

Kashmir Insurgency: The Spillover of the Soviet-Afghan Jihad

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In the British Indian context, the divide-and-rule policy originally meant that the British imperialists used this strategy to sow the seeds of dissension and communal hatred to prolong their tyrannical rule in India, which is a valid contention. However, some Indian historians later came up with the fancy notion that colonial powers lent their support to the division of India in 1947 in order to use Pakistan as a bulwark against communist influence in the region. This latter conspiracy theory is farthest from truth.

Firstly, the British imperialists took great pride in creating a unified and cohesive British Indian army and it's a historical fact that the latter organization was vehemently opposed to the division of the British Indian armed forces. It simply defies common sense that if the colonial power was apprehensive of the expanding influence of the former Soviet Union in the region, in that case it would have preferred to leave behind a unified and strong India army, rather than two divided armies at loggerheads with each other.

Secondly, although Pakistan joined the Washington-led SEATO and CENTO alliances in the 1950s and it also fought America's Jihad in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union during the 1980s, we must bear in mind that there were actually two power-centers of communism during the Cold War: the Soviet Marxism-Leninism and the Chinese Maoism.

If the intention of the colonial powers was to use Pakistan as a bulwark against communist influence in the region, then how come Pakistan established such cordial relations with China during the 1960s that President Ayub Khan and his Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto played a pivotal role in arranging President Nixon's visit to China in 1972?

Fact of the matter is that both India and Pakistan had good relations with the Western powers during the Cold War; however, India had friendly relations with Soviet Union and adversarial relations with China, whereas Pakistan had adversarial relations with Soviet Union and friendly ties with China. The relations of India and Pakistan with the communist powers were based more on their national interests than on ideological lines.

The relatively modern Indian historians who came up with the aforementioned conspiracy theory have actually retrospectively applied this theory to the chain of events: that is, they conceived the theory after Pakistan joined the anti-communist alliances and played the role of Washington's client state during the Soviet-Afghan Jihad in the 1980s. At the time of independence movement in the 1940s, neither the Hindus nor the Muslims of British India knew anything about the aftermath of their respective freedom struggles.



Nevertheless, historically Pakistan's military first used the Islamists of Jamaat-e-Islami during the Bangladesh war of liberation in the late 1960s against the Bangladeshi nationalist Mukti Bahini liberation movement of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman (image on the right) - the father of current prime minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, and the founder of Bangladesh, which was then a province of Pakistan and known as East Pakistan before the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

Jamaat-e-Islami is a far-right Islamist movement in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh - analogous to the Muslim Brotherhood political party in Egypt and Turkey - several of whose leaders have recently been hanged by the Bangladeshi nationalist government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed for committing massacres of Bangladeshi civilians on behalf of Pakistan's military during the late 1960s.

Then, during the 1970s, Pakistan's then-Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto began aiding the Afghan Islamists against Sardar Daud's government, who had toppled his first cousin King Zahir Shah in a palace coup in 1973 and had proclaimed himself the president of Afghanistan.

Sardar Daud was a Pashtun nationalist and laid claim to Pakistan's northwestern Pashtun-majority province. Pakistan's security establishment was wary of his irredentist claims and used Islamists to weaken his rule in Afghanistan. He was eventually assassinated in 1978 as a result of the Saur Revolution led by the Afghan communists.

Pakistan's support to the Islamists with the Saudi petro-dollars and Washington's blessings, however, kindled the fires of Islamic insurgencies in the entire region comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indian-administered Kashmir and the Soviet Central Asian States.

The former Soviet Union was wary that its forty-million Muslims were susceptible to radicalism, because Islamic radicalism was infiltrating across the border into the Central Asian States from Afghanistan. Therefore, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 in support of the Afghan communists to forestall the likelihood of Islamic insurgencies spreading to the Central Asian States bordering Afghanistan.

Regarding the Kashmir dispute, there can be no two views that the right of self-determination of Kashmiris must be respected in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions on the right of plebiscite for the Kashmiri people, and Pakistan should lend its moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri cause; but at the same time, the

militarization of any dispute, including Kashmir, must be avoided due to horrific human suffering that militancy and wars anywhere in the world inevitably entail.

The insurgency in Kashmir erupted in the fateful year of 1984 of the Orwellian-fame when the Indian Armed Forces surreptitiously occupied the whole of Siachen glacier, including the un-demarcated Pakistani portion.

Now, we must keep the backdrop in mind: those were the heydays of the Cold War and Pakistan army's proxies, the Afghan jihadists, had the upper hand against the Red Army in the Soviet-Afghan War during the 1980s, and the morale of Pakistan's military's top brass was touching the sky.

Moreover, Pakistan's security establishment also wanted to inflict damage to the Indian Armed Forces to exact revenge for the dismemberment of Pakistan at the hands of India during the Bangladesh War of 1971, when India provided support to Bangladeshi nationalists and took 90,000 Pakistani soldiers as prisoners of war after Pakistan's humiliating defeat in the war of liberation of Bangladesh.

All the military's top brass had to do was to divert a fraction of its Afghan jihadist proxies toward the Indian-administered Kashmir to kindle the fires of insurgency in Kashmir. Pakistan's security agencies began sending jihadists experienced in the Afghan guerilla warfare across the border to the Indian-administered Kashmir in the late 1980s; and by the early 1990s, the Islamist insurgency engulfed the whole of Jammu and Kashmir region.

Here, it's worth noting, however, that an insurgency cannot succeed anywhere unless militants get some level of popular support from local population. For example: if a hostile force tries to foment an insurgency in Pakistan's province of Punjab, it wouldn't succeed; because Punjabis don't have any grievances against Pakistan.

On the other hand, if an adversary tries to incite an insurgency in the marginalized province of Balochistan and Pakistan's tribal areas, it would easily succeed, because the local Baloch and Pashtun populations have grievances against the heavy-handedness of Pakistan's security establishment.

Therefore, to put the blame squarely on the Pakistani side for the Kashmir conflict would be unfair. Firstly, immediately after the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, India annexed the Muslim-majority princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in violation of the agreed-upon "partition principle" that allocated the Muslim-majority provinces of the British India to Pakistan and the Hindu-majority regions to India.

Even now, if someone tries to foment an insurgency in the Pakistan-administered Kashmir, it wouldn't succeed, because the Kashmiri Muslims identify themselves with Pakistan. The Indian-administered Kashmir has seen many waves for independence since 1947, but not a single voice has been raised for independence in the Pakistan-administered Kashmir in Pakistan's seventy-year history.

Secondly, India re-ignited the conflict by occupying the strategically placed Siachen glacier in 1984. Pakistan's stance on Kashmir has been quite flexible and it has floated numerous proposals to resolve the dispute. But India is now the new strategic partner of Washington against China, hence India's stance on the Kashmir dispute has been quite inflexible, as it is negotiating from a position of strength. Diplomacy aside, however, the real victims of this

intransigence and hubris on both sides have been the Kashmiri people and a lot of innocent blood has been spilled for no good reason.

Finally, another obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute is that the Kashmiri liberation struggle and militancy have been indigenized to a great extent during the last two decades. An entire generation of Kashmiri youth has been brought up in an environment of violence and bloodletting. Now, no political solution to the Kashmir conflict is possible unless it is acceptable to domestic political leadership of the Kashmiri people.

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