

INDIA PAKISTAN RELATIONS IN GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS

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Abstract:

India-Pakistan relationship for decades has been idealized as an irreconcilable one. This paper traces the relationship between the two nations from the period of partition to make sense of the conflict. This process cannot be undertaken without understanding Pakistan's Kashmir policy since 1947. Its policy revolves around the failure to create a nation for South Asian Muslims, which it sees as its inherent part, and the failure to not integrate it. This paper further examines the strategic importance of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir for China and its impact on the relation between India-Pakistan. The fundamental question that the paper seeks to answer is despite the present economic conditions of Pakistan and its inability to solve its internal issues, and continuous defeats in major wars with India, what ideational factors are present in Pakistan's strategic culture and how it perceives India based on these factors. This paper finally examines the factors involved that impact the relations between the two nations and explores the possibility of eternal peace.

Keywords - Strategic culture, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, India-Pakistan relation

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Introduction:

Considering the long-term tensions and associated conflicts between India and Pakistan as rooted only in the bilateral relations between the two countries may represent an oversimplification of history and modern international relations. Both contemporary countries inherited the British Raj, and previous political structures like the Mughal Empire, European colonies, and historical cultural milieux like the Indus Valley Civilization. The classical decolonization process that became mainstream in the first part of 20th century resulted in the dissolution of British formal rule over the “Indian Continent” but settled only one of the conflicts specific to this geographical area. Long-term tensions and rivalries throughout the region reemerged in new forms, influenced, among others, by interactions with more modern and technologically advanced states and militaries. The April 2025 crisis that emerged between India and Pakistan represents both a predictable continuation of a historical multidimensional conflict and the outcome of a peculiar international relations context, marked by polarization, inconsistencies, growing confrontational rhetoric, a generalized contestation of the state of affairs, and global rearmament.

Present study aims to identify core underlying elements of the April 2025 acute crisis between India and Pakistan, analyze the latest developments of the water and trans-border terrorism challenges that the two neighbors face and determine potential frameworks and conditions for de-escalation.

India-Pakistan Relations – Latest Developments:

In February 2021, India and Pakistan issued a joint statement for the first time in years, announcing that they would observe the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC). The countries have agreed to a strict observance of all agreements, understandings and cease firing along the Line of Control (LoC) and all other sectors with effect from the midnight of February 24-25, 2021. In the interest of achieving mutually beneficial and sustainable peace along the borders, the two Directors General of Military Operations agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace and lead to violence.

- In the latest bilateral brief between India and Pakistan (February 2020) India stands by its “Neighborhood First Policy” and desires normal relations with Pakistan in an environment which is free of terror and violence.
- In 2019, Article 370 of India's Constitution, was scrapped off, which gave a special status to Jammu and Kashmir. Following which, bilateral relations faced a severe blow. It was followed by Pakistan expelling the Indian High Commissioner in Islamabad and suspension of air and land links, and trade and railway services.
- There was no forward movement in bilateral ties in 2020 due to the mistrust between the two countries, especially on the Kashmir issue.
- India, on February 15, 2019, withdrew Most Favored Nation Status to Pakistan.

Key Issues in India-Pakistan Relations: Evolution:

- 1. Cross-Border Terrorism:** From the 1989 Kashmir insurgency to the 2001 Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai attacks, Uri (2016), Pulwama (2019), and now Pahalgam (2025), terrorism remains the biggest concern. ORF classifies Pakistan's terror infrastructure as “state-enabled non-state actors.”. Pakistan has long been providing safe havens to terror groups like LeT, JeM, and Hizbul Mujahideen. The 2001 Indian Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai attacks, 2016 Uri attack, and 2019 Pulwama attack are all linked to Pakistani-based terror outfits. E.g. A 2023 report by Brookings Institution identified Pakistan's “proxy war” strategy in Kashmir as a major destabilizing factor in South Asia.
- 2. Kashmir Dispute:** The core territorial dispute stems from Pakistan's claim over J&K, while India asserts its legal accession. Post-2019 abrogation of Article 370, Pakistan downgraded diplomatic ties and internationalized the issue at various forums. While India asserts it as a domestic issue, the UN Human Rights Council has occasionally flagged concerns over human rights in the region. Shyam Saran (ex-Foreign Secretary), “Pakistan treats Kashmir as the keystone of its identity” and C. Raja Mohan calls it Pakistan's Kashmir fixation “strategic inertia rooted in ideological rigidity.”
- 3. Border and LoC Ceasefire Violations:** Over 5,000 ceasefire violations in 2020 alone, according to MEA. While the 2021 reaffirmation brought temporary calm, violations resumed in 2023.

4. **Water Disputes under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT):** Treaty Signed in 1960 under World Bank auspices. India has raised concerns post-Uri attack (2016) about revisiting the treaty. Pakistan raised objections to India's Kishanganga and Ratle Hydropower Projects. India invoked Article XII of the treaty to renegotiate terms in 2023. World Bank urged both sides to resolve differences via neutral expert arbitration.
5. **Trade and Economic Relations:** Post-2019, Pakistan suspended bilateral trade. A report by CUTS International (2021) estimates potential trade loss of billions annually due to non-cooperation.
6. **Religious Radicalization:** Export of extremism through LeT, JeM, and D-Company operate from Pakistani soil. UNSCR Reports highlight proliferation of madrassas and extremist hubs.
7. **Nuclear Brinkmanship and Arms Race:** Both nations maintain nuclear arsenals and credible deterrents. Post-Balakot (2019), India and Pakistan came dangerously close to conflict escalation, as noted in RAND Corporation's 2021 assessment.
8. **Afghanistan, Narcotics and Drone Warfare:** India supports democratic stability, while Pakistan has been accused of covertly aiding Taliban factions. USIP Report (2023) said India fears increased terror influx via Afghanistan post-Taliban resurgence. India has proximity to Death Triangle (Formerly Golden Triangle) which increases the threat of narcotics and terrorism as seen in drone-based narcotics and arms drops in Punjab.
9. **Cyber Warfare and Disinformation:** Cyber espionage by Pakistani actors like APT36 targeting Indian defense and research. CERT-IN reports several Pakistan-origin intrusions.
10. **Prisoners and Fishermen:** 300+ fishermen from both sides remain jailed. Cases of spies (e.g., Kulbhushan Jadhav) worsen mutual distrust. International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled Jadhav's favor in 2019.

