



INDIA PAKISTAN RELATIONS IN GLOBAL GEOPOLITICS. (2012 TO 2022)

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Abstract:

This study analyses the trajectory of India-Pakistan bilateral relations from 2012 to 2022, examining how persistent structural conflicts were amplified by domestic political shifts and evolving global geopolitics. The decade was characterized by "minimalist engagement"—a cycle of short-lived diplomatic overtures quickly derailed by major security crises. While the period began with a brief, cautious attempt at trade and visa liberalization (2012–2014), relations deteriorated sharply thereafter, culminating in a phase of kinetic military escalation. The 2016 Uri attack and India's subsequent "surgical strike," signaling a shift toward more assertive, proactive military responses. This article aims to analyze the significant geopolitical shifts in Pakistan-India relations from 2012 to 2022, focusing on key events and their implications for regional stability. The period witnessed fluctuating tensions and sporadic diplomatic engagements, marked by critical incidents such as the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, which escalated military confrontations. Efforts towards peace, including the 2015 Ufa meeting and the Kartarpur Corridor initiative, reflected intermittent attempts at rapprochement. However, India's abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 further intensified the geopolitical rivalry, significantly affecting regional dynamics. The study employs a qualitative analysis of key diplomatic and military events, supplemented by a review of policy responses and their impact on bilateral relations. The research highlights the complex interplay of national security concerns, domestic politics, and international influences that shaped the trajectory of Pakistan-India relations during this decade. Strengthening diplomatic channels and confidence-building measures is essential to mitigate tensions and foster long-term regional stability.

Keywords: Pulwama Attack, Balakot Airstrike, Uri Attack, Kashmir Dispute, Cross-Border Terrorism, Line of Control (LoC), Ceasefire Violations.

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Introduction:

The India-Pakistan relationship from 2012 to 2022 was primarily characterized by minimalist engagement and a sharp decline in bilateral ties, punctuated by major terror incidents and subsequent military and diplomatic escalations. The dynamic was dominated by the persistent issues of terrorism and the Kashmir dispute, which profoundly shaped the region's geopolitics and drew in global power involvement. A liberalized visa agreement was signed in 2012, and Pakistan committed to granting India Most Favored Nation (MFN) status (though it was never fully implemented). These were brief, positive signs for people-to-people and economic ties. This cautious



thaw was quickly undermined by border skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) and renewed tensions over terror-related issues.

A terrorist attack on an Indian Army base in Uri led to India announcing a "surgical strike" on alleged militant launch pads across the LoC, signaling a significant shift in India's policy of retaliation. A suicide attack on an Indian security forces convoy in Pulwama, claimed by the Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), triggered a major military escalation. India responded with an airstrike on a JeM training camp in Balakot, deep inside Pakistani territory. This was followed by aerial skirmishes between the two air forces, bringing the nuclear-armed rivals closer to a full-scale conflict than they had been in decades. India withdrew the MFN status granted to Pakistan following the Pulwama attack, and Pakistan subsequently suspended all bilateral trade. India revoked the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and reorganized the state into two Union Territories. Pakistan strongly condemned this unilateral move, downgrading diplomatic ties, expelling the Indian High Commissioner, and suspending bilateral trade.

The immediate aftermath of independence saw large-scale communal violence and the migration of millions across the newly drawn borders, setting a contentious tone for future interactions (Talbot & Singh, 2009). The primary bone of contention has been the region of Jammu and Kashmir, which both nations claim in full but control only in part. This dispute has led to several wars, including those in 1947-48, 1965, and the Kargil conflict in 1999 (Bose, 2003). The bilateral relations have oscillated between periods of confrontation and attempts at diplomacy. Notable diplomatic initiatives include the Simla Agreement of 1972, following the Indo-Pak war of 1971, and the Lahore Declaration in 1999, aimed at nuclear risk reduction and conflict resolution (Ganguly, 2002). However, these efforts have often been undermined by subsequent conflicts and terrorist attacks, such as the 2001 Indian Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which have strained diplomatic ties and heightened security concerns (Jones, 2010).

