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MILITARY BUILDUPS AND BORDER DISPUTES: THE SECURITY DILEMMA IN SOUTH ASIA

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Abstract

This article examines the security dilemma in South Asia, focusing on the military buildups and border disputes involving India, Pakistan, and China. It analyzes how the accumulation of military assets and pursuit of strategic depth by these nations escalate regional tensions and fuel an arms race. The study explores historical and ongoing border conflicts, particularly in Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh, and the Line of Control (LoC), while discussing the security dilemma—where defensive measures by one state are perceived as threats by others, leading to a cycle of arms accumulation. The paper also reviews the impact of external factors like alliances, arms imports, and international diplomacy, including confidence-building measures and bilateral dialogues. It highlights the socio-economic consequences of military spending, such as the diversion of resources from development and humanitarian impacts on affected populations. In conclusion, the article calls for a comprehensive security framework in South Asia that addresses political issues and suggests paths for conflict resolution and stability.

Keywords: *South Asia, military buildup, border disputes, security dilemma, India, Pakistan, China, arms race, international diplomacy, regional stability.*

Introduction

In 1867, Kipling's fabled 'East' was an enigma wrapped in layers of complex mystery; few individuals in the 'West' would have considered the notion of unwrapping this riddle and allowing the profound mysteries of the East to be known and understood, particularly given the centrality of the exotic image in sustaining and reinforcing Britain's imperial mythology (Chatterjee, 2021). The original wrapper of ignorance and distance is now long gone, yet the enigma and enduring mystery still persist in some form, deeply ingrained within the cultural and historical fabric of our societies. More than a century and a half later, we find that South Asia is still a region where nations at peace with themselves and with each other have the potential to significantly shape and transform destinies that reach far beyond the subcontinent (Bose & Jalal, 2022). However, military buildups and border disputes remain key integral themes very much beneath the more visible and pressing issues of terrorism and trade that dominate regional discussions and global intellectual thought.

An understanding of military buildups and border disputes is a crucial aspect that sits comfortably within the broader study of the security dilemma, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. The complexities of this conundrum become all the more striking and pronounced when it manifests itself between historical rivals and adversaries who have engaged in three significant wars since the year 1947. The last of these conflicts, which occurred in 1999, ended in a tense stalemate in the challenging terrains of the Kargil heights (Fair, 2023). Consequently, India and Pakistan habitually escalate their military readiness and posture in direct response to the highest priorities and strategic concerns posed by one another, with practically no regard given to mechanisms for escalation control. India's well-documented penchant for extensive military modernization is further reflected in the recent announcement regarding the establishment of an integrated theatre command. This command aims to effectively counter the dual threats posed by both China and Pakistan.

- **Background and Context**

Militarization and border disputes have been hallmarks of the South Asian security landscape, particularly in the case of India and Pakistan. Each has sought to maintain a favorable military

balance to pursue their interests in the region. The balance of conventional and nuclear buildups has led to a security dilemma situation in which military postures and policies intended to shore up security have, in fact, contributed to creating insecurity. Territorial disputes have undergirded the rivalry between India and Pakistan, informed by a historical series of confrontations and conflicts between these two states. The colonial legacy created borders whose demarcations were debated in the post-colonial period; partition further inflamed mutual resentment. In addition to intra-regional security dynamics, South Asia occupies a position where its stability and secure trade routes are of global concern. This consideration has also impacted the regional security calculus of great powers, like China and the wider geopolitical imagination, as well as their policies and national interests in the region (Raju & Srinivasan, 2023).

Geopolitical interests, along with access to lucrative markets, abundant natural resources, and various other valuable assets in the region, significantly influence South Asia's critical importance to a multitude of external players. This complex interplay of factors creates a scenario where regional dynamics are constantly evolving. Simultaneously, concerns stemming from a long history of foreign interventions remain deeply embedded in Indian strategic thinking, shaping the country's responses to external influences. Ties within the region, particularly in terms of economic cooperation, face further strain due to the longstanding Indian-Pakistani dispute as well as persistent unresolved border and security issues between the powerful neighboring nations of Beijing and New Delhi (Pal, 2021). These intertwined factors only serve to exacerbate the already tenuous conditions characterized by tension, rivalry, and fluctuations in stability that permeate throughout the region. A particularly pressing concern is the physical and economic scarcity of water resources, which is increasingly emerging as a potent source of rivalry, leading to its securitization within regional discourse. Moreover, the ongoing militarization of the region's borders, marked by the construction of highways and development of defense and energy projects, carries implications that extend well beyond the operational realities of the immediate environment, affecting regional stability and the interconnected geopolitical landscape.

