

## Living on the frontlines: Perspective from Poonch and Kotli region of AJK

Shaheen Akhtar\*

### Abstract

*Kashmir conflict deeply impacts the lives of the people living along the 740km Line of Control (LoC), dividing former state of Jammu and Kashmir. The people living in the in Kotli and Poonch districts are extremely vulnerable to volatile conditions of the LoC which adversely affect their physical security, livelihood, socio-cultural life, educational development, psychological health and wellbeing. This study evaluates the impact of Kashmir conflict and escalation of tension on the LoC in the 1990s, the impact of 2003 ceasefire and recent LoC tension on the lives of the people living in villages on the zero line in Kotli and Poonch districts. It argues that human dimension of the Kashmir conflict should be recognized, ceasefire on the LoC institutionalized and stalemated political dialogue resumed to revive political process on resolution of Kashmir dispute.*

**Key words:** Kashmir conflict, Line of Control, Poonch, Kotli, impact of firing, shelling, 2003 ceasefire

### Introduction

The people living along the LoC are extremely vulnerable to militarization and volatility of the LoC which adversely affect their physical security, livelihood, socio-cultural life, educational development, psychological health and wellbeing. The LoC became a battle zone during India-Pakistan wars of 1948, 1965 and 1971 and remained explosive in the warlike situations such as in 1990, in 1999 during Kargil crisis and in 2001-2002 following military standoff. With uprising in Indian held Jammu & Kashmir (IHK) in the 1990s, the incidence of firing and shelling on the LoC went up resulting in killing, injuring and displacement of a large number of civilian populations inhabiting the bordering areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). In November 2003, India and Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire on the LoC which restored a sense of security to the people living close to the LoC and resumed travel (2005) and trade (2008) connectivity across the LoC which was snapped in the wake of 1965 war. While ceasefire was very effective in the first few years, very serious incidents of violations have taken place in more recent years.

The study examines the impact of Kashmir conflict, volatility of LoC and 2003 ceasefire on the lives of the people living on the zero line the Kotli and Poonch districts of AJK. The region is highly vulnerable to LoC firing/ shelling and was hugely affected in the 1990s. It argues that impact of Kashmir conflict on the people living in proximity of the LoC should be recognized, ceasefire be institutionalized and political dialogue be resumed to end spiral of ceasefire violations on the LoC. It is divided in two periods: first period explores impact of Kashmir conflict and

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\*Author is Associate Prof. Department of International Relations, National Defence University, Islamabad – Pakistan.

escalation of LoC on the people living in the Neelum valley in the 1990s. The second period analyses the impact of 2003 ceasefire on these people.

### **Universe of the study**

The study is mainly based on the field analysis; Stratified Random Sample Survey (SRS) conducted by the author.<sup>1</sup> The universe of the study is bordering villages of Poonch and Kotli districts that were deeply affected by firing and shelling on the LoC from 1990 to 2003. The physical security and socio economic life of the people living in these villages is adversely affected whenever there is escalation of tension and hostilities between India and Pakistan on the LoC. The villages in Kotli and Poonch districts where Stratified Random Sample Survey (SRS) was conducted included Seri Majwar, JajotBahader, AndarlaKattera, Khad, MethiDhera, Nidi Sohana, Haripur Sohan, ZereenDhera, BalaDhera, Badi, Datot, Panjni, Dharooti, Lanjot, Dubsi, Sehra, Battal, Tetrinote, Chattra, Panjpani, Chand Tekri, Kala Mula, BandiSyedan, Behdi, and KhwajaBandi.

### **Specificity of LoC in Poonchand Kotli region**

The Line of Control (LoC), referred to as ceasefire line (CFL) until 1971 divides the pre-1947 state of Jammu and Kashmir into Indian and Pakistani Administered zones of Kashmir. The CFL, established by Karachi Agreement signed between India and Pakistan in July 1949 was to be supervised by United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) <sup>2</sup> The LoC mainly reflected the troop

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<sup>1</sup> The study uses the Stratified Random Sample survey (SRS) method and design questionnaire to explore the impact of conflict and ceasefire on the people living in the forward areas of Kotli and Poonch districts. The survey was conducted between August and December 2014. The civilian population living along the LoC formed the universe and an appropriate sample of 400 persons- 200 each from Kotli and Poonch districts was drawn to find out the effects of conflict and ceasefire on the local community living in these areas. The survey tries to cover maximum social strata across gender, age and occupation. A ratio of 60 percent males and 40 percent females was maintained. The female respondents included housewives, farmers, health care and social workers, teachers and students. The male respondents comprised those engaged in small businesses, farmers, labourers, traders, transporters, cross-LoC traders, office workers, journalists, students and teachers. There was mix age group across gender- youth, middle aged and elderly who have experienced the conflict in a varied manner and at different times. There were 15 % from 60 and above; 40 % between 40 and 60 and 45 % between 18 and 40.

<sup>2</sup> These observers, under the command of the Military Adviser, formed the nucleus of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP). UNMOGIP's functions were to observe and report, investigate complaints of cease-fire violations and submit its findings to each party and to the Secretary General.

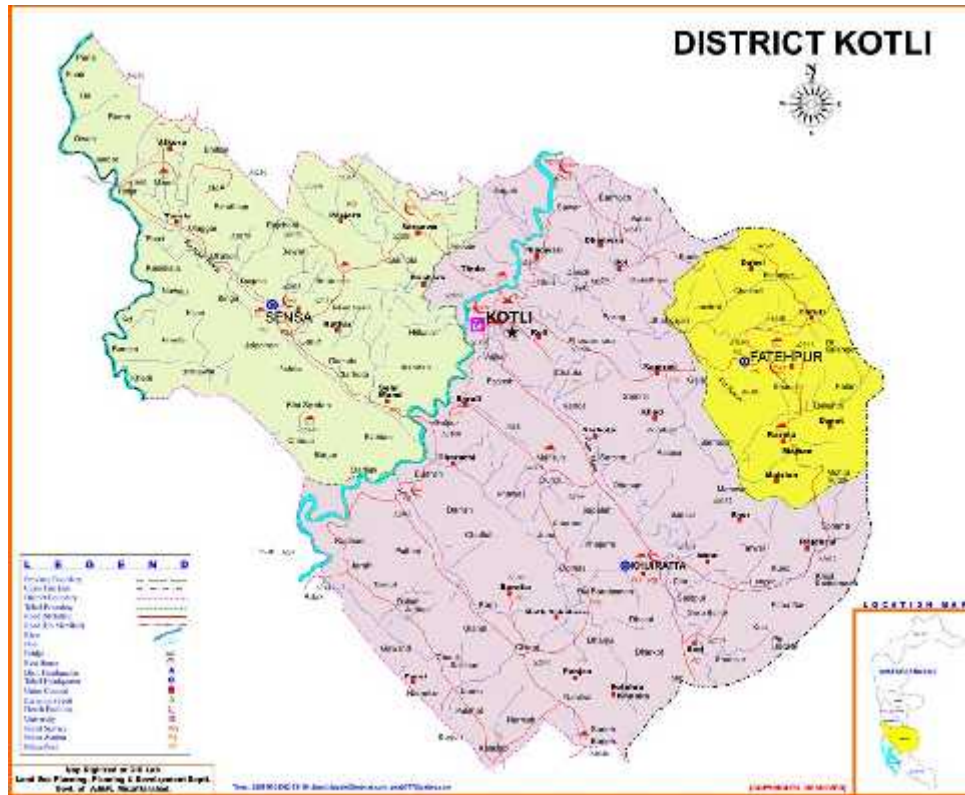
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positions held by both sides in December 1948. The CFL that ‘runs from Manawar in the south, north to Karen and from Karen east to the glacier area’ (Karachi Agreement, 1949) was renamed as Line of Control in 1972.<sup>3</sup>

