

Research Article

Navigating the Strategic Triangle of South Asia: Analyzing the Power Dynamics Between China, India and Pakistan

Zahoor Ahmad Dar^{*} , **Shanaza Janbaz**

Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, India

Abstract

This research paper examines the complex and changing power dynamics within the strategic triangle of South Asia, concentrating on the interactions and relationships among China, India, and Pakistan. It examines the historical context and current developments that have influenced the geopolitical dynamics of the region, emphasizing the complex nature of bilateral and multilateral interactions among these three countries. The paper asserts that strategic relationships in South Asia are defined by an intricate interplay of cooperation and competition, shaped by external influences and regional ambitions. It analyzes critical themes, including territorial conflicts, military advancements, economic alliances, and diplomatic efforts, highlighting China's emergence as a dominant force and its influence on India-Pakistan relations. This paper enhances the comprehension of South Asia's geopolitical intricacies and contends that the future of peace and stability in the region depends on acknowledging and managing the fundamental power dynamics among China, India, and Pakistan. The study highlights the need for sophisticated diplomatic efforts and strategic planning from all stakeholders to reduce conflicts and promote collaborative security arrangements in a swiftly evolving global environment.

Keywords

South Asia, Pakistan, India, Power Politics, Strategic Triangle, China

1. Introduction

India and China, two influential powers in the region, exhibit striking similarities in both their historical and contemporary contexts. Historically, both nations were distinguished civilizations, achieving remarkable advancements in technology and scholarship. However, they ultimately faced decline due to a variety of factors, including weakened political structures, internal and external rivalries, heightened social polarization, economic stagnation, and the prevalence of dogmatic beliefs and superstitions alongside external invasions. A notable aspect of both countries is the nature of their political systems, heavily influenced by the ideologies of

Hegel and Marx, which have fostered governance structures that impede economic progress. This scenario parallels the historical experience of ancient Egypt, where, despite the Pharaohs' implementation of beneficial agricultural policies, their rigid adherence to these ideas made them ill-equipped to adapt to changing circumstances. Likewise, the physiocratic school of thought, particularly the Queen's perceived wisdom regarding agriculture, illustrated a similar inflexibility in policy-making.

During the post-medieval era, the Indian sub-continent remained under British colonial rule. The governance estab-

^{*}Corresponding author: Zahooradar.psscholar@kashmiruniversity.net (Zahoor Ahmad Dar)

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lished by the British was characterized by an authoritarian approach, particularly affecting those in administrative roles, while the agrarian populace, primarily farmers, operated under a system known as Jarenah, which reflected similar hierarchical structures. [1] In contrast, within China, there were instances where military leaders challenged the government's unjust policies, showcasing a degree of resistance against the colonial administration. Before World War II, Japan was similarly aligned with these colonial frameworks, functioning under the same oppressive systems as many other nations. In China, the colonial regime lasted longer and was eventually dismantled through widespread uprisings led by the populace. [2] This upheaval was widely interpreted as a shift towards a Communist system, reflecting the people's desire for change and representation. In contemporary times, both China and India have emerged as significant powers on the global stage, each navigating their unique forms of governance. While both countries are often associated with communist ideologies in their historical contexts, they operate within capitalist economies today. Despite their differing political frameworks, China and India have successfully integrated elements of capitalism, contributing to their economic growth and increasing influence in world affairs.

The geopolitical significance of the Indian Subcontinent has been a focal point in international relations since ancient times. Its strategic location has fostered crucial connections with great civilizations, including the Arabs, Persians, Romans, Turks, Mongols, and various European powers. [3] As trade and military operations flowed through this region, it became a critical hub influencing the stability of surrounding nations. However, some political analysts emphasize that the importance of the South Asian landmass extends beyond mere economic transactions. They argue that it exerts a negative strategic significance due to the destabilizing conflicts and wars that spill over into neighbouring areas, creating a climate of fear. The political dynamics of adjacent states have been profoundly shaped by their geographical proximity to the subcontinent, which connects them to the Middle East, West Asia, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Far East. The geopolitical ties that the region maintains with these areas are essential, driven by transit routes, migration patterns, cultural exchanges, environmental issues, territorial disputes, and, at times, military conflicts. Understanding these complexities acknowledges the enduring frustrations and challenges within the international system, making the Indian Subcontinent a region of paramount importance.

