excluded” (Erskine, 2013, p. 43). In opposition to this worldview, communitarianism sees “membership in particular communities, and participation in their practices” as “morally defining”; more specifically for the purposes of normative IR theory, communitarianism is “uniquely state-centric,” insofar as “the borders of one’s state demarcate those who are ‘insiders’ in the sense of having equal moral standing” (Erskine, 2013, p. 44).

Consequentialism and deontology differ from cosmopolitanism and communitarianism as they “provide moral frameworks to guide and evaluate our decisions regarding what we ought to do” rather than focusing on “moral identity” and “the scope of our obligations to others” (Erskine, 2013, p. 44). Consequentialist theories focus on the outcomes of actions rather than the actions themselves, demanding that we “make choices according to the state of affairs that will result from our actions” (Erskine, 2013, p. 44).

Conversely, deontological theories contest that certain acts are inherently wrong, irrespective of their effects (Erskine, 2013, p. 45). A final, pertinent theory that speaks to some deontological perspectives is the doctrine of double effect (DDE), which argues that “it is permissible to perform an action even if it results in foreseeable harm, as long as this harm is not directly intended” (Erskine, 2013, p. 45).

Many concepts in normative IR theory tie into the constructivist take on the international realm. A body of thought that has expanded rapidly since the end of the cold war, constructivism is “a social theory that is broadly concerned with the relationship between agents and structures” (Barnett, 2011, p. 154). Constructivists believe that actors are “produced and created by their cultural environments” and the knowledge produced therein, which in turn enables them to “construct and give meaning to reality” (Barnett, 2011, p. 155). The social construction of reality determines the legitimacy of actions in any given society (Barnett, 2011, p. 155).

This speaks to the constructivist conception of power: in line with the logic of appropriateness, states generally crave legitimacy, in that they want other members of the international community to believe that they abide by international norms (Barnett, 2011, p. 157). That said, states help to define norms at the same time as they attempt to comply with them, for power “also includes how knowledge, the fixing of meanings, and the construction of identities allocate differential rewards and capacities” (Barnett, 2011, p. 157).

The final reference points for this paper, those pertaining to South Asian IR theory, draw from most, if not all of the theories outlined above. South Asian international thought as a whole is possibly even harder to define in narrow terms than the likes of liberalism or normative IR theory; as such, I elucidate the views of Pakistani-born scholar Sohail Inayatullah as outlined in his 2008 article, “Distant Futures and Alternative Presents for South Asia.”

Inayatullah asserted that neorealist ideals and resultant practices have “handcuffed” South Asia to its past and “chained” the region to its future, both of which are thus defined by “war, poverty and stultifying bureaucracy, state, and military” (Inayatullah, 2008, p. 52). Inayatullah explained that the neorealist conception of statism has fostered suspicion between the major players in the South Asian arena, who therefore “function like self-interested egoistic individuals” (2008, p. 55).

The discourse of partition is a uniquely South Asian component of Inayatullah’s depiction of neorealism. According to the author, Pakistan’s breakaway from India left “more than a generation of mistrust, hate and fear” in its wake, as a result of which “creating alternative futures, new utopias and eutopias, not dominated by the partition discourse has been nearly impossible” (Inayatullah, 2008, p. 53).

Later in his article, Inayatullah sketched nine scenarios for South Asia’s future. He grouped these permutations into four broad categories: Failed South Asia, in which the region succumbs to chaos and potential nuclear collapse; Globalization, in which South Asia is overcome by Western-style consumerism and/or indigenous cultural intermingling; Dramatic Change, in which the region breaks from tradition entirely in a technological, political and/or cultural sense; and the Community Future, in which Gandhi’s localism comes to reign across the board or South Asian nations break apart to form federations of states.

Inayatullah clearly endorsed an idealistic vision of South Asia’s future — “one based on difference and unity, on creative renderings of history and of the local and universal” (2008, p. 71) — and the last major section of his article lists the stepping stones to such a future. These include planning the use of water for the long term, protecting human rights, denationalizing self, economy and identity, rethinking colonial interstate boundaries, encouraging self-reliance and localization, proposing the new and the environment, and ensuring that all governmental decisions are transparent.

On the Trail of Peace and Democracy

In light of the aforementioned IR theories, what do the two roadmaps at hand imply for the futures of India, Pakistan, and, above all, the Kashmiri people?

To a large extent, the JKLF’s plan for a fully independent Kashmiri state is contingent upon the UN’s willingness to mediate fairly between the different parties involved in the dispute. When it comes to the Kashmiri question, the UN’s effectiveness in implementing solutions since the conflict’s inception is questionable at best. Perhaps the most prominent example of this is the UN Commission’s 1949 call for a “free and impartial plebiscite” to determine the fate of Kashmir, which has yet to be answered.