Kotli and Poonch districts together have 96 km length of boundary with the LoC; Kotli 64 km and Poonch 32 km. Kotli district falls in Mirpur division. It’s a hilly area that rises gradually towards the high mountains of Poonch District. With 14 percent of the total area, it is the second largest district in AJK. In terms of population it is the largest with 0.826 million people- 19.40 percent of the total population and has density of 444 persons per sq. km. (AJK at a Glance, 2013). Traditionally, the social set up of Kotli was based on kinship, built around clans or *baraderi*. Its major tribes are Syed, Gujar, Jat, Rajput, Awan and Sudhan and its indigenous languages Hindko, Gojri and Pahari.

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<sup>3</sup>In July 1972, India and Pakistan signed an agreement defining a Line of Control in Kashmir which, with minor deviations, followed the same course as the ceasefire line established by the Karachi Agreement in 1949.



[http://pndajk.gov.pk/images/maps/Dist\\_Kotli.jpg](http://pndajk.gov.pk/images/maps/Dist_Kotli.jpg)

The Poonch district is a part of the pre 1947 Jammu region of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Presently, it falls in the Poonch division of AJK. In terms of area, the district is one of the smaller districts, comprising 855 sq km; 6.4 per cent of the total area of AJK. The Poonch district is entirely hilly with an average elevation of about 2000 meters above sea level. The mountains in the district are part of the PirPanjal Range. Tolipir is the highest peak in the eastern mountain regions of the district. Its population is 0.573 million or 13.46 per cent of the total AJK population. However, the population density is 670 persons per sq. km, the highest in AJK (AJK at a Glance, 2013); attributed to mountainous terrain, which results in a higher concentration of settlements in the narrow plains in the foothills. Poonch is inhabited by diverse communities, such as Gujjars, Bakerwals, Syeds, Kashmiris and Rajputs. Gujjars mostly reside on the slopes of mountains. While 86.84 per cent of the population of Poonch lives in rural areas, the literacy rate of the district is 67.22 percent — 72.10 percent for urban and 66.45 percent for rural areas. (District Profile: Rawalakot, July 2007. p. vii.)

Means of livelihood in the Kotli and Poonch districts include farming, rearing livestock and poultry, government service (both civil and military), business and

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overseas employment. Industry is minimal in terms of contributions towards livelihoods. The contribution of industry is minimal towards livelihoods. Domestic seasonal migration for employment is common. In decades of 1960 and '70s people from Kotli district migrated abroad to seek job, which bolstered the economy of the area. The main economic activity in the district however, continues to be in the fields of agriculture, livestock rearing and the service sector. Of the total land of about 414,019 acres of the Kotli district, 20 percent is available for cultivation while 80 percent of the land bears forest, settlements, infrastructure and uncultivable land. (Gulpur Hydropower Project: ESIA and ESMMP, 2013, p.x)<sup>i</sup>



[http://pndajk.gov.pk/images/maps/Dist\\_Poonch.jpg](http://pndajk.gov.pk/images/maps/Dist_Poonch.jpg)

The low forward areas of the otherwise hilly Kotli and Poonch districts are densely populated- inhabitation is higher or concentrated in the narrow plain land in the foothills. Thereby the civilian population living in the frontline villages- mostly in the foot hills overlooked by the Indian positions- is highly vulnerable to militarization and the volatility of the LoC. In Poonch district about 81,846 people live along the LoC.<sup>4</sup>

### Impact of firing, shelling and mines

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<sup>4</sup>Based on information provided by AJK government official source.

Living on the LoC where two armies stand eyeball to eyeball is different from living along the normal international borders. On the Pakistani side in AJK, civilian live very close to the LoC because AJK itself is mainly hilly and geographically, a very narrow strip, and there is lot of population pressure on the land. Secondly, there is no fencing on this side of the LoC, people who have ancestral homes- majority of whom are economically marginalized- practically live *on* the zero line, even beyond the army posts; sometimes less than 500 meters away from it. There is no concept of no-man's land. The population is scattered, and a sizable chunk of it lives within 2-3 km from the LoC, dangerously perched on the firing line.

From 1990 to 2003, the lives of the people living close to the LoC in Poonch and Kotli were directly affected by firing and shelling, resulting in killing and injuring of many locals. There was intermittent machine gun firing and heavy artillery shelling, casualties through antipersonnel mines, kidnapping through commando action. According to official sources, from 1990 to 2002, 266 people were killed in LoC firing in Poonch district while 827 were injured. (Deputy Commissioner, Poonch, AJK) The field survey revealed that security risk was very high as 85 percent of the respondents felt least secure before 2003 ceasefire. They experienced direct physical threat to their life, the threat of losing loved ones, and of losing their belongings and livelihood.