Poverty, ignorance, and self-interest have significantly contributed to the disconnection between political, institutional, and economic activities in the South Asian region. [4] This disunity has been exacerbated by the contradictory actions of conservatives, radical nationalists, frontiersmen, and intellectuals, all of whom resist necessary adjustments. The international community is increasingly frustrated that, despite the region's potential for abundance and integration, South Asia is home to some of the most impoverished na-

tions and populations, largely due to social and religious strife, economic instability, and a convoluted political landscape. [5] The historical dialogues and tenuous defenses regarding neighbouring regions perpetuate pressing international issues linked to the Indian subcontinent, drawing the world's attention. Many believe that, with effective management, the potential to curb external influences is promising. Given the reality of interdependence with various regions, it is essential within international relations theory to advocate for a proactive regional approach from the Indian federal government. Such a strategy holds the promise of enhancing interactions and influence far beyond what identity-driven tactics can achieve, paving the way for greater power and stability.

Unlike India and Pakistan, who have developed a resentful relationship post-colonization, China has been actively seeking to assert its influence in South Asia. China's interest is driven by its perception of India as a threat, particularly regarding Tibet, and the fear of India's strategic containment policies. Similar to Japan, China views India's divided landscape as a potential nucleus for anti-China coalitions backed by the U.S. China is also aware of the growing military capabilities of its regional adversaries, which could lead to catastrophic outcomes. Unlike Japan, China aims to mitigate tensions through economic engagement, offering developmental opportunities in Southeast Asia while navigating its complex relationship with India and its Muslim counterpart. This rivalry may lead to a coalition among these groups against perceived threats from Beijing.

2. Theoretical Framework

The 'strategic triangle' framework has emerged as a dominant theoretical lens through which to analyze the intricate power dynamics among China, India, and Pakistan in post-Cold War South Asia. Through enhanced political and military collaboration, these three nations are actively reshaping the international landscape, particularly in Asia and South Asia. To truly grasp the complexities at play, it becomes crucial to critically evaluate the theoretical foundations of the 'strategic triangle.' Both the 'balance of power' and 'strategic triangle' concepts more effectively elucidate the fluctuating behaviours and interactions of these countries. It is beneficial to adopt an alternative theoretical framework that captures the diverse motivations and actions of these influential neighbours within the realm of power politics in South Asia. This paper seeks to integrate regional conflicts and strategic threats into the traditional balance of power analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the strategic interactions among China, India, and Pakistan in the post-Cold War context. By employing a two-dominant problem model, this analysis broadens the theoretical discourse surrounding the dynamics of Chinese-Indian and Chinese-Pakistani relations. Furthermore, with the escalating assertiveness and global influence of China, India, and Pakistan, the importance of

dissecting their power dynamics and cooperative initiatives in shaping the Asian geopolitical landscape becomes increasingly vital.

These nations have solidified their status as pivotal players in both regional and international matters, significantly influencing global geopolitical relationships and security dynamics. The interactions and collaborations among these countries hold significant potential to shape the future trajectory of not only South Asia but also the broader global order. It is, therefore, essential for scholars and policymakers to continuously explore and refine theoretical frameworks in order to gain deeper insights into the complexities of the 'strategic triangle.' This enhanced understanding will facilitate the development of effective strategies aimed at maintaining stability and addressing the challenges presented by this ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. We can achieve a more nuanced comprehension by examining the intricacies of the triangular relationship between China, India, and Pakistan. This insight will not only contribute to fostering peace, security, and prosperity in South Asia but will also have implications that extend beyond the region's borders.

3. Geopolitical Interests of Trilateralism in South Asia

A crucial evolution in the strategic dynamics of the India-China relationship is the emerging collaboration focused on mutual economic interests. Historically, tensions have characterized this relationship, mainly due to Maoist China's geopolitical ambitions, which were cloaked in a narrative of advocating for Tibetan liberation. [6] However, following the Cold War, China has shifted its primary focus toward economic development, demonstrating an acute awareness of the importance of its ties with India. This shift suggests a potential move toward cooperation rather than conflict in the political and economic spheres. The current understanding between India and China transcends mere political considerations; it reflects a strategic intent to leverage their respective economic potentials for shared benefits. This approach indicates a level of foresight and awareness that may define the trajectory of their bilateral relations in the foreseeable future.

