

PAKISTAN-INDIA PEACE AND CONFLICT: ANALYZING THE TWO DECADES OF TURBULENCE (1999-2019)

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Abstract

India and Pakistan maintain one of the most challenging diplomatic partnerships at present, as their relationship frequently degenerates into military clashes and diplomatic impasses and irregular peace negotiations. India-Pakistan relations underwent profound changes from 1999 to 2019, because of Kargil conflict developments, South Asian nuclear proliferation, border terrorism, and strategic policy shifts. The region initially benefited from nuclear deterrence because it was supposed to prevent big wars, but both countries have fought restricted battles because of their nuclear postures. Peace and conflict patterns in this area result from the strategic combined effects of military position-taking, diplomatic engagement, and international mediation mandates. The research examines critical crises, primary diplomatic activities, and transforming strategic doctrines that affected India-Pakistan relations in the past twenty years. This evaluation considers how international entities such as the United States and China, along with multilateral organizations, participated in crisis management as well as conflict resolution efforts. The research demonstrates that India-Pakistan diplomacy consists of alternating periods between open confrontation and peaceful reconciliation, yet continuing disagreement about border terrorism together with conflicting territorial interests and strategic distrust.

Keywords: India-Pakistan Relations, Conflict, Peace, Nuclear Deterrence, Diplomacy, Cross-Border Terrorism, Two Decades of Turbulence

Introduction

India and Pakistan continue to face ongoing conflicts as well as crises while making occasional attempts at establishing peace through 72 years since their 1947 partition. The two nations share deep historical ties, but their political disputes, especially about Jammu and Kashmir, lead to continuous hostile relations. The years from 1999 through 2019 brought substantial changes to their ongoing disagreements, which were mainly affected by the Kargil War (1999) and subsequent events, including the 2001–02 military standoff, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, the 2016 surgical strikes, and finally the 2019 Balakot airstrikes. Peace between Pakistan and India proves to be weak and unstable since their dual statuses as nuclear powers. Traditional violent conflicts persist, yet warfare has expanded due to the growing significance of cross-border terrorist activity, hybrid battles, and asymmetric warfare methods (Ganguly & Kapur, 2008). Volatile politics within both nations, along with international diplomatic involvement and Chinese and American foreign interventions, create an intensified diplomatic complexity (Fair, 2014).

The development of nuclear weapons in India-Pakistan relations functions as both an opposing factor that limits their conflicts and makes their military disputes more complex. Both countries executed nuclear tests in 1998 with the aim of creating strategic stability through nuclear deterrence to stop significant conventional warfare. Nuclear weapons did not stop Pakistan from launching its Kargil War offensive against Indian-administered Kashmir in 1999, according to Kapur (2006). Little wars along with proxy conflicts could occur in

situations where nuclear deterrence inhibited all-out warfare. Both India and Pakistan displayed military aggression after the 2001 Indian Parliament attack through a lengthy military standoff that prevented them from starting an all-out war. Academic scholars refer to this behavioral pattern as the "stability-instability paradox," demonstrating that nuclear weapons systems generate spaces for conflicts below war levels, such as terrorist operations and light military encounters, to operate without war-like escalation. This strategic standoff maintains influence over the progressive changes in security relations between these two countries. (Narang, 2014).

Cross-border terrorism plays a major role in shaping the course between peace and conflict. India encountered one of its most dangerous terrorist attacks in Mumbai in 2008 when Pakistan-based militant groups carried out the attack, leading to major shifts in how India handled security matters. The attacks created more than 160 civilian casualties while causing serious deterioration in diplomatic ties between India and Pakistan (Fair, 2014). The post-Mumbai era witnessed India take a new direction in military practices since previous terrorist incidents had required Indian diplomacy to pursue accountability measures. The Indian government expanded its counterterrorism operations simultaneously with the reinforcement of security protocols and voiced opposition against Pakistan internationally. The military development led to India launching the surgical strikes in 2016 and the Balakot airstrikes in 2019 against Pakistani territory for the first time since the 1971 war. India started to actively defend against Pakistan's proxy terrorism strategy through military intervention, as shown by these recent events, which marked a move beyond historical Indian hesitation in such matters (Tellis, 2019).

