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The Kashmir Issue and its Influence on the Foreign Policy of Pakistan

Muhammad Zulqarnain¹, Muhammad Hasnain^{1*}, Saleem Arshad¹, Shakeela Riaz²

¹Department of History, Thal University Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan.

²Department of English, University of Sargodha, Sargodha Punjab, Pakistan.

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Corresponding Author*:

Muhammad Hasnain

Department of History, Thal University Bhakkar, Punjab, Pakistan

Email:

Hasnainmalik0915@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The Kashmir dispute, originating from the 1947 Partition of British India, remains a "frozen conflict" that serves as the central pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. Termed Pakistan's "jugular vein," the issue is deeply rooted in the Two-Nation Theory, which posits that Muslim-majority regions should belong to a sovereign Muslim state. Beyond ideological motivations, Kashmir provides Pakistan with critical strategic advantages, including water security via the Indus River and a northern gateway to Central Asia. Pakistan's policy has evolved through distinct phases: early UN-based diplomacy and military confrontation (1947–1965), a shift toward bilateralism after the 1972 Simla Agreement, and a subsequent era of proxy warfare and intense diplomatic campaigns beginning in the 1990s. Following India's 2019 revocation of Article 370, Pakistan has pivoted toward internationalizing the issue by highlighting human rights concerns in multilateral forums like the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. However, the conflict is increasingly characterized by a "stability/instability paradox," where nuclear deterrence prevents full-scale war but encourages limited skirmishes and proxy conflicts. This ongoing stalemate, exacerbated by India's insistence on a bilateral resolution and Pakistan's reliance on its strategic partnership with China, continues to hinder regional economic integration and South Asian security. Consequently, the Kashmir issue remains the intractable axis around which Pakistan's international relations and national identity revolve.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Kashmir Conflict

The Kashmir dispute has its roots in the cauldron of events that followed the Partition of British India in 1947, when India and Pakistan came into existence. Jammu and Kashmir were a princely state which had a Hindu monarch, Maharaja Hari Singh and a Muslim majority. The demographics and geographical location made Kashmir's situation rather cloudy and controversial. After the demise of British supremacy,



the princely states were supposed to accede to either India or Pakistan, depending on the demographics and geographic location of their citizens. For Kashmir, this factor was complicated by the Hindu ruler and Muslim majority, and this was a point of political and ideological issues between the two young states (Mukhtar, 2021; Zagoria & Ganguly, 1986). Also, the Kashmir issue has a historical background that also involves the larger ideological fault lines that had emerged in the process of British exit. The Indian National Congress has called for a secular, inclusive politics while Muslim League, led primarily by Muslim interests, demanded the establishment of a separate Muslim state namely Pakistan. The Kashmir symbolism of the religious and territorial tangle came to represent the unsolvable problems created by partition (Zagoria & Ganguly, 1986).

In late 1947, when militias from the tribes of the state were threatening to invade Jammu and Kashmir and the Maharaja was forced to sign the Instrument of Accession which made Jammu and Kashmir a part of the Dominion of India. It was a strategic decision because the Maharaja wanted to procure military support to ward off the invasion. However, accession by Pakistan was refused as the majority of Kashmiris were Muslims and Pakistan argued that Kashmir was a Muslim majority region and, hence, should be included in Pakistan, and thus, a war broke out that escalated into the first Indo-Pakistani war (1947-1948). This war brought about a cease-fire brokered by the United Nations and led to the formation of the Line of Control (LoC) which is a de facto border between the land and the Pakistani controlled land. The status of Kashmir is yet to be resolved and the region is militarised with the LoC being a symbol of the issue (Aggarwal, 2004; Mukhtar, 2021).

The first Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir not only imposed Kashmir as a dispute, but also paved the way for the continuation of conflict in the region, further strengthening the nationalistic narrative in the two countries. Pakistan's submission made primarily on the basis of the right of Muslim majority to rule Kashmir, whereas India had approximately aligned itself with the accession to Kashmir and the principle of secular government which included minorities. This dispute has since led to several wars, ongoing violence and a complicated socio-political situation involving Kashmir, along with serious human rights abuses and a cycle of retribution between the Indian authorities, the Pakistani authorities and the Kashmiri factions themselves (Bhat, 2019; Mukhtar, 2021).

1.2 Significance of the Kashmir Issue in Pakistan's Foreign Policy

The Kashmir region is of great strategic and emotional importance for Pakistan, and is even called Pakistan's "jugular vein". This metaphor highlights Kashmir's role in the national identity, security and geopolitical agenda of Pakistan. Kashmir is not only being considered as a territorial dispute but also being perceived as a part of Pakistan's very *raison d'être*, which is strongly linked with the foundational ideology that led to the establishment of Pakistan-the two-nation theory (Pande, 2011).

The two-nation theory suggests that Muslims and Hindus in British India were two distinct nations with incommensurable religious, cultural and political differences, which justifies the establishment of an independent Muslim state (Pakistan) representing the interests of the Muslims. Particularly, Kashmir, though Muslim majority, had a Hindu ruler, became a symbol of its failure to materialise. One of the reasons supporting the claim of Pakistan over Kashmir is that the region should have joined a Muslim homeland since it was Muslim majority. This ideology continues to be the basis for Pakistan's claim and involvement in Kashmir, which is connected with its very identity as a Muslim state (Bhat, 2019; Pande, 2011).

