

India-Pakistan Nuclear race and its Impacts on Regional Security (1998-2022)

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Abstract - India-Pakistan nuclear competition has been a defining element of South Asian geopolitics, influencing regional security dynamics. Using the conceptual frameworks of the balance of power, deterrence, mutual assured destruction, and security dilemma, this study focuses on the India-Pakistan nuclear race and its impacts for regional security. The research attempts to give a comprehensive explanation of how the security dilemma and deterrence theory contribute to shaping the region's stability and instability by examining the relationships between these two nuclear powers. It also explores how international institutions and players may mediate and lessen the security implications of this nuclear rivalry. To preserve long-term stability in the South Asian region, the findings highlight the importance of diplomatic efforts to resolve underlying security concerns. The study analyzes the current state of the conflict, including the military capabilities of both countries, their nuclear doctrines, and the existing mechanisms for conflict resolution. It also assesses the potential risks associated with the use of nuclear weapons by either country or the implications of a nuclear conflict for the region. The study uses a descriptive and historical approach, including qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Keywords - India-Pakistan nuclear race, regional security, South Asia, Balance of power



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1. Introduction

The South Asian security environment has significantly changed because of the India-Pakistan nuclear race. This change encompasses strategic postures, doctrines, and the broader spectrum of confrontation between these two powers and goes beyond the simple possession of nuclear capabilities. Concerns about a potential nuclear conflict have dominated world discourse as both countries pursued different nuclear doctrines, i.e., credible minimum deterrence and first-use strategies. The implications of the nuclear equation between Pakistan and India go far beyond their own borders. The region's increased instability has an impact on both regional powers and major international entities. Pakistan developed tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) in response to India's decision to develop nuclear weapons, which it did to protect its sovereignty. Similarly, Pakistan started a ballistic missile program, and India pursued a limited war doctrine known as the Cold

Start.

As for India and Pakistan, since their existence, both countries have been engaged in rivalry and competition. The two nations have been engaged in several wars and other conflicts. India is the source of Pakistan's primary perception of threat. Although India also sees Pakistan as a threat but its desire to maintain its position as a major regional power also influences its security strategy. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict over the disputed territory of Kashmir exacerbates the situation and raises the risk of conflict escalation. Any military action taken by either side could be perceived as a threat to the other's security and lead to a dangerous escalation of tensions. India possesses an estimated 164 nuclear warheads, which are deployable through land-based, sea-based, and air-launch platforms. The nation had initially adopted a No First Use policy, committing to refraining from initiating a nuclear strike in any conflict.

In August 2019, India indicated a reevaluation of this policy. On the other hand, Pakistan possesses around 170 nuclear warheads, surpassing earlier projections from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency in 1999 that estimated Pakistan's arsenal to reach 60-80 warheads by 2020. If current trends persist, Pakistan's inventory might expand further to reach 220 to 250 warheads by 2025. Pakistan follows a distinctive approach by keeping its nuclear warheads and missiles stored separately, assembling them only if they are to be deployed. Unlike India, Pakistan has not officially embraced a No First Use policy. Instead, it has emphasized the development of smaller battlefield or "tactical" nuclear weapons, positioning them as a response to India's larger and more advanced conventional military capabilities.¹

The single case study approach is utilized in this study with the aim of developing a conceptual framework of the nuclear arms race and its impact on deterrence stability in South Asia. The research focuses on analyzing the action-reaction spiral that defines the nuclear arms competition in the region. Regional security and the arms race are the dependent variables while National Security is adopted as the independent variable. The variations in the dependent variables influenced by the independent variable can help understand that by what means the nuclear race distresses regional security.

1.1 Objectives

- To investigate the historical context of the India-Pakistan nuclear race, including the motivations, events, and factors that led to their respective nuclear capabilities.
- To highlight the threats emerged due to nuclear race between India and Pakistan.
- To assess the impact of the nuclear status on regional security within the socio-economic structure of South Asia.

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the key historical and geopolitical factors that led to the development of nuclear capabilities in India and Pakistan?
- How effectively does the nuclear arms race reflect the security concerns of India and Pakistan?
- How does the Indo-Pak nuclear race affect the stability and security dynamics of South Asia?

