



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**India-Pakistan Security Dilemma: Analyzing the Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy in the Context of Regional Stability**

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**ABSTRACT**

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the alteration of military doctrines by India and Pakistan with tactical nuclear weapons establishes a fragile balance of power where an attempt to live peacefully becomes threatening. This article also assesses the effect of external alignments on the escalation dynamics between both countries, such as a growing alignment between India and America, on one hand and Pakistan establishing a strategic link with China. Using a qualitative, comparative case study method from 'Security Dilemma Theory' within the realist paradigm, the research reveals the relatively under-studied yet useful tool of coercive diplomacy in India-Pakistan relations. Through an examination of this two-track approach, this article offers informative recommendations for scholars and policymakers that seek to curb threats and secure sustainable peace for South Asia. We have employed interpretative methodology in understanding the existing security environment between India and Pakistan.

**KEYWORDS** Deterrence, Coercive Diplomacy, South Asia, India-Pakistan, Security Dilemma

**Introduction**

The security dilemma in the South Asian region is a deeply grave and complex issue that has been building since the partition of British India in 1947-both India and Pakistan are archival rivals. Such animosity between the two nuclear-armed neighbors has, indeed, been studded with successive conflicts, disputes over territories, and a persistent wrestle for regional domination, especially over the Kashmir region. The roots of this conflict begin with partition itself: a period of mass violence, displacement, and the eventual creation of two sovereign states that were fundamentally antithetical in their national identity and political ideologies. That history has created a security environment in which "both countries view each other as existential threats, ensuring the continuing cycle of distrust" (Parveen, 2023) and long hostility. The strategic deterrence dominates the security in South Asia and the shift of security doctrinal has greatly altered the concept of defence between India and Pakistan; thus deterrence play an important role in forming and developing into the present state. Both adopted a conventional deterrence approach that was soon amplified by developing nuclear weapons and the security strategy became more complex in the region. The main driving force for Pakistan's ambitions to develop nuclear weapons gain equilibrium against India's long-standing military superiority, particularly after India conducted its first nuclear tests in 1974.

Pakistan developed the doctrine of "minimum credible deterrence," with the objective of providing an adequate nuclear response in case India resorted to any act of "belligerence" (Awan & Khan, 2021; Saeed, et. al., 2023). Whereas, India has been employing the policy of "No First Use" (NFU) of nuclear weapons all along but the shifts in military doctrine in response to perceived threats by Pakistan are increasingly making its viability questionable (Noor, 2023). Such an evolution has been marked with some significant events that tested and stretched both the limitations of nations as well as their military doctrines. The 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2001 Indian Parliament attack forced India to increase the

verbal aggressiveness, along with the development of the "Cold Start" doctrine that permits limited strikes against Pakistan without crossing the nuclear threshold (Ainet. Al., 2024; Hagerty, 2020).

This doctrine is indicative of the intentions of India, which wants to seize its conventional military advantage while, at the same time, avoiding the risks of a nuclear escalation. Pakistan, for its security, has established more extensive nuclear program-including tactical nuclear weapons- to deter India's conventional military actions and provide strategic stability (Bluth, 2010). The importance of coercive diplomacy within the India-Pakistan strategic security dilemma has gotten unmovable holds. Military threats have dovetailed with diplomatic engagement, helping both countries to pursue their objectives. For example, Indian operations in 2016 and 2019 used surgical strikes and have been termed as coercive diplomacy to both signal resolve and deter cross-border terrorism to a domestic and international audience. But this action increased tensions and heightened the stakes for both so much that miscalculations can plunge them into uncontrolled conflict engagement. Post-Pahalgam incident shows that "India's military and political leadership are moving on the same route" (Akhtar, 2023) and dominated by their nationalists narrative that has dominated their military -security- paradigm. This paper provides the answer of these questions; how India-Pakistan maintained their strategic parity? Why has India's doctrine of 'military' superiority failed against Pakistan?