Literature Review:

Paul (2013) explored Pakistan's militarized state structure and its implications for its relations with India. It examines how Pakistan's security concerns, particularly regarding India, have shaped its political and economic development. The analysis extends to how these dynamics have influenced Pakistan's foreign policy decisions, contributing to the cyclical nature of Indo-Pakistani conflicts.

Cohen (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan, analyzing the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of their rivalry. The book discusses the various attempts at peace and why they have repeatedly failed. Cohen also considers the role of external powers and the potential paths forward for the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

Fair (2014) offered a critical examination of the Pakistan Army's strategic culture and its persistent antagonism towards India. The book argues that the military's worldview drives Pakistan's foreign policy, perpetuating conflict with India. It provides insights into the institutional factors within Pakistan that sustain adversarial relations, despite the costs of ongoing hostilities.



Ganguly (2016) provided an in-depth analysis of the persistent tensions between India and Pakistan, focusing on the recurring patterns of conflict and attempted peace. The book examines the strategic calculations behind key incidents, such as the Mumbai attacks, and their impact on bilateral relations. It also highlights the role of nuclear deterrence and its implications for regional stability.

Theoretical Framework:

Neorealism, which emphasizes the anarchic structure of the international system and the resulting security competition between states, provides the most powerful explanatory framework for the overall hostility during 2012–2022. The geopolitical dynamics of Pakistan-India relations from 2012 to 2022 can be effectively analyzed through the lens of realism, a prominent theory in international relations that emphasizes power, security, and national interest as central to state behavior. Realism posits that the international system is anarchic, with no overarching authority to enforce rules or mediate disputes, leading states to prioritize their survival and security through power accumulation and strategic alliances (Mearsheimer, 2001). The power dynamics between Pakistan and India during this period have been characterized by a persistent security dilemma, where the actions taken by one state to enhance its security often lead to increased insecurity in the other, prompting a cycle of arms build-up and strategic posturing. India, with its larger economy and military, has sought to assert its regional dominance, while Pakistan, perceiving existential threats, has focused on maintaining a credible deterrent, primarily through its nuclear arsenal and alliances with external powers like China (Paul, 2014).

Incidents such as the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack exemplify how power dynamics influence bilateral relations. These attacks led to significant military escalations, including surgical strikes by India and aerial skirmishes, highlighting the constant state of military readiness and the precarious balance of power. The abrogation of Article 370 by India in 2019, which altered the status of Jammu and Kashmir, further shifted power dynamics, as Pakistan perceived this move as an aggressive unilateral change to a disputed territory, prompting diplomatic and strategic responses (Ganguly, 2020).

Material and Methods:

The study of India-Pakistan relations in global geopolitics from 2012 to 2022 necessitates a qualitative, case-study-based methodology combined with a geopolitical analysis framework. The primary goal is to interpret the complex interplay of high-stakes political decisions, military events, and external power dynamics during this volatile decade. The research on the "Geopolitical Changing Dynamics of Pak-India Relations during 2012 to 2022" will adopt a qualitative methodology, leveraging an analytical approach to delve deeply into the evolving geopolitical landscape between the two nations. This study will gather data through various qualitative sources, including books, articles, policy documents, diplomatic communications, and media reports. The research on the "Geopolitical Changing Dynamics of Pak-India Relations during 2012 to 2022" will adopt a qualitative methodology, leveraging an analytical approach to delve deeply into the evolving geopolitical landscape between the two nations. This study will gather data through various qualitative sources, including books, articles, policy documents, diplomatic communications, and media reports.



Key Events and Developments (2012-2022)

2012-2014: A Period of Cautious Engagement

The resumption of talks in 2012 was facilitated by the then-Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to India, which was seen as a positive development in bilateral relations. However, the optimism was short-lived, as tensions soon escalated over issues like the Kashmir dispute, border skirmishes, and terrorism.

