



Will Iran Interfere in Kashmir?

OE Watch Commentary: The dispute between Pakistan, India, and China over the Kashmir region dates back to the 1947 partition of India and it remains one of the world's most intractable problems. Today, India controls approximately 43 percent of Kashmir (in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where 70 percent of the Kashmir region's total population lives), and Pakistan controls 37 percent of the region as a province it calls Azad Kashmir, or Free Kashmir. China controls Aksai Chin, a border area which falls under the administration of the Xinjian Uyghur Autonomous Region.

On 1 April 2018 violence flared in India-controlled Kashmir, leading to the deaths of 20 people, including 13 rebels, four civilians, and three members of the Indian army. Against this backdrop, the Iranian foreign ministry offered itself as a mediator in a statement excerpted from the *Islamic Students News Agency*.

While Iran has cordial relations both with India, an important trading partner, and increasingly Pakistan, its interest in Kashmir might also be ideological. While Iranian leaders frequently talk about their support of Palestinian "resistance" against Israel, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei also frequently lists the administration of Kashmir by Hindu-dominated India as both a grievance that the world should rectify and as evidence of a plot by Western powers to subjugate Muslims.

As the Islamic Republic increasingly acts militarily and by proxy to export the values of its revolution, more ideological elements inside the Iranian government might seek to ramp up their activities in, and support for, Kashmiri separatists in Jammu and Kashmir. While the practicalities of Iran-India trade might temper this, the presence of Twelver and Ismaili Shi'ite Muslim communities in Kashmir provide a means for the Iranians to augment their activities should the ideologues win the debate against foreign policy pragmatists. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**

"Iran has supported any actions that are in the best interests of the people of Kashmir."

Source: "Amadegi Iran baraye komak beh Kahesh Tenesh dar Kashmir" ("Iran is Ready to Reduce Tensions in Kashmir"), *Islamic Students News Agency*, 2 April 2018. <https://goo.gl/ud8RPX>

The spokesman of the Foreign Ministry, expressing regret at the recent conflict in Kashmir, called upon both sides for restraint. Behram Ghassemi, expressing regret at the recent unrest in Kashmir, which led to the deaths and injuries of many citizens, invited the parties to show restraint in the conflict. The Foreign Ministry spokesman added, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has supported any actions that are in the best interests of the people of Kashmir, and Iran is ready to take effective steps to reduce tensions if requested by the parties."

Source: "Didar-e Rais Jomhuri Slovini bah Rahbar-e Enghelab" ("Meeting of the President of Slovenia with the Supreme Leader"), *Khamenei.ir*, 22 November 2016, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=34967>

"U.S. officials do not have a plan for uprooting the Islamic State. Like the British-- who have kept the wound of Kashmir open since an era of colonialism on the Indian subcontinent, which has resulted in the discord of two neighboring countries, India and Pakistan, until today...."



Neelum Valley, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan.

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