

BBC News

Q&A: Kashmir dispute

The mountainous region of Kashmir has been a flashpoint between India and Pakistan for more than 50 years. BBC News Online provides a step-by-step guide to the dispute.



The Disputed Area of Kashmir



Why is Kashmir disputed? Read on ...

The territory of Kashmir was hotly contested even before India and Pakistan won their independence from Britain in August 1947.

Under the partition plan provided by the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Kashmir was free to accede to India or Pakistan.

The Maharaja, Hari Singh, wanted to stay independent but eventually decided to accede to India, signing over key powers to the Indian government - in return for military aid and a promised referendum.

Since then, the territory has been the flashpoint for two of the three India-Pakistan wars: the first in 1947-8, the second in 1965.

In 1999, India fought a brief but bitter conflict with Pakistani-backed forces who had infiltrated Indian-controlled territory in the Kargil area.

In addition to the rival claims of Delhi and Islamabad to the territory, there has been a growing and often violent separatist movement against Indian rule in Kashmir since 1989.

What are the rival claims?

Islamabad says Kashmir should have become part of Pakistan in 1947, because Muslims are in the majority in the region.

Pakistan also argues that Kashmiris should be allowed to vote in a referendum on their future, following numerous UN resolutions on the issue.

Delhi, however, does not want international debate on the issue, arguing that the Simla Agreement of 1972 provided for a resolution through bilateral talks.

India points to the Instrument of Accession signed in October 1947 by the Maharaja, Hari Singh.

Both India and Pakistan reject the option of Kashmir becoming an independent state.

How dangerous is the Kashmir dispute?

It is potentially one of the most dangerous disputes in the world and in the worst-case scenario could trigger a nuclear conflict.

In 1998 India and Pakistan both declared themselves to be nuclear powers with a string of nuclear tests.

In 2002 there was a huge deployment of troops on both sides of the border as India reacted to an armed attack on the national parliament in Delhi the previous December. Tension between the two countries has rarely been so high.

India said the attack was carried out by Pakistani-based militants assisted by the Pakistan government - a charge always denied by Pakistan.

For much of the last two decades, separatist militancy and cross-border firing between the Indian and Pakistani armies has left a death toll running into tens of thousands and a population traumatised by fighting and fear.

Are there grounds to hope the Kashmir dispute can be resolved?

Recent years have seen a big thaw in relations between India and Pakistan.

In addition to holding more talks, they have taken several Kashmir-specific confidence building measures. A bus service between the two parts of Kashmir was resumed in 2005.

In October 2008 an old trade road was reopened after 60 years across the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Indian and Pakistani-administered Kashmir. Earlier in the same month a rail service was introduced.

The two governments have huge international backing to continue the peace process and make their ongoing negotiations succeed.

An end to the violence and uncertainty in Kashmir would also be widely welcomed in India and Pakistan - and not only by those weary of the fighting or those who see it as a hindrance to the economic development of the South Asia region.

However, a diplomatic solution has escaped both sides for more than 60 years, and there are no signs of any new proposals yet.

Furthermore, both governments face powerful hard line groups within their own countries who will be carefully monitoring the talks to make sure concessions they deem to be unacceptable are not offered to the other side.

Who are the militants?

Since the insurgency began in 1989, the number of armed Muslim separatists grew from hundreds to thousands. However their numbers have dwindled over the past two years.

The most prominent militant group are the pro-Pakistani Hizbul Mujahideen. Islamabad denies providing them and others with logistical and material support.

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was the largest pro-independence militant group but it gave up the armed struggle in 1994 and has since been active on the political front. Its influence is thought to have waned.

Other former militant groups have joined the umbrella of the All-Party Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference (APHC), which campaigns peacefully for an end to India's presence in Kashmir.

However the hard line faction of the APHC - as well as several armed militant groups - are demanding a tripartite dialogue among Indian, Pakistan and Kashmiri representatives - but India has so far not agreed to this.

The moderate faction of the APHC, led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, opened bilateral talks with the Indian government in 2004.

But they have complained that Delhi has not taken steps it promised to create a conducive atmosphere for dialogue - such as the release of prisoners and the withdrawal of the laws that give sweeping powers to the armed forces.

Talks between the two sides last took place in early 2006.

Is religion an issue?

Religion is an important aspect of the dispute. Partition in 1947 gave India's Muslims a state of their own: Pakistan. So a common faith underpins Pakistan's claims to Kashmir, where many areas are Muslim-dominated.

The population of the Indian-administered state of Jammu and Kashmir is over 60% Muslim, making it the only state within India where Muslims are in the majority.

What is the Line of Control?

A demarcation line was originally established in January 1949 as a ceasefire line, following the end of the first Kashmir war.

In July 1972, after a second conflict, the Line of Control (LoC) was re-established under the terms of the Simla Agreement, with minor variations on the earlier boundary.

The LoC passes through a mountainous region about 5,000 metres above sea level.