- **Purpose of the Study**

This paper is conducted to educate a deep sense of military buildups, political distrust, and border disputes. It seeks to

critically analyze the factors that underlie military buildups and border disputes between India-Bangladesh, India-Pakistan, Pakistan-Afghanistan, Pakistan-China, Pakistan-Iran, China-Myanmar, India-Sri Lanka, China-India, China-Pakistan, Sri Lanka-India, and Nepal-China. One could not simply study military, economic, or border issues in isolation. They interact and influence each other. An explicit endeavor is made to underline the underlying motivations of the nation-states in studying the security dilemma. The paper imparts useful knowledge and potential political implications relating to the negative consequences of their military behavior for regional peace and stability. It could serve academicians, policy analysts, and policymakers to the best of our knowledge. It might also be of interest to the wider public who are watchful and wary of the role of the military in their countries.

To tackle the aforementioned issues in a broad fashion, a study of Pakistan's military non-cooperation is evaluated. Policymakers and stakeholders should closely examine the findings and recommendations of the study, as the military buildup and actions tend to have a significant impact on the security environment. The term 'Security Dilemma' is much acclaimed in international politics. It has been discussed and debated by innumerable scholars, who have explored the phenomenon from all possible angles. No nation can trust without invitations; it keeps on floating excuses for an HHM (Muraviev et al.2022). Thus, the domain has sufficient practical relevance to actions and policies. International relations scholars are much more interested in employing its theoretical relevance. This study aims to bridge the gulf between such diverse interests and discourses. Neither has it relied solely on empirical data, nor on an ahistorical theorem.

- **Research Questions**

While India and Pakistan experience frequent border skirmishes, military escalations between the two countries are, in fact, relatively rare. This seems counterintuitive from the security dilemma argument and conventional wisdom, which suggest that states tend to build up their military power to ensure deterrence, particularly on their contentious borders. It raises important research questions.

1. What is the connection, if any, between the decades-old border disputes and ongoing military buildups in South Asia?
2. Do these military buildups lead to the escalation of any disputes?

3. What are the key conflict resolution mechanisms to manage this conflict? Do they actually work?

Theoretical Framework

The literature has proposed three theories to analyze the process of military build-ups and border disputes. The first is Security Dilemma Theory, where the military reductions and defense policies taken by one state are perceived as a potential threat by other states and can turn a peaceful conflict into a bloody war. The second is the Balance of Power Theory. This theory opines that different states seek to acquire more and more military armaments to balance a dominant state or to establish their own superiority to enforce peace. In other words, the strategic calculations of states based on arms and military aid make them stronger in dealing with enemies and adversaries. Third, Game Theory may also be adapted in our study to analyze strategic interactions among South Asian states, particularly during a crisis situation.

To analyze military build-up and border disputes in South Asia, this study has been theoretically constructed with various theories. Specifically, the theory of Security Dilemma has been utilized to depict a situation where states do not find security in weapons or force, which in turn creates mutual fear among themselves. The Balance of Power Theory has been applied to explain the strategic calculations of India and Pakistan in terms of their military build-ups. Our study is drawn from a realist tradition to explain the phenomenon of relationships among states. What makes this study more analytical than other studies is the integration of three theories. This mode of analysis is intended to contribute to rich and multidimensional findings, based on random selection of research questionnaires. It is also intended to be an effort towards further empirical research based on theoretical modeling.