**Impact of the conflict: Responses for the 1<sup>st</sup> period from 1990- 2003 in Poonch&Kotli region**

	<b>Security risk/ threat</b>	<b>Emotional loss</b>	<b>Economic loss</b>	<b>Environ.&amp; Social loss</b>	<b>Travel and Comm. ease</b>
None	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	81.0
least	0.0	4.0	5.1	1.0	14.0
Fair	6.0	6.0	8.1	13.0	5.0
Good	8.0	48.0	17.2	20.0	0.0
Most/Best	85.0	42.0	69.7	66.0	0.0

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Total %	100	100	100	100	100
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Over the years, people living in the frontline villages of Nakyal in Kotli and the Battal in Poonch experienced direct impact of the conflict on the LoC, losing human life, home and hearth, livestock and livelihood. Many villagers live in isolated houses close to the line, practically between the soldiers on either side and are so poor that they don't have the means to move away from the danger zone. Here, there are many stories of people who lost members of their family in the LoC firing. One such incident was narrated by Niaz Akhtar<sup>5</sup> (Niaz Akhtar, Personal Communication, August 2014) from Lanjot (Dabsi valley) in Kotli whose house is on the zero line, just 300 meters away from Indian Army post MawalaJabri. According to Akhtar, at mid night on February 24, 2000, about 15 Indian army commandos crossed the LoC and broke into their house. They shot dead 14 people including a 2 year old child and two elderly men of 90 and 95 years respectively from his family. Those killed included six women and four children. The Pakistani post, Forward Jabri, behind their house was engaged in the firing when the incident took place. The heads of those killed were severed and taken away, said Akhtar. Only two men, Mohammed Younis and Akhtar himself, escaped alive. Others from the area, like Aurangzeb from Lanjot chakarwali and Sajid from Bai Nar Lanjot, pointed out that Lanjot has often borne the brunt of the Indian firing. "There was threat to life all the time and we felt very insecure", Sajid, a local resident from Bai Nar Lanjot. About 30 percent of the families living in Lanjot migrated to safer areas.(Respondent from Bai Nar Lanjot)

Residents of UC Seri village in Kotli, too felt there was always a threat to their life, and livelihood. "They suffered loss of life, their houses were damaged and they had to migrate to safer places temporarily whenever tension on the LoC escalated. They were unable to tend to their fields or take care of their livestock. Crops in the fields would get damaged and businesses were destroyed. Describing fearful security conditions in the decade between 1990 and 2003, Seri's Haji Ferozdin, whose house is the last one on the zero line between the Indian and Pakistan army posts, said, "They [the people in his village] were very scared of Indian firing, especially small arms, as those could hit them directly. They were living in a constant fear of Indian army coming down at night and attacking them." (Respondent from Seri village)Elsewhere, in Khanpur village on the LoC, Adnan Ahmed, recalled a similar atmosphere of terror. He said, "We used to live in danger and feared losing our lives. There used to be intermittent firing and heavy shelling. The houses and crops were destroyed. There was fear and sense of insecurity all around. I could not go out of the house to do any work." (Respondent from Khanpur)"There was heavy firing and shelling, shattering daily life of the people, confining them to their homes," echoed

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<sup>5</sup>Niaz Akhtar is the son of Abdul Hameed who survived the attack and provided details of the incident.

Mirza Rafiq Ahmed of Dabsi Gala, also in the Kotli district. (Respondent from Dabsi Gala)

In the neighbouring district of Poonch, Dara Sher Khan village located on the zero line was terribly affected by LoC firing/shelling in the 1990s. The village has a population of 200 families, 12,000-odd people in all, who live in the foothills, beyond the Pakistan army posts, and watched by the Indian army positions on the hilltops facing them. Their position not only exposes them to the Indian firing, but also traps them in the event of a cross fire. The main road that passes through the village is totally exposed to the Indian fire, and in times of shelling the vehicular movement ceases completely here and people are trapped inside their homes. The local population of the area has suffered a lot during the 1990s in terms of loss of life and livelihood. In fact, this is an area where ceasefire has never been observed completely<sup>6</sup> (SardarAmjadYousuf, Personal Communication, December 2014) and has heated up again in the last few years. The mortars have landed in homes and killed people. Locals have been killed in sniper fire while sitting in their courtyards, inside their homes, even inside their rooms. At times, those injured could not be rescued due to continued firing and died on the way to hospital. The healthcare facilities have been very poor in the bordering areas. Further, bringing injured from the hilltops and roads exposed them to firing, and it was too difficult and dangerous to save the lives of the wounded people. The villagers from the area said whenever there was firing, they were confined to their homes and relied on stocked food. The Pakistani army evacuated the injured and provided free treatment. It also provided food to the locals, when they were under siege due to shelling at the LoC.(Local community, Dara Sher Khan, Personal Communication, December 2014)

Many people who were financially sound moved away from the area in the 1990s and only the marginalised poor families were left behind. They lived on their limited livestock and small landholdings, said Saqib, whose family migrated from Battal to the main city of Poonch but still maintains a home there. ‘In Dara Sher Khan, Indian soldiers used to come down from their post at the hilltop at night and kidnap or kill people’ said another local resident. “There was lot of insecurity and uncertainty. The fear of death and displacement dominated life here, and there was no means of livelihood,” said, Waseem Ahmad also from Battal. (Respondent from Battal)Fellow resident, WaheedSadiqqi, added, “Houses were destroyed, schools and health infrastructure was damaged in the heavy artillery shelling.” It was very difficult to evacuate the injured between rounds of firing and shelling. The terrain is hilly and people live in isolated houses on the hills, so most of the time wounded died on way to the closet field hospitals. Since the healthcare infrastructure is very poor in these areas, the local population relies on military field medical units.

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<sup>6</sup>SardarAmjadYousuf, a politician from Abbaspur, Rawalakot district.



### *The menace of landmines*

People have become victim of landmines in the Chattar sector of Kotli, especially in Jogalpal, JajotBahdur villages. In this region, most of the high hills along the LoC are with the Indians and are mined. In the rainy season, and due to landslides, the mines float down to forests, streams and fields and threaten the lives of the civilian population in the area. (Amiruddin Mughal, Personal Communication, September 11, 2014.)<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to get exact data of landmine victims because it is not properly documented and many incidents remain unreported; but the number remains quite high. Civilian life in Chhamb, Chattar and Neelum area is fraught with the fear of landmines. In Kotli official sources put the figure of mines victims at 33; many in addition were killed as well. In Jogalpal, for example, a young women Nisbatbibi was struck by mines and lost her leg while she was cutting grass for the cattle. Another local, Muhamad Latif, lost his legs when he took his cattle to drink water from a stream close to the LoC. In Jajot Bahadur, Majid, now 55 years old lost his leg in a mine accident when he was 20. His is not merely physically challenged, but socially and emotionally deprived as well- he couldn't get married due to his disability. Mohammad Aslam, 45, of the Abbasspur sector, is also a landmine victim who lost his right eye and a leg. In Tatrinate, yet another village in Poonch, 38-year-old Iftikhar Hussain Shah was injured in a blast in December 2011 when he was grazing his goats close to the LoC in the hills nearby.

Since water sources such as streams and springs, often lie close to the LoC, a lot of women who go to fetch water have become landmines victims. Similarly, grazing areas are often closer to LoC and a number of women are injured while grazing cattle. Cattle too step on mines all too often. Since such people are poor and live on livestock and small landholdings, they are not in a position to afford treatment. People have sold their castles to pay for treatment, but it is not sustainable, as artificial devices must be replaced every three years, and in hilly terrains, earlier still. While the government initially provides some assistance for treatment, it is not sufficient. So the victims continue to suffer lifelong.

