War Clouds in Kashmir

As tensions rise between India and Pakistan, the subcontinent regains its status as “the most dangerous place on earth”

By ALEX PERRY/SRINAGAR

Sometimes it seems nobody wants peace in Kashmir. When two masked gunmen dressed in Indian police uniforms gunned down Abdul Gani Lone at a rally in the leafy summer capital of Srinagar last week, the list of suspects was notable for including almost everyone. Some naturally pointed the finger at India and its secret service: for decades Lone had staunchly opposed Indian rule in Kashmir. But the 70-year-old former lawyer had modified his stance in the past two years, and that had survivors, including Lone’s son Sajjad, pinning the assassination on Pakistan, its powerful intelligence agency the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and Kashmir’s Islamic guerrillas. Sajjad, who succeeds his father in Kashmir’s most powerful separatist alliance, even wondered whether his father’s allies were involved. Lone had been evolving into that Kashmiri rarity: a man pushing for peace. Nearly everyone agrees that’s why he died.

And with his death, the clouds of war grew immediately darker. Last week in India and Pakistan—and most concentratedly in Kashmir—the talk was not of whether there will be conflict, but when and what form it will take. Since 1947 the South Asian neighbors have squabbled over the lush Himalayan foothills; and since 1989 more than 35,000 people have lost their lives in a separatist rebellion, partly fueled by Pakistan. Lone’s death followed a militant attack at an army camp in Jammu the week before that left 31 dead, and India declared it had lost patience with Pakistan’s “cross-border terrorism.” Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee told some of the 750,000 Indian troops massed with heavy artillery and short-range ballistic missiles all along the western front to prepare for a “decisive battle.” He used the same alarming phrase a day later before the civilian press. Vajpayee ordered thousands more jawans, or soldiers, to the 3,000-kilometer-long border with Pakistan and moved five warships to the Arabian Sea. Pakistan responded by pulling 4,000 men out of peacekeeping duties in Sierra Leone and stationing them along its eastern frontier. It is considering withdrawing thousands more of its soldiers from the coalition hunt for al-Qaeda fugitives on the Afghanistan border. On Saturday, it performed a provocative test of a medium-range Ghauri missile. With mutual nuclear annihilation as the ultimate escalation, the subcontinent once again regained its status, in Bill Clinton’s phrase, as “the most dangerous place on earth.”

Kashmir is the locus of that terrible peril because, for most of the players, continuing conflict works. It works for the militants, who have found an escape from grinding poverty in the gun and the cash and prestige it attracts. That’s true of both the indigenous Kashmiri militants and the “guest mujahedin” who come in from Pakistan, veterans of ISI-run training camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and former Taliban-ruled territory in Afghanistan, who subscribe to the same ideal of waging a purifying jihad.

Trouble in Kashmir also works for Pakistan. While President Pervez Musharraf publicly denounces militant incursions from his side of the border, it would be political suicide for him to denounce their aims. Nor does the Pakistani President’s rhetoric blind anyone to the memory that...
in 1999 he commanded the operation to seize strategic passes in the mountains of Kargil on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LOC). Moreover, Musharraf’s announcements of a crackdown on the militants ring more than a touch hollow. While five insurgent groups have been banned and bank accounts have been frozen, some of the arrested leaders have been freed, the bank accounts are reported to have been emptied before they were closed and the incursions and attacks inside Indian territory continue, including a December attack on Parliament in New Delhi in which 14 people died. Lately, all-out war has also become increasingly attractive to India. Vajpayee’s limping, pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is only too aware of the restorative powers of a good fight. War talk and fulminations against Muslim militancy have successfully rid India’s newspapers of reports of the excesses of the BJP’s hard-line supporters in Gujarat, where more than 1,000 Muslims have been killed in a 10-week religious pogrom. Conflict and crisis also allow India to ignore the average Kashmiri’s main complaints: the nagging injustice of Indian rule, rigged elections, rampant official corruption, police torture and murders by soldiers. And with the U.S. enthusiastically pros-}

**Questions**

1. Why are war clouds gathering in Kashmir?
2. What are the opinions of President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee?
The Kashmir Conflict: Analyzing Two Sides of a Controversy

“War Clouds in Kashmir” on pages 21 and 22 describes the escalating tensions in the disputed region of Kashmir. How evenly is military force distributed in this region? And in what ways does ongoing conflict actually benefit both India and Pakistan? Deepen your understanding of the Kashmir conflict by using facts from the article and accompanying map to fill in the spaces in the chart below. Then answer the questions at the bottom of this page.

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<tr>
<th>ISSUE</th>
<th>INDIA</th>
<th>PAKISTAN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>According to the map on page 22, how many troops does each country have in Kashmir?</td>
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<td>What steps has each nation taken to prepare for war?</td>
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<td>The writer states that “continuing conflict works” for both sides in the Kashmir conflict. In what specific ways does conflict benefit each nation?</td>
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FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING
1. Review the notes you made in the chart above. In your view, is one nation at an advantage over the other in the Kashmir conflict? Why or why not?
2. What predictions can you make about events likely to occur in Kashmir? Explain the basis for each prediction.
3. What role do you think the U.S. should play in this controversy?