- **Security Dilemma Theory**

Although the words "security dilemma" entered the strategic literature only in the mid-20th century, the idea that states not directly threatening one another might feel threatened by one another has a long history in international relations (Mearsheimer, 2021). In South Asia, from the moment of independence, military buildups and arms races have started in part because actions intended to enhance security will be perceived by the adversary as indicative of aggressive intent. Fearing the potential of one another worse than anything else, they will each seek, by increasing their armament, to reduce their own vulnerability. But what builds their security, they believe, builds the adversary's offensive capability;

and so, insecurity becomes a cyclical process. These are the essential starting points of the classical security dilemma formulation. Contemporary examples bring the theory to life (Lee, 2021). South Asia was the osmosis of the Cold War, where superpower strategic calculations added an extra edge to the ethno-strategics among former colonial parts.

The etiology of security dilemmas is multicausal. India and Pakistan continue to have legitimate security concerns regarding external and internal threats. But the security dilemma results from the complex interaction of systemic, unit-level, and transnational psychological variables unique to each country. Intra-systemic dynamics include the anarchical nature of international relations; the process of self-help/self-protection dynamics stemming from uncertainty about intentions and capabilities and risk aversion; the visibility of military buildups; states' tenure uncertainty in regional politics; and differences in military expenditure capacities (Nte et al., 2021). Unit-level factors include leaders' psychological doubts about the security strategies of the other country and mutual fears of alliance behavior by the other. Psychological elements have marked Indian and Pakistani decision-making on defense, stated, and alliance policy, adding an emotional facet to their security calculus. Repeated contacts and potential alliances lodged in Indian and Pakistani fears about each other, rooted in colonial tactics, adding another layer to the security dilemma (Ali & Alqama, 2023).

- **Balance of Power Theory**

The Balance of Power Theory posits that states perceive one another as potential threats and therefore attempt to build military alliances and develop their military capacities as a strategic tactic to effectively respond to such perceived threats. According to the Balance of Power Theory, states that engage in preparations driven by security dilemmas are not necessarily considered to be aggressive or hostile. The roots of this theory can be traced back to the historical behavior and interactions of European nation-states with their respective neighbors, showcasing how they adapted in response to each other's military capabilities and intentions (Reichwein, 2024). At its inception, the primary focus of the theory was on inter-state relations; however, its application has now broadened to better understand the intricate military landscapes that exist within various regions worldwide. The theory, on the other hand, is highly relevant to a number of geopolitical regions,

including the complex region of South Asia, which is particularly pertinent for the research being conducted at hand.

An important question that arises is: where is the balance of power situated within this context? Each of the potential members within this geopolitical landscape possesses varying military capabilities, raising inquiries about their respective power dynamics. For instance, in South Asia, the alliance between the United States and India is especially significant for shaping regional power dynamics. The balance of power in this area is also greatly affected by the presence of appropriate symmetric or striking military hardware, which can influence the regional stability and strategic calculations of involved states. India, as a fledgling aspiring global power, is characterized by long-standing territorial disputes with both Pakistan and China, which further complicates the regional equation. Notably, India's military authority is substantial and dwarfs that of its neighbors, particularly Pakistan. With China, it finds itself in a position where it is beginning to match military capabilities to a lesser degree (Afzal & Mushtaq). Each state within the region not only seeks to protect itself but also endeavors to define its national interests and aspirations, heavily influenced by its structural location essentially its position concerning capabilities and the potential threats it faces within a given region. The security fears tend to amplify at an alarming rate whenever the boundaries of competitive states are in close proximity to one another, further exacerbating tensions and raising significant concerns among nations. Thus, South Asia, with its intricate web of relations, presents itself as a geopolitically significant area on the world stage. This region features not only vital energy and trade routes but is also marked by a multitude of longstanding and deep-rooted border disputes that continue to ignite passions (Aryal & Pulami, 2024).

In this complex landscape, the ongoing and often volatile conflicts between Pakistan and India stand out as some of the most urgent and pressing issues, highlighting the critical importance of balance of power considerations in ensuring lasting regional stability and security. These dynamics warrant careful monitoring and strategic engagement from the international community to foster peace and prevent escalation.

