

## New Delhi's Pakistan Dilemma and the Indo-Pakistan Peace Process

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**Abstract:** *Although many argue that since Modi took over, Indo-Pak peace became a mirage yet, this paired minority conflict started in 1947. At present, any discussion in the west on India-Pakistan relations implicates Pakistan for all the wrongs with the relationship. What is missing from this narrative is the lack of a clear Indian position and policy towards Pakistan. What is New Delhi's Pakistan policy? How New Delhi intends to address its Pakistan problem? The core argument of this paper is that the biggest hurdle to establishing India-Pakistan peace or normalization is a lack of a clearly stipulated Pakistan policy on the part of New Delhi and that it has no vision for how to deal with Pakistan other than as an enemy.*

**Key Words:** India, Pakistan, Peace Process, South Asian Security, India-Pakistan Relations

### Introduction

Since Narendra Modi assumed the office of the Indian prime minister for a second term, and the policy his administration adopted towards South Asia in general and Pakistan, in particular, made peace between India and Pakistan a mirage. Although his hostility towards Pakistan was an open secret yet after his reelection, Modi and his national security team have openly expressed hostility towards Islamabad, attacked Pakistan and supported terrorists and terrorist activities inside Pakistan. (The Economic Times, 18 Dec 2017)

Anti-Pakistan rhetoric was at the core of his election campaign. This was coupled with his anti-Indian Muslim agenda that has since become glaringly visible to all. Therefore, the generally held belief among the South Asia watchers was that due to his anti-Pakistan stance, the likelihood of any meaningful progress in the Indo-Pak bilateral relationship is impossible. Modi's government argued that the political leadership in Pakistan is just window dressing, whereas the actual decision-making is done by the military. When prime minister Imran Khan assumed office after winning the 2018 elections in Pakistan (Hashmi, 17 August 2018), a noted Indian commentator stated that for the first time, New Delhi has a prime minister in Pakistan that enjoys full support and endorsement of the Pakistani

army and has been called as the GHQ-man by New Delhi. (Jacob, 4 August 2018) This, according to him, provided New Delhi with an unequal opportunity to work with the actual decision-makers in Pakistan. In other words, Modi got an ideal partner if peaceful bilateral relations were to be established. Yet, when the Pakistani prime minister reached out to New Delhi by stating, "I really want to fix our ties... If they take one step towards us, we will take two, but at least [we] need a start" (NDTV, 27 July 2018) New Delhi suffered from a cold foot. Unsurprisingly, New Delhi did not reciprocate. Responding to Khan's statement, New Delhi hoped that Imran Khan's government would work constructively to "build a safe, stable, secure and developed South Asia free of terror and violence." (NDTV, 29 July 2018)

Following up on the peace offer, Islamabad took several conciliatory steps; for the first time ever, the Indian military attaché attended the Pakistan Day parade. (Yousef, 23 March 2018) Unfortunately, these peace signals were ignored by New Delhi. Why, despite, Islamabad's peace signalling, New Delhi could go on blaming Islamabad for all the problems in the bilateral relationship?

Historically, Pakistan, India's proverbial twin, has a complicated relationship with India. Since

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1947, Pakistan and India are engaged in what Stephen Cohen called a 'paired minority conflict.' It is a relationship based on open hostility, rivalry and deep mistrust. The historical baggage of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and the subsequent bilateral and regional as well as global developments have further added to complication. ([Sattar, 2007](#); [Padukone, 2014](#))

At present, any discussion of India-Pakistan relations implicates Pakistan for all the wrongs with the relationship. This generally held narrative states that it is Pakistan that never responded to India's peace offers. Moreover, Pakistan sent its raiders to Kashmir in 1947-48, initiated Operation Gibraltar that resulted in the 1965 war, supported terrorist groups in India, especially in the Indian controlled Kashmir. New Delhi also accuses Pakistan of providing sanctuary to groups like Lashkar-e-Tayiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM)- and that it is responsible for Kargil and the Mumbai terror attacks.

