Troubled India-Pakistan Relations and Major Stumbling Blocks in the Peace Process

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Abstract

The prospects for peace between India and Pakistan further diminished after their relations entered into a new phase of antagonism in 2016. India stressed the issue of terrorism more forcefully as a principal irritant in bilateral relations after the Uri terrorist attack in Indian Held Kashmir (IHK) in September 2016. The growing gulf on core issues between the two countries and attaching peace with a one-point agenda has acted as a disincentive for the peace process. India has refused to engage with Pakistan despite Pakistan's repeated overtures and has continued to blame Pakistan for the turmoil in IHK as well as sporadic terrorist attacks. The existing tense relations between India and Pakistan are a product of longstanding grievances and changing dynamics in Indian power and policy. India's transition from Nehruvian secularism to communal and Hindutva politics has further complicated its political engagement with Pakistan. Since the dialogue process cannot be resumed in such circumstances, the prerequisite for the peace process is normalisation in relations. In the backdrop of the troubled relations between India and Pakistan, this paper attempts to analyse the major stumbling blocks to the peace process. The paper is divided into three sections. After an overview of the troubled relations between India and Pakistan post-2014, the first section analyses the core issues between the two countries. In order to understand why the core issues have become stumbling blocks, the second section examines the contributing factors to the persistence of rivalry. The third section proposes options for normalisation of relations and the peace process.

Introduction

Historically, tensions have remained a constant feature of relations between India and Pakistan as both states have failed to reconcile their differences through peaceful means. Indian politics have already been influenced by Hindutva, the ideology of Hindu cultural revivalism that has been adopted with the abandoning of the Nehruvian

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policy of restraint and secularism.[1] India's irresponsible reactions to a host of terrorist attacks following the unrest in Kashmir in mid-2016 unleashed a major shift in India's policy under Modi's leadership in dealing with Pakistan. The two countries had reached a state of a war-like situation on the Line of Control (LoC). The clouds of war hovered over the region in the last quarter of 2016 due to unrestrained public statements from the Indian leadership, which even raised fears of the use of nuclear weapons in response to India's military attack on Pakistan.[2] The war of words and negative propaganda led to a continued deterioration in relations. India launched coercive diplomacy to isolate Pakistan in the world and even tried to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state. The relations entered into a new phase of antagonism after India put pressure on Pakistan to change its stance towards support for the Kashmir cause.[3]

Traditionally, the process for the resolution of conflicts between India and Pakistan had never been constructive. The only workable agreement between them was the Indus Waters Treaty in 1960, which resolved the issue of their shares in water resources as upper and lower riparian states, even though some disagreements on the distribution of water still exist. Other significant agreements, which include Tashkent in 1966 and Simla Agreement in 1972, were only aimed to settle post-war issues, especially readjustment of territories held during the war and the release of prisoners of war. It was also agreed in the Simla agreement that both countries could resolve all issues through peaceful means. It took them several years to reach an understanding to mutually engage in a composite dialogue process. This idea of composite dialogue was first proposed on the sidelines of the South Asian Association for Cooperation (SAARC) summit at Male in 1997 during a meeting between the then Indian prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral and the then Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif. Both countries worked out an eight-point agenda that formed the Lahore Declaration in 1999, which was considered the first step towards initiating a peace process but was derailed after the Kargil war.[4] It was followed by the Agra Summit in 2001, which also failed to culminate in an agreement between the two countries. The terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in October 2001 escalated tensions between India and Pakistan to a military stand-off which ended in 2002 and relations were normalised after the cease-fire

agreement on LoC in 2003. The de-escalation in tensions was the result of the diplomatic efforts by the United States to convince both nuclear neighbours to reduce tensions and resolve issues through negotiations.

The formal Composite Dialogue process commenced in 2004 on an 8-points agenda in which the then prime minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee agreed to discuss all issues including Kashmir. The peace process that began was short-lived. India accepted to include Kashmir in the dialogue process and Pakistan also agreed not to make it issue-specific. The rounds of composite dialogue from 2004 to 2008 helped both countries to make progress on multiple fronts including the Kashmir issue. But the process was suspended after the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008 and relations between the two countries have remained strained since then.

Methodology

Over a period of time, the environment for building peace deteriorated with the growing assertiveness in India's attitude due to changing dynamics in their power and policy and also the changing environment in the region. Terrorism became pervasive in the region and dominated the discourse in South Asia by adding a new dimension to the relations between the two countries.

Since the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008, both countries have not engaged in a constructive dialogue process to normalise relations. Although contradictory positions on Kashmir dispute remained central to their conflict, India insisted on terrorism being the core issue. Pakistan once again demanded the resolution of Kashmir on the basis of the United Nations resolutions.

India's one-point agenda after the Mumbai attack also strengthened the position of the hardliners in Indian politics. Under their influence, India resorted to an offensive-defence policy in 2016, instead of restoring the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) for risk reduction. Relations did not normalise even a year after the Uri attack in 2016 and the situation on the LoC remained volatile. The persistent tensions in relations not only obstructed the peace process but also posed the threat of a nuclear war. With this background, the main question addressed in this paper is how the core issues between the two countries have become major stumbling blocks in their peace process.[5] The traditional

ways of conflict resolution become ineffective in such a hostile environment.[6] In order to kick-start the process for peace, the prerequisite is creating a conducive environment through normalisation in relations. Relations could only be normalised through reactivating the existing CBMs[7] and also working on low-hanging fruits.[8] In case the two countries maintain the status quo, a vicious cycle of security and competition would prevail in their relations with destabilising consequences. The peaceful means of conflict resolution are illustrated in comparison with the hostile means in Table 1 in which war and competition are inevitable.

Table 1

Peaceful Means	Hostile Means
CBMs	**Troubling Relations**
• Military and Political CBMs • Economic CBMs • Media CBMs • Building trust through low-hanging fruits	• Diplomatic stand-off • Cross-border firing on LoC • Boycotting or withdrawal from joint summits of regional institutions • No restraint in public statements • Building alliance with other countries with negative agenda • The impasse in the peace process • Maligning each other's leaders and blame game • Psychological warfare, spreading false news, diplomatic offensive, antagonistic educational curriculum • Economic sanctions, trade-embargoes, flooding markets • Strict visa policies, no interaction among civil

	society organisations, no collaboration on art, common problems and shared culture
Structural Peace Process	**War**
• Composite Dialogue Process • Comprehensive Dialogue Process	• Conventional warfare, nuclear warfare, cross-border firing on LoC, surgical strikes, Indian Cold Start Doctrine, Arms race, • Using subversive means of destabilisation, state-sponsored terrorism,

The paper is divided into three sections. After an overview of the troubled relations between India and Pakistan post-2014, the first section analyses the core issues between the two countries. In order to understand why the core issues have become stumbling blocks, the second section examines the contributing factors to the persistence of rivalry. The third section proposes options for normalisation of relations and the peace process.

