



Where is Kashmir?

- Kashmir is fundamentally contested, each acre claimed by one or the other neighbouring country (India, Pakistan, and China). It covers 222,200 square kilometres – the size of countries such as Ghana and the United Kingdom.
- Approximately 17 million people live across this vast area, mostly in the regions controlled by India and Pakistan. The population of the Indian-held region alone is 12.5 million. Aksai Chin, controlled by China, is barren, its significance merely for a road that connects Tibet to Xinjiang.

What is the permanent problem of Kashmir?

- The question of Kashmir is part of the unresolved business of the partition of South Asia in 1947. Until 1947, the region was under the control of a Hindu monarchy. The king was unwilling to accede to India. It was after armed raiders from Pakistan entered the Kashmir valley that he agreed to sign the Instrument of Accession. The most popular political movement in the region, the Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah), agreed to join the Indian Union as long as Kashmir's autonomy was

respected. The Indian Union has consistently whittled away at this autonomy.

- On the day that the Indian army entered Kashmir (27 October 1947), India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sent a telegram to Pakistan's Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan. In this telegram, Nehru wrote that Kashmir's future 'must be decided with the wishes of the people'. The standoff brought the dispute to the United Nations Security Council, which called for a plebiscite (resolutions 38 and 47).
- Kashmir was divided by the war of 1947 between India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan have fought at least four major wars (1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999) as a result of this conflict, which has generated a permanent insurgency and a permanent militarisation. There are estimated to be 600,000 Indian troops in Kashmir. Both countries have nuclear weapons.
- Conditions in the Indian part of Kashmir have been atrocious for decades. Sober observers of the region have catalogued human rights abuses, including detentions, collective punishment, and torture of civilians. The UN High Commissioner of Human Rights' reports from 2018 and 2019 show a shocking disregard for human rights by the Indian government in Kashmir. This violation of human rights and dignity is sought to be justified by the wild accusation that Kashmiris are terrorists.

What is the current crisis in Kashmir?

- Two articles in the **Constitution of India** (1950) offered a fragile compromise towards the state's autonomy. Article 370 conferred a special status on Jammu & Kashmir, allowing the state autonomy over certain key aspects of its governance. Article 35A prevented non-Kashmiri permanent residents from, among other matters, owning land in Kashmir.

- On 5 August 2019, the right-wing Indian government of Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) invalidated articles 370 and 35A. This has been a demand of the Indian right-wing ever since 1948. On 3 April 2018, the Indian Supreme Court had said that Article 370 had acquired permanent status. Article 35A could not be removed because the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved in 1957. The legal basis to remove these two articles is not available. It will be challenged in the Indian courts.
- Before the Modi government made this announcement in Parliament, it sent 35,000 additional Indian troops into Kashmir. At the same time, it arrested all the major political leaders in Jammu & Kashmir. The legislative assembly had been dissolved in November 2018. The press was curtailed, and the Internet and phone services shut down.
- The Indian government has unconstitutionally abolished the state of Jammu & Kashmir and divided it into two Union Territories, which will be governed from New Delhi rather than from Jammu & Kashmir's capital Srinagar.
- The Communist Party of India (Marxist) called the government's actions the 'murder of democracy and federalism'.

What is the geopolitical impact of the Kashmir crisis?

- The Indian government's move on Jammu & Kashmir should not merely be seen as an internal matter. It is inextricably linked to the geopolitical atmosphere around the region.
- The borders of China, India, and Pakistan collide in Kashmir. All three countries have fought wars for parts of Kashmiri territory. India and Pakistan have fought four wars, while China and India fought one major war in 1962.

- The main conflict here – since the 1940s – has been between India and Pakistan. Disagreements are deeply rooted in the political culture of each country. The rise of the far right in India has only inflamed the conflict further.
- Wrapped up in the India-Pakistan conflict is the larger struggle between the United States and China. China opened its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to any country that would like to participate. India has refused partly because of its older history of animosity against China and partly because of its subordination to the United States. The United States is against the BRI; it is committed to the encirclement of China.
- China's BRI has developed in Pakistan and Nepal. The \$46 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) runs through Pakistani-controlled Kashmir along the Karakoram Highway to the Gwadar Port in Baluchistan. In 2017, China and Nepal agreed to build the Himalayan Economic Corridor. India's Border Roads Organisation has been busy building roads along its border with China, from Kashmir to Bhutan to Nagaland.
- In 2017, tensions rose in the Doklam region near the border between Bhutan, China, and India. Bhutan openly says that it does not want to get drawn into a China-India conflict. It wants to settle its border with China but is prevented from doing so by India.

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