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SIKH SEPARATISM IN INDIA - A GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF KHALISTAN

Abstract:

2023 Witnessed a great resurgence of the Sikh separatist movement both in Punjab and among the diaspora. Arrests in India and mysterious murders of prominent leaders of the Khalistan movement abroad are showing the real scale of the problem. Sikhism is the fifth largest religion in the world. Unfortunately it is not well known and rarely written about in Poland, it has a tremendous impact on contemporary India's political climate. Sikhs' statehood dates back to the modern era and the idea of Sikh independence has not died since the downfall of the Sikh state in 1849. Using both Polish and English literature of the subject – with particular attention given to Sikh authors – author wants to further the understanding of who the Sikhs are, what is their religion based on, what is their history, characterize their independence movement and in general describe their religious and political community. Using the geopolitical paradigm author proves that independent Sikh state (Khalistan) in contemporary Punjab has next to no chance of establishing itself and surviving in current geopolitical scene. Even though it is certain that the idea of independent Khalistan has not died and it will still be an important issue in the Indian domestic and foreign policies.

Key words:

Sikh, India, Khalistan, separatism, Sikhism

INTRODUCTION

India, as of recently the most populous country in the world and the fifth-largest economy by GDP, despite its

impressive status and the prospects it brings, remains in the shadows of its' much more recognized neighbor - China. India is often perceived as the "lesser" of the Asian titans. Over the past 30 years, China's economy has grown from approximately \$444 billion in 1993 to nearly \$18 trillion in 2022¹. During the same period, India's economy has grown from \$279 billion to "only" \$3.4 trillion². Until this year, China, not India, was the most populous country in the world.

Apart from their geographical location in Asia, vast populations, and large economies, India and China share another critical characteristic: both are civilizational empires. They encompass numerous ethnicities and nations within a single cultural framework. The most illustrative comparison for to understand this phenomena from European perspective might be imagining the European Union as a single state. Both countries are multilingual and multi-religious, yet decision-makers shape the image of these nations as monolithic entities, at least in certain aspects. In China, this is often framed as the dominance of the Han Chinese ethnicity and the Mandarin language, while in India, religion - particularly Hinduism - is emphasized more prominently.

Despite these similarities, China is unequivocally a more frequent subject of reflection among commentators in the contemporary West. This is undoubtedly influenced by its rivalry with the United States and the steady rise of China's global significance. It is therefore unsurprising that issues related to minorities in China are also far more widely discussed, not only by scholars but also by main-stream media. The oppression in Tibet, highlighted during the 2008 Olympics, the recent annexation of Hong Kong and the persecution of the Uyghurs have been being, at least somewhat, covered for years. Few, however, are aware that issues related to minorities and, consequently, separatist movements, are at least equally significant in India.

¹ GDP (current US\$), World Bank website, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>, (access: 01.09.2023).

² GDP (current US\$), World Bank website, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=IN>, (access: 01.09.2023).

This paper addresses this gap by examining the Sikh community, which remains underrepresented in global academic discourse despite its prominence as the world's fifth-largest religion. While Sikhism has a modest presence in regions like Europe, including Poland, where a small but active community practices the faith, its political dimensions, particularly the Sikh independence movement, are often overlooked.

Recent events underscore the relevance of studying Sikhism and its political implications. Developments such as the arrest of Amritpal Singh, the assassinations of key Sikh leaders like Paramjit Singh Panjwar and Hardeep Singh Nijjar, and the subsequent diplomatic fallout between Canada and India highlight the renewed intensity of the Khalistan issue. Protests within the Sikh diaspora and in Punjab further illustrate the complexities of this movement.

This study aims to introduce an international audience to Sikhism, not only as a religion but also as a political and geopolitical phenomenon. It explores the historical and geographical significance of Punjab, the cradle of Sikhism, and examines the contemporary challenges faced by the Sikh community as a distinct religious and political entity. The paper ultimately argues that while the idea of an independent Khalistan faces substantial geopolitical and social barriers, the aspirations of the Sikh community cannot be dismissed within the broader framework of India's political and cultural dynamics.