- **Game Theory**

Game theory, the most important and popular strategic framework in the field of international relations, is a method of studying multilinear interactions among decision makers. The theory was

originally developed to analyze competitions or conflicts between two or more individuals acting rationally but independently in an environment of uncertainty. It sheds light on how two rational competitive decision makers develop their strategies and make end results or payoffs dependent on both players' strategies (Barron, 2024). From this game of strategy, the term "strategic game" was coined. In the contexts of military buildups, arms transfers, and alliances, strategic game theory provides a clear analytical framework for the in-depth exploration of the factors involved in the development of these relationships and the possible end results (Ho et al.2022). In military terms, strategic game theory has provided new insights into strategic assessments. This theory is, therefore, highly relevant to an assessment of the security dilemma among South Asian states and helps to identify salient points in the Paktia Dynamics Model (Rafique, 2021).

The basic research study of strategic games showed that an actor, in response to an outside threat, first adopts one of an infinite number of policies depending on his or her assessment of the threat. The threat may constitute any one of a variety of security policies such as increases in military forces and moves to acquire alliances and/or military aid from other states. To obtain greater insight into what the targets of the threats may do in the face of a threat, strategic games called "games of death" were developed in response. To take an example from a game of death, consider Country A, which perceives a threat from Country B, and Country B, which may or may not actually be threatening Country A. If there actually is a threat or policy of confrontation on the part of Country B, it can take the following alternative responses:

- (1) Allow the "crises" to build and possibly go to war;
- (2) Allow the threat to build but take action to resolve the crisis by negotiation;
- (3) Remove the source of the threat by improving relations with Country A or renouncing the now useless source of divergence with Country A.

Thus, policies of the actors involved in these games are dependent on their assessments of what their rivals can do to them and what those rivals know, rather than on how good the actors consider themselves to be in an arms race. The ultimate payoff or the cost of the game consists of the likelihood of a result rather than of an immediate result through additional dynamic competition, for example, to build more and more in every cycle. The essential point is that the game shows "the moves and countermoves"

between individuals, not necessarily the outcomes of these moves in an arms race or other confrontation. It is possible to explore these interactions and postures (Broad, 2021). Although not widely known, the results of these early studies provide insights into the effectiveness of security dilemma resolutions or confidence-building measures when addressing arms races with consensual adversaries.

Military Buildups in South Asia

The risk of future conflicts between India and Pakistan is perceived to be increasing, and the likelihood of external involvement could rise significantly if such conflicts occur. Establishing a formal regional security framework may yield various advantages. The primary issue stems from the governments' interpretations of sovereignty, and despite the influence of globalism, both nations exhibit hesitance to compromise these principles. Current relations between India and Pakistan are not conducive to resolving the underlying tensions. If peace is the ultimate goal, the engagement policy appears to be the only viable approach at present, as suggested by many Indian security experts and representatives (Gokhale, 2021).

However, the expert community is not the only audience influencing security discourse; media consumers on various platforms also participate in this conversation, necessitating a collective analysis of both informal and formal perspectives. This text will now provide a detailed overview of military expansions and arms acquisitions that have transpired over the past fifty-plus years involving these two nations. A notable effect has been Pakistan's capacity to withstand another Indian "anaconda." This dependency has compelled Pakistan to align with unreliable allies. Concurrently, India's focus on nuclear proliferation has intensified, likely guided by a specific principle (Gibbons, 2022). This security dilemma has propelled Pakistan's nuclear development efforts, resulting in a counterproductive yet necessary threat. It is posited that India's nuclear deterrence is effective against any rational state. Non-proliferation has not historically been a central tenet of India's foreign policy, and it is presumed that India has contested the primacy of the dominant superpower..

- **Indian Military Modernization**

India has maintained the strategic military edge in the South Asian region throughout the post-independence period. This is quite naturally a corollary of the asymmetric power capacity existing

between India and the rest of its South Asian neighbors. Indian military power is rooted in its dominant population, its powerful economy, and its strong industrial base. Relatively speaking, India's scientific-industrial base is quite advanced. The country has a defense industrial infrastructure that is second to no other country in the region. Indian defense policy is based on certain core strategies and attitudes shaped by the idea of a 'one-nation' approach: that is, it has to maintain strong defense forces not only for its external security but also to secure its internal security and the unity and integrity of the country. Furthermore, India has to have the capability to act as a leader in the promotion of regional peace and stability, based on which the leadership role can be effectively projected and exercised (Khan et al., 2021).

