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## INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS IN THE PRISM OF ‘REALIST SCHOOL’ OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### ABSTRACT

The India-Pakistan relationship is shaped by internal and external variables – which form very complex interactions between the two. Externally, both countries are influenced by multiple factors which shape their foreign policies – the geopolitics of South Asia is the major one. However, another important factor in the relationship between the two nations and a source of great tension between the two of them is the persistence influence of the ‘realist school’. This school of thought, holds that nations are rivals and will only seek their own interests at the costs of those of their neighbors. This theory of international relations holds that countries such as India and Pakistan need to compete with each other, especially militarily. This paper will focus on the geopolitical factors which shape India-Pakistan relations in contemporary times – how the geostrategic culture is shaping the relationship of both South Asian neighbors in bringing more distrust, and an antagonized sense of insecurity and mistrust. This article will analyze the geopolitical settings and related factors – bilateral nuisance such as Kashmir, wars and other border disputes; regional factors such as China, Afghanistan – and geopolitical interests of both nations. This research can lead to a better understanding of the strategic culture of the region which greatly influences the relationship between India and Pakistan. This research examines the negative impact of the ‘realist school’ on the relationship between Pakistan and India and indicates that only a change in the political culture of both nations can lead to peaceful co-existence.

**Key words:** India-Pakistan relationship, ‘realist school of international relations’

## INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics is the study of how geography and space influence foreign relations.<sup>1</sup> *Classical geopolitics is characterized by three features: first, international relations are conditioned by the spatial configuration of naturally existing and manmade material objects. These objects have an impact on states that is independent from social construction. Secondly, Classical Geopolitics is policy-oriented. It is most suitable for elaborating rational strategies to be pursued by the states. Third, Classical Geopolitics incorporates the dynamic nature of politics.*<sup>2</sup> This is a suitable approach to narrate the patterns of relations in IR. The context in which foreign relations take place is considered critical to understand their nature and the behaviors of actors such as states.<sup>3</sup> This essay aims to prove that the 'realist school' is decisive in the relationship between India and Pakistan. Developments in the South Asian region and beyond are the main factors that determine the Indo-Pakistan relationship and its nature.<sup>4</sup> This work argues that there is a direct correlation between the political culture influenced by the 'realist school' and the status of the region and developments and the policies adopted by Pakistan and India. To understand the Indo-Pakistan relationships it is necessary to understand the impact of the influence of the school of thought that sees international relations in terms of power politics.<sup>5</sup> This work discusses key geopolitical factors such as the long border between the two nations, Kashmir, the vicinity of China and Afghanistan and relate them to the persistent influence of the 'realist school' on the political cultures of both South Asian countries.

## BACKGROUND

Nations that have long borders have traditionally often had difficult relationships. However, this is not always the case, as, for instance, as far as America and Canada are concerned. Pakistan and India share a 2,064-mile border. Due to the long border Pakistan feels quite vulnerable,<sup>6</sup> considering that India has a population of one billion, five times that of Pakistan.<sup>7</sup> The long border is very important in the formulation of

<sup>1</sup> J. Agnew, S. Crobridge, *Mastering Space. Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy*, London 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Soren Scholvin cited Lacoste in *The Geopolitics of Regional Power. Geography, Economics and Politics in Southern Africa*, London 2016, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. Kegley, E.R. Wittkopf, *World Politics. Trend and Transformation*, 12<sup>th</sup> ed., Wadsworth 2008, p. 77.

<sup>4</sup> A. Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis. Asia's New Geopolitics*, Oxford 2015.

<sup>5</sup> M. Bastos, "Geopolitical Modernity and Pakistan Foreign Relations: How Relevant?", *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2014), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> L. Dittmer, *South Asia's Nuclear Security Dilemma. India, Pakistan and China*, Armonk, N.Y. 2005.

<sup>7</sup> K.C. Dash, *Regionalism in South Asia. Negotiating Cooperation, Institutional Structures*, London 2008, p. 46. L. Dittmer, *South Asia's Nuclear...*

Pakistan policies and it has led many in the political elite to adopt a realist approach to their relationship with India.<sup>8</sup> This sense of vulnerability on the part of Pakistan has been one of the key factors influencing the relationship with New Delhi.

