Islamism in Pakistan and the Kashmir Conflict

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Abstract

The conflict in Kashmir is influenced by various interactive factors among which the Islamization of Pakistan and the following Talibanization of the entire Sub-Indian region undoubtedly have played a significant role. The emergence of the dispute is a consequence of the decolonisation process which peaked after the Second World War. Unfortunately, this same period was also marked by the beginning of the Cold War. Hence, it is argued that the Islamization of Pakistan is the product of the negative interaction of two main factors – the geopolitical rivalry of the superpowers at that time, especially considering the negative impact of the war in Afghanistan, and the rise of Islam as a consequence of the overall religious revival around the world. Adding to them is the local rivalry between the newly emerged states of India and Pakistan producing an extremely explosive mixture with the potential to ignite the entire region of South-East Asia, involving also the leading international powers. Thus, the conflict in Kashmir became an integral part of the post-Cold War world directly affected by the Islamic revival and the dissemination of the Islamist principles in Pakistan.

Introduction

In the wake of 9/11 and subsequent developments, the multiple manifestations of Islamic extremism in the form of terrorist attacks and religious violence, as well as the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic State (ISIL) in Syria and Iraq, and Al Qaeda worldwide, have taken on particular significance. Globally, it is Islamism and the overall Islamic renaissance that are among the most important reasons that led to these events

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recent years, the lack of far-sighted development programs, mass poverty and the collapse of state systems in Muslim countries, their societies have become an easier target for religious and extremist organizations and movements.

However, modern processes related to Islamism have their roots in the past. The process of Islamization in Pakistan, started by general Zia-ul-Haq, is a specific example of the birth and development of Islamism through the vigour and influence of the Islam religion. Islam has played an important role in the history of Pakistan and the concept of a state based on Islam has dominated religious and political thought in the country for a long time. Numerous attempts have been made to impose a political system that represents the Muslim population and follows Islamic principles and laws. In fact, this is the first significant problem to be solved by the newly created state and which turns out to be fateful for the formation of the political and institutional pattern of Pakistan. But the imposition of Islamism and Islamist ideology are the main obstacles preventing Pakistan from developing a properly functioning political and religious system. Islamism, consequently, has played an important role also in the foreign policy decisions and actions of Pakistan.

The process of Islamization carried out by general Zia consists of three main aspects. First, mobilizing and building cooperation with those parts of the political elite and especially with the religious groups that share the regime's point of view. Second, using conservative Islamic principles as a building block to introduce changes in the political-legal system. This process includes also Islamization of the education system by introducing new Islamic disciplines (which started already during the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) and by increasing the number of religious schools in Pakistan with the financial help from the US and Saudi Arabia following the global jihad against the Soviet Union during the war in Afghanistan. Thirdly, taking advantage of the strong Islamic faith within the Pakistani society, trying to build a true Islamic state.

Over the years, Kashmir has become an integral part of Pakistan's strategic and security policy, especially for the military governments, who see Kashmir as a main part of the Pakistani identity. Therefore, the main objective of Pakistan's foreign policy for decades has been to obtain justice and freedom for the Kashmiri Muslims living in the Indian-administered parts of the province. For this purpose, Pakistan has repeatedly tried to use diplomatic means but also force through open war as well as through proxy military groups. However, none of these tools succeeded so far (Cohen, 2004) and the only consequence is that the ongoing conflict in Kashmir is seriously damaging the international status and position of Pakistan. In any case, the same is applicable also for India (Ibidem.).

The present study focuses on Pakistani external policies during the rule of general Zia-ul-Haq and specifically in regards to the conflict in Kashmir. It seeks to explore what are the consequences of the development of Islamism as a leading policy and ideology in Pakistan for that conflict. It is argued that Islamization in Pakistan has become a major factor that determines the international relations in the region and especially in the Kashmiri conflict. Research tasks include tracing the historical roots of the Kashmir conflict as well as bringing out the factors that determine the impact of the Islamization process in Pakistan on the

development of the Kashmir conflict. The study maps the specific actions taken by general Zia, leading to the establishment of Islamism as the leading state policy. Main factors that determine the use of political Islam are outlined.

