



Pakistan-India relations: January 2015 update

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Author: Jon Lunn

India-Pakistan relations remain fraught with danger and mistrust. Since October 2014, there have been regular exchanges of fire between their troops across the 'Line of Control' which runs through contested Kashmir. Turbulent times could lie ahead.

The two nuclear-armed governments accuse each other of responsibility for these skirmishes. The tenor of their exchanges has become increasingly hostile. There are also Indian claims that militant groups based on the Pakistan side of the Line of Control are seeking to infiltrate Indian-administered Kashmir in larger numbers. Over recent months, there have been several battles between militants and security forces.

Hopes that India and Pakistan could resume talks in earnest following the electoral victory of Narendra Modi in India last year have not yet been realised. He is currently acting like a man for whom a deal with Pakistan is desirable but not essential.

His self-confidence may soon receive another boost. Political developments within Indian Jammu and Kashmir could produce a coalition government involving his party, the BJP – an outcome which few observers would have predicted until very recently.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government is keen to do a deal with India on Kashmir and other issues but cannot afford to look weak. He will be hoping that the PDP decides against joining up with the BJP in Indian Jammu and Kashmir.

The more moderate Kashmiri separatist leaders will share the dismay of the Pakistan government if it does. However, the armed militant groups – whose influence and reach have waned in recent years – are likely to be delighted if the BJP shares power, as increased political polarisation could act as a recruiting-sergeant for them.

Pakistan's anxieties about the increasingly close US-India relationship have heightened recently. President Obama recently finished a three-day visit to India in which numerous deals were signed.

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Renewed tension along the Line of Control

India-Pakistan relations remain fraught with danger and mistrust. Since October 2014, there have been regular [exchanges of fire](#) between their troops across the 'Line of Control' which has run through contested Kashmir since Indian independence and the simultaneous birth of Pakistan in 1947. Turbulent times could lie ahead.

The two nuclear-armed governments accuse each other of responsibility for these skirmishes. The tenor of their exchanges has become increasingly hostile. There are also Indian [claims](#) that militant groups based on the Pakistan side of the Line of Control are seeking to infiltrate Indian-administered Kashmir in larger numbers. Over recent months, there have been battles between militants and security forces. In December 2014, [over 20 were killed](#) in a major clash.



Source: *CIA World Factbook* [Note: The territory in green is administered by Pakistan. The territory in orange is administered by India. The Northern Areas are now officially known as Gilgit-Baltistan]

Stalled talks

The [Mumbai attacks](#) in November 2008, in which terrorists sponsored by the Pakistan-based group Lashkar-e-Taiba, killed at least 166 people brought talks between the two countries, known officially as the 'composite dialogue', to a grinding halt. Indian calls for those responsible to be brought to justice and Pakistan's failure to act, along with the electoral cycles of the two countries, have prevented their subsequent revival.

The decisive election victories of Nawaz Sharif's branch of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) in Pakistan in 2013, followed by Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) electoral triumph in India in 2014, raised hopes that the composite dialogue might soon restart.

The 'mood-music' between the governments was relatively positive for the first few months after Narendra Modi took office as India's prime minister. Sharif attended Modi's inauguration. The foreign ministers of the two countries were due to meet in August 2014 to resume the talks. However, [India cancelled the meeting](#) after Pakistan's High Commissioner to India met with the Kashmiri separatist leader Syed Ali Saha Geelani shortly beforehand.

The BJP could become part of the state government in Jammu and Kashmir

For now, Modi's government is almost entirely unchallenged in India. He is currently acting like a man for whom a deal with Pakistan is desirable but not essential.

His self-confidence may soon receive another boost. Political developments within the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir could produce a coalition government involving his party, the BJP – an outcome which few observers would have predicted until very recently.

[State-level elections](#) took place in Jammu and Kashmir in November-December 2014. Calls by Kashmiri separatists to boycott the elections were largely ignored. The ruling National Conference/Congress Party coalition, led by Omar Abdullah, was heavily defeated.

