

IT IS NOT JUST KASHMIR, IT IS PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The Indian Government's unlawful steps on August 5, 2019 to reoccupy, bifurcate, annex and colonise the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), have been rejected by the state's people and excoriated by the international community. A punitive security lockdown has exacerbated human rights crisis in IOJK. India's threats and brinkmanship have pushed the region to the brink of a nuclear war. Pakistan reacted vigorously at the national and international levels. In pursuance of its fascist Hindutva doctrine, the BJP has threatened to "retake" Azad Kashmir, attack and disintegrate Pakistan and persecute India's Muslim population. In view of the situation, Pakistan faces a new challenge and opportunity to defend the rights of the people of the IOJK and find a just solution of the Kashmir dispute. It is also an opportune time for Pakistan to redesign its strategic parameters to safeguard its own sovereignty and territorial integrity and emerge as a leading military and economic power in the region and beyond.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir, Occupation, Colonisation, International Law, World Reaction, Pakistan's Reaction, Appeasement, Hindutva, Nuclear War, Diaspora, Pakistan's Policy Reset.

Introduction

India declared war on the Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) on August 5, 2019. There were already 700,000 India troops deployed in the occupied state; and in the preceding weeks additional 180,000 paramilitary forces, including a Rapid Action Force, were rushed to the territory. Hindu pilgrims and tourists were asked to leave the region. All schools, colleges and academic institutions were closed down. With these preparations, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government invaded the IOJK, re-occupied it and laid a brutal, long and asphyxiating military siege to the territory. The BJP stripped the 'state' of its

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symbols of cosmetic autonomy: a separate flag, an assembly, a constitution; and rescinded an article of the Indian constitution that gave the people their privileged rights to education, employment, resistance and acquisition of property.

The Indian forces invaded, re-occupied, bifurcated and colonised the territory. In the execution of this nefarious plot, no attempt had been made to seek the consent of the Kashmiri people. The act was performed with stealth. This was an ambush to disenfranchise 14 million people *en masse*, which in fact was the first and worst instance of this kind in the 21st century.

The BJP-led government made its intention known to divide the big chunk of the state under its occupation and settle Hindus from all over India in its divided parts in order to turn its Muslim majority to a minority. Then, on October 31, 2019, it went on to separate Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir and designated the two territories as Union Territories - like Chandigarh and Puducherry - that would be governed by the Federal Government. The status of the union territories is not more than municipalities, which are ruled directly by the central government. India went one step further. On October 31, it issued fake maps to include Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir in the so-called union territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir, respectively. These are the most blatant examples of “settler colonialism” and irredentism. India has also publicly admitted that it intends to replicate Israeli illegal settlements on the lines of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Indian unilateral actions violate the principle of *uti possidetis juris*; the internal and external boundaries of states emerging from decolonisation will remain unchanged. In case of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, this is a double imperative because its fate has not yet been decided by its people.

The steps that India took constitute war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. They violate the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir, passed from 1948 to 1957, that had declared the entire state of Jammu and Kashmir as disputed, whose future had to be determined by the people of the state through a UN-supervised referendum.

Rule 130 of the customary International Humanitarian Law prohibits states from deporting or transferring parts of a civilian population into a territory they occupy. Such illicit transfers, which India has announced to change the demographic composition of IOJK, contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention, Additional Protocol I, the Statute of the International Criminal Court, UN Security Council resolutions 446, 452, 465, 476 and 667, and the recommendations of the

Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights Dimensions of Population Transfer, including the Implantation of Settlers and Settlements.

The Indian government also tweaked and twisted its own constitution to revoke Article 370. The article could not have been repealed without the consent of the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly, which was dissolved in 1957 thus making this article a permanent part of the Indian Constitution; or without the consent of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly/Government, which had ceased to exist in June 2018. At the time of the repeal of Article 370, the IOJK was under the President's rule and the BJP government with a sleight of hand amended Article 367, which pertains to the interpretation of the Constitution. The modifications in this article made two significant changes: (1) reference to the Government [of Jammu and Kashmir] shall be construed as including references to the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir; and (2) the 'Constituent Assembly of the State' will be understood to mean 'Legislative Assembly of the State'. Thus, the path was cleared for a constitutional fraud and use of unfettered force in IOJK.

