
Kashmir Crisis

Superpowers converge on Indian subcontinent

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

Washington and Moscow are now seizing the opportunity of the extreme tensions between India and Pakistan over the contested border region of Kashmir to insert their superpower condominium into the Indian subcontinent. As the house organ of the U.S. Eastern Establishment, the *New York Times*, opined May 24, "It is urgent that Washington and Moscow intervene as peacemakers. . . . A united superpower stand could help strengthen the two governments [of India and Pakistan] and isolate their hawkish challengers as well as the extremists who have long exploited U.S.-Soviet rivalries to sustain murderous and unwinnable local conflicts."

With this mission of creating a superpower peace over the subcontinent, on May 19-21, a three-member U.S. delegation, led by President Bush's special envoy, Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates, came straight from Moscow for discussions in Islamabad and New Delhi. The ostensible mission of the delegation was to tell both India and Pakistan to find means to defuse border tensions immediately, before they lead to war. President Bush, in letters to the respective heads of state, has urged both countries to enter into negotiations, in the spirit of the Shimla Agreement to resolve the four-decade-old Kashmir dispute.

The White House initiative came in the midst of growing awareness that the ongoing violence in Kashmir, along with tough rhetoric and movement of troops close to the borders by both sides, are sliding the subcontinent into a state of war.

The delegation—which, besides Gates, consisted of John Kelly, assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, and Richard Haass, senior director in the U.S. National Security Council—told the Indians that the White House initiative had Moscow's blessings and that the recent talks between U.S. Secretary of State James Baker and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze also included on the agenda the growing tensions between India and Pakistan.

A talk-and-listen mission

From the outset, the U.S. mission made it clear that it would not mediate between India and Pakistan, but instead would deliver President Bush's messages to both leaders. Just prior to the team's arrival, the Indian Foreign Office had told newsmen that India would not allow any third party to

interfere in the Kashmir dispute, but would welcome the "concern" of others.

In Pakistan, the Gates mission met with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. In the absence of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who is on a whirlwind tour to eight Muslim countries to drum up support for the Pakistani position on Kashmir, the delegation met with her national security adviser, Iqbal Akhund.

President Khan reiterated Pakistan's moral support to the people of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in their "legitimate right to self-determination." The Pakistani President also denied allegations that Pakistan is arming and training Kashmiris against India. If President Khan suggested to the Gates delegation a way to defuse the crisis other than granting the right to self-determination through the United Nations in a plebiscite in Kashmir, it has not been made public.

However, while in New Delhi, during his talks with Prime Minister V.P. Singh, Gates proposed withdrawal of troops by both sides to their "peacetime locations"—a proposal believed to have originated in Islamabad. Prime Minister Singh pointed out that it was the Pakistani action "in aiding and abetting terrorism" in the Kashmir Valley along the borders, which has led India to deploy its forces in a "suitable defensive position near the borders." India effectively suggested that the withdrawal of troops be coupled with the dismantling of alleged terrorist camps within Pakistan.

Regional crisis management

The Gates mission offered U.S. satellites to monitor the proposed troop withdrawal, and offered U.S. aid to help avert war when both sides carry out their military exercises. Much of the formulation offered by the delegation comes from a book penned by Richard Haass, one of the delegates, titled *Conflicts Unending: The United States and Regional Disputes*, where the author has addressed the Kashmir dispute.

In his book, Haass states that tension persists in South Asia because rivalry and mistrust form the core of India-Pakistan relations. Constructive American diplomacy in this case would be to push for a series of confidence-building measures, he suggests. "This would include limiting the size, number, and locale of military exercises, and arrange for the exchange of observers so that each could confirm the activities of the other," he added. Among other measures recommended by Haass are demilitarizing contested border regions, cooperation in law enforcement, and sophistication of control commands and communications to avoid an accidental conflict.

The Gates mission did appear to acknowledge the existence of Pakistan's terrorist-training activities and called upon the Islamabad government to put an end to such activities. The mission reported that Pakistan had recently closed

down some 30 "posts" (i.e., training centers).

Pakistan was also on the receiving end of criticism from another U.S. politician: Sen. Daniel Moynihan (D-N.Y.), former ambassador to New Delhi and currently chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on South Asia. Moynihan advised both India and Pakistan—"perhaps especially the Pakistanis," he said—from the Senate floor to pay close attention to the Gates delegation. Reviewing the likely scenario in case of an India-Pakistan war, he said, "A move into the vale of Kashmir [by the Pakistani Army] would be countered with a thrust [by the Indian army], into the Punjab, a dash for Karachi, the loss of the Navy, rebellion in Baluchistan, chaos all around, ruin all around. And, above all, no sympathy, no assistance from anywhere save Beijing, which is much too occupied with reestablishing relations with the Soviet Union to risk them over Pakistan."

The nuclear aspect

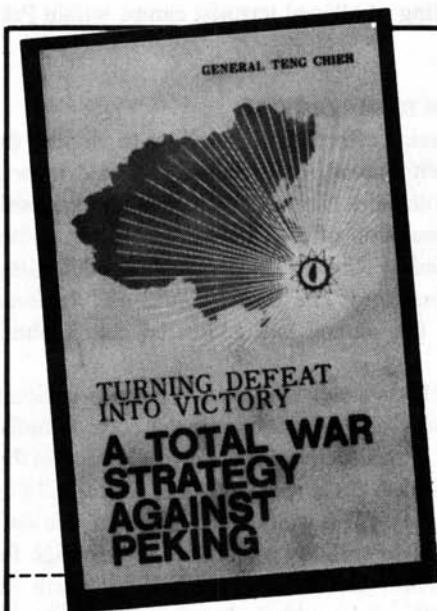
In addition to these veiled threats against both India and Pakistan, should the crisis move closer toward war, there are also reports that the Kashmir issue is going to figure prominently in the Bush-Gorbachov summit. Rep. Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), who chairs the House Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific Affairs, and Peter Galbraith, chief policy South Asia adviser on the Senate Foreign Relations Commit-

tee, said there could be a "superpower consensus" to urge India and Pakistan to de-escalate the present warlike posture. Galbraith, assuring the Indians that the Gates mission was not designed to internationalize the Kashmir issue, said, "We are simply trying to make our good offices available because we are concerned over a situation in which two friends of the United States might enter into a conflict."

Solarz, who will be visiting the subcontinent beginning May 30, said the issue must get into the Bush-Gorbachov meeting agenda, because it has a nuclear dimension as well. "It is a major issue. It is for the first time where two developing countries—both of whom have nuclear capabilities—appear to be, are likely to go to war," he said. A similar concern has also been voiced in Moscow.

Earlier in May, *Izvestia*, the Soviet government newspaper, strongly criticized India for not signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and supported Pakistan's campaign to declare South Asia a "nuclear-free zone."

It is agreement on this issue, as much as any immediate war danger, some observers conclude, that has brought the United States and the Soviet Union, the two signatories of the treaty and the biggest proliferators, together to try to pose as moderators of the Indo-Pakistan dispute. The Gates mission, therefore, may have more than one dimension, and that will be revealed sooner rather than later.



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