However, what is missing from this narrative is the lack of a clear Indian position and policy towards Pakistan. What is New Delhi's Pakistan policy? How New Delhi intends to address its Pakistan problem? Historically, New Delhi has followed different policies to deal with Pakistan at different times: actively participating in the disintegration of Pakistan (1971), engaging in a peace process and dialogue with Islamabad, ignoring the latter, active diplomacy for peace (Gujral doctrine) and to declaring Pakistan a rogue state etc. While many would argue that Modi's New Delhi has adopted a clear and hostile policy towards Pakistan yet despite being more aggressive and provocative, it is still the same policy.

The core argument of this paper is that the biggest hurdle to establishing peace or normalization of India and Pakistan relations is a lack of a clearly stipulated Pakistan policy on the part of New Delhi. And a lack of imagination on the part of the Indian foreign and defence establishment that has no vision for how to deal with Pakistan other than as an enemy. The paper begins by exploring how peace is established between enemies and the conditions and dynamics of a peace process. The following section overviews the debate about the emergence of India as a major player in the Asia Pacific region and the international order, especially how the world, especially the USA, is viewing it as an important partner against its struggle against China for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region. The third section explores the strategic thinking in New Delhi about how it views its position and role in the global order, especially within the emerging Asia-Pacific security

paradigm. It also looks at the role, if any, would Pakistan play in India's strategic vision about its role in the world? The paper concludes with an analysis of the bilateral relationship arguing that New Delhi's insistence on Islamabad to concede with New Delhi's demands as a pre-condition to dialogue is empirically flawed.

## **Building Peace between Adversaries**

A huge set of literature is available that attempts to provide the most fundamental question of how peace can be established between enemies? ([Kupchan, 2010](#); [Fortna, 2004](#)) What do the conflicting parties need to do to inch towards and eventually establish peace? First and foremost is the desire and realization to establish peace. This realization then translates into an urge to cooperate to achieve this objective. In this way, mutual cooperation towards achieving peace is the most fundamental step towards establishing a durable and meaningful peace between adversaries. The realization of the cost of conflict and the benefits of peace plays a significant role in pushing them towards peace.

According to Harold Saunders, "a peace process is more than conventional diplomacy and negotiation. It encompasses a full range of political, psychological, economic, diplomatic, and military actions woven together into a comprehensive effort to establish peace. Progress towards peace depends on breaking down the barriers to negotiation and reconciliation. If we ignore the politics of breaking down the barriers, the mediator and negotiator may never have a chance." Charles Kupchan states that stable peace can only be achieved when the bigger and stronger of the parties in the conflict move towards peace and reconciliation. He argues that "the stronger party undertakes the 'opening gambit' and makes the initial concession to its adversary since its relative strength 'puts it in a better position to offer concessions since it is more confident than the weaker party that it will not suffer unacceptable costs should the target state fail to reciprocate. In other words, deft diplomacy, and not trade or investment, makes peace." ([Kupchan, 2011](#))

Although Zartman argues that hurting stalemate pushes the parties towards negotiation aimed at settlement of issues, this might still not happen if the parties involved in the conflict does not have the people's support to go for a peaceful settlement of the issues. (Zartman, 1989) Public support provides the leadership with the required strength to take a difficult decision, and without the existence of such support, any attempt to change the situation will be taken as a sign of weakness. Zeb argues that the institutionalization

of the peace process or dialogue also is very important. According to Zeb, "in the absence of the institutionalization of peace, the leadership of one or both parties will remain doubtful of the real intentions of the other party and whether they will remain the same over the period of time or not." Another important factor is reciprocity and openness to the possible outcomes. Both parties should not try to dictate their desired outcome unilaterally. (Zeb, 2010)

According to experts, a number of factors or points are important in establishing durable peace between adversaries, such as a robust desire for peace both at the governmental and public level. According to several conflict resolution theorists, the peace process cannot be successful unless the conflict is ripe for resolution. There is another angle to the element of timing in a peace process; here, timing is linked with the element of patience in the peace process. A peace process is a time consuming and often a long and rutted process with several ups and downs. In case of slow or almost non-existent progress, terror attacks, weaker domestic peace constituency, either of the party could lose patience or hope in continuing peace negotiation and dialogue. In such a situation, external encouragement or facilitation can support the parties to continue the peace process. The identification of the issues and discussing all issues that are important for the parties involved is also key to the success or otherwise of the peace effort. It has been correctly pointed out that "Contrary to the popular belief, the content of a peace process is also very important because as it has been very rightly pointed out, the process is simply a mechanism for achieving the content. If the focus is allowed to shift away from the content, it could distort priorities and have a negative impact on the peace process as a whole." (Zeb, 2010)