The conditions there are so extreme that the bitter cold claims more lives than the sporadic military skirmishes.

North of the LoC, the rival forces have been entrenched on the Siachen glacier (more than 6,000 metres above sea level) since 1984 - the highest battlefield on earth.

The LoC divides Kashmir on an almost two-to-one basis: Indian-administered Kashmir to the east and south (population about nine million), which falls into the Indian-controlled state of Jammu and Kashmir; and Pakistani-administered Kashmir to the north and west (population about three million), which is labelled by Pakistan as "Azad" (Free) Kashmir. China also controls a small portion of Kashmir.

What's the UN involvement?

The UN has maintained a presence in the disputed area since 1949.

Currently, the LoC is monitored by the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (Unmogip).

So what of the future?

In Indian-administered Kashmir, many people are wary of confidence building measures (CBMs) which they fear may be used as a ploy to convert the LoC into a permanent border.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has reiterated that Kashmir's borders cannot be redrawn, but they can be made "irrelevant".

The Pakistani and Indian armies are for the most part observing a ceasefire along the LoC .

In what seemed like a major break from its position over the Kashmir question in 2008, Pakistan's new President, Asif Ali Zardari, denounced separatist violence as "terrorism". However, his spokesperson later clarified that the remark was about non-Kashmiri militants fighting in Kashmir.

Even so there has overall been a huge decline in violence in Indian-administered Kashmir over the past three years.

The main exception to that has been the events of the summer of 2008, when the government of Indian-administered Kashmir decided to transfer to a Hindu religious trust 100 acres of land on a mountain route leading to an important shrine.

This sparked widespread protests among Muslims in the valley throughout June, in which many civilians were killed. The decision was then rescinded in early July, which in turn triggered large-scale protests in the Hindu-majority districts around the city of Jammu.

The incident provided a good example of how volatile this beautiful part of the world can be - and how the capacity for violence is never far away.

India-Pakistan Relations: Moving Ahead

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Heard on Morning Edition

November 17, 2009 - STEVE INSKEEP, host:

Its MORNING EDITION from NPR News. Im Steve Inskeep.

The prize-winning Indian novel, *The White Tiger* begins with an entrepreneur in Bangalore. He writes a letter dismissing American books about business success. Those books, the entrepreneur writes, are so yesterday. I am tomorrow. India is the world's largest democracy with a growing economy, and the possibilities of tomorrow are prompting some Indians to say its time to let go of the past.

For decades now, India has been locked in a rivalry with its neighbor, Pakistan. They've been at odds since 1947, when the British colonial rulers carved the territory into two states: one for Hindus and one for Muslims. Yesterday, we heard from the Pakistani side of the border.

This morning, NPR's Philip Reeves reports on Indians who think its time to pay less attention to that divide.

PHILIP REEVES: Some stories still sound new and shocking many years after they were first told. The partition of India is one such story. No one knows exactly how many people died in the communal bloodletting that followed. Some say more than a million. Santosh Madhok(ph) was there.

Ms. SANTOSH MADHOK: Every other person was so sad, crying, the children, and the trains were full.

REEVES: Madhok is 81. She remembers the hurried departure of the bankrupt British as they folded up their empire. She remembers a multitude of Asians on the move, Hindus and Sikhs fleeing the newly created nation of Pakistan, Muslims trudging across the landscape in the other direction. She remembers the pain that lingered on in her family for years afterwards.

Ms. MADHOK: My mother was all the time in a trauma. She could not stop weeping.

REEVES: Madhok, whos Hindu, grew up in Multan, now a city in Pakistan. She and her family fled to India, traveling by train from the border area to the capital, New Delhi. That train ride usually takes six or seven hours. This time, it took four days. The train kept stopping.

Ms. MADHOK: You know, and they could not move because they were - bodies were lying across because the bodies had to be cleared. They were firing across, and every now and then they would say, please lie down, lie down, because the bullets are crossing. So the mother would say, lie down, lie down. Quickly, lie down.

REEVES: That was 62 years ago. Since then, India and Pakistan have fought three wars. They've both built nuclear arsenals, and they've become locked in a relationship rooted in rivalry and suspicion.

Mr. RAHUL GANDHI (Congress Party, India): I actually feel that we give too much time in our mind to Pakistan.

REEVES: Rahul Gandhi of India's ruling Congress Party thinks its time for attitudes to change. Rahul's mother, Sonia Gandhi, is the party's president. His father, Rajiv, was a former prime minister, and so was his grandmother, Indira, the daughter of Nehru. Both were assassinated. Many believe Rahul will one day lead the nation, a nation he'd like to see spending much less time obsessing about Pakistan.

Mr. GANDHI: We are now becoming a serious international player. Pakistan is a very small piece of our world view.

REEVES: Many analysts believe India's biggest foreign policy challenge these days is its rivalry with China. Changing attitudes about Pakistan isn't going to be easy, though. The subject dominates India's news media, which often makes no attempt to disguise its bias.