Overview of Contemporary Relations

It took more than two years after the Mumbai attack to revive the dialogue process in 2011. But there was no major breakthrough and the efforts were disrupted by sporadic skirmishes along the LoC in the disputed territory of Kashmir in January 2013.[9] The prospects for building peace through the dialogue process seemed uncertain during the election campaign of the BJP led by Narendra Modi. He was a strong advocate of responding more forcefully to supposed cross-border attacks from Pakistan while he was in opposition.[10]

The starting point in relations after the victory of the BJP was unexpectedly good despite the fears associated with Modi's election victory and his anti-Pakistan rhetoric. As the history of relations between India and Pakistan is generally devoid of golden moments,[11] Modi's invitation to former prime minister Sharif to his swearing-in ceremony on 26 May 2014 was regarded as a good gesture that also got appreciation

across the border.[12] Moreover, Modi surprised everyone by paying an unannounced visit to Pakistan, when he stopped in Lahore on 25 December 2015. It was the first visit of an Indian prime minister to Pakistan in 10 years.[13] This development instilled a lot of hope amongst the people of Pakistan because it was not expected of Modi after his tough stance against Pakistan during the election campaign.

Despite attaching hopes to the increasing warmth in relations between the two premiers, the issue of terrorism gained prominence. The terrorist attack on an Indian airbase at Pathankot on 1 January 2016, which India blamed on Pakistan-based militant groups, torpedoed the goodwill generated by Modi's surprise visit within no time. It happened two weeks before the scheduled foreign secretary-level meeting between India and Pakistan in January 2016 in Islamabad.[14] As a result of the Pathankot attack and due to mounting domestic pressure, Modi tied negotiations to progress on Pakistan's commitment against terrorism.[15] India demanded the arrest of Masood Azhar, the chief of Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), for his alleged involvement in the attack. The foreign secretary-level talks were postponed until India's demands were fulfilled.[16] Once again, the efforts made for resuming the dialogue process with India halted and progress was reversed to the post-Mumbai terrorist attack situation.

The second half of 2016 witnessed another upsurge in tensions between the two countries over unrest in IHK after the death of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen leader Burhan Wani in July 2016. The killing of Burhan Wani resulted in widespread and unprecedented protests across Kashmir.[17] Dozens of peaceful protesters were killed and hundreds were injured by pellet guns. Pakistan strongly condemned India's atrocities in IHK. This led India-Pakistan relations to another low when Pakistan dedicated Independence Day to Kashmir and, as a response, Narendra Modi gave a reference to human rights violations in Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Kashmir during his Independence Day speech. Many hawks in India endorsed his move on the pretext that if Pakistan internationalised Kashmir they would do the same with Balochistan in response.[18] Some observers also argued that his reference to Gilgit and Balochistan was meant to upset the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It was also the reason that his comments generated furore in Pakistan and India received a tough response from Pakistan's military

leadership.[19] India boycotted the One Belt One Road (OBOR) Summit in Beijing on 15 May 2017 mainly due to concerns over CPEC, a key part of the initiative, running through the disputed territory of Kashmir.

India's reaction to the terrorist attack on the IHK Uri Army camp on 18 September 2016, in which 18 soldiers were killed, was more severe because of the continued tension between the two countries and resulted in a steady decline in India-Pakistan relations after the Pathankot attack. The biggest reason for India's aggressive reaction to the Uri attack was the ongoing unrest in Kashmir and Pakistan's explicit concerns over the use of force against Kashmiri protesters. Indian Home Minister Rajnath Ram Badan Singh called Pakistan a 'terrorist state', and warned that "there will be no joint investigation team (JIT), no forbearance in public statements, and little faith in Nawaz Sharif."[20] Hardliners like Ram Madhave, Secretary General of the ruling BJP, went on to say, "For one tooth, the complete jaw. Days of so-called strategic restraint are over." This echoed India's plan to retaliate forcefully and to increase costs to Pakistan disproportionately. It showed a major shift in India policy and pushed the relations between the two countries to their lowest point after the Mumbai terror attack.[21] In the backdrop of this new phase of antagonism, the core issues between India and Pakistan can be analysed, which have become stumbling blocks in the peace process.

Core Issues

Adversarial Perceptions and Insecurity

The conflict between India and Pakistan is not only the product of physical factors such as territory and resources but also of ideological factors based on opposing identities. The trust deficit between the two countries keeps the environment tense and unfavourable for the peace process to develop. The origin of mistrust and adversarial perceptions between India and Pakistan has been traced to pre-partition differences in the political aims and ideologies between the All India Muslim League and the Indian National Congress.[22] The post-partition experiences, including the unjust Indian annexation of Kashmir, violent mass migration, the controversy over asset sharing, stoppage of water, and the war in 1948 provided reasons to strengthen the belief in Pakistan that Indian National Congress was against the creation of Pakistan.[23]

Pakistan would not survive, was a dominant view held by the Indian National Congress. But the Hindu conservatives were staunchly against partition.[24] The discomfort of secular democratic leaders on the creation of Pakistan created room for a radical class of Hindus in India to develop the strategic culture and dominate the political landscape of India. The concept of Hindutva gradually intruded into the strategic thinking of India.[25] The militant Hindu revivalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) under the leadership of Veer Savarkar "had opposed partition on the grounds that India was a cultural and religious entity with a Muslim minority that did not merit the privilege of becoming a separate state. Although he agreed with the 'two-nation' theory, he did not believe Muslims deserved any such reward."[26] Nehruvian secularism started to erode in the 1990s with the rise of Hindutva within India and with the rise of revivalism in other parts of the world and its reverberations in India. In the present case, Hindutva presents a real blow to the reconciliation of historical narratives between India and Pakistan. [27]

The national identities and policies developed along a singular concept of rivalry[28] have been transferred and legitimised through educational curricula in both countries. The conflicting national narratives have promoted ill-will against each other to the extent that many political and religious forces exploit them for their vested interests. Widening differences give rise to religious and political intolerance on both sides of the borders.[29]

Apart from hardline beliefs of the RSS, generally Indians detest Pakistan's reference to its different culture and civilisation, the notion on which the sub-continent was divided between the two nations: Hindu and Muslims.[30] Mostly, their fears stem from Pakistan's belief that the partition was imperfectly carried out and its unwavering claim for Kashmir that would probably upset the integrity of India.[31] According to Pew Research Center, Pakistan is the least favoured nation in India, with only 18 per cent seeking better relations with the neighbouring state, while 64 per cent wanting to stay away from it.[32]

