

## Q& A on Kashmir

### Who's involved in the dispute over Kashmir?

The territory of Kashmir was hotly contested even before Indian 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 accede to 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 flash-point for two of the three India-Pakistan wars: the first in 1947-8, the second in 1965.

Since 1989, in addition to the rival claims of Delhi and Islamabad to the territory, there has been a growing and often violent separatist movement fighting for the independence of Kashmir.



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### 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 (see below).

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, doesn't want international debate on the issue, arguing that the Simla Agreement of 1972 provided for a resolution through bilateral talks.

India points to the Instrument of Accession signed in October 1947 by the Maharaja, Hari Singh.

Both India and Pakistan reject the so-called "third option" of Kashmiri independence.

### What is the Line of Control?

A demarcation line was originally established in January 1949 as a ceasefire line, following the end of the first Kashmir war.

In July 1972, after a second conflict, the Line of Control (LOC) was re-established under the terms of the Simla Agreement, with minor variations on the earlier boundary.

## What's the geography?

The LOC passes through a mountainous region around 5,000 metres high.

The conditions are so extreme that the bitter cold claims more lives than the sporadic military skirmishes.

North of the LOC, the rival forces have been entrenched on the Siachen glacier (more than 6,000 metres high) since 1984; it's the highest battlefield on earth.

The LOC divides Kashmir on a two-to-one basis: Indian-administered Kashmir to the east and south (population around nine million), which falls into the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir; and Pakistani-administered Kashmir to the north and west (population around 3 million), which is labelled by Pakistan as "Azad" (Free) Kashmir.



Indian artillery: Pounded "insurgent" positions

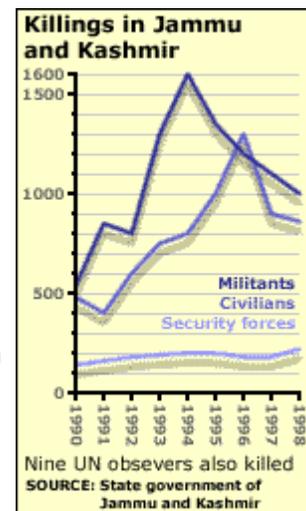
## What's the UN involvement?

The UN has maintained a presence in the disputed area since 1949.

Currently, the LOC is monitored by the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). It is commanded by Major-General Jozsef Bali of Hungary.

According to the UN, their mission is "to observe, to the extent possible, developments pertaining to the strict observance of the ceasefire of December 1971".

As of 31 December 1998, nine UNMOGIP personnel have been killed in the conflict.



## Is religion an issue?

Religion is an important aspect of the dispute. Partition in 1947 gave India's Muslims a state of their own: Pakistan. So a common faith underpins Pakistan's claims to Kashmir, where many areas are Muslim-dominated.

The population of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir is over 60% Muslim, making it the only state within India where Muslims are in the majority. There have been sporadic but recently increasing incidents of sectarian violence.

## Who are the militants?

There are several groups pursuing the rival claims to Kashmir.

Not all are armed, but since Muslim insurgency began in 1989, the number of armed separatists has grown from hundreds to thousands. The most prominent are the pro-Pakistani Hizbul Mujahideen, which declared a ceasefire last week. Islamabad denies providing them and others with logistical and material support.

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was the largest pro-independence group, but its influence is thought to have waned. Other groups have joined under the umbrella of the Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, which campaigns peacefully for an end to India's presence in Kashmir.



Armed Kashmiri militants: A growing presence

## What about human rights?

International human rights agencies have frequently expressed concern about Kashmir.

In a recent report, Amnesty International said there was "a pattern of human rights abuses committed by Indian security forces in connivance with armed groups".

In its World Report 1999, the Washington-based group Human Rights Watch describes the massacres of Hindu civilians by what it says are Pakistan-backed militant groups as "a deadly new development".



Indian security forces: alleged human rights violations

By BBC News Online's Fergus Nicoll