1.3 Methodology

This research uses both descriptive and historical methods of research in answering research questions focusing on the Indo-Pak nuclear race and its effects on security. The study also employs

¹ G Y Jalil, "Nuclear Arms Race in South Asia: Pakistan's Quest for Security," *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2017).

both the primary and secondary data collection techniques to ensure the information is extensive on the topic of the study.

2. Indo-Pak Nuclear race and its impacts on regional security

Globalization has shifted the character of security threats from major power types of conflicts to regional and hybrid in nature with threat mainly arising from non-state actors such as terrorists among others. Some of the states are almost immune to insecurity while others are highly prone to internal and external insecurity threats. Thus, there is a tendency towards the improvement of relations between the South Asian nations, mainly India and Pakistan. However, nuclear tests have not ensured stability in this quite volatile relationship and the tensions are still triggered by mutual mistrust influenced by regional tensions and internal security threats, which include terrorism and separatism.²

Such dynamics are negative not only for the internal stability of Pakistan and India but also for the stability of the entire region because in this area, an act of terrorism can lead to other larger scale events involving several countries. Therefore, even if the continuation of the dialogue seems rather precarious, it is imperative for avoiding the escalation of the conflict and the potential shift to the nuclear level. However, the area remains vulnerable to moving from foreseeable incidents to dangerous escalation due to old animosities, nuclear deterrence, and great powers' interventions. Control of such complicating factors requires constant and unambiguous participation from around the world like that of U.S. and other powers to deter threatening military representations throughout South Asia and raise the region's stability.³

The arms race was initiated in South Asia in 1974 when India carried out its first nuclear test to deter Chinese nuclear tests. This was a new sign of change in the previously non-violent nuclear environment of the region affecting not only Asia but also other areas of the world. The nuclearization complicated the security status among neighboring states, which may slow their rates of economic growth. Nevertheless, the actual nuclear complex in South Asia does not possess the sophisticated outlook and coherent organization characteristic of the developed nuclear states. This lack indicates that coping with a nuclear crisis will be quite difficult for these countries. These trends have further complicated relations amongst the nuclear states and have led to an upgradation in the quantity and quality of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Due to the changing regional factors, unsettled bilateral conflicts, and the entry of sophisticated weapons in the region, the security landscape in South Asia is affected.⁴

The presumed stabilizing measures of deterrence policies have contributed to instability in South Asia. These policies make the regional and global participants get involved in an arms race, which enhances regional insecurity. The strategic behaviors of India and Pakistan have influenced the securitization process in the region, increasing the unpredictability of deterrence.⁵

2.1 Nuclear Proliferation in South Asia: A Cause for Global Concern

The existence of nuclear race in South Asia is one of the most severe threats to global stability. Various hostile relations between India and Pakistan have inflicted the region with the status of nuclear proliferation where the countries are working incessantly to upgrade and advance nuclear

² Y Sun and H Haegeland, *China and Crisis Management in {South} {Asia}* (Investigating Crises: South Asia's Lessons, Evolving Dynamics, and Trajectories, 2018).

³ F Khan, "Pakistan: Political Transitions and Nuclear Management," *Nonproliferation Policy Education Center* 8. (2012).

⁴ M MacDonald, *South {Asian} Arms Race Raises Risk of Nuclear War: Think Tank* (Reuters, 2013).

⁵ S Ali, Brice Lee, and T F., *Deterrence Measure: A Cause for Promoting Regional Instability in South} Asia*. *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 2022, 2250008.

and missile technology. In the past, especially after the nuclear tests by India and subsequently Pakistan, both have independently embarked on the indigenous development of ballistic missiles, thus fueling the regional tension.⁶

An unconcerned approach has been depicted by both, India and Pakistan towards the idea of Nuclear Zero. This indifference is due to the reason that the current global and regional debates for nuclear weapon free South Asia are backed by ineffectual rationale, logical paradoxes, and raise the bars that are beyond attainability. New Delhi and Islamabad both have failed to successfully sign or to enforce a mutual bilateral arms control agreement or treaty that may have perhaps paused the nuclear arms race and lessened reciprocal suspicion. Therefore, both countries maintain fabricating missile material, manufacturing, testing, and deploying dual-use ballistic and cruise missiles. Subsequently, the specific NSG export guidelines amendment of September 2008 has only strengthened Pakistan's obdurate stand at the CD on the FMCT. This amendment which gives India the permit to undertake nuclear trade is seen by Pakistan as strategic threat; hence complicates disarmament initiatives.⁷