Leave aside the fine points of international law that India has flagrantly trampled. On August 5, India imposed a punitive security lockdown and communication blockade on the besieged people of IOJK. An information blackout reinforces a catch-all gag order. Anybody who says that the situation in IOJK is not normal runs the risk of being dubbed as traitor. In their zeal to penalise Kashmiris collectively, the occupation forces have cast aside all norms. The broad sweep of the draconian laws - the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Public Safety Act - and absence of any judicial intercession have empowered the occupation forces to detain the entire political leadership which includes the Hurriyet leaders, collaborationists and political activists. The occupation forces' chosen targets are young boys who are picked up randomly to spread terror. The National Federation of Indian Women, after a visit to IOJK despite restrictions, established that 13,000 young men and boys between the ages of 13 and 28 had been detained and had in fact been forcibly disappeared.¹ The real number of detainees is much more. These detainees have been moved to the jails in northern India, without any charge, where they are being tortured. Kashmiri women, because of their fair skin, have been fetishised and the followers of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are projecting them as "spoils of war" because India has "conquered" Kashmir.

The BJP's contention is that whatever it has done in IOJK is lawful, the situation post-August 5 is normal and the measures taken will usher in an era of prosperity and stability. This reminds us of Martin Luther King's words on Hitler's

actions: "We should never forget that everything Adolph Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal". In a massive campaign, the BJP and RSS are weaponising and instrumentalising the exodus of the Pandits from Kashmir in 1990s, choreographed at that time by the Governor, to justify establishment of illegal settlements in Jammu and Kashmir and to punish Kashmiris.

What is evident is that through these brazen actions India is seeking exceptionalism for itself as an emerging world power. Its outrageous invasion and occupation of a disputed territory is designed to demonstrate that it is above the international rule of law and has operated under the assumption that the most powerful nations, inside and outside the UN Security Council, will acquiesce in India's perilous expedition in IOJK, though this is bound to have dire consequences.

Until recently, the trope of exceptionalism was reserved for the United States, for instance, as Madeleine Albright's "indispensable nation" or Ronald Reagan's a "shining city on the hill". The American proponents projected their nation's exceptionalism as a positive force, though detractors disagreed. On the contrary, the BJP hardliners, which have lately touted India as a competitor of the US, have sought endorsement of their war crimes and evil deeds in Gujarat, brutalisation in IOJK, persecution of 200 million Muslims and other minorities in India, and neo-Fascist Hindutva which advocates Hindu exclusivism, Xenophobia, intolerance and violence. Since the ascendancy of Narendra Modi, India has been proclaiming its 'exceptionalism' and 'strategic autonomy', though many would look askance at such a self-adulatory portrayal. This quest for exceptionalism, without a doubt, undermines the world order which was fashioned after World War II and is symbolised by the United Nations.

Emboldened by its hubris, India is trying to subjugate the people of IOJK through the use of force and threaten Pakistan with aggression and annihilation. The Indian Defence Minister has threatened to "retake" Azad Kashmir Kashmir and talked about disintegration of Pakistan. A senior RSS leader, Indresh Kumar, has stated "Before 1947, Pakistan was not on the world map, I believe it will not be on the world map again. And, it can so happen that we will celebrate Bapu Jayanti and Hindi Diwas in Lahore, do you agree?"². This is not empty rant; this is what the RSS and BJP are preparing for. The BJP knows full well that the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) never belonged to India even before India's occupation of the remaining part of the state. AJK was liberated by its valiant people in a military

campaign from June to October 1947. Similarly, Gilgit-Baltistan was liberated by its own people in November 1947. Later, Azad Kashmir forces, in collaboration with the tribals from Pakistan and Pakistan army, repulsed Indian operations to capture these territories. Today, both AJK and G-B form a strong defensive bulwark of Pakistan.

The same Defence Minister has said that India could revise its *No First Use* nuclear doctrine to pave the way for attacking Pakistan with nuclear weapons *first*; and Modi in April 2019 infamously bragged that he would wipe Pakistan out with the “mother of nuclear bombs.”³

A nuclear war by India would not just be directed against Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan; it would impact the region and the globe at large. Meanwhile, Modi has the dubious distinction of being the only head of government of a nuclear weapon state who has so irresponsibly indulged in nuclear sabre-rattling. Seeking exceptionalism or sheer tomfoolery?