GEOPOLITICS OF PUNJAB

An analysis of the separatist movement must begin with defining the geographical framework of the areas it concerns and presenting their characteristics. Punjab, the land of five rivers (the name Punjab, meaning “The Land of Five Rivers,” derives from Persian: *panj* – “five” and *āb* – “water”), refers to the region of the Beas, Chenab, Jhelum, Ravi, and Sutlej rivers. It is located in the northwestern part of India. Although its boundaries have been defined differently over time, they are

consistently bordered by the Himalayas to the north and east and by the Sutlej River to the south.

The lands of the "Land of Five Rivers" are among the oldest areas of where humans built civilizations. In Punjab, one can find traces of the Indus Valley Civilization dating back as far as 5,000 years ago. Today, Punjab is divided into two parts: Indian Punjab and Pakistani Punjab. Given the focus of this analysis, we will concentrate on the situation in Indian Punjab. The Indian province of East Punjab is home to approximately 27.5 million people, accounting for 2.3% of India's total population according to the most recent census³. Of this number, about 25 million are Punjabis, with 16 million being Sikhs⁴. This means that the number of Sikhs in India is slightly less than that of Christians, a population not commonly associated with the subcontinent.

Punjab directly connects India with a land route through the Khyber Pass in the Hindu Kush (currently on the Afghan-Pakistani border). Its presence has historically ensured a steady influx of not only traders and merchants from other regions but also numerous invaders. Conquerors aiming to enter India via land routes from Central Asia had to pass through Punjab. Over the centuries, the region faced incursions from countless armies, including the Persians, Macedonians led by Alexander the Great, Arabs, Mongols under Genghis Khan, the Mughals, and Afghans. Furthermore, invaders often established imperial centers in northern India, ignoring the southern parts of the subcontinent (Siddiqi 1982). Consequently, Punjab has frequently been under the control of various peoples, beliefs, and cultures. Each group added its traditions to Punjabi culture, which, due to frequent interactions with "foreigners" not only in military but also in trade and administrative contexts, became increasingly cosmopolitan.

This strategic position as the "gateway" to the subcontinent later prompted the British to expand into this area. The geopolitical region has been administratively divided twice. Historically, it includes Indian Punjab and Haryana, as

³ 2011 Census of India, Official Website of Indian Government, [Home | Government of India \(censusindia.gov.in\)](https://www.censusindia.gov.in) (access: 02.09.2023).

⁴ *Ibidem*.

well as Pakistani Punjab (the most populous province of Pakistan). Today, the two provinces of Punjab form the borderland of one of the most dangerous interstate rivalries in the world. The Indo-Pakistani conflict, which has escalated into war three times over the past 80 years, poses a threat not only to South Asia but also to the entire planet. Both Pakistan and India are nuclear powers, and an exchange of fire between them could result in a global catastrophe.

The region was profoundly affected by the Partition of India in 1947. Punjab found itself at the center of massive migrations tied to the religious division of the former British colony. Millions of people emigrated in both directions, and the social and political chaos caused by the partition led to hundreds of thousands of deaths and numerous other crimes, with millions affected. The scars of these events are still visible today, for instance, at the famous Wagah border crossing (Tariq 2023). Today, this region is a hotbed of political, social, and religious tensions, such as the ongoing regional dispute over water resources (Gupta 2023).

Despite these unfavorable geopolitical conditions, Punjab's fertile lands, thanks to its many rivers, have always been capable of producing vast amounts of food. For this reason, even after the most devastating conflicts, it has always managed to rebuild and often found itself as a central administrative hub for powerful North Indian states (e.g., the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire). Following the so-called Green Revolution, Punjab was referred to as the agricultural backbone of both India and Pakistan. It produces large quantities of wheat, rice, and cotton. Unfortunately, modern agricultural production in the region is declining due to climate change and the overexploitation of groundwater.

THE SIKH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

As mentioned earlier, Sikhism is the fifth-largest religion in the world. Its origins trace back to the 15th century when Guru Nanak experienced a revelation and began teaching people in the region. According to religious accounts, Guru Nanak traveled extensively to the religious centers of Islam,

Hinduism, and Buddhism of his time (Grewal 1998). He laid the foundations for a religious movement initially characterized by reform and syncretism, which his successors transformed into a fully-fledged, independent religion over the years. The successors of Nanak, who held the title of Guru (effectively the head of the Sikh religious community), developed the faith not only doctrinally and philosophically but also made significant strides in organizing community life of the faithful. This evolution turned a group of followers of a local spiritual leader into a politically influential movement that rulers of the Mughal Empire had to reckon with.