Defense modernization is regarded as an essential prerequisite in the framework of Indian strategic thought and constitutes one of the pivotal features of Indian defense policy formulation. As India's strategic doctrines have evolved, moving from a stance of nonviolence to 'armed neutrality', then transitioning to 'defended peace', and culminating in the most recent doctrine of 'defensive offense', the nation has shifted its focus. This evolution signifies a shift in priorities where India now places significant emphasis not solely on enhancing its defensive capabilities but also on developing strike and power projection capabilities across both conventional and non-conventional spheres. The acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities stands as a testament to this shift, and more recently, the advancement of the Ballistic Missile Defense system has further underscored this intent (Tarapore, 2022). When India undertakes defense acquisitions, they are presented through its own unique lens, shaped by its specific perceptions of security's ultimate objectives. However, these acquisitions can also be viewed as measures necessitated by a security dilemma that is deeply inspired by a wounded strategic culture. In this context, India concurrently expects the international community to recognize that its deep commitments to the civil doctrine of defense lie at the very core of any meaningful security arrangement (White, 2021). This expectation is further reinforced by India's military actions, which are indicative of its serious approach to establishing a robust security environment while navigating the complexities of regional and global geopolitics.

- **Pakistan's Military Capabilities**

Missile development has emerged as an exceptionally vital and increasingly significant facet of Madam Prime Minister Benazir

Bhutto's dedicated and unwavering efforts to foster a robust national security culture that places an emphatic focus on the critical domains of science and technology (Akhtar, 2022). In light of this, the vector review serves to effectively identify and pinpoint the core learning experiences essential for ambitious and aspiring Pakistani science and engineering students. This initiative will greatly underscore the supreme and pivotal role that missile technology plays in national defense strategies and policies. Moreover, this endeavor aims to illuminate the excitement and various incentives associated with her remarkable challenge of constructing a modern military state through the proactive empowerment of self-help initiatives and the enhancement of indigenous capabilities (Shrestha, 2024). Research and development in emulation, substantiating the previous successes achieved with the strategic deployment of the missile, is both promising and already clearly evident in the reported and commendable testing of the much-celebrated Ghauri missile (Karako & Dahlgren, 2022).

In this context, scientists are frequently quoted as eagerly reporting successful virtual testing outcomes that leverage all the most modern techniques available. These techniques include advanced ring accelerometers and innovative rotational switches. These cutting-edge systems, which are seamlessly integrated into target-tracking equipment, generate exceptional quality data. This data is efficiently supplied to each and every crucial component as precise feeds to the highly sophisticated image processor, as well as the advanced environmental simulators designed to accurately account for various vibrations (Concha Salor & Monzon Baeza, 2023). For the purpose of thorough and reliable testing, the seventy-foot-long mockup is meticulously mounted on a highly complex pneumatically controlled azimuth rotation test rig. This elaborate setup is thoughtfully surrounded by a sophisticated automatic plume simulator, or potentially two, depending on whether a simple or dual chamber configuration is effectively being modeled to ensure precision and accuracy in testing outcomes. It is clear that such innovative measures are indicative of a forward-thinking approach to military technology and highlight the remarkable journey of Pakistan as it commits to advancing its defense capabilities to meet the challenges of the contemporary world.

- **China's Military Presence in the Region**

China's nuclear cooperation with Pakistan is understood within the realist perspectives on international politics, particularly the

balance of power theory. Some studies indicate that Pakistan was forced to turn to China for nuclear weapons technology. These works invariably posit China's cooperation with Pakistan against its strategic rivalry with India. The reasons why China would supply nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan are best explained by the logic of international politics. The end of the bipolar alliance system used for maintaining a strategic balance of power left a gap in Pakistan's security calculations. After the withdrawal of the United States from the South Asian region, Pakistan's relationship with China certainly emerged as a critical component of its regional security policy (Gul et al., 2022). For China, cooperation with Pakistan allowed for the spillover of technology, strategic influence, and achievement of counterbalancing against India.