Diplomatic relations supported the evolution of India-Pakistan relations despite military conflicts receiving more public attention. The series of terrorist strikes along with military standoffs has not stopped numerous diplomatic efforts from being initiated. The 1999 Lahore Declaration exhibited diplomatic attempts at building dialogue coupled with nuclear confidence-building measures, but military engagements thwarted these efforts, according to Ganguly (2001). India and Pakistan started the Composite Dialogue Process in the early 2000s to tackle major problems involving Kashmir, trade, and people movement. The initiative struggled to produce results because security issues repeatedly caused its breakdown, especially after the Mumbai attacks. The diplomatic channel between Manmohan Singh and Pervez Musharraf yielded promising progress regarding Kashmir, but political instability in Pakistan ended these negotiations, according to Sridharan (2005). The Kartarpur Corridor demonstrates that while tensions persist between India and Pakistan, the two nations can still work together on humanitarian and cultural projects, according to Basu (2019).

The global environment changes both political interactions between India and Pakistan because foreign powers actively help resolve crises and bring peace to these countries. The United States repeatedly stepped into major Pakistan crises, starting with Kargil in 1999 and ending with the 2001-2002 standoff, according to Riedel (2013). India faces complex strategic challenges because China has strengthened its diplomatic ties with Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) along with its growing economic partnership (Joshi 2018). India-Pakistan relations are influenced by shifting security dynamics in South Asia, particularly due to U.S. military disengagement from Afghanistan and increasing activity by non-state militant organizations. The interaction between Pakistan and India through nuclear deterrence and diplomatic negotiation stands as a core element of their relationship, yet the following time period will decide if their hostile patterns can lead to enduring stability.

This research examines the entire expression of peace and conflict between India and Pakistan from 1999 through 2019 to establish a detailed evaluation. Intensive examination of strategic battles and moves, along with diplomatic initiatives, allows the research to study vital factors that reshaped their diplomatic relations. The research examines the integration of nuclear defense systems with international mediation platforms and economic interdependencies to determine their effects on diplomatic peace-building programs. Peace potential between India and Pakistan remains possible thanks to enduring diplomatic strategies along with sustained dialogue and progressively built confidence measures. This research studies the possibility of how India and Pakistan can proceed from their entrenched enmity or if their previous conflicts will persistently generate instability across the region.

Literature Review

The academic discussion about India-Pakistan relations has undergone major advancements throughout the last twenty years by studying the connections between traditional warfare and nuclear deterrence together with terrorist activities and international diplomacy. A large collection of research investigates nuclear weapons' effects on crisis stability while different scholars address how nuclear arms either prevent major wars or create prospects for aggression based on the stability-instability paradox. Several researchers have explored both the persistent negative effects of border-crossing terrorism and the impact of international actors in peace negotiations. The Kargil War serves as a well-researched example of warfare during the nuclear era. According to experts Pervez Hoodbhoy (2013) and Paul Kapur (2006), Pakistan chose to carry out operations in Kargil because Pakistan thought its nuclear capabilities would stop India from transforming the conflict into a major war. India successfully gained back its captured land, yet the Kargil War showed that deterrence strategies have their weaknesses and nuclear capabilities lead to potential errors by military forces. This event further strengthened India's view that Pakistan stood as an unreliable party in negotiations, thus leading to worsening diplomatic ties between the two nations. Academic research has analyzed the 2001–02 military standoff that occurred after the Indian Parliament attack to understand how deterrence stability worked.