The lack of contact in such a situation augments the misperceptions and hinders the process of trust-building for peaceful resolution of conflicts. The continuous mistrust, adversarial perceptions, and opposing national identities have given birth to a 'security dilemma'

in Indian and Pakistani relations. This dilemma emerges out of the socially constructed realities, especially the mutual negative perceptions. "The interpretation of one state action as hostile due to the unknown intentions of the other state leads to negative expectations and tends to fear for the worst."[33] And so according to John Herz, due to this dilemma, which is uncertainty and fears about the other state's intentions to do harm under anarchy, states accumulate more and more power. It leads to a cycle of power competition.[34] This vicious cycle of security and competition is visible in both India and Pakistan. The security dilemma has led both countries to engage in a nuclear arms race and tough military postures.[35]

The severity of the security dilemma has been witnessed in Indian and Pakistani relations many times. Most recently, after India's resort to an offensive-defence approach after the Uri attack in September 2016, the threat of nuclear war was high. The systematic offence-defence theory by Robert Jervis, argues that the security dilemma and the risk of war become doubly severe in an offensive era in the state system.[36] India under the BJP hardline policies has resorted to an offence-defence policy against Pakistan which in the absence of basic CBMs can lead both countries to an all-out war.

Conflicting Positions on Kashmir

The dispute over Kashmir is central to the conflict between India and Pakistan. The Kashmir conflict was a product of the demarcation of borders and division of territories between the two newly created countries when British rule came to an end. The controversy over India's annexation of Kashmir is keeping the hostility alive to-date.[37]

Despite the Indian move to the UN Security Council, after a war with Pakistan in 1948 and the subsequent UN resolution calling for a plebiscite in Kashmir, India has denied of even considering it a disputed territory. Pakistan accepted the UN resolutions and considered them a viable solution to the dispute. India initially accepted, but now proclaims that Kashmir is an internal problem of India and blames Pakistan for interference.[38]

India itself did not consider the accession offered by Maharaja Hari Singh during the time of crisis as conclusive enough to affect the formal inclusion of Kashmir into the Indian Union. It was the reason that

India had accorded a special status to IHK through article 370. With the passage of time, India embraced the status quo. Pakistan repudiated the accession because Maharaja, who had first asked for a standstill in the decision of joining any of the dominions, offered accession to India in return for assistance against the invasion of the tribal people in Kashmir. Hence, he did not represent the sentiments of the majority of the people who were Muslim. The people of Kashmir had strongly resented accession to India, therefore, Pakistan also talked about a referendum in Kashmir. India, by refusing the dispute, also contradicts India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's initial promise of giving the people of Kashmir their right to self-determination.[39]

India revisited its policy on handling Kashmir issue over the period of time.[40] India now abhors the fact that it once had sought UN intervention in Kashmir that designated it an internationally disputed territory.[41] Pakistan accepts the disputed nature of the territory, therefore, the part under its control is called Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), which means independent Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan considers Kashmiris to be a third party to the dispute, which should be given the right of self-determination according to the UN resolutions. On the other hand, the Indian government has also miserably failed to accommodate Kashmiri separatists and pro-Pakistani factions to calm down the internal dissent politically through negotiations.[42] It also rejects outside support or mediation in the matter of Kashmir since the signing the Simla Agreement in 1972 in which India and Pakistan agreed mutually to resolve all outstanding issues bilaterally through peaceful means. However, its strict interpretation is continuously used by India to confine the differences to bilateral negotiations. In such a case, a perpetual stalemate is maintained each time India refuses to negotiate.[43]

For a long period of time, India refused to negotiate on Kashmir by considering it a threat to its integrity and secularism that they argue would foment similar separatist movements demanding secession based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines.[44] India tries to diminish the indigenous dissent of the Kashmiri people by drawing attention to terrorism.[45] However, the anti-India sentiment is strong throughout the IHK, where it is evident that the Indian state's survival in Kashmir depends on using its army to maintain law and order. It is the reason, according to Sumati Panikkar, a New Delhi-based left-wing activist, that

the people are no longer scared of the bullet.[46] The resentment among Kashmiris against the deployment of hundreds of thousands of Indian troops also helps in garnering support for rebels who have been fighting since the 1990s to demand independence or a union with neighbouring Pakistan. Keeping in view the mistreatment of the Kashmiri people by the Indian forces, it can be established that the discontent among in the new generations of Kashmiris is embedded in India's own policies of suppression. Instead of addressing this problem, India vindicates itself from responsibility by accusing Pakistan.[47]

India's refusal to accommodate the interests of reasonable Kashmiri stakeholders in a peace process has also become a source of more resentment. By only talking about terrorism and neglecting the core issue of Kashmir, India is instigating the militant elements to attack India to invite international attention to the grievances of Kashmiri Muslims.[48] According to experts, Pakistan cannot take on the proscribed militant groups under Indian pressure because it would create internal divisions. However, improvement in relations will increase the options for the government to deal with such terrorist groups. Without India's flexibility towards the Kashmir issue, action against militant groups would be dangerous to both India's and Pakistan's security.[49] Moreover, India's resolve to use force to fight threats against India only adds to the dangers of escalation in conflict with Pakistan.[50] In such an uncertain environment, the chance of potential terrorist attacks will have devastating implications for Pak-India relations in the future.[51] In order to deal with such a situation, military and political CBMs between the two countries can play a significant role in averting an unrestrained response to such incidents. Also, a normalisation in relations and an improved environment would bring flexibility in the positions of both countries on the issue.

Blame-Game over Terrorism

The issue of terrorism is complex and multi-dimensional in the regional and global context. India started presenting it in a more simplistic way after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the US. It used it as an opportunity to wilfully project itself as a long-standing victim of terrorism by presenting links between international terrorism and the freedom struggle in IHK. Since then, India has remained very successful in

convincing the world to assess the struggle for independence in Kashmir in a different light.[52]

Although Pakistan joined the US in the fight against terrorism soon after 9/11, the US remained suspicious of Pakistan's sympathies towards the Taliban. This belief of the US also helped India in gathering international support against militant activities in IHK. As a result of India's labelling of Pakistan as a terrorist-sponsoring country after 9/11, Pakistan's support for Kashmir has been greatly undermined. US support to India during the attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 led to the blacklisting of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and JeM. This also led Pakistan to ban jihadi organisations and revisit its foreign policy. In addition to several diplomatic initiatives, such as proposing new options to resolve the conflict, Pakistan also significantly reviewed the Kashmir policy in 2004.[53] Pakistan's commitment to not let its territory to be used by militant groups against India and subsequent proposals on the resolution of Kashmir resulted in the commencement of the dialogue process. Former p*resident* Pervez Musharaf had even proposed a 4-point formula that proposed a non-territorial solution to Kashmir by making the LoC irrelevant.[54]

Frequent interaction and diplomatic ventures helped both countries make progress in relations. The peace process initiated with India in 2004 during former prime minister Vajpayee's government was also pursued by the newly elected government of Congress. However, the goodwill created was not carried forward after the terrorist attack in 2008. Rather it gave rise to nationalist fervour against Pakistan in India. Consequently, the anti-peace process elements succeeded in keeping the conflict alive between the two countries.[55] Terrorism was highlighted as the major flashpoint in their troubled relations after the Mumbai terrorist attack. It also provided a good reason to many hardliners in India to depict the peace process as futile and the BJP capitalised on it to revive public support in favour of its Hindu nationalist ideology.

