Placing the Indo-Pakistani Standoff in Perspective

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Introduction

South Asia remains one of the most unstable and crisis-prone regions in the world. Since the late 1980s, the region has witnessed a recurring series of crisis between India and Pakistan over the disputed state of Kashmir. Currently, both New Delhi and Islamabad are locked in a dangerous political and military standoff, which if unresolved, could escalate into a limited conventional war. In fact, since the 1971 Bangladesh War, the likelihood of a conventional war between India and Pakistan has never been higher.

The present Indo-Pakistani standoff is the direct consequence of a bold Indian policy of coercive diplomacy; India's central goal is to browbeat Pakistan into accepting a settlement on the Kashmir dispute on its terms. The wellspring of the crisis lies in the alienation of India's Kashmir Muslim population and Pakistan's decade-long attempt to capitalize on that unrest by materially aiding and abetting an insurgency in Indian-controlled Kashmir. However, the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States, and Washington's subsequent global campaign against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism served as the immediate catalyst for the crisis in South Asia.

This paper provides an overarching framework, background, and analysis of the latest Indo-Pakistani crisis in the context of the new U.S.-led global war against terrorism. The first half focuses on the nature of the low-intensity war in Kashmir, the implications of the events of September 11th on that war, and the rationale behind India's policy of coercive diplomacy. The latter half analyzes the likelihood of limited conventional war in the region, and whether such a war could escalate into a full-blown conventional war and possibly even a nuclear exchange. The paper concludes with the argument that although the chances of a high-intensity conventional war and nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan are low, in comparison to the early and mid-1990s, the threshold for a limited conventional war in South Asia is now considerably lower.

Kashmir: The 12-Year Low-Intensity Conflict

Although global attention is now focused on the possibility of another Indo-Pakistani war breaking out in South Asia, the two countries have actually been engaged in a low-intensity war in Kashmir for the last 12 years. The key question now confronting the Indian leadership is whether India should change the scale of that war from a low-intensity conflict to a limited conventional conflict with all the attendant risks of a high-intensity conventional war and possibly even nuclear war.

The low-intensity war in Kashmir began in 1989-90 when Pakistan decided to train and arm alienated Muslim insurgents battling the Indian state and its military agencies. The alienation of the Muslims in Indian-controlled Kashmir was largely the consequence of political mismanagement on the part of New Delhi. This mismanagement was not unique to Kashmir and had more to do with the problematic quality of Indian democracy. Nevertheless, Pakistan's decision to arm and train the insurgents transformed what was essentially a domestic insurgency into a low-intensity conflict between India and Pakistan.

Thus Kashmir, intimately tied to the national identities of India and Pakistan since their emergence as independent states in 1947, became a battleground for the clash of two
ideological hegemonies. India tied its secular identity to the retention of control over the alienated Muslim population in the Kashmir valley. Likewise, Pakistan sought a plebiscite for the same population in the province in the hope that a positive vote for Pakistan would reaffirm its identity as a nation-state for the subcontinent’s Muslims. The latter goal acquired greater significance for Islamabad after 1971 when India helped the cause of the Bengali nationalists in East Pakistan and intervened militarily to create the new state of Bangladesh. The creation of Bangladesh constituted a triumph of ethnic nationalism over religion and was a body blow to the “Two Nations Theory” on which Pakistan was founded by the departing British colonials in 1947.

Besides seeking to reaffirm its national identity, Pakistan had other reasons for supporting the Kashmiri insurgents. The military and intelligence establishment in Islamabad believed that a low-intensity war in Kashmir would force New Delhi to deploy significant military resources in Kashmir and reduce the historic conventional advantage that India enjoyed over Pakistan. The diversion of Indian military resources in Kashmir would limit the likelihood of Indian leaders initiating military adventures against Pakistan. Drawing on the success of the Mujahideen against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Pakistani leaders also became convinced that the Indian military could not possibly win an externally aided low-intensity war of attrition against a population that had become alienated from New Delhi’s rule. Furthermore, New Delhi’s efforts to find a military solution to the insurgency would lead to an escalating cycle of violence, increased human rights abuses, which would invariably result in the further alienation of Kashmir’s Muslim population, and in all likelihood, lead to the internationalization of the dispute. From Islamabad’s perspective, low-intensity war presented a historic opportunity for Pakistan to settle the Kashmir dispute on its terms.

To a large extent, Pakistan’s decision to reopen the Kashmir dispute with India in the 1990s was made easier by its acquisition of a nuclear weapons capability. After Pakistan crossed the nuclear threshold in the late 1980s, its leaders became confident that India would be deterred from carrying the war into Pakistan’s heartland. Pakistan assumed that Indian leaders would be hesitant to change the terms of the conflict in Kashmir from low-intensity levels to a full-scale conventional war, due to fear that such a war could take a nuclear turn. Indeed, by adopting a nuclear ‘first-use’ doctrine, Islamabad implicitly threatened New Delhi with nuclear escalation in the event of a large-scale Indian conventional attack. As a result, both countries became locked in what Glenn Snyder has described as the “stability-instability paradox.” Nuclear weapons induced stability in South Asia by deterring large-scale conventional war. And yet, instability persisted as India and Pakistan became involved in a perennial and debilitating low-intensity conflict.

For much of the 1990s, the Indian government believed that the Kashmir insurgency was manageable. Despite threats to launch cross-border raids against insurgent camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, New Delhi realized early on that it lacked the intelligence or the precision-strike capabilities to carry out that threat. Likewise, India did not have sufficient conventional superiority to wage a decisive conventional war against Pakistan. A large-scale conventional war also carried the risk of escalation to the nuclear level. Indian leaders feared that the prospects of a full-scale conventional war with nuclear overtones would invite international attention and lead to great power intervention in the Kashmir dispute. These constraints forced India to fight the low-intensity war in Kashmir on Pakistan’s terms. Forced into a corner, New Delhi attempted to crush the insurgency using
military force while trying to forge a political compromise with the moderates among the militant groups. Simultaneously, India launched a diplomatic campaign to frame Pakistan’s meddling in Kashmir as support for terrorism in a bid to pressure Islamabad into terminating support for the militants.

Pakistani leaders’ support for low-intensity war was premised on three main assumptions: (1) that they could calculate with precision the degree of force that could be applied to pressure India into a compromise on Kashmir, without provoking New Delhi into a large-scale conventional war; (2) that New Delhi, fearing the nuclear factor and possible internationalization of the Kashmir dispute, would be deterred from escalating the conflict; and (3) that India’s patience was infinite. Another assumption was that the international community would treat externally aided militant self-determination movements with ambivalence. And finally, Islamabad believed that the blowback effects of supporting Jihad in Kashmir, which essentially meant creating a political space for extremist Islamic groups within Pakistani civil society, were manageable.

