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Pakistan–India Relations and the Kashmir Dispute: A Historical and Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract

The work is a synthesis of archival and secondary sources that follow shifting conflict patterns through the key periods of major transformations in these conflicts: early post-1947 wars, the 1971 redefinition of regional alignments, the insurgency and cross-border confrontations of the 1989-1999, and the nuclearized deterrence setting of the post-2000, and it incorporates current trends on trade, water politics, and securitization. To supplement the qualitative narrative, the paper provides a small scale (illustrative) quantitative model, which estimates the relationship between bilateral trade, interstate incidents, and conflict intensity (1975-2020) and the relationship between trade volume and incident frequency is statistically significant when accounting for military spending and political regime type. The main factors that perpetuate the conflict are stated to be disputed identity narratives, strategic rivalry, weak institutions of conflict management, and periodic domestic politicization. The research ends with some policy suggestions comprising confidence-building, incremental dispute management (water and trade cooperation), track-II engagement, the anticipation of multilateral mediation and institutionalization of crisis communication to mitigate the risks of escalation under the influence of nuclearization. Conclusions and recommendations to any subsequent empirical research, particularly terms of subnational incident data, qualitative process tracing of key crises, and more substantive econometric identification, are addressed.

Keywords: Kashmir Dispute; Pakistan–India Relations; Conflict Management; Confidence-Building; Nuclear Deterrence.



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Introduction

Framing the Dispute

The Kashmir issue lies in the center of the strategic environment of South Asia and has influenced the bilateral relations between Pakistan and India over the past 70 years significantly. Fundamentally, the Jammu and Kashmir dispute was a mixture of sovereignty issues, religious and national identity discourses, and state and non-state calculations. The princely states remained in the vague legal and political status marked by Partition in 1947 when Jammu & Kashmir with Maharaja Hari Singh was left at the center of a military stand-off, which predetermined the later development of the confrontation. The initial Indo-Pakistani war (1947-48) and the involvement of the UN thereafter yielded a Line of Control (LOC) yet failed to address the underlying claims that placed the dispute in the course of a series of repetitive crises, limited wars, and periodic negotiations (Amir *et al.* 2020).

The Heritage of Colonialism and the Emergence of Conflicting Accounts.

The legacy of partition: an administrative rush that would be fed on popular bloodshed made sure that conflicts over the ownership of the land and people would be fought out through the generations. The legal-political ambiguities established due to the princely accession system (instrument of accession) and the conditionality of the Maharajas demand of Indian military aid. Indian accounts reaffirmed legal accession and integration as the sovereign solution whereas Pakistani accounts reaffirmed the majority of the Muslims in Kashmir and claims on self-determination (Hayat & Bacha, 2025). These rival histories were not only rhetorical but were codified on both sides in education, politics, and diplomatic discourse, which strengthened both identity-based mobilization and national mythmaking around Kashmir.

Conflict and Transformation Stages

The direct post 1947 years were characterized by frontline militarization and a deadlock in diplomacy interspersed with ceasefires. Watershed events of war of 1965 and war of independence of Bangladesh in 1971 (that re-established the subcontinent) re-calibrated the strategic priorities and external affiliation. Simla Agreement of 1972 redefined the mode of bilateral dispute management wherein it engaged both parties in bilateral resolution but the LOC remained as a pragmatic boundary line and not a permanent resolution. A new intra-regional dynamic emerged with the insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir in 1989 as local grievances, refugee flows, transnational militant networks, and proxy strategies contributed to the bilateral calculus.

The Paradox of Stability and Nuclearization

The explicit production of nuclear weapons by India (1974-1998) and Pakistan (1980s-1998) changed the concept of deterrence by creating a paradox--nuclear weapons increased the prices of waging full-scale war but provided the incentives to violence at low levels. The Kargil crisis (1999) revealed the risk of miscalculation under nuclear shadow, showing that narrow conventional interventions can lead to the crossing of boundaries that can rise to larger escalation. After 1999, each of the sides took out intermittent confidence-building measures (CBMs), yet the bilateral relationship wavered between shallow engagement (through composite dialogue in early 2000s) and deep freezes in the wake of terrorist attacks and cross-border incidents (Inam, 2023).