Sikhism is a monotheistic, or even monistic religion (Prill 2023). Sikhs believe in the Oneness, whose emanations are present in every aspect of the world. This Oneness has no form, and the spiritual goal of every individual is to merge with it, thereby breaking the cycle of reincarnation. A person who achieves this, loses their sense of individuality and gains the understanding that all beings and actions are manifestations of the same essence⁵. Notably, the pursuit of Oneness is always good, regardless of how it is undertaken. Therefore, the followers of Nanak do not condemn other religions; instead, they commend their practices. This inclusiveness is reflected in the Sikh holy scripture, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. It comprises hymns written in various languages, recorded in the Gurmukhi script, authored by Sikh Gurus and individuals from other religions, such as Hinduism and Islam. The *Guru Granth Sahib* evolved over centuries, with its primary authors being the successive Gurus. The title of Guru was passed from the current leader of the community to their chosen successor. There were precisely ten individuals who bore this title (chronologically: Nanak, Angad, Amardas, Ramdas, Arjan, Har Govind, Har Rai, Har Krishna, Tegh Bahadur, Gobind Singh). The last living Guru, Gobind Singh, ended this process by proclaiming (following the death of his sons) that the Guru for all eternity would be the Holy Book (*Guru Granth Sahib*). In more purist gurdwaras, this is taken quite literally. The scripture is ritually "woken up" and "put to bed," treated

⁵ In European philosophical tradition, this seems to be a view similar to the one of Plotinus, who, however, claimed that the One is fundamentally unknowable as long as there is a mind belonging to the individual.

ceremonially as if it were a living being, in accordance with the wishes of the last living Guru.

Sikhism as a religion has continuously evolved. Initially, Guru Nanak's followers were regarded as both a sect of Islam (specifically Sufism) and Hindus, hence the perception of Sikhism as a syncretic religion (Das 2006). Moreover, denizens of Punjab viewed Guru Nanak more as a reformer of Hinduism than as the founder of an independent religion. The subsequent Gurus focused on solidifying and expanding the community while clarifying its religious creed. As the number of followers grew and Sikh traditions diverged from both Islamic and Hindu practices, they began to be viewed with suspicion, leading to numerous conflicts, persecutions, and heroic acts of martyrdom that today stand as its' foundation. Sikhism developed into a religion that not only provided spiritual guidance but also constituted a distinct Punjabi political community, which spent centuries resisting the Islamic Mughal rulers and neighboring Hindu states.

This trajectory culminated during the leadership of the last living Guru, Gobind Singh. His influence on contemporary Sikhism is most evident in the establishment of the *Khalsa* ("the Brotherhood of the Pure") in 1699. This is a special class of initiated Sikh devotees (approximately 15%), who undergo the *Amrit Sanskar*—a nectar ceremony. The initiation is conducted in the presence of at least six people (five members of the *Khalsa* and a narrator) as well as the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Initiates must arrive early, ceremonially bathed, and wearing the five *Ks*. Their eyes and hair are sprinkled five times with holy sweetened water, which is then consumed by those undergoing initiation. The entire ceremony is accompanied by recitations of prayers and ritual expressions. However, members can be expelled from the *Khalsa* if they violate the principles of Sikhism.

The establishment of the *Khalsa* is associated with the contemporary most recognizable aspects of Sikhism. Guru Gobind Singh reinforced Sikh distinctiveness by mandating its display. He instructed all men to adopt the surname "Singh" (lion) and all women to adopt the surname "Kaur" (princess) to break with the Indian caste system and present Sikhs as a unified community striving for Oneness. While this tradition is

strictly abided by members of the *Khalsa* (who must change their names upon joining), less traditional Sikhs often follow it only partially, such as by adding the Singh/Kaur suffix to existing surnames. This practice, while signifying their Sikh identity and aspiration for unity, paradoxically also highlights their caste background in the Indian subcontinental context, where surnames often indicate caste (Puri 2003).

