



[\[Back \]](#)

[USIPeace Briefing](#)

Building Blocks, Stumbling Blocks: Prospects for Peace in Kashmir

By [A Heather Coyne](#)
January 2007

- [Stumbling Blocks to Peace](#)
- [Building Blocks to Peace](#)
 - [Who speaks for Kashmir?](#)
 - [Parties and Issues](#)
 - [Shaping the Deal](#)
- [Notes](#)

The U.S. Institute of Peace recently hosted Farooq Kathwari, head of the Kashmir Study Group, to discuss the prospects for peace in Kashmir. Kathwari's personal involvement and commitment to the peace process give him a unique ability to see potential for a way around the obstacles in this seemingly intractable conflict. During the session, Chester Crocker, a member of the Kashmir Study Group and a USIP board member, described those obstacles in more depth, providing a framework for analyzing what peacemaking efforts like Kathwari's have been able to achieve and which aspects of the process remain fragile.

This USIPeace Briefing highlights the central points made during that discussion and does not represent the views of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

Stumbling Blocks to Peace

Crocker outlined the major stumbling blocks that stand in the way of a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict, stumbling blocks that both result from and contribute to its intractable character:

- The centrality of Kashmir to the identity of both India and Pakistan means that compromising on the principle of Kashmir is felt by both sides to be the equivalent of compromising one's national identity.
- There is a lack of clarity about who the parties to the conflict are and who is empowered to be at the table in a peace process.
- There is a lack of clarity about what issues need to be resolved: is the question whether the territory of Kashmir should be part of India or Pakistan or is it whether the people of Kashmir should have some form of autonomy?
- There is a lack of consensus on the shape of the deal: that is, on what the solutions might look like and who would sign on to them.
- There is no agreement on who speaks for the Kashmiris and no clear way for an authentic Kashmiri voice to emerge in an environment where various powers are trying to monopolize the decision on

who can speak for the Kashmiri people.

- External mediation is not an option because the power asymmetry between India and Pakistan allows India to veto external intervention.
- There is no agreement on a peace process: one side preconditions a peace process on the cessation of violence while the other says it cannot control the violence until progress on resolving issues is achieved.
- The protracted nature of the conflict empowers extremists by increasing the number of grievances and potential spoilers. The longer the conflict continues, the more difficult it is to resolve.
- Resolving this issue is a low priority for the international actors that have leverage on Indian and Pakistan, and for the governments of India and Pakistan themselves.
- The Kashmir issue is inextricably linked to the wider problem of Hindu-Muslim relations in the region.

Any of these obstacles in itself might be enough to deter or derail a peace process; taken together, they present a formidable challenge to peacemaking in the region.

Building Blocks to Peace

In his presentation, Kathwari described the progress that has been made on several of these obstacles, stating that prospects for peace are better today than they have been at any point in the last six years. However, he noted that even the successes are fragile, and the chances of disruption are high. He believes that a major effort is needed by all sides to take advantage of the momentum that has been created on several fronts.

Who speaks for Kashmir?

Perhaps the most important recent development addresses the issue of who speaks for the Kashmiris. Several dialogue initiatives have brought Kashmiris together from both sides of the Line of Control and from many sectors of society.¹ The results suggest that Kashmiris, when they have the opportunity to speak for themselves, may pursue a dialogue on resolving the conflict more assertively than the Indian and Pakistani governments that claim to act on their behalf. At a meeting convened in December 2004 by Pugwash, Kashmiri leaders, meeting for the first time in decades, reached agreement on a consensus document in only two hours.

Another lesson of this increase in contact between Kashmiri civil society and government leaders is that while challenges to external mediation may be prohibitive, less formal facilitation has become more acceptable and constructive. Foreign NGOs have provided the opportunity for the parties to meet and have helped to frame the discussions, but have not attempted to impose solutions or press the parties further than they want to go.

Parties and Issues

Improved communication, not only between civil society organizations, but also between the governments of India and Pakistan, has contributed to a growing recognition of the interdependency of interests. For example, for the first time Indian and Pakistani business leaders are putting pressure on their political leaders to address the Kashmir issue. They understand that trade in south and central Asia is impeded by the bad relations that exist between India and Pakistan as a result of their antagonism over Kashmir. Other interdependencies, such as environment, energy, natural resource management, and control of extremism, have similarly created impetus for change. New players and new factors have been inserted into the debate, with the potential to alter the cost-benefit calculation of resolving the conflict.