Methodologically the research builds upon political analysis with an emphasis on the international influence of Islamism in Pakistan, which includes also a comparative analysis of different policies and perspectives. In addition to the political analysis, the text provides a historical study of the processes related to the conflict in Kashmir.

Literature review

The research is based on an extensive and thorough analysis of various sources: monographs, dissertations and scientific studies, articles in newspapers and magazines, reports from international organizations, government documents and resolutions as well as other specialized publications. They offer not only a general overview of Islamism and the Islamic revival in the Muslim world and in South-East Asia but provide an extensive and deep analysis of the situation in Kashmir and Pakistan in particular. Different and sometimes conflicting sources have been used so that the processes can be better and more deeply analysed from all sides and perspectives.

A particular emphasis is put on government documents and reports, which present the official state policy of the relevant period, as well as press coverage of certain debatable and contentious issues and events. In the present study are taken into account numerous publications of international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and International Crisis Group, which periodically track and publish reports about various crisis areas around the world, including Kashmir.

Another important source are the works of Stephen Cohen, one of the most prominent scholars and analysts having worked extensively in the field of South-Asian security studies, especially in Pakistan: *The Pakistan Army* (Cohen, 1998), *The Idea of Pakistan* (Cohen, 2004) and *The Future of Pakistan* (Cohen, 2011). It is interesting to note that in his book *The Idea of Pakistan* he describes two distinct faces of Pakistan. The first one embodies the idea that Indian Muslims need a homeland to fulfil their cultural and civilizational mission. The second face represents the state of Pakistan, characterized by weak and uneven economic growth, political chaos and religious violence. Moreover, even when he published his book *The Pakistan Army*, Cohen warned that Pakistan could once again become its own worst enemy and the disastrous events from 1971 and the emergence of Bangladesh could be repeated again.

Other sources regarding the Islamic revival include Ira Lapidus' *Islamic Revival and Modernity: The Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms* (Lapidus, 1997), *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860-1900* (1982) written by Barbara Metcalf as well as William Richter's *The political dynamics of Islamic resurgence in Pakistan* (Richter, 1979) which are detailed and comprehensive publications on Islamic resurgence both in the Muslim world and in South-East Asia and Pakistan in particular.

The study of Tanver Khalid titled *Islamization in Pakistan: A Political and Constitutional Study from 1947-1988* (Khalid, 2004) provides an extremely precise analysis of the entire process of Islamization that took place during the rule of gen. Zia and his predecessors including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Additional sources used regarding the Islamization process in Pakistan include the books of Hussain Haqqani *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (Haqqani, 2005) and Ahmad Mumtaz *Islam, Politics and the State: The Case of Pakistan* (Mumtaz, 2012), as well as a collection of articles of the Middle East Institute entitled *Islamization of Pakistan, 1979-2009* (MEI, 2009). The latter volume is particularly valuable because it provides different perspectives and opinions of many scholars on the Islamization in Pakistan through the prism of specific issues such as: sources and consequences of Pakistan's crisis, the national identity of the new state, the rights of women and minorities, etc.

In relation to the ongoing Islamization and growing Talibanization of the countries of the region I reviewed the works of Ahmed Rashid: *Schools for Soldiers: Islamic Schools Mix Religion and Politics* (Rashid, 1995), *The Taliban: Exporting Extremism* (Rashid, 1999) and *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (Rashid, 2000) which trace the emergence and rise of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. After all, one of the primary factors that led to the emergence of the Taliban was precisely the development of Islamism in Pakistan, and specifically the expanding network of madrasahs.