Conflict escalation in the South Asian region has relations to political instability in Afghanistan that is a neighbor to Pakistan. India involvement in the Afghanistan that may lead to emergence of new military technologies and influence non-State actors. This state of affair rises the danger of nuclear spread, especially as Iran is alleged to be developing nuclear weapons. Pakistan has been pushing for joining the NPT if India also ensures it, while India perceives the NPT as reverse.⁸

2.2 Strategic and Economic challenges in South Asia

Together with the strategic risk, the opportunities for economic yields make the big odds which South Asia must play for it to come up with synergy with the major global shift that is current age's uniqueness. The South Asian region is a fruitful ground for economical and trading activities; assessment of peaceful and stable South Asia will bring the great dividend to the population of South Asia besides the global economy. Increase in nuclear programs of both India and Pakistan especially the tests which were conducted in May 1998 has before this shift in the strategic model shifted the focus exclusively to the nuclear factor of rivalry. However, South Asia's security is influenced by a complex interplay of several factors at three levels, these can be categorized into the domestic, the regional or bilateral, and the global. As will be deduced from the subsequent analysis, there is a mutual reinforcement interdependence between these factors and security of the aforesaid areas.⁹

3. Regional and Domestic Factors

3.1 Socioeconomic Challenges

Most South Asian nations have become entrapped in a cyclic process of poverty, deprivation, and underdevelopment. The conditions of these countries can be characterized as the lowest level of social and human development rates. Sanitation such as clean drinking water is hardly available and nearly all community members lack proper homes. To be educated, one must be privy of the education system, which is a facility for the lucky few. Thus, life is necessarily stern, cruel, and brief under these circumstances.¹⁰

⁶ M L Mir, "The Nuclear Conundrum Between India and Pakistan," *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 23, no. 2 (2019).

⁷ Z N Jaspal, *Towards Nuclear Zero in South Asia: A Realistic Narrative* (Irish Studies in International Affairs 22, 2011).

⁸ M Huque, *The Danger of Nuclear Proliferation: Perspectives on South Asia* (South Asia Journal, 2018).

⁹ M Lodhi, "Security Challenges in South Asia," *The Nonproliferation Review* 8, no. 2 (2001): 118–24.

¹⁰ M Haq, "Human Development Challenges in South Asia," *Journal of Human Development* 1, no. 1 (2000): 71–

Table 1: Socio-economic Scenario of South Asian Economies (2019)

Countries	GDP Growth	Per Capita GDP Growth	Population (Thousands)	Labor Force Participation Rate (%)	Average annual HDI Growth (%) (2010-2019)
Afghanistan	3.9	1.5	38041.75	49	0.89
Maldives	7.0	3.9	530.95	71	0.86
Sri Lanka	2.3	1.7	21803.00	54	0.41
Bangladesh	8.2	7.0	163046.16	59	1.41
Bhutan	5.5	4.3	763.09	67	1.46
Nepal	7.0	5.0	28608.71	84	1.28
India	4.2	3.1	1366417.75	49	1.21
Pakistan	1.0	-1.0	216565.32	53	0.94

Source: From Socio-economic Scenario of South Asia: An Overview of Impacts of COVID-19 (Yadav & Iqbal, 2022), World Bank Database and UNDP (Human Development Reports), 28(1).

Economic deprivation, illiteracy as well as unemployment are the main causal factors that lead to intolerance and extremism, hence causing conflict and violence in societies. Ethnic, communal, religious and sectarian intolerance foundations are strongly predominant as it divides the region into internal and cross border conflicts. The government of South Asian countries has failed to respond to these issues mainly because of their fundamental obsession with external security threats or hegemonic dreams of attaining superfine power status through regional power. Therefore, the inherited conflict format remains, preventing both nations from fulfilling their potential in terms of their respective ‘social contract’ with their respective populace.