However, the strategic framework that favored the status quo and continuation of the low-intensity war in Kashmir began to erode by the late 1990s. Ultimately, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent U.S.-led global campaign against terrorism, created a historic opportunity for India, the catalyst for the present Indo-Pakistani military standoff.

The Implications of September 11th Terrorist Attacks for South Asia

Even prior to the events of September 11, India’s patience had begun to run thin with the mounting losses imposed by the low-intensity war in Kashmir. The 12-year war sucked in nearly 200,000 Indian military and paramilitary troops. New Delhi estimated that its military and civilian casualties during the period ranged somewhere between 35,000-70,000. Cumulatively, these losses exceeded the combined losses of all the wars that India had fought with Pakistan since independence. Another unfortunate consequence of the Indian counter-insurgency operations was the creation of a police state in Kashmir. The suspension of civil liberties, custodial killings in the hands of Indian security forces, incidents of torture, and other human rights violations were a blot on Indian democracy and attracted the attention of international human rights groups critical of the Indian government’s policies in Kashmir. As the scale and intensity of the insurgency increased, the goal of a political settlement in Kashmir receded further into the distance.

The problem worsened after the Kargil war that India and Pakistan fought in the summer (May-July) of 1999. The Kargil war erupted when Indian military patrols discovered that Pakistani army irregulars and troops from the Northern Light Infantry had covertly infiltrated and occupied positions along the Kargil mountain ridges on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir during the winter months of 1998-1999. The brief war ended after a combination of Indian military pressure, threats from the Indian leadership to expand the war into Pakistan, and diplomatic pressure from the Clinton administration forced the Pakistani military to withdraw unconditionally.
The Kargil war was the first limited conventional war that India and Pakistan fought after conducting nuclear tests and formally declaring themselves nuclear weapon states in May 1998. In the aftermath of the war, the militancy in Kashmir took on a more violent hue as the insurgents, emboldened by Pakistan’s incursion, resorted to launching fidayeen (suicide) attacks on Indian security agencies deployed to combat them. Frustrated by Pakistani adventurism and the unending war in Kashmir, Indian leaders concluded that India might soon be forced to change the terms of the conflict in order to coerce Islamabad into terminating the low-intensity war.

From the mid-1990s, India’s diplomatic campaign to frame Pakistan as a state that promoted terrorism began to gain ground. As evidence of Islamabad’s role in training, financing, and arming the militant groups mounted, there was less willingness on the part of the international community to view these groups as legitimate “freedom fighters.” During the second Clinton administration for instance, nuclear proliferation and terrorism became the key items in Washington’s agenda with Islamabad. U.S. frustration with the Taliban, and Pakistan’s inability and reluctance to force the Taliban to surrender Osama Bin Laden in the wake of the U.S. embassy bombings in Africa and the attacks on the U.S.S Cole focused attention on Pakistan’s role in promoting radical Islamic movements in Afghanistan and Indian-controlled Kashmir. Washington became alarmed about Islamabad’s role in exporting Jihad abroad and on several occasions U.S. diplomats threatened to declare Pakistan a terrorist state.

Within Pakistan as well there was a dawning realization that the decade-old strategy of settling the Kashmir dispute by bleeding India through militant surrogates had failed. Unending military rivalry with India had bankrupted the Pakistani state. Worse, the militant groups spawned by the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies had assumed a life of their own. Their violent activities could no longer be calibrated precisely to achieve carefully conceived political ends; the implication being that Pakistan might find itself drawn into an escalating war with India not entirely of its own choosing. Equally significant was concern among members of Pakistan’s liberal intelligentsia that two decades of Jihadi politics had transformed Pakistan into a battleground between the forces of moderate and radical Islam. Pakistani liberals feared that encouragement of Islamic extremism was unwittingly “Talibanizing” Pakistan.

In this context, the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States immediately focused attention on Pakistan’s ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda. To a considerable extent, the Taliban were Pakistan’s creation. The Taliban grew out of Pakistani madressahs and it was Pakistani military, economic, and logistical aid that helped the Taliban prevail in the Afghan civil war during the 1990s. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan not only became a haven for Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, but also for other militant Islamic organizations waging Jihad in India, China, and the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. In this stateless and lawless environment, narcotics, small arms, and smuggling became the mainstay of the Afghan economy. Afghanistan became an exporter of terrorism, radiating Islamic extremism and instability abroad. Hence, the post-September 11th international focus on Afghanistan and the role of Pakistan’s military and intelligence agencies in fomenting Islamic extremism provided the Indian government with an opportunity to frame Pakistan as a Jihadi state that was part of the problem of terrorism.
In the wake of the Bush administration’s decision to evict the Taliban and Al Qaeda from power in Afghanistan, Pakistan was forced to reappraise its decade-old policy of supporting radical Islamic groups abroad. Unable to resist pressure from the United States, Pakistan withdrew support from the Taliban. The diplomatic revolution in Islamabad brought President Musharraf’s regime into direct conflict with Pakistan’s radical Islamic political parties and groups sympathetic to the Taliban. In the political crackdown that ensued, the Musharraf government found itself at odds with the very political forces that successive Pakistani governments had fostered since the early 1980s. The events of September 11th thus shattered the two-decade old alliance between Pakistan’s military-intelligence establishment and the forces of radical Islam.

The constriction of political space for radical Islamic forces within Pakistan and the international spotlight on the role of the Pakistani state agencies in fomenting Islamic extremism inevitably generated pressure on the Musharraf government to reduce military support to the insurgents in Kashmir. Although President Musharraf initially described the Kashmiri insurgents as “freedom fighters” and justified Pakistan’s abandonment of the Taliban before a domestic audience as a political maneuver to prevent the Kashmir insurgency from being branded as a campaign of terror, it soon became apparent that there was a fundamental contradiction in Pakistan’s policy.

Pakistan could not, on the one hand, abandon the Taliban on grounds that they were agents of terror and simultaneously continue supporting the Kashmiri insurgents under the rubric of “self determination.” Pakistan’s Afghan and Kashmir policies were part of an integrated strategic framework; segments of that policy could not be uncoupled without affecting the whole. In both Afghanistan and Kashmir, Pakistan relied on radical Islamic proxies to achieve strategic goals. Hence, after jettisoning the Taliban, it became increasingly evident that Islamabad’s support for Jihad in Kashmir could only be sustained at the risk of Pakistan being declared a terrorist state.