The largely Muslim People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by Mufti Mohammed Sayeed and his daughter, Mehbooba Mufti, emerged as the largest party with 28 seats, with the BJP performing unprecedentedly strongly, albeit overwhelmingly in the Jammu part of the state, winning 25 seats and the largest share of the vote.

Overall, the PDP may have been a little disappointed by the results, which left it well short of a majority. The State Assembly has 87 seats in total.

Coalition negotiations

The PDP has subsequently been searching for the coalition partner it needs to form a government in Jammu and Kashmir. The PDP has rebuffed approaches from its arch-rival Omar Abdullah. For a while, the Congress Party appeared the keenest and most likely partner.

However, in recent days the BJP appears to have pushed its way to [the front of the queue](#). There is now talk of a "common minimum programme" in which economic development is prioritised.

The PDP may have to abandon its call for the scrapping of the controversial *Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act*, which critics argue has given the security forces impunity from prosecution for human rights abuses.

The BJP may have to abandon its call to scrap Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gives "special status" (a high degree of autonomy) to Jammu and Kashmir, if the PDP is to welcome it on board. Also likely to be required is some form of words that would reaffirm India's openness to future talks on Kashmir with Pakistan.

While it may have to give ground on Article 370, the BJP could be calculating that, by entering the state government, it will underscore its claim that Jammu and Kashmir should be increasingly considered a 'normal' state within India.

Some observers doubt that such an unlikely governing alliance will hold together for long, not least because a lot of rank-and-file members of the PDP will be uncomfortable about it.

The delay in forming a new state government and Omar Abdullah's apparent reluctance to stay on as caretaker Chief Minister led to the imposition of 'Governor's Rule' from New Delhi on 9 January 2015 on the understanding that it was a temporary measure. A deadline for forming a new government has been set for 7 February 2015.

The Pakistan government feels vulnerable

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government is keen to do a deal with India on Kashmir and other issues but cannot afford to look weak.

Despite its sizeable parliamentary majority, Sharif's government is fragile. [Street protests](#) threatened its survival in 2014. Sunni-Shia [sectarian violence](#) has been rising in recent years. There are reports of an [Islamic State presence](#) in the tribal areas.

Pakistan launched offensive operations against militants in North Waziristan in 2014 following years of US pressure to do so, and several days ago reportedly [banned](#) the Haqqani Network. The Pakistani Taliban experienced a [split](#) in 2014 but remains active – as demonstrated by its [attack on an army school](#) in Peshawar in December, in which at least 141 people died – 132 of them children.

The Pakistan government will be hoping that the PDP decides against joining up with the BJP in Indian Jammu and Kashmir. The more moderate Kashmiri separatist leaders will share the dismay of the Pakistan government if it does.

However, the armed militant groups – whose influence and reach have waned in recent years – are likely to be delighted if the BJP shares power, as increased political polarisation could act as a recruiting-sergeant for them. There is a danger that the level of armed militant attacks within Indian Kashmir (and beyond) could escalate significantly, possibly with the support of parts of Pakistan's security establishment.

Obama visits India

The Pakistan government and its allies have recently renewed their efforts to 'internationalise' the Kashmir dispute, again calling on US President Barack Obama to become directly involved. India will be gratified that he shows no enthusiasm for doing so.

Pakistan's anxieties about the increasingly close US-India relationship have heightened recently. The long-standing alliance between China and Pakistan could deepen in response.

On a three day official visit by President Obama to India that ended on 27 January 2015, observers remarked on an apparent "[bromance](#)" with Modi.

During the visit, President Obama endorsed India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The two sides also issued a statement urging Pakistan to crack down on militants and bring the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai attacks to justice. Obama and Modi also took steps to revive a stalled 2008 US-India civil nuclear deal. There has long been a proposal on the table for [Westinghouse](#), a US-based company, to build a nuclear power station in Gujarat, Modi's home state. The US is also supporting India's application to join the [Nuclear Suppliers Group](#).