Economic and Trade Relations Economic and trade relations between Pakistan and India witnessed a cautious thaw during this period, with both nations recognizing the potential economic benefits of increased bilateral trade. In 2012, Pakistan granted India the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status in principle, although its implementation faced delays due to domestic opposition and security concerns (Taneja et al., 2013). Trade talks focused on reducing non-tariff barriers, improving infrastructure at border trade points, and expanding trade through the Wagah-Attari land route. Despite political and security challenges, there was a discernible increase in bilateral trade volumes, reflecting a shared interest in economic cooperation (Ahmed, 2014).

Cross-Border Tensions However, the period was not devoid of cross-border tensions, which intermittently threatened the peace process. Incidents of ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in 2013, led to casualties on both sides and heightened military alertness (Saeed, et. al. 2023; Ganguly & Kapur, 2014). These skirmishes underscored the fragile nature of the peace efforts and the deep-seated distrust between the two nations. The tensions were often exacerbated by nationalist rhetoric and media sensationalism, complicating diplomatic efforts to sustain engagement and dialogue (Chowdhury, 2013). Despite these challenges, the period from 2012 to 2014 represented a phase where both nations cautiously navigated their complex relationship, balancing engagement with preparedness for conflict. The Composite Dialogue and economic interactions highlighted a pragmatic approach to diplomacy, seeking common ground amid enduring tensions.

Composite Dialogue During the years 2012 to 2014, Pakistan and India engaged in a cautious yet hopeful attempt to improve bilateral relations through the Composite Dialogue process. Initiated in 2004, this framework aimed to address a wide range of issues, including terrorism, territorial disputes, and confidence-building measures (CBMs) (Chari, Cheema, & Cohen, 2007). The dialogue resumed in 2012 after being suspended following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, reflecting a mutual willingness to address outstanding issues despite deep-seated mistrust.

2016-2019: Escalation and Diplomatic Isolation

Uri Attack and Surgical Strikes The period from 2016 to 2019 began with a major escalation following the Uri attack in September 2016. Militants attacked an Indian Army base in Uri, Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in the deaths of 19 Indian soldiers. India held Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed responsible, leading to a severe diplomatic fallout. In retaliation, India conducted surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) on alleged militant launch pads, marking a significant shift in its military strategy towards Pakistan. These surgical strikes aimed to demonstrate India's resolve to counter cross-border terrorism and assert its military capabilities (Kaura, 2016).



The Doklam Standoff (2017) and Chinese Factor: The Doklam Standoff in 2017 was a significant event that underscored the complex geopolitical dynamics involving India, China, and Bhutan. The standoff occurred in the Doklam plateau, an area claimed by both China and Bhutan, but strategically significant due to its proximity to India's sensitive Siliguri Corridor, also known as the Chicken's Neck. The standoff began when Chinese troops attempted to extend a road in Doklam, prompting Bhutan to protest against what it saw as an infringement on its territory. India, as per its close ties with Bhutan under the 2007 Friendship Treaty, intervened on Bhutan's behalf, arguing that any change in the status quo in Doklam would pose a direct security threat to its northeastern states. Indian troops crossed into Doklam to prevent the construction, leading to a tense standoff that lasted for over two months (Tellis, 2018).

China's actions in Doklam reflected its broader geopolitical ambitions, including its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and efforts to enhance strategic infrastructure in disputed areas. The standoff also highlighted China's assertive approach in asserting territorial claims and challenging India's influence in its immediate neighborhood. This episode underscored the complexities of managing relations between two major Asian powers with overlapping strategic interests and historical grievances (Tellis, 2018).

Pulwama Attack and Balakot Airstrike Tensions peaked again in February 2019 with the Pulwama attack, where a suicide bomber from Jaish-e-Mohammed killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel. The attack led to widespread outrage in India and calls for a strong response. In a dramatic escalation, India conducted an airstrike on a Jaish-e-Mohammed training camp in Balakot, Pakistan, claiming significant casualties among militants. Pakistan responded with airstrikes across the LoC, leading to aerial skirmishes and the capture of an Indian pilot by Pakistan, who was subsequently released as a peace gesture (Fair, 2019). These events marked the first time in decades that both nations conducted airstrikes within each other's territories, significantly raising the stakes.