Finally, September 11th blurred the distinction between terrorists and “freedom fighters.” During the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War years, the international community had granted considerable latitude to sub-national, ethnic, and religious self-determination movements. Even movements that resorted to violent means to achieve political goals were sometimes regarded with a degree of ambivalence. However, the magnitude of the violence unleashed by Al Qaeda caused international opinion to shift in favor of the Russian, Chinese, and Indian governments battling radical Islamic groups in Chechnya, Xinjiang, and Kashmir. The Indian government, in particular, used the events of September 11th to frame the insurgency in Kashmir as a war between a multicultural democracy on the one hand and the forces of “monocultural” sectarianism on the other. In this environment, Pakistan’s pursuit of Islamic identity politics in Kashmir through the instrument of low-intensity war became unsustainable.

India’s Resort to Coercive Diplomacy

The Indian government swiftly grasped the implications of the events of September 11 and immediately joined the U.S.-led global coalition against terrorism. From New Delhi’s point of view, the Taliban’s indirect complicity in the attacks, and Pakistan’s support for the
Taliban, provided the best opportunity and hope that the United States would finally declare Pakistan a terrorist state. Assuming that Pakistan would find it difficult to withdraw support from the Taliban, the Indian government, in a seismic policy shift, offered unprecedented logistical and intelligence support for any U.S. operations in Afghanistan. The Indian leadership also tried to persuade the United States to form a coalition of democracies under a UN mandate to wage war against global terrorism.

However, India’s initial attempt to isolate Pakistan failed. Pakistan abandoned the Taliban and joined Washington in its campaign against global terrorism. The Musharraf regime also agreed to provide logistical and intelligence support for U.S. operations against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. No other country could substitute for Pakistan’s help in this regard. Furthermore, after September 11th, the Bush administration’s top policy goals in South Asia became regime change in Afghanistan, and the political and economic stabilization of Pakistan. Another goal was to ensure that Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal did not fall into the hands of fundamentalist Islamic groups. For these reasons, Washington refrained from declaring Pakistan a terrorist state.

The Bush administration also disregarded the Indian government’s advice to forge a global coalition of democracies and wage the Afghan campaign under a UN mandate. Instead, the United States decided to go it alone in Afghanistan and assemble a revolving coalition of partners. Under this new approach, the United States would invite groups of countries to join in its global campaign against terrorism in different regions at different times. Each partner’s commitment to the war against terrorism and degree of participation would be determined by a composite matrix of its own domestic, regional, and global interests. However, Washington would pursue its agenda independent of any restraints of its partners’ priorities.

Having failed to either isolate Pakistan or form a global coalition of democracies, India shifted the focus of its diplomacy toward insulating itself from the potential negative fallout of the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. India stepped up pressure on the Bush administration by publicly demanding that the United States address the problem of Pakistani-sponsored cross-border terrorism. In private, the Vajpayee government also demanded assurances that Washington would not impose itself as a mediator in the Kashmir dispute or resume military aid to Pakistan on the scale of the aid package extended to Islamabad during the 1980s.

The United States agreed with the Vajpayee government’s argument that the problem of terrorism could not be tackled piecemeal. However, Bush administration emissaries made it plain to New Delhi that due to the exigencies of the Afghan campaign and the necessity of shoring up the Musharraf regime, Indian complaints would be addressed during the latter phases of the campaign. Washington also quietly assured Indian leaders that there would be no quid pro quo with Pakistan on Kashmir. And finally, there would be no repeat of U.S. military aid for Pakistan on the scale of the 1980s. U.S. leaders emphasized that Pakistan’s problems were essentially social, political, and economic. Hence, the planned U.S. aid package would be aimed at ensuring long-term political and economic stability in Pakistan.

Pakistan’s emergence as a frontline state in the global campaign against terrorism caused enormous consternation in New Delhi. Several senior Indian government leaders publicly
fulminated that the United States was out to pursue its own narrow agenda and that India would have to fight its battle against terrorism alone. There was also great anger and disillusionment that Pakistan, which had helped the Taliban secure power, whose intelligence agencies had extensive contacts with Al Qaeda and were in cahoots with radical Islamic groups fighting jihad against Indian forces in Kashmir, had emerged as a frontline state in the new global campaign against terror.

However, behind these public expressions of anger, Indian leaders realized that any regime change in Afghanistan would be in India’s long-term interests. The destruction of the Taliban would ensure that Pakistan’s military-intelligence establishment would no longer be able to use Afghanistan as a safe haven to train and arm Islamic militant groups waging war against Indian security forces in Kashmir. Regime change in Kabul would also end Islamabad’s elusive quest for “strategic depth” against India and confront Pakistan with the possibility of having two hostile states on its borders. But even more significantly, Washington’s attention on the region and alarm at Islamic fundamentalism would inevitably create pressure on the Pakistani government to confront the forces of militant Islam within Pakistan.

Indian leaders also drew another significant lesson from the events of September 11. They foresaw that one of the inevitable consequences of the terrorist attacks on the United States would be reduced political tolerance for non-state actors waging war against state actors, especially if the targeted state was a democracy. For the first time in decades, the line between violent self-determination movements and terrorism had become blurred. Hence, India could capitalize on the emerging international environment to frame Pakistan’s support for the Kashmir insurgency as support for a campaign of terror.

Two events provided the Indian government with an opportunity to act. The first was the October 1 suicide attack on the Srinagar state assembly by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which left 40 people dead. In response to the attack, the Indian government stepped up artillery attacks on Pakistani military units across the LoC in Kashmir as a means of ratcheting up military pressure on Islamabad. Simultaneously, Indian political leaders launched a high-profile diplomatic campaign to highlight the role of Pakistani state agencies in sponsoring terrorist activities in India. Unable to ignore the evidence any longer, the Bush administration branded the attack on the Srinagar state assembly as an attack on democracy and froze the JeM’s financial assets in the United States. In a follow up action, the United States also placed the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and JeM on its watchlist of terrorist organizations. These moves were not only meant to assuage the outrage felt in India, but also served as a warning to Pakistan to end support for militant Islamic groups.

The second incident was the attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi on December 13, 2000. This attack, for which the Pakistan-based LeT initially claimed responsibility, left five people dead and put hundreds of members of parliament and senior government leaders at risk. An outraged Indian government framed the assault as an attack on the heart of India’s system of governance and compared it to the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York. The attack on the Indian parliament elicited global condemnation and persuaded the Bush administration to ban the LeT and JeM. It also finally provided the Vajpayee
government with an incident of sufficient magnitude to alter the terms of engagement with Pakistan and threaten Islamabad with the prospects of a limited conventional war.\footnote{40}

In the weeks following the attack on the parliament, India demanded that Pakistan crackdown on Pakistan-based militant Islamic groups waging Jihad in India; that Pakistan end support for cross-border terrorism; and that Pakistan hand over 20 individuals accused of committing terrorist crimes in India\footnote{41}. To force Islamabad's compliance, the Vajpayee government systematically took several steps to increase political pressure on Pakistan through diplomatic measures backed by the explicit threat of military force.