The realist school is a group of theories of international relations that emphasizes national interest, and military power in world politics. It is based on the supposition that the powerful will exploit the weaker, as argued by Thucydides in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>9</sup>. This has long been the traditional view of international relations until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it has become increasingly sidelined because of the rise of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. However, the unique history of the sub-continent founded on Hindu-Muslims rivalry and the tragedy of partition mean that unlike many other areas of the world that the realist school still predominates<sup>10</sup>. This is because of the particular geography and history of the region. This means that realism is still the school that dominates the thinking of the political elite in New Delhi and Islamabad. It should be noted that the persistence of 'realist' or the neo-realist approach to geopolitics is not because of a lack of sophistication or understanding in New Delhi and Islamabad but that they are in a sense forced into that position because of long standing disputes and the geopolitical situation. In a real sense, this is despite those who wish to adopt a more 'liberal' approach to international relations which stresses cooperation, rather than confrontation. This is despite a series of confidence building measures that began in the 1990s. They have failed to change the political cultures of both countries. However, the following factors mean that in a sense the geopolitical outlook of both India and Pakistan remains tied to the realist school of thought.

## THE THRONE OF KASHMIR

The State of Kashmir is of the utmost strategic and political importance for both India and Pakistan.<sup>11</sup> Kashmir's occupation by India is the source of conflict between India and Pakistan, the latter claims that the area should have been given to it at partition. Here the centuries old rivalry between Hinduism and Islam is at its most intense, mainly as a result of British colonial policy.<sup>12</sup> This has had important implications for the political culture in India and Pakistan. The continuing conflicts between Pakistan and India over Kashmir has had important consequences for both culture and in particular it has persuaded many to continue to hold a 'realist' view of the nature of international policy making<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> S. Noor, "Pakistan-India Relations and Terrorism", *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 60, no. 2 (2007), pp. 65-84.

<sup>9</sup> Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, transl. by T. Hobbes, London 1990, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> T. Powers, *The War without End*, London 2018, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> A. Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990*, Oxford 1991.

<sup>12</sup> M.S. Rajan, "India and Pakistan as Factors in Each Other's Foreign Policy and Relations", *International Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1961), p. 359.

<sup>13</sup> T. Powers, *The War...*, p. 34, 145.

At present Pakistan holds one third of Kashmir and India holds the rest.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the population in Kashmir is Muslim. Many of them want to leave India and become an independent state. This problem has been unresolved since partition.<sup>15</sup> Two major wars have been fought over the issue and at present there is sporadic shelling between Pakistani and Indian units over the Line of Control.<sup>16</sup> India rejects this border and this attitude has led to regular confrontation and conflicts between the two South Asian nations.<sup>17</sup> India cannot even contemplate letting Kashmir secede from the country. That would set a dangerous precedent for if Kashmir could join Pakistan, as this would encourage secessionist groups throughout India. On the other hand, India needs to preserve control over Kashmir in order to preserve the territorial integrity of the country. For Pakistan, Kashmir is not just a political issue it is very important strategically.

*Pakistan claims Kashmir as her jugular vein, her lifeline, an unfinished agenda of partition and core of Pakistan's ideological survival. Historically Pakistan has viewed its dispute with India as a key determinant of its strategic behaviour in the international arena. Kashmir has a geo-strategic, economic and military significance for Pakistan. As for military importance is concerned, there are thirteen routes to Siachen Glacier, the highest military base of India and Pakistan. There is only one route for India. Without Kashmir, Silk route to China will be greatly endangered and there will be no link with China—a time tested ally and friend of Pakistan. The importance of Kashmir to Pakistan as the lifeline can be well-understood by having a look at the map of Pakistan. Three out of six rivers, which run through Pakistan, originates from Kashmir namely Rivers Indus, Jhelum and Chenab whereas remaining three namely Rivers Ravi, Sutlej and Bias originate from India. Pakistan's agricultural life to a great extent depends on Kashmir. Economically, the waters of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab, which originate through Kashmir, are vital to the agricultural life of Pakistan. Kashmir and Canal water are Pakistan's life line as Military ruler Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan was of the opinion that both the Kashmir and Canal water Disputes are matters of life and death to Pakistan.*<sup>18</sup>

As seen in the map below Kashmir is of great strategic importance for Pakistan as Indian-control of the region means that they can potentially strike Pakistan.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> S. Dwivedi, "India as a Dominant Security Concern to Pakistan (1947-1980)", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 69, no. 4 (2008), pp. 889-896.