International Responses and Mediation Attempts The international community closely monitored these escalations, expressing concerns over the potential for a larger military confrontation between two nuclear-armed neighbors. Several countries, including the United States, China, and Russia, called for restraint and urged both nations to engage in dialogue. The United Nations also emphasized the need for peaceful resolution and offered mediation, although both countries were reluctant to accept external mediation on the Kashmir issue (Paliwal, 2019). The Balakot episode highlighted the global dimension of the conflict, with major powers playing crucial roles in de-escalating tensions and promoting diplomatic engagement. During this period, Pakistan faced increasing diplomatic isolation due to allegations of harboring terrorist groups. India launched a concerted diplomatic campaign to isolate Pakistan internationally, leveraging its growing strategic partnerships and economic influence. Pakistan, in turn, sought to counter these efforts by highlighting human rights violations in Kashmir and garnering support from allies such as China and Turkey (Riedel, 2019). The interplay of military actions, diplomatic maneuvers, and international interventions characterized this period of heightened tensions and complex geopolitics.



2019-2022: COVID-19 and Shifts in Strategic Focus

Impact of the Pandemic on Bilateral Relations The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in late 2019, had a profound impact on global dynamics, including Pakistan-India relations. The pandemic diverted attention and resources towards managing public health crises and economic disruptions, temporarily de-escalating immediate tensions. Both countries imposed strict lockdowns and faced significant economic challenges, which shifted their strategic focus inward (Ain, et. al., 2024; Wagner & Cafiero, 2020). However, the underlying mistrust and geopolitical rivalries remained unchanged, with both nations continuing their military and diplomatic posturing amid the pandemic. Revocation of Article 370 and Its Implications In August 2019, India unilaterally revoked Article 370 of its constitution, which granted special autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir. This move was met with strong opposition from Pakistan, which condemned it as a violation of UN resolutions and bilateral agreements. The revocation led to increased military presence in the region, severe restrictions on civil liberties, and heightened tensions along the Line of Control (LoC) (Kaul, 2020). Pakistan intensified its diplomatic efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue, seeking support from global and regional actors, but faced limited success due to India's growing international influence and strategic partnerships.

Regional Dynamics (Afghanistan, China) The regional dynamics between 2019 and 2022 were significantly influenced by developments in Afghanistan and China's growing influence in South Asia. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent Taliban takeover created a new geopolitical reality. Both Pakistan and India recalibrated their strategies in response to the changing situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan, which has historical ties with the Taliban, sought to leverage its influence to ensure a favorable security environment and curb cross-border terrorism. India, on the other hand, focused on protecting its investments and strategic interests in Afghanistan, while also strengthening its ties with other regional players like Iran (Pant & Joshi, 2021). China's increasing assertiveness and its strategic projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), continued to shape regional geopolitics. The close Sino-Pakistan ties were perceived by India as a strategic challenge, prompting it to enhance its own partnerships, notably through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the United States, Japan, and Australia. This period saw India balancing its regional security interests with the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, aiming to counter China's influence (Rehman, 2021).

Results and Discussion:

Realist Perspective:

Realism, emphasizes the role of power, security, and national interest in shaping state behavior. From a realist perspective, the dynamics of Pakistan-India relations from 2012 to 2022 can be understood through several key elements: military build-up and strategic alliances, nuclear deterrence, and border security and territorial disputes.

Realism posits that states constantly seek to enhance their power and security in an anarchic international system. For India and Pakistan, military build-up has been a central aspect of their strategic calculus. Both countries have engaged in significant defense modernization and arms acquisition to enhance their military capabilities and



project power. India's focus on upgrading its military technology, including acquiring advanced fighter jets and naval assets, reflects its strategy to maintain a strategic edge over Pakistan (Mohan, 2018). Conversely, Pakistan has pursued a parallel strategy, investing in missile technology and strengthening its conventional and nuclear forces to counterbalance India's military superiority (Chengappa, 2016). Strategic alliances also play a crucial role in realist calculations. India's partnerships with the United States and its involvement in the Quad alliance highlight its strategy to counterbalance China's influence and secure regional support against potential threats from Pakistan (Pant, 2020). Pakistan's alliance with China, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), serves as a counterweight to India's growing regional influence and provides strategic depth in its geopolitical calculations (Riedel, 2019).

