

Afghanistan post-2014: reverberations in Kashmir

Asma Khan Lone

Summary

- There is a growing concern that the drawdown of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) from Afghanistan in 2014 may accelerate Indian-Pakistani rivalry for greater influence in Afghanistan, and that this may have grave repercussions for the security of the region, including in Kashmir.
- A number of possible scenarios, including an influx of foreign fighters or a shift in religious ideology within Kashmir, could fuel existing tensions in Kashmir, leading to an increase in the scale and intensity of violence. This could undermine and potentially reverse the already fragile Indian-Pakistani dialogue as well as intra-Kashmir peacebuilding initiatives, including cross-Line of Control (LoC) confidence building measures (CBMs).
- With violence already on the rise, it is urgent that measures are taken to increase Kashmir's resilience to potential pressures. India and Pakistan should support broader conflict resolution in Kashmir by reopening dialogue with Kashmiri leaders, facilitate increased intra-Kashmir interaction, reduce restrictions on the space for political expression, and prevent the further alienation of Kashmiri youth.
- Normalisation mechanisms between India and Pakistan – including economic ties and water cooperation in Afghanistan – have the potential to reduce instability in the long-term and help stabilise and institutionalise existing intra-Kashmir peacebuilding mechanisms.

Introduction

As US-led ISAF forces prepare for a military drawdown in Afghanistan in 2014, reverberations can be felt across the region. Afghanistan has historically been the setting for great power contests and has more recently evolved as an extended arena for Indian-Pakistani rivalry.

Pakistan views India's presence in Afghanistan as part of a larger design to 'encircle' Pakistan and a cover for supporting anti-state forces in its restive provinces of Balochistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). India on the other hand believes Pakistan is attempting to subvert its economic and strategic interests in Afghanistan. It further suspects that political and military elements in Afghanistan, in cooperation with organisations in Pakistan, pose a potential national security concern to India (both in Afghanistan and on Indian territory), particularly in the disputed region of Kashmir.

At the centre of tensions between India and Pakistan lies Kashmir, a region over which the countries have fought three wars. The continuing security dilemma between the two countries is heightened by concern that the withdrawal of ISAF forces will be hailed a victory for religious and political militancy by some regional elements, and will encourage militant action elsewhere in the region, in particular in Kashmir. This could see a shift in focus and resources, including financing and recruitment for armed action, in the already troubled region.

There has been a decrease in militant activity in Kashmir since ISAF began operations in Afghanistan, as well as an increase in CBMs and peacebuilding initiatives on and between both sides of the LoC. The first ever dialogue between elements of the Kashmiri secessionist leadership and the Government of India also took place during the period.

However, 2013 saw an alarming increase in levels of violence in Indian-administered Kashmir compared to preceding years. While it is unlikely this violence will reach the same levels of the insurgency in the 1990s, there is a growing concern that reverberations from Afghanistan may fuel existing tensions within Kashmir. This could lead to an increase in the scale and intensity of violence, as well as undermine and potentially reverse the fragile Indian-Pakistani dialogue and the various intra-Kashmir initiatives that have been established in recent years to support a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

This paper examines the dynamics of rising violence in Kashmir, the potential paths such instability may take, and, in particular, the underlying factors of such violence in the context of the ISAF drawdown in Afghanistan. While the trajectory of outcomes that may emerge from the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan is unclear, the severity of the associated risks highlights the need to ensure and protect the political space for dialogue and peacebuilding initiatives in Kashmir at all levels.

Escalating violence in Kashmir

In 2013 there was an increase of violence in Kashmir, along with a deepening diplomatic stalemate between India and Pakistan. Military violations along the LoC in early January were followed by a succession of skirmishes and artillery exchange across the LoC. There were a total of 200 incidents – an increase of 80 per cent from the preceding year. These exchanges were violations of the 2003 ceasefire agreement, which had successfully limited such episodes for almost a decade. The pattern of violence continued throughout the year as both sides accused each other of instigating and provoking the violations.

There was also increased militant activity within Indian-administered Kashmir. There were 103 casualties during the first nine months of the year compared to 57 in the same period in 2012.