Nuclear experts are taking nuclear signalling seriously. *Science Advances* in its October 2019 issue made the following chilling assessment:

“Pakistan and India may have 400 to 500 nuclear weapons by 2025 with yields from tested 12- to 45-kt values to a few hundred kilotons. If India uses 100 strategic weapons to attack urban centers and Pakistan uses 150, fatalities could reach 50 to 125 million people, and nuclear-ignited fires could release 16 to 36 Tg of black carbon in smoke, depending on yield. The smoke will rise into the upper troposphere, be self-lofted into the stratosphere, and spread globally within weeks. Surface sunlight will decline by 20 to 35%, cooling the global surface by 2° to 5°C and reducing precipitation by 15 to 30%, with larger regional impacts. Recovery takes more than 10 years. Net primary productivity declines 15 to 30% on land and 5 to 15% in oceans threatening mass starvation and additional worldwide collateral fatalities.”⁴

Experts have ruled out a so-called ‘limited nuclear war’ between India and Pakistan. If such a war takes place it would cause devastation all around the world. The range of destruction would include radioactive fallout, slow, painful deaths of hundreds of millions of people as a result of radiation, extreme weather patterns, firestorms, plummeting temperatures, failing crops, refugee outflows and global recession.⁵ This all sounds like an apocalypse.

What is next on India’s anti-Pakistan agenda? A water war? India has publicly stated that it could revoke the Indus Water Treaty between India and

Pakistan and divert the waters from the rivers allocated to Pakistan under the treaty.

In our times, however, a threat even more lethal than the nuclear Sword of Damocles is the rise of *Hindutva*, which may well become a trigger for a nuclear Armageddon. From whichever angle you look at the violent, warped doctrine of *Hindutva*, there is nothing benign about it, not even for its own proponents and followers. Even its most neutral definition characterises it as an ideology seeking the hegemony and supremacy of Hinduism or a Hindu way of life. If it were a cultist *idée fixe* nobody would give a second thought to it. But it is in fact a political religion that is patently Islamophobic and Christianophobic; and it endorses open and disguised violence to achieve its objectives. What's more, the BJP and its ideological affiliates and muscleman entities - the RSS, Bajrang Dal, Vishva Hindu Parishad and Shiv Sena - all have formed a communion of communal hatred and especially designated IOJK, AJK, Pakistan and Indian Muslims in India as objects of their wrath.

So a war, which is simultaneously civilisational, ideological, military, political and economic, has been imposed on Pakistan. Already inside its territory, Pakistan is fighting India-sponsored proxy wars and terrorism, as well as hybrid warfare. Pakistan has no choice but to respond to these hostile acts in self-defense. This past year, 2019, has been the worst year for more than half a million people of AJK living along the Line of Control (LoC) with 61 civilians killed, nearly 300 critically injured and disabled, infrastructure destroyed. After several years, Indian forces also used banned cluster munition, which claimed children's lives.

For the rest of the world, *Hindutva* is a distant menace; for Pakistan and Kashmiris an existential threat. The BJP is secure in the belief that its pivot to the rising tide of the ethnic, supremacist nationalism in the West will underwrite its bestiality and depredations in IOJK and its anti-Muslim drive in India. This evil plot must not be allowed to succeed.

All is not dark. China, Turkey, Malaysia, Iran, Germany, Sweden, Finland and many other nations have courageously spoken up for the Kashmiris and called out India for its precipitate and oppressive actions in Kashmir. For the first time in decades, the taboo that India cannot be held accountable for its heinous crimes in IOJK has been broken by the mainstream international media, reputable parliamentarians and human rights defenders of the US, Europe and South East Asia. The US Congress has held two public hearings and a resolution on the

situation in Kashmir has been tabled in the House of Representatives. The British and European Parliaments have held plenary debates to express their grave concern about the situation in Kashmir; and the French Parliament convened its first ever conference on the human rights and humanitarian conditions in the occupied state. The British Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of European Parliament (MEPs) have been most vocal. In the US, scores of Republican and Democratic senators and congressmen have expressed their indignation over India's conduct in IOJK through compelling statements and communications and some of them have urged the US President to intervene.

In September 2019, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) issued a strongly-worded communique demanding that India retrocede the territory of IOJK to its people, reverse the illegal steps it took on August 5 and stop human rights violations in the territory; and that the UN play its role to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with its own resolutions. The OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) has held a special session on Kashmir.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad raised the issue at the UN General Assembly with clarity and conviction. While President Erdogan called for diplomacy to resolve the issue, Prime Minister Mahathir termed Indian action in IOJK as invasion and occupation and appealed to all to respect the UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir. India threatened both countries with sanctions but their leaders stood their ground. Seriously alarmed at the situation in IOJK, on August 16, 2019, China, despite India's aggressive lobbying, at the request of Pakistan, facilitated a meeting of the UN Security Council on Kashmir, which took place after a lapse of fifty years. A second meeting in December 2019, again facilitated by China, was postponed because the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was apparently not "ready" with its report. On August 21, expressing concern about the situation in Kashmir, the Iranian supreme leader Imam Khamenei called on India to "adopt a just policy towards the noble people of Kashmir and prevent the oppression & bullying of Muslims in this region"⁶.

