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Issue Brief

Trump: Breaking the Logjam on the Kashmir Dispute

May 24, 2017

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Since the Indo-Pak partition, the political status of the state of Kashmir has been contested by both Pakistan and India and it still remains disputed. The recent surge in the Kashmiri youth and frequent shelling at the Line



of Control is perturbing not only for the region, but also for the international community as the two nuclear states has already fought two major wars including numerous border skirmishes and military standoffs. The US is in a position to influence both India and Pakistan. It has strong bilateral ties with both the countries and its recent apparent eagerness to mediate a peaceful solution on the Kashmir dispute is a breath of fresh air.

The US in the past, has time and again voiced its concerns regarding the Kashmir dispute, yet chose to stay out of it as a mediator, calling it India's internal issue. It maintained the narrative that the pace, scope and character of India-Pakistan dialogue on Kashmir is for those two countries to determine.¹ However, with the new Trump administration in office, the US involvement in this regard seems to be taking a new turn.

Before taking over the office as President, Donald Trump sporadically remarked that, if necessary he would get India and Pakistan getting along, and that it would be a tremendous achievement, if they wanted me to, I would love to be the mediator or arbitrator². In a recent statement, the US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said that it's absolutely right that this (Trump) administration is concerned about

¹ US refuses to link Kashmir issue with terrorism, Dawn News, Aug 13, 2013, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1035453/us-refuses-to-link-kashmir-issue-with-terrorism>

² Ready to play mediator between Pakistan, India: Trump, October 16, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1200028/ready-play-mediator-pakistan-india-trump/>

the relationship between India and Pakistan and very much wants to see how we de-escalate any sort of conflict going forward.”³

Nonetheless, like many other foreign policy issues, the US at the moment lacks clarity on resolving the outstanding issues, including Kashmir, between India and Pakistan. The only way one can trace certain contours is by certain statements issued by the officials in the Trump Administration. On the other hand, keeping in mind the unpredictable nature of Donald Trump, it will be naïve to hinge on the idea of US mediation on the issue about which India is extremely parsimonious. Moreover, there is little the US can do if India refuses to come on the table, which seems to be the case at the moment.

Pakistan has always remained open and steadfast to talks and mediation with India on all outstanding issues including the Kashmir dispute. India, on the other hands, remains stiff and does not agree to a third party mediation approach, whether by the US or any other international organization.

India’s static position on the issue of Kashmir is neither sustainable nor productive; it is only causing an atmosphere of uncertainty in the region. This attitude of India has led to numerous violations by it on the Line of Control, resulting in deaths and severe damage on the Pakistani side.

Keeping in mind the growing intensity of the Kashmir dispute, it is imperative that Pakistan and India resume their composite dialogue process. Simultaneously, the Trump Administration should strive to engage the top leadership in both the countries for talks to settle the decades old dispute amicably, to avoid any war like scenario in the future. If India refuses to do so, Washington and the international community together, should push India to recommence the Track II political process with Pakistan more vigilantly, if not a direct bilateral initiative, to end the chaos in Kashmir which has cost lives of many innocent. Furthermore, the process will be more substantial and meaningful if it also involves representation from Kashmir as well. Another approach that can be looked at to resolve the issue is through a multilateral method, to involve not only the US, but also China, as it shares border with India and will be directly affected by a fallout between the two countries. Equally, it is important for Pakistan and India to approach this issue not as a disputed territory, but as a human right crisis and sort out a short as well as a long-term solution.

³ US to mediate between Pakistan and India over Kashmir issue, The Express Tribune, April 4, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1373860/us-mediate-pakistan-india-kashmir-issue>