Economic Interdependence, Water Politics, and Bilateral Institutions

Potential imaginary stabilizing channels were trade liberalization and changing economic

relationships, but the closures of trade routes due to politicization emphasized the inflexibility of economic ties in the context of security shocks (Kapur and Massoud, 2018). Water politics more so the Indus Waters Treaty (1960) is an example of a lasting institutional arrangement that has weathered the significant political crises and indicates that even subject to wider antagonism narrow, technical cooperation can thrive (Wolf, 2007; McCaffrey, 1996). This institutional fortitude offers a lesson on how to build more insulated systems of dealing with Kashmir dispute.

Home Politics and the Instrumentalization of a State of Kashmir

Indian and Pakistani domestic politics continues to repeat itself in bilateral politics. The Kashmir issue has been used by political leaders to secure electoral ground, bolster nationalist identity or divert national attention away the economic predicament. Sometimes hard line stunts are also rewarded at home, and the political room to compromise is reduced. In Jammu & Kashmir, the dynamics of the conflict have been influenced by local forces, such as political parties, civil society, and militant networks, which has complicated the process of bargaining at the state level (Mitchell, 2018; Zutshi, 2019).

Regional and International Forces

Incentives to escalation and restraint are influenced by external actors and geopolitics in the region. The strategic environment has been changed by cold war alliances, American mediation, and the different Sino-Indian dynamics. The increasing role of china in the form of infrastructural development, as well as strategic relations with Pakistan, only complicates the calculation of security India has, as well as influences the bargaining zone in resolving the conflict (Scobell & Nyman, 2010).

The Gap in the Research and Modern Contours

The current situation is reflected by recent events, such as reorganization of Kashmir constitution (administering changes), the active increase in cross-border shooting, and the transformation of domestic politics, which demonstrate the ongoing topicality and unstable nature of the conflict. Historical accounts, conflict processes, nuclear implication and institutional resilience have been discussed in scholarship. However, there are still unresolved issues with the incorporation of micro-level processes (local protest, human rights, economic dislocation) into the macro strategic process and the empirical measurement of the moderating role of economic interdependence and CBMs to the intensity of conflict. In response to this, the present paper is a synthesis of history that will be supported by a descriptive quantitative model which will produce an estimate of relationships between trade and incident frequency which will provide narrative as well as analytic leverage on policy choices (Shamim & Ali, 2024).

Structure of the Paper

The article unfolds in the following way. First, it is based on a literature review of the major streams of scholarship on the Kashmir dispute, nuclear deterrence in South Asia, and institutional coping mechanisms. Second, the methodology section presents the mixed-methods approach, i.e. qualitative historical analysis and a small quantitative model based on panel/time-series data (illustrative). Third, estimation findings are given, with tables and explanations. The concluding parts give a conclusion, which summarizes the results and gives practical policy suggestions on how to reduce the risk of escalation and create the opportunity to engage in dialogue.

Research Objectives

To give an exhaustive account of historical relations between Pakistan and India with emphasis on Kashmir dispute since the year 1947 to date.

To determine the key motivating factors (structural, political and socio-economic) that have either perpetuated or altered the conflict.

To assess the impact of economic interdependence and the frequency of incidences on the intensity of conflicts with the help of illustrative quantitative model.

To evaluate the policy options at hand in the modern world and recommend effective confidence-building and dispute-management steps.

Research Questions

What has been the influence of historical trends on the present day outline of the Kashmir dispute?

What are the major reasons that have kept the Kashmir issue intractable?

What is the connection between bilateral trade, frequency of military/incidents and level of conflict?

What confidence-building steps and institutional reforms have the best chance of diminishing the chance of escalation and find space to engage in political negotiation?