Besides, Kashmir has immense strategic importance for Pakistan due to its geographical position. It acts as the northern gateway to connect Pakistan with Central Asia and is of high importance for security and economic concerns. Pakistan's control over Kashmir not only gives it control over vital water resources but also over its defensive capability against India and also its influence in shaping the regional geopolitics of South Asia. Therefore, the loss of Kashmir or an undesirable status quo is seen as detrimental to Pakistan's sovereignty and strategic position and hence, Kashmir is termed as the "jugular vein" of

Pakistan. This deep-rooted sentiment has shaped Pakistan's enduring political, diplomatic and even military involvement in the Kashmir conflict (Pande, 2011; Yaseen et al., 2016).

Kashmir conflict also influences and is influenced by Pakistan's foreign policy. Ever since its establishment, Pakistan has been deeply affected by the Kashmir issue, particularly in its dealings with India. The foreign policy objectives of Pakistan have been focused on securing international opinion in the favor of Kashmir issue, balancing India's influence in the region, and developing alliances that would increase the security and strategic position of Pakistan. For example, Pakistan has made contacts with the international and regional players including China, the United States, Islamic countries to strengthen military and diplomatic capabilities in the context of Kashmir. The exchange suggests that Kashmir cannot be understood without Kashmir, because Pakistan's foreign policy is still dependent upon it and the conflict is an axis around which all foreign policies of Pakistan revolve (Pande, 2011).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Dominance of Kashmir in Pakistan's Foreign Policy

As Kashmir issue has been a huge phenomenon since its inception in 1947, it has significantly influenced Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic perspective. The Kashmir issue has been a recurring theme in Pakistan's foreign affairs and is deeply linked to its national identity and security concerns. This Kashmir issue becomes the basis of Pakistan's foreign policy, regional partnerships, and defence policies (Pande, 2011).

The Kashmir issue is not just about the territory; it is also indicative of the ideology of the Pakistan movement and the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was founded, justifying the establishment of Pakistan as a Muslim homeland from the Hindu majority India. Since Kashmir is a predominantly Muslim area and its accession with India has never been resolved, the Pakistani claim has been continuously put forward on the international platform and they are being active in this regard. The Kashmir issue is a pivotal component of Pakistan's foreign policy agenda, playing a significant role in bilateral relations with India and international dynamics. The Kashmir issue has been a central part of Pakistan's foreign policy agenda, influencing bilateral relations with India and international dynamics across various aspects of the country's policy making.

The struggle for the Kashmiris to exercise their right to self-determination. The movement for the Right to Self-Determination of Kashmiris.

Self-determination of Kashmiris is one of the cornerstones of Pakistan's foreign policy rhetoric. Every time Pakistan has tried to sell Kashmir as a human rights issue, it has always done so by emphasizing on the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and has tried to sell any international campaign based on the premise that Kashmiris should have the right to decide their political fate freely. This strategy has been a move to undermine India's administrative authority over Kashmir and to gain sympathy and interest from the outside world, pitting Kashmir as a cause of justice, freedom and not just a border dispute (Wirsing, 2004).

2.2 Strategies of Internationalization

Pakistan has tried to go international by employing multilateral diplomacy by engaging in various international organizations and forums including the United Nations and requesting influential states to intervene or exert pressure on India to resolve the issue. Though it has not been successful so far, the internationalization of the Kashmir issue is designed to keep the world engaged in the issue and will give Kashmir a diplomatic leverage in order to stop the dispute from turning into a purely bilateral one, where India is in majority control. This approach is consistent with Pakistan's acceptance that international opinion and intervention might be able to change the status quo supporting its claims (Wirsing, 2004).

Diplomatic pressures have been supported by periodic military pressure on the Line of Control (LoC) and Pakistan's alleged covert involvement in supporting the insurgents in Indian-administered Kashmir. This is because Pakistan has a double game in line with its Kashmir agenda which is to put pressure on India

through its control challenge and to sow the seeds of political instability. But it is such insurgency related practices that have led to international condemnation and created hindrances in Pakistan's diplomacy. Meanwhile, Pakistan consistently continues to maintain an active Kashmir issue, by deploying military and paramilitary forces along the LoC, and thus never allowing it to become normalised with India (Wirsing, 2004).

The centrality of Kashmir in Pakistan's foreign policy has further exacerbated South Asian security dilemma and continued adverse Indo-Pak relations. The Kashmiri policy of Pakistan has sought to serve its own goals of protecting Muslim Kashmiris' rights and also limit the influence of India in the region, but it has also resulted in periodic wars, cross-border militancy and tensions in the international diplomatic arena regarding the conflict. Despite all attempts of dialogue, the intermittent peace negotiations and ceasefire, Kashmir continues to remain a 'frozen conflict' which is integral to Pakistan's external policy framework (Ganguly et al., 2018).