The books of Vipin Narang (2014) and Rajesh Rajagopalan (2008) demonstrate that the Indian military massing was intended to force Pakistan to suppress terrorist group activities. The military crisis exposed several challenges related to extending military operations in a nuclearized setting. Global diplomacy achieved through U.S. involvement served to decrease conflict levels between nations in South Asian crises. The Mumbai attacks of 2008 triggered intensified attention toward terrorism as an essential factor behind India-Pakistan hostilities.

Researcher Christine Fair (2014) states that Pakistan's support for militant proxies stands as a major hindrance to peace because the militant groups block genuine diplomatic solutions. India demonstrated discipline after the attacks because it understood the dangers of intensifying conflict, yet its ability to counter unconventional threats remained unsteady. In recent years, India has modified its military approach through more direct military action. The leading examples of strategic changes are the 2016 surgical strikes along with the aerial Balakot attacks from 2019.

The analytical commentary of Sushant Singh (2019) and Ashley Tellis (2019) demonstrates that India purposefully modified the financial equation of cross-border terrorism, yet exposure to incorrect judgments and increased confrontation formed additional dangers. Nuclear deterrence functions as the cornerstone in analyzing the conflicts between India and Pakistan. Traditional nuclear deterrence theories verify that atomic weapons stop major conflicts, yet the paths of South Asian relations remain intricate. The stability of the region following nuclear acquisition remains uncertain, according to Scott Sagan and Kenneth Waltz

(2003) in their analysis. Sagan asserts that Pakistan's ineffective command and control systems, coupled with its military nuclear asset control history, result in higher probabilities of both unauthorized and accidental nuclear weapon use. Nuclear weapons function as powerful tools of war prevention, according to Waltz, because they make both India and Pakistan exercise caution during military operations. The Kargil War, alongside the military standoff of 2001–02, contradicts Waltz's positive assessment since they took place even with the presence of nuclear deterrence. The stability-instability paradox, which Glenn Snyder (1965) first introduced, maintains its relevance for studying India-Pakistan international relations. According to this paradox, nuclear deterrence washes away the possibility of major global wars yet stimulates conflicts that start at the insurgent level and culminate in cross-border terrorism. The nuclear capability gives Pakistan the confidence to employ militant proxies because its assessments suggest India will refrain from a full-scale military response due to nuclear escalation risks, according to Ganguly (1995) and Kapur (2006).

Since Kargil, Pakistan-based terrorist organizations pursued multiple assaults on Indian territory, which included assaults against India's parliament in 2001, Mumbai in 2008, Pathankot in 2016, and Pulwama in 2019. Various research analyzes how the Indian military strategy transforms to counter the proxy conflicts launched by Pakistan. Strategic restraint led to proactive deterrence in India's policy, as highlighted by Vipin Narang (2014), following the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack. Researchers and scholars actively discuss the Cold Start as a military doctrine aimed at rapid but restricted assaults inside Pakistani territory without triggering a nuclear response. Critics maintain that Cold Start seeks to stop Pakistan from using militant proxies, yet it carries the danger of uncontrollable escalation incidents. The Pakistani government has enacted two actions to maintain crisis stability through lowering its nuclear thresholds and developing tactical nuclear weapons, according to Clary & Narang (2019). Experts have thoroughly studied how cross-border terrorism influences the dynamics of India-Pakistan diplomatic relations. The military-intelligence complex of Pakistan treats terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed as critical assets to fight against India's military superiority, according to Christine Fair (2014).

The asymmetric warfare policy of Pakistan has become a major obstacle to diplomatic progress, according to historical records following the collapse of the Agra Summit in 2001 and the termination of the Composite Dialogue Process in 2008 and the unsuccessful backchannel talks after the Mumbai attacks. International demands for Pakistan to suppress terrorist groups have failed to prevent its security establishment from employing these organizations as components of its rivalry with India. Global mediators have proven vital in controlling times of crisis between India and Pakistan. The United States conducted vital diplomatic missions between 1999 and the present, focusing on the Kargil War and both Kargil War's subsequent tensions, then again during the post-Mumbai attack period. The Kargil crisis demonstrated the value of global involvement after U.S. President Bill Clinton forced Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to pull back his forces, according to Bruce Riedel (2002). Operation Parakram (2001–02) experienced de-escalation when Powell served as U.S. Secretary of State because he urged Pakistan to restrict militant organizations. The effectiveness of international mediation has proved limited since Pakistan did not make substantial policy changes after two terrorist events involving Mumbai in 2008 and Pulwama in 2019.