### *Internal Displacements*

The people living in the frontline villages of AJK have been repeatedly displaced in between 1990 and 2003; the number shooting up after nuclear tests in 1998, during Kargil conflict in 1999 and military standoff in 2001-2002. The AJK government

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<sup>7</sup>Amiruddin Mughal is a local Journalist from Kundalshahi (Neelum), and a reporter for Samma TV from Muzaffrabad. He has made first ever documentary on landmines victims along the LoC.

estimates that from 1990 to 2002, a large number of 199,188 people living along the LoC were displaced due to Indian shelling- including 21,686 from Muzaffarabad district which included Neelum at that time; 25,231 from Bagh; 28,192 from Poonch; 13,793 from Kotli and 110,286 from Bhimber. As such nearly 6 per cent of the total estimated population of over 3.9 million (2010) (Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK) was displaced- among them were a large number of women, children as well as elderly persons. Besides, 1,314 were killed and 4,705 were injured in the same period. (Relief and Rehabilitation Department, AJK.Robinson, 2013, 54).<sup>8</sup> Many people living in villages located on the zero line of Kotli district fled their homes during intense firing and shelling between 1990s and 2003. They were repeatedly displaced, and those who stayed on were mostly poor- either below the poverty line or close to it - and were in no position to make their living outside their native village. “[Even today] they are highly vulnerable because they sustain themselves with the help of some livestock and small landholdings,” added Iftikhar from Battal village. (Respondent from Battal) If the cattle are killed in firing or mine blast, the villagers are immediately pushed below the poverty line. Majid, another local from Kotli district, remarked, “Few people could afford to opt for migration to Pakistan or nearby regions; in extreme firing some people did temporarily migrate to neighbouring places.’

In many villages in UC Nidhi Sohana (Kotli) which is located entirely on the LoC, people migrated to safer areas. According to a Raja Naeem, secretary of the UC, a large percentage of local population migrated from Mithi Dehra 40 per cent ; Sohana 35 per cent, Hariipur Sohana 45 per cent; ZereenDhara 25 per cent, BalaDhara 30 per cent; Nidi MianMohra 5 per cent and Chenge de Ghati 7 per cent. Many other forward villages in Kotli also witnessed similar displacement at the LoC. According to Raja Baber Khan from UC Khanpur Seri, the entire population of Thandi Kasi was displaced (about 4500 people). Pitha Nar (35 per cent), KasJamiri (70 per cent), Jagot Bahadur (40 per cent), Jogal Pal (25 per cent) and Dabsi (6 per cent) also witnessed dislocation. (Raja Baber Khan, Personal Communication, Khanpur Seri)<sup>9</sup> Most moved in temporarily with their relatives in safer areas; some were left behind to fend for themselves as the relatives were not in a position to host them. The AJK government provided canvas tents, but they did not register these people as refugees or made relief provisions. (AkramSohail, Deputy Commissioner Muzaffarabad, Personal Communication, October 5, 2014)<sup>10</sup> The camps closer to the LoC were seasonally occupied by IDPs; Hattian and Kel camps were used almost exclusively for displaced AJK residents after 1998.

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<sup>8</sup>Robinson quoting AJK government estimates states that more than 350,000 residents were displaced within AJK and Pakistan.

<sup>9</sup> Raja Baber Khan is UC official, Khanpur Seri.

<sup>10</sup>AkramSohail served as Deputy Commissioner Muzaffarabad during that period.

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The field analysis showed that condition of IDPs who were forced to move out from Dara Sher Khan, Bhedi, Dhaki and Chaknar turned far worse as they did not have the status of refugees. They are now living in camps in Bagh. There is also a camp in Jamgarh, where IDPs from Behdi are staying. These people earlier lived in areas wedged between the Indian and Pakistan army posts on the zero line. As they do not enjoy the status of refugees, there is no government support either. (Muhammad ArifUrfi, Personal Communication, October 13, 2014)<sup>11</sup>

### **Psychological impact of ‘Living in danger’**

The psychological impact, or emotional loss, is intangible and difficult to grasp and quantify. Yet, this study tried to measure it through use of latent variables and a set of questions to arrive at a conclusion on how people feel about displacement. About 90 percent of the respondents felt that they experienced great emotional loss because of migrations, constant fear of losing near and dear ones and belongings in LoC firing, separation from family members, and inability to meet them. The psychological impact of heavy militarization and conflict conditions on the people living in the zero line villages of Kotli and Poonch was massive. There was a general sense of insecurity and uncertainty, constantly perceived threat to life, and fear of displacement and of losing family members. A large chunk of 42 percent respondents felt that this had adversely affected them psychologically and emotionally, while 48 percent observed that the impact was quite substantive.

People across villages spoke of interruptions and of the underlying fear that vitiated mundane lives. Mehmooda Begum from Pitha Nar, on the zero line, for instance, said: “while cutting grass for their cattle, people were always scared of firing.” (Respondent from Pitha Nar) Jamila Begum also from Pitha Nar, stated: “there was always a fear that the ‘enemy’ might forcibly enter into their house and kill them.” Raja Naju from Khanpur village in Seri UC, spoke of fellow residents who have an Indian Army post opposite their house: “In summer they were very scared of sleeping on the rooftops due to the dread of sudden firing from the Indian side.” ( Respondent from Khanpur) Over the years, this constant, high level of fear has left deep impressions on people’s psyche, said Raja Naeem from Mithi Dehra in UC Sohana.

### **Economic losses of the local communities**

Economic loss is one of the most important factors in the forward villages of Kotli and Poonch which changed drastically before and after the ceasefire. About 86 percent respondents reported that their sources of livelihood were damaged or destroyed by the escalation of tension on the LoC. The shelling destroyed their houses,

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<sup>11</sup> Muhammad ArifUrfi is reporter Geo News, AJK.

shops/businesses, livestock and restrained their mobility further affecting their livelihood activities. In Poonch district 729 houses were completely destroyed while many other were partially damaged. (DC PoonchRawalakot, AJK) There are three major area of economic activity- farming livestock and small businesses- were all badly disrupted. During firing/shelling, villagers could not go to their fields for sowing or harvesting, which destroyed their crops. At times, standing crops went up in flames due to the shelling. Cattle grazing virtually ceased and many animals were killed in the firing. Visitors stopped coming into the area for business of social engagements. This further contributed to the severe poverty in the communities living along the LoC. Trapped in their homes, they were unable to venture out to work or do anything at all. Many had dug trenches, as even homes were unsafe. Mining of the LoC also restricted the movement of the civil population in the areas nearby.