2.3 Ideological, Strategic, and Domestic Considerations

The basic two-nation theory is the bedrock of Pakistan's Kashmir policy, that Muslims and Hindus are two nations which need two states. The Muslim majority population of Kashmir puts it right at the heart of the Pakistani ideology, reinforcing the idea that Kashmir is rightfully part of Pakistan as the home of South Asian Muslims. This ideology has led to the consistent demand of Pakistan that Kashmir be part of Pakistan and that it be granted freedom and self-determination to the Kashmiri Muslims. This ideological motivation is not just for territorial control but also to preserve the 'religious and national identity' which Pakistan was established to protect (Pande, 2011; Pye & Schofield, 2000).

Besides, this ideology is reinforced and reinforced in the political discourse and the national identity discourse in Pakistan. The Kashmir policy is an expression of the unfinished partition project, and the government's move justifies its overall strategic stance against India, claiming that India had violated the concepts of partition when it annexed Kashmir. It is in this ideological justification that this is also politically useful domestically as the diversity of the population is unified around a shared cause which is presented as a struggle against Indian oppression and in the name of Muslim brethren (Ismail et al., 2025). Kashmir is strategically significant, not just for the ideology. In terms of geopolitics, Kashmir land is of great importance for Pakistan's strategic penetration in the competition with India. Control and influence of Kashmir gives Pakistan an important buffer zone which affects military defense and regional power projection. The rugged topography of Kashmir has proved to be strategic for Pakistan in contestations in the region (Pye & Schofield, 2000).

Notably, this area plays an important role in Pakistan's water security. Kashmir is the source of water to the Indus and its streams which are important for agriculture and hydroelectric power production in Pakistan. Control/influence of these headwaters is a very basic national security interest as any reduction in these water resources would compromise Pakistan's economic stability and food security. As a result, environmental and resource security are interlinked with the Kashmir issue in multiple ways and consequently, it has gained priority in the overall strategic calculations of Pakistan (Sarjito, 2024).

Furthermore, the Kashmir region is also a part of Pakistan's larger geopolitical considerations in the backdrop of the South Asian landscape. The Kashmir conflict also plays a significant part in the military alliances and foreign policy of Pakistan, especially when it comes to major powers looking to secure strategic leverage in the region. Pressure on Kashmir is the best way to repel Indian dominance and convince Pakistan of its relevance in international circles based on this unresolved conflict.

Kashmir is also a key province in the development of national unity and political discourse in Pakistan. The Kashmir cause serves as a symbol of the nation, using it as a political rallying point and a means of building a national identity in the ethnolinguistic mosaic and political fracture of Pakistan. It can serve as a rally call for nationalism, surmounting internal differences and fostering unity against external challenges (Ismail et al., 2025). Besides, the Kashmir issue is being used as a political tool at home to justify political regimes and to give legitimacy to military institutions which see their role as maintaining

security in the Muslim homeland, and defending the rights of Kashmiri Muslims. This is the point at which popular support becomes enough and defence spending and policies geared towards Kashmir are justified, though there are internal issues like political instability, ethnic tensions, economic difficulties, etc. (Ismail et al., 2025).

The focus and continued discussion on Kashmir in education, media and public discourse continue to strengthen the Kashmir issue as an integral part of Pakistan's national narrative. This strategy not only sustains the political momentum and public awareness of the Kashmir issue but also guarantees that it remains an integral part of the conflict regardless of shifts in domestic political dynamics (Ahmad et al., 2025).

2.4 Evolution and Reciprocal Influence

The 1947–1965 Phase, Diplomacy at the UN and Military Options, is designed to ensure a cohesive and coherent method for organizing and assigning the activities.

The early years of independence were also marked by protests by Pakistan against the accession of Kashmir to India after the Instrument of Accession was signed by the Maharaja Hari Singh to India during a tribal invasion backed by Pakistan. This triggered the first Indo-Pakistani war (1947-1948), culminating in a UN-brokered ceasefire, which marked the founding of the Line of Control (LoC) between the Indian and Pakistani controlled parts of Kashmir, effectively splitting it into two parts (Mukhtar, 2021).

In this period, Pakistan did a lot of diplomacy work to put the Kashmir issue on the agenda of the United Nations, and demanded self-determination for Kashmiris and intervention in the matter. The UN brokered arrangements to stop fighting and organized a plebiscite, but neither came to pass, as there were no agreements. Pakistan's diplomatic move was to go global and not bilateral, as they established Kashmir as a global issue instead of bilateral issue (Wirsing, 2004). At the same time, Pakistan lagged behind in rejecting military alternatives and instead fought two wars with India (1947-48 and 1965), and continued to pursue military conflicts as well as diplomatic avenues to isolate and exert pressure on India for Kashmir (Pearson & Baumann, 1993).

The 1972–80s Phase was a period of transition towards bilateralism and international support.

After the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971 and the Simla agreement in 1972, there was a dramatic change from international forums to bilateral diplomacy between India and Pakistan. The Simla Agreement has effectively converted the LoC into a de facto border and put a greater focus on bilateral talks between the two parties as the main instrument for resolving the Kashmir issue, thus diminishing the importance of third-party involvement, including the UN (Wirsing, 2004).

Pakistan tried to retain the help of Western powers and Muslim nations, claiming the Kashmir issue was a matter of Muslim rights and self-determination. Strategic alliances were attempted in order to emerge out of it through multilateral forums and build diplomatic relations in order to strengthen Pakistan's hand. Military posturing went on, but with greater emphasis on "diplomatic manoeuvring" and efforts at dialogue, with some peace talks in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Wirsing, 2004).