There was also a sharp increase in the targeting of security personnel with 65 such attacks in the year. A militant attack on military and police installations in Jammu threatened to derail a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York between the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh and his Pakistani counterpart, Nawaz Sharif. According to the Indian army, approximately 40 militants attempted to cross the LoC in September 2013 and came into direct confrontation with the Indian security forces. Although the incident was subsequently downplayed in the national Indian media it was demonstrative of the complex interests in continued violence in Kashmir. The year also witnessed a continuation of the 'summer uprising' seen in previous years, with clashes between security personnel and the local population in Shopian reverberating across Kashmir.

Potential scenarios following drawdown of ISAF forces

Whilst escalating violence in Kashmir highlights continuing and emerging challenges for the region, it also sits at the edges of a larger security paradigm evolving in the region. The emerging situation in Afghanistan has the potential to exacerbate regional fault lines in a cyclical manner; it could be utilised by India and Pakistan to derive leverage in Kashmir, while any resulting violence in Kashmir could be used by both countries to garner advantages in Afghanistan.

A shift in focus for regional militancy

The withdrawal of the bulk of ISAF forces from Afghanistan could be seen as an ideological victory for political and religious militancy in the region. It could also lead to a diminishing ideological premise for conflict within Afghanistan, especially for foreign fighters, even if the internal power struggle rages on. Foreign fighters may then seek new ideological frontlines and causes elsewhere, spurred on by a sense of triumph over unwanted 'colonising' forces.

Kashmir is often evoked as one alternative option for fighters currently in Afghanistan – the other being the larger conflict-theatres in the Middle East. A report by the Oslo-based Centre for International and Strategic Analysis (SISA) quotes a leading Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) commander in January 2013 vowing to send fighters to Kashmir.¹ A Hizbul Mujahideen commander who had been fighting in Afghanistan, told Al Jazeera in September 2013 that, "Many Kashmiris have been martyred in Afghanistan. So it is a debt that the Afghan Mujahideen owe us." On 5 February 2014,

Hafiz Saeed, head of Jammāt-ud-Dawaah – the political wing of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – publicly declared that "just as foreign forces had to withdraw from Afghanistan, India will have to withdraw from Kashmir."

Inter-linkages between various Afghan and Pakistani militant organisations are already well established. According to Indian analysts, cooperation has taken place for many years, with Kashmir-centric organisations such as the LeT targeting Indian assets in cooperation with various Afghanistan-centric outfits. The bombing of the Indian consulate in Jalalabad in August 2013, the Indian Embassy in Kabul in 2008, and the targeting of various other Indian assets are cited as evidence of this collaboration. The growing presence of LeT in the eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan is also highlighted as further indication of cooperation.²

Renewed violence in Kashmir will provide militants added ideological impetus and credibility within Kashmir, heightened by the political stalemate of 2003-2013 (also termed the 'Lost Decade'), when despite numerous windows of opportunities there was no substantive forward movement towards the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The receding ISAF forces provide an opportunity for militant organisations such as LeT and its affiliates to resume activity in Kashmir. These autonomous organisations, resourceful both in terms of men and material, primarily derive their legitimacy and credibility from the 'Kashmir cause' – the secession of Kashmir from India. The changing regional

1 Bennett-Jones, Owen. 'Trouble in Kashmir', The News (2013): www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-9-213779-Trouble-in-Kashmir

2 Patil, Sameer. 'India's top security risks in 2014', Gateway House (2014): www.gatewayhouse.in/indias-top-security-risks-in-2014/

realities provide them the opportunity to bolster their credentials and improve their position within the power hierarchy of the militant groups based in Pakistan. The strengthening of the Taliban position in Afghanistan and parts of Northern Pakistan reinforces ideological support to replicate the model in Kashmir.

Election processes due to take place in 2014 – Indian general elections and assembly elections in Indian-administered Kashmir – also provide the opportunity for militant organisations to tilt the balance in favour of militant ideology. The disruption of elections and resulting low voter turnout also electorally benefits certain political parties in Kashmir. Whilst they may not directly support violence they may consciously choose not to restrain it. In addition, a certain level of violence suits various political actors in Kashmir enabling them to maintain their relevance either with New Delhi or Islamabad.