The conflict in Kashmir: historical roots and major aspects

The roots of the conflict in Kashmir, like many others in the recent history, embody the colonial world order set by the European powers between 17th and 20th century. After the Second World War and under the pressure of religious riots in British India, the British Empire decided to grant independence to its two main ethnic groups. Following the establishment of the two new states – India and Pakistan – many other regions that are part of the Indian sub-continent but not directly under British government, were able now to choose either to join one of the new states or to remain independent. One of these regions was Jammu and Kashmir with the majority of the population being Muslims, but the region was ruled by Hindu maharajas.

Initially, after the partition of British India, the Kashmiri ruler opted for independence but faced the danger of rebels supported by Pakistan, who treated to invade Kashmir from the North-West Frontier Province. This forced the maharaja to seek the protection of India. In order to provide the necessary support India first requested his accession, which was eventually accepted by signing the instrument of Accession in October 1947. Kashmir thus became the only Muslim-dominated state in India with special status which guaranteed almost full independence, except in foreign affairs, defence and communication[2].

Pakistan, of course, did not agree with these actions and war broke out in October 1948. The UN immediately intervened and managed to stop the fighting in January 1949,

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[2] As a matter of fact this special status was revoked in August 2019 as pointed out further in the text.

leaving about three-quarters of the province in Indian hands. Initially India promised the UN to allow the Kashmiri people to make a choice on their own between India and Pakistan. However, this was only a short-lasting peace, because India broke that promise insisting that there could not be a plebiscite until all military forces were removed from Kashmir, including Pakistan's. As a consequence, the dispute remains unresolved until now, making it the oldest dispute ever within the history of UN (Cohen, 2001). In general, while the Kashmiri Muslims feel that their human rights are endangered, the Kashmiri Hindus feel marginalized and betrayed by both their neighbours and the Indian government (Fazili, 2010).

According to the journalists and year-long BBC correspondent in Pakistan Owen Bennett Jones, three main interconnected factors could be highlighted in Kashmir (Jones, 2013). The first one is the Kashmir's ethno-nationalist struggle for self-determination. There is no unified vision among the population what Kashmir should look like. Some Kashmiris envision a union with Pakistan, others hope for a fully independent state, and others still want the semi-autonomous status promised by India. The second factor is nationalism within Pakistan and the emblematic value of Kashmir in maintaining that nationalism. Finally, in the 1980s, India witnessed a rebirth of militant Hindu nationalism (Varshney, 1991), which deviated from the secular democratic ideals enshrined in the constitution (Embree, 2003) and became a powerful tool that influenced the Indian policy in Kashmir (Hefner, 1998).

In addition, the Islamic revival that started in the mid and late 1980s influenced also the Kashmiri region and particularly the insurgents, who began to publicly raise the increasingly popular slogans of establishing an Islamic state. Acts of violence began and escalated largely due to strong Kashmiri resentment of Indian administration and India's militarization of their province. As pointed put by some analysts, all Kashmiri groups are to a greater extent heirs to the jihad against the Soviet Union (Vira and Cordesman, 2011: 174).

Islamization of Pakistan and Pakistani involvement in Kashmir conflict

General Zia was the first to take concrete steps toward the Islamization of Pakistan and he successfully imposed the Islamist ideology through a number of political, social and economic changes. However, Zia was not the only Pakistani politician using the Islam to gain power and influence in Pakistan. After general Ayub all politicians started exploiting Islam for their own benefit. In fact, the political trends that general Zia inherited the all too easy radicalization and Islamization of the country and he took full advantage of them. In any case, his religious policies succeeded in radicalizing society to the point that various religious groups, such as the Taliban, were a constant threat to the security and integrity of the state, and later on to the entire region.