Most importantly, in the world media, Kashmir gained unprecedented visibility and attracted worldwide condemnation for the use of excessive force, torture and telecommunications blockade imposed by Indian forces. The Indian chokehold on the world media was loosened. Shocked by India's ruthless offensive, reminiscent of Hitler's invasions of Germany's neighbouring countries

during the Second World War and India's own swift occupation and annexation of the IOJK in 1947, leading newspapers and TV networks reacted censoriously heaping opprobrium on India. Media outlets highlighted the plight of the besieged Kashmiris, their aspirations for freedom and self-determination, and their rejection of Indian occupation; and decried Hindutva. The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, LA Times, Bloomberg, The Guardian, Financial Times, Global Times (China) - all wrote scathing editorials, some of them by the full body of their editorial boards. Story after story by news agencies - Reuters, AP and AFP - as well as BBC, Al Jazeera, TRT, CNN and others excoriated India, and despite severe restrictions inside IOJK managed to get footage on torture, intimidation and miserable life under occupation. Indian officials' spiel and fake stories planted by the pro-Government vendors and embedded journalists were dismissed. The New Yorker's Dexter Filkins, who managed to sneak into IOJK with the help of Indian journalist Rana Ayyub, published a macabre account of the Gujarat massacres in 2002 under the supervision of Narendra Modi, and linked it to the impending fresh genocide and pogroms in IOJK.⁷ Moreover, themes of Kashmir as a nuclear flashpoint, the most dangerous place on earth, one of the most militarised zones in the world, and a tripartite dispute between Pakistan, India and Kashmiris - were reinforced in editorials and reporting. The emphasis was on ending the curfew, not reversing the illegal steps India had taken. Exhortations for a definitive solution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute were scant.

The Indian opposition parties, some regional parties, civil society and human rights organisations from across the country opposed and protested against the revocation of Articles 370 and 35 A, as well as the inhuman and degrading treatment to which the Kashmiris were being subjected. There was a genuine outpouring of sympathy for Kashmiris in these circles, though their political paradigm too did not brook any form of self-determination beyond the limited autonomy that was given under Article 370. Some rights' organisations took grave risk to gather authentic information about oppression by visiting IOJK. The Congress Party, which itself has soiled record on Kashmir, was obviously trying to get political mileage out of this crisis, while some of its party members genuinely believed that the delicate equilibrium they had worked out on Kashmir would unravel because of the BJP's rash decisions. The popular reaction in India after August 5 was much larger in volume and intensity than the principled positions that used to be taken by politicians like P. Chidambaram and Yashwant Sinha or the lone voices of intellectuals like Arundhati Roy and Pankaj Mishra. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen also castigated the Modi-led government for revoking "special status" of Jammu and Kashmir and splitting it into two Union Territories

and added that “it should have been up to Kashmiris to decide on the rights of land use in the state as it was their land...”.⁸

The most disappointing response in the aftermath of August 5 was the conduct of the UN Security Council and most powerful nations on earth outside the Council. They were either consciously reticent or ambivalent in their statements on Kashmir. President Trump’s offer of mediation, made during Pakistan Prime Minister’s visit to Washington in July 2019, had kicked off euphoria in Pakistan and furore in India, but ultimately the offer turned out to be a lackadaisical initiative. Despite calls from many British MPs, the UK, hugely distracted by Brexit, only managed to say that it was “following the developments closely and support[s] calls for the situation to remain calm.”⁹ The UN Secretary General counselled “maximum restraint”; and the UN Security Council did not convene a meeting of the Council on its own in accordance of the provisions of the Charter. These lukewarm but carefully crafted responses conformed to the pattern of *appeasement* of India because of Washington’s strong alliance with India and the Western countries’ growing economic and strategic ties with Delhi. The eerie similarity of Modi’s action in IOJK with the 1938 Munich Agreement, which paved the way for Hitler’s land grab of Czechoslovakia and Poland, was striking. Little thought was given to the fact that this kind of appeasement of a rising supremacist power could be as dangerous as it was in the last century. With the moral fibre of the world order withering and international legal regime frayed, *realpolitik* prevailed.