## **Literature Review**

Deterrence is referred to as a strategic approach aimed to discourage adversaries from taking aggressive actions. Traditionally, deterrence is classified into two different forms: one is general deterrence and the other is immediate deterrence (Morgan, 1983). Former is a continuous state of military preparedness to persuade adversaries from aggressive actions. On the other hand, coercive diplomacy involves the use of threats, economic pressure and limited force to compel an adversary to change its behavior. It differs from deterrence in such a way that it seeks to alter the status quo rather than to maintain it (Clary & Vipin, 2019).

Coercive diplomacy and Deterrence have been central to India-Pakistan relations, significantly after both the states in 1998 became nuclear powers. These strategies are rooted in the game theory and realism, which shape their crisis management, diplomatic maneuvers and military doctrines. Deterrence in the South Asia operates at both the conventional and nuclear levels. In line with the Kenneth Waltz's nuclear peace theory, nuclear weapons promote strategic stability by making a full-scale war too costly. However, the Glenn Snyder's stability-instability paradox (Yaseen, et. al., 2016; Glenn, 1965) suggests that while nuclear deterrence prevents from a full-fledged war, it however encourages low-intensity conflicts for instance frequent cross-border skirmishes and such as the Kargil Conflict in 1999 (Tellis, 2020). Pakistan, to counter India's conventional superiority and doctrines - the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) - follow a full-spectrum deterrence posture. This approach includes the development of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) like the Nasr Missile (Ahmad, 2016) to deter the limited incursions by the Indian military.

Whereas, officially, India has officially adhered to a 'No First Use' (NFU) policy but after Palwama incident has debated to shift towards a counterforce strategy that could neutralize the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan preemptively, also raising concerns about crisis stability. Coercive diplomacy has also played a significant role in shaping the interactions between the two countries. In the aftermath of Kargil Conflict, India had successfully leveraged the military and diplomatic pressure (Vassu, 2022) with America's involvement playing a major role in compelling Pakistan to withdraw *unilaterally*. However, in the wake of 2001 of Indian Parliament attack, India has been engaged in the coercive diplomacy via Operation Parakram, mobilizing troops along the border to pressure Pakistan to take the action against militant groups. In addition, the Mumbai attacks in 2008 saw India using

global diplomatic pressure rather than any military action, which resultantly made Pakistan to take limited steps against the religious outfit (Khaver,2019).

The Pulwama-Balakot crisis in 2019 further tested the coercion and deterrence. India had conducted the airstrikes in Balakot in response to a terrorist attack, while breaking the past norms of limited cross-border engagements. Pakistan, however retaliated with the airstrikes and captured an Indian pilot, and engaged in calibrated escalation to reinforce the deterrence policy while avoiding the full-scale war. This crisis demonstrated that how both the sides use limited military action alongside the diplomatic signaling to test the red lines without triggering the conflict (Tellis, 2001).

Despite these frameworks of deterrence, challenges persist. The credibility of nuclear threats is however frequently questioned, as Pakistan's first-use policy and the India's shifting NFU stance create uncertainty. Thus crisis instability remains due to the brinkmanship, where both the countries push the limits of escalation, often requiring third-party mediation such as the China's and America's interventions to de-escalate tensions amid conflict between India- Pakistan. In addition, new forms of coercion have emerged, including the cyber deterrence, where both the states engage in disinformation and hacking campaigns (Jacob,2019). While the deterrence has prevented the full-scale war, cross-border conflicts, recurring crises, and terror incidents continue to challenge the strategic stability in the South Asian region (Ahmad,2016).

## **Material and Methods**

The study is qualitative and uses comparative case study methodology with a focus on critical events and doctrines that have influenced the security dynamics between India and Pakistan. Both primary sources (official government statements, treaties, policy documents) and secondary sources (academic articles, books, expert interviews) are analyzed. This study will employ a mix of historical analysis and content analysis to understand development and implications related to deterrence and coercive diplomacy in bilateral relations between these two nations.