Increased pressure on Indian-Pakistani relations

There is a concern that any renewed low-intensity warfare in Kashmir, as well as a potential power play between India and Pakistan within Afghanistan, could intensify strained relations between the two countries – disrupting some of the positive developments in their relationship in recent years such as CBMs, as well as jeopardising the possibility for broader dialogue. Faced

with its own internal challenges, the Pakistani establishment may not undertake any intervention in Kashmir directly but could turn a blind eye to any adventurism carried out by other autonomous outfits such as the LeT. This is more likely if a regional shift in militant activity towards Kashmir leads to a shift in attacks on the Pakistani army within Pakistan to the Indian army in Kashmir – acting as what a US Military Academy-sponsored study at WestPoint termed, a “release valve” for terrorism-inflicted Pakistan.

Equally, certain constituencies in India may point to rising violence in Kashmir to validate a hardline approach. Heightened violence in Kashmir would provide justification for the prevalence of the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that extends immunity to the various security and paramilitary forces in Kashmir. This would facilitate the expansion of security forces in Kashmir and go against the trend in recent years when a decrease in violence diminished the need for an extended military presence.

India could also rely on a narrative of Pakistani-backed escalating violence to resist pressure to engage moderate elements within Kashmir as well as Pakistan. It would also allow India to build its diplomatic argument against a US rapprochement with the Afghan Taliban, which would be seen as strengthening Pakistan’s position in Afghanistan while jeopardising Indian interests.

Repercussions for Kashmir

Although the exact outcomes of the withdrawal of ISAF forces from Afghanistan are unclear, there are real concerns about the widespread repercussions for Kashmir, particularly if India sees the need for an expanded security policy in Kashmir. Despite an increasing peace constituency in Kashmir the lack of substantive forward movement in the peace process supports the prevailing discourse that peaceful methods are not reciprocated by India and that “violence is the only way to negotiate with India.” As well as the physical impact on the population, an increase in violence could:

- Obstruct intra-Kashmir initiatives
- Lead to renewed restrictions on political space
- Lead to a radicalisation of political and ideological beliefs
- Increase the sense of alienation amongst the Kashmiri population, in particular youth

These scenarios are interlinked and could potentially increase the likelihood of insecurity in Kashmir and within India and Pakistan, as well as affect existing and future conflict resolution and

peacebuilding efforts at all levels.

Obstruction of intra-Kashmir initiatives

There is a real risk that an increase in instability will hamper initiatives aimed at supporting interaction and institutionalised collaboration between communities on both sides of the LoC. For example, the cross-LoC trade and bus service could be reduced or completely halted, as occurred during recent skirmishes across the LoC, and anticipated initiatives such as the ‘Skardu - Kargil Road’ could be abandoned. Furthermore, increased instability could trigger security measures that completely close the door on any such enterprise, such as the proposed construction by India of a 10-metre high and 135-metre wide concrete wall along the LoC to deter the infiltration of militants. Cross-border initiatives have played a crucial role in promoting communication and interaction between communities divided by the LoC, and particularly in reuniting divided families and reviving historical social, cultural and economic linkages. As well as direct benefits to the immediate communities, such

initiatives are an integral stepping stone for wider conflict transformation – if such developments are given time to evolve they can support broader trust-building, capacity-strengthening and reframing of the conflict allowing space for Kashmiris to lay the groundwork for more institutionalised collaboration. There is a real risk that the positive benefits of the cross-LoC CBMs will be lost or worse, reversed.

Renewed restrictions on political space

The reduction in violence in previous years had opened up political space in Kashmir. This had provided space for discussion amongst Kashmiris on common social, political and economic issues of concern. This has led to increased political confidence amongst Kashmiris and a strengthening of the Kashmiri voice, which had previously been absent from the Indian-Pakistani dominated arena. It also allowed an active civil society to flourish and supported the emergence of an expanded peace constituency. An increase in violence could spell the return of the crackdown on political expression that was prevalent during the previous phase of the insurgency. While such action serves as a means to quell political dissent, it is also instrumental in restricting the possibility for Kashmiri-owned political alternatives and conflict resolution, and entrenches a narrative shaped by external forces.

