

Crisis in Kashmir created to weaken South Asia

by Ramtanu Maitra

After undergoing continuous artillery fire for weeks in Kashmir, in the last week of May, the Indian Army disclosed that a large number of armed insurgents from Afghanistan had intruded far inside the Line of Control that separates the Indian and Pakistani armies in Kashmir. The insurgents have captured strategic high points in the Kargil area, posing a threat to Srinagar, the capital of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and cutting off the vast rocky lands of Ladakh district, which borders Tibet in China. Grudgingly admitting a complete intelligence failure, New Delhi swung into action with MiGs and Mirages and brought in at least 25,000 troops to push back and, if necessary, kill off the terrorists. The first few days of reports indicate clearly that the enemy is not only solidly entrenched, but is also armed with Stinger missiles. India lost two MiGs and a helicopter. One Indian Air Force pilot was shot in the head and another was captured by the Pakistani Army. India claims that it has not violated Pakistani air space, and Washington endorsed India's view, but Pakistan has said that the Indian planes crossed the border.

At this writing, the situation is dangerous, with Pakistan threatening to use "any weapon" if Indian troops cross the border. Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes has assured the nation that there is no threat of a nuclear war.

Much confusion

In February, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, entirely on his own initiative, opened a bus line between New Delhi and Lahore, Pakistan, where he was met by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The two signed the Lahore Declaration, which called for a settlement of the Kashmir issue through peaceful, bilateral negotiations. Now, all intelligence information indicates that even as the two prime minis-

ters were signing this historic declaration, armed insurgents had begun to cross the Line of Control to occupy strategic positions. There is no explanation for why Indian intelligence kept mum about the whole thing.

New Delhi's confused state can be traced to following reasons:

- The Vajpayee government is keen to keep the historicity of the Lahore Declaration alive, and, hence, has come up with the formulation that Islamabad is not involved in pushing in the insurgents, placing the blame on the Pakistan Army. On May 28, Defense Minister Fernandes even exonerated Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)—which is linked to Israel's Mossad and Britain's MI6—and pointed his finger solely at the Army. The next day, however, the government changed its line and added in the ISI as a fellow-intriguer.

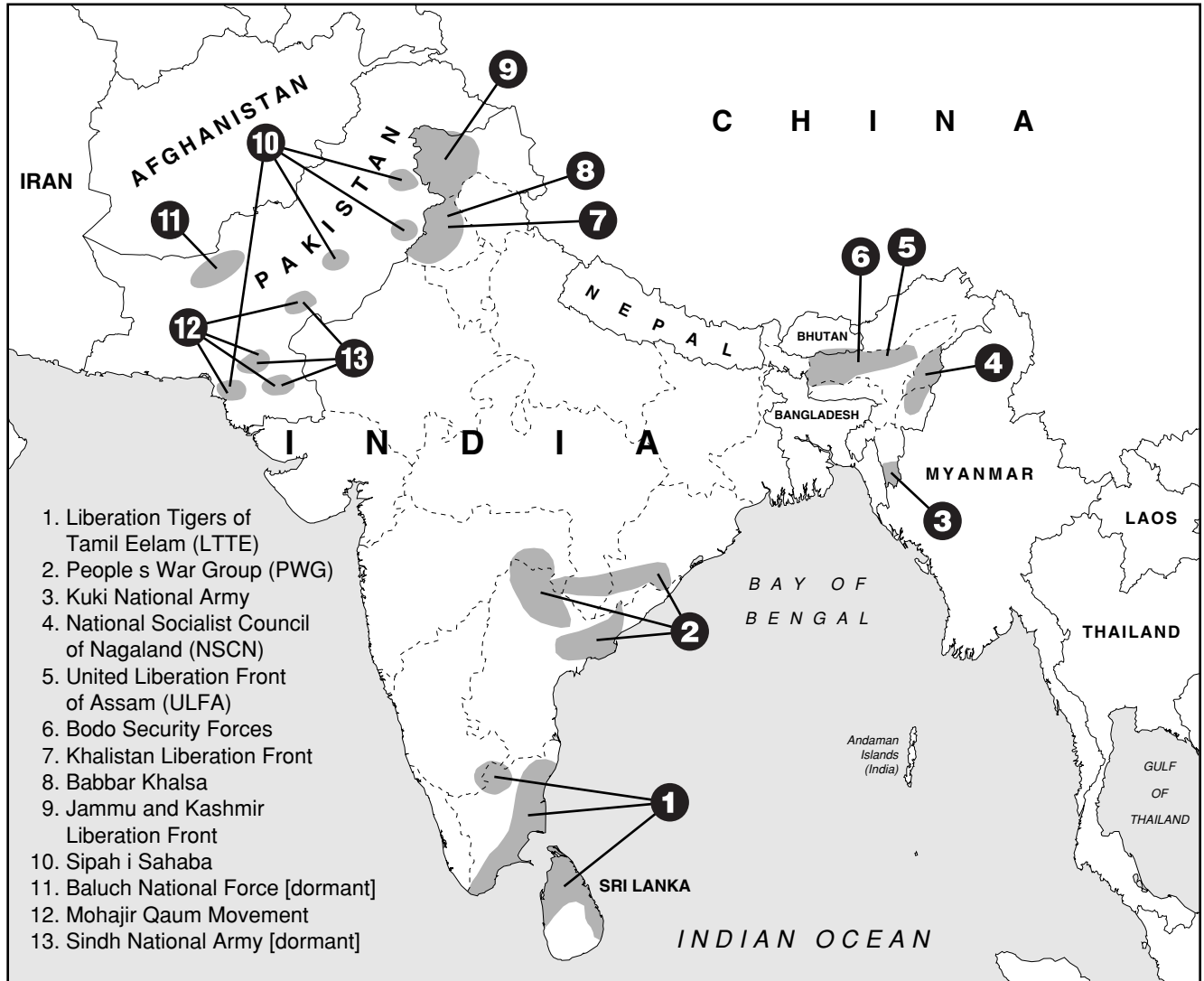
- The government, a coalition led by Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party, is facing parliamentary elections in September. The opposition, particularly the Congress Party, has accused the BJP of being "soft" toward Pakistan, and has charged the Defense Ministry with gross incompetence. To fend off the political attack, the Vajpayee government is issuing menacing statements that a "war-like situation" exists in Kashmir.