### **Effects on education, social life and the environment**

The volatility on the LoC directly impacted the educational activities, socio-cultural life and ecology of the Poonch-Kotli region. In the field survey 99 percent of the respondents felt that LoC firing badly affected the education of their children, impinged on their social and cultural interactions, and adversely impacted their natural habitat that sustains their livelihood. A great majority of 66 percent of respondents reported that LoC firing and shelling has drastically impacted social sector like health and education sectors, their social life and environment of the area. Another 20 percent felt there was substantive negative impact while 13 percent viewed that there was adverse impact on their socio-cultural environment and ecology.

#### ***Impact on educational activity***

The intermittent firing and shelling on the LoC hampered the educational infrastructure and activities in the forward villages in Kotli and Poonch. According to Kotli's Deputy Commissioner Choudhry Shaukat Ali, there are at least 6-8 high schools located very close to the LoC in Kotli, which were badly affected in the shelling and overall about 100 educational institutions were affected by LoC firing and shelling in the Kotli and Poonch region. Although schools were exposed to the firing, and mortar shells damaged many buildings, they continued to function during the 1990s; the classes were suspended during the shelling.(Chaudhry Shaukat Ali, Personal Communication: December 1, 2014.)<sup>12</sup>Fazal Hussain Khan who was principal of Girls Higher Secondary School Mandhole, (Poonch) until 2002, recalled: "Most of the schools and colleges remained open during the worst bouts of firing. But firing hinders social or educational activities anyway- for example, people feel scared to send their children to schools/colleges, fearing that the buildings might be shelled."

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<sup>12</sup>Chaudhry Shaukat Ali, Deputy Commissioner, Kotli, AJK.

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Waheed Ahmed from Ropari village, UC AndalaKatera, said there were mines in the area too. The school in the Ropari was destroyed, and there is no hospital nearby and the road condition is very poor, getting help for the wounded is also very difficult. Such impediments, and others — like the school staff and students' families migrating, leaving the region entirely, or students leaving school temporarily/permanently — partially hamper education. Locals in the forward villages of Dabsi, Seri, Lanjot, Khanpur and Battal also observed that schools were often caught in the firing and usually remained closed.

### ***Effects on Social life and Environment***

The socio-cultural life of the people in the Kotli and Poonch region was badly affected due to militarization of the LoC and sporadic shelling. Social sectors like health and education suffered hugely in the area; schools, hospitals and road infrastructure were either damaged or could not function effectively. In the survey, 66 percent of the respondents felt that environment and their socio-cultural life were greatly disturbed by escalation of conflict at the LoC. The mobility of the people was severely constrained by the sporadic and sudden firing on the LoC; their mobility was also constrained. Locals in Dara Sher Khan, Lanjot and Dabsi stated, that their social life would come to a standstill- marriages, cultural and religious festivals like Eid could not be celebrated freely, visits to the shrines or funerals during day time were also rendered impossible.

The heavy shelling also directly affected the environment- causing fires, damaging forests in the areas closer to the LoC. Since it's not possible to put out such fires during the firing, the damage is very high, according to the District Forest Officer (DFO) Kotli, Sulman Khan. Fires have affected biodiversity, caused pollution and soil erosion leading to landslides in the region. There also damaged many medicinal plants that grow naturally in the area, especially in Nakyal, Haveli, Neelum and Leepa valleys. Availability of firewood for the local community was impacted too. Further, wildlife and spring water was contaminated by the explosives, and many springs went dry. In some villages, the shortage of water was made worse when they lost access to the springs closer to the zero line during the exchange of fire.

### **Travel and communication ease**

Ever since the division of Kashmir in 1947-48, the communication and travel between the two parts became difficult and gradually hardening of the LoC separated the people completely. During peacetime though, before 1990, the situation was relatively better. People could visit the shrines on the LoC and even could attend marriages or funerals if they had relatives on the zero line on the other side. Such movements however, were done with the tacit approval of forces on both sides, as they were perceived to be non-threatening. There were also some instances of local cooperation.

For instance, in Lanjot there is a spring at Bi Nar Bagola. Before the decade of increased tension at the LoC, the Indian army and the locals would draw water from this spring. But after the escalation of the tension residents of Lanjot no longer have access to it. In the field survey, 95 percent respondents reported that while there were no communication and travel links with their relatives across the LoC, even within the border belt of Nakyal- Battal, the warlike conditions and heightened the security concerns meant telephonic communication was poor or not available. The road infrastructure, especially the roads vulnerable to LoC firing, were damaged and closed to the civilian population, particularly during the day. To get essential goods, people travelled at night with the lights of their vehicles turned off, skirting roads vulnerable to Indian fire.

**The impact of the 2003 ceasefire on the Kotli&Poonch region**

**Positive impact of the improved security conditions**

The greatest effect of the ceasefire is that it restored a sense of security along the LoC, which allowed people to return home, rebuild houses, resume their livelihood activities and move freely in their fields. In the Kotli and Poonch region, 79 percent of the respondents reported great change in their daily lives. They now feel more secure in their homes and outside and can engage in normal livelihood activities and pursue social and cultural life. Yet, 21 percent still feel threatened. They are mostly people who live in most volatile border area of Battal and Nakyal. The ceasefire was never fully implemented in these sectors, and small skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani armies continued- intensified even- during the last few years.

**Impact of the ceasefire on Poonch and Kotli region: Responses for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Period post- 2003**

	<b>Security risk/threat</b>	<b>Emotional loss</b>	<b>Economic loss</b>	<b>Environ. &amp; Social loss</b>	<b>Travel and Communication ease</b>	<b>Support for CBMs/ ceasefire</b>
<b>None</b>	39.0	60.0	82.0	92.0	0.0	0
<b>least</b>	40.0	32.0	18.0	8.0	22.0	0
<b>Fair</b>	21.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	33.0	10
<b>Good</b>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	37.0	11
<b>Most/ Best</b>						79
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100

The field analysis revealed that after the ceasefire, a majority of the population has returned home and built *pucca* houses. They are quite happy with the improved the