Pakistan was ranked third on the Global Terrorism Index in 2014. It was reported as the most affected country by terrorism after Iraq and Afghanistan.[56] Despite Pakistan's undeniable losses in terrorist attacks in the last 15 years, India continued to paint Pakistan as a terrorist country and dismissed the actual problem between the two states which is rooted in their mutual mistrust and the Kashmir dispute. By associating all

problems between the two countries with terrorism, India wanted to change the narrative on Kashmir. This dismissive attitude of India also strengthened Pakistan's suspicions about India's involvement in Balochistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Karachi in terrorist activities.

India could not provide any substantial evidence for Pakistan's involvement in the Pathankot attack. They accused non-state actors of perpetrating these terrorist attacks with inadequate evidence.[57] On the other hand, Pakistan's security forces arrested the Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav shortly after the Pathankot attack who confessed about his involvement in subversive activities in Pakistan.[58] Pakistan has on several occasions raised the issue of India's involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan.[59] Prime Minister Modi's public references to Balochistan, FATA, and Gilgit-Baltistan in August 2016 substantiated Pakistan's allegations. It was a confirmation for many Pakistanis about India's strategy to employ covert means to destabilise Pakistan.[60] The blame game over terrorism is further instigating the misperception and fears in both countries. It also gives rise to the perception that there is a lack of will on the Indian side for the resolution of all outstanding issues.

Domestic Politics and Lack of Will

Electoral politics and competing interests between major institutions also play a major role in affecting the peace process between India and Pakistan. Mostly religious hardliners and the political far right in both countries influence decision making. They have serious misgivings about the other side and, therefore, oppose the normalisation process on ideological grounds. Most of the time, the leaders in both countries submit to the demands of these groups for their own political interests.[61] This state of affairs is the outcome of the antagonistic culture that has been cultivated in both countries for a long time. The presence of hardliners as admirers of this culture strengthens the position of forces who have an interest in the persistence of conflict rather peace.[62]

In the present case, the tides of extremist elements could be identified as real obstacles to the peace process between the two countries. Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri in his book Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove described the current situation in India as more complicated. Despite the fact that Vajpayee belonged to the BJP and had started the peace process, the Congress under former prime minister Manmohan

Singh carried it forward with equal passion. According to Kasuri, the shift in India's politics at the centre happened when Modi was in the opposition in the Lok Sabha. It was found politically advantageous to raise the Pakistan issue for his elections.[63] The most troubling obstacle to the viability of the solution of the Kashmir dispute according to Stanley Wolpert, was the election in India of another BJP-led government after 2008, especially because it was dominated by Narendra Modi.

It was assessed from Modi's strong opposition to former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's meeting with his Pakistani counterpart in Sharm-el-Sheikh Egypt in 2009. Modi was against any talks with Pakistan after the Mumbai attacks. He had even demanded that Pakistan confess to its role in launching terrorist attacks against India. Wolpert had predicted that the possibility of Modi's coming into power would diminish the prospects of permanent peace between India and Pakistan without which the solution of the Kashmir dispute was not possible.[64] Only a statement by the then Pakistan's prime minister Gilani and Manmohan Singh in Sharm-el-Sheikh on delinking terrorism and Composite Dialogue invited severe criticism for the Indian prime minister. The BJP had opposed this move to the extent that Manmohan Singh had to backtrack from his earlier statement.[65]

Unlike India, there is a consensus among politicians of all major parties in Pakistan on improving relations with India. But the resolution of the Kashmir dispute is close to the heart of all major political parties in Pakistan. Kashmir issue also plays a dominant role in Pakistan's domestic politics. The omission of Kashmir in their public statement during the meeting of Nawaz Sharif with Modi on the sidelines of SCO in 2015 had drawn a lot of criticism from the opposition for Pakistan's prime minister.[66]

According to many political analysts, Modi's reaction to terrorist attacks in 2016 was aimed at satisfying internal demands to punish Pakistan. Due to his angry rhetoric and hawkish views against Pakistan, the public in India had attached high expectations from him to take on terrorist groups decisively. On the other hand, the situation in Pakistan compelled it to retaliate. Modi's tough stand on Pakistan in the form of the international demonisation of Pakistan, the purported surgical strikes across the LoC, and the continued belligerent statements was also

aimed at his electoral gains in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Manipur, and Uttarakhand in early 2017.[67]

Besides from domestic politics, the primacy of military in the foreign policy decision making in Pakistan is widely debated as an obstacle to peace with India.[68] Indians allege that Pakistan's military is inherently against peacebuilding with India.[69] It is *because* Pakistan was ruled by the military for most of its history. The lack of cohesion in Pakistan and its troubled neighbourhood necessitated a strong defence system for Pakistan and the military has always earned public admiration for it. In the absence of strong institutional foundations, Pakistan's political development was slow as against the fast growth in strength and size of the military. Over a period of time, the civilians' role in decision-making has either reduced or they have failed to gain relative balance in power.[70] Therefore, the military served both functions: the defence of the borders as well as defining national interests of the country. It is for this reason that the hawks in India consider it futile to engage in any dialogue process with civilian governments in Pakistan who they think have little say in policy-making regarding India. On the basis of this basis, many in Indian policy circles preach coercion and compulsion to dictate terms to Pakistan.[71] Currently, India has now once again blamed Pakistan's armed forces for derailing the peace process. India substantiated its claim by giving references to the internal build-up of pressure on Nawaz Sharif after his elections. India projected the army's opposition to Nawaz Sharif in formulating India policy.[72]

The power imbalance in civil-military relations in Pakistan and the military's dealing with India and Afghanistan is criticised for many reasons. But India has also missed opportunities for making peace with Pakistan and did not reciprocate with a similar spirit to the peace initiatives by former Pakistani president Musharaf. Despite Musharaf's urge for making peace, the Agra summit in 2001 failed because of non-flexibility at the summit by Indian leadership.[73] L.K. Advani, veteran Indian political figure, admitted in his book *My Country, My Life* that he derailed the process because of Pakistani president's prioritisation of Kashmir issue.[74] Likewise, it was the inconsistency in approach and lack of desire for peace on the part of the Indian government that the massive progress made on Siachen and Sir Creek issues and Musharaf's joint mechanism formula for Kashmir could not proceed in the aftermath of the

Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008. Musharaf had made considerable concessions on Pakistan's decades-old stance over Kashmir at that time. The domestic political interests and lack of will to make conditions for peace favourable is becoming a major stumbling block in the peace process between the two countries.