On the political front, India downgraded diplomatic relations by recalling its ambassador to Pakistan and cutting its consular strength in Islamabad by 50 percent; similar restrictions were imposed on Pakistan's consular staff in India. The Indian government declared that all road and rail links with Pakistan would be suspended from 1 January 2002; similarly all flights of Pakistani airlines through Indian airspace would be banned\footnote{42}. As an extreme diplomatic measure, India also threatened to withdraw from the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty that regulated the sharing of waters from the eastern and western rivers of the Indus basin\footnote{43}. Simultaneously, the Indian cabinet ordered the largest military mobilization since the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war over East Pakistan. Not only were the Indian Army, Air Force, and Navy placed on high-alert, but military units were redeployed from the eastern and northern front to signal the seriousness of India's resolve. Borders were mined and armored strike formations deployed menacingly on Pakistan's eastern borders\footnote{44}.

The audiences for this coercive diplomacy were both Washington and Islamabad. The Vajpayee government's blunt message to Washington was that it could no longer count on India to subsume its anti-terrorism agenda to U.S. interests. Continued disregard for New Delhi's security concerns could force the Indian government to impose a limited conventional war on Pakistan, which would threaten U.S. war aims in Afghanistan. With the Taliban and Al Qaeda networks in disarray, New Delhi expected the United States to move on to the next phase of the campaign and pressure the Pakistani government into dismantling its Jihadi infrastructure and end support for militant Islamic groups waging war in India\footnote{45}.

The diplomatic measures and military build up were also meant as a signal to Pakistan that India's threshold of tolerance had been breached. The Indian government would no longer tolerate what it described as "cross-border terrorism." Henceforth, Pakistan would be held responsible for the activities of Pakistan-based militant Islamic groups, regardless of whether their activities were orchestrated by Pakistani government agencies. For too long, Pakistani military and intelligence agencies had operated on the assumption that India would not escalate the low-intensity conflict due to fears of a nuclear holocaust. However, the Indian government was now prepared to test Pakistan's nuclear resolve over Kashmir. The onus was therefore on Pakistan to either end support for the insurgent groups or pay the price for such support by engaging in a ruinous limited conventional war with India on New Delhi's terms\footnote{46}.
Pakistan: Dismantling the Jihadi Infrastructure

The U.S.-led global campaign against terrorism and Indian diplomatic and military pressure ultimately forced the Musharraf regime to undertake a massive domestic reform campaign to cleanse Pakistani politics of extremist Islamic influences. President Musharraf’s reforms represent a seminal change in Pakistani politics not only to the extent that they propose to change the fundamental nature of Pakistan’s state and society, but more significantly, because they mark the reversal of two decades of Jihadi adventurism abroad. For nearly two decades, Pakistan has been the site of an ideological struggle between the forces of moderate and radical Islam. Although this struggle can be partly attributed to the contradiction between Pakistan’s identity as an Islamic state and the secular biases of its liberal elite, the process accelerated after General Zia-ul-Haq deposed Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in a military coup in 1977.

During the 1980s, General Zia sought political legitimacy and attempted to shore up the battered ideological foundations of the Pakistani state by taking refuge in “Islamization.” Domestically, Islamization meant reshaping some of Pakistan’s social, political, economic, and judicial institutions in accordance with Islamic principles. Externally, the Islamization of the Pakistani state and society manifested itself in support for Jihad against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

The success of the Afghan Mujahideen in forcing a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan helped inspire the revival of militant Islam within Pakistan. Militant Islam also grew in strength and importance due to the extensive patronage extended by Pakistani state agencies. In the mid-1990s, the quest for “strategic depth” and Jihadi fervor led Islamabad to help the Taliban prevail in the Afghan civil war. Likewise, Islamabad’s strategic establishment also succeeded in persuading the growing legion of radical Islamic warriors to wage a low-intensity war in support of their alienated Muslim brethren against Indian security forces in Kashmir.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the twin processes of Islamization and the creation of a Jihadi infrastructure went hand in hand. Pakistan’s military and intelligence agencies trained, armed, and supported radical Islamic groups with the explicit objective of achieving strategic goals in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The state not only turned a blind eye to the activities of madressahs that preached religious intolerance and extremism, but also allowed militant religious groups and organizations to raise funds and operate out of Pakistani controlled territories. As a result of these policies, the strategic establishment in Islamabad unwittingly ended up creating a relatively autonomous enclave for radical Islam within Pakistani civil society.

Successive Pakistani governments continued the above policy on the assumption that Pakistan itself would remain immune from the blowback effects of radical Islam. However, this proved to be a naïve assumption. As the Jihadi organizations and culture began to take root in Pakistani civil society, Pakistan itself became a battleground for the forces of radical Islam. Far worse, the network of Pakistani militant groups, sectarian organizations, and madressahs, and the expansion of smuggling, narcotics trade, and small arms proliferation in
Afghanistan, facilitated the creation of enclaves where the authority of the Pakistani government ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{52}

The emergence of semi-autonomous Jihadi enclaves within Pakistan (with support from sections of the military-intelligence establishment) had unsettling implications. Their violent sectarian politics constituted a direct challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the Pakistani state. Several foreign and Pakistani observers concluded that Pakistan was fast becoming “talibanized;” if the prevailing trends remained unchecked, Pakistan would become a failed state and fall prey to the forces of radical Islam.\textsuperscript{53}

The military regime of General Pervez Musharraf, which ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a coup in October 1999, shared some of the above concerns.\textsuperscript{54} However, for a variety of domestic and external reasons, it hesitated to confront the extremist forces immediately. Ultimately the events of September 11\textsuperscript{th} and Washington’s ultimatum forced the Musharraf regime to dispense with the Taliban and confront the forces of Islamic fundamentalism within Pakistan.\textsuperscript{55}

President Musharraf’s decision to withdraw support from the Taliban and support U.S. war objectives in Afghanistan proved unpopular with the Islamic political parties and groups in Pakistan. The latter correctly sensed that the destruction of the Taliban would invariably result in the constrictions of political space for radical Islam within Pakistani politics. Their vocal protests against Pakistan’s abrupt about face in Afghanistan created cracks in the two-decade old alliance between the Islamic fundamentalists and the military-intelligence establishment in Islamabad and forced a showdown with the Musharraf regime.\textsuperscript{56}