Shift in religious and political ideology

Historically home to Sufi ideology and tradition, Kashmir has seen an increased proclivity towards a more stringent variant of Deobandi ideology in recent years. The past decade has seen an increase in religious Madrassas and the growing appeal of more strict versions of Islamic scripture. These trends, heightened by the continued political deadlock, have radicalised significant sections of youth. There is a risk that the withdrawal of ISAF forces will be seen as a victory for a particular brand of religious ideology as well as for armed resistance against 'outside forces.' This discourse could be used to bolster credibility and support for militant action within Kashmir. Furthermore, any infiltration of foreign fighters into the region could also bring with it a more austere and belligerent form of Wahabi Islam with a regional political agenda stretching beyond Kashmir. This would threaten the indigenous nature of the conflict and undermine a Kashmiri narrative that identifies the assertion of national, political rights as the prime motive for resistance. This type of distortion was seen in the late 1990s when the indigenous nationalist agenda was overtaken by an Islamist and bloodier 'fidayeen' modus operandi of 'external' militant organisations, including LeT. This fed into a discourse of a Pakistani-controlled militancy, which was supported by the subsequent

post 9/11 narrative, and justified the use of harsher and more blunt security measures. A resurgence of such a dynamic would make it both physically and ideologically difficult to move towards a more realistic and Kashmir-centric resolution of the conflict.

The continued alienation of Kashmiri youth

Kashmiri youth feel an acute sense of alienation propelled by a lack of socio-economic and political opportunities and administrative misgovernance and corruption. The perception that India is stalling on political progress has increased their agitated and vulnerable frame of mind. Any of the factors highlighted above, including increased religious radicalisation, could provide a vehicle for increased mobilisation of youth. Whether this is violent or non-violent, recent evidence suggests that any mobilisation generates an increased reaction by security forces, which feeds back into a feeling of marginalisation and anger. The rising levels of violence already corresponds to an increased number of educated youth participating in militant activities.³ Any further limitation or restriction of social and economic activities will feed into the mounting frustration and reified belief that India is to blame. A hardened and emboldened batch of militants (potentially supported by those with extended experience in Afghanistan) will not constrict their activities to Kashmir, and the effects could be felt across mainland India.

However, concurrent developments towards normalisation between India and Pakistan have the potential to reduce instability in the long-term and help stabilise and institutionalise existing intra-Kashmir peacebuilding mechanisms. A commitment by the two countries in December 2013 to uphold the 2003 ceasefire agreement is a positive sign in this regard, as is the growing official interaction and resumption of track II diplomacy between the two states. Internal challenges that beset both countries, including India's stagnating economy and growing energy security concerns and Pakistan's violent unrest, also underscore the need for an integrated regional framework. This would facilitate the introduction of further confidence building mechanisms in Kashmir both on an intra-Kashmir level as well as along the Srinagar-New Delhi and Muzaffarabad-Islamabad axes.

These challenges could also play out in opposite, especially in the medium term, with each country vying to undermine the other's leverage, particularly in Afghanistan. This competition could eventually find its way into Kashmir.

³ Jacob, Happymon. 'Kashmir's educated militants', Greater Kashmir (2013): www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2013/Jun/16/kashmir-s-educated-militants-12.asp

Suggested points for action

- India needs to seek partners for peace within Kashmir by reigniting the beleaguered dialogue process with the moderate Kashmiri leadership. It should also expand the scope of the dialogue process by including the intelligentsia and civil society. Ultimately, India needs to make the process inclusive by embracing a more representative set of stakeholders.
- Existing intra-Kashmir CBMs – cross-LoC trade and travel – need to be streamlined and consolidated and in due course expanded to other areas of cross-LoC cooperation.
- Broader intra-Kashmir interaction should be permitted. Parliamentarians and political leaders should be allowed to travel across and engage in cross-LoC dialogue. This would help to bridge the trust gap and remove many of the operational difficulties in implementing existing CBMs. A small, demilitarised zone of approximately one kilometre could be created along the Srinagar–Muzaffarabad and Poonch–Rawlakot routes to support the process of dialogue among people on both sides of the LoC. This could be used as a park dedicated to dialogue between Kashmiri people including divided families, traders and students. Such dialogue is likely to prove effective in consensus building across the LoC.⁴
- India and Pakistan should provide more space for political expression within areas of Kashmir under their control. This can be done in the form of devolution of powers, free and credible elections, independent media and receptive political institutions.
- The peace process of 2004-2007 should be restarted by India and Pakistan. Although current political administrations may wish to avoid association with frameworks or nomenclature used by previous governments, similar guidelines of realistic and achievable goalposts should be set out. Making borders ‘irrelevant’ should be a key guide.
- India and Pakistan need to institutionalise structures of dialogue and an eventual peace process that are more inclusive of Kashmiri representation and perspectives.
- India and Pakistan should put in place institutional mechanisms similar to the (now defunct) 2006 Joint Anti-Terrorism Mechanism (JATM). It addressed terrorism as a collective threat and provided a constructive institutional framework for engagement. The mechanism should be extended to include violence in Kashmir. It should also have the capacity to transcend terrorist strikes undertaken by non-state actors without derailing broader engagement between the two countries.
- An integrated regional economic corridor would help build a model of ‘complex interdependence’, which would make it less possible to take maximalist stances or undermine institutionalised peacebuilding measures. The existing Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) with Pakistan could be expanded and linked to the improving trade ties between India and Pakistan as well as the envisaged Gwadar–Kashgar economic corridor, which includes parts of Kashmir under Pakistani-administrative control.
- A concerted Indian-Pakistani effort to improve Afghanistan’s outdated irrigation system to reduce wastage could lead to a possible water-sharing mechanism between Pakistan and Afghanistan (who share nine rivers).⁵ Any such agreement would relieve the pressure on the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) and the ensuing friction between India and Pakistan. More importantly, any water sharing agreement with Afghanistan will address Pakistan’s water insecurity, which has profound implications for Kashmir. Kashmir is central to Pakistan’s water security as all the country’s major rivers flow from Kashmir. If Pakistan is able to diversify its water sources and decrease its reliance on Kashmir it might be possible to reduce its intense focus on Kashmir. This could bring about a more flexible and creative outlook on Kashmir, paving the way for more enabling conditions for a resolution to the conflict.