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security conditions, allowing them to live in peace and pursue their normal lives. In general, residents of the villages in Nakyal and Khurata felt the most satisfying aspect of the ceasefire was that it greatly decreased the cross-LoC firing and shelling. “[The ceasefire] was a blessing for the people living on the LoC,” said Kurshid Mirza, a cross-LoC trader from Tatrinate. (Kurshid Mirza, Personal Communication, August 6 2014)<sup>13</sup> However, uncertainty still prevails as firing and shelling can start suddenly and bring their life to a grinding halt; at times, resulting in killing or injuries. (DC Kotli, Personal Communication, December 1 2014) This was a perception shared by many respondents from the border villages of Nakyal and Battal, who believed that while security conditions had improved, the threat to life had not entirely ended. Nasim Bibi, a resident of LanjotPinyari village, for instance said, “though they can move freely to work in their fields, the threat to life persists.” Faiza, from Lanjot, who belongs to a family that lost 14 members in the Indian soldiers’ cross-LoC raid in 2000, still feels physically threatened while tending their fields. Despite the lingering fear, many are rebuilding houses damaged or destroyed in the shelling. Raja Javed, a resident of village AndralaKatera links such activities to the reduced fear of dislocation. Irtiqa Arshad, a resident of Dara Sher Khan, too believes, “The threat to life has decreased and mobility has improved,” adding, “however, the mines have not been fully cleared.” (Respondent from Dara Sher Khan) Similarly, AbdurRehman from village BattalDaram in Poonch felt that despite moving freely in the fields, the threat from mines remains.

### Improved Psychological and emotional life

After ceasefire and restoration of normalcy, 92 percent of the respondents maintained that they now feel free from the stress and uncertainty of life and fear of being dislocated again. Of these, a majority of 60 percent felt psychologically secure; another substantive chunk of 32 percent felt quite secure while 8 percent felt fairly secure. Most of the LoC residents who do not have families on the other side of the LoC were giving their observations on the basis of reduction of direct threat to their life, reduction of fear of dislocation, opportunity to rebuild their houses and revival of their livelihood. From LanjotChakrawali, SardarNisar Ahmad linked greater freedom to work in the fields with psychological wellbeing, while another local Master Aurangzeb, connected it to the reduced fear of displacement. FerminaNaseer from Jagot Bahadur too saw the ceasefire as a boon — “Now you can work in the fields and grow your crops; the livestock is also safe. So you feel very satisfied.” (Respondent from Jagot Bahadur) Those who have families across LoC in addition felt, that the resumption of travel across the LoC is emotionally rewarding as it provided opportunities to meet their relatives. Cross-LoC travel was suspended in the wake of 1965 Indo-Pak war.

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<sup>13</sup>Kurshid Mirza, a cross-LoC trader.

### Positive impact on economic conditions

The ceasefire has most visibly had a positive impact on the restoration of economic activity and socio-cultural life in the forward villages. About 82 percent observed it has allowed them to rebuild or repair their houses, send their children to schools, and resume their livelihood activities- work freely in the fields and reestablish their businesses. About 70 percent felt it has benefited them the most, while 18 percent perceived a lower threat to livelihood. Iftikhar from Battal village said, “People are rebuilding their houses, they can now cultivate their fields, the road infrastructure has also improved, and they have reestablished their businesses now. In Dabsi too, there’s renewed economic activity and reconstruction of homes.

The resumption of cross-LoC travel and later, trade in October 2008- on the same routes used for cross-LoC bus services, Salamabad/Uri-Chakothi and Tetrinote-Poonch- have also contributed to generation of economic activity for the population in the Kotli and Poonch. It is a duty free trade in barter mode with 21 tradable items. Initially it was carried out twice a week, but was extended to four days a week in July 2011. About 5,000 people are currently associated with trade related activities. (Zulfiqar Abbasi, Personal Communication, November 2014)<sup>14</sup> Despite limitations of communication, lack of banking facility and trade related infrastructure, cross-LoC trade has registered modest growth over the years. The total value of the goods traded via Chakothi-Salamabad route from 2008 to 2015 was PKR 2210.3981 crores, while those traded via Tetrinote-Poonch crossing point accounted PKR 782.4908 crores. Between 2008 and 2014, about 27,931 trucks crossed LoC from AJK side and 37,671 trucks plied from the other side of the LoC.

A trader from Kotli pointed out that each truck that crosses LoC generates economic activity for many people in the forward area- for instance, labourers are employed to load and unload the goods from the trucks crossing into AJK. In this context, Sardar Zahid a resident of Sehra contended, “Earlier people in these areas were mostly jobless and marginalized because of heavy shelling and low economic activity, but now the situation has changed significantly in their favour. Local labourers charge higher rates for their services. Cross-LoC trade has created opportunities for many allied businesses - such as hotels, restaurant and eateries; even owners of vacant land or fields in the area have converted their plots into the parking lots.” (Sardar Zahid, Personal Communication, December 2014) Having said that, many respondents highlighted issues that are obstructing the growth of cross-LoC trade. For instance, Khurshid Mirza, a trader from Kotli, said, “Since barter trade is practiced here, one cannot assess the real market. Some of the permitted items, such as lentil, coconut,

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<sup>14</sup>Zulfiqar Abbasi is former President of Jammu & Kashmir Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry (JKJCCI).



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turmeric, whole chilies, have also been banned, and now, trade is mostly restricted to onions, tomatoes and bananas.” Despite such constraints in the cross-LoC trade, the locals- especially those with relatives on the other side — have become beneficiaries. The well-constructed upcoming houses along the LoC manifest this newfound prosperity.

### **Improved socio-cultural life and environmental conditions**

There was practically no social and cultural life before the ceasefire as people were virtually stranded in their homes during the day. The psychological repercussions, therefore, were many, especially as people could not gather to share their grief or happiness with each other. After the ceasefire, the quality of socio-cultural life of the people has undergone a sea change. About 92 percent of the respondents reported a positive impact on both the social and environmental sectors. Now people can join the celebrations at marriages, festivals and other organized social gatherings. Educational activities have also got a boost in after the ceasefire. Wildlife, flora and fauna and tree cover in the border regions has improved too. Since 2013-14, Pakistan Army has started a tree plantation campaign in the areas within 2-3 km of the LoC. A special wing of the Forest Department is providing saplings to the army for plantation. (District Forest Officer, Kotli, Personal Communication, December 1, 2014) A large number of saplings have been issued for planation and their survival is also monitored.

### **Travel and communication ease**

The roads exposed to Indian fire are safer now, allowing free movement of the civilian population. This encouraged people to resume regular lives; they could send their children to schools; engage in livelihood activities and pursue a vibrant social and cultural life. The roads have been rebuilt or repaired and communication links are far better than they were before. The resumption of the Srinagar-Muzaffrabad and Poonch-Rawalakot services in April 2005 and the opening of five crossing points at LoC also made the prospect of travelling across the LoC to meet relatives a reality. This has particularly benefited the divided families, although the procedure is quite cumbersome. A majority of people is quite satisfied with these changed situations. The level of ease for travel and communication was reported to be good or fair by 67 percent of the respondents. A substantive segment of 22 percent were however, not fully satisfied with this improvement and asked for removal of procedural hic ups and opening up of more travel opportunities and means of communications across the LoC.