In the 1990s-2000s Phase, the emphasis was on proxy warfare and diplomatic campaigns. The 1990s-2000s Phase focused on proxy warfare and diplomatic campaigns.

When the armed insurgency erupted in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1989-1990, it represented a new order of affairs that was marked by proxy warfare and a stepped up diplomatic campaign. Pakistan was severely criticized for supporting the insurgent groups to destabilize the Indian control in Kashmir through a non conventional approach of armed struggle without the declaration of war (Ganguly et al., 2018; Wirsing, 2004).

In addition to the clandestine military operation, Pakistan also engaged in strong diplomatic campaigns to sustain the Kashmir issue on the international discourse. Diplomatic campaigns focused on human rights violation by the Indian security forces and obtained sympathy from the world through the media and international forums. On the other hand, India depicted the war as a struggle against terrorism and the

defense of its territory, making it more difficult to respond from an international perspective (Ahmad et al., 2025; Bhat, 2019).

During this period, there were occasional military escalations both on the LoC and in the effort to attempt dialogue, such as peace summits and ceasefires, but these were hampered by mutual distrust and violent incidents. When both sides developed the nuclear capability the conflict gained a nuclear character and led to greater international apprehension and demands for a restraint (Wirsing, 2004).

2.5 Post 2019 Developments

The consequences of the revocation of Article 370 and Article 35A. Effect of Revocation of Article 370 and 35A. The revocation basically ended J&K's partial autonomy and resulted in the division of the state into two federally administered territories. The revocation, while touting economic opportunities and administrative integration, brought political unrest and heightened alienation to many Kashmiris. The issue of women's rights is rhetorically foregrounded as a catalyst for the change, but the analyses indicate that there are contradictions between the rhetoric and the current legal status of women's property rights in Kashmir. In addition to the legal and economic debate, the revocation was accompanied by a rise of nationalist rhetoric, which frequently was gendered and ethnic, and even further increased division and social tension. The protest by Kashmiri women against this political transformation has revealed their agency and brought into the limelight ongoing human rights concerns with the conflict (Aslam & Sudan, 2021; Kazi, 2022).

The economic aspirations of some youth, particularly in the Jammu region, for better infrastructure, agriculture, tourism and investments for recovery and development are huge but high unemployment rates, political instability etc. are challenges to economic recovery. Along with this, the revival of local industries, education and clear development projects has been considered essential to achieve economic benefits after revocation, while there remains a level of uncertainty as a result of the persistent security and political problems (Aslam & Sudan, 2021).

As a reaction, the government of Pakistan stepped up its human rights advocacy efforts in international forums rather than talking about a bilateral territorial dispute, instead pointing at the Kashmiris' basic rights and freedoms being violated. This approach is based on the numerous instances of human rights violations in Kashmir over the years such as political repression, curfews, communications blackout, violations by security forces and so on, that have impacted millions of Kashmiris across the social, economic and cultural spectrums (Bhat, 2019).

These human rights issues have been played up to create sympathy for Pakistan on the international stage, with a call upon the United Nations and other multilateral bodies to put pressure on India. The heightened emphasis on human rights advocacy signifies a new approach that seeks to bring the Kashmir issue to the international agenda, which is present in the context of challenges in conventional diplomatic avenues. Pakistan uses legal and normative aspects of human rights of the international community in its articulation of Kashmir as a rights issue and a question of freedom, thereby portraying itself as a human rights defender and arguing the need for an internationally mediated resolution (Bhat, 2019).

The influence on the international status of the Kashmir issue remains an issue. The impact of the Kashmir issue on the international status has been a matter of concern.

The policy of human rights based advocacy has positively and negatively affected the status of Kashmir issue on the international forum in Pakistan. Human rights groups and certain countries have voiced concerns about the situation following August 2019, while many global powers have generally shown restraint in Kashmir and have only discussed restraint, with no direct involvement. Geopolitical interests and strategic alliances can temper the international community's reaction and restrict meaningful action or legal shifts on Kashmir's "global agenda" (Bhat, 2019).

However, Pakistan's relentless attempt to make Kashmir's human rights violations known to the world has brought human rights and humanitarian aspects to the forefront of the discussions, alongside the territory issue. This multi-dimensional approach continually challenges India diplomatically, while India continues

to assert its stance on Kashmir as an internal issue. Despite being a prolonged and frozen conflict, the Kashmir dispute is being handled by a "new" Pakistan which has been employing an adaptive tactic to find legitimacy and international attention via human rights discourse (Bhat 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative and Descriptive Analysis

The document provides a comprehensive and detailed analysis of the Kashmir conflict, treating it as a "frozen conflict". It synthesizes various political, strategic, and ideological dimensions rather than using quantitative or statistical data.

3.2 Historical Research Method

The study employs a longitudinal approach, tracing the evolution of the conflict through distinct chronological phases to understand how policy has shifted over time:

1947–1965 Phase: Focus on UN diplomacy and early military options.

1972–1980s Phase: Transition toward bilateralism following the Simla Agreement.

1990s–2000s Phase: Focus on proxy warfare and heightened diplomatic campaigns.

Post-2019 Developments: Analysis of the impact of the revocation of Article 370 and 35A.

