

## From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

### U.S. boosts Kashmiri secessionists

*After Somalia and Haiti, is President Clinton planning an intervention in the Indian state of Kashmir?*

Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Robin Lynn Raphel, on Oct. 28 at a press briefing in Washington, issued a strident declaration that the United States considers the whole of Kashmir as a disputed territory and therefore does not recognize "the instrument of accession" by which the Maharajah of Kashmir made Kashmir an integral part of India in 1947. Many here are now suspicious of the prospect that the Clinton administration, bogged down in Somalia and Haiti and paralytic over the developments in Bosnia, is now planning to get involved in the Kashmir conflict.

The U.S. State Department's official response to the spate of Indian protests has failed to convince anyone. One diplomatic troubleshooter dismissed the U.S. reply as a "carefully drafted clarification which seeks to maintain what she [Raphel] has said more overtly."

Raphel's press briefing itself was an exercise in doublespeak. She declared that the Shimla Agreement, signed by India and Pakistan in 1972 as an instrument to resolve bilateral conflicts through negotiations and without resorting to force, may no longer be an effective instrument for resolving the Kashmir dispute. "It is 21 years old and there have been very few discussions, if any, under that accord in terms of resolving the Kashmir dispute," Raphel said.

Raphel is a friend of Bill Clinton, who prior to her appointment as assistant secretary of state served as political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi for almost two years. She

indicated that the United States was now interested in mediating the Kashmir dispute "if all parties to the dispute want it."

But her press briefing also indicated that for the first time the U.S. government is veering toward the policy avidly put forward by British Lord Avebury in the House of Lords, that Kashmir should become its own independent country. Raphel pointedly noted that "no resolution [on the Kashmir issue] can be stable and lasting unless agreed to by the people of Kashmir."

Raphel also indicated that the United States is now set to engage Russia in a formal consultation on South Asia, and that she would be undertaking a trip to Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, as well as Russia, early in November.

On the same day as Raphel's press briefing, Stephen Solarz, former congressman from Brooklyn and President Clinton's nominee for ambassador to India, raised the "hypothetical question" of the impact on India's stability in the event Kashmir were allowed to secede. He referred to two alternative views: one stressing the damaging consequences to Indian unity, and the other suggesting that Kashmir is a unique problem, and its separation is unlikely to affect the unity of India.

Raphel's concern about the views of the Kashmiri people was earlier expressed at an Asia Foundation dinner where, in answer to questions, she said that she was happy to report that the Kashmiri people, who had hitherto

eschewed any political dialogue, are "getting together and organizing themselves so that they have someone who can speak for them as a whole, as a group." The statement suggests that during her posting in India, Raphel was in touch with Kashmiri secessionists.

India and Pakistan have fought three futile wars over Kashmir, and came close again in 1991. The region has been a trouble spot for the last four decades and more. Kashmir is now split four ways, with almost two-thirds of it belonging to India. Of the Indian part, one section is the Kashmir Valley, inhabited mostly by Muslims. The other two parts are Jammu, a Hindu majority area, and Ladakh, with a largest Buddhist community, bordering China. The Pakistan-occupied part of Kashmir is in turn split into three parts. The Kashmiris themselves have little loyalty toward either India or Pakistan.

The People's National Party (PNP) representative of the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir, Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, unveiled at the Round Table on Kashmir in Amsterdam recently a map of the "United States of Kashmir," which includes the whole of Kashmir. He said, "We accept neither accession to India nor Pakistan."

Kashmiri also blamed the United States and Europe for wanting to keep the regional conflicts going, so that they could influence events. He said the Kashmiris felt threatened by the rapid industrialization of the two Asian giants, China and India.

Another speaker at the Round Table echoed Raphel's positive affirmation of the Kashmiri separatist movement, noting that although it was true that the Kashmiris do not have leaders of the stature of Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela or Yasser Arafat, still the Kashmiri movement is beginning to produce its own leaders.