### **Response to ceasefire and CBMs**

The people living in the forward villages of Poonch and Rawalakot area expressed overwhelming support for the ceasefire as it changed the situation on the ground and brought peace and security to their lives. The ease in travel and trade also generated support for CBMs on Kashmir. A huge majority of 79 percent strongly supported the ceasefire, while another big fraction of 21 percent termed it a very positive development and 10 percent felt sufficiently satisfied and supported it. There was however, a caveat- people felt that these CBMs were not effectively implemented and thus don't offer long-term solution to the Kashmir conflict. Many even felt that CBMs are going to 'dilute the Kashmir issue'.

### **Ceasefire remains tenuous in the Nakyal and Battal sectors**

Even after the 2003 ceasefire, there have been incidents of firing and mortar shelling in Nakyal and Battal sectors especially in Dara Sher Khan. These sectors have seen intense ceasefire violations since 2013. In 2013, the Nakyal sector in Kotli district lived through the same nightmarish conditions that had been witnessed before 2003. For the first time in a decade, intense shelling triggered displacements from the forward areas of Nakyal. In August 2013, after heavy Indian firing, around 25 families from Balakot, Datote, Lanjot, and DheriDabsi villages moved to their relatives' homes in safer areas. (Dawn, 2013)

In January 2013, Dharmassal village, which is on the edge of the LoC in the Battal region, metres away from Indian positions, came under fire and life came to a standstill here. People were trapped indoors, terrified by the heavy exchanges of artillery fire between the Pakistani and Indian troops. Boats that ferry people across Poonchriveer were moored too. According to locals, a boat ferrying residents of Dharamsal and Mehndala villages across River Poonch also came under fire. (Tariq Naqash, Dawn, 2013) Nazia Bibi, 35 a resident of Dharmassal who left her three children with her husband in the nearby main town of Tatrinoote and went to Hajira, another border town 12 km away, to see her parents said: "I am very worried about my children. I want this firing to stop," adding, "Our children are not safe in these conditions. We want peace." (Dawn, 2013a) Another resident of the area Ishtiaq Ahmed said, "I started my restaurant at this hotel five years ago and I did good business during the period of ceasefire. But from yesterday [January 9] onwards, I have had to save my own life and there is no business." (Dawn, 2013a) The firing restricted the movement of around 40,000 people. Several people, including women and children were killed and wounded in the recent ceasefire violations. On September 2, 2013 the children were stranded inside a local school in Nakyal due to LoC shelling.

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The year 2014 turned out to be worse for the people in this area. In October 2014, on the first day of Eid, the civilian population in Nakyal, Kallar, Dara Sher Khan, Tatapani and Goi was hit by the Indian shelling. On the second day, Dara Sher Khan was shelled again. In just four days, firing along the LoC and Working Boundary (WB) left 14 civilians dead and injured over 40, most of them on WB.<sup>15</sup> In Dara Sher Khan, 19-year old Razia Bibi was killed in the sniper fire in October 2014, as she was stepping out of her home. First year student, Furqan was also hit by shrapnel on the head, inside his own house- although he survived miraculously. (Local community, Dara Sher Khan, personal communication, December 1, 2014)

Residents in AJK's frontline villages say that Indian troops often whisk away civilians who herd cattle, or collect fodder, firewood or medicinal plants along the LoC. In August 2014, 42-year old Kala Khan from Dara Sher Khan went missing while gathering fodder on a mountain behind his hamlet, close to the unmarked dividing line. Three days later, his body was handed over by Indian army to AJK authorities at Tatrinate-Chakan da Bagh crossing point in Poonch district. (Tariq Naqash, Dawn, 2014) Deputy Commissioner Poonch, Chaudhry Fareed, who received the body, stated that the postmortem report conducted in Hajira revealed that Kala Khan was shot from point blank range.

The ceasefire violations have continued in the Kotli and Poonch sectors through 2015, 2016 and 2017 resulting in killing of civilians and wounding many others. In November 2016, six civilians, including a woman were killed and eight others, including two women injured in Indian firing in Nakyal and Jandrot sectors. (Dawn, 2016) Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif stated in the National Assembly on March 7, 2017, that India had committed 1,427 ceasefire violations since 2013, killing 111 civilians and wounding 457. (Nation, 2017) According to military sources, India has committed more than 400 ceasefire violations until June 2017 this year, leading to killing of nine civilians while injuring more than 60 others. (Tariq Naqash, Dawn, 2017)

### **Fresh fighting impedes cross-LoC travel and trade**

Increased tension on the LoC has directly and indirectly undermined the limited trade and travel prospects in the region. Early in January 2013, incidents of firing led to the stranding of 123 passengers travelling on Poonch-Rawalakot bus route for 20 days, before the Tetrinate-Chakan da Bagh crossing point was reopened on January 28. Those who returned to their homes included 79 passengers belonging to AJK and 44 from IHK side of the LoC. There was no new passenger from the Indian side, but 15

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<sup>15</sup>The worst-affected sectors were and Jandrot (Kotli), Hot Spring (Bagh) and Beduri (Rawalakot) and Harpal, Dhamala and Charwah along the WB.

new passengers went across from the AJK.(Tariq Naqash, Dawn, 2013) Although travel through the Chakothi-Uri crossing point continued, the passengers who had travelled through Tatrinite-Chakan da Bagh point were stuck on both sides because India did not allow passengers to return from any crossing point other than the one through which they had travelled across. Trade through Tatrinite-Chakan da Bagh was also suspended on January 11, when a truck, carrying trade goods through this route came under Indian fire, smashing its windscreen. No-one was injured in the incident. But the Pakistani side decided to suspend vehicular movement as a 'precautionary step'.(Mariana Baabar, TheNews, 2013) "Indian army posts overlook the road leading to the crossing point from our side. It is thus vulnerable to their shelling, compelling us to suspend trade and travel, particularly after the firing on a truck," said, AJK Trade and Travel Authority Director General Brig (retd) Mohammad Ismail. (Tariq Naqash, Dawn, 2013b) The shelling forced the AJK authorities to close a few vulnerable roads. Earlier trade and travel through the Tetrinite-Chakan da Bagh point was suspended in June 2012 following escalations along the LoC. Again, trade and travel was suspended on this route in March 2017. The fragile peace on the LoC forcing such suspensions badly shatters the confidence of both travelers and traders.

### **The Way Forward: Consolidating Ceasefire & Resuming dialogue**

The fragility of ceasefire on the LoC and absence of political dialogue between India and Pakistan is impending threat to the dividend of peace, accrued to the people living along the LoC in the Kotli and Jammu region. The ceasefire is highly tenuous and will remain so until it is institutionalized and is supported by a vibrant political dialogue.

