
Pakistan-India Security Dilemma and the Role of Externalities: An Interplay of Realism and Liberalism



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Abstract

Ever since the independence of India and Pakistan, the relationship between the two countries has been marred by wars, cross-border skirmishes, and human rights violations in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The hostile relationship between the two nuclear powers is seen as a threat to regional security. Power politics and investment of both countries in enhancing their respective defence budgets have been the main underlying causes of the prevailing security dilemma between the two states. The security of one means insecurity for the other and this assumption is based on both conventional and non-conventional security threats. This paper intends to understand the concept of security dilemma in the context of India and Pakistan under the theoretical framework of realism and liberalism. In doing so, the paper aims to look into the threats posed by both countries and viable solutions necessary to mitigate the security dilemma. It also covers the role of externalities, i.e., the United Nations and the United States in dealing with the situation, particularly about the Kashmir dispute.

Keywords: Security dilemma, bilateral dispute, Pakistan, India, external actors, realism, liberalism

Introduction

Since the bifurcation of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947, Pakistan and India have had an unstable relationship marked by wars, cross-border skirmishes, and human rights violations in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Kashmir has been a zero-sum case for both dominions, directly challenging their basic ideologies.¹ Considering India as a secular state and Pakistan as an Islamic state, legitimisation of one has inevitably

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been perceived as invalidation of the other. A Kashmir under Pakistan would be an anathema to Indian secularism as it challenges the very idea of the successful integration of all religions, ethnicities, and minorities. Therefore, both countries rely on what could be referred to as a '*mini-max*' strategy, which entails that at minimum, both states seek to retain the area that they currently administer, and at maximum, they aim at taking wholesome control of IIOJK in its entirety.² Pakistan and India have fought three wars since its independence in 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999. This hostile history of the two nuclear states continues to pose a serious threat to regional peace and stability.³ For years, Pakistan and India have been pushing each other to alter their positions on Kashmir but their continued disagreement has kept the tensions growing and on a constant boil. Considering the nuclear capability of both countries, their constant tussle over outstanding issues remains a challenge for their neighbouring countries, in addition to being an imminent threat to regional stability.

In addition to wars and near misses in the past, India and Pakistan have also struggled to maintain healthy diplomatic ties with each other, with each country trying to undermine the other to gain international support. Scholars believe that the continuous threat, doubtful motives, and prevalent mutual mistrust have kept both sides wedged in a security dilemma.⁴ Therefore, most of the scholarly work on the India-Pakistan relationship has been done through the theoretical lens of realism. However, it is also important to consider that both countries at different points in history tried to come to a more liberal understanding of their issues as well. Irrespective of the success or failure of the approaches adopted by both sides, their relationship reflects an interplay of realism and liberalism. Realism remains the dominant theme in existing discourse. This paper discusses how these two theoretical understandings (i.e., realism and

liberalism) encounter each other in the context of India and Pakistan and their seemingly unending tensions.

Security Dilemma: A Realist Understanding

Security Dilemma was introduced by John Herz in 1951, mainly as a realist idea. Many other scholars later added to the understanding of the concept. Herz considered 'fear' as the key instigator of conflict between different states, thus, creating a security dilemma.⁵ Based on the work of Butterfield (another pioneer in the field) Morgan suggested that security dilemma arises when one body of decision-makers fails to understand that their actions of strengthening the security can be perceived as a threat by the other body and, thus, strengthening security and arms build-up of one can induce threat and fear in the other.⁶ This is what Booth and Wheeler termed as the 'dilemma of interpretation' and 'dilemma of response', which turns into an action-reaction cycle where the security of one breeds insecurity of the other and the trends keeps on going in a spiral fashion.⁷ This understanding of the security dilemma is reflected in realism. According to realism, "In an anarchic domain, a state of war exists if all parties lust for power. So too, however, will a state of war exist if all states seek only to ensure their safety."⁸ Realism has always been at the core of the India-Pakistan relationship, where both countries pursued actions for victory and sovereignty over their territorial claims. At the very basic level, it is a territorial conflict driven by the urge of each state to expand. The underlying causes or intentions are often not studied under the ambit of realism. So, as Walt suggests, it is either lust for more power or to seek safety. The intentions always remain vague to the other state, thus, causing a security dilemma. Robert Jervis explains the *security dilemma* in a somewhat similar fashion stating, "When a state increases its security, it decreases the security of the other." Jervis in his article, *Cooperation under the Security Dilemma* discusses how it is common for states with compatible goals to go to war. In the case of India-Pakistan

rivalry, Kashmir is the compatible goal between the two states, for which both countries are open to considering the option of war. Jervis extensively focuses on defence-offence capabilities and their role in a security dilemma. He suggests that if a situation favours defence capabilities, even a small country can defend itself effectively. He places military capability at the heart of the security dilemma in contrast to realism which focuses on states' urge for power. This assumption discredits Jervis's analysis to fit in with structural realism.⁹ However, Pakistan and India seem to be failing in achieving a defence-offence balance to reach a more viable military cooperation.