Scholars have focused attention on the increasing Chinese influence in the relations between India and Pakistan. The matrimonial alliance between China and Pakistan weakened as China increased its economic footprint in Pakistan, especially through its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) program. China pursues the stabilization of India-Pakistan relations for

economic purposes, according to some experts, while others maintain that Beijing's support for Pakistan creates ongoing tensions between India, especially in the Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh disputes (Joshi, 2018).

Research has thoroughly examined the effect that domestic political forces have on the relations between India and Pakistan. Foreign policy decisions of both nations have evolved under the influence of nationalist government movements. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India has taken a forceful approach to national security by dealing specifically with the military crises of 2016 and 2019. The Pakistani military maintains its hold over foreign policy, which hampers civilian government attempts to construct peace agreements. According to scholars Hussain Haqqani (2013) and Stephen Cohen (2019), the prospects for lasting peace remain uncertain because the Pakistani military continues to serve as the prime authority shaping Indian policy.

Only through prolonged diplomatic efforts do India and Pakistan maintain the unresolved fundamental conflicts about territorial claims and cross-border terrorism along with strategic distrust between their governments. The 2004-initiated Composite Dialogue Process targeted comprehensive solutions to the issues, but terrorist attacks stopped their progress. The impact of Track II diplomacy involving retired officials and civil society actors has been limited because political conditions inside their respective countries restricted their work. The analysis of this body of literature confirms that resolving this conflict proves difficult due to historical conflicts together with strategic objectives and external involvement.

Theoretical Framework

For international relations research, the Stability-Instability Paradox functions together with Deterrence Theory as a theoretical framework. The two theories present valuable insights into the underground dynamics of India-Pakistan conflicts while illustrating that conventional warfare along with border incidents persists despite mutual nuclear capabilities.

Glenn Snyder (1965) established in his Stability-Instability Paradox that countries can use nuclear deterrence theories to prevent major warfare while promoting limited conflicts. The India-Pakistan relationship exhibits this paradox because Pakistan prefers to use militant intelligence instead of conducting conventional military operations. Pakistan's political actions, starting from Kargil and continuing through the Mumbai attacks and including Uri and Pulwama, demonstrate their ability to operate beyond standard nuclear deterrence predictions. According to Paul Kapur (2006), Pakistan chooses this approach by using a nuclear defense to protect against sub-conventional attacks as well as prevent major Indian responses. The presence of nuclear weapons in Pakistan did not stop India from launching surgical attacks and conducting offensive operations at Balakot to demonstrate its ability to retaliate.

The Deterrence Theory underpins nuclear policy development in India and Pakistan through MAD principles to maintain full-scale war prevention. Three significant aspects affecting South Asian deterrence stability cause problems, according to Rajesh Basrur (2009), including crisis instability and misperception and non-state actors. The United States and the Soviet Union maintained stable deterrence, but India and Pakistan continued in an unstable situation because of frequent terrorist attacks and the absence of strong communication links. The combination of Pakistani tactical nuclear weapon development with Indian limited war strategies produces extensive complexity in the overall deterrence framework.

International mediation serves as a necessary tool for studying how India-Pakistan confrontations advance toward solutions as part of a third theoretical explanation. Bruce Riedel (2013) shows that the United States uses de-escalatory measures in each major crisis, yet China provides no clear position in these situations. International mediation fails to

deliver its intended benefits since Pakistan and India persist with long-term hostile relations and global superpowers shift their foreign policy positions repeatedly. Major war prevention through mediation has failed to resolve the underlying factors that generate conflicts in the region.