3.2 Impact of Budget Allocation on Regional Security Dynamics

Nuclear weapons deployed by India and Pakistan have caused more insecurity in South Asia than before. These missiles, despite referred to as defense missiles are not aimed at contributing to the security of any of the parameter of ordinary South Asians as well as not contributing to the regional stability, cooperation or development. The social side of the nuclear arms race shows that it consumes a large portion of both countries’ budgets on military spending, thereby significantly damaging their economic potential for growth. Nuclear sustenance and preservation in the form of maintaining the nuclear weapons arsenal involves a large amount of costs, which is a very tough proposition for the South Asian nations primarily due to the sub-region’s relatively poor economic state. The Indian government spending in the year 2018 for railway was \$58 billion, which accounts to 2%. As a percentage of their GDP, it currently averages about 1% to defense expenditures.¹¹

At the regional level, the drive to state domination of its immediate neighbors creates insecurity and the environment is unlikely to be secure. The fact that India dominates South Asia in terms of overall power, both in terms of strategic goals and military potentials and the instability in the region are also the result of small and big neighbors. India’s desire for hegemony enhances this scenario, and efforts to seize control are aggravating and exceedingly risky in nature. It is a drive for dominance which underlines the fact that, today modern India has the fourth largest army in the world while most of their neighbors remain disarmed or poorly armed. Thus, the tests

conducted by India in May 1998 were primarily due to the urge of the country to acquire status.¹²

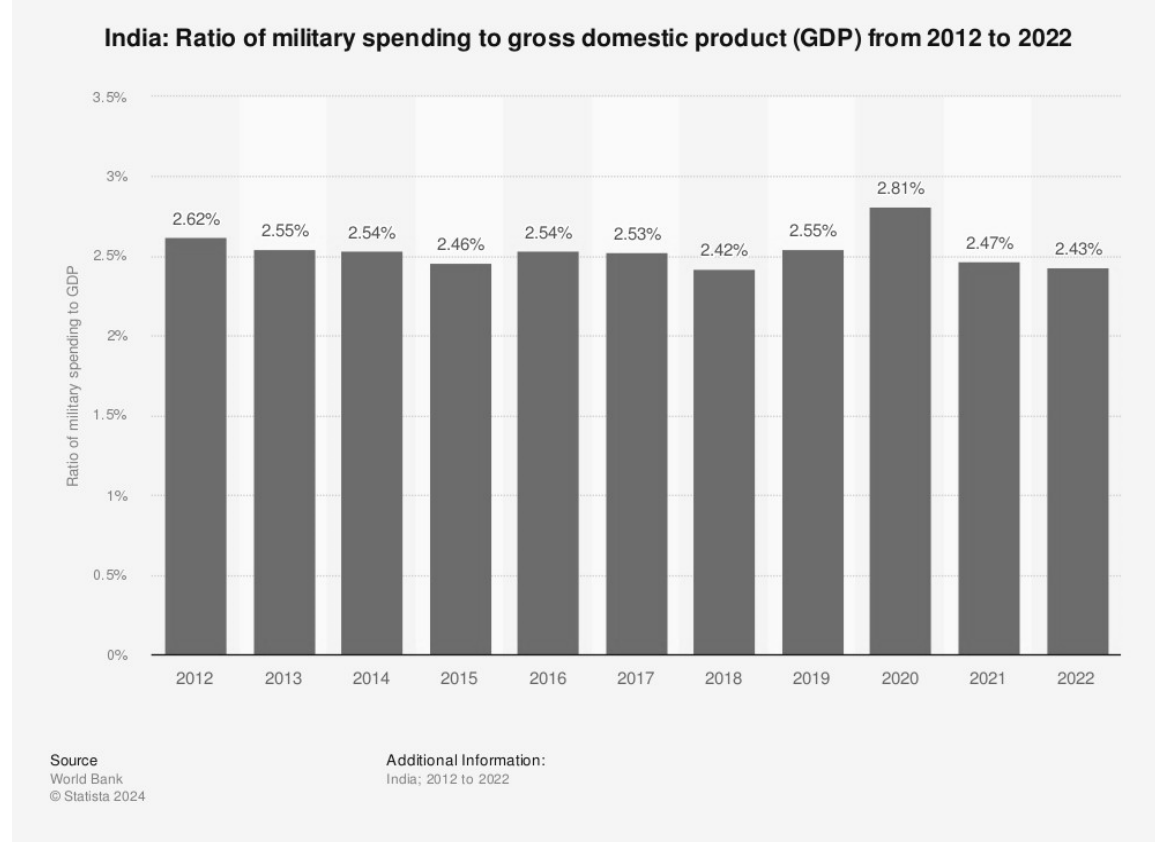


Figure 2: India: Ratio of military spending to gross domestic product (GDP) from 2012 to 2022.