Deciding to sit together and work towards peace is just the first step towards establishing peace. New challenges emerge while the parties talk and discuss different issues and measures. Once both sides start taking steps towards peace, a major challenge that they face is what the parties are getting out of the dialogue. According to a study on the India-Pakistan peace process, "If party A is getting more than party B, then the leadership of party B might like to change the situation because this will again bring in its mind the issue of party A's intentions and that this gain might be used against it in any future conflict. Therefore, the chances of the party (which is gaining less) to back off will increase because it will start thinking that it will be left nowhere if the other side, after getting whatever it wants, defects and that these gains might be used against it in

any future confrontation." (Zeb, 2010) This is because, in such a situation, a party might develop a sense of strength and might start to operate with the assumption that it could dictate the terms and achieve its desired outcome. Such a sense and assumption would be detrimental to the ongoing peace process, as a peace process must address the concerns of all parties engaged in it. It has been rightly argued that "If one side (mostly the stronger side) monopolizes the agenda, then the concerns of the weaker party are ignored, and this adversely affects the peace process. Ironically, to ensure that the peace process moves on, the weaker party has to maintain the ability to impose a stalemate. Experts point out that "a party which has the ability to mar the interests of its adversary by stalling negotiations acquires greater control over the outcome." (Wizarat)

### India-An Emerging Global Powerhouse?

That India is an emerging powerhouse in the international order is not a new debate. Arguably, this question is under discussion since the 1970s. Whether India has the potential to rise as a global power is hotly contested among political scientists and Indian watchers the world over. The fact that it is the world's largest democratic republic and home to a substantial English speaking population, India is favorably looked upon as an emerging powerhouse. At present, India is included in Kennedy's list of pivotal states, Garten's list of big emerging markets as well as Hobraad's list of middle powers. (Garten, 1997; Holbraad, 1998; Kennedy, 1998; Zeb, 2008) Many noted India experts acknowledge that India is an idea whose time has come. (Scindia, 2011) Many argue in favor of a tri-polar world: US-China-India. Yet many knowledgeable India watchers, including prominent Indian academics, have expressed reservation about this. For instance, Varun Sahni maintains "despite its enormously larger land area, population and GDP; India's GDP per capita, infant mortality rate, life expectancy figures and female adult illiteracy rate are similar to those of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal, and significantly worse than those of Sri Lanka and the Maldives." (Zeb, 2008) And that "Nearly 70% of India's more than 1 billion people live in more than 500,000 villages connected largely by dusty tracks, dependent on agriculture and forced to endure acute shortages of drinking water and electricity." (Zeb, 2008). George Perkovich believes that power to influence comes from a combination of factors, among them "military strength, social cohesion and mobilization, economic resources, technological capacity, quality of governance and diplomatic and intelligence acumen." (Perkovich, 2004) He establishes that India's economy stands in the

way of its big power status. Its GDP is among the lowest in the world, its quality of life index, its per capita income, and the ratio of its population living below the poverty line, its poor infrastructure and low literacy level, further thwarts its ambition to become a global power. He looks at its declining rather than improving social cohesion after fifty years of independence and concludes that nuclear weapons alone do not bestow the big power status. (Perkovich, 2004) Despite all this, in the post-cold war global order, India, aided by its allies, has been successful in projecting itself as an emerging power and a potential global player. In the new Asian power game, the west in general and the United States in particular views India as a partner and a balancer against China. This reality could be gauged from the fact that India is at present a key strategic partner of the US and is included in Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC) and noted groups like the G-20 [major economic powers plus the European Union]. Now New Delhi is strongly lobbying for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Krishan Nayyar has aptly captured Indian diplomatic efforts and projection at the global stage by stating: "The world has learned to live with US power, Soviet power, even Chinese power, and it will have to learn to live with Indian power." Several noted American foreign policy heavy-weightier, such as Former Secretary of State Ms Condoleezza Rice, believes that India has a major role to play in the global arena. In her *Foreign Affairs'* article, she argues in favor of paying close attention to India's role" in maintaining the Asian balance with China. (Rice, 2000)

According to those who favor a closer and stronger Indo-US alliance argue that both countries have a number of commonality of interest on diverse issues such as national security, terrorism, violent Islamic extremism, the future of Af-Pak and the larger Asia-Pacific security landscape.