Instability in Afghanistan

Instability and conflict in Afghanistan is another dimension in the troubled relations between India and Pakistan. India had supported and maintained good relations with all Afghan governments except the Taliban. Pakistan has always been concerned about the Kabul-New Delhi nexus. Over the past decade, the growing Indian presence in Afghanistan and the strategic partnership agreement between them gave rise to reservations in Pakistan. Indian coercive diplomacy launched in 2016 against Pakistan was also joined by Afghanistan, exacerbating Pakistan's apprehensions. After the Uri attack, India and Afghanistan together opened a front against Pakistan on many multilateral forums, which also resulted in deterioration of relations with Afghanistan. During the Heart of Asia conference on Afghanistan in Amritsar in December 2016, both India and Afghanistan used the venue to embarrass Pakistan on terrorism.[75]

Both Pakistan's internal and external security complexities are linked to neighbouring Afghanistan. Friendly Afghanistan has long been considered crucial for Pakistan's internal cohesion and security as well as defence against India. On the other hand, strategic alliance with Afghanistan serves India's strategy to contain Pakistan from the western side. India has long been accused of using Afghan soil to hurt Pakistan.[76] It is due to these adverse strategic objectives in Afghanistan that the existence of a proxy war between the two has always been speculated. Over the last decade, Pakistan's fears against India's influence in Afghanistan were increased because the US-installed Karzai government was India-friendly.[77]

Due to the planned pullout of the US forces from Afghanistan, India was concerned about the return of the Taliban with the backing of Pakistan. Therefore, India has accelerated its diplomatic, economic, and strategic relations with Afghanistan in the last few years. Under the guise of economic and infrastructural development of Afghanistan, India succeeded in establishing close relations also with the new government

there. Apart from investment in Afghanistan, Modi capitalised on the issue of terrorism between Afghanistan and Pakistan. By joining the Afghanistan government, Modi believed that India would earn more credibility for its claims about Pakistan's mothership of terrorism. Modi also took advantage of the growing differences between Pakistan and the US over the Afghan issue to drive Pakistan into international isolation.[78]

It went in favour of Modi's hardline approach that Afghanistan shared negative views of Pakistan with India. By adding the Afghan issue to the bilateral conflict between India and Pakistan, the chances of creating a healthy environment for initiating a peace process between the two countries have further decreased.

Contributing Factors to Persistence of Rivalry

Impact of Power Asymmetry on Indian Policy Towards Pakistan

According to T. V. Paul, power asymmetry also becomes a causal factor in the persistence of rivalry. In the case of India and Pakistan, the peculiar power asymmetry that prevails between them makes the trajectory towards conflict resolution difficult.[79] India's expanded manoeuvring space and assertiveness after Modi ascended to power is the result of growing disparity in the strengths between the two countries. According to defence analyst Moeed Yusuf, India due to this leverage can forego benefits of improved ties with Pakistan and its dismissive attitude can allow it to keep the Kashmir dispute off the table in relations with Pakistan.[80]

The growing disparity in diplomatic, military, and economic strength between India and Pakistan has been witnessed in the post-1971 war period.[81] Indian diplomacy moved to consolidate its regionally dominant position during this period when the morale of Pakistan's armed forces was shattered after the break-up of Pakistan. Indira Gandhi pioneered the tough, uncompromising, and assertive approach towards neighbours.[82] Indian domestic politics, over the next two decades, witnessed a steady departure from the early commitment to secularism.

Pakistan, after becoming a nuclear power, challenged the conventional asymmetry as a sole determinant of setting terms with India. However, India's policy towards Pakistan experienced tremendous change under the BJP government from 1998 to 2004. The BJP

gradually deviated from the Nehruvian policy tradition, which believed in peace diplomacy and localised self-defence, engagement with rivals, and a policy of restraint.[83] This policy was replaced by a new and more self-confident and assertive approach based on India's growing economic and military strength with a more strategic and pro-Western orientation. As war was not an option due to nuclear parity, by adopting 'assertive and offensive' policies with regard to Pakistan, India believed that it would be successful in enforcing its will on Pakistan. India would maintain status-quo in case of Kashmir and gradually find strong grounds to make it irrelevant in its adversarial relations with Pakistan. This policy was also aimed at increasing costs to Pakistan of its demand for the resolution of the Kashmir issue.[84]

The continued threat perception from India has always kept Pakistan busy in search of security against India. Pakistan was facing both security threats from India and also suffering from a weak economy. But security was preferred over economic growth. India continued developing militarily as well as aspired to strengthen the economy. Pakistan has been spending substantial funds on its domestic and foreign arms procurements while losing the battle on economic grounds.[85]

India's domestic economic policies have yet to meet the needs of its masses. About 21.25 per cent of Indians live at or below the World Bank's poverty line of $1.90 as compared to 8.3 per cent in Pakistan.[86] Although it shows Pakistan in a better position than India in terms of poverty, India is reaping many advantages based on its economic potential. India leverages many favours from the US and Europe in international affairs due to its potential to stand parallel with China as the fastest economy on the Asian continent. According to the UN's *World Economy Report*, India is predicted to be the fastest growing economy at 7.53 per cent in 2016 that would improve further to 7.5 per cent in 2017.[87] Apart from Pakistan's smaller size and population than India, its GDP is eight times smaller than India. In the past two decades, Pakistan's growth rate has been only half that of India and China. If current trends continue, by 2050, India's economy will be 40 times larger than Pakistan.[88]

According to the *Global Competitiveness Report (GCR) 2014-15*, by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the market size of India is one of

the best in the world with an overall ranking of 3 against Pakistan's 30.[89] India's defence budget has seen a tremendous rise from $11.8 billion in 2001 to $52 billion in the year 2016 and $ 63.9 billion in 2017.[90] Pakistan raised its defence budget to $8.78 billion in 2017.[91] India was ranked 6th largest military spender in 2016, while Pakistan was ranked at number 27 on the Global Index of Defence Budgets.[92] India has overtaken France and Germany in military spending. By the year 2020, India is expected to emerge as the third-largest country in terms of defence-related expenditures, behind the US at number 1 and China at number 2. India is expected to spend $70 billion in the year 2020 on military power projection that would leave Pakistan far behind.[93] According to these projections, even if Pakistan spends more under the best economic forecasts, it would not be able to compete with India for long. So the conventional military balance would continue to shift inexorably in India's favour.[94]

