


Chapter 5

Rethinking the Asymmetric Dynamics of India–Pakistan Relations: A Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

India and Pakistan became independent countries in 1947 as part of South Asia's decolonization. They have been engaged in a long-lasting rivalry since their inception. Kashmir has been a point of friction and an unfinished issue. Pakistan calls it its “jugular vein,” while India refers to it as an “integral part.” Their relationship has always been rocky, marked by enemy formation, identity issues, mistrust, and resentful memories. They fought three major wars and one minor battle in Kargil in 1999, despite the power imbalance between the two in economic, military, land-mass, and population terms. Pokhran I led to the nuclearization of the region and an ongoing missile and nuclear arms race. Their enduring rivalry affects not only their relations but the entire region. This chapter focuses on the following questions: Why do India and Pakistan maintain an enduring rivalry? How do power politics, national identity, and historical grievances shape their relationship? What are the fundamental issues driving their conflict? Why have they struggled to manage and resolve their disputes?

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INTRODUCTION

India and Pakistan have had an unstable relationship since 1947, when British India was partitioned. The two nations have fought three major wars (1947–1948, 1965, 1971) and a minor one (1999) and endured countless bilateral political-economic crises until 2017. This is now one of the longest interstate confrontations in history. Most scholars explain the India–Pakistan conflict using land, identity, religion, or ideology. The two countries inability to reach a resolution over Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), a princely state that joined India in 1947, is the main cause of this conflict, according to territory-focused interpretations. National identities and religious belief systems are incompatible and in virtual rivalry, which may explain the India–Pakistan conflict. India is democratic and secular, while Pakistan is non-secular, Islamic, and totalitarian. An alternative explanation is that the India–Pakistan conflict stems from different views of nationalism and statehood. The “two-nation theory” held that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct nations that deserved their own state, so Pakistan was founded on religious and ethnic nationalism while India was founded on secular and civic nationalism (Cohen, 2005, pp. 28–31).

This conflict's analysis is largely theoretical, focusing on roots and history (Basrur, 2010). There are many realist and neo-realist interpretations of the India–Pakistan conflict (Chellaney, 1999; Dixit, 2002, 2003; Ganguly, 2001; Ganguly & Hagerty, 2005; Majumdar, 2004; Nanda, 2001; Nayar & Paul, 2004; Rajagopalan, 2005), but most are political-realist. The dispute has been explained by democratic peace theory (Russett, 1993) and constructivist analysis (Chatterjee, 2008). Political scientist T. V. Paul examined power asymmetries (Paul, 2006, pp. 600–601) and proposed three key factors for assessing the power distribution between the two states as truncated asymmetry: military balance, strategy and tactics of both states, and great powers as balancers. Lack of internal or external shocks that could have escalated the conflict has also contributed to its durability (Paul, 2005).

All of the above can explain some aspects of this ongoing conflict, but I believe that Barkin's (2003, 2010) realist-constructivist approach is better for explaining the India–Pakistan conflict's origins, evolution, and persistence and predicting its future. As an alternative theory, this article suggests realist-constructivism. This method blends realism with constructivism, combining their principles. According to Barkin (2010), “Both constructivism and realism often suffer from a castle syndrome, in which they are seen as paradigms, as exclusive and self-contained research orientations for the study of international relations” (p. 154). Instead, realist-constructivism examines how power structures effect normative change in international relations and how norms affect power structures (Barkin, 2003, p. 337). More specifically, “the role of a realist-constructivist, then, is to examine, skeptically from a moral perspective, the interrelationships between power and international norms” (Barkin,

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