China's military presence in the region has significantly influenced Pakistan to deepen its strategic relationship with China in terms of armed forces collaboration. During the late 1990s into the early 2000s, China unmistakably signaled to the Pakistani military the importance of taking more aggressive action against India concerning the ongoing issue in Kashmir. This encouragement came through a series of elaborate military exercises and the strengthening of military connections that emerged between the two countries. The construction of vital ports in Gwadar, located in Pakistan, and Hambantota, situated in Sri Lanka, is a crucial part of China's broader strategy aimed at encircling India and at the same time projecting China's expansive power into the Persian Gulf, effectively utilizing the Arabian Sea as a route. This approach has also inadvertently led to a remarkable increase in the number of personnel exchanges and joint military exercises being conducted between the two armed forces, fostering closer ties and cooperation. In terms of weapons transfer and co-production initiatives, the first major defense deal established between both states was the development and acquisition of the JF-17 fighter aircraft, which has become a symbol of their growing defense collaborations (Boon & Ong, 2021).

Impact of Military Buildups on Regional Security

No matter whether the recent regional armament surges are specifically designed for preemptive or retaliatory action strategies, when crises do occur and escalate, the perceived capabilities of both involved parties are significantly diminished, prompting a corresponding increase in the propensity to take risks. Numerous defense analysts have given great weight to the potential effects

and implications of a regional arms race on overall national security and stability. In examining the magnitude of the effect that an arms buildup can have on another country, it is essential to take into account the specific environment and geopolitical context in which it is embedded. A "strategic effect" might be effectively neutralized or even strategically turned to advantage by implementing accompanying measures, such as military deployments or proactive regional diplomacy, that collectively work to raise the costs and risks associated with using new capabilities in a conflict.

Military enlargements create both real and relative threats that can drastically alter the dynamics of security in various regions. These changes serve as critical warnings regarding possible transformations in the strategic environment and indicate that the risks associated with these transitions are elevated. Political, military, and psychological motivations often work together to reinforce arms buildups, which in turn can generate potential crises and escalate existing regional tensions. The intensity of military pressures significantly increases the likelihood of conflict by rendering military maneuvers more provocative, reducing the time available for reactions, or undermining the perceived capacities of other states to respond to possible surprises. The concept of regional balance manifests when the interplay between specific military strengths and the perceived intentions of involved parties exhibits a Goldilocks quality, where neither side feels overly threatened nor too emboldened. However, the strategic environment inherently harbors risks; investing in enhanced military capabilities can unintentionally trigger a cyclical spiral of military efforts and arms races, in which both sides feel compelled to respond to actions that, while reflective of the prevailing status quo, do not genuinely challenge it or provide any real resolution to underlying tensions (Maitra2021).

- **Arms Race Dynamics**

As highlighted by the extensive literature on arms races, the multifaceted and intricate relationship manifested between escalating international tensions and a correspondingly diminished ability for effective and constructive conflict resolution points toward a highly troubling and concerning formation of spirals of deep-seated distrust. This particular dynamic diverts and shifts substantial resources into the mire of persistent and ongoing arms competition, which can have the cascading and expanding effect of spreading instability and escalating conflict across various and

numerous regions around the world. This critical understanding has been drawn from the pivotal concept of perpetual peace and the foundational idea that when the physical powers held by states have inevitably developed to a point where these powers can be weaponized to inflict significant and potentially devastating harm, the regulation of conduct transforms into a matter that hinges primarily on sheer, raw strength. Within this increasingly perilous environment, nations are driven, almost inevitably, to seek security by making determined and concerted efforts to consistently exceed or recreate the potential damage that can be inflicted upon them. This strategy fuels an ongoing cycle of fear and mistrust, as each state races to gain an advantage over the others (Ali, 2023).

As a result, they are led further into an arms race driven by the relentless pursuit of relative military advantage over one or more of their adversaries. The arms race model itself is fundamentally built upon the significant technological advances that have transformed military capabilities, as well as the increased speed, destructiveness, and range of delivery systems associated with the continuously upgrading conventional, alongside nuclear, arsenals of the various belligerents engaged in such competitions. As cutting-edge technology permits nations to gain a significant strategic advantage, these advancements are increasingly regarded as damaging to overall security. Furthermore, due to the ever-present security dilemma, there exists no credible or effective way to refute the underlying intentions of potential adversaries; hence, each side consistently has ample reasons to presume the worst about the other's capabilities and intentions (Thee, 2025).