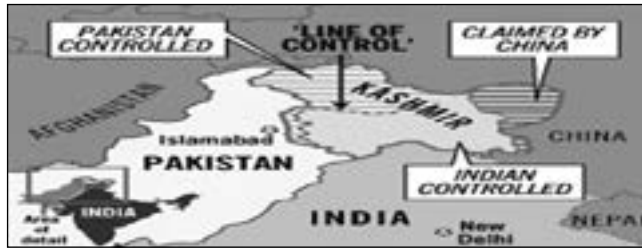
<sup>15</sup> A. Mattoo, "India's 'Potential' Endgame in Kashmir", in S. Ganguly (ed.), *The Kashmir Question. Retrospect and Prospect*, London—New York 2004.

<sup>16</sup> S. Dwivedi, "India as a Dominant Security Concern...", pp. 889-896.

<sup>17</sup> A. Mattoo, "India's 'Potential' Endgame..."

<sup>18</sup> N.A. Kalis, S. Showkat Dar, "Geo-political Significance of Kashmir: An Overview of Indo-Pak Relations", *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2013), pp. 120-121.

<sup>19</sup> J.N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, London 2002.



Map of Kashmir – Sensitive Areas of Conflict, at <<http://revolutionaryfrontlines.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/india-kashmir-map1.gif>>, 12 December 2016.

Successive Pakistani regimes have either ignored or covertly supported the activities of Kashmiri militants operating in Pakistan territory as they see them as containing the threat from India.<sup>20</sup> Many in the Pakistani security services see the Kashmiri militants as reducing the strategic advantages of India in Kashmir. However, this policy has greatly antagonized India and they see the Kashmiri militants as waging a secret war on the behalf of Islamabad.<sup>21</sup>

But apart from this description of Indian narrative on Kashmir, the human rights violations, rising political consciousness among Kashmiris and their right of self-determination should not be ignored.

The geopolitics of Kashmir in contemporary times is still causing unrest in both countries. In 2016, India launched the 'surgical' strikes in the contested territory of Kashmir, conducted multiple nightie raids across the Line of Control, and resulted in killing of two Pakistani soldiers. India, officially acknowledged these raids. Lt Gen Ranbir Singh, India's director general of military operations, said there were "significant casualties ... to terrorists and those trying to shield them".<sup>22</sup> India also considered this action as a response attack on the Indian army outpost in Uri. India also threatened Pakistan by altering the water-sharing treaty which allows Pakistan to draw water from India to irrigate 65% of its land<sup>23</sup> – a clear example of connection between geopolitics and economy. This means that the political, military and diplomatic elite in both Islamabad and New Delhi are in a sense persuaded to maintain the old realist school. They still see the relationship between them as rivalry and potential military rivals. This is despite efforts to defuse the situation, by diplomatic means<sup>24</sup>. The geopolitical reality on the ground means that the political class needs to remain conservative and to prioritize the defense of national interests. This means that the 'realist' approach still predominates in New Delhi and Islamabad. Failure to adopt this approach could

<sup>20</sup> R.G. Sutter, *China's Rise in Asia. Promises and Perils*, London 2005.

<sup>21</sup> J. Ciment (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Conflicts since World War II*, vol. 1, Chicago 1999, p. 79.

<sup>22</sup> "India Says Troops Cross Kashmir Border to Attack as Crisis Escalates", *The Guardian*, 29 September 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> T. Powers, *The War...*, p. 341.

be furthermore politically unpopular and result in criticism from entrenched interest groups such as the military, this is especially the case in Pakistan.

## GEOPOLITICS OF KARGIL AND SIACHIN

In 1999 large numbers of Islamic militants seized a strategic area known as Kargil, a district of Kashmir annexed from Pakistan by India in the 1971 war. An armed conflict occurred at Kargil fought in the summer of 1999 which began with the movement of insurgents and plain-clothes Pakistani soldiers into Indian-controlled Kashmir.<sup>25</sup> This was an attempt by Pakistan to re-capture this strategic area, that ultimately failed. This action was widely seen as a Pakistani invasion and many regard it as the fourth Indo-Pakistan war. Indian believes that while Pakistan will not commit to a full-scale assault on Kashmir, it will continue to use terrorists and insurgents to seize the region.<sup>26</sup>