India perceives Pakistan as a source of tension and instability in South Asia, fully aware that its challenging relationship with Islamabad is critical for both national and regional peace. [7] However, India's strategy regarding economic engagement with Pakistan is driven by multifaceted reasons. Indian strategists understand the profound implications of their combined economies, which represent a quarter of the global population and offer the potential for sustainable GDP growth rates that surpass those of developed countries. This opens up numerous opportunities for trade and investment, particularly concerning competitive labour markets. More importantly, New Delhi believes that fostering economic and

social development in Pakistan can gradually shift its longstanding adversarial stance towards India. By enhancing these financial ties, India seeks to promote a more realistic and constructive approach to Pakistan's policy, paving the way for more effective resolutions to longstanding bilateral issues, including terrorism, Kashmir, and nuclear tensions. [8]

While military cooperation between China and Pakistan has garnered significant attention, military engagement is becoming an increasingly important facet of the China-India relationship. Defence diplomacy at the highest levels has emerged as a crucial, albeit still evolving, element of Sino-Indian relations. In 2006, the Indian Chief of Army Staff made a landmark visit to China, marking the highest-ranking visit by an Indian officer since the onset of the border dispute in the early 1960s. [9] This came a year after China's defence minister visited India, during which it was announced that Indian and Chinese military forces had convened at the border to supervise the destruction of the primary Chinese incursion into Indian territory that occurred in August 1962.

Defence interactions represent the most prominent feature of military engagement between China and India. Communication through media and information sharing serves as a crucial early warning system against unauthorized approaches, helping to prevent unintended incidents in the air. While these interactions are noteworthy, they reveal a significant gap in the security ties that should ideally unite the two nations. Despite participating in various regional and international military mechanisms, defence connections between China and India remain subdued. [10] Most bilateral exchanges reflect a weak spirit of cooperation, limited primarily to a vaguely defined strategic partnership. However, it's essential to note that this dynamic is evolving significantly as India fortifies its economic and political relationships with Gulf nations.

Following independence, the primary challenge for Indian leadership was to devise a comprehensive plan to uplift the vast population. As a result, little emphasis was placed on India's security interests. It was believed that hegemonic interventions in foreign nations posed a threat to freedom-loving states, a concern that could be addressed by establishing an international institution dedicated to collective security. India became a member of all such organizations. However, the proposed institution not only failed to materialize as an effective mechanism for collective security but also became a stage for superpowers to engage in their own power politics, often at the expense of smaller nations. When member states attempted to act together to safeguard their local interests, they were frequently suppressed by these superpowers.

The challenging experience of the 1962 India-China war, during which all signatories of the Panchsheel resolution hesitated to support India out of fear of China's disfavour, underscored a critical lesson for India: self-reliance is essential for safeguarding its inviolable territorial interests. The Soviet Union's military backing during Bangladesh's fight for

freedom—demonstrated through the deployment of three naval task forces—instilled a much-needed sense of confidence in India's capabilities. The complexity of navigating superpower relationships, coupled with the disillusionment stemming from their rivalries and the inadequacy of a collective security framework, compelled India to adopt a dual approach. First, it prioritized the development of self-reliance, aiming for strategic independence rather than becoming a pawn in great power politics. Second, India committed to enhancing its influence, power, and standing within its own region, recognizing that a robust regional presence is essential for achieving the security and acceptance needed to pursue policies aligned with its national interests. [11]

The security concerns that shape the policies of rival states in South Asia significantly hinder military confidence-building measures. India, though facing challenges related to its standard of living, is increasingly aware of the critical importance of regional security. Meanwhile, the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan have raised alarms in Beijing. China recognizes that a stable South Asia could serve as a counterbalance to its own security issues, not just with India but also with the Soviet Union. In the short term, Pakistan might continue its pursuit of nuclear capabilities, reminiscent of the strategic restraint exhibited by Hanoi for two decades post-1962.