Unidentified Female: Now it is indeed the most preposterous accusations of all. Pakistan interior minister has accused India of backing the Taliban. On a television interview

Ms. SEEMA MUSTAFA (Editor, Covert Magazine): It's hysterical. I think, it's absolutely, totally unprofessional.

REEVES: Seema Mustafa is editor of India's Covert magazine.

Ms. MUSTAFA: I think the television channels have actually, you know, forgotten that they're journalists and they've become, like, advocates for war.

REEVES: Mustafa argues the relationship between India and Pakistan is a paradox.

Ms. MUSTAFA: At the individual level, it turns into a whole lot of camaraderie. And at the political level, it is akin to hate.

REEVES: Mustafa says even Indians who take a hard-line stance on Pakistan sometimes display a strangely contradictory view.

Ms. MUSTAFA: People who have been sort of going hammer and tongs about nuking Pakistan, of taking your army across and finishing that country, are people I have seen visit Islamabad and be even friendlier with the Pakistanis. The families all start visiting each other, big gifts are taken. And then after that, they come back and say the same thing.

REEVES: In 2004, India and Pakistan started a peace process and opened up some trade and transport routes. They came close to a framework agreement over Kashmir, the territory at the heart of their dispute. It lost momentum when then-Pakistani leader Pervez Musharraf ran into political trouble at home. Then, this happened.

(Soundbite of gunfire)

REEVES: One year ago, a team of militants sailed in from Pakistan and attacked India's commercial capital, Mumbai. After nearly three days of sieges and gunfights, theyd killed more than 160 people.

Unidentified Group: (Chanting in foreign language)

REEVES: A few days later, thousands of Indians took to the streets of Mumbai to protest.

Prahlad Kakkar, a leading advertising executive in Mumbai, was among them. Kakkar says the crowd was more angry with India's politicians, for failing to protect the country, than with Pakistan.

He still feels that way now.

Mr. PRAHLAD KAKKAR (Advertising Executive): We should look within ourselves for the answers to what we - our problems are, not look at Islamabad. Islamabad is not a superpower.

REEVES: Kakkar believes Indian attitudes toward Pakistan have since hardened.

Mr. KAKKAR: Today, I don't think there is any sympathy for Pakistan in India, whether its among the Hindus or the Muslims, to be very honest. Because they are so alarmed by what's happening in Pakistan. They just see the state sliding into chaos.

REEVES: Gopalapuram Parthasarathy, a former Indian senior diplomat who served in Pakistan, says the Mumbai attacks were a turning point.

Mr. GOPALAPURAM PARTHASARATHY (Former Senior Diplomat): Deep down, there is a sense within the country that we can't go back to business as usual with Pakistan until they act decisively against the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks, and more importantly, close down what we call the infrastructure of terrorism.

REEVES: After the Mumbai attacks, India's government froze the peace negotiations, officially known as the composite dialogue.

Indias since signaled its willing for the dialogue to resume, but only if Pakistan takes effective action against the Mumbai attackers and other militant organizations on Pakistani soil.

Parthasarathy says Pakistan's current campaign to root out the Taliban is not enough.

Mr. PARTHASARATHY: The Pakistan military has targeted only those radical Islamic groups which have challenged the writ of the Pakistani state, but are still retaining as their own instruments groups which are targeting either Afghanistan or India.

REEVES: Afghanistan is a big source of friction. India is spending more than \$1 billion a year there, much of it on infrastructure projects. That alarms Pakistan, which fears that India is extending its influence to its western border.

India has accused Pakistani intelligence of a role in last years deadly attack on its embassy there.

Some in India are opposed to renewing peace talks with Pakistan on any terms.

Dr. AJAI SAHNI (Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi): The composite dialogue has no potential for resolving these problems.

REEVES: Thats Ajai Sahni of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi.

Dr. SAHNI: Any of the problems between India and Pakistan can only be resolved by an alteration of the equation of power between the two countries. It is power politics that will decide these things. Nothing on the table can be negotiated.

REEVES: More than 60 years after partition, India and Pakistan are still struggling to find a way to live peacefully side by side. And Santosh Madhok is still haunted by the memory of her terrible train journey. She believes the time has come for India to look to the future, not the past.

Ms. MADHOK: Well, it's better to forget, one can do nothing about it now. So thats better to forget and forgive.

REEVES: Philip Reeves, NPR News, New Delhi.

INSKEEP: And we have an update this morning on one of the issues that divides these two nuclear arms states. Philip mentioned the possession of Kashmir, the mountain territory that both sides have claimed since 1947. Theres a line of control, effectively a battle line that cuts through the middle of it right now. Some people in Kashmir would like to be independent of both nations, and a leading Indian newspaper reported today

that the Indian government held secret talks with separatists on the Indian side of Kashmir. The talks could reduce tensions. The separatists want Indian troops to pull back and want prisoners released as a prelude to more talks.

(Soundbite of music)

INSKEEP: Its MORNING EDITION from NPR News.

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