Theory frameworks within this framework form a comprehensive analytical structure to analyze India-Pakistan diplomatic relations. Deterrence Theory explains the misunderstandings of threats that arise from unstable environments, yet stability issues prevent nuclear deterrence from working as per the Stability-Instability Paradox while external mediator involvement shapes crisis stability dynamics. Such analytical instruments help experts track the experience of both Pakistan and India regarding their peace and military engagements from 1999 through 2019.

The Kargil Conflict and Its Implications (1999)

Since the major nuclear weapons proliferation, the Indian and Pakistani forces engaged for the first time in combat during the 1999 Kargil conflict. The conflict presented a major divergence from previous wars between Pakistan and India because Pakistan tried to change the LoC status through military plus militant infiltration into Indian Kashmir. The collision erupted shortly following both Pakistan's and India's nuclear tests from 1998 because experts feared nuclear arms escalation under these conditions. The primary goal of Pakistan during Kargil included taking control of vital mountain peaks while breaking Indian authority in the region to make Kashmir an international issue. The Indian military conducted a complete military operation to retake the lost ground following hard battles in the mountainous region. American diplomatic action forced Pakistan to bring back its military forces, according to Hagerty (2008).

The Kargil crisis created great consequences that affected the existing relationship between India and Pakistan. India confirmed its belief about Pakistan's inconsistency as a partner by the timing of the military invasion, which took place right after India and Pakistan signed the Lahore Declaration to achieve loyalties in peace. This conflict revealed Pakistan's flawed military assessment when they undervalued India's powerful defensive capabilities. The Kargil War proved dangerous for nuclear deterrence because both countries engaged in aggressive language and movement of troops while creating escalating concerns. The Pakistani military incursion led India to enhance both conventional military forces and intelligence systems to stop future threats (Kapur, 2006). Pakistan suffered international condemnation by global powers during this time, which worsened its position on the diplomatic stage.

The 2001–02 Military Standoff and the Limits of Deterrence

A terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001 by Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, originating from Pakistan, triggered a prolonged military confrontation between India and Pakistan. Operation Parakram commenced when India sent over 800,000 military personnel to the border. South Asia experienced its most significant military expansion since the 1971 conflict, as India and Pakistan confronted a substantial risk of direct collision. The stalemate between India and Pakistan persisted for around twelve months, during which their forces sustained heightened military readiness through aggressive troop maneuvers and missile testing exercises. The crisis illustrated the challenges of employing coercive measures to compel Pakistan to dismantle terrorist operations, due to the complexities of maintaining nuclear deterrence stability (Narang, 2014).

Through international mediation facilitated by the United States and Russia, both nations ultimately consented to withdraw from their perilous proximity to the conflict. The crisis demonstrated that deterrence has limitations in preventing protracted armed conflicts. While

nuclear weapons effectively averted complete war, they did not deter governments from escalating military actions or adopting terrorism as a strategic policy tool. After the stalemate, India implemented new military protocols that resulted in the formation of Cold Start, which formalized rapid, limited assaults on Pakistan without inciting nuclear retaliation. Pakistan enhanced its asymmetric warfare capabilities, subsequently escalating the ongoing confrontation. (Clary & Narang, 2019).

The 2008 Mumbai Attacks and the Shift in Counterterrorism Strategy

The occurrence of the 2008 Mumbai attacks is one of the critical turning points in India-Pakistan relations. The attack was conducted by ten militants from Pakistan belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba group, and more than 160 innocent civilians were killed during this event, and its echoes could be heard around the world. Unlike the past terrorist attacks that struck primarily military or government facilities, the Mumbai attacks were a clear indication that terrorists no longer aimed to take hostages to negotiate but to kill as many civilians as possible while capturing a building and the cameras capturing every moment of it. This led to a serious diplomatic conflict in which New Delhi particularly called on Islamabad to act against terrorist sanctuaries in the country. However, the response from Pakistan was very weak since its security establishment never accepted state involvement in the attacks (Fair, 2014).