By spending a large portion of its limited resources on achieving military parity with India, Pakistan neglected the economic dimension of security.[95] According to Owen Bennett-Jones, the economy alone is a country's true strength because economic growth can not only benefit citizens but also earn respect for the country all over the world.[96] This gives India a substantial advantage over other small South Asian countries. The recent episodes of escalating tensions between India and Pakistan show that the rising disparity with Pakistan is going in favour of Modi's belligerent policies against Pakistan. Modi wants to keep Pakistan stuck in its current India-centric security paradigm that would keep increasing its threat perception against India. This could be better achieved by keeping Pakistan worried about India's military strength, doctrines, and periodic actions such as on the LoC and its collusion with Afghanistan.[97] When a country is in a strong position, it becomes difficult to convince it to resolve disputes on equal terms or on a win-win situation. This further empowers India to maintain the status-quo regarding the Kashmir conflict and intimidate or humiliate Pakistan whenever there is a chance.

Asymmetrical International Interests

Over the period of time, the world's response to the conflict between India and Pakistan has also been shaped by India's diplomatic,

military, and economic advantage over Pakistan. The world is ready to believe India's portrayal of any dissent in Kashmir as terrorism. Pakistan's former ambassador Munir Akram calls it discriminatory treatment on the part of the Western countries with regard to the Kashmir issue for their vested interests attached to appeasing India.[98] The appeasement of India is driven by a convergence of interests between New Delhi and the global powers because India offers the world's military-industrial complex the single largest market and its economy has largely locked in Western business and investment interests. In addition to that, India also offers to play a counterweight to China for the West. Narendra Modi is able to cash more on the two real advantages that are power disparity and the world's support to him in his narrative on terrorism.[99]

There was a time when the US was concerned about maintaining a balanced approach towards disputes between India and Pakistan. In the past, the US had played an important role in promoting a broad and balanced agenda for Pakistan-India talks. In 1998, when Pakistan achieved nuclear parity with India, the US pursued identical agenda of dialogue with India and Pakistan that also included Kashmir along with concerns about nuclear and conventional arms control. However, Washington decided to 'de-hyphenate' US policies towards India and Pakistan because of the China factor. It gave India unanticipated concessions from the US. The prime examples are the US formal defence pact and a Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement with India in contradiction to the principles of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) which prohibits such cooperation with a non-party to the treaty.[100] The US went a few steps forward during Modi's government despite his previous unpopular reputation in the US. Modi paid frequent visits to the US after assuming power, which resulted in key defence pacts between the two countries. To further strengthen their strategic partnership, both governments signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in the second half of 2016 that would allow the militaries of the US and India to share their facilities.[101] Moreover, the unconditional support of the US to India's bid for membership in the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), even if it is at the expense of Pakistan, indicates the outsized political importance of India in US policy circles.

Both military and economic terms further accelerated between India and the US with the change of administration in the US in January 2017.[102] US President Donald Trump, during his election, only informally expressed a desire to mediate between New Delhi and Islamabad over the Kashmir issue. His desire to seek Indian help in countering Pakistan's nuclear programme was alarming. It showed that India's NSG entry would get further momentum during Trump's presidency.[103]

The special treatment from the US in nuclear affairs not only enabled India to expand its nuclear programme but it also changed India's behaviour with its neighbours other than China. The US policy ignored Pakistan's concern about an arms race in South Asia.[104] It is barely observed by the US that India's growing military power is heightening Pakistan's strategic vulnerabilities. It also indicates that the asymmetric capability between India and Pakistan would continue to widen. Pakistan, in search for parity with India, is heavily relying on its military and strategic relations with China.[105]

As against the growing economic and strategic relations between India and the US, China and Pakistan also made rounds in the media because of their ongoing mega economic and infrastructure project, CPEC. Due to a convergence of interests and healthy relations that have developed between the two neighbours, China comes to Pakistan's support against India's moves to harm Pakistan internationally. China resisted India's unconditional entry into the NSG because that would have been discriminatory. Moreover, China repeatedly blocked India's moves to declare JeM Chief Masood Azhar as a terrorist in the UNSC in 2016 without adequate evidence against him proving his involvement in Pathankot attack.[106] India-US and China-Pakistan add a global dimension to their conflict that is giving rise to strategic competition between India and Pakistan and search for global alliances. The outsiders' response to the conflict is also influenced by their evolving relations with the two countries.

The persistence of rivalry between the two countries and the inequitable approach of the world towards India and Pakistan also affected Pakistan's political and economic growth. As a consequence, Pakistan would continue diverting resources disproportionally to its defence that will keep on distracting it from its more pressing internal needs.[107] This can give rise to a power imbalance in Pakistan's political

system. But this factor has been widely ignored by India that stability in Pakistan is also vital for peace and security of the region. Internal stability also comes from a stable and flourishing economy that, along with other measures, is crucial to eradicating violent extremism and terrorism in the region.

Lack of Potential Economic Cost of Rivalry

South Asia has been the least integrated region in the world. Political tensions between the two neighbours have also plagued their economic relations. The absence of substantial economic relations also does not give a strong reason to both countries to avoid conflict[108] No two countries can afford isolation in this globally interdependent marketplace. It has been debated in the last few years that increasing trade relations between India and Pakistan would be instrumental in lowering political tensions between the two countries and would eventually be a tool for conflict resolution between them.[109] Currently, the trade between them is far from its potential and remains extremely vulnerable to political fluctuations. In 2012-13, the recorded trade between India and Pakistan was $2.4 billion.[110] In the years 2015-16, the trade between the two countries was $2.61 billion.[111] This small size of trade does not play a significant role in making both countries worry about the cessation of trade activities during political tensions. Following the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, India-Pakistan trade fell drastically and came to a near standstill for almost nine years in the aftermath of the 1965 war. More recently, India stopped trade via land and air routes following the attack on Indian Parliament in 2001. In 2013, trade was blocked following cross-border firing.[112]

There is a potential to raise bilateral trade to $ 8-10 billion. Even after increasing volume to this level, it would only account for 3 per cent of their total trade volume. Both countries ship $300 billion worth of goods to all parts of the world.[113] According to experts, economic cooperation has the potential to significantly shift the paradigm of cross-border relations in South Asia. “If healthy trade relations are built up between India and Pakistan—and the potential is immense—it can integrate the lives of millions of people in both countries. With livelihoods at stake, both India and Pakistan will be forced to stay engaged and find alternate means of dispute resolution.”[114]