## **Data Collection**

- Primary Sources: Speeches, official documents, treaties, defense white papers.
- Secondary Sources: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly analyses on the security dilemma and deterrence strategies.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy: Is the Coercive Diplomacy an Alternative or a Complement to Deterrence?**

India and Pakistan both employ coercive diplomacy to achieve strategic goals while avoiding full-scale wars that may threaten regional stability. The 'doctrine of deterrence' remains central to the security dynamics of India-Pakistan, particularly in the aftermath of nuclear tests of 1998. Both the countries have developed and operationalized strategies of deterrence through Conventional, Nuclear and Psychological Deterrence. The conventional deterrence is the maintenance of large conventional forces to prevent escalation of limited conflicts. Nuclear deterrence in terms of India-Pakistan relations is the development of second-strike capabilities to maintain strategic balance, and India's NFU policy versus Pakistan's First Use Doctrine(Farooq, 2020). Psychological deterrence is signaled through military exercises, diplomatic rhetoric and missile tests. Nevertheless, in India-Pakistan deterrence policy has been prevented full-scale wars -post 1998 nuclear tests-the Kargil war in 1999, military standoff in 2001-2002, and the Pulwama-Balakot episode in 2019

underscore its limitations in managing the cross-border terrorism and sub-conventional conflicts (Ganguly,2021;Ganguly &Hegerty, 2005).

The kargil conflict in 1999, in which Pakistan's limited war strategy under the nuclear umbrella that aimed to alter the status quo in Kashmir region, but military response by India and the diplomatic pressure forced Pakistan to withdrawal from the conflict. Further, the Operation Parakram in 2001-2002 following the Indian Parliament attack, India's military mobilization was a coercive strategy that forced Pakistan to curb their military activities. This operation did not escalate into a full-scale war, but it led to diplomatic concessions from Pakistan. The Surgical strikes in 2016 and Balakot strikes in 2019, in which India shift towards proactive militant responses aimed to coerce Pakistan to alter its alleged support for militant groups, to test the threshold of deterrence (Krepon, 2004).

The recent kinetic operation (May 2025) between India and Pakistan has reestablished the concept of deterrence and diminished the notion of India's new normal. India's military modernization and Pakistan specific strategic doctrines have failed in May 2025. The post Pehalgam incident amplified serious threat between India- Pakistan and the latter's superiority over India engaged the international community to de-escalate conflict and to ceasefire to avoid nuclear clash (Guardian, 2025). Pehalgam incident and military standoff between the two nuclear states in South Asia reset the strategic deterrence.

### **Risks of Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy**

The risks and challenges associated with the deterrence and coercive diplomacy in the context of India-Pakistan are profound, given the presence of armed and nuclear weapons and historical hostilities. One of the primary risks is escalation of conflicts where coercive measures or policy of deterrence posturing might push both the countries unintentionally toward a full-scale conflict. Following the Indian Parliament attack in the 2001-2002 military standoff highlighted how military mobilizations could bring both the states to the brink of war without a clear mechanism of de-escalation. In addition, in 1999 the kargil conflict demonstrated how perceived policy of deterrence stability could be disrupted by limited conflicts that threaten the strategic calculations, consequently leading to heightened military responses (Ibrahi,2020).

Moreover, another significant risk is the dilemma of credibility in deterrence. Both the states must demonstrate continuously the credibility of their risks of threats to maintain deterrence, yet overlapping this can lead to dangerous circumstances. In 2019 the Pulwama-Balakot crisis are the prime example, where India's airstrikes and Pakistan's subsequent response of military attacks tested the limits of nuclear and conventional deterrence (Schaffer&Schaffer, 2012). However, the lack of effective mechanisms of management of crisis makes these situations more difficult. This headed to the increasing possibility of miscalculations that could shift into war. The involvement of the non-state actors had further complicated the coercive and deterrence diplomacy. Cross-border militant activities create a scenario where the state actors are unable to control the escalation dynamics fully, as seen in the attacks of 2008 named as Mumbai attacks and subsequent diplomatic breakdowns (Fair, 2019). Thus, such incidents often blur the line between the actions of state and non-state actors making the deterrence unreliable mechanism for the prevention of conflicts.