3.3 Extensive Literature Review

The research builds upon existing scholarship and "previous studies," citing numerous experts in the field (such as Ganguly, Wirsing, and Pande) to contextualize the conflict within international relations. It utilizes secondary sources, including:

Scholarly articles and books.

International resolutions (such as UN-brokered ceasefires).

Diplomatic agreements (like the Simla Agreement).

3.4 Theoretical Frameworks

The analysis is grounded in several political and security theories:

Two-Nation Theory: Used as the ideological bedrock to explain Pakistan's foundational claim to Kashmir.

Stability/Instability Paradox: Applied to explain the "nuclear dimension," where the presence of nuclear weapons discourages full-scale war but encourages limited proxy or militant conflicts.

Frozen Conflict Theory: Used to describe the intractable nature of the dispute despite decades of shifts in the global order.

Strategic Signaling: Employed to understand the crises and communication between India and Pakistan.

3.5 Multi-Dimensional Analytical Lens

The methodology examines the issue through several interrelated lenses to provide a holistic view:

Geopolitical/Strategic: Analyzing the role of major powers (China, USA) and regional infrastructure (CPEC).

Ideological: Focusing on national identity and religious fault lines.

Humanitarian: Integrating human rights advocacy and the lived reality of the Kashmiri people into the political discourse.

Domestic: Considering how the Kashmir cause is used as a political tool for national unity within Pakistan.

4. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 STALEMATE IN POSITIONS AND ASYMMETRY

One of the major differences between the two nations, India and Pakistan, in the Kashmir conflict is the extreme asymmetry of their stances, which plays a significant part in the impasse of the conflict. The Indians' stance is rooted in their claim of Kashmir being an integral and inalienable part of the Indian territory, which means that there was no talk of its separation or any third-party involvement in the matter (Yaseen et al., 2016). This position pushes India to always reject all forms of third-party mediation talks on Kashmir and only take the dispute up with Pakistan. India considers the process of internationalisation

as a breach of its territorial integrity and a hindrance towards peaceful resolution (Wirsing, 2004; Yaseen et al., 2016).

On its side, Pakistan demands third-party mediation and international forums and emphasizes Kashmiri self-determination and rights as per the historical UN resolutions. But India has refused to give way to such outside interference to this conflict, with bilateral negotiations sometimes breaking down due to mutual mistrust and unwillingness to compromise, and this has contributed to the standoff that has been in place for more than seven decades (Yaseen et al., 2016).

The asymmetry also finds expression in the security and conflict arenas, particularly in view of both countries' nuclear arsenal. The area is an excellent example of the "stability/instability paradox," which states that nuclear weapons further add to the likelihood of limited conventional wars. In exchange, Pakistan occasionally engages in small-scale proxy or militant attacks within the Indian controlled Kashmir, as a political tactic to shift the focus from Kashmir to the international arena and to put pressure on India, whereas India restrains itself in proportionate response to prevent the escalation to a war with the risk of escalation into a nuclear war (Kapur, 2005).

This paradoxical risk generates a situation of constant tension and increasing militancy, with armed groups increasingly continuing their acts of violence even during ceasefire periods, thereby keeping the region in a state of instability. The potential nuclear threat is a deterrent to "full-scale" war, and it also encourages proxy war and limited skirmishing, making the war a constant security dilemma of high risk for broader violence (Kapur, 2005; Wirsing, 2004).

4.2 International and Regional Implications

Pakistan's foreign policy on Kashmir and the security of the region are greatly shaped by its geopolitical limitations, alliances and constraints, especially with China and the Muslim countries, and its inherent limitations on foreign policy flexibility and regional economic integration and peace.

Pakistan has attained strong diplomatic backing from China, which has made their relationship a strategic partnership built on the foundation of long-term friendship and "complex interdependence." This alliance began shortly after the independence of Pakistan, and has become more than just a military or diplomatic partnership; it is now a robust economic partnership, particularly in the form of initiatives such as the CPEC. CPEC is expected to be a game-changer in the region and bring important infrastructure and connectivity connectivity to Pakistan between Gwadar and China's Xinjiang region. China, on the other hand, provides Pakistan with diplomatic support on international platforms, thus safeguarding Pakistan against pressures due to the Kashmir issue and countering Indian influence in the region (I. Hussain et al., 2020; M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

Likewise, Pakistan has different degrees of backing from the Muslim majority countries which have at times expressed solidarity on Kashmir as a human rights and self-determination matter, as a Muslim concern. These countries have also extended diplomatic support in international forums like Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in order to keep the Kashmir issue as an international matter and global eyes on the alleged violations in Indian administered Kashmir. This support, however, has been somewhat inconsistent owing to wider geopolitical considerations, as well as to each individual country's relationship with India and the rest of the world (Wirsing, 2004).

Though these alliances, Pakistan foreign policy flexibility has been limited due to various reasons. The fact that it has been extremely dependent on China in both economic and diplomatic investments means that Islamabad is restricted in its diplomatic maneuverability in the broader geopolitical context. The strained relations with the western powers accentuate this dependency as there are concerns regarding the support of militancy and terrorism by Pakistan, which renders it difficult to obtain diversified diplomatic partners and economic partners (I. Hussain et al., 2020; M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

Furthermore, Pakistan's attention towards Kashmir-centric conflict posturing and the emphasis on security issues over economic and regional cooperation have limited its ability to be proactive in the arena of multilateral economic cooperation. Hostilities with the dominant economic power in South Asia, India,

further hinder Pakistan's contribution to regional initiatives such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which also narrows economic opportunities and political engagement in South Asia (Kumar, 2019; Shah et al., 2025).

