

Extremist Collaborations Abroad

Table of content

I. Introduction	1
II. Understanding Extremist Movements	1
A. Khalistan Movement	1
B. Azad Kashmir Movement	2
III. Case Studies	2
IV. Effect of Abolishment of Article 370 in Kashmir	3
V. Bilateralism between Khalistan and Azad Kashmir Movement	
VI. Role of the Pakistan Government and ISI	3
VII. Key Challenges in Tackling Extremist Collaborations Globally	3
A. Human Rights Concerns	3
B. Diaspora Politics	4
C. Freedom of Expression	4
VIII. Recommendations	4
IX. Conclusion	4
X. References	4

I. Introduction

The recent unresolved extradition requests have become a significant dispute in India-Canada diplomatic relations. India perceives the lack of action as a lack of commitment to addressing terrorism, while Canada maintains that its legal and human rights obligations must be entertained. This issue has created a trust deficit and has hindered cooperation on broader issues such as trade, security, and diplomatic engagement. India has faced many separatist insurgencies since independence, but the campaigns for Khalistan and Azad Kashmir have posed the biggest threats to India's territorial integrity. While rooted in distinct Indian history, these movements resulted from political interests, religious identities, and perceived grievances of the people of Punjab and Kashmir. The demands for a separate Sikh state were voiced before the dissolution of British India in 1947 but it did not gain significant political traction. The Khalistanis did not begin employing violence to advance their demands until the late 1980s. The region of Kashmir became a point of contention after the partition of India and Pakistan. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, which had a Muslim-majority population, chose to accede to India under the leadership of Maharaja Hari Singh, leading to the first India-Pakistan war (1947-1948). Kashmir has remained a battleground between the Indian Military and Militants especially in the early 2000s. The tension often gets ignited due to the involvement of Pakistan and neighboring countries breeding militancy.

II. Understanding Extremist Movements

A. Khalistan Movement

The discontent among Sikhs with demands for greater autonomy and concerns about Sikh identity and representation was one of the main causes behind the rise of the **Khalistan (Land of the Khalsa)**. The state of Punjab was divided between India and Pakistan, leading to displacement and communal tensions after India's independence. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was a political document, put forth by the Shiromani Akali Dal at their annual session in Anandpur Sahib in 1973. The resolution outlined the interests of Punjab and Sikhs in India, greater autonomy for Punjab, and control over its resources and administration. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution itself did not explicitly call for Khalistan, but its demands and the subsequent events it influenced played a significant role in shaping the political landscape of Punjab and India. **Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale**, a Khalistani leader who mobilized Sikhs around religious and political grievances. His association with radical elements escalated tensions. In June 1984, Under the orders of then Prime Minister **Indira Gandhi Ji**, the Indian Army stormed the Golden Temple to flush out militants and Jarnail Singh. This led to significant civilian casualties and damage to the sacred site. In retaliation for the operation, Indira Gandhi Ji was assassinated by two of her Sikh bodyguards on 31st Oct 1984. This incident led to anti-Sikh riots. The violence was widespread, with Sikhs being killed, injured, and their properties looted and burned. The Khalistan movement amasses financial and ideological support from segments of the Sikh diaspora, particularly in countries like Canada, the UK, and the USA. Several pro-Khalistan groups have operated in the United States, Canada, and Europe. **Sikhs for Justice (SJF)** is not the only Khalistani group present in the United States. It even operates many spin-off groups and media outlets, including US Media International. **Amrit Pal Singh** (a self-styled preacher advocating for Khalistan) and **Gurpatwant Singh Pannun** (legal advisor and spokesperson for Sikhs for Justice) are some of the major leaders, promoting the separatist agenda. India has made a formal request to Canada to arrest Pannu and extradite him to face charges in India because of his hate speeches.

B. Azad Kashmir Movement

In 1947, The British colony of India gained its independence and it divided the region into areas - the secular nation of India and the predominantly Muslim nation of Pakistan. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was predominantly Muslim population with a Hindu leader. Jammu and Kashmir, also known as "Indian Kashmir" or just "Kashmir," joined the Republic of India, but the Pakistani Government continued to believe that the majority Muslim state rightfully belonged to Pakistan. The Kashmiri people seek full independence from India and Pakistan. They argue that the region should have the right to administration and full authority over its resources. The movement has taken a violent turn that has created unrest in The Valley for more than three decades now. The foundation of various militant groups such as **Hizbul Mujahideen, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)**, exploitation of Kashmiri youths, their brain-washing, and militant funding from neighboring countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh have posed serious threats to India's territorial and national security. Pakistan is a breeding ground for various militant groups. It has provided logistical, financial, and training support to various militant organizations through its military and intelligence agencies such as the **Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)**. In 2019, The BJP revoked J&K's special status (**Revocation of Article 370 (2019)**) by making it a Union Territory. This move led to widespread protests, arrests of political leaders, human rights concerns, and increased tension with Pakistan, which views the action as altering Kashmir's disputed status. The BJP government has pushed for infrastructure development, but ongoing instability has limited the success of economic initiatives.

