

Opinion

To Push a Kashmir Settlement, Lean on Pakistan

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Despite a recent upsurge of fighting in Kashmir after the collapse of a hopeful peace initiative, there is a growing opportunity for an internationally supported resumption of peace talks. Kashmiri sentiment is increasingly receptive to negotiations with India. But the military regime in Pakistan, seeking to keep New Delhi on the defensive, has stepped up military aid inputs to Kashmir. The rare chance for peace now opening up may well be lost unless the United States and other international donors can get Pakistan to cooperate by using their powerful economic aid leverage.

Evidence is multiplying that Islamic extremists in the Islamabad regime sabotaged the July peace overture by a leading Pakistani-supported Kashmiri insurgent group, Hizbul Mujahidin. Without consulting Islamabad, Hizbul leaders offered to negotiate a cease-fire with India. Their motive was to get a competitive advantage over rival insurgent groups that have been receiving greater support from Pakistani intelligence agencies. In contrast to Hizbul, which is made up mainly of Kashmiris, many of the groups most favored by Pakistan consist of Afghans, Algerians and other imported Islamic fighters.

Caught by surprise when India accepted the offer, Islamabad pressured Hizbul to make its offer contingent on Pakistan's participation in the proposed talks. This would have broadened the agenda to cover Kashmir's long-term future, and was predictably rejected by India, where hard-liners and moderates are at odds over settlement terms.

At some point in a meaningful peace process, Pakistan would have to be involved. But the immediate priority is a cease-fire that would contain in the vicious cycle of Kashmiri attacks and Indian reprisals in which both sides are committing unspeakable atrocities against civilians. Negotiating the terms of a cease-fire requires a direct dialogue between the combatants that would eventually embrace all of the leading Kashmiri insurgent factions.

Pakistani policy toward Kashmir is controlled by Islamic extremist groups with a hatred of India. Pervez Musharraf, the front man for the military regime, no longer even makes a pretense of cracking down on the extremists, who have powerful sympathizers among five of the generals in his inner circle. Far from reining them in, he has been trying to appease the extremists in order to remain in power.

The United States is reluctant to use its economic aid leverage to pressure Pakistan for more conciliatory policies toward Kashmir. Washington fears that this might precipitate a collapse of the sagging Pakistani economy. Withholding aid would undermine General Musharraf; it is argued, inviting a coup by Islamic extremist generals who would further escalate the fighting in Kashmir. But Islamic extremists already control Pakistani policy in Kashmir. By holding back aid,

the United States and other aid donors would strengthen, not weaken General Musharraf's ability to pursue more restrained policies.

The IMF is uncertain whether to proceed with a three-year, \$2 billion financial rescue package urgently sought by Islamabad, starting with a first installment of \$750 million this fall. General Musharraf has failed to meet economic criteria for the package, notably a major expansion in tax collections.

Nevertheless, the United States and other aid donors appear ready to give Pakistan the benefit of the doubt in judging whether it should get IMF aid. Similarly, they are planning to reschedule large debt repayments, including two in September, \$300 million to international agencies and \$175 million to the United States.

This lenient treatment makes no sense in the context of the deepening crisis in Kashmir. The international donors should make clear that they will not extend new aid or roll over existing debts until Islamabad stops military aid inputs to Kashmir and encourages a resumption of cease-fire talks.

India would have to be much more responsive to Kashmiri demands for autonomy in order to create a favorable atmosphere for a stable cease-fire. Even the Indian-installed chief minister of Kashmir, Farooq Abdullah, has been pushing demands for autonomy. Kashmir would remain within the Indian constitutional and defense framework under the Abdullah plan, but with a degree of autonomy bordering on independence. Pakistan would keep the portion of Kashmir that it has ruled since the division of the state after the first India-Pakistan war in 1947.

This is the only realistic basis for a long-term settlement, and one that most Kashmiris on both sides increasingly seem to favor.

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