

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND THE KASHMIR ISSUE

Successive US administrations have been mostly ambivalent, when not inimical to India in the context of the Indo-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. The Trump administration at the outset, however took a markedly pro-Indian stand which it mitigated later when it conducted negotiations with the Afghan Taliban with help from Pakistan. When India amended Article 370, the Trump Administration gave qualified support to New Delhi while the Democratic party took a pro-Pakistani position and harshly criticised the Modi government.

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In the post-9/11 era, the US largely adopted a pro-India policy vis-à-vis Kashmir due to Pakistani support to terrorist groups of Afghanistan and Kashmir. So too did the Trump Administration. Republican President Donald Trump actively encouraged bilateral talks between India and Pakistan to resolve the issue. He repeatedly expressed his desire to play a mediatory role if acceptable by both India and Pakistan. The Trump Administration not only cooperated with India in its fight against terrorism but also pressurised Pakistan to stop supporting terrorist groups in Kashmir. This paper discusses the Trump Administration's overall policy and approach towards the Kashmir issue.

In the beginning of his election campaign, President Trump largely tried to ignore the Kashmir issue knowing well that the K-word could alienate Indian Americans. However, later, while addressing the Republican Hindu Coalition event in October 2016, he broke his silence and proclaimed that if he was elected, the US would be the best friend of India and stated that any country would not be "more important to us" than this one. (Bradner, Eric, "Donald Trump on

India: We are going to be best friends”, CNN, (Online:Web)16 October 2016, <https://election.cnn.com/2016/10/16/politics/donald/trump/india-pakistan-mediate/index.html>.) Addressing the Indian Americans, Trump said that the US would be willing to play a mediating role in addressing the “very very hot tinderbox” of Kashmir between India and Pakistan. (*ibid*) This use of the “mediation” word by Trump in his election campaign aroused hope in Islamabad about the administration’s approach towards Kashmir. When Trump emerged victorious, Pakistan expressed hope that the “President elect will play a more proactive role” in resolving the Kashmir issue. (“Pakistan looking to approach Trump over Kashmir”, *Indian Express*, New Delhi, 11 November 2016 (Online:Web) newindianexpress.com/world/2016/nov/11/Pakistan-looking-to-approach-trump-over-kashmir) However President Trump did not pay any attention to the Pakistani appeal and clearly sided with India.

In June 2017, the Trump Administration designated the Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahiddin Chief Syed Salahuddin, a global terrorist. As moments later President Trump was scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Washington, this US action seemed like an Eid gift from the US President to the Indian Prime Minister. (*Mir, Hamid*, “By naming Salahuddin, is Trump mediating in Kashmir”, *Indian Express*, 28 June 2017 (Online:Web) <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/by-naming-salahuddin-is-trump-mediating-in-kashmir-4725194/>) The Indian media regarded this US announcement as “a big win for New Delhi” but the Pakistani media saw it as an unjustified act of Washington to please New Delhi. (*Ibid*) Thereafter, the Trump Administration went much further than previous administrations in supporting India’s fight against terrorism. This US policy supporting India against the Pakistani export of terrorism in Kashmir, emanated more from its realisation that Pakistan supported many terrorist organisations in the South Asian region, including those targeting Americans in Afghanistan. (“US puts terror rider on defence funds for Pak”, *Times of India*, New Delhi, 16 July 2017) Washington’s hardened attitude towards direct Pakistani support to terrorism was further reflected in US National Security Advisor, General HR McMaster’s statement, saying, “The President has so made clear that ...we need to see a change in behaviour of those in the region, which includes those who