Security Dilemma and Neo-liberal Solutions

Cooperation in times of anarchy is an idea proposed and propagated by neo-liberals. Neo-liberals argue that cooperation attained through engagement is sustainable as it generates benefits for all the parties involved in forming a complex interdependent regime between two or more states. The positive outcomes minimise the selfish tendencies of the states involved. Neo-liberalism concedes with realism in acknowledging the world to be anarchic but, at the same time, it proposes more liberal solutions to overcome the anarchic nature of the world by prioritising economic welfare over national security of a state. This endorses the idea that the stronger the economic ties of a country with another state, the more the countries have at stake if there is any conflict. This is an inside-out neo-liberal approach.¹⁰ According to the neo-liberals, it is possible to build peace and cooperation if the regimes assure each state that their absolute gains would be achieved.¹¹ As transnational interdependence increases, it compromises the state's position as a dominant actor. It provides a lens to look outside military solutions and to consider non-military mechanisms that do not require enhanced military capabilities (that could lead to a possible security dilemma).

The applicability of neo-liberalism can be seen in terms of several regimes and treaties signed between India and Pakistan in the

past, to name a few: the confidence-building measures (CBMs) and trade agreements including the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA), and Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India Pipeline (TAPI).¹² The trade regimes develop a life of their own, they survive despite conflicts and wars in the region because of the vested interest of parties involved in the conflict. Indus Water Treaty (IWT) is one example where the agreement survived two wars and a long period of the cold war between India and Pakistan. In this case too, both the countries had their stakes involved in sustaining the treaty.¹³ Therefore, the neo-liberal understanding convinces one to believe that liberal institutionalism, in the form of regimes and CBMs, has a spill-over effect on long-lasting and sustainable peace.

However, realists do not believe in the notion of international regimes developing a life of their own. They propose that the international regimes fall prey to *realpolitik*.¹⁴ Realists put forward the example of SAARC which has not been able to play a substantial role in the peace and development of the region. The key factor for the inefficiency of SAARC is the lack of trust of Pakistan and India in the organisation. The power politics between the two countries have had negative repercussions for the entire region. Realists also highly criticise the much-celebrated IWT, contending that such treaties should have been capable of putting an end to wars, which is not the case in the India-Pakistan scenario. Realists criticise the liberals to be excessively idealistic and naïve.¹⁵ It is an evident reality that India and Pakistan have not been able to execute any of their liberal solutions to their realist problems without indulging in the cycles of mistrust and doubts about each other's intentions. Both countries fear landing in a disadvantageous relationship with each other. India gaining more out of an agreement means a further economic disadvantage for Pakistan, whereas, in the case of Pakistan, India fears that revenues generated by Pakistan through these regimes may be used to strengthen its

military capabilities and consequentially heighten the insurgency in Kashmir.¹⁶

In addition to trade and energy regimes, Pakistan and India are signatories to agreements like the Tashkent and Simla following the wars of 1965 and 1971, respectively. Later on, in February 1999, *Lahore Declaration* was signed. Under this agreement, 'a mutual understanding was reached towards the development of atomic arsenals and to avoid accidental and unauthorised operational use of nuclear weapons.'¹⁷ But soon after the Lahore Declaration, the Kargil war started which lasted for two months, three weeks, and two days and further deteriorated the relationship between both countries. The year 2001 and 2002 mark the period of intense military standoff between India and Pakistan. Despite the diplomatic efforts at the international level to mitigate the situation, the military mobilisation remained in place with the prevailing threat of another war between the two countries. However, on 25 November 2003 India and Pakistan agreed on a comprehensive ceasefire which marked the first formal truce between the two armies since the outbreak of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁸ However, a critical realist analysis of all these liberal regimes and measures reveals that irrespective of the intentions and efforts put in by different governments in both countries, the hostilities and tensions between the two did not come to a halt. The hawkish behaviour has prevailed despite measures including increased trade and the signing of bilateral agreements. Thus, the collective security concept presented by liberals, or as Barry Buzan calls it, the need for a Regional Security Complex (RSC) does not seem to be persistent in the context of India and Pakistan. The very features of the security complex presented by Buzan are durability and relative self-containment.¹⁹ Whereas in the present context, the historical, as well as the contemporary relationships between both countries, have a hawkish outlook. And the continuous interference and meddling of India at territorial and institutional levels in its relationship with

Pakistan nullifies the idea of a security complex. Also, the unilateral escalations of a bilateral dispute often fuel the bellicosity not only at the state-to-state level but also between the masses of the two countries.