In 2022, India's military expenditure to the GDP ratio was reduced to .43 percent against the previous year. India's defense budget for the financial year 2020-2021 was hiked by a healthy 9 percent over the previous year and was set at \$65. It was 1% of the GDP with a target to increase to 2% by 2022. Out of this budget, 56% was allocated to the Indian Army, followed by 23% to the Air Force, and 15% to the Navy; the rest was for miscellaneous. However, the main determinant of military expenditure in India was the security threats posed by China and Pakistan, thus India became the third largest military spender in the world in 2020 even amid the Covid-19 outbreak.¹³

¹² B Buzan, "South {Asia} Moving towards Transformation: Emergence of India as a Great Power," *International Studies* 39, no. 1 (2002): 1–24.

¹³ K Kaushik, *India Third Highest Military Spender in 2020* (India third highest military spender in 2020, states data published by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2021).

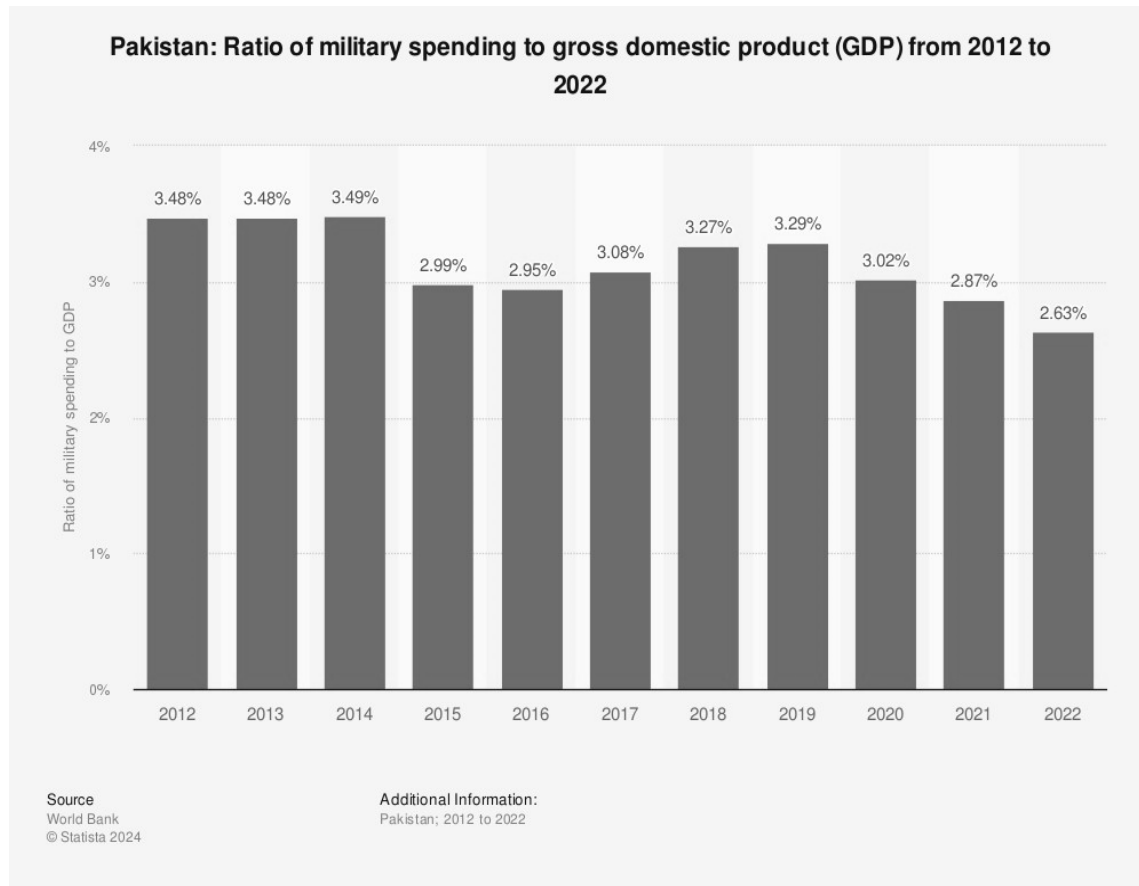


Figure 3: Ratio of military spending to gross domestic product (GDP) in Pakistan 2022. Statista.