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are providing safe haven and support base for the Taliban, Haqqani Network and others”. (*“Trump wants Pak to change ‘Paradoxical’ policies: NSA”, Times of India, New Delhi, 07 August 2017*) Mr. McMaster gave this statement in response to a question on terrorism in Afghanistan and the region. Later former President Trump himself came down heavily on Pakistan for its support to terror groups saying the country received billions of dollars in US aid but continued to harbour militants. (*“Will cut aid, strip ally tag, US warns Pak”, Times of India, New Delhi, 24 August 2017*) Mr. Trump warned that Pakistan would face consequences and could lose the major non-NATO ally status if it continued to provide safe havens to terror groups. (*ibid*) Trump’s stern warning to Pakistan came at a juncture when Pakistan’s critics in Washington urged Trump to go further by authorising US strikes against terrorists inside Pakistan or by declaring Pakistan a “state sponsor of terror”. (*“Pakistan could lose privileged ally status over terror safe havens: US”, Times of India, 24 August 2017*) No doubt the Trump Administration’s tough posture towards Pakistan and various terror groups operating there stemmed from the US Afghanistan strategy. India was the biggest beneficiary of Washington’s hardened attitude towards Pakistani support to terrorist groups in the region (mainly operating in Afghanistan and Kashmir) which harmed US interests in Afghanistan and Indian interests in Kashmir.

As Pakistani support to terror groups operating in Afghanistan and Kashmir continued, US-Pakistan relations were further strained and in January 2018, Trump accused Pakistan of lies and deceit in its relationship with America and cut off US\$ 1.3 billion in US Security Assistance. (*Afzal, Madiha, “Evaluating the Trump Administration’s Pakistan reset”, Brookings Institute (Washington), 26 October 2020 (Online: Web) <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020>*) This was indeed the lowest point in US-Pakistan relations. A month later, the Trump Administration moved to change Pakistan’s status with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international watchdog that monitored terrorist financing. Washington further upgraded Pakistan’s status on the FATF’s increased monitoring “grey list”. (*ibid*) This designation hampered economic investment, causing financial harm to Pakistan. Its economic impact was so severe that Islamabad tried hard to come off the grey list and to avoid blacklisting, and to that effect, took action against militant groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba too.

Some events of major significance occurred in 2018 and 2019 in Jammu and Kashmir. In June 2018, the Jammu and Kashmir government, a coalition of the BJP and PDP (Kashmir-based People’s Democratic Party) collapsed after the BJP withdrew its support, bringing direct control through a governor. Another

incident occurred on 14 February 2019. A terrorist attack took place in the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir when an explosives-laden SUV rammed into a convoy carrying para-military forces. This massive explosion killed 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel. The suicide attacker probably belonged to the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), a Pakistan-based terror group which later took responsibility for the deadly suicide attack. This incident brought India-Pakistan relations to the lowest point. In response to the Pulwama attack, Indian Air Force jets bombed the Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorist training centre in Balakot (situated in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir) on 26 February 2019. This was the first such attack on Pakistan since the 1971

war. (*Kashmir: Background, recent Developments and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report, 13 January 2020, (R45877),

(Online: Web), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/45877>) The Pakistani Air Force retaliated which led to the downing of an Indian Air Force jet. Though Pakistan released the ejected Indian Air Force pilot on 1 March 2019, tension remained high between both neighbours. The incident pushed both countries to the brink of a full-fledged war. The US administration intervened to prevent any war between India and Pakistan and sided with India. A White House statement on the day of the bombing called on Pakistan to “end immediately the support and safe haven provided to all terrorist groups operating on its soil”. (*ibid*) The series of events strengthened US-India cooperation and the resolve to fight terrorism. Some members of the US Congress also condemned the Pulwama attack. However, experts felt that the Trump Administration was diplomatically absent during the South Asian crisis due to lack of officials in the State Department, following mass resignations and non-replacement of many bureaucrats.