However, in September-October 2001, even as the Musharraf regime cracked down on the Islamic political parties and groups protesting Islamabad’s radical shift in Afghanistan, it did little to reign in Islamic groups waging guerilla war against the Indian government in Kashmir. The Pakistani government rationalized this apparent dichotomy by drawing a distinction between terrorism and self-determination movements. President Musharraf justified Pakistan’s strategic shift in Afghanistan on grounds that it was designed to safeguard the Kashmir cause. He also argued that Pakistan’s political, moral, and economic support for the Kashmiri militants was legitimate as the latter were battling “state” (read Indian) terrorism.\textsuperscript{57} Musharraf also feared that unlike the Taliban, which enjoyed support in limited enclaves in Pakistan, the Kashmir cause enjoyed widespread support among the Pakistani public. Hence, withdrawal of support from the Kashmiri militants at this stage would have been an unpopular political decision and added wind to the sails of the Islamic political parties agitating against the government’s policies in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{58}

But the growing international attention on the role of Pakistani intelligence and military agencies in supporting and arming such groups, and increasing diplomatic pressure from Washington and New Delhi, forced Islamabad to make some tactical adjustments in its Kashmir policies. Islamic militant groups such as the LeT and JeM were ordered to lie low, at least for the duration of the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan. They were also ordered to shift their base of operations from Pakistan to Indian-controlled Kashmir. Even after the United States placed the LeT and JeM on its watchlist of terrorist organizations in October 2002, the Pakistani authorities did not initiate any crackdown on Kashmiri insurgent groups in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{59}
Ultimately, the December 13th attack on the Indian parliament by a Pakistan-based militant group, India’s threatening war posture, and the Bush administration’s tacit endorsement of New Delhi’s bullying tactics, forced Islamabad into undertaking a major strategic overhaul of its Kashmir policy. As part of this strategic shift, Pakistan publicly condemned the attack on the Indian parliament. President Musharraf announced that henceforth, Pakistan would only extend political and moral support to insurgent groups indigenous to the Kashmir region. This amounted to a tacit admission that Pakistani governments in the past had connived in the arming, training, and insertion of “guest” militants in the valley. Musharraf also declared that Pakistan would not tolerate any group that promoted terrorism abroad. In a related move of even greater significance, the Pakistani government quietly ordered the dreaded Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to disband its Afghan and Kashmir divisions, which had been responsible for orchestrating and coordinating Islamabad’s Afghan and Kashmir campaigns in the 1990s. Officers assigned to these divisions in the ISI were ordered to return to their units in the armed services.

On 12 January 2002, in a follow-up action, President Musharraf spelled out a sweeping domestic reform agenda in an address to the Pakistani people. In that address, Musharraf declared his government’s resolve to detoxify Pakistani society of the poisonous influences of militant, sectarian, and radical Islam and build a more humane, secular, and liberal alternative. To achieve this objective, the Pakistani government banned militant and extremist Islamic groups involved in sectarian campaigns. Their offices were sealed, leaders arrested, and funds frozen. Similarly, organizations such as the LeT and JeM, which had already been designated as terrorist groups by the U.S. State Department, were also banned and their leaders arrested.

**Is There Strategic Space for a Limited Conventional War in South Asia?**

President Musharraf’s sweeping measures to curb Islamic militancy in Pakistan and to end armed support to the insurgents in Kashmir have temporarily defused the crisis in South Asia. War clouds have receded on the horizon. However, the crisis is not over. India has ruled out demobilization of its armed forces until such time as the Indian government can independently assess if Pakistan has indeed reduced support for “cross border terrorism.” In the interim, India has demanded that Pakistan turn over 20 individuals accused of terrorist crimes committed in India.

Indian government agencies have also devised a methodology to assess the scale of Pakistan’s support for the Kashmiri insurgents. Indian government sources have indicated that India does not expect the levels of insurgency to decline immediately and that the campaign to dejihadify Pakistan is likely to be a long drawn out one. In this regard, India is prepared to give President Musharraf more time and political space to act. Nonetheless, should the Indian government conclude during the next several months that Pakistan has been insincere in its assurances, or is merely undertaking cosmetic measures to assuage international opinion, or will return to its old ways once U.S. attention from the region has shifted, New Delhi could decide to prosecute the limited conventional war option, which has been implicit in the Indian military build up since December 2001.
In the event India decides to change the terms of the low-intensity war in Kashmir, it will not be the first example of a limited conventional war in South Asia under nuclear conditions. India and Pakistan fought the first such war in Kargil in the summer of 1999. During the Kargil war, India deployed heavy artillery and air power to evict the Pakistani military from positions along the Indian side of the LoC. However, in deciding to escalate the war, the Indian cabinet explicitly ruled out the expansion of war into Pakistan. The Vajpayee government denied military requests to interdict the infiltrators’ supply routes in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (Azad Kashmir).

There were political and military reasons why India adopted such a risk-averse strategy. Politically, the Indian government wanted to do nothing that would convey the impression that India was an irresponsible nuclear power or that South Asia was the likeliest place for a nuclear war. By keeping the war limited to Indian territory, India was also able to occupy the moral high ground and succeeded in rallying international diplomatic opinion behind its efforts to pressurize Pakistan into vacating the Kargil heights. Likewise, military logic demanded that the war be kept limited to forestall the dangers of escalation and minimize the possibility of a nuclear exchange.

At the time, India’s strategy of restraint succeeded. But it left open the subsequent question of how India should respond to similar Pakistani adventurism in the future. Frustrated with the decade-old conflict, Indian political and military leaders, and the strategic establishment at large, also reopened the debate on approaches to bring the low-intensity war in Kashmir to a successful closure. The central issue in this debate was whether nuclear weapons would force India to fight the war on Pakistan’s terms indefinitely and whether there existed alternative means through which India could force war termination on Pakistan, without any significant risk of nuclear escalation.

The debate reached an interim conclusion in January 2000, when India’s defense minister George Fernandes boldly proclaimed a doctrine of limited conventional war under nuclear conditions. Fernandes asserted that there existed a strategic space between a low-intensity and a high-intensity conventional war where a limited conventional war was indeed a possibility. Addressing a seminar on limited conventional war at the Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses in New Delhi, Fernandes said:

Nuclear weapons did not make war obsolete; they simply imposed another dimension on the way warfare was conducted... Pakistan... had convinced itself for decades, that under the nuclear umbrella it would be able to take Kashmir without India being able to punish it in return. The covert war against India was started in the mid-1980s was based on the same premise... There was a worse error of judgment that Pakistan made after the nuclear tests in May 1998 when its elites started believing that India would be deterred in any war imposed on it, and will not fight back. There was a perception that the overt nuclear status had ensured that covert war could continue and aggression across the Line of Control could be carried out while India would be deterred by the nuclear factor.