The scaled-down ratio to the GDP in 2022 made Pakistan's military expenditure rate declined to 63 percent, which is the lowest score in the years past. Pakistan being 4.1% smaller than India and spends 17.4% of its budget on defense. Up to a maximum of 1.9 percent of India's defense spending as a fraction of the gross domestic product. Such a huge amount, out of which the major portion is raised from the IMF loans, distorts the capacity of its development, and diverts the scarce resources away from the sectors that need them, like health and education. Some of the critics have argued that this amount is because India openly spending on its defense forces. While Pakistan's hedging through high defense spend increases the protection requirement without resolving border issues or fostering diplomacy, it initiates nuclear measures and extends security predicaments.¹⁴ Hence, political discussions and diplomatic measures do not count for the question regarding the border between India and Pakistan or any other country of the South Asian region and thus other countries should opt for political negotiation on border demarcation. Nepal and Bhutan are those countries which have their basis on both China and India and, therefore, they have more to look forward to in the dialogue and less in the arming up.

3.3 Role of Regional Organizations

South Asia, located between Central Asia, West Asia and South-East Asia, is politically and strategically very important. The countries of this area are participants of important regional

¹⁴ S Chaubey, *Pakistan's Defense Budget Rises to 18.4%, But at What Cost?*, News18, 2021. Dosch, J., *Changing Security Cultures in Europe and Southeast Asia: Implications for Inter-Regionalism*. Asia Europe Journal 1 (2003): 483–501.

structures: the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). South Asia's traditional and non-traditional security issues underscore its significance in world politics. Yet, the current and especially the frozen armed conflicts i.e., between India and Pakistan, have not given priority to commercial ties and instead of augmenting regional cooperation have contributed to the adversarial political and security environment.¹⁵

However, the never-ending Indo-Pak hostility is one of the major factors that greatly limit the actualization of these regional economic integrations. Continued security challenges and political rivalry appear to be the biggest spoilers of regional integration and collective development endeavors by suppressing projects that enhance connectivity and therefore the integration and development of the regional economy.

3.4 OECD and Security Challenges in South Asia

The security threats and dangers particularly the hostility between the two nuclear powers India and Pakistan for the South Asian region have resembled the OECD world although the area and the strategies adopted are different from the latter. While interstate wars and conventional security threats such as territorial disputes and arms race declined in both regions non-conventional security threats enhanced, international terrorism, organized crime, separatism, irregular migration, poverty, environmental degradation, energy shortages, economic crises, and pandemics and natural disasters.¹⁶

3.5 Role of SAARC in Regional Connectivity

When it was formed in 1985 the vision of this institution known as South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was to promote regional integration in South Asia. However, it seems to have fallen victim to the India and Pakistan rivalry, the two prominent states in the region. However, this mistrust and insecurity have acted as the major reasons that have prevented SAARC from growing to the level of other regional organizations that have recorded dynamic regional cooperation even in the face of politics through economic and connectivity agenda. For instance, Southeast Asia's Association of Southeast Asian Nations ASEAN as a regional organization has very strong economic interaction even though members have political rivalries. The tensions between India and Pakistan over the territory of Kashmir heavily influenced a SAARC meeting in 2016. After an attack which occurred on an Indian army camp in Kashmir, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to ensure that Pakistan was diplomatically isolated.¹⁷

After that, India declined to attend the SAARC summit planned for November 2016 in Islamabad and other members of the organization had to follow the same example. However, in that year, October India continued with their spirit of regional cooperation to host BIMSTEC meeting to which Afghanistan and Maldives were invited entrée even though they are not members of BIMSTEC, but they are members of SAARC. This kept Pakistan out of the summit. Despite this scenario, Pakistan did not agree to shift the venue of the SAARC summit, and this deadlock has been major hurdle why SAARC has not been active in years. But this conflict situation between India and Pakistan is not always negative for the SAARC member states and there are possibilities of different facets of integration and connectivity in the region.