The parties have also evolved in their understanding of the proposal to hold a plebiscite for Kashmir,

which has been a longstanding point of dissension. The Kashmir Study Group recognizes that the demand for a plebiscite, as stated in its original form, is not practical and that there will be no progress if the parties insist on waiting for one. However, a greater appreciation of the heterogeneity of Kashmir has created another option: regional plebiscites that recognize that Kashmir is not one homogenous community but a collection of several communities with differing needs. Incorporating this diversity into the peace process could result in a solution that is more acceptable to the different actors.

Shaping the Deal

These developments, reinforced by the post September-11 global context, have resulted in tentative changes to the stated positions of all sides, positions that have dominated the debate for the last 60 years. But in spite of the parties' willingness to move away from some of their hardline positions, the reality is that adherence to some key principles is still fixed. Therefore, to be effective, peacemakers must develop creative solutions that acknowledge these realities but take advantage of the changing paradigm. For instance, the Kashmir Study Group in early 1999 raised the idea of establishing a sovereign entity or entities from the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir but without an international personality. This idea helped jumpstart the process of looking at new options aside from the fixed positions of the parties. Unfortunately, discussion about it was ultimately derailed by the Kargil crisis.

The Kashmir Study Group developed the proposal by focusing primarily on the Kashmiri-speaking entity as the core of the problem, but after numerous discussions with peoples from various regions of Jammu and Kashmir and after the 2004 Pugwash-organized meetings, it realized that each of the other regions wanted to maintain their own identities and governmental administration as well. With this realization, the group arrived at a general concept for the "shape of the deal": give all five regions the ability to govern themselves, allowing the three on the Indian side and the two on the Pakistan side to form some common body to look after their interests, and then create an overarching entity to govern the interests shared by both sides, such as tourism, water, and environment. This solution also called for the borders to be opened, to become almost meaningless. In other words, Kathwari explained, a viable solution would not change the status quo of the Line of Control, because if you attack that principle, you cannot move forward. Instead, the proposed solution would make no changes to the Line of Control or current borders, but would make the borders irrelevant—just "lines on a map." There has been some movement on the ground since these ideas were discussed including opening the Line of Control to travel on a permit instead of passports. Discussions are now underway to open the Line of Control for trade.

This proposal has continued to evolve with input from meetings of Kashmiri civil society and officials. Indeed, one of the main debates in the region now is on the question of self-governance, on what form it might take to satisfy the parties' core interests. As Kathwari said, "There is a wide spectrum of opinion, but at least people are discussing the ideas." From Kathwari's perspective, that discussion in itself is a profound achievement. Whether it can overcome the lack of trust, the continuing "blame game" over past grievances, and, most importantly, the ability of spoilers to disrupt the slow, fragile process of devising a unified vision for the region remains to be seen. Although he is conscious of these stumbling blocks, Kathwari is hopeful that momentum is building and that any stumbling is a "stumbling forward."

Notes

1. "Kashmiris" refers to peoples of different regions of Jammu and Kashmir state as it existed in 1947.

Of Related Interest

- [Religion & Peacemaking Program](#)
- [Quickstep or Kadam Taal?: The Elusive Search for Peace in Jammu and Kashmir](#)
Special Report, March 2005

- [The Political Economy of the Kashmir Conflict: Opportunities for Economic Peacebuilding and for U.S. Policy](#)
Special Report, June 2004
- [The Kashmir Problem and Its Resolution](#)
Senior Fellow Project Report by Wajahat Habibullah, April 2004
- [India-Pakistan Negotiations: Is Past Still Prologue?](#)
USIP Press Books, May 2006
- [Events: Asia](#)
A complete listing of USIP event related to Asia, including Afghanistan Working Group events

This USIPeace Briefing was written by [A Heather Coyne](#), a senior program officer, in the Institute's [Center for Mediation and Conflict Resolution](#). The views expressed here are not necessarily those of the Institute, which does not advocate specific policies.

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan, national institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent international conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and democratic transformations, and increase peacebuilding capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in peacebuilding efforts around the globe.

[See our complete list of USIPeace Briefings.](#)

United States Institute of Peace - 1200 17th Street NW - Washington, DC 20036
(202) 457-1700 (phone) - (202) 429-6063 (fax)