Historically, the United States, as a supporter of Pakistan within the Sino-Indian-Pakistani triangle, has successfully deterred Pakistan from crossing the nuclear threshold by threatening extensive cuts in military and financial aid. [12] This influence stems from overlapping military and developmental interests that have persisted since the 1950s and can remain intact only if there is urgency in addressing the politico-military strategy stretching from the Straits of Taiwan to the northern Arabian Sea, given the backdrop of relative stability among China, India, and Pakistan. Evidence indicates that China is equally capable of leveraging both current and emerging technologies in alignment with its interests alongside Pakistan and the U.S., a relationship that has been evident since the mid-1980s.

Countries possess a range of mechanisms and tools they can utilize to uphold their leadership within the regional security complex. This dominant role not only bolsters their sense of security but also provides an opportunity to play a significant role in both regional and global politics. Despite both China and India having established their respective spheres of influence, the South Asian strategic triangle primarily captures the focus of regional powers. Consequently, both nations are intent on preserving their preeminence within this security framework. However, India, in particular, appears to be in greater need of adopting a more assertive stance to safeguard its influence in South Asia, largely due to perceived threats stemming from internal conflicts within neighbouring states. History demonstrates that it is only in times of dire existential threat that political leaders and the populace devote their utmost attention to the security and

integrity of their territory.

Pakistan's perspective on China's strategic objectives and nuclear capabilities is unique compared to any other country in the world. Notably, China is the only ally that has remained steadfast in its support for Pakistan despite its nuclear weapons capabilities. More significant than the nuclear aspect itself is the assistance China offered in developing Pakistan's nuclear capability between 1965 and 1983, providing a delivery system throughout this period. The depth of China's strategic commitment to Pakistan became particularly evident during the rise of Russian influence and terrorism along Pakistan's northern border, which led to the establishment of a strategic partnership between the two nations in 1962. [13] China's endorsement of Pakistan's national interests has never been explicitly revealed or publicized. Therefore, individuals must avoid comparing the nuclear capabilities of Pakistan with those of China. China distinguishes itself as a global power through its formidable arsenal of atomic and hydrogen bombs. China possesses a military force capable of strategic and effective strikes from any location, bolstered by its advanced arsenal of Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicles (MIRVed) Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) armed with first-generation nuclear warheads.

4. Race for Power-Grabbing in South Asia

A significant threat to global peace and human civilization is emerging due to the competition for power among nations in the so-called free world. An examination of the current power struggle and arms race among purportedly free nations reveals that, due to the recent fluctuations in international politics, they are in fierce competition for the control of wealth and natural resources in primarily Asian and African countries. The identical ambition to augment their sphere of influence has led the USA, France, England, and other imperialist and expansionist nations to Asia, particularly South Asia. Their ambitions and desires are being promoted through the propaganda of the so-called free world. Every ostensibly free nation participates in power politics either autonomously or in collaboration with others. [14] The United States has established a significant presence in both the eastern and western regions of South Asia, with allies including England, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Australia, and several other nations. All these purportedly free nations have aligned themselves as allies and advocates of Pakistan in its endeavour to penetrate the 'iron curtain' encasing China. The expanding pyramid of power politics in South Asia, originating from the USA and encompassing the three regional pivots—Pakistan, India, and Burma—has evolved into a triangle characterized by intense activity and a competition for power among the purportedly free nations.

Deterrence operates on two tiers: strategic nuclear deter-

rence and sub-strategic nuclear deterrence. Strategic nuclear deterrence is implemented against an adversary's homeland and critical assets, while sub-strategic atomic deterrence targets the opponent's theatre of operations, battlefield supremacy, or both. Both parties in the South Asian strategic triangle have established nuclear arsenals as threats directed towards one another. [15] Consequently, examining the significance and applicability of deterrence theory within the security strategies of nuclear-armed states in South Asia is essential.

In recent years, foreign policy inquiries, particularly regarding alliance systems, have been distinctly articulated in South Asia. This era is characterized by suspicion, hostilities, heightened regional security awareness, and a political environment that links the arms race to the psychological and political dynamics within the subcontinent. The prolonged isolation of the Islamabad government has led to a peculiar scenario in which even amicable neighbours, Afghanistan and Iran, are contemplating regional hegemonies. Kabul and Tehran are engaged in South Asian regional security matters rather than in cooperation between India and Pakistan. This intricate geopolitical environment has provoked significant power dynamics and affected the destinies of nations. The strategic triangle of China, India, and Pakistan has evolved into a focal point of intense manoeuvring, influencing the future of South Asia. Each nation competes for supremacy, striving to safeguard its interests while cautiously navigating the fragile balance of maintaining stability in a volatile region.

