

Kashmir card

Friday 28 May 2010, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 27 May 2010).

Kashmir serves as jackboot to kick civilian rulers every time they dare assert their control over Pakistan's foreign policy.

A report highlighted by Indian daily, *The Hindu*, informs about an increase in 'infiltration' at the Line of Control (LoC). If one goes by the report, the year 2009 "saw a year-on-year increase in infiltration for the first time since 2002, with an estimated 106 terrorists crossing over in 433 recorded attempts". According to the newspaper, "there were 342 reported infiltration attempts in 2008". It must be a fantastic coincidence that increased infiltration coincides with public rallies and conferences by proscribed militant outfits. One such public show, on February 4, was organised in Muzafarabad under the auspices of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), a re-named Lashkar-e-Toiba(LeT). A dozen militant groups, besides General Hameed Gul, attended this moot (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, or JKLF, strongly objected to a Jihadi conference in Muzafarabad). Next day on February 5, Jamaat-ud-Dawa staged a rally in the heart of Lahore.

That the infiltration has increased or Jihadi outfits are crying extra hoarse under a democratic ally elected government indicates a sinister pattern visible since General Zia-ul-Haq's not-so-accidental death. Every time an elected civilian set up begins to take shape in Pakistan, the Kashmir issue is assigned a catbird's seat by the powers that be. For instance, Benazir Bhutto invited her Indian counterpart, Rajiv Gandhi, during her first stint in power (1988-90) in an endeavour to improve relations with India. During this visit, Rajiv's entourage was supposed to pass by Kashmir House in Islamabad. The road-side signboard indicating the location of Kashmir House, was mysteriously removed ahead of entourage's arrival. The signboard was removed, according to propaganda commissars, 'lest it should embarrass Rajiv'. This minor incident triggered a media uproar and oppositional agitation. Also, this trifle helped stigmatise Benazir Bhutto as the so-called 'security risk'. Ironically, oppositional campaign was spearheaded by the then Punjab chief minister, Nawaz Sharif. Ten years on, Nawaz Sharif as prime minister, attempted to normalise relations with India. He invited his Indian counterpart, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to Lahore. A violent protest in Lahore by Jamaat-e-Islami on Vajpayee's arrival, to stall the peace process, was perhaps a knee jerk response. A more calculated answer to Nawaz Sharif's peace bid was Kargil conflagration. Paradoxically enough, when the architect of Kargil misadventure, General Musharraf, forcibly replaced Nawaz Sharif at the helm of affairs, Kashmir's touchy issue was conveniently consigned to the back burner. Thus Kashmir serves as the jackboot to kick the civilian rulers every time they dare assert their control over country's foreign policy. To boot, myopic politicians complicate situation for themselves. Whenever a civilian ruler is besieged or attempts to establish patriotic credentials, s/he shoots out a hawkish statement on Kashmir. It is like Arab world where every tyrant outdoes other autocrats in championing the Palestine cause.

Latest attempt to champion Kashmir question was made by President Zardari. Talking to the members of Azad Kashmir's Legislative Assembly, earlier this year, he vowed to honour his father-in-law's pledge to wage 'a thousand year war' to seize from India the territory claimed by Pakistan. Similarly, it was Nawaz Sharif who declared February 5 a national holiday as a gesture of solidarity with Kashmir's Muslim brethren. As if to prove that champions of Kashmir cause give a damn to

Muslim brethren close at home, the same industrialist Nawaz Sharif, during his second tenure as prime minister, annulled the workers' holiday on May Day!

By being hawkish, the elected leaders fail to understand, they undermine their own position. To strengthen democracy, parliamentary forces need to reclaim foreign policy. Militarisation of foreign policy would only serve anti-democratic forces and their Jiahdi proxies. Definitely not a good omen either for democracy or for peace in the region.

Farooq Sulehria

P.S.

* From Viewpoint:

* Farooq Sulehria is working with Stockholm-based Weekly Internationalen (www.internationalen.se). Before joining Internationalen, he worked for one year, 2006-07 at daily The News, Rawalpindi. Also, in Pakistan, he has worked with Lahore-based dailies, The Nation, The Frontier Post and Pakistan. He has MA in Mass Communication from Punjab University, Lahore. He also contributes for Znet and various left publications in Europe and Australia.