

Jammu and Kashmir: Implications for Regional and Global Peace

The following are my remarks at the Panel Discussion: Jammu and Kashmir: Implications for Regional and Global Peace, held on October 27, 2020.

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The current situation in India's illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJ&K) is not without current, tragic precedent. Bringing non-native Kashmiris into the territory, and since April, two million non-natives have been approved to do so, with the goal of eliminating Kashmiri culture and the nation itself follows the Israeli model in Palestine. This is not lost on Indian government officials. On November 16 of last year, Sandeep Chakravorty, India's consul-general to New York City, was attending a private event in New York. He told Kashmiri Hindus and Indian nationals that India will build settlements modelled after Israel to bring the Hindu population to Kashmir. He did not mince words; said he: "you will be able to go back ... and you will be able to find security, because we already have a model in the world. I don't know why we don't follow it. It has happened in the Middle East. If the Israeli people can do it, we can also do it." We can refer to Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which reads, in part, "Everyone has the right to a nationality". India's actions violate that basic right.

By looking at what the Israeli model, that Chakravorty is so anxious to implement in Kashmir, has meant for the Palestinians and for peace in the Middle East, we can draw some conclusions on what the result may mean for Kashmir and peace there and in neighboring countries.

1. We can expect the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris; this slaughter has been ongoing for decades and will only continue. There will also be the displacement of millions more with no place to go except refugee camps in their own or neighboring countries. Typically, such camps are grossly overcrowded; have limited sanitary facilities; provide few, if any, educational opportunities for children and youth, and are breeding grounds for despair.
 - Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care, etc."
 - Article 26 states that "Everyone has a right to education."
2. We can expect ongoing clashes between the marginalized Kashmiris and the Indian settler-colonists, resulting in the deaths of many innocent Kashmiri men, women and children and long imprisonment for others who, like the Palestinians, are only exercising their internationally-guaranteed right to resist the occupation. Resistance to occupation is not terrorism, as both India and Israel would have us all believe.
 - United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/33/24 of

November 29, 1978 reads, in part, as follows: "Reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, particularly armed struggle."

3. We will see the slow obliteration of Kashmiri culture. As more non-Kashmiris settle in Kashmir, driving out the Kashmiris, the settlers, again in the same style as the Israelis in Palestine, will destroy mosques, museums, cemeteries and other landmarks vital to Kashmiris and their culture. Let's not forget that Israel bulldozed the ancient cemetery, Ma'man Allah in Palestine to create a 'museum of tolerance' on the site. The hypocrisy is astounding.
 - Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, in part, that 'Everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community....'

These actions are, of course, components of genocide.

4. Another result will be heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, both nuclear states. We know that even a so-called 'limited' nuclear war would have catastrophic impacts on the entire planet. Even a conventional war between those nations would draw in other countries, leading to disastrous results in loss of human life, ecological damage and global economic disruption.

We may see some limited action in the United Nations, since what India is doing in Kashmir violates various Security Council resolutions and international laws. But, again drawing conclusions from the Palestine-Israel situation, the people of Kashmir cannot rely on the U.N. to bring them peace and justice. Kashmiris have known this as long as the Palestinians have.

But the situation is certainly not without hope, because people around the world can and must help. There are several things we can all do. Not everyone can do all of these, perhaps, but everyone can certainly do some of them.

1. Become educated. Webinars such as this are an excellent way to gain knowledge, which will enable each of us to better articulate the specifics of the suffering of the Kashmiri people, and how it is India that is fully culpable for that suffering. Join groups and get on mailing lists.
2. Write to news organizations. Doing a search on 'contact CNN' or 'contact MSNBC' or any other news agency will bring you to a site explaining how to contact that agency. Generally, there is a form on the site that you will be asked to complete. Ask specific questions such as this: "Social media sites have been shut down or greatly limited in Kashmir by India for over a year. Why has your outlet not covered this?" Or: "The Indian government is forbidding foreign news correspondents from entering Kashmir, and is harassing those already in the country. Why have I not seen this information on your news programs?"
3. Contact your member of Parliament; write and visit, and do it more than once. Hold them accountable for allowing India's crimes against humanity.
4. Write to newspapers. Letters to the editors of different publications serve two purposes: they inform the editors that their readers are concerned about and interested in this issue, and, when letters are published, they inform other

readers.

5. Fight Islamophobia. It seems that since it is a mainly Muslim country that is being victimized, the level of outrage is very low. We must be cognizant of the fact that attitudes in the U.S. influence those in Canada and the rest of the world. As a candidate in 2016, Donald Trump said this: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on." Trump's one-time national security advisor, Michael Flynn, said that "Fear of Muslims is rational". This attitude is nothing new. In 2010, Sarah Palin, who ran for vice-president in 2008, tweeted this when a mosque was proposed in downtown New York City: "Peace-seeking Muslims, pls understand, Ground Zero mosque is UNNECESSARY provocation; it stabs hearts. Pls reject it in interest of healing." This ridiculous statement, of course, unjustly associates Islam with the September 11, 2001 attacks.

We fight Islamophobia by countering every anti-Muslim comment we hear. If it's in a tweet, we respond that way. If on a news program, we contact that program. If in a newspaper, we write a letter to the editor, refuting what was said. If it's a comment made by an acquaintance, we calmly counter whatever statement has been made. I include 'calmly', because, although I am not Muslim, Islamophobic comments anger me, so I need to remind myself to respond calmly and politely.

I would like to close with one of my favorite quotations, this one by the anthropologist Margaret Mead; it is one you are probably familiar with. She said this:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, organized citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

We have formidable foes in our quest to liberate the people of Kashmir from Indian oppression, and to assist them in achieving their basic right to self-determination. Our task is not an easy one, but it is a moral imperative.

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