Sikhism lacks a clergy, and any respected believer, including women, may lead rituals and ceremonies. To distinct themselves Guru Gobind Singh ordered that followers must always carry five symbols of their faith, collectively known as the five Ks (with symbolic significance attached to the number 5 in Punjab):

Kesh – uncut hair – the most well-known symbol of Sikhs, as it is the long, uncut hair that Sikhs cover with their turbans. Hair symbolizes strength and holiness, acceptance of a simple life, and a desire to detach from material needs. Keeping hair uncut represents acceptance of the world as God created it and has practical significance as well. Through their turbans, Sikhs stand out not only in Western societies but also in their native region, where, although not unique to Sikhs, turbans still have the power to distinguish them from the crowd. The tradition of not cutting hair was initiated by the last living Guru, and even physically emulating him carries significant meaning (a similar custom exists in Islam, for example). The prohibition does not apply solely to the hair on the head but extends to the entire body. Sikh women are forbidden even from procedures such as eyebrow shaping, and men may not trim their beards.

Kara – a steel bracelet – the iron it is made of serves as a reminder that the *kara* is not an ornament but a symbol of being part of the community. It represents a link in the chain formed by all believers, with no beginning and no end. Furthermore, worn always in a visible place on the wrist, it is meant to deter Sikhs from committing acts that the Guru would not approve of. The idea is that actions are performed with the hands, and noticing the *kara* during an act such as theft should remind the Sikh of their faith and obligations to the community.

Kanga – a wooden comb – used for combing uncut hair, the *kanga* symbolizes cleanliness of the mind and body. It emphasizes the importance of taking care of the body given by God, which may seem contradictory to the commandment of not cutting hair and its symbolism of renouncing the material world. However, Sikhs believe there is no contradiction because the body itself is a kind of vessel for the soul striving for enlightenment. Therefore, the body should not be mortified or neglected. Sikhs culturally emphasize physical fitness and view negatively any mortification of the body as a means of attaining the Absolute (a common practice in other monotheistic religions).

Kaccha – woolen breeches – they must not extend below the knee, are very comfortable, and allow freedom of movement, making them suitable for daily wear. They symbolize purity and are a reminder of sexual restraint for Sikhs.

Kirpan – a steel dagger or sword – *kirpans* come in various forms, with lengths ranging from just a few centimeters to nearly a meter. They are typically worn concealed under clothing, although this is not a requirement. The *kirpan* symbolizes readiness to defend good and protect the weak, the fight against injustice, and broadly defined spirituality.

It is important to note, however, that for Sikhs, the symbolism is not the primary reason for adhering to these practices. The most important one being that the Guru commanded it. Using the same symbols also creates a timeless and intergenerational connection. Every member of the Khalsa is to remain faithful to these symbols, and every contemporary successor is to take pride in using and honoring the same elements. It is also worth noting that these symbols are popular among all Sikhs, not just members of the Brotherhood of the Pure. By this group they are used selectively, for example many non-orthodox Sikhs cut their hair but still wear the *kara*.

THE SIKH POLITICAL COMMUNITY

The formation of the Sikh political community, as discussed earlier, was a result of the conflicts that arose

between them and the Mughal rulers who governed Punjab at the time. Initially, relations between the Mughal imperial center in Agra and Delhi, and the Sikhs were exceptionally cordial, with many Mughal emperors expressing not just sympathy but also deep respect for the followers of Guru Nanak and his successors. However, over time, this relationship deteriorated significantly⁶. This process was linked to the political aspirations of Guru Arjan, who, along with the entire Sikh community, became involved in the internal politics of the Mughal Empire. According to Sikh legends, Guru Arjan met a martyr's death, marking the beginning of a series of conflicts between the Sikhs and the Empire⁷.

From that point on, the Sikhs were being persecuted in Punjab and had to fight for their survival for nearly two centuries. With the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the Sikhs gained control of Punjab and established numerous small states known as *misl*s. These would unite against external threats (such as wars with Hindus in the south or invasions by Afghans) but would often turn on each other once the common enemy was no longer a pressing concern. This pattern continued until the reign of Ranjit Singh in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Ranjit Singh created a powerful state, which he modernized and centralized. However, during the same period, the British were rapidly expanding their influence in India. Until Ranjit Singh's death, relations between the two states were very good but in its' aftermath the British quickly sensed the instability within the Sikh state and, after two wars, dismantled the empire in 1849. The Sikh state had lasted only 50 years.

The British classified the Sikhs as a "martial race" and employed them in both World Wars and numerous colonial conflicts. After the annexation of Punjab, Sikhs also joined the British civil service, leading to Sikh migration throughout the

⁶ Myths of meetings between the Great Mughals and Sikh gurus are famous even nowadays. The legendary meeting between Abū al-Faṭḥ Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad, for simplicity called Akbar, and Guru Amar Das was supposed to prove mutual respect, or even friendship and admiration between the parties.