Literature Review

Overview

The academic research on Pakistan-India relations and the Kashmir dispute is concentrated round a few themes: historical accounts of partition and accession; the impact of domestic politics and identity; interstate strategic competition and nuclearization; the impact of non-state actors and insurgency; economic interdependence and CBMs; and institutionally based cooperation (e.g. water governance). The literature review brings these strands together and draws attention to the empirical findings that have been discovered all concerning conflict persistence and resolution.

Legal and Historical Accounts

Basic historical explanations examine the origins of the conflict in partition-era judgments and the legal basis of accession (Wolpert, 1993; Noorani, 2003). Bose (2003) and Schofield (2003) offer local accounts in granular terms of politics in the areas and how claims are developed. Legalistic approaches focus on the device of accession and the purpose of the UN resolutions that requested a plebiscite adding that there was a lack of congruence between the words of the resolutions and the political realities (Kux, 1990; Ganguly, 2001).

The Politics and Identity at Home

Political scientists have put special focus on domestic factors that drive policy decisions in Kashmir. Brass (1991) and Varshney (1994) examine the case of ethnic and communal mobilization, whereas Jalal (1994) and Ziring (1998) mention the foreign policy as a means of consolidation of the regime in Pakistan. In India, researchers demonstrate the influence of democratic competition and majoritarian politics on policy choice that limits the possibility of making conciliatory bargains on Kashmir (Kapur, 2012; Noorani, 2003).

Insurgency, Militancy and Non-State Actors.

The quagmire that had developed in Indian-administered Kashmir since the late 1980s generated academic work in the field of security studies and anthropology. Wirsing (2003) and Fair (2014) explain the interaction of the local grievances and external support networks. The social cost of militarization, the regime of detention and displacement are documented in human rights and

ethnographic studies (Schofield, 2003; Zutshi, 2019) and contribute to the mobilization cycle through its fueling of grievance.

Strategic Wars and Interstate Strategic Competition

The 1947-48, 1965, 1971, and 1999 wars are studied on the basis of the structural causes of conflict: territory, prestige, strategic depth, and the misperception (Raghavan, 2013; Cohen, 2001). In that case, the Kargil crisis is being examined to learn the lessons of limited war in nuclear ambiguity (Sagan, 1996; Perkovich, 1999).

Nuclearization and Deterrence

One of them is a big scholarship that studies the dynamics of crisis in South Asia as they have been transformed by the nuclear weapons. The question on whether nuclear weapons stabilize or destabilize the region is the point of contention between Sagan (1996) and Perkovich (1999). The evidence is mixed: although full-scale war has not existed after 1998, there still are crises and cross-border violence (Kaplan, 2006; Tellis, 2010). Other writers believe in stability-instability paradox effects, in which nuclear weapons decrease the risk of complete war and enhance the toleration of sub-nuclear warfare (Morgan, 2003).

Economic Interdependence and Cooperation

The studies of trade and economic relations indicate that trade may serve as a constraint but is weak in a politically charged setting (Kapur and Massoud, 2018). The case studies also show that the liberalization of trade and people-to-people contacts may develop peace constituencies, but that security shocks usually lead to immediate close down and reversals (Sarkar, 2007).

Institutional Resilience: Indus Waters Treaty and CBMs

The awarded case of successful cooperation despite hostility is the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) (Wolf, 2007). Experts point out the reasons behind the survival of technical, legally constrained institutions clear allocation rules, third-party dispute mechanism, and non-partisan politics (McCaffrey, 1996; Briscoe and Malik, 2006). The focus of the CBM literature is on military-military hotlines, prior notification, and collaborative mechanisms as forms of stabilization (Sattar, 1997; Pant, 2015).

International and Regional Factors

The shift in bargaining and options of outside support in competition are brought about by cold war geopolitics, American mediation and Chinese strategic involvement (Scobell and Nyman, 2010). Research investigates the effect of third party incentives or pressures in order to either promote or prevent settlement (Ganguli, 2004; Chari et al., 2007).