One area that does not receive the attention that it deserves is the Siachen sector in Kashmir. This is a desolate glacier, but is of huge strategic importance. This area is important for all the regional powers. From 1984 to 1999 India and Pakistan skirmished frequently in Siachen. In 2003 there was a de-facto ceasefire put in place and this has greatly reduced tensions in the India which has control over most of the glacier at present. Efforts to de-militarize the glacier have failed.<sup>27</sup> At present Indian and Pakistani forces are in a standoff. This is a dangerous stand-off and many soldiers from both sides are dying in the brutal conditions of the glacier. The situation in Siachen is complicated by the proximity of China and Chinese forces. India sees the Chinese presence in the sector as dangerous by many Indians.<sup>28</sup> In this area China and Pakistan forces could join in a military attack on Indian units. In 2011, the Indian Army warned that the presence of Pakistani troops in the area near the Chinese border is a major strategic issue, especially since the 1965 war.<sup>29</sup> The presence of Chinese forces near the Pakistani army is one that influences Indian attitudes towards Pakistan and persuades many in the New Delhi establishment to take a hardline approach to the Islamic Republic. The Sino-Pakistan relationship means that despite a desire to have improved relations with Pakistan many in New Delhi continue to adopt a 'realist approach'. It means that India cannot adopt the liberal view of international relations with regard to Pakistan as is the case with Bangladesh, according to Powers.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> S. Dwivedi, "India as a Dominant Security Concern...", pp. 889-896.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> J.N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan...*

<sup>29</sup> S. Noor, "Pakistan-India Relations...", pp. 65-84.

<sup>30</sup> T. Powers, *The War...*, p. 451.

## NUCLEAR-DYNAMICS

The historical rivalry brought both nations to an arms-race – another geopolitical dimension in the relations of both India and Pakistan. When India successfully tested a nuclear device, it persuaded Pakistan to develop a nuclear program. When Islamabad successfully tested a nuclear weapon, this was done to deter their larger Indian army from attacking.<sup>31</sup> This, however, has only led to an arm-race in the sub-continent, despite efforts at de-escalation such as the Lahore Agreement (1999). The nuclear issue means that many in India and Pakistan who may like to have better relations between the nations are not able to do so. The risk of a nuclear strike, no matter how slight, means that both the Indians and the Pakistanis need to adopt the ‘realist approach’ while the rest of the world adopts a liberal approach to diplomacy and increasingly co-operate with their neighbors.

## THE CHINA FACTOR

China is regarded by many in India as the greatest single threat. Of the two Asian giants, China has the larger population, army and economy. Many in New Delhi regard it as the main strategic rival. The two Asian powers share a 1,500 mile frontier, among several border disputes, especially regarding Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. China inflicted a heavy defeat on Indian in the 1962 war and the two sides skirmished in 1967 and 1987.<sup>32</sup> China has developed a very close relationship with Pakistan and these two countries cooperate in a variety of areas, especially in the military and technological fields.<sup>33</sup> It is widely believed that without Beijing’s support Pakistan would not be a nuclear power. The economic cooperation between the two countries is even closer and the Sino-Pakistan economic corridor which links the two countries is the most evident sign of this cooperation. Pakistan is also an important element of China’s ‘string of pearls’ policy, aimed at securing maritime trade routes and energy supplies to the Asian giant. Gwadar Port in Pakistan, for instance, is being expanded by China. These measures are all seen as a threat by the Indians and are used to justify increased military spending which provokes the Pakistan government and as a result there is an arms race on the sub-continent.<sup>34</sup>

The ‘China’ factor is a crucial element in India’s foreign policy. It is widely seen as the biggest issue facing India. It has persuaded many in the Indian political elite to seek to build up its military and to enter an alliance with America.<sup>35</sup> The increasing close-

<sup>31</sup> B. Chellaney, “Rising Powers, Rising Tensions: The Troubled China-India Relationship”, *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2012), pp. 99-108.

<sup>32</sup> S. Noor, “Pakistan-India Relations...”

<sup>33</sup> A. Mattoo, “India’s ‘Potential’ Endgame...”

<sup>34</sup> S. Dwivedi, “India as a Dominant Security Concern...”, pp. 889-896.