4.3 Impact on Economic Integration and Regional Peace

The foreign policy orientation of Pakistan due to its alliances and constraints has far-reaching implications for regional economic integration and peace. If the political and security situation allows, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has the potential to prove to be a regional economic catalyst with broad and far-reaching infrastructure and connectivity advantages. But the project also adds to the geopolitical tensions in the region, especially with India, who considers CPEC as encroaching on Kashmir's sovereign territory. This rivalry has detrimental impact not just on the economic cooperation, but even on regional security as well (M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

Further, Pakistan has limited flexibility in its diplomacy, has not engaged in regional integration with the neighbouring countries beyond strategic alliances, and the Kashmir issue remains unresolved. The regional cooperation in the field of economy is yet to be satisfactory in the SAARC and other regional organisations, which is limiting the possibilities for regional growth and perpetuating the instability in the region. The rivalry between Pakistan and India is continuing and is now a security dilemma that hinders peacebuilding efforts and mutual economic interdependence, both important for a sustainable development in the region (Kumar, 2019; Shah et al., 2025; Wirsing, 2004).

4.4 Statement of the Issues

The complexity of the Kashmir issue and the fact that it is a frozen conflict, combined with the changing regional and international dynamics in which it continues, only emphasize the need of a detailed and up-to-date study of the conflict and Pakistan's foreign policy. The issue of Kashmir has yet to be resolved and remains one of the most intractable and unresolved issue in modern day of international relations despite decades of animosity, military confrontations and diplomacy in the region, with serious implications for the regional security and stability in South Asia (Ganguly et al., 2018).

The need for an updated analysis. Justification for an updated analysis.

The current deadlock and the changing geopolitical dynamics the nuclearization of the crisis, the changing domestic politics in India and Pakistan, the new power dynamics in the world – justifies a fresh and different analytical approach to the Kashmir issue. However, the deadlock cannot be broken by traditional means and new developments like the 2019 revocation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir by India, new diplomatic moves in Pakistan, and greater involvement of other countries around the world require a fresh look (Wirsing, 2004). Furthermore, the study of protracted conflicts has been enriched by newer theories like the concept of “frozen conflicts” and the theory of “strategic signaling”, which has been crucial to understanding such long-running conflicts, particularly the sequential nature of the crises and signaling between India and Pakistan (Gartzke et al., 2017; Ganguly et al., 2018).

Pakistan's approach to Kashmir has varied between military, international and diplomatic means with differing levels of effectiveness. The use of proxy militancy and diplomacy to internationalise the Kashmir issue has kept the issue on the agenda and helped to hold the domestic political unity. But these methods are extremely expensive, with the risk of international criticism, economic sanctions, and internal political instability. Pakistan's promotion of Kashmir as a human rights issue in multilateral forums has reached a point of being successful in raising awareness, but in terms of influencing India's policy has not had much impact, nor has it resulted in consistent international mediation (Ganguly et al., 2018; Wirsing, 2004).

Moreover, military solutions raise the possibility of escalation in a nuclearized South Asia, which not only fails to solve the underlying political issues but also perpetuates the situation of insecurity. The “stability/instability paradox” refers to the fact that nuclear deterrence can help to facilitate limited conventional conflicts, as Pakistan has demonstrated, but also keeps a vicious cycle of violence alive that harms long-term peace (Wirsing, 2004). In terms of their policy flexibility, Pakistan's options are limited

by India's vehement opposition to third-party mediation and its insistence on bilateralism which further reduces the chances of third-party involvement supporting Pakistan's agenda (Ganguly et al., 2018).

1. Based on the above, the possible ways to defuse the Kashmir issue need to be multidimensional and adaptive, which would reflect the changed world order. These could involve:

2. Innovative Diplomacy and Signaling: Using credible signaling in calibrated diplomacy and military signaling can help to lower misperceptions and help to establish trust over time that can facilitate conflict management and resolution. New empirical learning about signaling can be used to optimize these policies to prevent unintended escalation (Gartzke et al., 2017).

2. Multilateral Engagement within a Bilateral Framework: India's approach is based on the bilateral approach; however, confidence building measures, humanitarian dialogues on human rights and economic cooperation, using multilateral norms and international institutions, can help set the stage for a bilaterals dialogue without breaching the core sensitivities.

3. Adapt to Global Geopolitical Shifts: Pakistan and India can also choose to embrace the larger geopolitical realignments including the evolving dynamics between the United States and China, the renewed global interest in regional stability and new technologies of diplomacy to facilitate constructive external engagement/mediation and thereby break the historical deadlock (Ganguly et al., 2018).

Including Non-Traditional Diplomacy Tools such as the use of humanitarian diplomacy and soft power tools including people-to-people engagement, cultural exchanges and global health diplomacy can help to reduce hostility and build mutual understanding and help to create grassroots support for peace (Kevany, 2014; Liadi, 2024).

