

Key Determinants of US policy towards Kashmir under President George

W. Bush:

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One of the cardinal factors that distanced India from the United States during the cold war period, was the latter's policy towards Kashmir. Since foreign or third party intervention in the Kashmir issue has always been unacceptable to India, the frequent US attempts to intervene and seek a resolution of the issue naturally generated resentment in India. After the cold war ended with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1990-91, the US lost its interest in South Asia and consequently, appeasing Pakistan-its cold war ally, no longer remained its overarching concern. And, though the concern for prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons prevented the US from totally abandoning South Asia, the post-cold war world order, nevertheless, offered new opportunities to both the US and India to revisit their estranged relationship. The paper attempts to show how the US change in its Kashmir policy served as a catalyst in finally bringing a rapprochement in Indo-US relations. It argues that the US, especially under George Bush deliberately avoided to seek solution of the Kashmir issue, apart from attempting to facilitate negotiations between India and Pakistan. The policy of de-hyphenation that the Bush administration sought to pursue in relation to India and Pakistan, in effect put Kashmir out of the bounds for the US.

Introduction:

The territorial dispute over the picturesque valley of Kashmir lies at the heart of strained and hostile India Pakistan bilateral relationship. While India calls Kashmir as the integral part of the "Union of India", Pakistan has been rhetorically asserting its claim on Kashmir by calling it as the 'jugular vein of that country'. No other dispute or issue has bedeviled the relations between the two countries more than this intractable dispute over Kashmir. The dispute emerged as a result of the "*disputed accession of the Kingdom ruled by a Hindu ruler but having a Muslim majority to the Indian Union in 1947 though under difficult circumstances*"¹. Since then the two countries have fought two major wars and one limited war besides engaging in frequent border skirmishes over this disputed territory. With the inception of Pakistan backed insurgency in Kashmir in 1989 and the overt nuclearization of South Asia following the May 1998 Nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan, the dispute has assumed such a dangerous proportion as never before. The two countries have been

¹ "Quarrelling siblings or friendly Neighbours? Turbulent Nature of Indo-Pal Relationship since 1947, UNICI Discussion papers, 29th May, 2012, P.33

embroiled in at least four military crisis since 1989. On each occasion the United States was drawn in to play an assertive role of either managing or resolving the crisis. Not surprisingly, one of the main foreign policy priorities of the United States in South Asia in recent past has been to avert the fourth war in the sub-continent².

US Policy on Kashmir in retrospect:

The United States policy on Kashmir has been rather inconsistent. In its first encounter with the Kashmir issue soon after the disputed accession of 1947, the United States under Truman administration adopted a ‘non-interference’ posture and avoided ‘making a choice between giving support to the interests of India or of Pakistan’³. But after this initial no interest on Kashmir question, the United States’ policy on Kashmir has witnessed a series of periodical transitions from active efforts to resolve the dispute in the 1950s and 1960s, to benign neglect in the 1970s, to a more proactive approach during the early Clinton period, to a more nuanced but hands-off approach subsequently⁴. As a matter of fact, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, each attempted to resolve the Kashmir conflict. Shortly after the first India Pakistan war, America and Great Britain worked through the framework of the United Nations to support several peace keeping missions and help establish an observer force along the cease fire line in Kashmir. The Eisenhower administration, worried about the possibility of another India Pakistan war, tried but failed to persuade India and Pakistan to come to a settlement on Kashmir, although it helped bring the Indus Waters dispute to a successful end during its second term. The negotiations were conducted under the auspices of the World Bank, with the United States

²Navnita Chadha Bohera, ‘Kashmir: Redefining the U.S. Role’ , Brookings Policy Brief Service October(2002), available at www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2002/10/India), accessed on 4 11 2015

³ Henderson to Lovett, January 9, 1948, report of discussions between the British delegation and the U.S. officials, quoted in Chintamani Mahapatra, American activism on Kashmir question 1-8, available at www.lds.org/an-oct-3.html, accessed on 3 11 2015

⁴. Rajeshwani Pillai Rajagopalan, “The Evolution of U.S. policy towards Kashmir” CLAWS Journal, Summer 2009, 257-267

providing half of the \$ 1 billion needed for construction projects. The last significant American effort on Kashmir was made by the Kennedy administration in 1962-63, during and after the China War. This also failed despite high level Presidential interest and considerable pressure and inducements by the United States and Britain. All of these American attempts at resolving the conflict of India and Pakistan over Kashmir sprang from the U.S. perception that a divided South Asia would be vulnerable to communist pressure⁵. The Kashmir issue remained largely neglected in the U.S. Foreign Policy formulations till the advent of insurgency in 1989. The decade of 1990s saw a steep rise in the tension between Indian and Pakistan on account of the increasing militancy related incidents. Though Pakistan vigorously attempted to internationalize the Kashmir issue by highlighting human rights violations by Indian Armed Forces in the State, and frequently asked for US help, the G.H.W. Bush administration limited its Policy on Kashmir around preventing the two countries from going into war. The U.S. no longer evinced interest in supporting the move for plebiscite in Kashmir and its stated position over Kashmir was that the dispute be resolved bilaterally through the 1972 Shimla Agreement⁶. The Clinton administration initially criticized India for Human Rights abuse in Kashmir and questioned the very legality of Kashmir Accession to India⁷. The nuclear weapons tests by both India and Pakistan in May 1998 and subsequently the armed conflict between the two countries

⁵, Stephen P Cohen, 2000, "India and America: An Emerging Relationship", a paper presented at the Conference on The Nation-State System and Trans-national Forces in South Asia, 8-10 December, Kyoto, Japan, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/articles/2001/1208india_cohen/kyoto.pdf last accessed 20/03/11.