Again, in May 2019, in the middle of the election season in India, the US administration took a pro-India position on the issue of terrorism and ensured that the 26/11 mastermind Masood Azhar was designated as global terrorist by the UN Security Council. The US exerted pressure on China which for about a decade had voted against any such move in the UN Security Council. (*Kashmir a central issue, says U.S. State Department, after Trump comment on mediation*, *The Hindu*, 23 July 2019 (Online: Web) <https://www.thehindu.com/news>) A month later, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

Mr. Pompeo said: “America has done a 180 degree turn with respect to Pakistan, from where the previous administrations were. We have done so not because we dislike Pakistan or Pakistani people, but because we are trying to get Pakistan to cease terror campaigns in India.

paid his first visit to India and met PM Modi, Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. While speaking on the American position on Pakistani support to terrorism in New Delhi, Mr. Pompeo said: “America has done a 180 degree turn with respect to Pakistan, from where the previous administrations were. We have done so not because we dislike Pakistan or Pakistani people, but because we are trying to get Pakistan to cease terror campaigns in India or supporting insurgents in Afghanistan”. (*“Only Modi, Trump can make India-US relationship work”, Times of India, New Delhi, 27 June 2019*)

The Trump Administration’s tough talk with Pakistan brought the Pakistani establishment to its knees and Pakistan finally admitted its direct role in exporting terror to Afghanistan and Kashmir. Pakistani PM Imran Khan while speaking at an event at the US Institute of Peace, Washington, accepted that Pakistan had been actively involved in cross-border terrorism in the Kashmir region of India. (*“Imran admits Pakistan’s role in Kashmir terror”, Times of India, 25 July 2019, p.1*) The Pakistani Prime Minister also admitted that Pakistan still had 30,000-40,000 armed men who had fought in some part of Afghanistan or may be Kashmir. (*ibid*) PM Imran Khan blamed his predecessors for adopting the policy of exporting terrorism. Khan’s disclosure about militant groups was his second major revelation in Washington. Earlier he had claimed that Pakistan’s spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had provided information and help to the US to capture and kill Osama Bin Laden in the garrison town of Abbotabad. (*ibid*)

The Trump Administration tried to balance its Kashmir policy towards both India and Pakistan and began to take a slightly pro-Pakistan stand after the US-Taliban deal of February 2019. The agreement became possible of course, because of the active help of Pakistan. This Pakistani support for brokering the Afghan deal was publicly acknowledged by US Ambassador to Pakistan Zalmay Khalizad. (*Afzal, Madiha, “Evaluating the Trump Administration’s Pakistan reset”, ‘op.cit.’*) Pakistan’s help in brokering the US-Afghan agreement was also acknowledged by President Trump during Imran Khan’s Washington visit in July 2019 when Mr. Trump met Khan in the White House. In this very first meeting with Khan, President Trump offered to mediate between India and Pakistan on Kashmir. (*ibid*) While taking questions from the media, President Trump also claimed that Indian Prime Minister Modi had earlier requested him to play a role of the mediator in the Kashmir dispute. (*“Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy”, CRS Report, 13 January, 2020, (R45877), ‘op.cit.’*) If Trump’s claim was true, such a request would represent a long-time policy reversal for India vis-à-vis Kashmir. The US President’s statement provoked such

an uproar in the Indian Parliament that India's Foreign Minister immediately rejected Trump's claim and assured parliamentarians and opposition parties that no such request had been made by Prime Minister Modi. (*ibid*) Mr. Jaishankar reiterated India's position that "all outstanding issues with Pakistan would be discussed bilaterally" and future dialogue with Islamabad would require an "end to cross-border terrorism". (*ibid*) In an apparent effort to reduce confusion, the State Department immediately swung into action and clarified Washington's position by stating that Kashmir was a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and that the Trump Administration stood ready to assist both parties.

Members of US Congress also supported India's position on Kashmir. Eliot Angel, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, did phone Indian Ambassador Mr. Harsh Shringla to reiterate his support for the long-standing US position on Kashmir and extended his full support for a dialogue "between India and Pakistan" but the dialogue's pace and scope could only be determined by India and Pakistan. (*India's Foreign Minister: PM Modi had made no such request*, *Times of India (New Delhi)*, 24 July 2019, p.5) He also called on Pakistan to facilitate such a dialogue by taking concrete and reasonable steps to dismantle terrorist infrastructures on Pakistan's soil. (*Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*, *CRS Report*, 2020, (R45877), 'op.cit.')

