



Executive Memorandum

No. 799

January 25, 2002

THE UNITED STATES SHOULD ENCOURAGE INDIA AND PAKISTAN TO DISENGAGE

DANA R. DILLON AND JOHN J. TKACIK

Recent events have again pushed South Asia to the brink of war. On December 13, 2001, Pakistan-based terrorists attacked India's parliament, killing 14 people. India's reaction, however justified, has turned a gross criminal act into a military standoff. Both countries sent heavy troops to their common border and brandished the nuclear option.

The United States must continue to encourage India and Pakistan to take the necessary diplomatic steps to end this crisis. Having both armies pull back from the border would be a good start. In addition, Pakistan should continue to crack down on Islamic fundamentalists that support terrorism. For its part, India needs to curb its bellicose rhetoric, which only fans the flames of Islamic militancy. Washington also must resist the temptation to mediate talks on the disputed province of Kashmir, the root cause of the animosity. India and Pakistan have the capacity to resolve this dispute by addressing the basic issues one by one. U.S. diplomacy should focus on convincing them to undertake direct negotiations with each other on security issues, including arms control.

The Kashmir Sand Trap. At the root of the December 13 attack is the thorny issue of Kashmir. The two terrorist organizations responsible, Lashkar-i-Taiba and Jaish-i-Muhammad, oppose Indian "occupation" in Kashmir. Thus, any U.S. effort to mediate the current hostilities between India and Pakistan will carry the temptation of resolving the Kashmir question first.

But Kashmir is a sand trap. India and Pakistan have fought three wars over it since the British partitioned India in 1947, and although India currently controls two-thirds of the territory, more than 60 percent of its people are Muslim as in Pakistan. India accuses Pakistan of fostering terrorist insurgents; Pakistan accuses India's military forces of brutality and intimidation against Muslim Kashmiris. Both charges are true.

The Bush Administration rightly recognizes that the war on terrorism is America's number one priority. In their struggle for power, many forces within Kashmir, whether pro-India or pro-Pakistan, have taken up arms and used terrorism to further their respective causes. Lashkar-i-Taiba and Jaish-i-Muhammad are both on the U.S. list of terrorist organizations. It would be sheer folly to prosecute them on the one hand and negotiate with them on the other.

India and Pakistan need to resolve the Kashmir issue on mutually agreed terms. A good starting point would be United Nations Resolution 47 of 1948, which called for a plebiscite for the people of

Produced by the
Asian Studies Center

Published by
The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Ave., NE
Washington, D.C.
20002-4999
(202) 546-4400
<http://www.heritage.org>



This paper, in its entirety, can be
found at: [www.heritage.org/library/
execmemo/em799.html](http://www.heritage.org/library/execmemo/em799.html)

Kashmir to decide whether to join India or Pakistan or become independent. The proposal for a referendum was accepted by both India and Pakistan, but the plebiscite was never held because neither country met the terms of the resolution.

Other nations have a stake in encouraging India and Pakistan to resolve this dispute, and the United States should welcome their diplomatic efforts. Because both India and Pakistan are Commonwealth countries, Great Britain can exercise its influence. Pakistan's strategic partner China could exert diplomatic influence in Islamabad, while Russia could exert influence on treaty ally India.

Nuclear Politics. Since 1998, when India and Pakistan conducted their first open nuclear weapons tests, both countries have insisted that their nuclear arsenals are purely deterrent. Yet, in the first crisis to test their resolve, both countries were quick to brandish the nuclear option. Despite its "no-first-use" policy, India's Defense Minister George Fernandes declared that India could use "all" the weapons in its arsenal should war break out. Pakistan, meanwhile, refuses to disavow first-strike capability. A spokesman for President Pervez Musharraf has announced that "[Pakistan has] the capacity to react or retaliate in all conceivable ways." This may be more than just bluster; Western intelligence agencies noticed an unusual amount of activity at nuclear weapons bases in both countries.

Conflict aside, the brash rhetoric alone threatens to increase the likelihood of war. Indian Minister Fernandes said that "[India] could take a [nuclear] strike, survive and then hit back. Pakistan would be finished." True or not, implicit in his assertion is that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal is not sufficient to maintain the equilibrium embodied in the Cold War principle of mutually assured destruction. Statements of this kind only encourage Pakistan to develop more nuclear weapons to balance the scales. The United States should exert every effort

to avert this outcome and recommend instead the alternative of nuclear arms reduction with the long-term goal of getting both states to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Conclusion. The United States has correctly focused its foreign policy on the war on terrorism, in which the countries of Central Asia play an essential role. In order to achieve its goals, America must remain free from needless political entanglements that do not serve its interests. Kashmir is a conflict that both Pakistan and India have the capacity to resolve but each also stubbornly refuses to address. Efforts by either side to elicit American support should be rebuffed; otherwise, assuming that both sides remain unwilling to compromise, Washington runs the real risk of alienating both partners and undermining America's position in the region.

The United States should focus its diplomatic efforts on convincing India and Pakistan that military brinkmanship only complicates the problems that arise during their periodic crises. Their unrestrained nuclear saber-rattling after the December 13 massacre demonstrates that India and Pakistan are unprepared for the responsibilities that come with being a nuclear power. And an arms race that merely serves to increase the range and consequences of their recklessness will benefit no one. Since there is no hope that either country will disassemble its nuclear weapons and abandon nuclear technology in the near term, Washington must settle for the next best thing: focusing its diplomatic efforts on convincing India and Pakistan that arms reduction is in the interests of both countries.

—Dana R. Dillon is Senior Policy Analyst for South and Southeast Asia and John J. Tkacik is Research Fellow for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation. Paolo Pasicolan, Research Assistant in the Asian Studies Center, also contributed to this paper.