⁷ It should be noted that according to Sikh legends, it was a continuation of the anti-Sikh policy of the Islamic empire. This is contradicted by the Mughal chronicles, which interpret the event as purely political. More on this topic in: R. Gandhi, *Punjab: A History from Aurangzeb to Mountbatten*, New Delhi 2013.

British Empire and earning them a good reputation in the West (Górny, 2020). However, with the end of the colonial era in India in 1947, the subcontinent was divided into two states based on religion: India and Pakistan. Although Sikh statehood and independence sentiments were older (dating back to at least the 1920s with the formation of the Akali Dal party), it was during this period that a larger-scale resurgence of the independence movement was observed (Axel, 2001). In South Asia, following the partition of British India along religious lines, countless nations inhabiting the subcontinent (such as the Tamils, and to some extent the Bengalis) were in some sorts denied their national identity as their religion was put above it by the colonizers. It was precisely what the Punjabis, seeking to expand their political agency, also emphasized to gain legitimacy on the same grounds as India and Pakistan. If Hindus and Muslims got their independent states, so it was only logical that the same would be true for the Sikhs. Those plans for independence were however quickly revised as India advertised itself as a multireligious state. Following that it's worth noting that after the partition of the subcontinent and the creation of the Indian province of Punjab, the Sikhs advocated for its further division. These pressures proved successful, and Punjab was divided into two parts (Punjab and Haryana), with some of its regions being incorporated into the third province of Himachal Pradesh. The aim was to create a province where Sikhs constituted the majority of the population and could exert more political influence within its borders. The aftermath of India's partition and the country's economic crisis led to a large-scale migration of Sikhs to Western countries and from Pakistan to India.

The year 1984 was the next pivotal moment for the Sikh independence movement and the Sikh community as a whole. Operation "Blue Star", a military operation carried out by the Indian government, was a traumatic event that resulted in the deaths of thousands and triggered the second mass exodus of Sikhs to the West. In the 1970s, the idea of Khalistan (a Sikh homeland) had gained some popularity among the Sikh diaspora, but it had not achieved significant success within India and was often viewed as a form of religious extremism. However, the continued support from the diaspora for

Khalistan, whether it was independence or greater autonomy, led to the rise of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in Punjab during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bhindranwale, who became an icon of the movement, was not necessarily an advocate for complete independence but rather sought greater autonomy for Punjab. However, his actions often resembled those of a criminal gang leader with an ideological bent rather than a political leader. He organized militias, ordered the assassinations of those he deemed heretics, and targeted political opponents, creating widespread chaos. Bhindranwale's actions resulted in the deaths of at least 410 people and twice as many injuries (Ghosh, 1997). Due to his connections with high-ranking members of Indira Gandhi's government, he avoided being held accountable for his actions. However, this changed when Bhindranwale turned against the ruling party and pledged allegiance to the opposition Akali Dal party in Punjab.

Now prosecuted Bhindranwale took refuge in the holiest site of Sikhism, the Golden Temple in Amritsar. As political violence escalated in Punjab, and negotiations with Bhindranwale failed, the government launched an offensive codenamed operation "Blue Star". The Golden Temple was surrounded by the military, who repeatedly called on Bhindranwale and his followers to surrender their weapons and allow pilgrims to leave. When they refused, a 24-hour battle ensued. The casualty figures vary widely, but estimates suggest that between 80 and 700 soldiers, 500 to 5,000 civilians in the vicinity of the temple, and several hundred militants (many of whom escaped) were killed. The most significant loss, however, was Bhindranwale himself.

The operation had far-reaching consequences. A few months later, in an act of revenge for the attack, the killing of innocent Sikhs, and the desecration of the Golden Temple, two Sikh bodyguards assassinated Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This assassination sparked anti-Sikh riots across India, leading to the deaths of thousands of Sikhs and forcing many to flee the country. The situation in Punjab deteriorated further.

