India and Pakistan –
Nuclear States in Conflict

Background
When the British left the Indian subcontinent after years of controlling it, the old India was divided. The division was based mainly on religion.

The old India, ruled by the British for 89 years, had both Muslims and Hindus. But the majority of people were Hindu. After World War II ended, the British finally allowed India to become independent. Because most Indians were Hindu, the British were worried that the Indian government might treat Muslims unfairly. So the British decided to partition (divide) India between Muslims and Hindus. Pakistan was partitioned on the west for Muslims, and Bangladesh was partitioned on the east. Those two countries became – and still are – mainly Muslim.

The partitioning made a region called Kashmir partly in India and partly in Pakistan. But India and Pakistan have been arguing and sometimes fighting about Kashmir ever since, mainly because most people in Kashmir are Muslim.

In 1947, the United Nations passed a resolution stating that the people of Kashmir should get to vote and decide which country they wanted to be part of – India or Pakistan. But the vote was never allowed. It is generally believed that the Indian government will never allow the vote because they fear that the people of Kashmir would vote to join Pakistan. There are also many people in Kashmir who simply want independence. Neither India nor Pakistan will let that happen.

Since independence from Great Britain, India and Pakistan have disagreed about other things. But Kashmir has been at the center of the continuing violence between India and Pakistan. Pakistan is open about supporting Kashmir’s “freedom fighters” and India calls those same fighters “terrorists.” Around 30,000 people have died in Kashmir over the last 11 years.

There have been three wars between India and Pakistan since independence from Great Britain – one in 1948 right after the partition, one in 1965, and one in 1971. There have been smaller battles in Kashmir. There have been several smaller battles since then, but no more full-blown wars. But if there ever is another war between these two countries, it would be even more dangerous than ever. This is because both countries now own nuclear weapons. Both
countries have nuclear bombs which could hit the other country’s major cities within 10 minutes after firing.

Many people who were living in Kashmir have fled. So many Indian and Pakistani military are permanently stationed in the area that the local people feel unsafe. From the end of 2001 there were military clashes almost every night in that border region, with sometimes one or two people being shot.

Pakistan and India agreed to peace talks in August 2015. However, those talks were cancelled before they ever got started. Both countries blamed the other for the talks being cancelled.


COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What was the main reason the British partitioned India to make two countries, India and Pakistan?

2. What power ruled India for 89 years?

3-5. Look at the map of Kashmir. What three countries own, or claim to own, part of Kashmir? ► ► ►

6. What is the main religion in Pakistan and in Bangladesh?

7. What international organization says the people of Kashmir have the right to vote on which country to be a part of?

8. Why does the Indian government fear that the Kashmiri people would vote to join Pakistan if they were allowed to vote? (You have to INFER this answer based on what was said earlier in the previous paragraph.)

9. What has been the main focus of conflict between India and Pakistan since independence?

10. Why would a modern war between Pakistan and India be so serious?

11. How quickly could Pakistan and India hit each other with nuclear weapons?

12. Why were peace talks between the two countries cancelled in 2015? (This is another answer you must infer based on what is said. The answer is not specific.)