In fact, as emphasized by Stephen Cohen, for the first generation of Pakistanis Kashmir was not a territorial or a strategic issue, although it later became both, becoming a symbol of the idea of Pakistan as a homeland for South-Asian Muslims. They believe that their

identity is tied to the fate of Kashmir, a region that reflects their own personal and political history (Cohen, 2004). For Z. A. Suleri, a close associate of Jinnah and an active member of the Muslim League and its descendants, the key questions about Kashmir were justice and truth, not strategy and security (Suleri, 1990). According to the contemporary Kashmiri poet Zareef Ahmad, Kashmir has always been a "composite culture" (cited in Kumar, 2022) until India and Pakistan were established on a religious basis which brought forward the issue with religion.

The global religious resurgence and internal Islamization, on the one hand, together with the geopolitical aspects of the Cold War, on the other hand, gave the Pakistani military a suitable opportunity to wage a proxy war in Kashmir against India (ICG, 2005: 12). The intervention of Pakistani and foreign fighters significantly changed the image of the insurgency, which – from a secular nationalist struggle – turned into a religious struggle, influenced mainly by jihadist principles fuelled by the newly promoted Islamism by Gen. Zia in Pakistan (Vira and Cordesman, 2011). Hence, by the mid-1990s, Kashmir had become the main field of action for local and foreign jihadist fighters in Eurasia (Williams, 2011).

Nevertheless, the military have never wanted to risk Pakistan's future over Kashmir. They have been keen to support the Kashmiri liberation movement, but basically see it as a guerrilla war led by Kashmir itself and not by outside forces. However, this does not stop Pakistan from supporting militant groups in Kashmir and helping to recruit volunteers who want to join the fight against India, though the motive for doing so is to hurt India rather than liberate Kashmir. In general, as Cohen summarized it, Pakistan has a military strategy toward Kashmir, but not a political one (Cohen, 2004). Subsequently, the lack of clearly and precisely formulated goal and strategy make the solving of the issue extremely difficult (Embree, 2003).

For years, this position was acceptable because it did not carry much risk for Pakistan. If Kashmir fails to achieve its freedom, it is because it is not motivated enough. If Kashmir does succeed, then it can only be in Pakistan's favour. Because of this, not too much attention is paid to the actual strategic consequences of an independent Kashmir and how it would affect Pakistan's relations with Central Asia, Russia, Afghanistan, China, India and, of course the USA. Unfortunately, as usual, the civil population of Kashmir is paying the highest price in this conflict. The Mumbai-based International Center for Peace Initiatives estimates that back in 2006 nearly 85% of those killed in the conflict are actually Kashmiri Muslims (HRW, 2006).

The war in Afghanistan changed the face of Pakistan forever and influenced the dynamics in the whole region, including the one in Kashmir. The Islamic extremists created by gen. Zia in the course of the war, not without the financial and strategic support of the United States and Saudi Arabia to fight against the common communist enemy, now turned their attention to Pakistan and the United States by interfering in the religious conflicts in South-East Asia and in the Middle East, especially after 9/11.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Pakistan's aid to Kashmiri insurgents is not the only source of violence in Kashmir. Acts of violence began and escalated largely due to strong Kashmiri resentment of Indian administration and India's militarization of their province.

In his publication *A Guide to Militant Groups in Kashmir*, Arif Jamal claims that in the early days of the Kashmiri Jihad there were over 150 different military groups (Jamal, 2010), which, according to the South-Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) at the Institute for Conflict Management (ICM), could be divided into two main types: 1) pro-Pakistan groups that fight for Kashmir to join Pakistan, and 2) pro-independence groups that support secession from India and Pakistan (SATP, 2017).

The influence of the second group is declining, mostly due to the rejection of violence as a mean to achieve this goal. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) is the most prominent and best organized representative from this group that has existed since the beginning of the conflict. After 1994, JKLF decided to change its tactics announcing the intention to fight for the independence of Kashmir through peaceful means (Vira and Cordesman, 2011).