Economic interests and monetary risks associated with disruption of trade relations can immensely influence the political decisions in both countries. Fierce economic engagement can create new stakeholders and interest groups benefiting from the engagement. The hawks in both countries would be confronted by this interest group that can also act as a strong lobby to nurture, preserve, and promote peaceful bilateral relations. The significant economic gains attached to normalcy in relations can serve as a powerful means to induce conflict resolution between India and Pakistan.[115]

Despite political differences between China and India, the trade volume between the two nations, which was just $1 billion in 2000, reached $70.73 billion in 2016. It can serve as an example for India and Pakistan.[116] Even in the face of bilateral political disputes, it is possible to promote trade within the region. Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and the creation of stakeholders in countries can eventually defuse tensions and soften the ground for peaceful resolution of disputes and disagreements.[117] The EU and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also examples where trade and economic relations were instrumental in conflict resolution between neighbours. A large amount of export and import flows in economic sectors influence decisions to initiate military conflicts. India could become a larger market for Pakistan's textile products. The beneficiaries of trade could pressurise politicians to maintain cordial bilateral relations. Therefore, if both governments make trade their top priority, they can achieve mutuality of interests.[118] The unresolved disputes and strained relations have also been a major drain on the resources of the two countries. The serious energy shortages faced by both countries are hampering their economic development. India cannot maintain a healthy economic growth rate if its energy resources remain inadequate. In Pakistan, normal public life has been badly disrupted by chronic electricity outages for many years and the scarcity of energy has also adversely affected industrial output.[119] Geopolitical conflicts could be reversed to geo-economic benefits. The strategic location of Pakistan could better be used for regional connectivity as a corridor to energy-rich Central Asia. By exploring the economic dimension of cost and opportunity between the two countries, India and Pakistan can also understand the need for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Local Narratives

In the age of information technology, the media is a powerful tool to influence public opinion. The media has a profound impact on the sentiments of the people in both India and Pakistan, especially at times of crisis or any positive development in their relations. It could be an agent of change if it adheres to an objective analysis of the conflict. However, negative reporting has so far dominated the India-Pakistan relationship.[120] Highly inflammatory rhetoric is promoted against the other side. Instead of playing as a neutral observer of the situation and focusing on objective and balanced reporting, which are norms of journalism, the media goes on a bashing spree during a crisis situation.[121] There is a lot of potential to replace the discourse of acrimony with the incentives of peace between the two countries. The role of the media can be instrumental in influencing public opinion towards mutual commonalities between the two neighbouring states. By highlighting economic dividends of good relations it can help in creating a positive environment to hold talks. If the media shows the potential benefits of trade normalisation and the possible impact on the common man in both countries, it would pave the way for stronger bilateral ties and regional integration.[122]

Removing Stumbling Blocks to Normalise Relations

Peaceful Means Versus Hostile Means

The normalisation of relations requires a secession of hostilities through building trust.[123] Both India and Pakistan are nuclear weapon states, putting in place CBMs become indispensable for managing the conflict during a crisis situation, as “crisis is an intermediate zone between peace and war.”[124] This process ensures the co-existence of belligerent states where organised violence does not enter into the mental equation of the policymakers.[125]

In order reduce the risk of war, the existing military and political CBMs between India and Pakistan include the following:

1) Communication measures:
    - Hotline between Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs);

- Direct Communication lines between Sector Commanders across the LoC;
- A hotline between prime ministers;
- Hotlines between Foreign Secretaries[126]

2) Transparency Measures: Nuclear CBMs, exchange of lists of nuclear facilities, prohibition of attacking nuclear facilities, information exchange before nuclear tests, nuclear doctrines.
3) Atmospheric measures: the release of prisoners as a goodwill gesture, border security measures, etc.[127]

In order to increase the cost of rivalry between the two countries and to increase the incentive for peace, both countries need to broaden the scope of CBMs to economic relations. Economic CBMs can include Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, visa liberalisations for business, increasing trade and investments, and joint economic ventures and cooperation. Both countries can also work on media CBMs which can include objective and balanced reporting, shaping public opinion through highlighting commonalities and highlighting economic dividends of good relations.

As part of the structured peace process, the Composite Dialogue process is an eight-point agenda which includes the following:

1. Peace and Security
2. Jammu and Kashmir
3. Siachin
4. Wullar Barrage
5. Sir Creek
6. Terrorism
7. Commerce
8. Promotion of friendly exchanges in various fields.[128]

The Comprehensive Dialogue process, proposed in 2015, included the following:

1. Peace and security
2. Jammu and Kashmir
3. Siachen, Sir Creek

4. Wullar Barrage
5. Tulbul Navigation Project
6. Economic and commercial cooperation
7. Counter-terrorism
8. Narcotics control
9. Humanitarian issues
10. People to people exchanges and religious tourism.[129]

This was comprehensive because it also included humanitarian aspects other than the conflicting issues.

Hostile Means

Under the status-quo and the pervasive security dilemma in the case of India and Pakistan, the vicious cycle of security and competition would continue between the two countries. This would include destabilising components, such as a nuclear arms race, tough military postures and nuclear doctrines, volatile border security, and the fear of the unknown.

However, in the nuclear age, the presence of nuclear weapons prevented the two hostile super-powers, the US and the Soviet Union, from engaging in a military conflict. Nuclear deterrence (the fear of retribution with the same destructive weapons) as a concept was developed during the Cold War when nuclear weapons kept peace for 40 years between the two powerful adversaries. The fear of inflicting an unacceptable punishment had lowered the chances for war.[130]

When war is not an option due to nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan, other hostile means can be trade embargoes, economic sanctions, or economic warfare. Even if both countries avoid a direct military conflict, other hostile means would also have a destabilising impact on the welfare of both countries. India can forego peaceful resolution of the disputes with Pakistan because of the increasing gap in power between the two countries. Still, this would have little incentive for India if it wants to become a developed country. Reliance on hostile means to manage the adversary is costly and dangerous to both countries.

Bridging Trust Through Low-Hanging Fruits

The Track II Diplomacy concept considers those conflicts intractable which are related to survival, identity, or fears. It is argued that these conflicts can only be addressed in a process that works directly to change the understanding of human relationships, promoting mutual understanding and acknowledgement of people's concerns.[131] In intractable conflicts, the threat is so powerful that the traditional mediation and negotiations are not adequate to address this kind of conflict. [132]

Keeping in view the core factors of rivalry and the factors that are contributing to the rivalry, the major stumbling blocks can be seen against the facilitators in Table 2. It is important to focus more on the facilitators and common problems for conflict resolution and removing the stumbling blocks in the peace process.