¹⁵ Mir, "The Nuclear Conundrum Between India and Pakistan."

¹⁶ Chaubey, "(2021)."

¹⁷ D Keohane and F Bokhari, *India's Modi Threatens to 'Isolate Pakistan' after Kashmir Attack* (Financial Times, September 25, 2016).

3.6 Effectiveness of the Nuclear Option and Regional Deterring

The Indo-Pak nuclear race is further complicated by the direct interferences of the major powers of the region and world especially the United States and Russia in both Military and Nuclear arena of both India and Pakistan. They also from time to time provided military assistance and nuclear support to India & Pakistan, allegedly for monetary gains and influence. However, such actions have amplified these circumstances to become longer and tenacious; not to mention contributing to the instability of security.¹⁸

4. Regional Connectivity and CPEC

Since the start of the year 2016, Pakistan has officially instrumentalized CPEC as the main link of connectivity of the region. Thus, summing it up, CPEC is, therefore, a North-South connectivity for import/export trading and transshipment corridor for goods between west China and Pakistan. Islamabad's goal includes the management of other key cost factors particularly regarding transportation and establishing a seamless and affordable public transport system. Similarly, Beijing has stakes in the energy and infrastructure sectors of Pakistan in CPEC to improve the economic opportunity of Pakistan. The next phase of investment in prospect in the forward looking is Industrialization where Chinese companies will be manufacturing in the designated Pakistan Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These can make or mar the face of economy in Pakistan.¹⁹

As far as positioning is concerned, Pakistan's geographical locations are strategic for the planning and realization of China's transit paradigm of Central Asian nations, South Asian nations, and West Asian nations. It has been the desire of Pakistani leaders since the earlier decades of the country's existence to turn Pakistan in to the trade and transit hub of South Asian region: An idea most represented in the strategic perspectives of the country. Thus, despite the rather active trading relations, bargaining of Pakistan with other neighboring countries remains insufficient, in contrast to China and Afghanistan.

The neighbors of Pakistan are an issue, as the nature of the relationships with the countries is turbulent in the case of Afghanistan and India. Thus, while hate has its virtues in relation to historical and social realities that impede Islamabad-Kabul relations, hostilities in Afghanistan. At the same time, the U. S is enhancing cooperation with India, which is a strategic rival of Pakistan, the target state. Another hostile country is Iran parallel to Pakistan, while investing in Chahbahar port of Iran gives India the chance to provide sea access to Kabul which complicates the Pak- Iran relation. Despite the fact, we have witnessed that in this context of tense geopolitical competition, Pakistan has allowed China the regime right to use Gwadar port, which is only 72 KM away from Chabahar. Currently, Pakistani policymakers have the challenge of supervising the BCI procedures of the CPEC due to the tense political situation in the South Asian area.²⁰

The India-Pakistan rivalry affects regional connectivity projects and especially the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The said route runs across the Gilgit-Baltistan which India considers as its territory of Jammu and Kashmir. China has referring to CPEC as an economic cooperation framework tried to detach it from the issue of Kashmir which according to China is a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan. Islamabad's government still supports CPEC for the development of the area and any counterarguments are impossible. Recalling the similar

¹⁸ B Buzan, *People (states & fear: an agenda for international security studies in the post-cold war era*, 2008).

¹⁹ M R Karim, "Same Principles but Different Outcomes of SAARC and ASEAN: Searching Gap," *Journal of Public Administration and Governance* 9, no. 1 (2019): 60–72.

²⁰ G Salimova, "International North–South Transport Corridor: South Caucasus-Centered Approach," *The South Caucasus-Centered Transport Hub: The Crossroads of the East-West and the North-South Corridors* 99. (2017).

aggression these tensions reestablish the historical territorial claims over Kashmir, on the other hand China tries to make a difference between economic interdependence and political rivalry.