4 Kamal, Arif. ‘Wither intra-Kashmir dialogue’, Greater Kashmir (2008).

5 Khurshedi, Nusrat. ‘Sharing water resources with Afghanistan’, Dawn (2011): <https://ronna.apan.org/Lists/Submitted%20Content/Attachments/4543/Sharing%20Water%20Resources%20With%20Afghanistan.pdf>

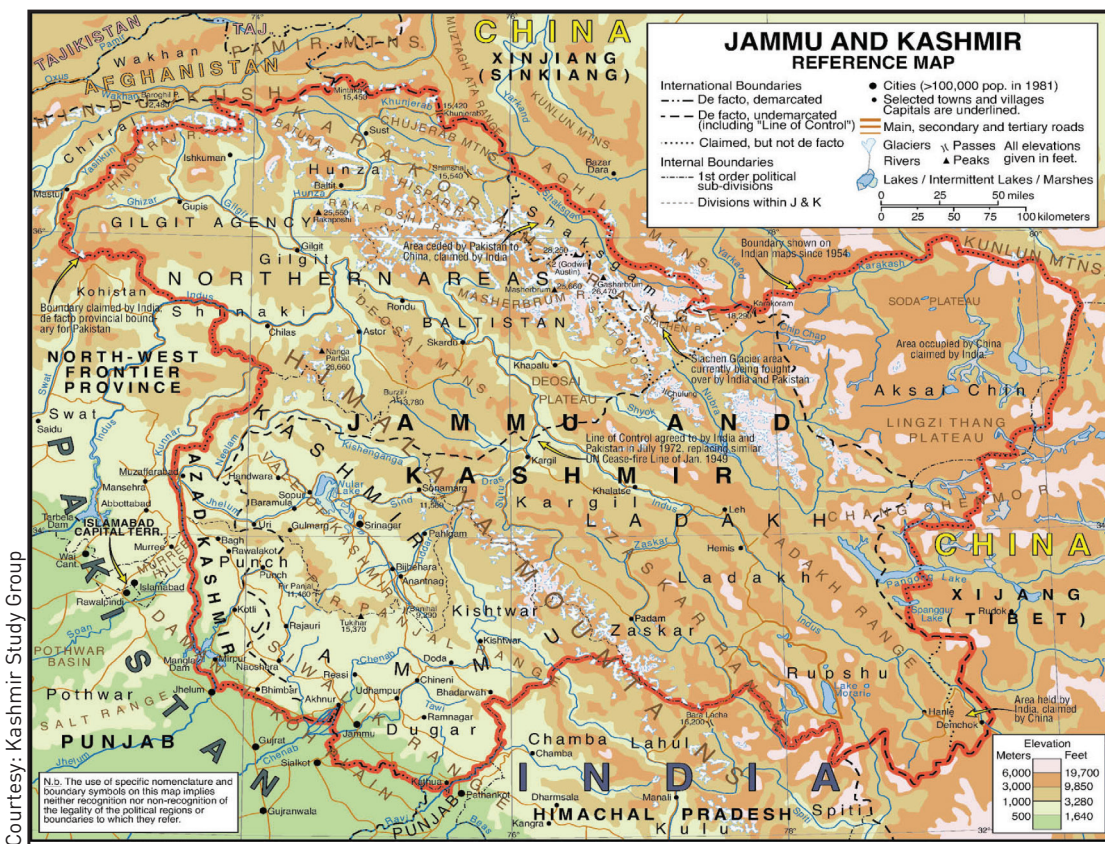
Conclusion

With the drawdown of ISAF forces from Afghanistan the risk of a proliferation of radicalised, ideology-driven militancy in the region seems a plausible possibility, particularly in the context of rising violence in Kashmir. Not only does this threaten to undo and potentially reverse the various peacebuilding measures underway in Kashmir, it could also close the avenues for future initiatives and forward movement on the issue.

Against the backdrop of a deep-seated desire for peace in Kashmir, both India and Pakistan

should strengthen the evolving peace constituency in Kashmir and help delegitimise violent and radicalised means of political pursuit. The drawdown of ISAF forces provides both a threat and an opportunity to explore areas of cooperation between the two countries and to reignite the peace process. There is also an urgent need to support the political space for peacebuilding within Kashmir and allow it to evolve towards institutionalised mechanisms of conflict resolution.

Map of Jammu and Kashmir region



Courtesy: Kashmir Study Group

Kashmir Initiative Group Members

- Dr. Shujaat Bukhari**, Convener of KIG; Senior Journalist, Srinagar
- Ershad Mahmud**, Co-convener of KIG; Columnist, Rawalakot/Islamabad
- Asma Khan Lone**, Analyst, Islamabad/New Delhi
- Dr. Shaheen Akhtar**, Academic, Researcher and Policy Analyst, Islamabad
- Dr. Parikshat Singh Manhas**, Academic, Researcher and Policy Analyst, Jammu
- Fayaz Ahmed Dar**, Researcher and Social Activist, Srinagar
- Javid Hayat Khan**, Researcher and Political Analyst, Berlin
- Ismail Khan**, Public Policy and Regional Cooperation Specialist, Islamabad
- Sardar Amjad Yousaf Khan**, Executive Director, Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR), AJK
- Shafat N. Ahmad**, Lawyer and Co-founder of Centre for Law & Development Policy, Srinagar