Table 2

Major Stumbling Blocks	**Facilitators**
Security dilemma because of adversarial perceptions/ mistrust/fears	Shared history, shared culture, shared language, common cuisine
Inflexible and conflicting positions on Kashmir dispute	Common social problems: extremism, intolerance, gender discrimination, lack of social cohesion, corruption, underdevelopment, poverty, common diseases
Domestic politics and division of society on the resolution of conflict Competing Institutional interests	Common structural and economic problems: underdeveloped infrastructure, energy shortages, lack of basic human facilities e.g. health, education etc. Common environmental problems: Depletion of water resources and soaring air pollution (smog)
Terrorism as an excuse and lack of will for engaging in a dialogue process	Delinking terrorism from the peace process
Afghanistan a new battlefield	Regional Platforms for cooperation

	(SAARC, SCO)
Minor Stumbling Blocks	
Lack of contact	Religious tourism, medical treatment, common educational institution (SAARC University) Academic interactions (exchange of academics, students and literature)
Lack of economic relations	Untapped economic opportunities, the potential of increasing trade up to $ 30 billion
Asymmetric interests of global powers	Regional development/connectivity projects for shared benefits (TAPI, CPEC) third-party mediation of UN, US, UK, China
Media war	Exchange of art (Films, drama, theatre, comedy and joint projects)

Keeping in view the stumbling blocks in the way of the peace process between India and Pakistan, both countries need to take an initiative for normalisation of relations through issues that are of common interest. This would pave the way for generating good-will through non-conflictual issues. Instead of restricting the dialogue process to a one-point agenda, both countries should work on identifying common threats and common challenges. The proposal of a comprehensive dialogue process in 2015 also focused on humanitarian issues, which can be resumed in a separate framework. The framework for working on common challenges will give the impression that the relations are not held hostage to the status quo of hostility and progress can be made towards normalisation of relations.

Some of the low-hanging fruits[133] on which cooperation is possible include soaring air pollution (smog), endemic diseases like dengue, easy visa process for medical treatment and religious pilgrimages, and academic exchanges. Smog-filled Indian and Pakistan cities can turn into unhealthy snow globes according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).[134] Among other endemic diseases, dengue fever is driven by complex interactions

among host, vector and virus that are influenced by climatic factors. It is also a common problem in both India and Pakistan. With the changing patterns in rains, especially in the monsoon season, at least a 25 per cent increase in dengue cases has been reported in India.[135] Moreover, the process of visa application for religious pilgrimage and medical treatment has been further tightened after diplomatic relations between the countries deteriorated with India's reaction to the passing of the death sentence on Kulbhushan Jadhav in May 2017.[136] Promoting good-will through showing flexibility on humanitarian issues can help in bridging the trust-deficit and can lead both countries to start a peace process.

Institutionalisation of the Peace Process

In order to avoid the negative influence of ideology, change in power and policy, and distractions through terrorist attacks, the peace process between India and Pakistan should be institutionalised. After creating a conducive environment for peacebuilding, the structured peace process can be resumed and institutionalised by dealing with each issue separately. Normalisation in relations will bring flexibility to each party's stance. India would be flexible in delinking the peace process from the issue of terrorism and Pakistan would also be willing to find a mutual common understanding on the Kashmir issue. Once the environment for peace becomes favourable, both governments would be able to avoid the actions of spoilers. As the chances for distraction in the peace process by them is always high when trust levels are low. In order to make the framework for dialogue on all outstanding issues in a comprehensive dialogue process, the two states can also do away with the previous conditions for peace. The UN resolutions that India opposes and the Simla Agreement that rules out third party mediation should be replaced with another framework. The framework may include Kashmiris as a third party. This would pave the way for political settlement of the conflict.

Conclusion

India has adopted both assertive and offensive measures to overrule the option of resolving issues through dialogue and mutual understanding with Pakistan. Through coercive diplomacy, covert

operations, and limited use of force in retaliation to terror attacks, India wants to rule out the possibility of even discussing the Kashmir issue. Linking the peace process to terrorism would serve Modi's firm position on the Kashmir problem and also earn him political gains, but it would raise the risks with its nuclear neighbour. India's hardline *approach* will further raise Pakistan's sense of insecurity and strengthen the positions of militant groups. It would weaken the position of democratic governments in Pakistan to make bold moves with regard to peacebuilding with India. The contradictory perspectives on issues, inflexibility, and mistrust would always spare room for spoilers to disrupt any effort for normalisation in relations. Many would reap political gains at the expense of millions of poverty-stricken communities in both countries.

In order to build peace, the leadership in both countries would need to be bold enough to take political risks by compromising their domestic political interests. Instead of giving space to hawks and spoilers, by understanding responsibility towards millions of their populations, the leadership would need to demonstrate maturity in dealing with the conflict. It would require a people-centric approach rather than overplaying a single issue. Moreover, they need to understand that efforts at building confidence and trust and seeking resolution of disputes can only bear fruit if the peace process is sustained and uninterrupted.[137] It requires a systematic approach and institutional mechanisms to outgrow the influence of character, attitudes of the individuals, and the attempts of spoilers.[138]

If India thinks that it can enforce its will on Pakistan based on its military, economic, and diplomatic leverage, it would put nuclear South Asia on a very dangerous path. After becoming a nuclear power, experts believe that the possibility of a major war is slim. India and Pakistan would continue depending on covert operations and proxies if the relations do not normalise. But in future, the situation could take a turn for the worse because militant extremist elements can go out of control, which can become a reason of nuclear war between the two countries.[139]

In order to create a healthy environment for the resolution of conflicts, both countries would need to understand and reverse the major irritants in their relations and their conflicting perspectives over issues. They would need to shed the negative historical narratives against each

other. Both countries would need to rewrite their history books and reverse the public discourse of ill-will by promoting commonalities between the two countries. Many experts believe that the resolution of the Kashmir issue would be difficult. Therefore, both countries should look for low-hanging fruits first. In their political conflict, both countries should not ignore the economic and cultural dimensions in their relations. Both countries should explore areas in which mutual interests could be developed. Increasing interdependence in economic and trade relations would give them a strong motivation to resolve all outstanding issues. Moreover, India would never become a great global power if it shoulders enmity with its neighbours.[140] It would be in the larger interest of the region if both countries seek only legitimate interests in Afghanistan and avoid playing the Afghan card in their bilateral relations. Moreover, both countries can craft policies through sharing best practices for alleviating poverty.

On the other hand, India's coercive measures can bring both countries close to a nuclear war. In order to avoid any misadventure in a troubled and uncertain environment, both states should continue their engagement through dialogue and renewed CBMs. In order to normalise relations and creating a conducive environment for dialogue, terrorism should be delinked from the peace process. It suggests that both states should regulate their relations through developing institutional mechanisms and also work on institutionalising the peace process to overcome the possibility of distraction and to offset the anti-peace forces.

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