The following year, 1985, the largest terrorist attack carried out by a Sikh organization took place. Sikh terrorists

planted a bomb on an Air India flight, killing 329 people off the coast of Ireland. A similar attack was planned for Japan but the bomb exploded prematurely, killing two airport workers. Although an international investigation linked the attack to the Babbar Khalsa, a group fighting for an independent Khalistan, only one person, Canadian Sikh Inderjit Singh Reyat, was ultimately convicted.

The unrest and rebellion in Punjab reached their peak. Sikh militias once again occupied the Golden Temple and in January 1986 and declared the independence of Khalistan. The fighting, bombings, protests, and civil unrest continued until the 1990s. However, the central government increasingly suppressed the rebellion, eliminating leaders and convincing the people of Punjab of the futility of seeking independence. The 1993 elections, the first fair elections after years of rigged polls, marked a significant turning point as the government party won. Although attacks and clashes with terrorist groups continued, the tide had turned.

Decades later, the idea of Khalistan has experienced a resurgence, again driven in large part by the Sikh diaspora. Sikhs living outside India continue to support organizations promoting Khalistan, providing financial assistance and international advocacy. Recent events, such as the activities of Amritpal Singh, a Punjab-based activist who has been compared to Bhindranwale, have further fueled the movement. Singh's arrest in 2023 sparked protests and violence.

Another significant event highlighting the ongoing issue of Sikh identity is the diplomatic conflict between India and Canada over the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Sikh activist. Nijjar was assassinated in the parking lot of his gurdwara in June 2023. Canadian authorities accused Indian agents of carrying out the killing. This incident has added to the tensions between the two countries, particularly given that Canada is home to the second-largest Sikh population in the world and has more Sikhs in its central parliament than India itself.

The scale of these events demonstrates that the idea of a Sikh state remains a potent force in contemporary international and Indian politics.

CONCLUSIONS

The history and tradition of Sikh statehood in Punjab are undoubtedly very strong. The region's religious and ethnic distinctiveness from the rest of India is a significant factor in the formation of separatist movements there, which are currently experiencing a kind of renaissance. However, this does not change the fact that the majority of the local population does not support, and even condemns, the activities of individuals like Amritpal Singh. While Sikhs have a relatively recent tradition of statehood, they have a much longer tradition of political independence and struggle against oppression. The role of these two culture-forming factors cannot be overestimated. It is therefore natural that the Khalistan independence movement actually exists and will continue to exist in the Sikh consciousness.

From a geopolitical perspective, the Indian Punjab region itself does not offer immediate prospects for the creation of an independent state. Punjab is located at the heart of the Pakistan-India conflict, between two military and nuclear powers that have no interest in the independence of this region. India would not allow this due to the federal nature of the state, the creation of a precedent, and the region's vital role in meeting the food needs of its growing population. Pakistan, on the other hand, would probably not even support such aspirations, as a Great Sikh Khalistan would also include the most populous part of Pakistan, where the linguistic-national factor may be more important than the religious one. Sikhs also lack the necessary state infrastructure in any area. The support of Islamabad for separatist movements in the 1980s and 1990s was not aiming for their success but only to weaken India. Additionally there is a lack of social support, and the Sikh demography in the region is too weak, as even if every Sikh supported separatism, they would still constitute only a small majority of the population, and such consensus in any multi-million population seems unlikely. It is no wonder, then, that the idea of Khalistan has undergone a significant transformation and again it rather supports the expansion of Sikh autonomy than full independence. This is all the more

important as India, as a state, has for many years been turning towards a kind of Hindu nationalism, where followers of other religions (primarily Islam, but also representatives of other religions) are relegated to the background in the eyes of the authorities and are not, in practice, citizens of the equal category.

Another problem is that the Sikh independence movement is currently popular mainly among second and third-generation diaspora, who seek their identity in a kind of support for the idea of self-determination, despite the reluctance of the Punjabi Sikhs themselves to participate in the struggle for their own independence, as they still remember Operation "Blue Star" and its consequences.

Beyond the local environment, it is also worth considering the issue of Khalistan from a systemic perspective. The current dynamic international security environment and the international system, which we are witnessing a revolution of, cannot afford to take unnecessary risks at any flashpoint, and the Indo-Pakistani border is undoubtedly one such. The liberal vision of the international system is currently in significant decline when it comes to how actors in international relations conduct their policies. Therefore, even if Sikhs were united on this particular issue, they and many other nations and communities will continue to be denied the right to self-determination and peaceful coexistence in the so-called family of free nations.

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