- Zafar Choudhary**, Journalist, Jammu

About the Kashmir Initiative Group (KIG)

KIG mission statement:

'An intra-Kashmir peacebuilding platform, building bridges between community perspectives and policymakers.'

Aims of KIG

- To influence policymaking
- To engage in advocacy
- To promote peace and reconciliation
- To empower local narratives through advocacy, research, and capacity building
- To network and provide a platform for peace
- To provide Kashmiris more agency
- To bridge local level civil society with policymakers



Kashmir Initiative Group

Residency Road
Srinagar-190001
Kashmir

House No. 148, Sector
F-2, Mirpur, Azad
Jammu and Kashmir –
Pakistan 10250

Email: 7kig2012@gmail.com

About Conciliation Resources

We're an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. Conciliation Resources is there as long as we're needed to provide advice, support and practical resources. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and practice worldwide.

Our programme work focuses on seven conflict-affected regions around the world, including Kashmir, and we take a further in-depth look at specific conflict contexts and peacebuilding themes through our *Accord* publication series: www.c-r.org/accord

Charity registered in England and Wales (1055436). Company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (03196482).

Conciliation Resources promotes participation of Kashmiris in the India-Pakistan peace process. We work in all regions of the disputed area including Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, and in India-administered Jammu and Kashmir. We also work with Kashmiri diaspora. Together, we can find peaceful alternatives to violence.

Conciliation Resources

Burghley Yard, 106 Burghley Road
London NW5 1AL
United Kingdom

Telephone +44 (0)20 7359 7728
Email cr@c-r.org
Website www.c-r.org

[Facebook.com/ConciliationResources](https://www.facebook.com/ConciliationResources)
[Twitter.com/CRbuildpeace](https://twitter.com/CRbuildpeace)

Supported by Conciliation Resources and the United States Institute for Peace.



The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.