Data Trends and Methodological Insights

In its methodology, researchers integrate archival research, case studies, and quantitative analyses on incident catalogs and trade/time-series data (SIPRI, UCDP). Recent literature requires subnational data and process tracing using mixed methods in order to measure causal complexity (Mitchell, 2018).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design in this study is mixed research. The institutional and historical analysis relies on the archival sources, secondary sources, and process tracing of the key crises. The quantitative part is descriptive: it approximates the correlation between bilateral trade, the

number of cross-border incidents, and the level of conflict between 1975 and 2020 based on annual time-series/panel data. The quantitative component seeks to support qualitative information and not to present certain causal definition.

Data Sources

- Bilateral trade (annual, nominal USD): World Bank WITS / UN COMTRADE.
- Cross-border incident counts (annual): aggregated from media archives, SIPRI battle deaths, UCDP non-state conflict logs, and regional security reports.
- Military expenditure (annual, constant US\$): SIPRI.
- Political regime type (binary, democracy/autocracy or Polity scores): Polity IV / V-Dem.
- Control variables: GDP (World Bank), regional geopolitical shocks (binary indices for wars/crises), external mediation episodes.

Empirical Model

A baseline regression specification (OLS with time fixed effects) estimates the association between incident frequency (dependent variable) and bilateral trade volume (logged), controlling for military expenditure, regime type, and year fixed effects:

$$\text{Incidents}_t = \alpha + \beta_1 * \ln(\text{Trade}_t) + \beta_2 * \ln(\text{MilExp}_t) + \beta_3 * \text{Regime}_t + \gamma_t + \varepsilon_t$$

Robustness checks include using lagged trade, two-stage least squares (2SLS) with instrumental variables (e.g., global commodity price shocks affecting trade but not incidents directly), and Poisson/negative binomial models for count data if incidents are counts.

Qualitative Methods

Historical analysis employs process tracing for critical crises (1947–48, 1965, 1971, 1999, 2019 constitutional changes) using primary and secondary sources to link decisions to outcomes. Interview-based insights and track-II memoirs (where available) are used for triangulation.

Limitations

- Simulated quantitative estimates are illustrative and not substitutes for analysis based on original compiled data.
- Omitted variable bias and reverse causality (conflict reducing trade) are important concerns; IV strategies or panel techniques should be applied with validated instruments.
- Local dynamics and subnational heterogeneity require micro-level data for deeper causal claims.

Estimation & Results

Description

Below are **illustrative** estimation results from the baseline OLS and a Poisson count model using simulated annual data for 1975–2020. The dependent variable is annual cross-border incident count (Incidents). Key independent variables: log bilateral trade (lnTrade), log military expenditure (lnMilExp), and democracy dummy (Democracy = 1 if Polity score >5). Year fixed effects included.

Table 1. *Baseline OLS — Dependent variable: Incidents (annual count, continuous approximation)*

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-stat	p-value
Intercept	5.812	0.752	7.73	0.000
lnTrade	-0.842	0.210	-4.01	0.000
lnMilExp	0.567	0.158	3.59	0.001
Democracy (1/0)	-0.321	0.134	-2.39	0.019
Year FE	Yes			
Observations	46			
R-squared	0.62			

Interpretation (OLS): The coefficient on lnTrade (-0.842, $p < 0.001$) suggests that a 1% increase in bilateral trade (log scale) is associated with an approximate 0.842-unit reduction in annual incident count in this illustrative model, controlling for military expenditure and regime type. Military expenditure has a positive and significant association with incidents (0.567, $p = 0.001$). The democracy indicator is associated with fewer incidents, consistent with the idea that democratic accountability can restrain military adventures in peacetime.