Despite Modi's overt Hinduization of India, brutal policy towards the Indian held Kashmir and repressive regime, India is increasingly projected as a global player with a significant role to play in the global power struggle as an American strategic partner, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. Nothing illustrates this point better than the fact that the U.S. Pacific Command that covers the American military's role in the Pacific region, including India, has been renamed the Indo-Pacific Command.

## India's Strategic thinking and calculus and Pakistan

How India's newly gained global significance and

importance would affect its relations with its neighboring South Asian countries, especially Pakistan? At present, India has problematic relations with all its neighbors. In the case of Pakistan, despite New Delhi's repeated claims of India's rise to the bigger league and status than Pakistan, it still is very much fixated with Pakistan. For New Delhi, Pakistan's continuous rejection of its greater power and hegemony in the region actually stems from the support China provides it to play the role of a spoiler and a hurdle in India's rise as a global powerhouse at the international level. Whereas for Pakistan, the major concern in New Delhi's projection of itself as a global player is Indian reliance on its military might, both conventional and nuclear. This is due to the fact that despite New Delhi's ever-growing hues that India has outgrown from the Pakistan league, Pakistan remains the primary target of its military and defence policy and strategy.

Of late, several Indian analysts and think tanks have started projecting Pakistan as a failed state. They believe Pakistan to be an unviable project, contending that it would collapse, fragment, turn into a failed state, be reabsorbed into India, or another such failed scenario-and that India ought to encourage. (Padukone, 2014) They allege that the country is run by its military, and it has a strong grip on its affairs. According to Satish Kumar: "...Islamic extremism and militancy have become as important reality in Pakistan as the army of Pakistan. Both of them are durable. There is a symbolic relationship between them that cannot be wished away. Both of them are hostile to India and acting in unison; their hostility will remain formidable." (Kumar, n.d) He further states: "...Pakistan poses a long-term security threat to India which is inherent in the nature of the Pakistani state, its ideology, its power structure, and the imperatives which determine the behavior of the ruling establishment. These factors are not likely to change in the next couple of decades. India has to cope with this kind of adversary and its strategic capabilities and thinking, its national will and character must respond the situation accordingly." (Kumar, n.d) Whereas according to Karnard, "A nuclear Pakistan, however much it huffs and it puffs, can still only end up imitating Thackeray's frog trying to blow itself up to ox-size." (Karnard, 2002) He is of the view that Pakistan has to accept the fact that India is a global player. As Pakistan, according to Karnard: "...is fated by geography and, as an appendage of the mainstream sub-continental culture, to always remain in India's shadow, strategically and otherwise. Even its role as a sub-regional spoiler and mischief-maker depends wholly on India's continued unwillingness to act its size, exercise the full range

of policy options open to it, and single-mindedly and uncompromisingly pursue its legitimately expansive national interests and objectives. (Karnard, 2002) His recipe for dealing with Pakistan is: "The absolute irrelevance of nuclear weapons to deal with Pakistan, a lower riparian State, in the most extreme way is contained in the fact that its granary, the Punjab province, can be turned into an arid wasteland by India's withdrawing from the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, and diverting and damming the waters flowing from the headwaters of the Indus River on the Indian side." (Karnard, 2002)

Therefore, the recent statements and action by New Delhi regarding the sharing of and blockade of water as an upper riparian should be seen in this light. The use of water as a tool to coerce Pakistan into submission has been glaring visible since Modi took over and decided to suspend meetings of the committee supervising Indo-Pakistan water-sharing, arguing "Blood and water cannot flow at the same time." ([Kirby, 28 March 2018](#))