India kept a strategic low profile in response to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai because it avoided any military attack on the terrorists and their sponsors, though the public of India demanded it to do so. They failed to do so as India launched an international diplomatic attack against Pakistan and pushed for counter-terrorism cooperation. It also brought radical changes internally as India revamped its intelligence and security departments for a better fight against terrorism. Likewise, India boosted its partnership action with the United States because the latter put pressure on Pakistan to act against some groups of militants. However, the attack in Mumbai also revealed the perspective that a diplomatic approach and subsequent peace intent, such as back-channel diplomacy, did not yield significant outcomes. (Narang, 2010)

The 2016 Surgical Strikes and the Rise of Proactive Defense Policies

However, by the mid-2010s, India adopted a new aggressive foreign policy due to cross-border terrorism. This change was noticeable, especially after the Uri attack in September 2016, when Pakistan-based militants killed 19 Indian soldiers at an army base in Jammu and Kashmir. In retaliation, India's forces conducted a surgical strike against terrorist launch pads in the Pakistan-administered territory of Azad Jammu and Kashmir across the Line of Control. This was least expected from India, which has been traditionally very cautious in its cross-border operations, and this was the first time the country formally admitted to carrying out a cross-border operation since the Kargil War. These surgical strikes were aimed at establishing to Pakistan and the world that India is no longer going to remain a passive spectator to state-sponsored terrorism and cross-border terrorism would attract a surgical response (Tellis, 2019).

Due to this, the Labour Party received mixed reactions that followed the strikes. Although these air raids were welcomed in India due to symbolizing the capacity to respond to hostile actions, the Pakistani side claimed no losses had taken place. However, the strikes paved the way for future operations, demarcating the codes of conduct when it came to deterrence and crises. Subsequent to that, India sustained the development of its systemic proactive defense policies, which demonstrated that the country was ready to raise the intensity of operations at the tactical level without going nuclear. This change of strategy can be attributed to the

strengthening of India's conventional military power as well as its intentions of preempting Pakistan's employing of militant proxies. (Singh, 2019)

The 2019 Pulwama-Balakot Crisis and the Escalation of Air Power

Analyzing the events that took place in the recent past, it is possible to identify the Pulwama attack of 2019, when a suicide bomber killed 40 Indian paramilitary personnel, as one of the critical moments that led to one of the most serious confrontations between India and Pakistan in recent years. The attack that was said to have been conducted by the JeM led India to bomb a suspected militant camp in Balakot, a region in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir. This was the first airstrike conducted by India in Pakistani territory since 1971, thus enhancing hostilities between the two countries. Pakistan retaliated and conducted airstrikes in the Indian-administered Kashmir, which resulted in an aerial combat in which an Indian aircraft was shot down and its pilot captured alive. The conflict was resolved later after the pilot's release, and the incident underlines the hazards of kinetic action in nuclear conditions (Joshi, 2019).

The Balakot strikes can be said to have shifted India's strategic approach because it successfully conducted air operations across the Line of Control notwithstanding the possibility of escalating tensions. The crises also revealed how important air power was becoming in the South Asian conflicts as both nations began to use the air force to display their capabilities. Although the outcomes of bombing have been mostly described in India in the tactical sense, its effectiveness as a tool of deterrence remains ambiguous. Pakistan has since then strengthened its air defense system and did not cease to modernize its missile technology, thus escalating the security dilemma in the region. The conflict served to remind us that indeed India-Pakistan relations are very sensitive issues that are likely to degenerate into a conflict within no time (Narang, 2020).