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Another Congressman, Brad Sherman, felt apologetic about Trump's Kashmir mediation statement. Mr. Sherman said, "Everyone who knows anything about foreign policy in South Asia knows that India consistently opposes third party mediation ...and would never suggest such a thing and Trump's statement is amateurish, delusional, and embarrassing". (*India's Foreign Minister: PM Modi had made no such request*, *Times of India*, 'op.cit.')

New Delhi tried to downplay the significance of Trump's statement by saying that, looking at the larger picture of India-US ties, one should ignore President Trump's recent Kashmir remark. It further stated that the State Department too had issued a clarification and now it was "time to move on". (*Time to move on : MEA on US Prez Trump's Kashmir remarks*, *Times of India*, 26 July 2019) Again, when US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar met in Thailand on 2 August 2019, the latter conveyed

a clear message to his US counterpart that any discussion on Kashmir, if at all warranted, would be between India and Pakistan. (*"Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy"*, CRS Report, 13 January 2020, (R45877), 'op.cit')

Now the question arises: Why did President Trump offer to mediate on Kashmir? First, he wanted to make the Pakistani PM happy after the US-Pakistan pact on Afghanistan. Second, Washington wanted more Pakistani help so that its armed forces could make a comfortable exit from Afghanistan. Third, the US wanted to balance its Kashmir policy between both India and Pakistan, which was the old US stance.

Though India disapproved of the US President's offer to mediate, some Kashmiri leaders supported it. In July 2017, ex-Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Farooq Abdullah had said that India should approach third parties, such as the United States and China, to mediate in the Kashmir dispute. Demanding third party mediation, Mr. Abdullah stated: "(US President) Donald Trump has said he wants to settle the Kashmir problem. We did not ask him for it (help). China has also said it wants to mediate in Kashmir...we are not saying hand over things to them". (*"Use friends to resolve Kashmir issue: Farooq"*, *Times of India*, 22 July 2017) He added: "The way out is through dialogue. Use your friends...use them for dialogue to resolve the issues". (*ibid*) Two years later, in July 2019, National Conference President Farooq Abdullah and former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti expressed their "optimism" about Trump's mediation offer. (*"Farooq, Mufti hail offer, Hurriyat also endorses it"*, *Times of India*, 24 July 2019) Regarding Trump's offer of mediation, Farooq Abdullah said, "It is time for India and Pakistan to shun hostilities because at the end its (sic) people of our state who face the direct brunt of such hostilities. It's our people who come in the line of fire whenever there is friction between India and Pakistan"... (*ibid*) Mehbooba Mufti said, "Even though USA does not hold a great record in resolving protracted conflict, I hope both countries seize this opportunity to peace through dialogue". (*ibid*) The Chairman of the Hurriyat Conference (M) Mirwaiz Umar Farooq tweeted saying, "Being the most affected party, people of Kashmir want an early resolution of the lingering Kashmir conflict. We have been urging for dialogue at all levels. Every effort, pushing India and Pakistan in that direction is welcome by people of Jammu and Kashmir". (*ibid*) India's ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and likeminded parties strongly criticised Farooq Abdullah for his statement demanding third party mediation.

In late July and during the first days of August 2019, India moved an

additional 45000 troops into the Kashmir region probably in preparation for announcing article 370's repeal. (*"Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy", CRS Report 13.01.2020, (R45877), 'op.cit.'*) When apprehensions were expressed about something big in Kashmir, the state administration justified the sudden deployment of forces on the ground that there were intelligence inputs of a terror threat. On 5 August, 2019 when Jammu and Kashmir State was in "lockdown", Indian Home Minister Amit Shah introduced legislation in Parliament to amend Article 370 and thereby reorganised the state of Jammu and Kashmir by bifurcating it into two union territories, one was Jammu and Kashmir and the other was Ladakh. (*ibid*) In his speech on the floor of Parliament, Mr. Shah described Article 370 as "discriminatory on the basis of gender, class, caste and place of origin". (*ibid*)