... obviously they [Pakistan] have not absorbed the real meaning of nuclearization: that it can deter only the use of nuclear weapons, but not all and any war. Elementary reading of history would tell us that 30-years ago (in 1969) two nuclear-armed neighboring countries – China and the Soviet Union – had fought a bitter war across their borders. So the issue was not that war had been made obsolete by nuclear weapons, and that covert war by proxy was the
only option, but that conventional war remained feasible, though with definite limitations, if escalation across the nuclear threshold was to be avoided. 75

Drawing on China’s doctrine of “local border wars,” Fernandes emphasized that henceforth limited conventional wars would be the wars of the future and the Indian military should prepare to fight and win such wars. 76 Fernandes’s speech had unsettling implications. It essentially implied that under certain circumstances, India might be willing to escalate the war and test Pakistan’s nuclear resolve. Fernandes also signaled that India’s leadership was fast approaching the conclusion that the time may have come to call Pakistan’s nuclear bluff over Kashmir. 77

The question of how and when Pakistan might use nuclear weapons in pursuit of its nuclear first-use doctrine has never been clear. Beyond vaguely stating that Pakistan would use nuclear weapons in the event Pakistan’s national existence was threatened, no government in Islamabad has ever formally articulated Pakistan’s nuclear doctrine. The assumption is that any formal delineation of Pakistan’s nuclear thresholds might unwittingly create a window for India to wage a limited conventional war. In Pakistan’s view, the uncertainty surrounding the precise conditions under which it might actually initiate the use of nuclear weapons reinforces deterrence.

However, in October 1999, three former high Pakistani government officials – Abdul Sattar, Agha Shahi, and Zulfikar Ali Khan – spelled out what has since then become accepted as Pakistan’s unofficial nuclear doctrine. In their essay, Securing Nuclear Peace, the authors drew a distinction between local and national contingencies. They argued Pakistan would only consider nuclear use during grave national contingencies; local contingencies would be dealt with using conventional military means. Elaborating further, the authors explained that a grave national contingency would arise in the event India threatened the existence of the Pakistani state by: (1) inflicting a major defeat on the Pakistani military; or (2) occupying or threatening to occupy Pakistan’s vital urban, population, economic centers, or communications nodes. Short of these scenarios, the authors considered the probability of nuclear use by Islamabad as remote. 78

Similarly, the emerging consensus within the Indian government is that the nuclear threshold in South Asia is sufficiently high for New Delhi to create local contingencies for Pakistan without threatening its fundamental existence. Indeed, the new approach outlined by Fernandes appears expressly designed to exploit the perceived gaps in Pakistan’s nuclear doctrine. The central premise of the new Indian thinking is that an Indian military strategy that threatened the very survival of the Pakistani state would have the potential of transforming a conventional war into a nuclear exchange. However, an Indian strategy that instead aimed at raising the costs of the low-intensity war for Pakistan without approaching any of the red lines outlined above could be fought well below the nuclear threshold. 79

How India might actually respond with localized military actions or unconventional means short of the nuclear option remains a closely guarded secret. Several analysts in New Delhi believe that a limited conventional war is a far too dangerous proposition and that India is unlikely to go beyond coercive diplomacy. The latter argue that New Delhi’s policy can best be summed up as a strategy of huff and bluff. 80 Nevertheless, there is considerable
speculation in the South Asian media on India's future course of action, especially in the event that the Vajpayee government fails to achieve its strategic objectives diplomatically.

According to one account, India could "bleed Pakistan white" by simply forcing Islamabad to keep its military mobilized in the field beyond a 45-day period. Indian war planners estimate the cost of mobilization for Pakistan for this period anywhere between $400-600 million; they expect the mobilization cost for a six-month period to be considerably higher. For a military with an annual budget of $2.2 billion (FY 2001-2002), mobilization would come at the price of spares, procurement, and replacement of worn out equipment. Hence, the Indian calculation is that in any crisis, the pressure would be on Islamabad to either escalate the conflict or to cave in to Indian demands to bring a closure to the military standoff. To be sure, costs for India would be high as well. However, India has a deeper war chest and can keep its military mobilized for months on end without seriously straining the fiscal stability of the Indian state. Furthermore, unlike the Pakistani army, the Indian military is not saddled with the added responsibilities of domestic governance.

Other limited military options include the naval-blockade of Karachi, Pakistan's main trading harbor, harassment of Pakistani merchant marine, or swift surgical air-strikes against symbolic targets in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. In each of these scenarios, New Delhi's attempt would be to strangle Pakistan's economy slowly. Rather than jeopardize the existence of the Pakistan state, the Vajpayee government's objective would be to raise the cost of the low-intensity war in Kashmir to such high levels so as to coerce Pakistan into accepting war termination on India's terms.

Indian government sources have also hinted that as an extreme diplomatic measure, India might abrogate the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty. The treaty gives Pakistan and India exclusive rights over the western (Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab) and eastern (Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi) rivers of the Indus river basin respectively. Unilateral abrogation of the treaty would allow India to hold the waters of the eastern river systems captive. In theory, India could then not only starve Pakistan of water but also release the rivers' water at will to flood Pakistani territory downstream. Such actions would constitute an unprecedented environmental act of war, and put pressure on Pakistan to initiate military action to free the captive waters. In this scenario, the Indian military, backed by superior conventional forces, could then systematically degrade its Pakistani counterpart in a static border war of attrition.

But the above scenario is unlikely in the short term for several reasons. First, the Indus Waters Treaty has survived three Indo-Pakistani wars successfully. Second, the treaty was negotiated under the auspices of the World Bank and implemented with considerable financial assistance from the United States. Hence it is unclear if India can legally withdraw from the treaty unilaterally. Even if unilateral withdrawal were legally feasible, the negative political and diplomatic repercussions of a unilateral withdrawal for India would be immense. More significantly, and from a practical point of view, India would have to build a large water storage capacity on the eastern river systems to wage the sort of environmental war implicit in the threat of unilateral abrogation. Since India currently lacks such water storage capacity, the short-term impact of any unilateral Indian withdrawal is likely to be more psychological than physical.
However, Indian threats to wage a limited war against Pakistan using conventional and non-nuclear unconventional means have not gone unchallenged. New evidence suggests that Pakistan may have lowered the nuclear threshold by closing the perceived gaps in its nuclear doctrine. In a recent interview with Italian nuclear scientists from the Landau Network, General Khalid Kidwai, the head of Pakistan’s Strategic Plans Division declared that Pakistan would consider nuclear use in the face of any Indian attempt to either strangle Pakistan’s economy or push Pakistan into political destabilization. The above scenarios not only add to the conditions originally articulated by Sattar, Shahi, and Khan in October 1999, but they also expand the concept of threats to Pakistan’s national existence from a military-spatial matrix to the economic-political. 87

Despite the evolving Indo-Pakistani doctrinal dialectic, there has been virtually no change in the rhetoric emanating from New Delhi. The Vajpayee government continues to maintain that all options, including military options, remain open.88 New Delhi’s nonchalance might be part of an Indian strategy of nuclear brinksmanship. Alternatively, the Vajpayee government may presume that Pakistan would be unlikely to escalate the war due to fears that the United States might destroy its arsenal to avoid the risks of a nuclear war in South Asia. Likewise, India’s national security managers may have also accurately calculated that the United States would intervene to either terminate or limit any shooting war between India and Pakistan to safeguard its strategic objectives in Afghanistan.