### **Not war not peace: misfires and missed opportunities in India-Pakistan Peace Process since 2002**

Then Indian Prime minister Vajpayee's infamous 2002 Srinagar speech that he delivered in the midst of the 2002 Indo-Pak military standoff is often considered the starting point of the most recent phase of the Indo-Pakistan peace process. US Senator Richard Lugar claiming credit for this, wrote that the "war was averted (between India and Pakistan), barely, thanks to intense, discreet diplomacy by the United States." After the 2004 Indian elections, Congress established the national government in New Delhi and appointed Manmohan Singh the prime minister of India on 22 May 2004. His two-terms tenure as prime minister of India (2004 - 2014) was significant for India-Pakistan relations. During his prime ministership, India and Pakistan almost worked out a mutually acceptable solution to the Kashmir problem. This fact was highlighted by Manmohan Singh himself in his farewell news conference in which he acknowledged that under his leadership, New Delhi came very close to striking a deal with Pakistan. Pakistan's then-president Musharraf's ouster scuttled this. BJP accused Manmohan of being too soft with Pakistan and his defence minister A.K. Anthony a Pakistani agent.

### **Enters Modi: Is Peace still Possible?**

Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) won 285 out of 543 seats in the 16th Lok Sabha elections held in nine phases from 7 April 2014 to 12 May 2014. This election victory is significant due to several

reasons, such as by emerging as a single majority party, BJP ended a long era of coalition governments in India and brought a decade long Indian National Congress rule in India to an end. What was even more alarming that the BJP, under the leadership of Modi, promoted Hindutva hence imperilled the secular nature of Indian society. It was believed, based on the BJP criticism of Manmohan Singh's government and the campaign slogans, that there would be minimal prospects of any progress between India and Pakistan under Modi. ([Curtis, 2014](#)) He immediately signalled that "terror and talks" would not be acceptable to India. Yet, New Delhi invited the Pakistani prime minister for Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony. This was taken as a positive development by all observers. However, the fundamental question that needs to address is what prompted this? Why Nawaz Sharif, the then prime minister of Pakistan, was invited in the first place? What exactly Modi wanted to achieve from this? What changed on the ground that led to this sudden change of heart? Was the alleged terror campaign against India halted? Or was it just political conjuring? This incident is a clear indication of the fact that New Delhi lacks a coherent Pakistan policy and that there is a policy vacuum with regard to Pakistan. By the same logic, what happened since then that Modi Sarkar once again starting emphasizing that terrorism must stop and started investing more towards measures to isolate Pakistan globally. This coupled with intensifying terrorist activities inside Pakistan through Afghanistan and overtly adopting an aggressive posture on the Line of Control (LoC).

On its part, then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif offered Modi's India full cooperation in working towards peaceful South Asia and pledged to jointly work for establishing peace between India and Pakistan regardless of who comes to the helms of affairs in New Delhi. He accepted the invitation and attended the Modi's swearing-in ceremony, yet this could not break the ice. One positive that came out of this encounter was that both prime ministers agreed that their respective foreign secretaries would jointly explore avenues for engagement and cooperation. The biggest setback to this came when the Indian side called off a meeting between the two foreign secretaries on August 19, 2014. This decision was taken by New Delhi in reaction to a meeting between the Kashmiri leadership and the Pakistani High Commissioner. Contrary to the regular practice in which the visiting Pakistani delegation met with the Kashmiri leadership, this time, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Vikas Swarup, advised the Pakistani delegation not to have this meeting.

Pakistani side made it clear that it would go ahead as planned. Sooner after, the Indian foreign minister issued a checklist before the dialogue with Pakistan can be resumed. According to the Indian foreign minister Sushma Swaraj, Pakistan must take action against the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks, without which the talks cannot be resumed. ([Banerji, 2018](#))

This changed with the meeting of the two Prime Ministers on 10 July 2015 in Ufa, Russia. Both were participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and had a meeting on the sidelines. In this meeting, both agreed to resume the stalled dialogue. A few days later, Modi, en route to New Delhi from Afghanistan, made a surprise stop-over in Lahore, a first visit from an Indian prime minister in almost 12 years. However, real progress was made in December 2015 when the Indian foreign minister came to attend the Heart of Asia Conference. Both sides agreed to resume the Comprehensive Dialogue Process. It was decided that as part of this dialogue process, all issues such as strategic stability, the Kashmir problem, Siachen, Sir Creek, counter-terrorism, Narcotics etc. will be discussed.