In the aftermath of the amendment of Article 370 and scrapping of the special status of J&K, there was news in the media that India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar had briefed US Secretary of State about New Delhi's move in advance during his in-person meeting on 2 August so that Washington would not be taken by surprise. However, US State Department's South Asia Bureau denied it, saying New Delhi "did not consult or inform the US government before revoking Jammu and Kashmir's special status". (*ibid*)

The Trump Administration reacted immediately on the situation in Kashmir. On 5 August 2019, a State Department spokesperson stated, "We

are concerned about reports of detentions, urge respect for individual rights and discussion with those in affected communities. We call on all parties to maintain peace and stability along the Line of Control". (*ibid*) Three days later, speaking on the issue more substantially, the Secretary of State said: "We want to maintain peace and stability, and we, of course, support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other issues of concern...whenever it comes to any region in the world where there are tensions, we ask for people to observe the rule of law, respect for international norms. We ask people to maintain peace and

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security and direct dialogue”. (*ibid*)

The spokesperson also flatly denied any change in Washington’s policy towards Kashmir. (*ibid*) Again, US State Department also expressed concern on the instability in South Asia, saying, “The US is closely following India’s legislation regarding the new territorial status and governance of Jammu and Kashmir. We note broader implications of these developments, including the potential for decreased instability in the region”. (“US will support direct Indo-Pak Talks on Kashmir”, *Times of India*, 09 August 2019) Later, Indian PM Modi in his meeting with US President Trump in Washington clearly said that the Pakistani Prime Minister’s “extreme rhetoric” and incitement of violence was not conducive to peace. (“Pak’s rhetoric not conducive to peace, Modi tells Trump”, *Times of India*, 20.08.2019, p.1) Mr. Modi told Mr. Trump about Mr. Khan’s statement describing the Modi Government as “fascist” and “supremacist” and other intemperate comments. (*ibid*) The Indian Prime Minister’s complaint was seriously taken by the US President. On the next day, Mr. Trump asked Pakistani PM Imran Khan to moderate his rhetoric and avoid escalating the conflict with India over the Kashmir issue, implicitly urging Islamabad to move on from its handwringing over New Delhi’s legislative and administrative changes removing special status for J&K. (“Tone down J & K rhetoric, Trump tells Imran”, *Times of India*, 21 August 2019, p.11) Further urging India and Pakistan to reduce the tension on Kashmir, Mr. Trump said, “Spoke to my two good friends Prime Minister Modi of India and Prime Minister Khan of Pakistan, regarding trade, strategic partnership and most importantly, for India and Pakistan to work towards reducing tensions in Kashmir”. (*ibid*) He admitted that it was a tough situation, but that conversations were good. The US President re-affirmed the need to avoid escalation of the situation and urged restraint on both sides. (*ibid*)

Later, US President Trump took a slightly pro-Pakistan position and described the situation in Kashmir as “explosive” and “complicated” on account of religious differences in the region. At that juncture, US President Trump again offered his mediation to resolve the Kashmir issue, saying, “Will do the best I can to mediate or do something” to defuse the crisis between India and Pakistan. (“Trump offers mediation again, says J&K situation explosive”, *Times of India*, 22 August 2019, p.1) In September 2019, the Trump Administration imposed sanctions on the chief of the banned Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Noor Wali Mehsud, and designated him as global terrorist. (“US designates TTP Chief Mehsud as ‘global terrorist’”, *Times of India*, 12 September 2019) These US sanctions sought to deny these terrorists the resources to plan and carry out attacks. The US law blocked all properties within US jurisdiction and prohibited

them from engaging in any transactions with them. (*ibid*) Interestingly, TTP Chief Mehsud's global terrorist designation by the US came on the same day New Delhi described Pakistan as the epicenter of terrorism. (*ibid*) By this designation the TTP chief entered into the club of the top 12 especially designated terrorist leaders of the world.