Pakistani nation’s response to Indian aggression in IOJK was robust and the unmistakable signal was of unity and solidarity with the people of IOJK. Mass rallies were held, conferences were organised and joint resolutions were passed by the Pakistan Parliament and the AJK Assembly. Every citizen was imbued with the spirit to defend Kashmiris in IOJK by harnessing all means. The Pakistani and Kashmiri diaspora community stood for the rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and created a truly global wave for the freedom of Kashmir. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, on October 27, 2019, made a passionate appeal to the world leaders assembled at the UN General Assembly to save the people of IOJK from genocide and the world from the scourge of war. Pakistan’s Foreign Office reached out to world capitals and leaders. This international spotlight on Kashmir, combined with the media’s close scrutiny of India’s scorched earth policy in the occupied territory, was probably instrumental in staying the oppressor’s hand and thus Kashmiris were, for the time being, saved from an instant and massive carnage on the scale India had planned. But despite worldwide criticism and pressure, there

were no signs that India would reverse its course of annexation and colonisation of the disputed region. This also demonstrated the limitations of political and diplomatic endeavours in regard to the putatively intractable dispute of Jammu and Kashmir.

For India Jammu and Kashmir is *lebensraum*, a geographical space that it needs to fulfil its strategic and doctrinaire ambitions; for Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan, it is the fate of the 20 million people who will determine their own political destiny. The BJP has already unveiled its plans to uproot, dislocate, displace and even exterminate Kashmiri Muslims, as well as repopulate Hindus from India, in order to effectuate proposed demographic changes. The occupation forces are generating so much stress that Muslims in IOJK would be forced to flee, migrate and seek asylum. A fresh refugee movement across the LoC cannot be ruled out. Already, there are 40,000 refugees in AJK camps who have been coming since the Indian crackdown in 1989.

The BJP-RSS plans are canny and demonic. In one go, they would seek to delegitimise their erstwhile loyalists - Abdullahs and Muftis et al - and Hurriyet leaders and try to create a new political class through a spurious electoral mechanism in the so-called union territory of Jammu and Kashmir¹⁰. The centre would also redesign and redraw constituencies in Jammu and the Valley of Kashmir to enhance Hindu seats so as to form a government headed by a Hindu Chief Minister. The so-called West Pakistan refugees, the Hindus who migrated in 1947, will be given rights on par with the original inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir, thus further increasing the ratio of Hindu population.

Securitized Sainak colonies (of ex-servicemen) would be constructed not only in Poonch and Rajauri but also in the Valley; and work on the Pandit colonies has begun. Besides, the Statistics Act, SARFAESI¹¹ Act, development projects, industrialisation and even repair and reconstruction of Hindu temples would be used manipulatively to alter demography and induce inflow of Hindus to IOJK.

Does the preceding analysis suggest that the die has been cast and the Indian actions are irreversible? On the contrary, India's reoccupation of IOJK and its massive atrocities will have grave repercussions. The entrapped people, as of now, are fighting back through peaceful resistance and civil disobedience (Kashmiri farmers have not sold their crops of apples, walnuts and saffron worth billions of dollars; and they have curtailed business timings to deny cooperation with the occupiers). The entire territory is seething with anger like a volcano about to erupt.

The BJP-RSS agenda of communalising Indian politics by disenfranchising Muslims and other minorities, securing a decision from the Supreme Court to construct a Hindu temple on the site of the demolished Babri mosque and passing the Citizenship Amendment Act has backfired. Students and a cross-section Indian citizens are sending a clear message to the BJP and RSS that enough is enough and that they would not countenance the BJP's doctrinal overstretch without reaction.

A series of measures taken by the BJP-led government are deliberately incendiary and revisionist, which directly infringe the right to self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and threaten Pakistan's security.

Pakistan must recognise this challenge and change its national mindset in order to realise its full potential as a great, powerful and prosperous nation. This would be accomplished by working on military preparedness, fast-paced economic development, knowledge creation and knowledge economy, investment in science and new technologies, and conscious endeavours to forge national unity. There is no preferred sequential order in prioritising these goals. They all are necessary and can move ahead simultaneously, as long as they are backed by political will to aggregate the interests of the masses, because no nation can reach its destiny without assured and holistic human development.