In an era in which India borders on superpower status and international organizations have to be careful not to irk the ire of Islamic nations – let alone a nuclear state like Pakistan – is the UN any more likely to drive Kashmir’s transformation than it was sixty years ago? Rhetorical intonations aside, the actual answer to this question relates closely to a number of constructivist concepts, especially “the fixing of meanings and the construction of identities” (Barnett, 2011, p. 157).

The ability of states to define norms or enjoy the rewards associated with norm definition is by no means distributed equally. As the UN has an increasingly difficult time denying India a permanent seat on the Security Council, Indian officials are likely to exercise their ever-growing ability to set and/or modify the UN’s agenda; the more conservative members of the Indian government are particularly unlikely to want to give up a region so deeply entrenched in the history of the Indian state itself. The UN can
also only do so much when it comes to issues that fall within the near-sacred realist sphere of domestic sovereignty.

As a counterpoint to the probability that Indian policymakers will twist the UN’s arm to serve their own interests in Kashmir, India and Pakistan could take up the position assumed by normative IR theorists who critique the existence and validity of international standards and prescriptions: with a host of more pressing and current issues waiting to be addressed by the UN, India and Pakistan may well be able to turn a blind eye to or even actively undermine the IKC’s recommendations.

While the JKLF should be wary of its reliance on the UN to transform Kashmir, the ramifications of its roadmap for South Asia cohere with the arguably tried and tested liberal institution of collective security. Countless political commentators have affirmed that a resolution of the Kashmir dispute would go a long way towards improving ties between India and Pakistan. Given the animosity that has defined the relationship between India, Pakistan, and Kashmir for so long, friendly relations between the three entities would advance the security priorities of all governments concerned and most likely improve standards of living and quality of life, particularly for the Kashmiri people. To bring Inayatullah’s ideas into the fold, the establishment of not one but many bridges of friendship between the different parties concerned would greatly decrease the probability for a “failed” South Asian future precipitated by nuclear conflict (2008, p. 66).

In keeping with Inayatullah’s article, the JKLF appears to be advocating for a kind of Community Future for Kashmir through the creation of a unified, fully independent, and secular Kashmiri state. This model, in turn, relies on a Gandhian brand of ethical cosmopolitanism, as a result of which the citizens of the proposed state would have to view each other as moral agents with equal rights and responsibilities toward one another. Needless to say, these are high hopes for two regions increasingly distinguished by factionalism ever since the Line of Control was drawn in the sand.

These hopes may well be dashed if the various ethnic and religious groups within the boundaries of the independent Kashmiri state begin to feel that their government is more secular in theory than in practice. Kashmir, however independent, is unlikely to flourish if independence simply internalizes the battle lines defined by colonial and postcolonial boundaries to date.

In addition to questioning the wisdom of reunification, the prospect of Kashmiri statehood itself is problematic, to say the least. This assertion admittedly goes against the grain of most Kashmiri demands. Nonetheless, the state is undoubtedly a Western—and, more specifically, Westphalian—construct, one that debatably promotes rather than prevents conflict. If the IKC and its Kashmiri national government do not succeed in nullifying militancy in independent Kashmir, Kashmiri elements either dissatisfied with the prevailing state of affairs or spurred by years of pent-up agitation may see statehood as a licence to take back land or other resources they see as rightfully theirs.

For that matter, the independent Kashmiri state itself may decide to act in this manner, although a populace scarred by decades of occupation would likely hesitate to “gain power at the expense of other states” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 92). Regardless, any encroachments on Indian or Pakistani territory may give the South Asian nations the excuse they need to employ reactionary policies in the name of defensive realism. Of course, India and Pakistan may not wait to have an excuse to reoccupy parts of Kashmir, given the viability and feasibility of the offensive realist view alongside both nations’ longstanding hegemonic missions in the region.

The potential problems of Kashmiri statehood do not automatically make the parliamentary delegation’s alternative the superior option. International actors can operate not only in accordance with theories but also under the banners of them. The second involves using the theory in question as an excuse rather than a sound justification for action, usually to pursue self-interested ends. In light of this, Indian administrators could operate under the banner of general realism to maintain the current oppressive status quo if Kashmir remains a part of India. Holding up the advancement and security of the Indian state as the “supreme good” (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 95), Indian forces could either continue to maintain a presence in Kashmir or reenter it at a given time for the sake of addressing an allegedly critical situation.

Classical realists would probably contend that this kind of behavior is to be expected. They may well point to the length and bloody nature of the conflict as evidence that Indian authorities are driven by nothing less than national tendencies to maintain an atmosphere of fear in Kashmir and act as though they are at war with the region (Dunne and Schmidt, 2011, p. 89). Escapism via the doctrine of double effect or consequentialist justifications of action would have the same basic end result.

That most Kashmiri discussion of the parliamentary delegation’s plan revolved around its rejection of an independent state is perhaps unfortunate, as intercultural dialogue, economic cooperation, and scaling back the prevalent police state could all move the region closer to peace and democracy. The call for increased interaction between all parties concerned as well as the proposed exchange program reflect a number of the stepping stones to Inayatullah’s ideal South Asia; they could well denationalize self, economy and identity, overcome colonial and postcolonial interstate boundaries, and promote the universal aspects of South Asian religions and cultures (Inayatullah, 2008, pp. 69-70).