⁶ Rajeshwari Pillai Rajgopalan, The Evolution of U.S. policy towards Kashmir, Op.cit

⁷ Parama Sinha Palit, "The Kashmir Policy of United States: A Study of the Perceptions, Conflicts and Dilemmas," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (2001), p. 791.

in the Kargil sector heightened US concern over a possible nuclear confrontation between the two. However, in spite of declaring the (LOC in) Kashmir as the most dangerous place on earth, President Bill Clinton, also avoided to seek the resolution of Kashmir issue and limited his efforts to prevention of a full-fledged war between India and Pakistan⁸.

Kashmir Factor and the US Engagement with India under President George W. Bush:

The US relations with India witnessed an unprecedented amelioration during the presidency of G W Bush who assumed power in January 2001. Bush had declared his intention to expand the US engagement with India even before coming to power. As a matter of fact, in one of his major election campaign speeches on November 19, 1999 at the Ronald Reagan Presidential library in, Simi Valley California, he had noted, “... *This coming century will see democratic India’s arrival as a force in the World., India is now debating its future and its strategic path and the United States must pay it more attention ...*”⁹ Bush’s liking for India also stemmed from his own aggressive worldview. To prevent China from challenging the US hegemony, especially in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region, the idea of forging a strategic partnership with India was lurking in the mind of Bush from the very beginning. Bush sought to remove the major irritants that had bedeviled Indo-US relations in the past. Change in America’s Kashmir and Pakistan policy and the pursuit of a de-hyphenated policy was a logical outcome of these endeavors of Bush. Under the policy ‘de-hyphenation’, the United States sought to systematically decouple India and Pakistan and value autonomous engagement with both India and Pakistan rather than handling the

⁸ Jonathan Marcus, Analysis: The World’s most Dangerous Place on earth, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/687021.stm, accessed on 6 5 2016

⁹ Governor George W. Bush, ‘A Distinctly American Internationalism’ speech delivered at the Ronald Reagon Presidential Library, (November, 19, 1999) available at <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm>, accessed on 8 11 2014

complex and often frustrating relationship between the two South Asian neighbors. The United States avoided making any substantial efforts to address their bilateral disputes, except to encourage them to continue their dialogue and stand ready to facilitate any agreement between them. Kashmir remained out of bounds for the American Policy.¹⁰ Bush's 'war on Terror' launched by the US and its coalitions in response to September 11, 2001 attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon offered a congenial opportunity to India to persuade the Bush administration to treat the ongoing insurgency in Kashmir as part of the global terrorist network, and Pakistan a terrorist sponsoring nation. A persistent Indian coercive diplomacy, particularly after the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 did result in Washington putting pressure on Pakistan vis a vis her support to insurgency in Kashmir. As a matter of fact making a departure from Pakistan's traditional Kashmir policy, President Musharraf banned two Kashmir based insurgency including Lashkari Toiba and Jaishe Muhammad groups in 2002.¹¹ The US pressure on Pakistan vis-à-vis her support to the insurgency in Kashmir was quite evident in the decline of militancy related incidents in the valley. Pakistan leaders had expected that Pakistan's cooperation with the US would encourage the latter to not only ignore Pakistan's support for insurgency in Kashmir, but also extend its diplomatic support for the settlement of Kashmir issue in its favour. Pakistan's isolation on the issue of terrorism reached its zenith when the US refused to sign a nuclear deal with Pakistan, similar to the Indo-US Nuclear deal. The Bush administration treated India as a responsible State that merited membership in the Nuclear

¹⁰ Stephen P. Cohen, *'Shooting for a Century: Finding Answers to The India-Pakistan Conundrum'* (New Delhi: Harper Collins Publishers 2013),p.182

¹¹ Jamal Shah and Nasir Reyaz September 11, 2001 and Change in Pakistan's Foreign Policy, American International Journal of Contemporary Research Vol. 3 No. 1; January 2013

Suppliers' Group, but questioned Pakistan's responsible behavior owing to its wrong track record highlighted by the A Q Khan episode in 2004.¹²

Conclusion: The US policy towards Kashmir under President G W Bush, was thus, basically the continuation of the policy pursued by Bill Clinton following the Kargil war. The US utilized its efforts towards the prevention of another full scale war between India and Pakistan while at the same time attempting to avoid irritating India by not forcing the two countries to seek a solution of the issue. On the other hand, the Bush administration pursued the policy of de-hyphenation with a view to garner the support of both these countries simultaneously, to effectively pursue its agenda of defeating terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11. The US avoided bashing Pakistan too much for its support to Kashmir insurgency while simultaneously denying any diplomatic support to it on the Kashmir cause as a reward to its role as US ally in the global war on terrorism

¹² Shoon Murray, US Adjustments to Global Power Shifts and Diffusion: An Analysis of Selected Security Issues, available at http://www.transworld-fp7.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/TW_WP_28.pdf, accessed on 5 5 2016