Furthermore, the coercive diplomacy relies on the ability to exert the sustained pressure without provoking the full retaliation. Diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions, and posturing military activities are frequently used, but their effectiveness in the long-run remains questionable. The international actors such –America, Russia, China, and UAE- often intervene to de-escalate the tensions, which sometimes undermines the strategies of coercive diplomacy employed of either state (Paul, 2015). While international pressure

helped defuse the crises such as Kargil issue and 2001-2002 military stand-off, it has also revealed the coercive diplomacy limitations as an independent strategic tool. Ultimately the coercive and deterrence diplomacy in terms of India-Pakistan operate within a fragile framework where escalation risks, non-state actors, credibility issues, and international constraints create instability persistent.

While these strategies have prevented the full-scale wars, they have not been successful to establish lasting peace. A more comprehensive approach is needed that integrates diplomatic engagement, measures to reduce risks perception, and crisis communication is necessary to ensure that coercive and deterrence diplomacy do not lead to catastrophic outcomes inadvertently (Ibrahi.2020).

### **Balancing Deterrence and Diplomacy**

Pakistan and India have struggled a lot to balance deterrence and diplomacy in their puzzling bilateral relationship since 1998 nuclear tests. However deterrence has played a crucial role in preventing the full-fledged wars yet conflicts remains at both the sides. These conflicts include; terrorist attacks, cross-border skirmishes and military crises. Both the states maintain nuclear doctrines aimed at ensuring the strategic stability, but the region remains volatile due to the historical grievances, political tensions, and asymmetric warfare strategies. While deterrence has prevented the large-scale wars, yet it has not eliminated the possibility of limited conflicts. This has raised the concerns about the crisis escalation and dire need for effective diplomacy (Raghavan, 2021).

Pakistan follows a full-spectrum deterrence policy by incorporating the strategic, tactical, and operational nuclear capabilities to counter India's conventional superiority and strategic doctrines. This approach includes the development of tactical nuclear weapons such as Nasr Missile which is intended to deter India from engaging in the, limited, conventional warfare. However, on the other side, India has historically adhered to the No First Use (NFU) nuclear policy, but the recent discussions have suggested that a possible shift towards counterforce strategies is possible that could neutralize Pakistan's nuclear arsenal pre-emptively. Such evolving posture raises concerns about the crisis stability that any miscalculation could lead to an unintended war escalation (Jacob, 2019). Nevertheless, India and Pakistan have repeatedly engaged in coercive diplomacy despite the presence of nuclear deterrence. Both the countries testing each other through diplomatic maneuvers and military actions, the 1999 Kargil conflict, was a defining moment where India, backed by the international diplomatic pressure, by the United States, compelled Pakistan to withdraw its forces (Riedel, 2019)

This highlights that diplomacy remains a fragile tool for maintaining the India-Pakistan relations. Efforts such as the 2001 Agra Summit, backchannel diplomacy, and the Composite Dialogue Process have periodically reduced tensions, but breakthroughs remain elusive. This is because, the unpredictability of political leadership, external influences, and domestic pressures often disrupt the diplomatic progress. Third party mediation, significantly by the US and China has always played a crucial role in de-escalation, yet long-term stability is required for a sustained bilateral relationship. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) including; nuclear risk reduction agreements, trade normalization, and military to military communication, have been proposed to create a stable environment in the region. However, their success depends upon the mutual trust and political will, which are often undermined by the hardline domestic narratives and incidents of violence (Vipin, 2014). Thus, the challenge for both the states lies in maintaining the credible deterrence while ensuring that diplomatic channels should remain open. Over-reliance on the military deterrence without meaningful diplomatic involvement increases the risk of miscalculation, particularly in the absence of crisis management processes.

However, a balanced approach that integrates deterrence with proactive diplomacy, people to people exchanges, and economic cooperation could create pathways to stability. Yet the strategic competition will persist, pragmatic engagement can prevent from crises spiraling into the conflicts, while ensuring that deterrence serves as a tool for stability rather than war escalation.

