

# Praise for *My Kashmir: Conflict and the Prospects for Enduring Peace*

*“Strong empathy, long direct experience, and profound understanding have combined to produce this compelling assessment of the Kashmir conflict.”*

—**Rajmohan Gandhi**, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

*“This work is a thoughtful, candid, and balanced account of an important player during a crucial period of the Kashmir conflict. It will be an invaluable source to scholars, journalists, political analysts, and policymakers.”*

—**Sumit Ganguly**, Indiana University

*“A compelling account and analysis by a quintessential insider. The author contends that Washington should adopt a more proactive role in resolving the Kashmir conundrum, especially as both Pakistan and India are American allies in the war against terrorism.”*

—**Rajesh Kadian**, author of *The Kashmir Tangle, Issues and Options*

*“Habibullah is among the most experienced Indian civil servants, whose career has intersected with Kashmir’s history over several decades. His devotion to the place and its people shines through his career, on some occasions at some risk to life and limb. He is a man of erudition, keen to portray Kashmir in all its complexities. The fact that Habibullah represents the Indian state makes this effort all the more admirable and intriguing.”*

—**Paula R. Newberg**, author of *Double Betrayal: Human Rights and Insurgency in Kashmir*

*“Habibullah writes with the depth and detail that only an insider can do. He exposes various skeletons that are seeding today’s alienation in the turbulent valley: broken promises, poor governance, corruption, a weak civil society, and a political culture that continues to demand the ‘profit of accession.’ Any serious student or analyst on Kashmir is well-advised to read this book. It gets deep into the polity of Jammu and Kashmir.”*

—**Vijay K. Sazawal**, Indo-American Kashmir Forum (IAKF)

*“An excellent book that adds greatly to our knowledge of the Kashmir issue, My Kashmir was written by someone who directly dealt with the problem during the years when it was at its most dangerous. The book is most valuable for the author’s insider accounts of Kashmir developments and his rapid-fire analyses of the lost opportunities—one after another—that the Kashmiris and the Indian government repeatedly missed.”*

**—Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer**, Georgetown University

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# MY KASHMIR



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## CONFLICT AND THE PROSPECTS FOR ENDURING PEACE

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WAJAHAT HABIBULLAH



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The views expressed in this book are those of the authors alone. They do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace.

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200

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# Acknowledgments

As this book goes to print, I must record a deep debt of gratitude to a friend whom I first knew in school but who grew to be a mentor. He is with us no more, but I shared his idea of the Indian nation, and his memory has been a powerful force in motivating me to put down what I saw of a critical period in India's history, when that concept of its nationhood stood challenged. Rajiv Gandhi's faith in the Indian people and his commitment to their becoming equal participants as it emerged into the twenty-first century, which he never lived to see, have become the underlying theme of this account of my relationship with a troubled part of that land and its people.

I must also acknowledge my debt to those very people, the Kashmiris, from whom I have learned so much. My love for them has grown because together we have faced violence, often finding ourselves in different camps but always sharing the sorrow over the tragedy that has devastated that "Eden of bliss." And I must acknowledge the immense love that the Kashmiris have shown me, however unworthy of it I may have been.

I must also thank the many people from Kashmir and the rest of India, and friends in the United States, the Indian civil services, and the Indian army who have been generous in sharing their perceptions and giving me their advice.

I am grateful to the United States Institute of Peace for giving me the opportunity, as Jennings Randolph senior fellow 2003–04, to contemplate in a serene environment with an intellectual ambience, to interact with some of the best minds in the country on issues of shared concern, and to put into writing the thoughts of one who has seen much suffering, in the hope that it might never recur in Kashmir—or indeed in any other part of our great human family.

I cannot conclude without thanking my beloved wife, Shahila, and my sons, Amar and Saif, who have put up with me and tolerated the fixation that, to their constant dismay, has always brought me back to that beautiful, troubled, captivating land.



# Foreword

The conflict over Kashmir has been a feature of the international landscape for sixty years. It is a deeply entrenched dispute involving a divided province and two estranged neighbors. The conflict encompasses the full panoply of issues that generate stubborn problems: national identity, ethnicity, religion, tension between central and local government, and territory. In its early years, it was seen as a conflict between India and Pakistan, amenable to a territorial solution. The settlement efforts that followed the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions of 1948 and 1949 called for a plebiscite in the state to determine its future. Only two options were on the table: the whole state would go either to India or to Pakistan.

In the negotiating efforts that took place at various times over the next four decades, India and Pakistan were the only parties involved, but especially after 1990, it became clear that the Kashmiris needed to have a part in shaping any settlement. That left two hotly disputed questions: how would Kashmiris play their part and, even more, who are "Kashmiris"? Does the term include people from all of Kashmir's major divisions, including Hindu and Buddhist majority areas, or just the Muslims from the Kashmir Valley? Should they participate in a three-way negotiating process, as many Kashmiris wanted and Pakistan occasionally proposed; should they exercise their franchise in the context of regularly scheduled provincial elections within the Indian electoral system, as India insisted; or something else altogether? Efforts to develop a settlement have included strictly bilateral discussions, UN-sponsored mediation, efforts by major powers, unofficial brokering attempts, and discussions among both the national governments involved and an array of Kashmiris, none of whom, in recent years, were generally recognized as legitimate spokespeople for the Kashmiri people. At various times, India conducted talks with Pakistan, and at other times, it tried to reach a better accommodation with the leadership in the Kashmir Valley, but it never engaged both at the same time.