China is rising as a significant global power, eager to expand its influence in South Asia. This region is vital for China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, prompting the nation to forge strong partnerships with Pakistan to establish a solid foothold in the subcontinent. [16] By investing heavily in infrastructure development and enhancing military cooperation, China aims to position itself as a dominant player, decisively shaping the landscape of South Asia. On the other hand, India, with aspirations to emerge as a regional power, recognizes the necessity of countering China's growing influence in its backyard. With determination and strategic foresight, India is forming alliances and enhancing military ties with neighbouring nations like Afghanistan and Iran. This proactive approach seeks to create a united front against any potential threats, fostering a robust regional security ethos. India knows that in the complex arena of power politics, the best way to safeguard its interests is by cultivating strong relationships and bolstering its diplomatic weight.

The complex landscape of power politics in South Asia extends beyond traditional alliances. Afghanistan and Iran, once perceived as passive observers, are now actively participating in the region's security dialogue. Both nations, driven by their own concerns and aspirations, are woven into the intricate fabric of South Asian geopolitics. By framing their engagement in terms of security, Kabul and Tehran aim to assert their influence and protect their interests. In the pro-

cess, they inadvertently add to the intricacies of the strategic triangle, intensifying the rivalry between India and Pakistan. As the dynamics of power politics in South Asia continue to shift, it is essential for all stakeholders to recognize the delicate balance that underlies the region's stability. While competition and the pursuit of interests are natural, it is crucial for cooperation and dialogue to prevail. The future of South Asia hinges on the ability of nations to transcend suspicion, build authentic partnerships, and strive for a collective vision of prosperity and peace. Only then can the strategic triangle become a catalyst for progress rather than a perennial source of tension and conflict. [17]

Power politics in the region are undeniably sordid and complex, with a web of alliances among individual republics entangled in relentless rivalries that significantly complicate the dynamics at play. To grasp these complexities, one must recognize the profound East-West entanglement that fundamentally shapes the political landscape. Notably, the region has skillfully avoided succumbing to interblocism or adopting a policy of nonalignment, an impressive feat given the intricate relationships and competing interests involved. Intriguingly, the Soviet Union has not explicitly linked its South West Asian policy to the question of Pakistan. Instead, it has subtly conveyed that a reduction of forces in 1979, following the Afghan crisis, would not be problematic for Moscow. This indicates a strategic and nuanced approach to managing regional interests. Conversely, India may face significant geopolitical challenges if the Kremlin starts viewing Afghanistan and India through the lens of shared political mores. Such a perspective could complicate India's political environment, compelling it to navigate with care amid the shifting dynamics of the region. In conclusion, the power politics of this area are remarkably intricate, shaped by a tapestry of alliances and rivalries. The deep intertwining of Eastern and Western influences adds to this complexity. Yet, the region's ability to avoid interblocism and nonalignment is a testament to its geopolitical resilience. Nonetheless, India's future politics could be significantly affected if it and Afghanistan are perceived as sharing political values. It is crucial for India to keenly assess and thoughtfully navigate these evolving dynamics to protect its interests in this volatile region.

5. Impact of the Strategic Triangle on Regional Stability

The influence of triangle interactions is significantly diminished by the notable alignment in perceptions and policy orientations of the weaker states toward the triangle powers. As these states observe and evaluate the positive aspects of power politics within the triangle's dynamic activities, their concerns about conventional power politics substantially lessen. They increasingly recognize and value the more legitimate and reasonable actions being taken by the triangle