6. Economic Integration and Regional Cooperation: In conclusion, promoting economic integration and regional cooperation could offer encouraging incentives outside of conflict dynamics, as regional economic benefits might push for de-escalation and collaboration (Ganguly et al., 2018).

- Kashmir dispute holds a central and defining role in the Pakistani foreign relations, not only Pakistan's bilateral relationship with India, but it also has an impact on Pakistan's relationship with regional and international actors. This centrality is due to Kashmir being a core issue of Pakistan, which has been brought to the fore since 1947, and is maintained by the ongoing political, military and diplomatic rivalry between Pakistan and India (Mukhtar 2021; Wirsing 2004).
- Kashmir's role as a pivot in Pakistan's foreign relations is emphasized. The role of Kashmir in Pakistan's foreign relations is highlighted.
- Pakistan has always associated Kashmir with the national identity as well as foreign policy agenda. Pakistan has always viewed the Kashmir issue as a question of self-determination and human rights, advocating for international intervention and highlighting perceived injustices faced by the Kashmiri people. The issue becomes a centre of gravity around which Pakistan can gather the support of the people of the country and build the narrative in international forums such as the United Nations and Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Further, Pakistan's diplomatic endeavours to mobilize Muslim countries and use international human rights norms reflect the strategic significance of Kashmir in Pakistan's foreign policy considerations (Bhat, 2019; Wirsing, 2004).
- In this way this Kashmir-centric approach influences Pakistan's relations more broadly and it is often that this attitude brings Pakistan into direct conflict with India, thereby restricting the possibilities of normalization and cooperation in South Asia. The Pakistan's Kashmir strategy also has an impact on the bilateral relationship between the country and the big powers of the world, as well as on the interests of those who are sensitive to instability in the region, escalation of nuclear tensions and terrorism (Yaseen et al., 2016).
- Regional and international implications of the peace and security situation. Regional and global peace and security implications

- The Kashmir issue brings in serious challenges to peace in the region as well as the world. Kashmir is a hotspot that can potentially escalate into a large-scale conventional or nuclear war, as it is a nuclearized conflict between two of the world's biggest nuclear powers, India and Pakistan. The nuclear dimension is accompanied by a paradox: the very prospect of a "nuclear war" exists alongside of the constant presence of "localized" military conflict, "proxy" warfare, and "militant" insurgency, which are often referred to as the "stability/instability paradox" (Wirsing, 2004).
- The Kashmir issue delays the process of integration and cooperation between the SAARC countries in the region, because every country has its own suspicion and hostility against each other, which has adversely affected the progress of the SAARC. The conflict consumes resources, it fuels a climate of insecurity and conflict, and it hinders economic and social progress throughout the region (Yaseen et al., 2016).
- The volatility of Kashmir also has implications on a global scale, with international actors closely watching for any potential signs of escalation and instability in a region of strategic importance. The conflict has also been "internationalized," as a number of political and security points of contact with global terrorism have also become apparent, particularly in the post-9/11 period and in relation to South Asian counterterrorism agendas and great power rivalries (Wirsing, 2004). Limited mediation in the past, India's insistence on bilateralism and Pakistan's calls for broad-based intervention has led to a diplomatic deadlock, with both sides appealing to the international community for restraint and dialogue.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Contribution to Existing Literature on the Kashmir Conflict

This detailed research on Kashmir in this context brings to enrich the existing scholarship with focus on the nuclear competition in region, international diplomacy and identity politics. This analysis builds on the previous studies that represented Kashmir as a frozen conflict, and emphasizes how multiple dimensions of the conflict such as political sovereignty, human rights concerns and religious identity faultlines interact to maintain the complexity of the conflict. (Ganguly et al, 2018; Wirsing, 2004)

It highlights the importance of seeing Kashmir not only as a matter of territorial claims but also as an issue of human rights abuses suffered by Kashmiris. It places the Kashmir issue in the context of a wider game of nuclear brinkmanship, regional contestation and the boundaries of international involvement or bilateral deals (Bhat, 2019). The inclusion of geopolitical, social and identity-based factors in the study offers a holistic understanding which not only has a policy relevance but also a research value—Resolution efforts need to take into account the multifaceted nature of regional security and the lived reality of Kashmiri people.

5.2 Conclusion

The conclusions drawn from the analysis highlight multiple interlinked aspects of Kashmir conflict and Pakistan's foreign policy. First of all, Kashmir issue is a very old, very protract conflict, and basically, a "frozen conflict" with a constant possibility of resurgence of violence. However, despite various diplomatic gestures and partial peace initiatives, a permanent solution is yet to be found, partly because of the stalemate and imbalanced stances of both countries and the intricate regional and international interplay (Ganguly et al., 2018).

Pakistan's foreign policy is highly influenced by Kashmir related historical and strategic considerations. For Pakistan, it has been a priority since inception to balance the regional superiority of India and the issue of Kashmir as a fundamental issue of national and foreign policy. Pakistan's dependence on alliances, particularly China and Muslim countries, to strengthen its diplomatic and security position vis-à-vis India has been a key factor. Further, Pakistan's foreign policy has emphasized the need to maintain the international discourse on Kashmir, mainly by highlighting human rights abuses, calling on multilateral

organizations, and utilizing diplomatic channels to internationalise the issue, which is limited by India's demand for bilateral solution (Pande, 2011; Wirsing, 2004).