In contrast, because of the significant state support they receive, the pro-Pakistan groups dominate the Kashmir conflict. The most prominent among them include Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JEM), Hizb-ul Mujahideen (HM), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM) and Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HUJI). It is believed that Hizb-ul Mujahideen is actually established as the military wing of Jamaat-e-Islami with the direct support and involvement of the famous Intelligence Agency of Pakistan, known for similar activities also in Afghanistan to oppose the JKLF (SATP, 2017). In reality, all these pro-Pakistan groups are to different degrees connected to the Pakistan Intelligence Agency (BBC, 2011).

Although, the prime focus of these groups is on Kashmir, they are increasingly becoming involved also in the so-called global jihad against the West (CoFR, 2008). Moreover, after the Taliban were expelled from Afghanistan following the US military operation and settled in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a significant part of the Kashmiri fighters joined the Taliban ranks, thus expanding their network and influence into the territory of Pakistan itself. Nevertheless, their involvement in terrorist incidents in Pakistan affected their relations with the Pakistani military and intelligence circles and after 2004, it is actually claimed that Pakistan's intelligence agency lost the main control over the Kashmiri groups (Vira and Cordesman, 2011).

The violent nexus Kashmir-Pakistan-India

The years between 1987 and 1989 marked the first phase of the Kashmiri insurgency, which aimed to generate discontent among the local population and sow the seeds of Islamist militancy. This initial phase was characterized by sporadic uncoordinated attacks against individual targets, avoiding direct confrontation with the Indian security forces (Avsm, 1995). During this period the agency used the existing and successfully operating Mujahideen's infrastructure to help the Kashmiri separatists (HRW, 2006). In most cases, this aid was channelled through the Hizb-i-Isiami organisation led by the Afghan Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The second phase of the resistance against India began during the early 1990s, which was now far better organized and even centralized to some extent. In 1992 the Pakistani Intelligence Agency created a general command and coordination of

the actions of the armed groups in Kashmir, following the example of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Additionally, the United Jihad Council was created in 1994, which began to coordinate the actions of 13 radical groups in Jammu and Kashmir (Ibid.).

This led to an increase in violence and armed conflicts. While a total of 390 cases of terrorism were reported in 1988, in just 4 years their number increased to 4,971 in 1992. Incidents against the security forces increased significantly – from only 6 in 1988 to 3,413 in 1992 (Avsm, 1995). According to data provided by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, between 1988 and 1994, over 55,000 incidents of violence were recorded in the Jammu and Kashmir region, and by 2010, 13,800 civilians and 4,730 security personnel had lost their lives (Annual Report, 2011). Since June 2004, when India and Pakistan initiated the most extensive peace talks to date, violence has registered a dramatic decline. For example, only 36 civilians were killed in 2010 compared to 1,067 in 2001 (Cordesman and Vira, 2011).

Unfortunately, this relatively fragile peace with only erratic attacks along the so-called Line of Control lasted only for a short time. In 2016 a new wave of violent raids started which continued until 2018. During this period there were registered more than three thousand violent cases in 2017 and nearly one thousand more only for the first half of 2018 (CPA, 2023).

As a result of removing the special status of Kashmir by the Indian Government in August 2019, the third phase of the conflict began. This act caused further tension between Pakistan and India as well as between India and the pro-independence circles in Kashmir leading to more casualties from all sides. Despite a ceasefire in February 2021, India did not refrain from its main goal to formally include Indian-administered Kashmir within its state territory. The difference is that now the Kashmiri militants are already home-grown and do not consist of foreigners trained across the border in Pakistan. This time they are not entirely driven by the global jihad and religious motives, but mainly by local factors such as frustration with the Indian administration, human and political rights violation, repression and humiliation (ICG, 2020). Their main goal now is to gain full independence and willingness to determinate their own fate without foreign forces.

However, this fact did not cut the ties and cooperation between the new home-grown groups and the ones supported by Pakistan (ICG, 2022). In addition, as reported by the Atlantic Council, since 2019 there has been a new group operating in Kasmir called The Resistance Front, which is arguably part of the Lashkar-e-Taiba or an "umbrella name for various Pakistan proxies", adopted under the pressure over Pakistan to stop supporting international terrorist groups (Pubby and Chaudhury, 2020). Moreover, there are assumptions that local militant groups cooperate with ISIS and al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has a local branch called Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir, also known as Islamic State Hind Province (The Economic Times, 2019).