powers. The consequences of the triangle's actions transcend mere power struggles and are adeptly reflected in various constructive initiatives. For instance, Chinese military assistance, combined with effective military cooperation among the triangle powers, plays a crucial role in enhancing regional collective security and stability. Moreover, the economic aid provided to impoverished regions serves as a powerful catalyst for transformative change, driving both development and collaborative initiatives. The triangle powers take an active role in mediating international disputes, using their influence to facilitate peaceful resolutions to bilateral conflicts. Their positive-sum competitive strategies extend beyond superficial gains, profoundly impacting weaker states. By thoughtfully implementing these measures, the triangle powers demonstrate their dedication to creating a stable and prosperous regional framework. This approach helps to instil greater trust among weaker states regarding the triangle's intentions, fostering an environment ripe for cooperation and advancement. Essentially, the triangle powers have skillfully cultivated an atmosphere where their initiatives yield diverse benefits. The dynamics of triangle interaction are significantly enhanced by the growing alignment in perceptions and policy among weaker states. By undertaking initiatives that are broadly regarded as constructive, mutually beneficial, and advantageous to all involved, the triangle powers have effectively built a culture of cooperation and solidarity in the region, leaving a lasting positive legacy for the participating nations. [19]

The dynamics of strategic triangle interactions profoundly influence regional stability and shape regional actors' security perceptions and choices, largely determined by the context in which these interactions unfold. Different dyads engage at various levels—domestic, bilateral, nuclear, and regional—each representing distinct layers of international relations, policy formulation, and decision-making environments filled with specific issues and interest groups. In examining power dynamics, the triangle operates within an interaction sphere that overlays a shared regional framework, revealing intricate substructures of engagement for each of its members. Analyzing their interrelations can uncover underlying strategic designs, balancing efforts, cooperative opportunities, or alternative choices in utilizing power resources, as well as the diverse roles and perceptions they afford one another. [20] The interplay within the regional decision-making landscape indicates that actions and statements can lead to either positive or negative outcomes for the triangle states. Thus, it is essential to thoroughly investigate the complex nature of these interactions, as they have significant implications for ensuring regional stability.

The intricate web of interactions across various levels of relationships forms a complex tapestry of power dynamics, significantly shaping the perceptions and decisions of the involved actors. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the underlying motives, strategies, and aspirations of each stakeholder. By exploring the intersecting points of these triangu-

lar powers, we can reveal the hidden intricacies of their strategic designs. This examination enhances our understanding of the objectives pursued, whether that involves maintaining a delicate balance, fostering cooperation, or exploring alternative avenues for power utilization. Moreover, these interactions provide an opportunity to identify the diverse roles and images that stakeholders assign to each other. Notably, the juxtaposition of interests and viewpoints profoundly influences the regional decision-making process. It is through this process that specific actions and statements gain the power to shape the evolving dynamics among the triangle states. This situation resembles a delicate dance, where each move can either promote positive-sum games that nurture mutual benefits or provoke negative-sum games that heighten tensions and rivalries. Consequently, a thorough and nuanced analysis of these factors allows for a deeper understanding of the intricate workings of strategic triangle interactions, offering valuable insights into the dynamics that govern regional stability and the subsequent implications for the security perceptions and choices of the involved actors.

6. The Race for Power Domination in the Region

The ongoing quest for dominance and authority among regional powers has made the geopolitical landscape susceptible to various interpretations and outcomes. A continuous struggle for supremacy unfolds, where the aspirations of local nations collide with the relentless ambitions of global powers, each striving to impose their influence and secure their interests. India and Pakistan, in their fierce rivalry, are not only engaged in a contest with one another but also find themselves entangled in a complex struggle with China, all in a fervent pursuit of regional hegemony. However, the misconceptions harboured by both Islamabad and New Delhi are deeply misguided as they chase an elusive dream of absolute power and control over their neighbours. It is astonishing that both nations overlook the reality that their counterparts are largely guided by the principles of coexistence and mutual respect, prioritizing equality and collaboration over domination and oppression. [21]

India and Pakistan, in their fervent quest for regional supremacy, face a significant barrier: their neighbouring countries do not share the desire to be dominated or controlled. This complex web of geopolitical dynamics reveals that the ambitions of both nations not only lack harmony with the genuine sentiments of their neighbours but also starkly contradict the collective aspirations of the region. The reluctance of surrounding nations to acquiesce to their ambitions serves only to hinder the efforts of India and Pakistan, locking them into a future marked by disillusionment and unattainable goals. The path to true regional prosperity cannot lie in the subjugation of others; it must instead focus on nurturing unity, cooperation, and mutual respect. Embracing these ideals

will unlock the region's potential and pave the way for a brighter future for everyone involved.