- **Nuclearization and Deterrence**

With nuclear capabilities on both sides, the strategic environment in South Asia has changed in a radical way, as has the meaning and practice of war, deterrence, and defense. One of the most important truths in this world is that nuclear weapons do not necessarily generate stability between adversaries. In fact, what they do generate is deterrence stability predicated on mutual vulnerability. Yet, given the multifaceted, diverse, and increasingly asymmetric character of security environments and relationships, deterrence stability is difficult to maintain, for mutual vulnerability can and often does become mutual fear and paranoia (Ali, 2024). It escalates the burden of security, and points of an accident, misunderstanding, crisis, or war between nuclear weapons states are many, especially when asymmetry and political enmity exist.

It is critical to note that the concept of deterrence was not born with the atomic bomb or even with the concept of a balance of power. There has never been a time, actually, when some nations did not try to balance or even outbalance others. But in the wake of the first and, more importantly, the second nuclear age, the predominant mode of international order, especially in relationships among the dominant powers, rested on the management of power or balance of terror. Deterrence, a dispiriting, uncertain, and material reciprocity, is not merely about a stalemate or tie in which each opponent fears that using force would make its own situation worse, but in which the structure of self-regulation and stability makes ties more probable than in other kinds of strategic situations (Weiss & Wallace, 2021). However, differences abound on the nature and adequacy of deterrence, which creates both doubt and disputes, thus necessitating the second tradition of compliance. With a rapid buildup and deployment of strategic nuclear arms on both sides, major powers in this situation would try to entrench a precarious form of peace, like the nuclear powers at present. Given that the present state of nuclear deterrence and defense has also affected the development and stability of a regional order, rethinking existing concepts of deterrence and defense is necessary.

Case Studies

- **Siachen Glacier Dispute**

One critical flashpoint between India and Pakistan, which has led to the deployment of military and paramilitary forces at the strategically important Saltoro Ridge, adjacent to the Siachen Glacier, needs to be highlighted. The dispute over the Indian and Pakistani union territories of Jammu and Kashmir is a legacy of the 1947 and 1965 Indo-Pakistani wars, during which the control of Jammu and Kashmir has been determined only along the ceasefire lines, a 740-kilometer long line of control, obviating international borders between India and Pakistan (Padder and Shah2024). Strategically important, the Siachen Glacier is the largest non-polar glacier, reaching 76 km in length and a maximum of 2.35 km in width. By the super-western bend of the Saltoro Ridge, which carries the geopolitical divide between India and Pakistan to the Chinese Tibetan Line of Actual Control, the Siachen sits astride a territory that remains too vital for demarcation. The terminus of the main human settlement of the Skyots and Balts is controlled by India at Northern Saltoro, known as TG VI and IT II (Panwar & Singh, 2023).

The militaristic inception of the Siachen in April 1984 occurred at a time when Pakistan was making strategic pincer movements on Indian Siachen from the west at Gyong Kangri, backed by external support, with a tentative plan to establish a new airhead that was spotted soon. It has been debated that Islamabad sought to preempt the situation, taking control of high ground before it was occupied by Indian forces, as claimed by India (Smith, 2021). However, the development of the Siachen dispute between India in the eastern wing of the Himalayas and Pakistan has resulted in the world's highest trench war since April 13, 1984, which is claimed by both parties to be the legacy of the Kashmir conflict between the two countries, or a result of the Siachen Glacier's strategic imperatives and strategic efforts. This is a highly sensitive area, as many in the Pakistan Army feel that moving out of the Salto Ridge as a demilitarized zone means accepting that strategic defense in the eastern Himalayas at Siachen Glacier can be violated at will. It is grave and unacceptable, as felt by many in the military (MacDonald, 2021). For India, withdrawing from Siachen would be insensitive politics regarding India's strategic interests.

This ongoing dispute arises from a complicated territorial wrangle involving three significant countries: India, China, and Pakistan. It has developed as a direct consequence of the culmination of various territorial agreements that were put in place between both India and Pakistan, as well as between Pakistan and China. These agreements were finalized a decade after Independence, which marked the creation of both India and Pakistan as separate nations. Additionally, it is important to note that under the then-existing agreements governing the Gilgit Agency, made for the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, a crucial agreement from 1949 established a line of separation. This line starts from the southern region of the India-Tibet-China junction, further complicating the already intricate nature of the territorial issues among these nations involved in this dispute.