One thing is certain – after India revoked the semi-autonomous status of Kashmir, the region became less stable and more open to negative foreign influence. The clashes between Indian forces and local militant groups occur more often and there is little or no dialogue with Kashmiri leaders and representatives (ICG, 2020). No need to mention that all these issues in Kashmir are constantly causing unnecessary tension between Pakistan and

India and hampering the dialogue between the two countries, which further increases the risk of intensifying the conflict.

In general, except for Pakistan, there was minimum international response to the decision from India to revoke the status of Kashmir. This is due to the fact that India is simply an important economic and geopolitical partner. However, there is already some pressure from the international community, particularly from the West powers, regarding the violation of the human rights on behalf of the Indian forces. There is no doubt that Pakistan will use this and will keep pushing through various diplomatic activities to bring the Kashmiri question back in the international spotlight. Pakistan already raised the issue across several international forums such as the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Yet being active in the diplomatic arena does not mean that Pakistan will stop the support for the militant groups, but the state must be cautious not to become internationally isolated and be left without economic support and investments. Historically Pakistan always tends to put its short-term goals and policies over its long-term national security plan, including internal and external threats. In any case, according to Dr. Nishank Motwani, deputy director at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) in Kabul, the best option for Pakistan might be to do nothing and wait for India to commit "a series of self-enforced errors" (Motwani, 2020).

Dr. Motwani argues that the biggest challenge for India in Kashmir is actually its own policy. Considering itself the largest democracy in the world, India is supposed to act as such (Ibid.). So far, India has refrained from major responding to terrorist provocations and attacks, largely because of fear of the potential consequences and escalation of the violence in the whole region, including its own territory. However, the way India handles the conflict in Kashmir with all the human rights violations and repressions might actually have a negative effect and could possibly damage India's economic and diplomatic ties by changing the way the international community looks at the conflict. In addition, India is under some pressure from the USA, which is afraid that Pakistan could reduce the support in the anti-Taliban operations (Vira and Cordesman, 2011).

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Pakistan and India are major regional forces whose internal problems affect the security of other countries in the region and across the world. In particular, according to Anthony H. Cordesman and Varun Vira, Pakistan has the potential to be both a major disruptive force and a major source of stability, which could influence the violence reduction in Afghanistan and Kashmir as well as curb the longstanding problems in the Middle East (Vira and Cordesman, 2011). The problem is that currently we only see the religious extremism forged and spread by Pakistan and if the state does not undertake serious and drastic internal reforms, this tendency could lead to a spiral of uncontrollable instability both at the national and regional level (Khalid, 2004).

At the same time, the increasing Islamization of the Kashmiri conflict is undermining both the Kashmiri aspirations for secession from India and the Pakistani aspirations for international

arbitration and a cessation of the dispute. In reality, the Kashmiri liberation movement is actually beginning to lose international support due to the fact that all these foreign fighters recruited by Pakistan and other Arab countries are turning the conflict into an Islamist jihad.

In general, the conflict has been regarded as a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan. However, perhaps it is time to include the Kashmiri people in its resolution by respecting their wish and allowing them to shape their own destiny. Sometimes we do not see enough political will in the two countries to solve the issue, e.g. "adopt delaying tactics or lack of prioritization" (Faisal, 2023). Therefore, the international community needs to exert pressure on Pakistan and India to resume formal bilateral discussion (following the partial break after 2019) and include Kashmiri representatives. At the same time Pakistan has to reduce the support for the anti-Indian militant groups in Kashmir. On the other hand, India needs to stop the anti-democratic measures in the region and engage with the local political leaders so as to meet its promises of allowing regional elections (ICG, 2022).

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