



Kashmir: A Nuclear Flashpoint

“The unfinished agenda of the partition”

There is no denying the fact that the longest lingering and the major issue between Pakistan and India is the Kashmir issue “the unfinished agenda of the partition”. It has often been dubbed as the nuclear flashpoint owing to the fact that it is a constant bone of contention between the two nuclear states of South Asia; India and Pakistan. A wider belief maintains that if there is one problem that has the tendency and potential to make the two nuclear power states come to an exploding threshold that would be the Kashmir problem. No wonder the first bloody war between India and Pakistan was fought over Kashmir in 1948, which set the precedent for future hostilities, distrust, proxies and battles. The Kargil conflict in 1999, again in the backdrop of Kashmir crisis, brought the most critical circumstances for the two states, where the world saw them positioning their troops along the border and readying their naval forces against each other. It was highly feared that the situation had brought them to the brink of another war, which could have irrevocably disastrous repercussions since the two had overtly gone nuclear by then. However the crisis was stopped short of spiraling into a full blown war by the international mediation, and by the very presence of the nuclear weapons which served as a deterrent. However the details mentioned in the book titled “This Unquiet Land: Stories from India’s Fault line” by Barkha Dutt, proclaims that India had not ruled out the possibility of using nuclear weapons against Pakistan during the Kargil crisis. The formal Indian National Security Advisor Brajesh Misra during an interview to the NDTV revealed that a letter given to President Clinton by PM Vajpayee had hinted that India was contemplating crossing the LoC as well as using the nuclear weapons if Pakistan did not pull out the fighters from Kargil. This revelation while was shocking but highlights a couple of facts: a) The international community only scrambled to its feet when came to know of India’s vile intentions of using nukes, b) going by the confession made in the book, it probably wasn’t the presence of nuclear weapons and their expected deterrent role, but the possibility of their use which made international community put pressure to keep the crisis from going out of control, c) India will not shy from using them despite time and again reiterating its “no first use” policy, d) the Kashmir issue needs a third party facilitation because so far the bilateral efforts have all led to stalemate, e) since the Kashmir issue remains unresolved till today, it may again trigger India to consider exploiting a nuclear option anytime.

The situation in Kashmir is once again calling for world attention amidst the equally critical yet slightly different circumstances. The extrajudicial killing of Burhan Wani reflects India's disregard to the legal system. Further making the situation worse, India has resorted to the most terrible form of violence and state terrorism against the locals to curb down protests, blinding them with pellets and causing most miserable injuries and deaths. These Indian atrocities merit an immediate intervention especially by the international human right watchdogs. The responsibility for the present unrest in Kashmir falls solely on India for committing violence against the unarmed civilian population. Even today, India is adamant at using force apparently against its "own people", as it claims IoK to be its own territory. Seeking a diplomatic solution of this problem doesn't seem to be on India's agenda. The ongoing crisis also points to the fact that locals do not accept Indian occupation and the recent havoc that Indian security and police forces have unleashed on the innocent unarmed Kashmiri people, has been their embarrassing failure in keeping the situation under control. Not just that, but recently when Pakistan showed solidarity with the Kashmiris by observing Black Day on July 20th, India implicated Pakistan for inciting and instigating the present crisis in Kashmir, demanding that it should stop supporting and abetting the insurgents and protestors. A couple of days ago, in her strongest statement against Pakistan till date, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of advancing the "despicable design" of destabilising South Asia by exporting "dirty money and dangerous terrorists". These allegations hurled at Pakistan however do not find endorsement of the international community; but the strong and caustic rhetoric by Indian leadership once again raises alarms regarding its aggressive mindset. The amendments in its nuclear doctrine since 1998, especially the Indian Cold Start doctrine does provide a space for that by aiming for rapid but limited retaliatory incursions into Pakistan by the Indian army in order to seize and hold narrow slices of territory in response to any act of terrorism in India by Pakistan. Since in the ongoing violence in Kashmir, it strongly incriminates Pakistan for abetting violence on alleged "Indian territory", no matter how hypothetical it may sound but looking at the past event one cannot rule out the possibility that India might once again be mulling over the nuclear option. Hence the tactical nuclear weapons become ever more relevant for Pakistan for effective deterrence, so is the active involvement of the international community not just to keep a close watch over the three stake holders but to also work efficiently for the immediate crisis management and later on for its resolution too. The international community should not wait until India's jingoism in Kashmir makes it send another letter to the US. The deplorable human atrocities in Kashmir at the hand of Indian state should immediately be put to end and those responsible for it should be held accountable. Kashmir needs attention not just as a political issue or for its tendency to become a nuclear flash point, which it still is and is going to remain for the times to come, but more importantly on the human grounds.