### **Coercive Diplomacy and Strategic Postures**

In India-Pakistan conflict landscape, coercive diplomacy has played pivotal role. Historically, both the countries have been engaged in the coercive strategies through military posturing, economic leverage and diplomatic pressure. Surgical strikes by India and counter-measures by Pakistan highlight a pattern of compellence strategies where limited military action is used to achieve the political objectives. However, the Kargil conflict in 1999 and the Balakot airstrikes in 2019 demonstrate how both the countries use coercive diplomacy to reinforce deterrence to avoid going into a full-fledged war (Tellis, 2020) . Despite the fact that both the states have nuclear capabilities, coercive diplomacy often exacerbates security tensions rather resolving them. For instance, India's reliance on sub-conventional tactics- hybrid warfare strategy against Pakistan - serves as a means of coercion against the conventional military superiority against Pakistan. Meanwhile the military doctrines of India such as, Cold Start Doctrine, indicates a proactive stance that challenges the traditional deterrence norms, increasing the escalation risks (Vipin, 2014) - though Cold Start Doctrine does not the serve India's strategic objectives. India's new limited war doctrine (Lading,2008) has not established deterrence vis-à-vis Pakistan. And Keep relying on surgical, preemptive, strikes against Pakistan.

The India-Pak security dilemma is further intensified by their external coalitions. India has a strategic tie with the United States, marked by the defense agreements -Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) strengthens its intelligence and military capabilities. However, India being an ally of the United States has influenced Pakistan to deepen its security ties with China, reflected in the projects like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and other military collaborations. Moreover, the role of international institutions such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in influencing the counter-terrorism policies of Pakistan demonstrates the impact of external actors on regional stability. The increasing, defence, collaboration of the US-India also has contributed to Pakistan's security concerns, reinforcing its alignment with China an emerging major economy, pushing the South Asian region into a polarized security architecture (Haider, 2024).

### **Regional In/Stability in South Asia**

India-Pakistan relations have significant implications for the South Asian regional stability. This influences the political dynamics, security structures, and economic developments. The history of conflicts, deep-rooted mistrust, and territorial disputes has kept the region in state of strategic volatility. While both the states possess nuclear deterrence, the recurrence of crises and absence of sustained diplomatic engagement continue to pose the challenges in the long-run. The Kashmir dispute remains a core issue till date, which affects the regional stability. Periodic escalations, including the militant activities and cross-border skirmishes, have fueled the tensions, involved the international community for mediation. However, the revocation of Article 370 by the Indian government in 2019 has strained relations to a greater extent. This has navigated to the diplomatic downgrades and military confrontations along the Line of Control (LOC) between India and Pakistan. These tensions have however contributed to an environment of uncertainty, impacting the military postures, and security policies on both the sides (Schofield,2010).

To overcome these major regional security implications, nuclear deterrence plays a pivotal role in the regional stability. While it has prevented the full-scale wars since 1998,

still risks of miscalculation persist. The main example of this is the Pulwama-Balakot crisis of 2019, and Peshawar narrative to air warfare May 2025, demonstrating how the conventional conflicts could escalate into the dangerous confrontations. The in/stability of the region is exacerbated by the absence of arms control mechanisms and frameworks of crisis management, making the region vulnerable to immediate military escalations. Cross-border terrorist activities and role of non-state actors further destabilize the region. It has been an utmost concern for India, that militant groups operating from the Pakistani territory, affecting the diplomatic engagements, consequently leading to the actions of retaliation. Conversely, Pakistan has accused India for supporting the separatist movements within its borders, particularly in the province of Baluchistan (Bibi & Muzaffar, 2023; Hayat, 2020). These security challenges reinforce a cycle of counter-measures and accusations, limiting the prospects for sustainable peace. International pressure, significantly from the global powers such as China and the United States have, sporadically, influenced the counter-measures, thus deep-seated mistrust continues to hinder the mutual cooperation in this domain.