This, in turn, might move the region closer to a variant on the Gandhian Communitarian Village or the Broadband Village, with the latter being somewhat more likely as a result of the many overlaps between India, Pakistan, and Kashmir in terms of language and popular media (Inayatullah, 2008, pp. 64 – 65). While cultural integration is feasible and, to a certain degree, likely, the outcomes of the proposal for increased economic cooperation are more difficult to predict. On the one hand, advocates of classical liberalism frequently call for open, uninhibited exchange on the free market as they believe that it foster peace between the different participants; they often point to the European Union as a prime example of this principle in action. On the other hand, true cooperation requires parties involved to be on the same footing; as such, economic exchange between India, Pakistan, and Kashmir is likely to improve relations between the three only if one or more do not dictate the terms of trade to the detriment of the others.

**Recommending Balance**

The preceding analyses should emphasize that both roadmaps are far from perfect. However, abandoning both schemes on the basis of their shortcomings would be inefficient, irresponsible, and, frankly, unfeeling. Even if a middle path between the two roadmap is unfeasible, a plan for peace and democracy that combines their best elements is imperative.

Firstly, a nongovernmental agency or international organization known for impartiality should be tasked with creating and/or modifying a definitive roadmap if necessary but definitely overseeing the transformation of Kashmir. The parliamentary delegation, the JKLF, and even the UN were arguably bound to have vested interests to some degree. These entities, along with India, Pakistan, and the Kashmiri leadership, will have to come together to make democracy in Kashmir work, but that does not mean that they should be trusted to fairly set up the democratic mechanisms in question.

In opposition to this, the Carter Center would probably be an excellent organizational candidate for supervising the democratic transition. Having dedicated more than a decade to Sudan’s civil conflict, the Center would be more than capable of placing all key players in Kashmir under international security during and after the transition.

As far as the features of a hybrid roadmap are concerned, an independent state may not be the answer to all of Kashmir’s problems, but it is exponentially preferable to any continuation of Indian or Pakistani rule. Even if India and Pakistan enter into agreements with Kashmir with genuinely altruistic intentions, far too many of the Kashmiri people have suffered under external domination for far too long to consent to a continuation of the status quo on either side of the border. It goes without saying that avoiding a prolongation of the dispute should be a top priority for all involved.

A conjoining of the two halves of Kashmir in independence could spell something of a fairytale ending to a torrid tale in optimal circumstances. However, the needs of Indian and Pakistani-controlled should be assessed separately before two peoples separated by time and culture are thrown together. The two halves may need to secure independence...
separately before they begin to see each other in any sort of brotherly light.

Addressing the needs of both segments would be arduous and time-consuming, but it may well prove a better alternative than throwing everyone and the proverbial kitchen sink into a melting pot and hoping for the best. On a different note, the JKLF may have called for a referendum after fifteen years of independence with a view towards emphasizing the empowerment of the Kashmiri people; while their empowerment will be the bedrock of any successful solution to the Kashmir question, a referendum organized by an external entity like the UN may not sit well with Kashmiris wary of intervention from the outside world.

As an alternative to this, any independent state in the Kashmir region could be granted the ability to sign treaties, enter into trade agreements, or even join with its neighbors if its citizens desire such action.

Even if various ethnic, political, and religious groups in Kashmir do not initially or ultimately come together within the boundaries of a single state, dialogue and cultural exchange between them should be encouraged as extensively as possible. Augmented cultural integration and intercultural integration over a period of time may render quarrels between national leaders irrelevant for the most part, maybe even to the extent that reunification will become the only sensible way forward for Kashmir.

A serious collaborative drive to achieve these crucial ends would probably have to involve not only “artists, students, and intellectuals” (Gill and Kumar, 2012), but also entire educational institutions, business leaders and their corporations, administrators of all levels, nonprofit organizations and activists, and policy think tanks, to name but a few potential contributors.

A Long but Imperative Walk to Freedom

This paper began by detailing the historical and political contexts of two roadmaps for Kashmiri peace and democracy put forward by the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front and an Indian parliamentary delegation assembled in 2010. Thereafter several theoretical frameworks, including realism, liberalism, normative IR, constructivism, and South Asian IR were considered an applied to each roadmap before making recommendations based on this analysis. While just two roadmaps for Kashmir’s future were considered here, plenty more exist, and not all lead toward peace and democracy.

As much as international relations scholars must critically analyze all of these approaches, they also have a moral obligation to discard solutions that stand to harm the Kashmiri people. To ignore decades of suffering and do otherwise would be to ignore one of the most pressing unresolved humanitarian causes of our time. For all the economic, political, and religious motivations intertwined in the Kashmir question, it is Kashmiri men, women, and children who have paid most, in blood and tears, for the ongoing conflict.

References


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