Pakistan Premier Imran Khan repeatedly approached world leaders begging them to play their part in resolving the Kashmir issue to prevent a fatal war, a reference to use of nuclear weapons

between India and Pakistan. (*"NO change in nuclear policy: Pak after Imran's statement", Times of India, 04 September 2019*) In September, Pakistani PM again raised the spectre of nuclear war with India over Kashmir while elaborating that this could be a "consequence" if Islamabad lost a conventional war with India. (*"Imran warns of chances of conventional war with india", Times of India, 16 September 2019*)

Khan's indirect threat of nuclear war was nothing but a deliberate attempt to blackmail the international community for the sake of Islamabad's designs in Kashmir. However, except for China, the international community did not take heed. US President Donald Trump continued to encourage Indian PM Modi to work for the improvement of India-Pakistan ties. India, however, maintained that there could not be any dialogue until Islamabad stopped using terror as an instrument of state policy. (*"Not against Pak talks: would not deal with Terroristan: MEA", Times of India, 26 September 2019*)

In September 2019, while taking a pro-India stand on Kashmir, Washington bluntly asked Islamabad why it was only bothered about the human rights of the Muslims in Kashmir and was not highlighting the "horrific conditions" that prevailed for the Muslim community throughout China. (*"Why concern for Muslims in Kashmir and not those in China: US to Pakistan", Times of India, 28 September 2019*) Simultaneously, Washington also hoped to see "rapid action" by India to lift restrictions imposed in Kashmir". Alice Wells, the top State Department official dealing with South Asia, said, "I think we are interested in knowing the next steps in engagement ... we hope to see rapid action in lifting of the restrictions and in the release of those who have been detained". (*"Why are you only bothered about Muslims in Kashmir", Times of India, 28 September 2019*) In late September, US Ambassador Wells said: "The United States is concerned by widespread detentions including those of politicians and business leaders, and

Pakistan Premier Imran Khan repeatedly approached world leaders begging them to play their part in resolving the Kashmir issue to prevent a fatal war, a reference to use of nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan.

restrictions on the residents of Jammu and Kashmir. We look forward to the Indian Government's resumption of political arrangements with local leaders and the scheduling of promised elections at the earliest opportunity". (*Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*”, CRS Report, 13.01.2020, (R45877), ‘op.cit.’p.16) During the 22 October 2019 House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee hearing on human rights in South Asia, Ambassador Wells testified that the Trump Administration “closely monitored the situation” in Kashmir. (*ibid*) She reviewed concerns about people’s continued detentions in Kashmir and called on Indian authorities to restore everyday services as swiftly as possible. (*ibid*) Welcoming Imran Khan’s statement abjuring external support for Kashmiri militancy, Wells stated: “We believe the foundation for any successful dialogue between India and Pakistan is based on Pakistan taking sustained and irreversible steps against militants and terrorists on its territory ...we believe that direct dialogue between India and Pakistan, as outlined in 1972 Shimla Agreement, holds the most potential for reducing tensions”. (*ibid*) In December as restrictions in Kashmir continued, the US appealed to India to protect the rights of religious minorities in keeping with the country’s Constitution and democratic values. (*US: Protect rights of religious minorities*”, *Times of India*, 14.12.2019)

After the scrapping of J&K’s special status, many members of the US Congress supported Kashmiri human rights. However, the Congressmen did not take a bipartisan stand in the Congress. Democrats mostly raised the issue of human rights and took a pro-Pakistan position. Republicans supported India and regarded New Delhi’s move to bring constitutional changes in J&K as an internal matter. During the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and Pacific and Nonproliferation hearing on human rights in South Asia in October 2019, the Chairman, Representative Eliot Angel, while being critical of the Trump Administration policies vis-à-vis Kashmir, stated that the administration was giving a free pass when countries violated human rights and democratic norms. (*Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*”, CRS Report, 2020 (R45877), ‘op.cit.’p.17) Further, Subcommittee Chairman, Representative Brad Sherman said that Kashmir was the most dangerous geopolitical flashpoint in the world as it involved wars between two nuclear powers. (*ibid*) Senator Bernie Sanders was the first US presidential candidate to publicly rebuke India for its constitutional changes in Kashmir. Harshly criticising India to please Muslim-American voters and using an Islamic platform, Sanders said, “India’s action (in Kashmir) is unacceptable. The communications blockade must be lifted immediately.