- Islamabad has also added to New Delhi's confusion. Sharif has labelled the insurgents "freedom fighters." The Pakistan Army, in its daily briefing, has allowed the terrorist group Hizbul Mujahideen to appear on the dais, singing the praises of the insurgents' bravery.

- Sharif reached Vajpayee by phone, and requested him to stop the Indian air strikes against the intruders, and offered to send Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz to Delhi. Vajpayee rejected the proposal to stop the air strikes, and asked Sharif, in

FIGURE 1

Terrorist theater of operations in South Asia



This map first appeared in EIR's Oct. 13, 1995 Special Report, "The New International Terrorism."

return, to call the insurgents back. Aziz has been kept waiting by New Delhi with packed bags in Islamabad.

Is Pakistan involved?

Such a question can be answered only if one can locate a power center that can be identified as the Pakistani establishment: Unfortunately, there is none. There is no question that Prime Minister Sharif has alienated himself from his people, by failing completely to prohibit the World Bank and International Monetary Fund from all economic and financial policy-making.

In addition, the law and order situation in Pakistan is in shambles. Terrorist groups and religious sectarianism are kill-

ing off Pakistanis, with Shias killing Sunnis, and Sunnis killing Shias; in Sindh, the Mohajir Qaum Movement, whose leader has been based in London for the last six years, is killing anyone they do not like in Karachi.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, after bringing further economic misery on his people, has crossed swords with both the judiciary and the press, drawing popular wrath. As a result, he has become increasingly dependent on both the Pakistan Army and the ISI for his own and his family's physical survival. One attempt on his life was reported a few months ago, and recently, he accused Britain of interfering in Pakistan's internal matters. Moreover, it is no secret that the Pakistan Army did not endorse the Lahore Declaration. The army

thrives and prospers as long as a conflict with India exists. This was the norm during the Cold War, when India was close to the Soviet Union and Pakistan was close to the Soviets' main rivals, China and the United States. Although the Cold War is over, the Pakistan Army has kept its priorities the same.

The ISI, for its part, became powerful during the Soviet occupation of neighboring Afghanistan. Helped by Islamic volunteers from Arab and the North African countries, and financed by the western intelligence agencies and renegades, the ISI got a share of the drug-and-gun funds that flooded Afghanistan. As a result, the ISI was infiltrated mightily by the MI6, Mossad, and the CIA. After the Russian withdrawal, the ISI maintained its high profile by creating the Afghan Taliban, and financing the Kashmiri separatists, and the Uighur Muslim separatists in the Xinjiang province of China. It is likely that if Kashmir's Ladakh district becomes infiltrated, new operations against neighboring Tibet will start.