The Role of Diplomatic Engagements and Peace Initiatives in Conflict Resolution

India-Pakistan relations have been mainly defined by military clashes, yet both nations have attempted many diplomatic activities to build peace and stability. The rise of antagonism between India and Pakistan has met repeated failures, but many bilateral and multilateral efforts have been tried to reduce tensions. During the Lahore Declaration of 1999, India and Pakistan established their first effort to develop peace by making mutual pledges about utilizing dialogue for conflict resolution and limiting nuclear capabilities. According to Ganguly (2001), political goodwill between India and Pakistan vanished rapidly after the Kargil conflict showed how military adventurism destroyed recent progress. India and Pakistan initiated the Composite Dialogue Process following their 2001–02 military conflict to negotiate terrorism together with trade and border issue resolution. The ongoing dialogue between Pakistan and India proved unstable, mainly due to incidents of terrorist operations and changes in political leadership. During the joint leadership of Musharraf and Manmohan Singh from 2004 to 2007, secret diplomatic negotiations brought Pakistan and India to the brink of signing agreements about Kashmir and international trade (Sridharan, 2005). Domestic political developments in Pakistan primarily ended the potential agreements because Musharraf lost his domestic influence within the country. Cross-border terrorism ruined India's diplomatic progress when Mumbai suffered the attacks of 2008, thus leading to India's firm reaction against terrorist threats and a diplomatic realignment.

The Impact of Political Leadership on India-Pakistan Peace and Conflict Dynamics

Their bilateral relationships receive major impacts from political changes in both India and Pakistan. The change from a Congress-controlled administration to a BJP government under Narendra Modi's leadership in India established a transition through which engagement became more assertive in foreign policy. The Indian government under Modi established

strategic assertiveness as its policy through direct military retaliation as demonstrated in both the 2016 and 2019 counter-terrorist operations. The current government established new political guidelines by breaking with previous diplomatic methods, which heavily depend on foreign mediation (Tellis 2019). The foreign policy decision-making authority of Pakistan's military, together with its unstable political system, has critically shaped the nation's foreign relations. The government leader Nawaz Sharif pursued improved diplomatic ties with India by meeting at the 1999 Lahore Summit and launching post-2013 trade union negotiations. Pakistan's military force regularly works against political progress, which attempts to develop better relations with India because they consider India to represent a strategic enemy. The two-part leadership structure of Pakistan allows military commanders to lead international affairs, but civilian leaders support peaceful measures, which results in irregular diplomatic interactions with India. The ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India result from constant patterns where diplomatic cooperation turns into military conflicts (Haqqani, 2013).

Cross-Border Trade and Economic Cooperation as a Path to Peace

Economic interdependence stands as a proposed solution to develop peace between India and Pakistan. Various economic initiatives that include granting the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status serve as proposed confidence-building measures between the countries. The political tensions, along with frequent interruptions, continue to restrict the growth of trade relations between the two nations. The Pakistani government declared its plan to establish MFN status with India in 2012, though these arrangements met delays because of internal resistance alongside security-related factors. The Indian government withdrew Pakistan's MFN status immediately after the 2019 Pulwama attack, which produced more damage to economic relations (Basu, 2019).

Some economic connections between Kashmir and across its borders, including Kashmiri trade and personal exchanges between communities, have demonstrated promise for advancing peacebuilding efforts. Sikh pilgrims benefited from the Kartarpur Corridor opening in 2019, as it allowed them to enjoy religious visits across the border during periods of escalating tension between India and Pakistan. The lack of economic engagement and trade liberalization makes peace incentives inadequate, according to Sridharan (2020).

