

Flashpoint: Kashmir

What is Kashmir?

Kashmir is a legendarily beautiful mountainous region of some 7 million people that is located where the borders of India, Pakistan and China meet.

In 1947 the colonial-era rulers of Kashmir decided to join newly-independent India. Neighboring Pakistan thought the mostly Muslim region should be incorporated into Pakistan which also gained independence at that time. The two countries went to war over the issue in 1947-49 and again in 1965. In those conflicts Pakistan and China gained control of territory claimed by India, although India held on to the most populated areas.

Kashmir is dominated by the Himalayan mountains which rise to 28,000 feet. From May to October, the city of Srinagar serves as the capital. From November to April, the capital moves to the city of Jammu. Jammu is also the name of the surrounding region.

Why is Kashmir disputed?

The territory of Kashmir was hotly contested even before India and Pakistan won their independence from Britain in August 1947. Under the partition plan provided by the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Kashmir was free to join India or Pakistan. The Maharaja, Hari Singh, wanted to stay independent but eventually decided to accede to India, signing over key powers to the Indian government - in return for military aid and a promised *referendum*. Since then, the territory has been the flashpoint of the South Asian region.

What are the rival claims?

Islamabad says Kashmir should have become part of Pakistan in 1947, because Muslims are in the majority in the region. Pakistan also argues that Kashmiris should be allowed to vote in a *referendum* on their future, following numerous UN resolutions on the issue. Delhi, however, does not want international debate on the issue, arguing that the Simla Agreement of 1972 provided for a resolution through mutual talks. India points to the Instrument of Accession signed in October 1947 by the Maharaja, Hari Singh. Both India and Pakistan reject the option of Kashmir becoming an independent state.

Who Is Involved?

India and Pakistan have a long-standing dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir, commonly known as Kashmir. The predominantly Muslim population is governed by the secular government of India. The armed forces of India and Pakistan maintain a frequently violated truce along what is known as the "Line of Control" dividing the region.

Since 1989, militant Islamic forces, including elements of al Qaeda and the Taliban, have used terrorism in an effort to drive India out of the region and establish Islamic rule. Pakistan says that India has perpetrated widespread human rights abuses to maintain its control. Since Sept. 11, India has said that it will go to war unless the cross-border attacks end.

Will there be war?

War is a real possibility.

For India, three terrorist attacks in the last nine months, allegedly perpetrated by Pakistani-based militants, justify a military response. In October 2001, Islamic separatists killed 40 people in an attack on the legislature in Srinagar. In December, five Islamic gunmen entered the Indian parliament in New Delhi and killed seven people before being killed. In May, gunmen attacked an Indian army camp killing 30 people, many of them wives and children of Indian soldiers. India has responded with a military build-up along the Line of Control and has threatened to attack Islamic militants operating from Pakistan.

For Pakistan, India's threats are seen as an aggressive continuation of its policy of controlling Kashmir and also a threat to the Pakistani nation.

What is the U.S. position?

The United States is pressuring Pakistan to curb terrorism while discouraging India from attacking.

"We are making it very clear to both Pakistan and India that war will not serve their interests and we're a part of a international coalition applying pressure to both parties," President Bush said in May, "particularly to President Musharraf. He must stop the incursions across the Line of Control. He must do so."

Above all, the U.S. wants to avoid a war between two allies that could hinder the U.S. war on terrorism in Afghanistan and the search for al Qaeda leaders believed to be hiding in Pakistan.