<sup>35</sup> S. Noor, “Pakistan-India Relations...”



ness of the relationship between the unlikely allies of Communist China and Islamic Pakistan is one that many in New Delhi believe tilts the balance of power in the region against them. Islamabad can use the relationship with China to compensate its inferior population and the size of its army. New Delhi is now faced with a 2700 km border with Pakistan and China that is potential hostile.<sup>36</sup> Successive governments and elements within the security apparatus believe that Pakistan and China are allies that are attempting to contain India<sup>37</sup>. Many in the Indian army are now planning for a war on 'two-fronts' against Islamabad and Beijing, this is supported by some in the Indian administration but they are reluctant to overtly demonstrate this and generally adopt a cautious approach to the projection of their military power. This is a strain even on the resources of New Delhi.<sup>38</sup> The Indians are very alarmed at the threat of further Sino-Pakistan cooperation. It has persuaded them that they are under threat but it has also persuaded them to act in ways that ensure that they do not have to fight a 'war on two fronts' a fear that is shared by not only the military but also by the democratically elected government.<sup>39</sup> This has meant that India has been measured in its response to Pakistani provocations in Kashmir as they fear a conflict between their army and those of Pakistan and China in the Sachin territory, for example. The balance of power in South Asia means that India needs to be wary of its actions about Pakistan because of the role of China and it has fostered a great mistrust between both capitals that has fostered a 'realism' which has only added to tensions between the two neighbors. This has persuaded New Delhi to continue to see the sub-continent through the prism of the 'realist school'. This means that all the series of talks to improve relations between the two neighbors and all the confidence building measures have failed to meaningfully change the dynamics in the relationship between the two nations and change their geopolitical outlooks<sup>40</sup>.

## AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the Soviets in 1988 was heavily influenced by Pakistan. The Pakistan military and its all-powerful intelligence services supported factions in the country in their own interests. Since 9/11 and the defeat of the Taliban, the Indian military and intelligence services are eager to reassert their influence and many believe that Pakistani intelligence is sponsoring militant groups.<sup>41</sup> Islamabad needs to have a friendly Afghanistan as it is part of its deep defense strategy. Pakistan fears that

<sup>36</sup> A. Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis...*

<sup>37</sup> T. Powers, *The War...*, p. 561.

<sup>38</sup> A. Mattoo, "India's 'Potential' Endgame..."

<sup>39</sup> R.G. Sutter, *China's Rise in Asia...*, p. 102.

<sup>40</sup> T. Powers, *The War...*, p. 478.

<sup>41</sup> S. Menon, "Hostile Relations: India's Pakistan Dilemma", *Harvard International Review*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2009), pp. 14-18.



if there is another war with India that they will be overwhelmed by the Indian army, which was nearly the case in 1971<sup>42</sup>. The enemy's tanks could easily proceed through the Indus river valley and onto Islamabad.<sup>43</sup> Pakistani military strategists, especially in the powerful intelligence services want the army to fall back into Afghanistan and use it mountains to continue the fight against the Indians. Afghanistan has become a new arena for rivalry between the two old enemies.<sup>44</sup> New Delhi has grown ever closer to the Afghan government and this has alarmed Islamabad. They fear that they could be surrounded by a hostile India and Afghanistan<sup>45</sup>. At present a twenty first century version of the great game is taking place, with both India and Pakistan vying for influence in Afghanistan. This is straining relations between Islamabad and New Delhi and it is strengthening the arguments of those who believe that they should build up their military power and seek alliances. This means that despite elements in the establishment who want to engage in confidence building measures that the realist position still predominates in both Pakistan and India.<sup>46</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The persistence of the 'realist' approach to international relations in South Asia is something of an anomaly in the modern world. There is now a general acceptance of the liberal approach to international relations during globalization. However, because of factors such as: geography, history, and religion India and Pakistan cannot follow the example of other countries and develop close bilateral relations. Then there are specific areas of concerns such as Kashmir and the 'China Factor' these means that there is a great deal of mistrust between the two countries. There have been attempts to improve relations between the countries in the past and to develop confidence building measures. However, the persistence of tensions means that India and Pakistan cannot foster a good relationship as is the case with New Delhi and Dhakka. These factors also mean that 'realism' continues to dominate the relationship between India and Pakistan and this is only adding to the tensions between the two countries. The relationship between New Delhi and Islamabad will not improve until there is a cultural change in the highest circles in both countries. This will require an end to viewing each other through the 'prism' of the realist school of international relations.

<sup>42</sup> S.J. Burki, *Pakistan. Fifty Years of Nationhood*, New York 2018, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> R.G. Sutter, *China's Rise in Asia...*

<sup>44</sup> S. Menon, "Hostile Relations..."

<sup>45</sup> S.J. Burki, *Pakistan. Fifty Years...*, p. 234.

<sup>46</sup> S. Noor, "Pakistan-India Relations..."

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