4.1 Geopolitical and Economic Dynamics in South Asia: US-China-Indian Engagements

Recently after the launch of BRI in 2013, China has made its economic estrangement in South Asia visibly through CPEC. CPEC is advertised as a China-Pakistan project and while both countries are happy to maintain that narrative, both are also happy to include third-party users. The Chinese have invested roughly of \$14 billion in infrastructure and development in Sri Lanka, \$ 38 billion in Bangladesh and over \$8 billion in Nepal. However, India perceives such a rise of Chinese investments as a threat to its dominance and thus boycotted the B&R forum in May 2017 due to sovereignty and transparency issues.²¹

The USA in collaboration with India the two giants have initiated different developmental project in South Asia to counterbalance the new emerging Superpower that is China. This is in a project in Afghanistan and transmission line in Nepal Hence, achieving the goals following agreements made in the 2016 India-US Joint Statement. India has also negotiated a liquid-gas terminal arrangement in Sri Lanka and is a member of transport tract International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) with Russia and Iran. Iran, India and Afghanistan reached on the broad framework for develop Chabahar as an ‘India-friendly’ Iranian port with an investment of \$500 million from the Indian government; India started exporting wheat to Afghanistan through Chabahar in December.²²

Thus, due to the above conflict in the relations between the two countries and the loss of the transit country, moving towards new routes from the Central Asian republics through Tajikistan, Pakistan is now in negotiations with Afghanistan and Tajikistan on the development of bilateral transit trade. The early conceived Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline plan has now reduced to Iran-Pakistan (IP) pipeline plan due to US pressures. On the other hand, the US supports the TAPI which the construction of the Turkmenistan segment was started in December 2015 and Afghanistan in February 2018, and they plan to complete in 2020.²³

The future peace in the region of South Asia requires the advancement in economic development to be parallel and continuous. Economic and social inequalities simply perpetuate tendencies towards chauvinism, religious fundamentalism as well as ethnic strife. It is very important that Pakistan and India create conditions for interaction in the spheres of economic and trade cooperation. That is why priority is given to the mutually beneficial economic and social development, this will help to eliminate domestic reasons for conflicts and tensions as well as work on the accumulated differences.²⁴

Pakistan has always supported the integration of the South Asian countries in economic and social uplifting through organization like SAARC. It’s either the expansion and liberalization of our economies where everyone is a winner if SAARC progress into a pure free trade area or the integration of the South Asian to the Central and West Asia.

5. Conclusion

The bipolar distribution of nuclear power in the Indo-Pak nuclear race also becomes visible as both the countries look to avoid being dominated by the other side. For example, India has emerged to

²¹ F Razzaq,” *Socio-Economic Cooperation between Pakistan and Central Asia: A Potential for Regional Prosperity*. Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis Journal 2. 2024.

²² R Paul, *October 14*) (China signs deal worth billions with {Bangladesh} as {Xi} visits. {Reuters}, 2016).

²³ M Gurt, *Leaders Launch Start of Afghan Section of TAPI Gas Pipeline* (Reuters, February 23, 2018).

²⁴ A Hussain, “A Perspective on Peace and Economic Cooperation in South Asia,” *Promoting Economic Cooperation in South Asia* 1. (2010).

possess a various nuclear deterrent including ballistic missile and nuclear triad to match Pakistan's conspicuous nuclear power. The Indian NFU policy is to ensure non-use of nuclear weapons till an adversary (Pakistan) pre-emptively strikes its nuclear establishments, and an assured retaliation would ensure a mutual genocide of affected countries; Pakistan's doctrine of credible minimum deterrence is identical to Indian NFU policy with the only difference of ambiguity. While analyzing the interstate relations in South Asia, the nuclear race between India and Pakistan has had a deep impact. Other new threats include nontraditional security threats like poverty, high immigration rate (Brain drain), strategic and economic challenges that further complicate the security situation in South Asia. The above challenges occur across countries, and they call for collective regional initiatives. However, the hostile relations between the two countries i.e., India and Pakistan have remained the major challenge toward the efficiency of regional organizations such as SAARC. The failure to cooperate within such organizations hinders collective mechanisms of dealing with these non-traditional security threats, hence worsening the state of the region. These dynamics remain overly important for understanding the regional security dynamics and prospects of interstate relations, crisis escalation, and the prospects of the use of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Hence, the regional security complex is fraught with the central paradox of nuclear deterrence and nuclear provocation, thus requiring delicateness and diplomacy to navigate the trends and prevent the negative while building on the positive trends.

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