The Kashmir literature, not surprisingly, has a Rashomon-like quality. There are studies from the Indian, Pakistani, and, more rarely, Kashmiri perspectives; there are conflict resolution studies, papers examining various specialized aspects of a potential settlement, and analyses of the region's society, politics, and occasionally its economy.

Wajahat Habibullah, who spent much of his long and distinguished career in the Indian Administrative Service working in Kashmir, has combined several approaches in this thoughtful and incisive book that is part

memoir, part history, and part prescription. He was deeply involved in some of the state's most wrenching turbulence, especially the siege of Kashmir's most revered Muslim holy place, the Hazratbal shrine. Having either participated in or watched at close hand the interactions between the Indian government, the state government, and local politicians in Kashmir, he gives a masterful view of the history of the Kashmir dispute and the best account I have yet seen of the way the Indian government has dealt with it. His insights on how Pakistanis see the problem are perceptive and enlightening. Kashmiris, all too often the forgotten people in accounts of the Kashmir problem, properly take center stage in his narrative.

Habibullah argues that the Kashmir conflict should not be considered "intractable." The main outlines of a possible settlement have been coming into focus since about 2000. Both Indian and Pakistani spokespeople talk about making the line that divides Kashmir "irrelevant"—allowing it to be easily crossed for peaceful purposes. Both implicitly acknowledge that if other parts of a settlement are in place, the location of that line will not change much from where it is now. Both use terms such as "self-rule," although at this writing they interpret the term quite differently. At least unofficially, both recognize that there may be a place for joint institutions, at least in dealing with such practical issues as forestry and electricity, running the state, and creating a greater sense of unity. And although Pakistani calls for demilitarization are usually deflected by India, Indian spokespeople state that once violence recedes, so too will the need for heavy armaments near the Line of Control. Most important, all these items figure on the Kashmiris' checklist.

Unfortunately, this emerging outline is not sufficient to propel the parties toward an actual settlement, so in practice the dispute has been intractable. All parties to the dispute have different ideas of what each potential element in a settlement should mean, and all have their own negotiating red lines. Both national governments have a strong sense of national honor and national integrity, which imposes on them requirements that are incompatible.

Perhaps the most difficult issue to resolve is one that Habibullah covers only lightly: the problem of leadership. When India and Pakistan began their present dialogue in 2004, each had a leader with strong nationalist credentials and substantial political power: Atal Behari Vajpayee in India and Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan. As this book goes to press, Musharraf is fighting for his political life, and Vajpayee's successor, Manmohan Singh, is constrained by a complicated division of power with Sonia Gandhi.

On the Kashmiri side, the problem is even more fundamental. Since the death in 1982 of Sheikh Abdullah, the foremost Kashmiri leader from the

generation that witnessed the partition of India, Kashmir has had no generally accepted leader. The chief minister of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is an elected position, but as Habibullah notes, even on the Indian side important parts of the political spectrum did not participate in the election, so the chief minister cannot claim recognition across the board. The other personalities from the Kashmir Valley are badly divided, and no organization or personality has sufficient status to speak for Kashmiris as a whole. Nor can any of the political leaders from Jammu or Ladakh claim such standing. As for the Pakistani side, its politicians are deeply enmeshed in Pakistani politics and have had little continuing contact with the Indian side, including the Kashmir Valley, which lies at the heart of the dispute.

Habibullah's account is particularly valuable for the light it sheds on the oft-mentioned problem of trust. Gallons of ink have been spilled on the subject of mistrust between India and Pakistan, and the checkered history of their efforts to resolve issues that should be much more tractable than Kashmir amply illustrates the problem.

An even more difficult problem of trust exists between the Indian government and Kashmiris. Habibullah's detailed account of the troubled history of political leadership in the state, as well as his own recollections of negotiating during various crises there, demonstrate this pervasive mistrust and its destructive effects. The lack of trust is the most important reason why progress toward a settlement, despite its promise, has so often come to nothing.

Everyone who has written about Kashmir has heartrending stories of what the unresolved dispute has done to the people there, and Habibullah's account is no exception. Because of his dual position as both insider and outsider, he feels—and he conveys to the reader—the tug-of-war generated by competing loyalties and emotions. This human waste should be reason enough to find a solution.

But other arguments are likely to be more compelling, at least for the governments in Islamabad and Delhi. The years since the end of the Cold War have been a time of extraordinary change in India—economic growth, integration with the world economy, and an increasingly active role in the world. India's international ambitions have increased at the same time. As it seeks a seat at the high table, in the United Nations Security Council and elsewhere, the unresolved dispute with Pakistan weighs India down.

In Pakistan, the cost of the continuing dispute is measured differently. Carrying on with Pakistan's traditional position, and maintaining the option to support the insurgency from time to time, entails multiple costs. The budgetary expense is trivial; the heaviest cost lies in the insidious impact of the shadowy organizations that support the insurgency on Pakistan's

political system and its society. Pakistani governments have to weigh the benefits of a settlement that might fall well short of Pakistan's traditional demands against the political costs of giving up positions that have defined Pakistani nationalism for nearly sixty years.

Pervez Musharraf has gone further in this direction than any of his predecessors. However, to make the Kashmir problem truly "tractable" will require the best efforts of a strong leader in Pakistan and an Indian leadership imbued with a sense of urgency that is not now apparent. Given the political will, Wajahat Habibullah's account can tell us a great deal about the way.

TERESITA C. SCHAFFER