



## Iran: Khamenei Speaks on Kashmir

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Islamic Republic of Iran often portrays itself not only as the leader of the world's Shi'ites, but also more broadly as leader of the Islamic world. As such, the Iranian leadership often advocates on behalf of Palestinians, Houthis, and Rohingya Muslims (See: "Iran to Assist Burmese Muslims," *OE Watch*, February 2013). However, the realities of diplomacy and Iran's national interests often mute its advocacy for certain Muslim communities. For example, Iranian authorities were largely silent in the face of Russian massacres of Chechens during the first and second Chechen Wars, and have also declined to criticize China for its mass incarceration of Uighur Muslims.

In the past, Iranian authorities have gently offered their diplomatic offices if not other support for Kashmiri Muslims upset with Indian rule (See: "Will Iran Interfere in Kashmir?" *OE Watch*, May 2018). India's August 2019 decision to revoke Article 370 of the Indian constitution and end Kashmir's special status within India was reportedly met with widespread dissent inside Kashmir, with

violence averted only by preemptive arrests, communication cuts, and the deployment of the Indian military and security forces into civilian areas within Kashmir. In the excerpted speech from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's website, the Iranian supreme leader seeks to walk the tightrope between advocating for Kashmiris while refraining from directly criticizing India, which remains a major Iranian trading partner and an outlet for Iranian students and tourists unable to get visas to either the United States or European countries. He does this by blaming the British.

Despite all the anti-US rhetoric among top Iranian officials and regular "Death to America" rallies, it is important to remember that historically Great Britain remains the chief boogey in the Iranian psyche, and the center of all conspiracies. Suspicion of the British remains rooted in their efforts to control Iran and exploit its resources during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, it was a desire to unravel British controls that led the Iranian government to first seek American advisors in the early twentieth century.

By suggesting that the latest Kashmir crisis is the direct result of a British conspiracy, Khamenei is threading a diplomatic needle: He is showing the Iranian public and the broader Muslim community that he stands in solidarity with Kashmir without actively antagonizing India. It is unlikely the Iranian government can continue this delicate balancing act, however, if Kashmir remains in the news. **End OE Watch Commentary (Rubin)**



Police confront protestors in Indian Kashmir, 17 December 2018.

Source: Photo by Seyyed Sajed Hassan Razavi, Tasnim News Agency, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/df/Police\\_in\\_Kashmir\\_confronting\\_violent\\_protestors\\_December\\_2018.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/df/Police_in_Kashmir_confronting_violent_protestors_December_2018.jpg)

*“This is the work of evil England.”*

**Source:** Bayn Setor-e Majera-ye Kashmir (Between the Lines of the Kashmir Story),” *Khamenei.ir*, 21 August 2019. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/video-content?id=43398>

### ***Kashmir is a Wound Left by the British***

*I am upset about the situation of Kashmir. The friends in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are not present here, but the Muslim people of Kashmir are really being oppressed. They are really being pressured. A fair policy should be adopted by the Indian government regarding these honorable people who live there. Of course, we have good relations with the Indian government, but we have this expectation of them.*

*I will tell you that this is the work of evil England. This is a wound that the English created in the Indian Subcontinent since 1947. When they were moving out of that area and when the subcontinent was divided into two parts, namely India and Pakistan. They inflicted that wound and they deliberately did not want it to be healed. They wished that the two countries of India and Pakistan would continue to have disputes and disagreements. Well, these pressures which are being exerted on the people are the consequences of that policy.*