A clearer picture emerges from a London *Times* story reporting that British Muslims of Kashmiri origin are being trained in Pakistani Kashmir to be sent across the Line of Control. Without revealing the MI6's hand in the terrorist training, the paper did say that two prominent radical Islamic groups, Shariah and Al Muhajiroun, are recruiting Muslims for *jihād* in order to create an independent Kashmir. Shariah is an Afghansi organization, headed by Abu Hamza, a former Afghan Mujahideen. Sheikh Omar Bakri Mohammad is the leader of Al Muhajiroun.

Thus, although Pakistan is not directly involved in pushing the Afghans into Kashmir, it does not prevent them from going in, nor does it oppose the open support for the insurgents by various terrorist groups and the ISI. Neither did the Pakistan Army or intelligence inform India that a large-scale intrusion by armed guerrillas was taking place.

Target India

There are indications that India, a major British target for break-up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has once again been put in the cross-hairs. In late December, when then-Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov visited India, he spoke of a "strategic triangle," centered on China, India, and Russia. The idea, in the aftermath of the U.S.-U.K. bombing of Iraq, was to change the strategic geometry from unipolar to multipolar. The concept did not get much support from either Beijing or New Delhi, but it was not rejected either. But, a number of significant international developments have taken place since then which give the concept, at least indirectly, more relevance. With the NATO powers pounding on Yugoslavia, Russia was served a warning. The British-American-Commonwealth faction in Washington also put forth the theater of missile defense (TMD) system, which is intended to throw a protective shield around East Asia. As Japan played a crucial role in the scheme, China identified the TMD as a provocation. It is at this time that Beijing also changed its stance toward India. A former Chinese Ambassa-

dor to India hinted that China's long-standing refusal to recognize Sikkim as part of India would be resolved, and expected that New Delhi would consider opening the historic trade route through Nathu-La in Sikkim.

Subsequently, two other important events occurred: first, Vajpayee's historic "bus diplomacy" to Pakistan, where he also announced that he may take the bus to China. On May 30, New Delhi announced that External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh has accepted an invitation to visit China in June, thus formally ending the hiatus in relations between New Delhi and Beijing. Second: On May 7, three NATO missiles struck the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. As a Chinese official told this author, 20 years of hard work to bring the United States and China close was destroyed in one night.

Things changed inside India, too, undermining Vajpayee's international accomplishments. Following Vajpayee's bus trip to Lahore, there were a number of violent acts against Christians in the Indian states of Gujarat, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh. The BJP, which led the government coalition, was once again berated internationally as a "Hindu militant" organization and the blame was placed squarely on the "Hindu militants" for those ghastly acts.

Then, on April 20, Vajpayee's government was brought down by a no-confidence vote that passed by one vote. In its wake, the following occurred:

- According to a recent report, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam—who, on May 21, 1991 had assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi—had met in Durban, South Africa to plan the assassination of his widow, Sonia Gandhi, who leads the Congress (I) Party. Similar meetings took place in London, where the Tamil Tigers met with Kashmiri separatists, and in Toronto, where the Tigers met with the self-styled "Khalistanis," Sikh separatists in Punjab. The Khalistanis were credited with the Oct. 31, 1984 murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. For their part, the Tamil Tigers have links with British MI6, Mossad, the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), a faction of the African National Congress, the Italian mafia, and Khalistani and Kashmiri separatists in Britain and Canada.

- Equally significant was the May 30 recovery of three bombs with timer devices in Chennai, Tiruchi, and Coimbatore—deep in southern India—two days after the Indian Air Force struck at the intruders in Kashmir. The bombs were attributed to Al Ummah, a radical Islamic group, allegedly linked to the ISI. In addition, intelligence reports indicate that in the state of Andhra Pradesh, several Islamic militant groups, identified as Lashkar-e-Toiba (the same outfit in London has pushed some militants in Kashmir), Hizbul Mujahideen, and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, have become very active.

- Finally, India's northeast remains vulnerable to ongoing insurgencies, and violent actions against the Christians may have also hardened the attitude of the Christian-dominated northeast toward the New Delhi government.