Viewed from the perspective of analyzing the situation in South Asia, two noteworthy events took place in the first half of October of this year. We are referring here to the visit of Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan (from 7 to 9 October) to the PRC, and that of China’s leader Xi Jinping to India (from 11 to 12 October). Both of these events deserve as much attention as the series of meetings held on the sidelines of the scheduled United Nations General Assembly, which we discussed earlier in the New Eastern Outlook.

After all, in New York as well as Beijing and the resort town of Mahabalipuram (located 20 kilometers from Chennai, the capital of India’s southern state of Tamil Nadu) the topic of either direct or indirect discussions was the regional situation that suddenly escalated after the special status of India’s Jammu and Kashmir state had been revoked on 5 August of this year.

At present, it is highly unlikely that one could find another region on the global political map with as much influence on ensuring some semblance of stability in the world. Only around Taiwan or the South China Sea could tensions rise as high (with time).

In this context, the political hype stemming from the Greater Middle East region in the media may be equated to a frenzy around an ant hill in the world’s “jungle”, which is best avoided when trying to accomplish any goals. And to a certain extent, many leading players of the “Big Game in the jungle”, i.e. China, Japan, Germany and India, are following just such a strategy.

And when one can no longer suppress one’s curiosity to learn more about what has happened to those poor ants, we
would not recommend poking a stick or, worse yet, your head into the hill, but instead using some means of studying the situation from a distance. Incidentally, the main “guardian of peace in the jungle” is currently trying to take his own head out the aforementioned ant hill. We simply need to wait and see whether he can do it successfully or not.

While making one’s way through the modern political “jungle”, it is important to watch out for truly dangerous obstacles in your path. And the current situation in South Asia is among such perils. It would be best to avoid it too, but, initially, it is prudent to monitor what is actually happening there.

The last time the New Eastern Outlook covered this issue was in its article about the aforementioned meetings on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly between the key parties to the conflict in South Asia (i.e. India and Pakistan) and two other leading players in the world, represented by U.S. President Donald Trump and PRC’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

From the author’s point of view, there have been no noteworthy developments in the situation taking shape in South Asia after Imran Khan’s and Narendra Modi’s visits to New York. Donald Trump continued with his attempts to reconcile two key (more and more irreconcilable) components of the U.S. strategy in the region. For Washington, it is extremely important to foster its relationship with a potential counterweight to China, i.e. India, in such a way so as not to lose the opportunity to restore relations with its key regional ally during the Cold War, Pakistan.

As for the meeting between Wang Yi and Imran Khan, the latter was once again assured of support by the second most powerful nation in the world. And it is worth mentioning that the most recent and critical development in South Asia, i.e. the decision taken by the Indian government with regards to Kashmir, was not addressed directly during the meeting. After all, Beijing would likely to leave itself some room to maneuver in relation to India.

In fact, one of the key aims of Imran Khan’s visit to Beijing was to ensure, at the highest level, that China supports Pakistan, which, at present, is so crucial for this nation. Pakistan’s Prime Minister received this support both during his negotiations with his Chinese counterpart Li Keqiang and PRC’s leader Xi Jinping, and via the Pakistan-China Joint Press Release at the end of the visit.

Again, the fact that India’s leadership revoked Article 370 is not mentioned in this document, instead it says that the PRC “was paying close attention to the current situation in Jammu & Kashmir” which had to be “properly and peacefully resolved based on the UN Charter, relevant UN Security Council resolutions and bilateral agreements.” The Joint Press Release also stated that China was opposed to “any unilateral actions that complicate the situation.”

Immediately afterwards, a negative reaction towards the aforementioned excerpts followed from India’s Ministry of External Affairs. Its official spokesperson stated that China was “well aware” of India’s position on the issue, which excludes the possibility of involvement of other countries in resolving it.

The negotiations also focused on an equally important number of issues in connection with China’s and Pakistan’s bilateral economic cooperation, which, in large part, is also linked to the Kashmir conflict. After all, the key element of this collaboration concerns the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (which has halted), discussed on more than one occasion in the New Eastern Outlook. One third of this entire “corridor” is supposed to traverse the former princely state of Kashmir, which India also has territorial claims over.

Members of certain circles of Pakistani society and China’s foreign “well-wishers” believe that the tough financial situation that Islamabad finds itself in at present, which has forced it to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for aid once again, in large part, stems from the “debt trap” that Pakistan landed in during the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

It is worth noting that Beijing has faced similar criticism with regards to projects (in other countries) that are part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the CPEC being one of its key components. However, the Global Times newspaper, quoting reports in Pakistani sources, has pointed out that Chinese loans accounted for “a mere 10 to 11 percent of Pakistan’s total foreign debt”.

In any case, the aforementioned Joint Press Release made a special mention about the CPEC. It says, among other things, that “the two sides expressed determination to speedily execute CPEC so that its growth potential” could be fully realized, thus “making it a high-quality demonstration project for BRI.”

From the author’s perspective, there is a direct link between the political support China (to reiterate, yet again) provided to Pakistan, and the latter’s agreement with everything that is included in the Joint Press Release about the CPEC and BRI.
By and large, the outcomes of Pakistani Prime Minister’s visit to Beijing, which had taken place shortly before Chinese leader’s trip to India, have somewhat complicated the current (not very positive) relationship between the PRC and India.

Hence, the leaders of China and India (who met informally two days later in Mahabalipuram) were faced with a difficult challenge of somehow ensuring that they did not reverse the positive direction taken in the Chinese city of Wuhan one and a half years ago, during their first “informal meeting”. The fact that Chinese media outlets focused on how the two sides would move beyond their differences did not go unnoticed in India.

Since it was an informal meeting, no documents were signed at the end of it, which seemed appropriate considering the “relaxing” atmosphere at the resort where both leaders sat on deck chairs and discussed various topics of interest to both nations. They were in no hurry and the meeting lasted 5 hours.

The government of India did everything in its power to ensure that nothing cast a shadow over the event. For instance, India’s police force quickly and decisively detained members of the Tibetan community who had come to Mahabalipuram “to throw their weight around.”

In turn, it seems that General Secretary Xi Jinping chose not to raise the Kashmir issue directly with Narendra Modi. In any case, this is what Vijay Gokhale (the administrative head of India’s Ministry of External Affairs) claimed. Incidentally, the Foreign Secretary was the former Ambassador to China, and his work is linked to the lowering of tensions between the PRC and India after the dangerous Doklam Plateau border conflict, and the initiation of the Wuhan process.

The decision not to mention the Kashmir conflict was the right one, as the significance of the meeting lies in the fact that it was held in the first place. The Kashmir (or Afghan, Tibetan, Uighur, Hong Kong) issue pales in comparison to the need to maintain the crucial channel of communication that exists between the two Asian giants.

Still, if so desired one could view the discussion between the two leaders about the “threat of terrorism” as an indirect reference to the Kashmir conflict.

However, at this point in the article, it is also apt to mention that, nowadays, it is easy to lay the blame for practically all the sins (and offences), which the players in the current stage of the Global Chess Game are responsible for, on these infamous “terrorists” (most often engaged in cyber terrorism). And the creator of the “global terrorist threat” concept certainly deserves the “Ignoble Prize.”

Overall, if we view the recent meetings involving the leaders of the main participants in the South Asian game with cautious optimism, it is possible to state that this game is (seemingly for now) under control.

_Vladimir Terekhov, expert on the issues of the Asia-Pacific region, exclusively for the online magazine “New Eastern Outlook”._