

*Annexation of Occupied Jammu & Kashmir by India:  
Lessons for Regional Security*

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Marking one year since India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019, it is a timely rejoinder of the consequences that ensued, and an opportunity to illustrate the lessons learned.

For, these lessons are not just germane to the Kashmiris and to Pakistan, but, in the current geopolitical context, applicable to regional States as well.

They have a bearing, I feel, on the region's collective capacity to navigate the simmering turbulence.

India, the largest State in South Asia, has undergone far-reaching transformation.

Under the strong ideological push of the RSS-BJP combine, India has abandoned the professed pluralistic, "secular" orientation of its founding fathers and definitively embraced **majoritarianism**.

Similarly, the world's largest self-proclaimed "democracy" has shed all pretences of democratic rule and decisively turned towards **authoritarianism**.

To sustain its stranglehold over India, the regime in New Delhi remains embarked upon the dangerous path of stoking religious and communal tensions and targeting and discriminating against their own citizens.

The RSS-inspired "Hindutva" ideology, once a fringe in Indian politics, has today captured mainstream space, and is exercising a growing and overwhelming influence on key Indian State institutions.

I wish to direct your attention to three core tenets of "Hindutva" that should be of particular concern to every peace loving South Asian:

- A: Of re-engineering India into a purely “Hindu Rashtra”. A corollary to this is the complete negation of the sizeable minorities, their cultural heritage, and the immense diversity of the country and the region. Today, Islamophobia is rampant in India, and growing. Today, to be a member of a minority community, in particular, an Indian Muslim, living in India, is to face systemic discrimination and a very real threat to one’s life, liberty and well-being.
- B: Of propping up the notion of “Akhand Bharat”, the mythical, all-powerful Hindu Empire that is supposed to have, in a romanticized, imagined past, encompassed the entire region.
- C: Of embracing the Machiavellian principle of ends justifying means. Neither considerations of morality, nor justice, nor even constitutional propriety can stand in the way of Hindutva Bhakts from achieving their goals.

If you wish to see “Hindutva” being played out in full colour and broad daylight, you need not look beyond what is happening in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJK).

Long a thorn on the side of BJP ideologues, IIOJK is today taking the brunt of brutal Hindutva repression and its sinister agenda of demographic re-engineering.

What is being viewed by Pakistan, the Kashmiris and the world as a monumental betrayal, a regression and a fundamental mistake, is being falsely projected in India as a necessary step to contain so-called “terrorism” and to bring development.

Consider the territory’s dire human rights and humanitarian situation, now getting under increasingly sharper scrutiny by world community. Under the fig-leaf of containing terrorism and bringing development, in the past one year alone, New Delhi has:

- I. Further militarized the already “most militarized” zone in the world.
- II. Sustained the longest running internet lockdown in history, undermining Pandemic containment, and online education.

- III. Killed hundreds of Kashmiris; tortured, injured, and maimed several hundreds; arrested thousands without charge; arsoned properties and molested women. These harrowing accounts have come from independent Kashmiri as well as Indians sources, and have been well documented by the international media.
- IV. Launched fake encounters to target Kashmiri youth; undertaken Cordon and Search, and Cordon and Destroy Operations and imposed Collective Punishment on a hapless, unarmed civilian population.
- V. Further stripped Kashmiris in occupied territory of all legal, civil, political and economic rights.
- VI. Inflicted over \$ 5 billion losses on the local industry and rendered 500,000 Kashmiris jobless and kept chipping away local jobs and contracts.
- VII. In a brazen bid to change the demographic structure of the occupied territory and dilute its distinct Muslim identity, altered domicile rules and already granted domicile to 450,000 non-Kashmiris. This is blatant violation of the UN Security Council Resolutions and International Law, including the 4th Geneva Convention.
- VIII. Inflicted deep psychological and physical trauma on youth, particularly children.
- IX. From last year till date, carried out over 5,000 Ceasefire Violations along the Line of Control killing 68 and injuring 421.
- X. Violated the Pakistani airspace through spy drones on 15 different occasions.

Senior Indian civil and military officials have stoked war hysteria, making irresponsible statements aimed at whipping up hyper-nationalism. Last year in February, under false pretexts, they attacked Pakistani territory. Despite being effectively deterred and countered by our armed forces, they cashed in this jingoism, at the elections.

To externalize their internal failings, or to divert attention from its State terrorism in IIOJK, there remains a distinct possibility that another “false flag” operation may be launched, justifying another ill-advised mis-adventure against Pakistan.