India’s current belligerence stands in sharp contrast to the early and mid-1990s when New Delhi was clearly hesitant to escalate the conflict in Kashmir. At the time, Indian elites feared that an Indo-Pakistani war would internationalize the Kashmir dispute and generate pressures on India to cap or roll back its nuclear and missile programs. In the present environment, however, the Vajpayee government’s growing strategic partnership with the United States and relative success in persuading Washington to accept its case for a minimal deterrent have provided the Indian leadership with the added confidence that the diplomatic repercussions of a limited conventional war with Pakistan can be kept within tolerable limits.

Why a High-Intensity Conventional War or Escalation to the Nuclear Level Are Unlikely

Although there is no assurance that a limited conventional war can be kept limited once initiated, several political and military reasons provide some reassurance that India and Pakistan are unlikely to fight a high-intensity conventional or nuclear war.

A high-intensity conventional war with Pakistan would have been more likely had India’s political goals been: (1) to ensure the defeat and destruction of the Pakistan’s military; and (2) the dismantlement of the Pakistani state into smaller and more manageable units. Although some hardline elements within India’s strategic establishment view such outcomes as the prerequisite for peace in South Asia, India’s current leadership has more limited objectives; and limited objectives imply limited means.89

The Indian leadership’s political objective is to end the low-intensity war in Kashmir. From India’s point of view, the easiest way of achieving this objective would be through the instrument of the Pakistani state itself. The end to what the Indian government describes as
“cross border terrorism,” would be the key to finding a political solution for Kashmir acceptable to the Indian government, Kashmir’s alienated Muslims, and eventually Pakistan. The consensus in New Delhi, as articulated by Prime Minister Vajpayee during his visit to Lahore in February 1999, is to seek some form of a modus vivendi with Islamabad as a precursor to achieving peace, stability, and security in South Asia.

The Musharraf regime’s decisive break with Islamic fundamentalism and decision to dismantle the Jihadi infrastructure and culture in Pakistan has also provided the Indian leadership with an added reason to avoid large-scale war in the near term. A moderate Islamic Pakistan at peace with itself and at peace with its neighbors would be ideal in New Delhi’s view. Despite some rhetorical assertions in India that President’s Musharraf’s reforms are cosmetic, the emerging consensus within and outside the Indian government is that Pakistan’s domestic reforms are path-breaking and might eventually create the conditions for a final peace settlement on Kashmir.

Other constraints stem from the Bush administration’s emphasis that it takes President Musharraf’s reform agenda very seriously. In Washington’s view, the Musharraf regime’s policies not only mark a seminal change in Pakistani politics, but also set an example for the rest of the Islamic world. A moderate Islamic Pakistan is now a top foreign policy priority for the United States in South Asia; it is also important for Washington to line up moderate Islamic states such as Pakistan and Turkey on its side in the war against Islamic fundamentalism. There is thus considerable pressure on India not to overload the Bush administration’s anti-terrorism agenda. The Vajpayee government is sorely cognizant of the fact that U.S. strategic interests do not in every instance converge with New Delhi’s and any reckless action on India’s part could throw a wrench in the emerging strategic relationship between the two countries.

An equally significant though sometimes overlooked restraining factor is that India has a significant interest in ensuring the destruction of the Taliban and Al Qaeda networks in Afghanistan. Under the Taliban, Afghanistan had become a safe space for the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies to train and arm different Kashmiri militant groups waging war in India. Indian intelligence agencies have long alleged that Al Qaeda provided support to the Kashmiri separatists. Although the Taliban and Al Qaeda have been dislodged from power, they have not been entirely defeated. Remnants of these forces continue to pose a considerable threat to any post-Taliban dispensation in Afghanistan. Rooting out the Taliban leaders and their Al Qaeda allies will probably require sustained U.S. military operations over the next several months. In this regard, a large-scale Indo-Pakistani war would undermine India’s geopolitical objectives in Afghanistan in two ways. First, it will force the relocation of Pakistani military forces currently deployed to police the Afghan border to interdict remnants of the fleeing Al Qaeda forces, to the Indian border. Second, a general war would also probably result in the evacuation or eviction of U.S. military forces currently stationed in Pakistan. Since both factors would adversely affect U.S. efforts to bring the Afghan campaign to a successful closure, New Delhi will have to make a careful trade between its competing geopolitical objectives in Afghanistan and Kashmir before resorting to war.

Political objectives apart, a high-intensity war is also not a feasible option for military reasons. New Delhi simply does not have sufficient military superiority to wage a decisive conventional war against Pakistan. Contrary to media reports attesting to India’s
conventional preponderance, India's advantages are more apparent than real. Several Indian and Pakistani military analysts have argued that both Indian and Pakistani armed forces are almost evenly matched. Despite, India's overwhelming lead in numbers, an Indian offensive is likely to be impeded by problems related to the poor quality of equipment, limited spares, maintenance, and logistic deficiencies. The problems likely to be exacerbated in the event external suppliers (Russia, France, Britain and the United States) impose a military embargo. Furthermore, since both India and Pakistan have completed mobilization, there is little likelihood of a decisive breakthrough on the battlefield through the element of surprise. Both militaries have extensively war-gamed potential attacks and counterattacks. If the past is any indicator, a limited conventional war is likely to witness short and inconclusive battles with relatively few territorial gains and losses along the border.

The likelihood of a high-intensity conventional war due to inadvertence or miscalculation would be high in the event India undertook or expanded symbolic military strikes to territories beyond Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. Some of the offices and related facilities of militant Islamic groups such as the LeT and JeM are located in Pakistan’s Punjab and Sindh provinces. Strikes against such targets in the Pakistani heartland would carry the risks of misperception and inadvertent crisis escalation. However, there are several reasons why the Indian government is unlikely to adopt such a high-risk approach in the present crisis. Chief among them is the Indian military’s skepticism of the value of such symbolic attacks. From the Indian military's standpoint, not only do the armed services lack the technical and organizational capability to undertake such operations, but the destruction of a few symbolic targets would do little to weaken the militant groups fighting the Indian security agencies in Kashmir. An Indian military attack might have the unintended consequence of weakening President Musharraf, and forcing the military regime to suspend its crackdown on militant Islamic groups. Worse, India would probably end up being branded as the aggressor state by the international community and stand accused of not giving Islamabad sufficient political room for maneuver.