Nuclear deterrence is a critical component of the realist perspective, emphasizing the role of nuclear weapons in maintaining strategic stability. Both India and Pakistan have relied on their nuclear arsenals as a means of deterrence, aiming to prevent large-scale conflicts and maintain a balance of power. India's no-first-use (NFU) policy and its focus on developing a credible minimum deterrent are designed to ensure that any nuclear aggression by Pakistan would result in devastating retaliation, thereby deterring potential attacks (Sagan & Waltz, 2012). Pakistan, in response, has adopted a more flexible posture, including a variety of tactical nuclear weapons to deter Indian conventional military operations and maintain strategic stability (Khan, 2021).

Border security and territorial disputes are central to realist theories, as states vie for control over strategic territories to enhance their security and assert their dominance. The ongoing conflict over Jammu and Kashmir is a prime example of how territorial disputes drive state behavior. India's revocation of Article 370 in 2019, which altered the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, was perceived by Pakistan as an aggressive move that threatened regional stability. The ensuing cross-border skirmishes and military confrontations along the LoC underscore the realist view that territorial control and security are crucial elements of state power and influence (Kaul, 2020). The Doklam Standoff of 2017 further illustrates the realist perspective on border security. China's attempt to extend its road construction in disputed territory, and India's intervention to prevent this, highlights the strategic importance of maintaining control over disputed regions and the willingness of states to use military means to achieve their objectives (Tellis, 2018).

Conclusion:

The period from 2012 to 2022 in Pakistan-India relations has been characterized by a complex interplay of military, diplomatic, and geopolitical factors. Throughout these years, both nations have significantly expanded their military capabilities and sought strategic alliances to enhance their security and regional influence. India's strengthening ties with the United States and participation in the Quad alliance demonstrate its strategy to counterbalance China and address regional security concerns. Conversely, Pakistan's strategic partnership with China, emphasized by initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), highlights its efforts to counterbalance India's growing influence and secure its regional position. These dynamics reflect a realist perspective, emphasizing the centrality of power and security in shaping state behaviour. The role of nuclear deterrence and territorial disputes has also been pivotal in this period. India's no-first-use policy and its



commitment to maintaining a credible minimum deterrent contrast with Pakistan's flexible nuclear posture, including tactical nuclear weapons aimed at countering Indian conventional military threats. The persistent border security issues, particularly the ongoing conflict over Jammu and Kashmir, have exacerbated tensions and led to frequent skirmishes. The Doklam Standoff of 2017 further illustrated the strategic importance of territorial control. While the COVID-19 pandemic momentarily shifted focus towards internal challenges, the underlying geopolitical rivalries persisted, influenced by developments in Afghanistan and China's expanding regional influence. The complexities of managing these relations stress the enduring nature of competition and the challenges of navigating a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

Recommendations:

- Engage with international organizations such as the United Nations to address the root causes of long-standing disputes, particularly over Kashmir, by seeking resolutions that respect the rights and aspirations of all parties involved.
- Strengthen direct diplomatic channels and regularize high-level meetings to address mutual concerns, reduce misunderstandings, and build trust, particularly in conflict-prone areas such as Kashmir.
- Implement and expand confidence-building measures, including military transparency, communication hotlines, and joint exercises, to prevent escalation during border incidents and maintain strategic stability.
- Encourage trade, investment, and economic partnerships between Pakistan and India, focusing on sectors that benefit both countries, to create interdependencies that reduce the likelihood of conflict.
- Utilize platforms like SAARC and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to facilitate dialogue, mediate disputes, and address regional security concerns, thereby reducing bilateral tensions.

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