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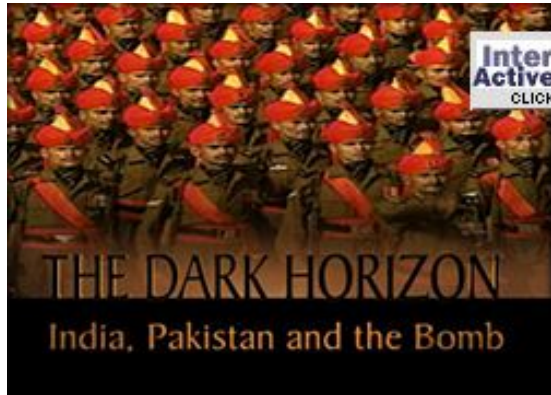
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Kashmir's Nuclear Nightmare



India and Pakistan Raise the Stakes in a Century of Struggle

Click on the image to view maps, video, a slide show and timeline that trace the many dimensions of the India-Pakistan conflict.



March 17 — When President Clinton lands in India Sunday, he will step into one of the most unstable regions on the planet, where violence and threats of violence intensify nearly every day. Here, he will face one of the greatest challenges of his presidency: Trying to convince two countries that do not fully trust the United States, to embrace peace after generations of war.

ABCNEWS' Peter Jennings will be there to report on the president's visit and to trace the roots of the deep hostility that separates the people of India and Pakistan. His special report "The Dark Horizon: India, Pakistan and the Bomb," airs Monday at 10 p.m. ET.

A Legacy of Conflict

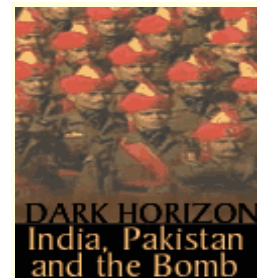
A deadly cycle of hate between Pakistanis and Indians dates back to 1947, when the British left India after 200 years of colonial rule and split the country into the separate states of India and Pakistan. One million people died in the ensuing conflict; thousands more in two other wars since 1948.

"The divide was on the basis of religion: Hindus in India, Muslims in Pakistan," says Mushahid Hussain, former Pakistani Minister of Information. "Ten million people swapped homes, crossed borders... it was a very traumatic experience."

Many issues remain unresolved — including the future of the province Kashmir at the foot of the Himalayan mountains, where the borders meet and where Indians and Pakistanis have been fighting for more than a half century.

SUMMARY

Peter Jennings reports on the struggles between India and Pakistan in "The Dark Horizon: India, Pakistan and the Bomb," Monday, March 20, at 10 p.m. ET, on ABC.



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Signs that a fourth conflict may be imminent seem far more ominous today because both countries have recently acquired and tested their own nuclear weapons. Not only is nuclear war suddenly a real possibility, but the sense of security ensured by the mere possession of such weapons may make renewed outbreak of conventional war all the more likely.

There is virtually no communication between the governments and their respective intelligence services have poor records for understanding the other's intentions.

"The bitterness does not allow the two sides to talk about the here and now," says Pakistani journalist Jussain Haqqani. "They can't talk about tomorrow. They are more concerned about yesterday."

Neither India nor Pakistan paid much attention to the Clinton administration in 1998, when it attempted to prevent the governments from testing their nuclear arsenals. The president's intervention last summer may have helped prevent a nuclear war, but it contributed to the eventual overthrow of the Pakistani government. And it remains unclear what the U.S. president can do to influence the leaders of either state and thereby decrease the tension.

The Kashmir Conundrum

As Jennings travels through India and Pakistan and into the war-torn province of Kashmir, he reports that both governments seem wedded to their belligerent positions.

For both nations, Kashmir is a symbol of national identity. And because the wounds of partition have never truly healed, the contest for the province rages on.

In 1947, the British partition allowed Maharajah Hari Singh, the Hindu leader of Kashmir, the choice of joining either Pakistan or India. Although the population was largely Muslim, he chose to make Kashmir a province of India.

The new leaders of Pakistan, believing that Kashmir's Muslim majority made it a natural part of their Islamic homeland, were incensed. Pakistanis have fought ever since to win it back from India.

A full-scale war in 1948 left Kashmir divided; fighting broke out again in 1965. And in 1971, the Indian army captured east Pakistan, which then became the independent nation of Bangladesh. Today, neither country's military forces are prepared to step back from the "Line of Control" that divides the province and tensions remain high. Both sides deny they that ever start the exchanges of gunfire that erupt periodically; but sides both readily admit that they always fire back.

At the Brink in Kargil

Because retaliation now includes the possibility of nuclear retaliation, the battle over Kashmir has become a far more serious threat to the rest of the world.

In fact, fighting near the town of Kargil last summer brought the world closer to the brink of a nuclear exchange than at any other time since the end of the Cold War.

When India and Pakistan revealed they possessed nuclear

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weapons in May 1998, the citizens of both countries had celebrated the achievement.

When India first tested its weapons that same month — followed by Pakistan only 17 days later — the White House was shocked. The CIA had failed to predict the test and diplomatic threats from Washington appeared to have little effect on the leaders in Dehli and Islamabad.

Within a year, the fighting in Kashmir had escalated to the worst in nearly 30 years. In both countries, public enthusiasm for the war was overwhelming; almost no one spoke of peace, only of victory.

By July 1999, more than 1,000 people had died in the conflict and the Indians were beginning to prevail. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was faced with the choice of escalating or retreating.

Sharif met with Clinton and the two leaders decided on a plan they hoped would end the fighting. Pakistan agreed in principle to pull its troops back to its side of the Line of Control and the U.S. president said he would take a personal interest in Kashmir.

The fighting in Kargil ended by August, but real peace has still not returned. Just last month, 20,000 Indian troops engaged in war games along the India-Pakistan border and 50 people died in skirmishes.

Instability in Pakistan

The Pakistani military felt betrayed by Sharif's retreat. When he attempted to fire Army Chief of Staff General Pervez Musharraf, disgruntled officers staged a coup and placed Musharraf in power.

This was the fourth coup in the country's short history. No elected Pakistani leader has ever completed a full term.

Gen. Musharraf, who has little experience in government, was the strategist who planned the Pakistani operation against the Indians at Kargil. In his struggle to retain power and maintain order, he has invested everything in the fight for Kashmir. He hopes that struggle will unify the nation, appease Muslim extremists and galvanize the armed forces.

But Pakistan is a nation in turmoil facing deep economic problems. Health care and public education are virtually non-existent.

Violence between various Muslim groups terrorizes the citizenry and religious extremists (who model themselves on the Taliban in Afghanistan), are closer than ever before to gaining control political dominance.

"Islamic militarism," says Pervez Hoodbhoy of Quaid-Azam University, "has come as a reaction to failure of the state."

A long series of corrupt governments has undone nearly every institution except for the military, which is now also vulnerable to the influence of the Muslim hardliners.

Both India, which is becoming more impatient and hard-line itself, and an increasingly unpredictable Pakistan remain prepared to go to war over Kashmir.

And Indian leaders have recently emphasized that Pakistan will not get away with using nuclear weapons as protection

for aggressive acts in the province.

The prospects for peace look dim and there is no solution in sight to the enduring disagreements. President Clinton has his work cut out for him. ■

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