

## VIEWPOINTS

# India must defend its interests in Kashmir

Many Americans have shown little interest in the intense fighting that is going on between two nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, in Indian Kashmir. The latest conflict started in May, when Pakistani troops and Islamic militants clandestinely occupied several mountain peaks on the Indian side of the cease-fire line that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.



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A brief historical review should put today's geopolitical issues in Kashmir in perspective.

When India was partitioned in 1947 to carve out Muslim Pakistan, the sovereigns of the states constituting British India were free to join either country. But Pakistan invaded Kashmir to force the issue, prompting its maharajah to cede Kashmir to India. Before Indian forces could clear the intruders, the United Nations Security Council ordered a cease-fire. The 1948 resolution demanded a total Pakistani withdrawal preceding a plebiscite for Kashmiris, but Pakistan refused to vacate the roughly one-third of Kashmir it held.

Pakistan claims Kashmir because of its

Muslim majority. But religion can't decide the issue, since India has many more Muslims. Besides, the religious basis for Pakistan's creation was negated when Muslim Bangladesh separated in 1971. By contrast, the Indian Constitution confers equal rights upon all, and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs have become even presidents. No country with a multiracial polity can countenance religion-based secession.

Since 1988, Pakistan has been fomenting an insurgency in Indian Kashmir. Initially, it enjoyed some support. But in recent years, Kashmiri youths, lured to Pakistan for training, have returned disillusioned. The restoration of democracy following internationally monitored elections in Indian Kashmir also has helped restore normality. That in turn has upset Pakistani designs.

Pakistan's latest misadventure has been universally condemned, with G-8 countries unequivocally demanding its withdrawal from Indian territory. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's desperate dash to Washington to persuade President Clinton also failed, and he now has promised to withdraw his forces. But Mr. Sharif's capacity to remove his remaining forces is doubtful, since the hard-line Pakistan army and Islamic fundamentalist groups wield the real power in Pakistan.

A major force to be reckoned with in the

region is the Taliban, which was nurtured in Pakistan's Islamic schools and equipped by the CIA to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan. It now is destabilizing the region with its extreme ideology. India is tacitly acknowledged as a front-line state in the struggle against Islamic fundamentalism.

Pakistan's close ties with China also threaten India's security. Although China hasn't overtly supported Pakistan in the current fighting, the two countries' past collusion and typical Chinese inscrutability provide little comfort.

What, then, is the prognosis? India has no option but to continue operations till the last intruder is evicted from Kashmir. If Mr. Sharif orders a withdrawal, he will face stiff opposition from the military and fundamentalist groups. Both are incensed with his capitulation and betrayal, and widespread disturbances are expected. Even if he survives, it will be on a stridently fundamentalist plank.

India, regardless of whatever assurances Pakistan may offer, probably will have to face intensified subversive and terrorist activities. And then there is the bigger concern of Pakistan's nuclear weapons being controlled by an uncertain and volatile power structure.

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