III. Case Studies

The tensions escalated following the assassination of Sikh separatist leader **Hardeep Singh Nijjar** (a Canadian citizen) in British Columbia. The Canadian authorities accused Indian officials of involvement, leading to the expulsion of Indian diplomats and a diplomatic standoff between Canada and India. This incident intensified discussions on the presence and activities of Khalistani supporters within the Canadian Sikh diaspora. In London, the Pro-Khalistani supporters removed the Indian national flag from the Indian High Commission which led to diplomatic tensions between India and the United Kingdom as well. The Kashmiris abroad have organized events to mark significant dates, such as the martyrdom anniversary of Syed Ali Gilani (a prominent separatist leader). These events aim to draw international attention to the Kashmir issue and the human rights situation in Indian-administered Kashmir. The Azad Kashmir activists have engaged in lobbying activities, organizing protests, and participating in seminars to draw international attention to the Kashmir issue. For many Kashmiri people and political parties, the separatist leaders and pro-kashmir activists who are killed in conflict with the Indian military, are often hailed as shaheeds (martyrs) while Indian Government sees the separatist movement in Jammu and Kashmir primarily through the lens of national security and considers those causing unrest in the valley in the name of Kashmir's independence or integration with Pakistan as threats to the country's territorial integrity.

IV. Effect of Abolishment of Article 370 in Kashmir

A brief spike was observed in militant activities, including attacks on security forces and civilians as militants attempted to resist the abolishment of Article 370 (Aug 2019) by the Central Government. The removal of Article 370 allowed the Indian government to enforce national laws more effectively in J&K, including stricter anti-terrorism laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). A significant reduction in the

number of Kashmiri youths joining the militancy was also noted. BJP government majorly focused on the root causes of alienation and delayed development of Kashmir due to Article 370 which militants often exploit. United Nations and organizations like Amnesty International raised concerns about the rights of residents in J&K but the Indian Government countered these allegations while briefing the necessity of this act. The Indian government emphasized that the move was an internal matter, consistent with its sovereign rights. The Central government fully integrated Jammu and Kashmir into India boosted economic development and eliminated a legal framework that facilitated corruption, separatism, and terrorism.

V. Bilateralism between Khalistan and Azad Kashmir Movement

In addition to a religiously-based identity with a considerable historical and institutional pedigree, there are additional similarities between the movements for Khalistan and Kashmir independence. For example, both movements were for a period contemporaneous – the Punjab crisis entered a violent phase during the 1980s whereas large-scale separatist violence erupted in Kashmir in 1989. Furthermore, both faiths have a strong tradition of martyrdom and a mixing of religion and politics that sits ill at ease with Indian secular nationalism. The Khalistani movement and the Azad Kashmir movement have historically been separate in terms of their regional and ideological goals, but there have been instances of collaboration between groups that advocate for these causes. SFJ has aligned with pro-Kashmiri separatist factions in some of their activities, particularly in diaspora communities in North America and Europe. European countries like the UK, Germany, and Italy have significant Sikh and Pakistani diaspora which many times voice their support to Khalistan and Azad Kashmir movement. European countries allude to the UN's framework of human rights but India has a strong stance against international involvement.

VI. Role of the Pakistan Government and ISI

Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI), assists pro-Khalistan groups financially and organizationally. The movement took a violent turn in the 1980s when militant factions, with support from Pakistan's ISI, escalated efforts for an independent state. While support for Khalistan waned within India, Pakistan continued to back the movement through Sikh diaspora networks, leveraging the issue to fuel geopolitical tensions with India. ISI is providing arms and financial aid to pro-khalistani organizations like Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Liberation Force, and International Youth Front. Pakistan also allegedly facilitated arms smuggling routes through Kashmir and Rajasthan, helping insurgents sustain their operations in Punjab. Wadhwa Singh, Chief Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), Lakhbir Singh Rode, Chief, International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), Paramjit Singh Panjwar, Chief, Khalistan Commando Force (KCF), Gajinder Singh, Chief, Dal Khalsa International (DKI) and Ranjit Singh Chief, Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) permanently based in Pakistan have been coordinating militant activities of their outfits in India under the guidance of Pak ISI.¹ Ranjit Singh (Chief of KZF) has spread up its activities in Jammu and Punjab with the support of Pak ISI. Gopal Singh Chawla (former chief of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC) and a pro-Khalistani leader) attended the Kartarpur opening ceremony, despite objection from the Indian government and declared that the "Khalistan movement was never suppressed, will never be suppressed. Inshallah, Khalistan will be free, and Kashmir will be free too" in his speech, showing his support for Azad Kashmir as well. After the 1965 war, the ISI assumed the role of principal supporter of insurgencies within India, adopting a bifurcated approach, with "West Pakistan providing access to Kashmir and Punjab while East

¹ [SATP](#)

Pakistan enabled ISI and SSG to tap into active insurgencies in India's remote Assam province."² Concerning the Khalistan insurgency by the late 1980s, Pakistan's ISI had entrenched itself in the separatists insurgencies.