- **Kashmir Conflict**

The dispute over Kashmir is one of the longest-running conflicts in South Asian history. In the partition that followed independence from the British in 1947, the soon-to-be independent territories of India and Pakistan, each geographically divided into eastern and western regions, were made up of a total of 562 princely states, some of which were still to accede to one or the other of the two new countries. The dispute between India and Pakistan over Kashmir began almost immediately upon partition, back in 1947,

when the Maharajah of the princely state decided to accede his territory to India instead of Pakistan, due to threats from the former's population, which in turn caused Pakistani and Indian forces to be quickly sent over and seize control of their respective positions in the territory, and the first full-scale war between India and Pakistan ensued (Ghori et al.2024).

Both India and Pakistan claim the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir as its own integral part via their respective claims over Kashmir, its population, and its hydropower resources. The territory is a purely political commodity in which India and Pakistan must have a "complete victory" or nothing. Furthermore, both India and Pakistan have, since the 1990s, engaged in very heavy militarization all along the Line of Control as well as adding nuclear weapons to their deterrents. However, all said, this paper focuses on the irrationalities of political, economic, military, and humanitarian issues for those who have it the worst and are the poorest. Local Kashmiris, who have to live and struggle to survive in a legally troubled environment, are left mentally, socially, and physically scarred (Kuszevska, 2022). It should be noted that when one group of a population is inducted into the military, that does not necessarily make it worse for their own population.

- **Doklam Standoff**

In the middle of 2017, at the tri-junction of the borders of India, Bhutan, and China, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China began building a road across the Doklam plateau, near the Chumbi Valley. This narrow strip of land is strategically vital to India and Bhutan, as it is the border connected to the "chicken's neck," a narrow and vulnerable corridor that connects India's northeastern states with the rest of the country. The strategic geography and this road's augmentation would have posed a potential risk of military intervention for China in the case of a conflict, raising inevitable Indian military responses. India moved swiftly to intervene and to block the road-building project, which led the PLA to respond with diverse forms of pressure on India. Troops from both sides faced each other near the border, and further aggression was contemplated. A legislative election was held in Bhutan while the Doklam standoff was ongoing and in the background of these actions and alignments (Bharti, 2024).

In late August, the two sides reached an agreement to disengage and de-escalate. The confrontation ended, and both countries announced that they would simultaneously withdraw. It should be noted that the crisis was unique as it was a conflict fought by two

such large and densely populated countries, which have only fought one war before. China's military actions reveal its intent to change the status quo unilaterally – a policy that creates vulnerabilities primarily for India but also for other countries. India's decision to intervene and halt Chinese activities signals its determination to safeguard the status quo in Bhutan as part of its long-term efforts to constrain Chinese influence and future posturing, even if that means that it would stand isolated and risk military escalation. The wider implications of such a standoff on regional security dynamics are significant. The response of the international community and its impact is also discussed.

Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between military enhancements and ongoing border conflicts in South Asia, which exemplify a security dilemma. It posits that the dynamics of the 'Bargaining Stalemate' between China and India significantly influence armament levels and mutual vulnerabilities in the region, and this relationship is more intricate than typically understood. Beyond local determinants, the escalation of military expenditures and arms procurement following Nuclearization in South Asia has also been shaped by global trends and alterations in the international balance of power. Although the notion that power distribution affects arms acquisitions is well-established, the primary objective of this research is to evaluate the extent of these influences within the South Asian context.

In conclusion, this paper has argued that military buildups and border disputes have careened South Asia into a complex regional security dilemma that is rarely ever static. Based on the above findings, possible mechanisms of stability in South Asia can be hypothesized. However, at best, these insights may be used to design a strategy that engages in damage containment, seeking to prevent the further expansion of territorial disputes, seek an agreement on codes for confidence-inducing measures, and use a third-party mediator to help institutionalize understandings. Creating opportunities for sustained dialogue will enable South Asian states to negotiate and lay down ground rules regarding military modernization from a position of relative power parity. There needs to be a cooperative approach to regional security to design and formalize any of these stabilization mechanisms.

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