The economic instability is another consequence of strained relations between India and Pakistan. Limited economic connectivity and trade restrictions have prevented the smooth regional connectivity and integration, in making South Asian region as one of the smallest economically coupled regions across the world. Initiatives- such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) a regional organization- have been hampered by the political tensions that also restrict the potential for economic collaboration (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017). The 2019 Kashmir crisis, has suspended the trade ties between the India-Pakistan, highlighting how political disputes put negative impacts on the economic growth. In this connection the enhanced economic and trade cooperation could serve as a confidence-building measures (Muzaffar, et. al., 2021a; Farooq, 2020). The India-Pakistan rivalry also influences the Afghanistan's stability, with both states having the divergent interests in the post-Taliban political landscape. Pakistan has historically viewed the neighboring Afghanistan as a strategic zone against India, while India has expanded its footprints in terms of economy and diplomacy in Afghanistan (Akhtar & Holland, 2023; Muzaffar, et. al., 2021).

Thus, the changing dynamics after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan have the potential to either alleviate or exacerbate the India-Pak tensions, depending upon how both the states engage with the new power structure in Kabul. External powers contribute crucially to shape the regional stability in South Asia. The US, Russia and China have all engaged with India-Pakistan either as strategic partners or mediators in conflict resolution (Greg, 2025). The presence of external actors leads to the additional complexities, as major powers rivalries intersect with the regional security concerns.

The interplay between coercive diplomacy and deterrence policy has significantly impacted the regional stability of South Asia. The strategic postures of both the states create a fragile equilibrium, where miscalculations can lead to unintended risks escalation. Given the heightened risks of war escalations, it is utmost significant to take steps for effective crisis management mechanisms. This includes the Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) such as nuclear risk reduction agreements, hotline communications, and military-to-military dialogues have played a crucial role in conflicts prevention (Krepon, 2004). However, these measures remain susceptible and fragile to political shifts and limiting their long-term efficacy. The ongoing arm conflict, driven by the advanced missile technology, India-Pakistan military modernization, and Indian strategic doctrines further complicate the regional stability and deterrence has not been overcome, however, it is reestablished by Pakistan in the recent military standoff. Pakistan's development of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) and India's acquisition of S-400 system illustrates the security dilemma at play, where each nation state's security measures is perceived as threat by the other (Vipin, 2014).

It is highlighted earlier that both Pakistan and India have adversarial relations, yet diplomatic engagements remain a crucial tool for mitigating the tensions. The backchannel diplomacy, an effort between India and Pakistan particularly in trade negotiations and ceasefire agreements contributes much to conflict resolution, also offering a glimpse of cooperation. However, Track II diplomacy, involving retired officials and academics has also contributed to de-escalation efforts, although its impact is often limited by the broader political constraints (Zaman, 2017).

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal that while nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan has effectively prevented the outbreak of large-scale wars since the 1998 nuclear tests, it has not succeeded in eliminating limited conflicts and recurring crises. Historical episodes such as the Kargil conflict of 1999, the 2001–2002 military standoff, and the Pulwama-Balakot crisis of 2019 demonstrate that the presence of nuclear weapons discourages full-scale wars but encourages lower-level confrontations and strategic brinkmanship under the stability-instability paradox. Both states continue to rely heavily on nuclear postures—Pakistan’s first-use doctrine and tactical nuclear weapons development, and India’s evolving debates over shifting from a No First Use policy to possible counterforce strategies—creating an environment marked by mistrust and uncertainty.

Moreover, the evolution of military doctrines has shaped the dynamics of crisis escalation and management. India’s Cold Start Doctrine, aimed at enabling swift limited strikes without crossing the nuclear threshold, has been perceived by Pakistan as a significant threat, prompting the development of tactical nuclear weapons like the Nasr missile. These changes have raised the stakes of misperception and miscalculation, making crises potentially more volatile. The analysis also highlights that coercive diplomacy—through limited military action, diplomatic signaling, and economic pressure—has become a common tool for both sides to achieve strategic objectives without resorting to full-scale war. However, events such as the surgical strikes in 2016 and the Balakot airstrikes in 2019 illustrate that while coercive diplomacy can demonstrate resolve, it also risks provoking retaliatory measures that push both countries closer to dangerous escalation.