It is not just Pakistan or the people of IIOJK on whom Indian guns are trained. Today, India’s ‘major power’ ambitions have a clear ideological underpinning. Neither India’s many neighbors, nor its myriad minorities, are secure from the consequences.

Indian myopia is stoking regional tensions, and exacting a heavy toll on the region's security, stability and future prosperity.

To me India's unhinged actions are a classic case of Cognitive Dissonance: They see what they wish to believe, while being blinded to the manifest reality.

How has Pakistan dealt with a neighbour, several times its size, with a historic burden of troubled relations, an ideologically-driven leadership and issues of cognition? How should other States respond? Clearly, there are lessons to be drawn.

Allow me to share with you, a few salient ones.

### **ONE: Confront, Expose and Push Back**

Just as it was a mistake to appease fascism a century ago, it is a mistake to appease "Hindutva" today. Over the past year, Pakistan has marshaled the full political, diplomatic and moral strength at its command to highlight the plight of the Kashmiris; support the cause for self-determination in line with the UN Security Council Resolutions; and expose "Hindutva" and its perils. At every forum, every interaction, every opportunity, we have been advocating the Kashmiris' case and pressing for their inalienable right to self-determination. Prime Minister Imran Khan has been an effective and articulate Ambassador of the Kashmir cause.

There is today palpable realization the world over about the gravity of the situation in IIOJ&K, as also about what the Indian government is doing and why. The bogey of "infiltration" from Pakistan no longer stands the test of scrutiny. That is why, unlike the past, today India is incurring a considerable reputational cost. The UN Security Council has discussed the Kashmir issue, now for the third time since August 2019. This has happened after a hiatus of nearly 55 years.

Going forward, if "Hindutva" is to be contained, or at least its worst impulses checked, it will need to be exposed with even greater courage, vigour and potency.

### **TWO: Deter**

A year ago, Narendra Modi launched a false flag operation, raked up war hysteria, and despite being effectively deterred by our armed forces, cashed it at the ballot box. The challenge before Pakistan was to prevent conflict that would be disastrous

for the region, while ensuring that India's aggressive actions did not go unpunished. We exercised our right to self-defence and demonstrated our will and capacity to respond to any misadventure. It was Pakistan's maturity, restraint and responsibility, but also a firm resolve, that de-escalated the stand-off and helped preserve the peace.

Pakistan continues to maintain military preparedness. We stand ready to respond to any misadventure, firmly and effectively.

### **THREE: Douse the Fire**

Fire cannot be fought with fire. Just as fire needs to be doused with water, intolerance can only be overcome with understanding, and hatred with compassion. Immediately upon winning the elections, Prime Minister Imran Khan had extended the hand of friendship. He had offered to take two steps forward towards peace, if India took one. It is unfortunate that the Indian leadership misread our intent as weakness, and spurned all offers of dialogue.

Despite the vitiated atmosphere, we launched the Kartarpur Corridor for our Sikh brethren from across the border and the world over. Kartarpur is a living testament to Pakistan's long-term vision for the region, which is one of co-existence, inter-faith harmony and peaceful resolution of outstanding disputes.

### **FOUR: Adapt**

One State's arrogance cannot be allowed to stand in the way of what is an imminently sensible course of action, that is, promoting regional cooperation as a means to advancing the regional development agenda. This stems from the realization that the biggest enemies that either of our two countries face, are not each other, but the perils of climate change, environmental degradation, pandemics, poverty and trans-national crime. South Asia is among the least integrated regions in the world. Not unsurprisingly, it is also home to one of the highest concentrations of poor in the world.

For our part, we will continue to advance regional integration and connectivity. We will continue to do so as part of Belt and Road Initiative and its flagship project of CPEC, and as active participants in the Shanghai Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Organizations. We will also persist in our efforts to revive SAARC.

I wish to leave you with one final thought. The world is undergoing monumental changes. These changes are evolutionary in character, but revolutionary in terms of impact and outcome. While upending economies, the Covid 19 Pandemic has served as a catalyst for trends and tendencies brewing for quite a while. The result is a new world, brave or grave, that is upon us, and with which we have to contend.

This world is more uncertain, less predictable, and for these reasons, perhaps more dysfunctional. The buffers and support systems of international organizations and international law, that helped buttress the post World War growth and prosperity may no longer deliver desired outcomes. States will increasingly be left to fall back upon their own devices and bank upon their own strengths. While challenges will persist, there are now opportunities and the necessary political space to take bold steps to correct past mistakes.

In an Asian century, we will have to rely on the traditional Asian wisdom, to illuminate the way forward.

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