The Role of International Mediation in Managing Peace and Conflict

The global community functions as the main force backing down between India and Pakistan, especially when the countries face potential nuclear confrontations. The United States, together with Russia and China, has joined forces with the United Nations and other multilateral organizations to prevent tensions from worsening. U.S. President Bill Clinton forcibly pressured Pakistan to back out of the Kargil conflict, which led to its conclusion. The 2001–02 military standoff between the two countries created extensive diplomatic interactions between Russia and the U.S. to reduce tensions (Riedel, 2013). Different nations experience constraints when they practice international mediation to resolve conflicts. Web international mediation has stopped major conflicts, but it did not solve the fundamental reasons behind India-Pakistan disputes, including terrorism and existing territorial conflict areas. Public diplomats working after the Mumbai attacks focused their efforts on stopping further conflict growth instead of requiring Pakistan to eliminate militant bases. The world powers participated in dialing down tensions following the Balakot airstrikes in 2019, yet they failed to establish lasting peace solutions (Fair, 2020).

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and Their Challenges

India and Pakistan have implemented multiple CBMs throughout the years specifically to enhance tension reduction and accident prevention between their forces. India and Pakistan developed three main CBMs through their agreements for nuclear non-use, their hotline

arrangements for military authorities, and their cultural diplomacy programs. The 1988 Agreement on Non-Attack on Nuclear Installations holds special importance since both nations maintain a permanent exchange of nuclear facility lists no matter the crisis situation. Both nations achieved stability through the 2003 LoC ceasefire agreement until fresh border skirmishes troubled the situation in the late 2010s (Ganguly&Kapur, 2008). The effectiveness of Confidence Building Measures has remained low in their ability to advance major changes in the overall conflict pattern. The CBMs remain ineffective due to terrorist events plus military engagements together with modifications in political environments. The LoC has shown its delicate nature through the numerous border violations that took place after 2016. Because of the Pulwama attack, countries have suspended their diplomatic relations, which has damaged their ability to sustain communication through institutional channels. (Joshi, 2020).

The Influence of Media and Public Opinion on Peace and Conflict

This period has witnessed the media shape the way citizens in both India and Pakistan view their relations through its growing magnitude. The leading news organizations in both countries tend to present their conflicts in nationalistic terms, which intensifies public animosity regarding such disputes. This phenomenon grew more extreme because of social media, which allows misinformation, propaganda, and hate speech to increase tensions between both populations. Media coverage activated essential forces in both public feelings and government actions when India suffered the 2016 Uri attack followed by the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, according to Chatterjee (2019). Media functions as both a disturbing instrument and a peaceful tool because it implements initiatives that display cultural links between nations while supporting Track II diplomatic initiatives. When Indo-Pakistani entities collaborate in literature, music, and sports, it creates spells of public friendship between people. Aman Ki Asha began as a joint media program between both nations to establish a dialogue between peoples while diminishing suspicions between their neighbors. The efforts to promote peace face challenges because of rising nationalistic statements and sporadic confrontations between the countries (Ghosh, 2018).

Conclusion

Peace and conflict conditions between India and Pakistan from 1999 up to 2019 featured a constant interplay between military clashes along with diplomatic efforts and changing strategic principles. Nuclear deterrence serves as a barrier against complete warfare but does not decrease the chances of localized military actions and border-based terrorist activities. Military confrontations, including the Kargil conflict along with the 2001–02 standoff and multiple Mumbai attacks, showcased the Pakistan-India relationship's instability, yet the Indian military adopted an aggressive stance through both the surgical strikes of 2016 and the Balakot airstrikes of 2019. The Composite Dialogue Process, together with backchannel negotiations, periodically created peace opportunities for both nations, yet repetitive terrorist incidents alongside governmental political evolutions frequently interfered with these initiatives. India-Pakistan relations face an uncertain future because ongoing nationalistic politics, together with cross-border terrorist activities and territorial conflicts, drive escalating tensions between the countries. Lasting peace between India and Pakistan depends on regular dialogues and economic partnerships as well as trust-building initiatives. Future relations between India and Pakistan will be formed by the decisive actions of international actors and media alongside civil society organizations that promote reconciliation. South Asian stability requires a dual approach of strategic pragmatism along with diplomatic resilience among both countries to pursue long-term stability in the twenty-first century.

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