The study further shows that external alignments significantly influence the security calculus of India and Pakistan. India’s growing strategic partnership with the United States, reflected in defense agreements and intelligence cooperation, has reinforced its conventional and technological advantages. In response, Pakistan has deepened ties with China, including economic and military collaboration, further entrenching regional polarization. These external factors add complexity to the already fragile security environment and constrain diplomatic space by hardening strategic positions on both sides.

Despite these deterrence strategies and coercive tactics, the core disputes—particularly the Kashmir conflict—remain unresolved, fueling repeated crises and undermining confidence-building measures. The revocation of Article 370 by India in 2019, for example, led to heightened tensions and the suspension of diplomatic dialogue and trade, demonstrating how political decisions directly affect security dynamics. The involvement of non-state actors and asymmetric warfare further complicates deterrence credibility, making it difficult for either side to fully control escalation once a crisis begins.

Overall, the analysis underscores that while deterrence has prevented catastrophic wars, it has not brought lasting peace or reduced the risks of miscalculation. A balanced approach that combines credible deterrence with sustained diplomatic engagement, confidence-building measures, crisis communication mechanisms, and economic cooperation appears essential for moving beyond the cycle of confrontation. Without such an integrated strategy, the region remains vulnerable to repeated crises, driven by historical



grievances, evolving doctrines, and external rivalries, keeping South Asia locked in a fragile and unstable equilibrium.

## **Conclusion**

The India--Pakistan security dilemma remains a critical challenge in South Asian geo-politics where coercive diplomacy and deterrence interact in a fragile balance. However, the external alliances or interveners also continues to shape their security policies, reinforcing strategic calculations that both enhance and de-stabilize the security in the South Asian region. However, to ensure long-term stability both the states, India and Pakistan, must explore CBMs, crisis management frameworks and diplomatic engagements to mitigate the risk perception associated strategic competition and coercive diplomacy.

The security dilemma of India-Pakistan requires a multi-faceted approach that balances diplomacy, deterrence, and economic engagement. This defines a challenge for the regional stability, where efforts to ensure the national security often trigger the counter-measures that deepen the heightened risks of conflict and mistrust. While the nuclear deterrence has prevented the full-scale wars yet it has not eliminated the possibility of limited conflicts, as seen in the past confrontations of Indo-Pak. While coercive diplomacy remains a strategic instrument, over-reliance on it enhances regional stability. The key to lasting peace lies in mutual confidence-building measures and in sustained diplomatic efforts along with collaborative security initiatives. Moreover, external factors including regional and international organizations must play a proactive role in facilitating dialogue and reducing tensions. Both India and Pakistan can shift from adversarial postures toward a cooperative security situation, while ensuring stability and progress in South Asia. Thus, navigating the delicate balance in the region, it requires a shift from re-active crisis management to proactive conflict prevention. Strengthening of CBMs can play a crucial role. Without adopting such efforts, the security dilemma will persist, keeping the South Asia locked in a cycle of instability with the significant risks for regional and global security concerns. To navigate the security dilemma of India-Pakistan, both the countries must refine their coercive and deterrence strategies while also incorporating the CBMs to mitigate the risks.

## **Recommendations**

This article suggests the following recommendations for peace and stability in the region;

- Strengthening the channels of crisis communication- reinforcing the backchannel diplomacy and hotlines to prevent the misunderstandings during the conflicts and crisis.
- Measures to reduce the nuclear risks- the implementation of bilateral agreements to prevent the nuclear escalation that occurs accidentally.
- Diplomatic Involvement, to utilize international forums to address the core disputes rather than relying only on military coercion.
- Counter-terrorism cooperation, it requires joint mechanisms to help curb the influence of militant groups that de-stabilize the dynamics of deterrence.

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