However, no progress could take place on the dialogue as the situation came back to square one after the terror attack on the Indian airbase in Pathankot on 2 January 2016. ([Banerji, ibid](#)) New Delhi once again blamed Islamabad for this attack and decided not to move forward with the dialogue and called off the planned meeting between the foreign secretaries of the two countries. During the same time, Pakistani counter intelligence arrested an operative of the Indian spy agency, The Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW), Commander Kulbhushan Yadav. During the interrogation, the Indian Navy commander working for R&AW revealed that he was tasked to conduct subversive activities in Balochistan and Karachi. ([Dawn, 30 March 2016](#)) The unprovoked attack on Pakistan in the guise of a surgical strike on Balakot inside Pakistan was another indication that India has no regard for International law. The befitting reply that New Delhi got from Pakistan is no guarantee that Modi's New Delhi would not repeat it. And this was not the only way; India was hurting Pakistan and creating problems for Pakistan. For Islamabad, the water shortage issue in Pakistan also has an Indian dimension. According to this perspective, Since the construction of several dams in total disregard and violation of the Indus water treaty, such as the Kishenganga dam, Pakistan is facing an increasing shortage of water. This is not the first-time water issues have emerged between India and Pakistan. ([Shaukat, 2018](#)) During the 1990s,

Islamabad viewed the construction of a hydro-electric plant on the Chenab river in Doda district in the Indian controlled Kashmir as a violation of the Indus Water Treaty, especially because Chenab is a tributary of the Indus River that, according to the Indus treaty was designated for use by Pakistan. Pakistan has serious reservations about India's Baglihar Dam. According to a Pakistani analyst, India is using a water weapon against Pakistan. From New Delhi's perspective, increasing China-Pakistan partnership and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is another problem area. Pakistan is receiving approximately \$ 62 billion in investment from China for a vast infrastructure corridor. As part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a number of power projects, nine industrial zones, extensive road and railway network will be constructed, connecting the Chinese city of Kashghar with Pakistan's Gwadar. New Delhi has strongly protested to the CPEC, claiming that CPEC will be passing through the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan, which is a disputed area as it was a part of the former princely State of Jammu & Kashmir.

New Delhi often claims that it is not clear whom it should talk to in Islamabad because Pakistan is run by the Pakistan Army, and it does not want peace with India. Shashi Tahroor reiterated that the real problem is Pakistan's army. He said: "India has an army; Pakistan army has a state." Hence, New Delhi is unenthusiastic to talk peace with Pakistan's political leadership. Yet, no resolution of the Kashmir issue came out of General Musharraf-Manmohan Singh back-channel diplomacy. Making peace with an army ruled Pakistan, according to the Indian strategic community, would strengthen the military in Pakistan and further weaken democratic forces. India under Modi is no different. Recently, one has come across a number of extremely aggressive, provocative and gratuitously reckless statements from the Indian army and air force chiefs regarding Pakistan. Apparently, this is done with the full support and encouragement of the Indian Prime minister Modi who has on several occasion issued extremely provoking statements. He proudly announced that India supported the freedom struggle and creation of Bangladesh and that India is supporting the Baloch insurgents. By looking at this aggressive behaviour and posturing, one could have argued that finally, New Delhi has decided how to address its so-called Pakistan problem and worked out a clear cut policy on how to, for once and for all, deal with its proverbial twin Pakistan. But then the Indian media broke the news that the Indian national security advisor met his Pakistani counterpart in Thailand. It was surprising that, on the one hand,

the Indian military leadership was on hot fuse hurling threats to Pakistan, and on the other, the Indian NSA was meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, according to the Indian media. What was to be made of it? Was it an indication of the widening civil-military divide in India? Are they onboard with the Indian civilian leadership contact Islamabad? If it is the former, it would not be surprising as since the 2002 standoff, the Indian military is unhappy with its political leadership. This is the often-overlooked dimension of the Indian military's cold start strategy. Another important development is the Indian decision to unilaterally change the status of the Indian occupied Kashmir in August 2019. This not only was a dangerous development for Pakistan, it also rang alarm bells in China. The recent Sino-Indian military clash in Ladakh should be seen through this perspective.