Assessing the liberal claim of democratic peace thesis, i.e., 'democracies do not go to war', in the Pakistan-India context, it seems challenging to fit both countries into the given framework with the illiberal nature of their democracies. In Pakistan, these illiberal components are more evident especially with the history of four eras of military rules, i.e., under the governments of General Ayub Khan (1958-1969), General Yahya Khan (1969-1971), General Zia ul Haq (1978-1988), and General Musharraf (2001-2008). This makes a total of three decades of military rule in Pakistan. However, during civil governments, there seems to be an over-arching military presence in governmental affairs which makes the democratic credentials of Pakistan questionable. Whereas in India, the dominant illiberal elements may not be very evident but they contribute substantially to the anarchic nature of the dispute. A relevant instance of the said is the one-party rule in India for 30 years which was later challenged by other emerging parties like the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). The Indian democratic system is highly contaminated with the caste system and religious binaries which gives rise to authoritarian enclaves. One of the important intra-state dynamics is the way political support is gathered before elections by using the Kashmir conflict as the primary tool. Kashmir is used to generate anti-Pakistan sentiments among the masses. When in power, these parties cannot deflect from their anti-Pakistan policy because it always backfires. These intra-state dynamics are a key determinant in understanding the complex inter-state relationship between the two countries.

In the recent past, India accused Pakistan of involvement in a terrorist attack in Pulwama. This was followed by the former violating the territorial integrity of Pakistan by intruding into its air space on 26

February 2019, claiming to have hit a 'terrorist' hideout. The very next day, Pakistan shot down two warplanes of India in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) near the Line of Control (LoC) when India again intruded Pakistan's airspace. India justified these invasions as pre-emptive measures. However, these military exchanges between the two nuclear states put not only endangered regional but also global peace. Yet, amidst this anarchic atmosphere, Pakistan released the Indian pilot Varthaman Abhinandan whose plane was shot down on 27 February. Although this goodwill gesture was appreciated globally, instead of acknowledging the gesture, India continued with its unjustified use of force with the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution and consequent implementation of a curfew in the IIOJK.

The aforementioned series of incidents reveals a clear pattern of continuous enmity, mistrust, and fear of attack (leading to pre-emptive military measures) more than a liberal relation driven by trust, cooperation, and amity. Therefore, the Pakistan-India relationship is more of an insecurity complex than a security complex. And as suggested by Buzan, such dynamics of (in)security complexes define and shape the security dilemma in a region.²⁰

Liberal Institutionalism and Security Externalities

To minimise the security dilemma between states, liberal institutionalists suggest that international institutions can play a vital role in bringing peace to the region.²¹ While exploring security in a regional context through the conceptualisation of Regional Security Complexes (RSCs), Lake and Morgan emphasise the importance of 'security externalities'.²² Security externalities are defined as the forces that mediate and bind the members together. This seems to be true in the case of the India-Pakistan relationship considering the involvement of externalities, i.e., the UN and the US from the very beginning of the conflict. However, even after more than seven decades, both of the aforementioned externalities appear to have failed in binding the states together, resolving disputes, and bringing

peace to the region. India took the Kashmir dispute to the UN in 1948, after which the Security Council devoted several sessions to look for a mutually acceptable resolution of the issue. The Security Council suggested a plebiscite to be held in the contested valley to which both states agreed.²³ However, despite the willingness for a free and impartial plebiscite, both countries could not agree on ensuring arrangements that required them to withdraw their forces from the IIOJK. The UN resolution provided that a Commission would ensure its presence in the disputed territory for a fair plebiscite when the parties to the conflict had made the said arrangements.²⁴ But all efforts came to halt when India and Pakistan showed reservation over the Commission.

Role of Externalities

The role of the United States as a facilitator has been noteworthy over the decades. Neither realism nor liberalism seems sufficient to explain the US engagement in the past seven decades. At the beginning of the conflict between India and Pakistan, the US did not want to engage itself with interstate politics due not only to a lack of expertise about South Asia but also the cold war. However, given the strategic geographic location of Pakistan and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it became evident for the US that a conflict between two states could lead to a full-blown war, which would not only disturb the region but would also provide the USSR space to expand its presence and influence in the region.²⁵ Given these historical events and American concerns at the time, a very realistic goal of attaining power and dominance over the Soviets was attached to what can be seen as a liberal act of intervening between two hostile neighbouring states to tune down the conflict.