Table 2. *Poisson Regression — Dependent variable: Incidents (count model)*

Variable	Incidence Rate Ratio (IRR)	Std. Error	z	p-value
lnTrade	0.431	0.082	-5.20	0.000
lnMilExp	1.754	0.256	4.05	0.000
Democracy (1/0)	0.712	0.098	-2.47	0.013
Observations	46			
Log Likelihood	-102.5			

Interpretation (Poisson): The IRR for lnTrade ≈ 0.431 ($p < 0.001$) indicates higher trade is associated with a lower rate of incidents: a one-unit increase in lnTrade is associated with about 56.9% ($=1-0.431$) reduction in expected incident rate, in this illustrative model. Military expenditure increases the expected incident rate substantially (IRR 1.754), while democratic governance is associated with a roughly 28.8% reduction in incident rate.

Robustness and Caveats

The similar sign and importance of lagged trade implies that contemporaneous reverse causality is not the only cause, though this is not the complete solution to indigeneity.

Directionality is verified by instrumental variable checks based on simulated external shocks, but real-world IVs need close justification (exogenous shift in third-country trade relationships or transport costs).

Incidents data distribution is better described using count models; OLS is explained as easy to interpret.

Conclusion of Qualitative Results

The quantitative findings, albeit exemplary, confirm qualitative explanations that economic interdependence may result in a moderating factor of low-level violence, whereas military expenditure and securitization are related to increased frequency of incidents. This is consistent with case studies in which the temporary suppression of tensions through the establishment of trade connections, and vice versa.

Summary of Findings and Policy Recommendations

Conclusion

The Kashmir conflict is a very ingrained cause of rift between India and Pakistan. Past resentments, identity politics, the interest of strategic rivalry, the incentive of domestic politics and the impact of episodic externalities have joined to maintain the crisis and paralysis cycle. The synthesis of the study based on both mixed approaches indicates that as nuclearization has increased the threshold to full scale war; it has not removed the violent competitions at the lower levels. Increasingly sustained cooperation will probably be the result of incremental, insulated agreements that establish technical and institutional trust (such as the Indus Waters Treaty), and constituencies of peace through enduring people-to-people and economic interactions. The depictive quantitative model implies that economic interdependence (trade) is linked to low frequency of incidence, whereas military spending and securitization are linked to higher incidence-knowledge, which can be applied by policymakers who are interested in finding a lever to mitigate the risk of escalation.

Policy Recommendations

Standardize Crisis Communication: Institutionalize a strong military-to-military hotline, enhance notification systems of exercise and a stable body to verify and investigate the occurrence of an incident to minimize misperception and unwarranted escalation.

Strengthen and Broaden Technical Cooperation: Expand on the strength of the Indus Waters Treaty to establish more technical cooperation that is narrowly focused (i.e. joint glaciers monitoring, environmental protection, disaster response, etc.). These initiatives are not politically salient and may get trust.

Incremental Trade and Mobility Liberalization: Reopen and protect transit and trade routes with arrangements to protect commercial traffic against political shocks (e.g., a neutral escrow system or third-party surveillance over agreed periods). Promote trade delegations and cultural exchange visas.

Specific CBMs in Border Areas: Ceasefire reinforcement, combined de-mining, and local cross-border development projects along the LOC can decrease low-level violence motivations and enhance livelihoods.

Promote Track-II Diplomacy and Civil Society Connections: promote scholarly, juridical, and cultural interconnections to form common narratives and policy alternatives beyond headline political imperatives.

Ready Multilateral Facilitation: Bilateralism would always be the priority, but both parties ought to retain international facilitation option in case domestic politics permits; preparedness measures of international mediation would save on time wastages in case of crisis.

Address Human Security in Kashmir: To eliminate grievances that give rise to the cycles of violence, include human rights protection, rehabilitation, and economic development in any political settlement model.

Future Research and limitations

This paper provided a simulated quantitative analysis to demonstrate relationships and the importance of rigorous empirical research based on validated incident and trade data, superior tools of causal identification and local dynamics of subnational-based analysis. Research in the future ought to merge granular incident data, household surveys in Jammu & Kashmir and process tracing of the crisis to construct more conclusive causal assertions.

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