The US government must speak out boldly in support of UN-backed peaceful resolutions”. (*Sanders calls India’s action on Kashmir ‘unacceptable’*, *Times of India (New Delhi)*, 2 September 2019, p.9) He also said, “I am deeply concerned about this situation in Kashmir where Indian government has revoked Kashmiri autonomy, cracked down on dissent and instituted a communications blackout. The crackdown in the name of ‘security’ is also denying the Kashmiri people access to medical care”. (*ibid*) Lawrence Stellan, a former US military commander and a critic of Pakistan’s role in the region, stated that Bernie Sanders could not find Kashmir on a map if it was coloured with bright blue crayon. Hence it seemed Senator Sanders’ statement was influenced by his Pakistani campaign manager and Muslim activist, Faiz Shakir. (*ibid*) The Indian American Congresswoman Pramila Jaypal along with another Congressman James P McGovern, urged US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to press India to immediately end the communications blockade in Kashmir and release those detained there. (*“US lawmakers want communication blackout in Kashmir to be ended soon”*, *Times*

of India (New Delhi), 13 September 2019, p11) In a letter written to Pompeo, they also said that international media and independent human rights observers must immediately be allowed into Jammu and Kashmir to investigate reports of abuse. (*ibid*) Later a powerful US Congressional Committee also urged New Delhi to lift its more than two-month-long restrictions in the Kashmir Valley. (*“US Congress panel tells India to end J&K communication blackout”*, *Times of India , New Delhi*, 9 October 2019, p9) The Committee in its statement said, “It’s time for India to lift these restrictions and afford Kashmiris the same rights and privileges as any other Indian citizen”. (*ibid*)

There occurred a rift between Democratic Congressmen and the Modi government in the post-J&K’s special status revocation era, mainly due to the one-sided narrative about the situation prevalent in the US. Indian American Congresswoman Pramila Jaypal claimed that India sought to cut her out of a Congressional meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in December 2019 by categorically saying that he was not interested in meeting those who were biased and were determined to be misled on issues relating to India. (*“Rift between Democrats in US and Modi govt out in open”*, *Times of India*, 21 December 2019. P10) When the media asked Mr. Jaishankar about the cancellation of the meeting, he said, “I

Democrats mostly raised the issue of human rights and took a pro-Pakistan position. Republicans supported India and regarded New Delhi’s move to bring constitutional changes in J&K as an internal matter.

have an interest in meeting people who are objective and open to discussion but not people who have already made up their minds”. (*ibid*) Criticising the Indian action, Jaypal said that the Indian government was intolerant of the criticism. She further said, “The cancellation of this meeting was disturbing. It only furthers the idea that the Indian government is not willing to listen to any dissent at all”. (*ibid*) Supporting Jaypal, presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren said that efforts to silence Jaypal was troubling. Adding her support, Palestinian American Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib said, “That is because they know they are violating international human rights laws that is leading to innocent lives being lost and causing irreparable harm to Children in Kashmir. Thank you Pramila Jaypal for speaking up for Kashmiris”. (*ibid*) This reported cancellation of the meeting between the Indian Foreign Minister and US House Foreign Affairs Committee chaired by New York Democrat Eliot Angel, made news on the Hill and in the American media even on Trump’s Impeachment Day. It seems Democratic lawmakers were especially critical of India’s Kashmir policy due to the good personal equation between Indian Prime Minister Modi and American President Trump which was on display at the Howdy-Modi Rally in Houston. (*ibid*)