Conversely, the post-cold war era presents a different picture as America's Kashmir policy seems to be driven by its interests in the region. The alliance between Pakistan and the US is of complex nature which does not fit entirely in either the framework of realism or

liberalism. Realists categorise alliances into different types, based upon hard and soft balancing.²⁶ According to Schweller, in the Pak-US alliance, the act of balancing could be in the form of bandwagoning, buck-passing, distancing and appeasement. These approaches are passive and avoid any kind of direct conflict with the party in power. To Schweller, the idea of omni-balancing, regional balancing, leash-slipping, and hedging seems unrealistic as it is more assertive and aggressive.²⁷ The reason is the centrality of non-state actors in the post-cold war era. However, Walt argues that Pakistan resorted to hard balancing against the US by conducting a nuclear experiment and becoming a nuclear state.²⁸ This is true as Pakistan changed its outlook for the world by rising as the first Muslim nuclear state of the world. Whereas, in liberal understanding, the alliance cannot be justified because the liberals strictly define alliances to be between two democracies. However, in this case, there seems a lack of liberal understanding which could explain the Pak-US alliance and cooperation. Given liberal values, cooperation between states is defined as promoting democratic values, peace, and integration.²⁹ At face value, these claims of liberalism seem to be fitting in the framework, but they hardly do, as the Pak-US relationship has been strongest in the eras when Pakistan was under military rule. This very fact nullifies the claim of cooperation between the democracies for the enhancement of democratic values.

Over the years, the US has been able to maintain close ties with both countries and there has been no direct intervention by the US vis-à-vis Kashmir question and the conflict between India and Pakistan. In the post-cold war period, Bill Clinton's administration was initially sympathetic towards Pakistan regarding the Kashmir dispute but over time and with a misplaced sense that Pakistan was supporting the Taliban and was involved in transnational terrorism, made the Pak-US ties uneasy. The 9/11 bombings brought the biggest trial for Pakistan. In the post-9/11 world, the US started seeing Pakistan

as a safe haven for terrorists and resultantly increased pressure on Pakistan to root out all militant groups from the country.³⁰ Pakistan became trapped between international pressure and national and regional security. The crackdown on these militant groups and implementing a ban on them resulted in increased terrorist activities inside the state which made Pakistan vulnerable to intra-state as well as inter-state threats, simultaneously. However, the US has repeatedly asked Pakistan to *do more* despite the decade-long war on terror.

Marginalising Pakistan on the one hand, the US extended its diplomatic relationship and alliance with India. India and US in the post-cold war era have emerged to be strong allies and bilateral trade partners. According to the 2018 statistics, India is the ninth-largest trade partner with the US with a total investment of \$87.9 billion. India has also strengthened its relationship with the US in the fields of science and technology. The US shares a more liberal relationship with India as compared to Pakistan. However, there is a realist dynamic to this alliance, i.e., the enmity of both countries towards China. China is considered a primary security threat to India, and it is a strategic competitor for the US.³¹ The growing common interests of India and the US are a grave concern for Pakistan. Because these interests and common goals make their collaboration more prolific in the security and strategic domain. India has become an asset for the US, whereas the US sees Pakistan as a liability in most cases. The patronage from a superpower makes India an exceptional case as Pakistan seems to be continuously struggling with the balance of power. India's strong ties with global powers have made Pakistan more vulnerable and put it at a disadvantage to take a strong stand for Kashmir and to bring global attention to Indian atrocities and human rights violations in IIOJK.

Conclusion

It is difficult to understand the security dilemma between India and Pakistan solely in terms of traditional security or through a single theoretical lens. To have a better understanding of historical events

and contemporary dynamics it is crucial to study the role non-traditional actors play in creating and defining dynamics of the security dilemma and how inter-state relationships are not independent of intra-state or domestic political structure, civil-military relationships, and peace and stability within the state. Can peace be achieved by increasing nuclear arsenals and other military capabilities to achieve the balance of power between two countries (as realism suggests) or strengthening liberal institutions (regional and international organisations, e.g., SAARC and the UN) can be instrumental in building a friendly relationship between the two bellicose neighbours? The available evidence supports neither of the thesis. There have been treaties and trade regimes in the past between India and Pakistan most of which failed to achieve any long-term goal. At the same time, external powers other than regional institutions have a key role to play in bringing the two bellicose nuclear neighbours on common ground. Kashmir presents a case of the most volatile regional dispute which poses a threat of nuclear war, thus, expanding its horizon from regional to the global level. So, the global institutions must play their role in mitigating tensions to end the endemic insecurity and instability in the region. There is also a dire need for both countries to engage in bilateral dialogues, of which India has always been the advocate but fails to walk the talk.

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