VII. Key Challenges in Tackling Extremist Collaborations Globally

A. Human Rights Concerns

International collaboration on countering extremism lies in measures to abide by human rights obligations. The Policies aimed at monitoring extremist activities may involve extensive surveillance, which can infringe on privacy rights. The Indian Government has many times been criticized by foreign media for their military deployment in Kashmir to restore peace in the Valley but many militants take shelter in innocent Kashmiri households which many times results in violent conflict between the local community and the police/military. Certain ethnic or religious communities get unfairly targeted, fueling grievances that extremists exploit and highlight the incident as a violation of basic human rights on the global stage.

B. Diaspora Politics

Countries like the UK, Germany, and Canada host significant Sikh and Kashmiri communities. The extremist elements within the diaspora discourse their route of legitimate advocacy to extremist ideology to globalize the issue and gain media attention. The Kashmir issue has become an aspect of geopolitical competition between Pakistan and India on the global stage. While Khalistan has become a point of lump between Canada and India's diplomatic relationships. In the US, while the government is generally supportive of India's counterterrorism initiatives, the issue of diaspora politics often complicates the narrative. The political influence of the Sikh and Kashmiri diaspora especially in regions like California is sympathetic to separatist causes.

C. Freedom of Expression

In Europe and the U.S., free speech is considered a fundamental right and India's censorship of media, protests, and internet access in regions like Kashmir has faced criticism. The Western government emphasizes protecting free speech and peaceful protest and finding a common ground that respects civil liberties and human rights. Some European countries have expressed concern that India's broad anti-terrorism laws are sometimes used to stifle discord which in turn weakens India's argument against extremist activities.

VIII. Recommendations

A. Strengthen Diplomatic Engagement: Establish strong diplomatic channels that focus on counter-terrorism cooperation. This can include sharing intelligence, coordinating law enforcement efforts, and implementing joint training programs to enhance capabilities in identifying and combating extremist threats. This can also accumulate mutual trust and support among countries to address extremist advocacy through their legal frameworks to ensure compliance with international norms, particularly human rights and anti-terrorism laws at various international forums like: G20.

B. Cancel the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licenses: Pro-Khalistan and Azad Kashmir extremist groups abroad often rely on NGOs and religious charities to funnel funds into India. Suspending or canceling the FCRA licenses of these entities would cut off a major financial lifeline. Through this, the Indian government can limit foreign influence on Sikh and Kashmiri youth and prevent radicalization through well-funded misinformation campaigns. Suspending or canceling the FCRA licenses of NGOs supporting Khalistan will strengthen its internal security, reduce the influence of Pakistan-backed elements,

² [Hudson Institute](#)

and prevent radical groups from misusing religious and human rights platforms to further their separatist agenda.

- C. A joint operation between The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of India as well as Canada:** A joint Indo-Canadian operation to curb Khalistani and Azad Kashmir extremist propaganda on social media can help counter separatist influence abroad. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Canadian authorities should enable Legal action against social media users in Canada promoting separatism, Joint cyber monitoring to track and remove extremist content, AI-based tracking, financial sanctions and Collaboration with tech companies to shut down accounts spreading propaganda. Shutting down propaganda accounts could impact funding and recruitment for separatist groups.
- D. Countering Radicalization Through Education and Community Engagement:** Promote education and understanding, particularly aimed at the youth within Sikh and Pro-Kashmiri communities through government schemes and programs. These programs can focus on countering radical ideologies by promoting peace, inclusivity, and understanding different perspectives. Collaborating with international partners (for example: the United Nations) on educational initiatives could serve as a proactive measure against radicalization while strengthening ties between countries. These programs must be led by local IAS officers, fluent in their local language so that they can form mutual connection. A progress report must be made and sent to the government to monitor the campaign's overall progress.
- E. International Cooperation for Monitoring:** Foster strong cooperation with international governments, law enforcement agencies, and international organizations to jointly monitor the activities of these groups. This involves not only tracking extremist rhetoric and fundraising efforts but also monitoring the propagation of separatist ideologies through social media, publications, and public events. Enhance the credibility of anti-terrorism laws like the UAPA, ensuring they are applied fairly and with respect for human rights. Addressing concerns about overreach will bolster India's international standing and strengthen its stance against extremist threats.

IX. Conclusion

The movements for Khalistan and Azad Kashmir, though distinct in their origins, share commonalities in their pursuit of separatism and the use of extremist tactics. These movements have been fueled by political, religious, and regional grievances, and have gained traction among diaspora communities abroad, often complicating diplomatic relations between India and countries like Canada, the UK, and the US. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving strengthened international cooperation, effective counter-radicalization strategies, and a commitment to balancing security with human rights. Only through diplomatic engagement, legal reforms, and community-driven initiatives can these global extremist collaborations be mitigated effectively, ensuring long-term peace and stability.

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