India-Pakistan Attempts for engagement:

1. India has made several attempts to build normal unneighborly relations with Pakistan. Since 2014, this has been manifested in the invitation to the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for the swearing-in ceremony in May 2014; the meeting between Prime Ministers in Ufa in July 2015; and External Affairs Minister's (EAM) visit to Islamabad in December 2015. EAM also took the initiative to propose a Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue in December 2015. These initiatives have been responded with acts of cross-border terrorism and violence against India including the cross-border terror attack on Pathankot Airbase on 2 January 2016; attack on Army Camp in Uri in August 2016; and terror attack on the convoy of Indian security forces in Pulwama by Pakistan based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) on 14 February 2019.
2. Prime Minister spoke to Mr. Imran Khan on 30 July 2018 and congratulated him for his party emerging as the largest political party in the National Assembly. PM also sent a congratulatory letter to PM Imran Khan on 18 August 2018 desiring meaningful and constructive engagement for the benefit of the people of the entire region. EAM congratulated the new Foreign Minister on 22 August 2018.
3. In response to PM's congratulatory letter, Pakistan wrote back on 14 September 2018 and suggested meeting between Foreign Ministers in UNGA in New York. The new Foreign Minister of Pakistan also wrote to EAM on 17 September 2018 with a similar proposal. These letters talked of bringing a positive change and mutual

desire for peace, and Pakistan's readiness to discuss terrorism. In response to the intentions expressed in these letters, Pakistan's proposal for a meeting was accepted by India on 20 September 2018. However, within hours of India's acceptance, Pakistan-based terrorist entities brutally killed three police personnel in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Earlier, that same week, an Indian BSF soldier was brutally killed at the border on 18 July 2018. All these incidents happened after Pakistan's PM and FM wrote letters to India's leadership expressing their desire for change and for peace. Moreover, India's strong protests with Pakistan and call for remedial action were met with outright denial. Under such circumstances, it was assessed that any conversation with Pakistan would be meaningless. India was left with no choice but to call off the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of India and Pakistan in New York.

4. PM Modi received a telephone call from Pakistan PM on 26 May 2019 congratulating him on election victory. PM Modi thanked him and recalled his earlier suggestion to Pakistan PM to fight poverty jointly. PM Modi also stressed that creating trust and an environment free of violence and terrorism were essential for fostering cooperation for peace, progress and prosperity in the region.
5. Pakistan is yet to respond like a normal neighbor. It has continued to restrict even normal trade and connectivity with India. On 7 August 2019 Pakistan regrettably took unilateral actions to downgrade diplomatic relations with India in an attempt to present an alarming picture of bilateral ties to the world. India has urged Pakistan to review its unilateral actions in respect of relations with India so that normal channels of diplomatic communications are preserved.

Potential Benefits of Improved India - Pakistan Relations :

1. Economic Opportunities:

Peace at the border and a resolution of the Kashmir issue could lead to economic benefits, particularly through projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This corridor, passing through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), could stimulate economic growth in the region and act as a gateway to Central Asia.

2. Energy Security:

Enhanced relations between India and Pakistan could facilitate projects like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. This pipeline, originating in Turkmenistan and passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan before reaching India, could address the energy needs of both nations, supporting their growing economies.

3. Regional Cooperation:

Reviving stalled projects such as the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline could further bolster energy security and foster cooperation between the two nations.

4. Stability in Afghanistan:

Improved relations between India and Pakistan are crucial for ensuring stability in Afghanistan. Terrorism affects both countries, and a stable Afghanistan is in their mutual interest. Better ties with Pakistan could also facilitate direct road access to Afghanistan, streamlining trade and regional connectivity.

5. Strengthening Regional Organization's:

Enhanced bilateral relations could revitalize the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its initiatives. Currently hindered by tensions between India and Pakistan, improved relations could unlock the full potential of SAARC, fostering regional cooperation and development.

Conclusion:

- Improved India-Pakistan relations can ensure the addressing of any threat the subcontinent may face in the future. Cooperation and coexistence through trust can ensure the establishment of peaceful and prosperous South Asia.
- Way forward for India-Pakistan relations lies in sustained dialogue, curbing cross-border terrorism, promoting soft diplomacy through strengthening and enhancing India's Foreign Policy in its Neighborhood and trade cooperation.
- **Sustained Dialogue:** Both countries need to engage in consistent and sincere dialogue at various levels, addressing core issues like terrorism, Kashmir, and trade in a constructive manner.
- **Promoting Soft Diplomacy:** Promoting cultural and academic exchanges, sports diplomacy, and tourism can build trust and reduce the deep-seated animosities between the people of both nations.
- **Economic Cooperation:** Expanding trade relations and economic ties could create a vested interest for both nations to maintain peaceful relations. Trade can act as a bridge to broader diplomatic dialogue.
- **Confidence-Building Measures:** Enhancing military-to-military communication, such as hotlines and periodic meetings, can prevent misunderstandings and reduce the chances of accidental escalation.

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