The relationship between Pakistan's foreign policy and Kashmir issue is cyclical and reinforcing. Kashmir is both a prism and an engine of Pakistan's foreign policy, and plays a pivotal role in both bilateral and multilateral relations. On the other hand, Pakistan's foreign policy decisions, such as backing proxy militancy, diplomatic efforts, and alliances, exacerbate the conflict's ongoing status by deepening the conflict and making conflict resolution more difficult. This complex relationship keeps Kashmir playing an important role in Pakistan's international demeanor and regional security issues, which keeps the situation in a state of impasse and security dilemma in South Asia (Ganguly et al., 2018; Pande, 2011).

To sum up, the Kashmir issue is inextricably tied with Pakistan's foreign policy, and the foreign policy of Pakistan itself has affected and been influenced by the Kashmir issue, which has existed from time immemorial. This interaction affects bilateral relations with India and regional security architectures and international diplomacy in general, highlighting the need for multi-layered, nuanced approaches to conflict management and possible resolution (Pande, 2011; Wirsing, 2004).

5.3 Future Research Directions

The Kashmir issue and the larger South Asia security scenario remain complex and contentious, and remain a subject of scholarly interest, which requires constant adaptation to the changing geo-political realities. Several pathways for future research and consideration of emerging trends are highlighted based on the existing literature to further the understanding and to guide policy.

Ideas for further study on the Kashmir issue and on security in South Asia:

Dynamic Analysis of “Frozen Conflict” Trajectories:

As Kashmir has been described as a “frozen conflict” with the potential of a peaceful or violent thaw or a further stalemate, future studies may utilize an empirical and theoretical longitudinal approach to trace the various transformation processes over the years. An examination of the conditions, triggers, and actors that make a change between peaceful thawing, violent renewal, and intractable persistence would enhance understanding of pathways to conflict management and resolution (Ganguly et al., 2018).

2. Regio-Alliance and Rivalry relations:

There is a need for more research on the influence of South Asian regional geopolitics, including changing dynamics and stances of Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and other regional countries, on conflict dynamics and diplomatic stances. The study of these trilateral/multilateral linkages could unveil fresh prospects and challenges for peace and regional cooperation in Bangladesh as the nation has become more autonomous and has come to a balance between its ties with India, China and Pakistan (Shah et al., 2025).

3. Effect of the Major Infrastructure and Economic Corridors:

The CPEC is an economic and geopolitical programme that is of momentous significance. Understanding the implications of these mega connectivity initiatives for bilateral relations and regional power relations and security perceptions is very important. It would be useful if research could be done that takes CPEC's economic changing dynamics in consideration and accounts for geopolitical prodding and consequential strategic rivalry. (M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019)

The four cases were presented: nuclearization and Stability-Instability Paradox Revisited:

The seemingly paradoxical impact of nuclear weapons on South Asian security demands further empirical and theoretical study and research, particularly on the nature of crisis behavior, the stability of deterrence and the nature of conventional conflict. The role of nuclear deterrence in creating limited conflict and proxy warfare needs to be explored and understood better before devising de-escalation strategies (Kapur, 2008).

5. Cybersecurity and Non-Traditional Areas of Conflict

There is a current gap in the literature on cyber dimensions of South Asian conflicts, as cyber conflicts are becoming more and more similar to and complementing traditional geopolitical conflicts. A comparative analysis of cyber conflicts, their influence on military conflicts, and their applications in international

relations may help policymakers to tackle new security concerns in a comprehensive manner (Dong et al., 2025).

6. Humanitarian and Human Rights Dimensions:

In the context of the significant human rights issues in Kashmir and their contribution to the continuation of grievances, interdisciplinary work combining conflict resolution and humanitarian diplomacy and human rights commitment is crucial. The progressive use of new models of diplomacy that integrate security and people-centred approaches can help improve conflict transformation in more sustainable ways (Ganguly et al. 2018; Liadi 2024).

5.4 Consideration of Emerging Trends and Potential Geopolitical Shifts

The changing strategic rivalries and cooperation between major powers, such as the growing role of China in the region through its CPEC and the United States' pivot towards South Asia — are transforming the security landscape in the region. These dynamics can be conducive to new opportunities for mediation, put new strains on relationships, or shift alliances, requiring careful scholarly monitoring (M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

There are signs of a possible realignment in South Asia, with Bangladesh striving to develop a more independent foreign policy and Pakistan making its diplomatic adjustment. It will be relevant to see how these changes affect security cooperation in the region such as under SAARC or BIMSTEC in the context of the region of Kashmir (Shah et al., 2025).

With the evolution of cyber warfare, surveillance, and information operations, there are new layers to be added to the old security dilemmas. These new domains may crosscut with regional rivalry, and their use and governance could either create or aid in conflict resolution (Dong et al., 2025).

Projects such as CPEC have been presented as a way to develop and connect the region, but they also can clash with India over territorial issues and increase mistrust, thus complicating the peace dividends. There will be an important space of research in the future where economic globalisation is juxtaposed with entrenched political conflicts (M. Hussain & Jamali, 2019)..

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