In contrast to Democrats, Republican Congressmen publicly backed India’s decision to amend Article 370 and revoke the special status of Jammu and Kashmir. The first Congressman to issue a statement on J&K was George Holding, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee. He stated that while Article 370 might have worked well for “those with political connections, it denied economic opportunities for the people and it also created a polarizing environment that was exploited politically”. (*India hopes to win support from Democrats too*, *Times of India*, 13 January 2020) Congressman Paul Gosar, the Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, and Pete Olson were other legislators who endorsed India’s position. Other Congressmen who openly supported India’s move in Kashmir were Joe Wilson and Francis Rooney, both members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. While speaking in the House, Wilson said that India’s decision was meant to boost economic development, fight corruption and end gender, caste and religious discrimination”. (*ibid*) Congressman Scott Perry, a Congressman from Pennsylvania and member of important House Committees like foreign affairs, transportation and infrastructure, became the sixth leader from the Republican Party to express support for India on the Jammu and Kashmir issue. Earlier in March 2019, Perry had introduced a resolution in the House

to condemn the Pulwama attack. Backing India's decision to revoke J&K's special status, Mr. Perry said, "I stand with India in their aspiration to provide equal economic, social, and political opportunities to all citizens. As part of this pursuit, two-thirds of the Indian Parliament voted last year to change the status of Jammu and Kashmir". (*ibid*) Supporting the Indian decision, Mr. Perry said: "This vote allowed the government of India to address the stagnant economy and high youth unemployment plaguing the region by providing economic opportunity and sound governance. The residents of Jammu and Kashmir have battled economic depression and forces of extremism and radicalization for too long. Regional stability now provided by the government will give residents of Jammu and Kashmir a better way forward and hope for the future". (*ibid*)

After New Delhi's abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019, Pakistan with the help of China, tried to internationalise the Kashmir issue. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan dialled US President Trump and other permanent

members of the United Nations Security Council before its meeting. However, Pakistan did not get any support from any permanent member of the UNSC except China. Finally, the UNSC held a closed-door meeting on 16 August 2019 on "India/Pakistan" but after the meeting no official statement was issued. (*Imran dials Trump, other UNSC member, Times of India, 17 August 2019*) No UNSC member other than China spoke to the media on the August meeting. Hence, experts were of the view that the issue was not supported by the UNSC members. (*Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report 13.01.2020, (R45877), 'op.cit.' p.19) A British diplomat later revealed that the UK did not side with China against India. It also clarified that London had no role in calling the Security Council meeting on India/Pakistan in August. (*UK did not back Pak on Kashmir at UNSC meet*, *Times of India, 20 August 2019*, p.1) In December 2019, Beijing again echoed Islamabad's request for the UN Security Council to hold another closed-door meeting on Kashmir but no such meeting took place because other UNSC members did not support it. (*Kashmir: Background, Recent Developments and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report, 13 January 2020, (R45877), 'op.cit.') Overall it can be said

The UNSC held a closed-door meeting on 16 August 2019 on "India/Pakistan" but after the meeting no official statement was issued. No UNSC member other than China spoke to the media on the August meeting. Hence, experts were of the view that the issue was not supported by the UNSC members.

that despite their best efforts, Pakistan and China failed to internationalise the Kashmir issue by using the United Nations platform, due to lack of support from the US, its western allies and Russia.

Again, the question arises: Why did the Trump Administration take a pro-India stand after Jammu and Kashmir's special status was abrogated in August 2019? First, Pakistan's continued to support terrorist groups in Afghanistan with which America was fighting. Secondly, Pakistan maintains a close economic and military relationship with China, a global US adversary. Third, the US administration regards India as a military partner to counter the growing Chinese influence in Asia and the Indian Ocean. Fourth, as Indians are among the wealthiest and the most active political minorities in the US, President Trump wanted to please the Indian American community to get their full support in the presidential election.

To summarise, it can be said that President Trump's administration tried to balance its Kashmir policy between India and Pakistan in the beginning. On the one hand, Washington asked Pakistan to stop supporting terrorism in Kashmir; on the other, it repeatedly offered to play a mediatory role to resolve the Kashmir issue. There was a period when Washington needed Pakistan to work out an agreement with the Taliban in order to bring its troops out of Afghanistan. That is when US sought to humor Islamabad. However, from the summer of 2019 the US administration adopted a pro-India policy and supported New Delhi's zero tolerance policy towards terrorism and abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in toto. The US and its western allies did not allow the Pakistan-China attempt to internationalise the Kashmir issue at the United Nations either.

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