### **Consolidating the Ceasefire**

The 2003 ceasefire put in place after the 2001-2002 military stand-off between India and Pakistan was the first major CBM that restored a sense of security to the communities living along both sides of the LoC. It allowed those displaced by recurrent shelling across the LoC since the escalation of hostilities in the 1990s, to return home, rebuild their houses and restart their livelihood activities. From 2003 to 2005, there was no incident of firing across the LoC and only three occurred in 2006. With India-Pakistan peace process slowing down, the number of violations on the LoC began to increase. The figure on violations varies from the Indian and Pakistan official and media sources, but an increased trend in ceasefire violations is quite obvious.<sup>16</sup> From 2008 through 2012, there were occasional spells of firing across the

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<sup>16</sup>According to Indian official sources, the number of incidents of fire increased from 28 in 2009 to 44 in 2010, 51 in 2011, 114 in 2012, 347 in 2013, 562 in 2014, 405 in 2015, and 449 times in 2016. See, Pakistan violated ceasefire daily in 2015, 2016: MHA", PTI Times of India. (May 7, 2017).

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LoC. This situation began to change in late 2012 when India began to build additional bunkers along the LoC. (Julia Thompson, 2015) Firing across the LoC increased further in January 2013, with reports that two Indian soldiers were killed, their bodies mutilated, and one beheaded. The situation along the LoC calmed somewhat in the following months, but firing again surged from late summer through November 2013 and became a routine occurrence. Ceasefire violations have continued since Narendra Modi's came to power in May 2014. Incidents of shelling have increased in intensity and duration and have usually graduated to the use of heavy weaponry as was the case in 1990s.

A limited number of military and political CBMs are in place to defuse tensions between the Indian and Pakistani armies. Hotlines are in place between the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs),<sup>17</sup> and sector commanders. In 2005 both sides agreed to upgrade to a secure and dedicated hotline between DGMOs, hold monthly flag meetings between formation commanders at four points on the LoC - Kargil (Olding in Pakistan), Uri (Chakothi), Naushera (Sadabad) and Jammu (Sialkot) - and implement the 1991 agreement on airspace violations. They also agreed not to build any new posts or Defence Works along the LoC and to ensure the speedy return of those (mostly civilian but the occasional military personnel) who inadvertently crossed the LoC. Formal agreements on construction along the LoC and the return of those mistakenly crossing the line have been under negotiation since 2006 but remains uncompleted.

Meanwhile, the LoC continues to be heavily militarised with Indian and Pakistani soldiers equipped with small arms and heavy artillery sitting eye ball to eyeball. In the absence of credible and effective monitoring mechanism the ceasefire violations remain point of contention between the two countries. The management of the LoC requires cooperation between the two countries to monitor the ceasefire violations. Pakistan supports strengthening of UNMOGIP, while India proposes joint patrols which Pakistan finds impractical. The UK, EU and US had explored an international helicopter borne force to monitor infiltration along the LoC during the 2001- 2002 standoff. This could be revived without prejudice to existing Indian and Pakistani

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<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pakistan-violated-ceasefire-daily-in-2015-2016-mha/articleshow/58558231.cms>

Pakistani official and media figures are: 20, (2009) 67 (2010), 86 (2011), 230 (2012), 315 (2013), 234 (2014), 221 (2015), 382 (2016). See, "India violated ceasefire 221 times in 2015", The News. (September 11, 2015).

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/8092-india-violated-ceasefire-221-times-in-2015>

<sup>17</sup>A hotline between the Director Generals of Military Operations (DGMOs) was established in 1971 and after the 1990 crisis the decision was made to use it on a weekly basis.

positions on the issue. Several other steps could be taken at the bilateral level to institutionalise the existing CBMs or further build on them:

- The early conclusion of agreements regarding construction of new posts on the LoC and speedy return of inadvertent line crossers.
- Demining of areas along the LoC and expansion of the no man's land area regulated by designated authorities on both sides.

Military CBMs can be expanded to consolidate de-escalation measures on the LoC. These may include:

- Increasing the frequency of meetings at the local commanders' level.
- A policy of no construction without informing the other side.
- The facility to call a meeting with the other side within 24 hours.
- Delegation of responsibility to brigade commander level.
- No firing on civilians or civilian transport.
- Creation and maintenance of safe farming zones on both sides of the LoC.
- Relocation of heavy artillery to at least 30 km away from the LoC.
- Reduction of troops along the LoC.

### **Resumption of political dialogue**

A sustained political dialogue between India and Pakistan is essential for stabilising ceasefire on the LoC and taking Kashmir specific CBMs on trade and travel to the next step. Cross-LoC travel and trade are facing several operationalization difficulties which could not be removed due to stalemate in the India-Pakistan peace process. Similarly, intra-Kashmir dialogue could not take off due to lack of interest in particular on part of India to make people of Kashmir are primary stakeholders in the resolution of the Kashmir conflict. It is pertinent to note that degree of tension on the LoC and in India-Pakistan relations directly affects the growth of cross-LoC CBMs. Thereby an early resumption of dialogue process between India and Pakistan is crucial to revive cross-LoC CBM process that would directly and indirectly improve the security and economic conditions along the LoC.

### **Conclusion**

The Kashmir conflict has profoundly affected the people living along the LoC that remains highly militarized, volatile and mined. In Kotli and Poonch region the lives of the people, their livelihood, socio-cultural interactions and educational activity is subjected to the security conditions on the LoC largely shaped by state of India-Pakistan relations. The 2003 ceasefire and India-Pakistan dialogue led to resumption

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of travel and trade across LoC which brought a semblance of normalcy in the lives of the people living in proximity of LoC. The deadlock in the dialogue process and gradual escalation of tension on the LoC have raised apprehensions that gains of ceasefire and CBMs would wither away if peace process is not resumed and steps are not undertaken by India and Pakistan to consolidate ceasefire and existing CBMs on Kashmir.

Early resumption of peace process between India and Pakistan is very important for stabilizing ceasefire on the LoC. Management of LoC requires institutionalization of ceasefire. Steps should be taken to expand military CBMs including strengthening of de-escalation mechanisms, early conclusion of agreements regarding no construction of new posts on the LoC and the speedy return of people who inadvertently cross the LoC. Both sides should engage in concrete dialogue on reduction of troops along the LoC and relocation of the heavy artillery 30km away from the LoC as civilian population is highly vulnerable to exchanges of heavy firing on the LoC as witnessed in recent times and during the 1990s. The areas along the LoC should be de-mined as they continue to threaten civilians and constrain their livelihood activities.

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