

Dr. HAQ EXPLAINS HIS STRATEGY TO UNFREEZE THE KASHMIR ISSUE

In a press statement issued today, Dr. Mahbub ul Haq, former Finance and Planning Minister of Pakistan, sought to dispel various doubts and misunderstandings caused by his recent remarks about the Kashmir issue. Dr. Haq made it clear that he fully subscribes to the solution of the Kashmir dispute through a free and fair plebiscite according to the UN resolutions but had offered some suggestions to break the present stalemate by initiating a step-by-step process where the end - result will be self-determination by the Kashmiris and, in fact, full implementation of UN resolutions. Following is the full text of his statement :

"I have been deeply pained by some of the mis-interpretations of my recent remarks about the Kashmir issue. Let me, therefore, make my own stand abundantly clear.

First, I have always fully subscribed to the view that the only just solution for the Kashmir dispute is to ascertain the wishes of the Kashmiris through a free and fair plebiscite according to the UN resolutions. I continue to subscribe to this view.

Second, I have every expectation that Kashmiris will opt for Pakistan as we have consistently supported their cause. Besides, many historical, cultural and ideological ties bind us together. But I also believe that we must have the self-confidence to open all options to the Kashmiris, including the option of an independent Kashmir. It is Kashmiris who must finally decide, not Pakistan or India.

Third, I have strongly condemned, and shall continue to condemn, India's repression in the Kashmir valley and its grave violations of human rights.

My differences are not on these basic premises of our Kashmir policy. I have only offered some proposals to see whether the current stalemate on the Kashmir issue can be broken and whether progress can be made on this issue in a step-by-step manner.

It is in that spirit that I proposed a UN Trusteeship for Kashmir for an interim period. The idea of such trusteeship is not to hand over Kashmir to the UN but hand it back to the Kashmiris for self-governance. The UN will only supervise the withdrawal of Indian troops from the valley towards a border belt - as well as Pakistani troops in Azad Kashmir - but leave full administrative autonomy to the Kashmiris. By offering to withdraw our own troops to a border belt, we shall be demonstrating convincingly that, unlike India, we do not need the presence of our troops to coerce Kashmiris to be aligned with us. It will also delegitimize the present line of control and remove a cruel barrier that separates the people of Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, such a withdrawal of troops is envisaged in the UN plan for holding the elections, which both India and Pakistan had accepted at that time. The basic purpose of such a strategy will be

to bring to an end India's repression of Kashmiris by moving towards self-governance in Kashmir under UN supervision. This will be only for an interim period : ultimately, Kashmiris will decide their own fate in a free and fair plebiscite where all options will be open to them.

I am fully aware that there will be some serious differences on such a step-by-step process. I neither wish to undermine Pakistan's case nor Kashmir's cause. But I would like to respectfully point out to my critics that all long-standing disputes in the world are being settled only through a step-by-step process. Some people, for instance, will disagree with Yasir Arafat for having accepted such a process in Palestine. I happen to think that that was the only realistic course. From self-governance and limited autonomy in Gaza and Jaricho, he is already moving steadily towards a free Palestinian State. We must think sometimes of concrete steps to unfreeze long-frozen disputes, without doubting the integrity of those who will like to see a process of peaceful development and who suggest new initiatives to end the present deadlock.

The cause of Kashmir is very dear to me. I fear that it is India that will not accept any such step-by-step process through which they will eventually lose control over the Kashmir valley. But such a process at least offers them a face - saving way of getting out of the present mess. For Pakistan and Kashmir, the process can only lead to the goal we have always cherished : self-determination by our Kashmiri brethren.

Let me conclude by saying that I am a Kashmiri by birth. When Kashmir bleeds, I bleed. People have every right to criticise my proposals. They have absolutely no right to attack my patriotism."