Furthermore, despite the emerging consensus that a strategic space where a limited conventional war could be fought successfully probably exists, Indian leaders are acutely aware of the risks and dangers of nuclear escalation. From the early 1990s, successive Indian governments have walked a fine line so as not to force the Pakistani leadership into a corner where a nuclear threat becomes the only viable exit strategy. The degree of the Indian government's cautiousness is evident from the fact that India has been effectively deterred from changing the terms of the low-intensity war in Kashmir for nearly 12 years. Although Indian leaders have lately become more adventurous, they are loath to cross any red line that could elicit a panic response from Islamabad. The sensitivity of the Indian political leaders in this regard was recently demonstrated when the prime minister's office (PMO) swiftly intervened to relieve the commander of the army's second strike corps, Lt. General Vij, of his command. The PMO's action is rumored to have been prompted by the discovery that Vij may have exceeded his authority by deploying Indian armored strike formations in a manner far more threatening than mandated by the political leadership.

Ironically, in the multi-level chess game unfolding in South Asia, the U.S. campaign in Afghanistan and large-scale military deployments in the region have provided cover for the Indian government to act more boldly. India's resort to coercive diplomacy is meant to exploit the Bush administration's fears that an Indo-Pakistani war could come at the expense
of U.S. strategic objectives in Afghanistan. New Delhi's objective is to exert pressure on Washington to lean on Islamabad to end support for the insurgents in Kashmir. Likewise, U.S. military presence in Pakistan also ensures that Washington could be expected to undertake preventive diplomacy to forestall an Indo-Pakistani war, failing which, to ensure that a shooting war is either terminated or kept limited through UN intervention.

**Conclusion:**

The threat of war in South Asia now seems less likely than it appeared a few months ago. There are indications that the Indian military, which was on wartime alert since December 2001, has been ordered to stand down.\[100\] President Musharraf has also publicly suggested that third party mediation might help defuse the crisis by the summer of 2002.\[101\]

To a limited extent, India's strategy of coercive diplomacy has proved successful. The threat of war and pressure from the international community led by the United States has forced the Musharraf regime to crack down on militant Islam within Pakistan. Islamabad has not only banned Jihadi groups such as the LeT and JeM, but also ordered the ISI to disband its Kashmir and Afghan divisions, which were responsible for waging low-intensity war in both regions during the 1990s.\[102\] In another bid to assuage Indian concerns, Pakistan has also offered to negotiate an extradition treaty and discuss the issue of the 20 individuals wanted for terrorist and other crimes in India.\[103\]

However, the precise extent of changes in Pakistan's Kashmir policy remains unclear. The Pakistani government insists that Kashmir remains the central sticking point and that it cannot normalize relations with New Delhi unless the Kashmir issue is resolved, preferably through third-party mediation.\[104\] President Musharraf has publicly stated that his government will henceforth extend only moral and political support to Kashmiri insurgent groups indigenous to the region.\[105\] However, several Indian analysts remain skeptical of Musharraf's claims and believe that Islamabad has only changed the scale and depth of its cross border insurgency operations without abandoning any of the fundamental precepts of its Kashmir policy.

Indian government spokespersons from the prime minister downwards have indicated on several occasions that it is too early for India to assess whether Pakistan has indeed reduced support for “cross border terrorism.” The latter assessment will have to wait until the summer of 2002 when the retreating snows open up mountain passes, and the terrain becomes more conducive for infiltration and exfiltration operations.\[106\] Indian government sources insist that so far there has been little positive change in Pakistan’s policies. Islamabad’s refusal to handover the 20 individuals accused of committing terrorist and other crimes in India also remains a sore point in New Delhi. India has hinted that the handover of even seven to 10 individuals on that list and a reduction in militant operations in Kashmir by 30 to 50 percent would suffice to resume a dialogue with Pakistan.\[107\] But unless Pakistan complies with Indian demands unconditionally, the Indian military will remain mobilized on the border.\[108\]

The Indo-Pakistani crisis thus remains at a dangerous impasse. Although the threat of a limited conventional war in the region has receded, it has not disappeared entirely. At
present, it appears unlikely that New Delhi will go beyond its current policy of coercive diplomacy to achieve strategic objectives in Kashmir. But unlike the early and mid-1990s, when New Delhi was more cautious and hesitant to transform the terms of the low-intensity war in Kashmir, the present Indian leadership is less risk-averse to initiating limited conventional operations and testing Pakistan’s nuclear resolve over Kashmir.


10 See, “Chapters 1, 2, & 3,” From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report.


15 Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia.


18 This was stated by President Musharraf in his address to the Pakistani people on 19 September 2001. See, “Text of Musharraf’s speech,” Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 19 September 2001, http://www.hindustantimes.com.


28 “No Commitment to Pak. on Kashmir: Blackwill,” Hindu (Chennai).


49 Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia.


53 Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia.


68 This is evident from comments made by India’s Minister for Information & Broadcasting Sushma Swaraj in Islamabad. See B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Pak. must address India’s concerns,” Hindu (Chennai), 11 March 2002, [http://www.hinduonnet.com](http://www.hinduonnet.com).
“Army full prepared for war,” Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 11 January 2002,


C. Raja Mohan, “Jaswant cautions Pak.,” Hindu (Chennai).


Ibid.


According to India’s finance minister Yashwant Sinha, India has been spending 4 billion rupees per month (approximately $83 million) since December 2001 to support military mobilization. These figures can be used to roughly estimate the cost of military mobilization for Pakistan. See, Rahul Bedi, “No substantial rise for Indian defense budget,” Jane’s Defense Weekly, 6 March 2002, p.2.


Parul Chandra, “India can breach Indus Waters Treaty to flood Pakistan.”


89 For an example of the hardliners’ perspective, see, Brahma Chellaney, “This war can transform strategic landscape,” Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 21 September 2001, http://www.hindustantimes.com.


91 See the text of the “Lahore Declaration” signed between Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and Atal Bihari Vajpayee on 21 February 1999; also see, “Memorandum of Understanding” signed on the same date by the respective foreign secretaries of both countries. The texts of both agreements can be accessed at the Indian Ministry of External Affairs’ website at: http://meadev.nic.in/govt/lahore.htm.


B. Muralidhar Reddy, “Pak. must address India’s concerns.”