The evident reluctance expressed by smaller neighbouring countries not only challenges the overpowering intent of their larger counterparts but bears similarities to the bold stance taken by Nepal, reminiscent of Cuba's steadfast self-reliance. It is clear that these smaller nations yearn for an environment free from aggression, rejecting the notion of thriving under the looming dominance of larger states. Unfortunately, India and Pakistan's inability to fully comprehend and respect this critical distinction has drained their energy and wasted precious time that could have been devoted to their own priorities. This entrenched attitude is heavily influenced by the aspirations of the smaller neighbours, which, in return, seek to cultivate amicable relations with China as a means to counter India's hegemonic pursuits. However, it is crucial to understand that the relentless scramble for dominance in the region is likely to intensify, potentially leading to severe repercussions that threaten stability and security in South Asia. The consequences of such fierce competition will cast a long shadow over the very foundation that South Asia endeavours to build and maintain for enduring peace and security.

7. Prospects and Challenges

The future of strategic stability in South Asia hinges on a complex interplay of factors, including political transformations, evolving threat perceptions, and the unique political dynamics of each state. Key elements such as the existing institutional frameworks, the formation of new institutions, nuclear doctrines, and the military capabilities of both Pakistan and India play a crucial role. Additionally, international influences—particularly from the United States—and the presence of external powers in the region, coupled with the trends in armament, especially in ballistic missile defense, lend further complexity to the situation. The debates surrounding traditional military vs. countermeasures at the regional level and the trajectory of future developments in both nuclear and conventional realms are pivotal. However, of utmost importance is the internal stability and political governance of the individual states, which will significantly shape the regional landscape in the coming years.

South Asia is recognized as one of the most precarious conflict zones globally, where instability is both consistent and endemic. The aftermath of 9/11 has transformed the perception of this region, fostering a greater alignment of interests between India and the United States, which in turn has diminished India's autonomous role. The escalating external pressures for a swift and significant shift in Pakistani policies regarding Kashmir pose risks to its socio-political fabric and challenge Pakistan's ability to adapt to the commitments outlined in the Madrid G-8 accords of 1997. Geopolitical shifts in the region carry long-lasting implications, driven by the emerging influence of China,

the strategic interests of the US, and a resurgent India positioned against a beleaguered Pakistan. The prevailing regional imbalance, which favours India, can be attributed to advantageous geographic factors and the consequences of decades-long domestic policy decisions. In light of the ongoing competitive landscape and vulnerabilities, Pakistan has sought to uphold its strategic relevance primarily through the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The primary regional concerns stem from the entrenched Indo-Pakistani rivalry, which unfolds against the backdrop of a complex international environment.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the intense security dynamics between India and Pakistan significantly shape their strategic decisions and influence their military postures. Pakistan's reliance on both China and the United States during this critical period, coupled with its perception of India as a formidable threat, has positioned it to transform conventional defeat into a potential nuclear escalation. This evolving capability not only holds regional implications but also poses a challenge to global powers, especially evident during the tumultuous 1990s and the early 21st century when the superpowers faced their own crises and the United States retrenched from its international responsibilities. Therefore, U.S. policy resonates deeply with the security concerns of Pakistani leadership.

Looking forward, it is essential to prioritize a comprehensive political agenda alongside military strategy in Sino-Pakistani relations, addressing South Asia's diverse and complex security challenges. This approach must effectively tackle the remnants of the Cold War and local disputes within an expansive security framework, forming a core component of foreign policy directed at East and South Asia. In this broader context, China emerges as a pivotal player in many of India's foreign and security challenges. India can no longer address its issues with China in isolation; such an approach risks overlooking the broader regional and global implications. As India rises as a pluralistic, secular, and democratic nation, its quest for regional leadership aligns with the existing international order under the United Nations Charter, enhancing its capacity to navigate contemporary challenges.

Abbreviations

USA	United States of America
ICBMs	Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Author Contributions

Zahoor Ahmad Dar: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis,

Funding acquisition, Methodology, Resources, Software, Supervision, Visualization, Writing – review & editing

Shanaza Janbaz: Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Ethical Approval and Informed Consent Statement

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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