Freedom for Kashmir cannot be won from a position of weakness. We need cutting edge conventional and strategic capabilities to deal with any regime in Delhi. Peace itself would be feasible from a position of strength, not merely through unilateral overtures. Talking about preparedness for war is not scaremongering but a realistic acknowledgement of the ground realities that a war imposed on multiple fronts has to be fought back either on the basis of parity or asymmetrically. Its bravado and bluster notwithstanding, India may not mount a conventional attack against Azad Kashmir but it would be prudent to continue to war-game such a scenario from both civilian and military angles. There is no short cut to great power stardom, while the ground is cut from under your feet. By issuing fake maps on October 31, 2019, India is flaunting its ambition to cut off direct Pakistan-China border and be a contiguous neighbour of Afghanistan and Central Asia. To some this may appear outlandish, but why take such projections lightly when the empirical evidence suggests otherwise. Military preparedness is not just the readiness of the armed forces but of the entire nation, especially youth, which at the moment constitutes 64% of the entire population or roughly 130 million-strong youth bulge.

The contours of Pakistan's foreign policy were shaped in the Cold War, which essentially remain the same. We have seen many nations walk past that era and attain unbelievable progress and prosperity. The ideological grooves have changed begging us to make adjustments. Some initial steps have already been made in that direction by engaging Russia. The time is ripe for making a shift towards pragmatism and coming out of a time warp. The needle must move forward. It goes without saying that all successful foreign policies have to be centred on economic development, and this is no rocket science if we make a determined effort to liberate our polity and economy from crony capitalism, rent-seeking and feudalism. In the recent past, our middle class has grown exponentially, but its contribution to the national exchequer and documented economy is nearly zilch, which compels us to seek external bailouts at the expense of national prestige and dignity and condemns us to a vicious cycle of chronic underdevelopment. We must astutely develop our indigenous economic sinews and seek external partnerships that will wean us off one-sided dependencies.

The scenario painted above is not pessimistic. Pakistan has reached a high threshold of nuclear capability, economic performance and educational knowhow. What it needs is a spurt towards a critical mass and high quality. This is possible.

Pakistan also needs to burnish its image and project its soft power. While Pakistan may have been deficient in these areas, one mustn't forget that a whole industry has been employed by India to tarnish Pakistan's image. BBC has reported that a global network¹² of 265 pro-Indian fake websites and think-tanks across 65 countries has been lobbying and disseminating propaganda against Pakistan, with the aim of influencing decision makers in Europe. Pakistan does not have to emulate India's fake methods; instead, it should develop and strengthen its own body of writers to craft an authentic narrative about Pakistan. Pakistan ought to proactively dispel the misperception spread by India that it is isolated diplomatically. As a pivotal state, Pakistan is fully integrated into the international system. We also need to counteract and foil India's legal manoeuvres in the UN Security Council, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) by learning and leveraging *lawfare*.

Our Kashmir policy should have both short-term goals and long-term strategy. Pakistan must acknowledge that an attack on any part of Jammu and Kashmir is an attack against its people and its sovereignty. If restraint is imperative, then it must be exercised in the form of *recessed deterrence*. The Kashmir dispute became international in 1948; it should have remained in that domain. By

bilateralising the issue, India created an illusion of a possible solution, which in their mind was maintaining the status quo. After August 5, the dispute and its story has moved back to the international arena where it belongs and where it should stay. Our success in the international forums, especially in the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council, will be directly proportionate to our perseverance and ingenuity in multilateral forums. No false sense of bonhomie, back door diplomacy, or out-of-the box franchises or third party mediation should be entertained that do not put the will of the Kashmiri people and their right to self-determination in the centre. This would not be a diplomatic stranglehold but a formula for waiting for the right moment for engagement and decision-making. Before that, unilateral, gratuitous and unsolicited concessions will undercut the rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and undermine Pakistan's sovereign interests.

Pakistan and the Kashmiris have found a new space and opportunity in the realm of communication, post-August 5, which must not be wasted at any cost. The world is relatively attentive and amenable to our point of view and Kashmiris' perspectives. To take full advantage of this opportunity, Kashmiris should be associated with the campaigns for diplomatic outreach.

Finally, we should make full use of the strengths of our diaspora community who have acquired political traction and economic clout in their new countries and act as bridge-builders *vis-a-vis* our foreign interlocutors. They can fathom depths that formal diplomacy cannot. Besides, they help us internationalise the Kashmir dispute outside the multilateral forums amongst global citizenry, Parliaments, think tanks and foreign affairs councils.

Every calamity presents a rare opportunity. The appalling actions of India on August 5, 2020 and thereafter give us our Vietnam moment. If we do not use it, we will lose it.

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