### **Critical Appraisal: New Delhi's Pakistan Dilemma and the Peace Process**

New Delhi has taken the position that if Islamabad wants to have a meaningful dialogue for a lasting peace between India and Pakistan, it must first stop the cross-border terrorism, dismantle the alleged terror infrastructure and agree to a number of pre-conditions set by New Delhi. Since the assumption of the office of the prime minister of India by Narendra Modi, New Delhi also wants Islamabad to accept India's dominant position in the region before it can engage Islamabad in a peace process. ([Akram, 28 September 2014](#)) Is New Delhi justified in putting pre-conditions for the initiation of a peace dialogue? India is indecisive on how to deal with its complicated relations with Pakistan. As the relations overview did in this paper indicates, New Delhi responds to developments instead of following a coherent policy. Another important factor in its dealing with Islamabad is that every step that New Delhi takes intends to be a signal to Washington to put pressure on Islamabad; otherwise, New Delhi would be compelled to take action against Islamabad that might jeopardize American interests in the region. ([Yusuf, 2018](#)) In the Indian strategic thinking, Pakistan is in a bad situation both internally as well as externally, whereas the regional and global power configuration is in India's favor and provide an opportunity to take action and decisions based on its own strategic advantage.

What New Delhi needs to consider is whether it would be possible for it to be accepted as a global power without having at least working relations with its neighbours, primarily Pakistan? Can India project itself as the dominant player in the Asia-Pacific region when it is not at peace with

its neighbours? Can India be a powerhouse without being a South Asian hegemon or at least a South Asian power? New Delhi cannot become a major global player if it continues to follow the current approach; without developing a coherent policy of how to deal with and its standing with its neighbours, especially Pakistan.

New Delhi's indecisiveness in working out a clearly spelled Pakistan policy is puzzling for South Asia observers. What lies at the root of this indecisiveness? What is New Delhi's Pakistan policy? How does it want to deal with its Pakistan problem? A generally held view among most of the South Asia watchers is for India to emerge as a global power, New Delhi must work out a solution to its rivalry with Pakistan. Yet, is India ready for it? Despite the conventional imbalance between the two, it is obvious that India cannot decisively defeat Pakistan, and any such military conflict would drag India further away from achieving its global power status. The Pulwama/Balakot strike and Pakistan's response once again reinforced this. It is paramount that India clearly spells out its Pakistan policy. Whilst India's indecisiveness continues, China's influence in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, would continue to expand. Stephen Cohen aptly described the problem: "The Pakistanis aren't going to give up; neither is India going to let go. ... The only solution to this that can at best be hoped for is to manage the relationship in a healthier way- similar to how India manages its relations with China or Pakistan it's with regards to Iran. It is difficult to say whether doing so will be possible within thirty-five years. But, if India thinks it can advance as a major power without solving the Kashmir issue, it is merely fooling itself." Another more alarming aspect of not having a Pakistan policy and a South Asia policy for India is China's continued ingress into South Asia: India's backyard. While India has clearly taken a position against China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China continues to further strengthen its foothold in South Asia: India's home turf. Although India claimed victory after the 73-day long Doklam conflict, it raised a number of concerns within the Indian strategic community. These were multiplied after the Chinese humiliated the Indians in Ladakh. South Asia has emerged as a theatre of Sino-Indian rivalry with long-term implications for Asia-Pacific security.

To sum up, India needs to work out a policy on how it wants to deal with Pakistan- and generally with other neighbours. Until this happens, India is not likely to emerge as a major power. This might need a bit of innovation and imagination on the part of New Delhi. In South Asian political culture, appearing to be weak or backtracking from

one's position is considered worse than actually being weak. This in essence, is New Delhi's Pakistan dilemma; if it reconsiders its position towards Pakistan, it will appear politically weak to a domestic, regional and

international audience. This is what makes peace between India and Pakistan so difficult to achieve and not who is at the helm of affairs in New Delhi.



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