History of the India-Pakistan Conflict

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1947: Partition & Colonialism

The conflict between India and Pakistan originated as a clash between Indian and Muslim nationalism during British colonial rule. The Indian National Congress led the Indian-nationalist struggle, while the principal Muslim-nationalist political organisation was the Muslim League. As the British government retreated from South Asia after WWII, it served notice on these two organizations to negotiate a constitutional framework for postcolonial India before its departure in 1947. But the bitter tensions created by the colonial legacy of divide and rule made it impossible for the parties to meet this demand within the prescribed time. Consequently, the British government imposed its own plan and departed. According to this plan, devised by the last British Viceroy, Louis Mountbatten, areas whose populations were predominantly Muslim, were to join Pakistan, while Hindu-majority areas were to be part of India.

In the 565 princely states of South Asia, which were not governed directly by the British, the decision to join either India or Pakistan was left to their rulers. They were, of course, not required to act according to their people's wishes. Jammu and Kashmir had a largely Muslim population but was ruled by a Hindu who decided to join India.

The boundary between India and Pakistan was drawn by a British lawyer Cyril Radcliffe. The incompetence and apathy with which the British colonial regime handled its departure had catastrophic consequences. Some three million people lost their lives and seventeen million were compelled to leave their homes.

1947: First Kashmir War

India intervened in Kashmir in 1947 on the pretext that as a regional great power, it had an interest in maintaining order in this strategically sensitive region near China and the Soviet Union. Pakistan had inherited a very small army that was almost completely reliant on British officers. The British Commander-in-Chief of Pakistan's Army initially refused to send Pakistani troops to bolster the rebellions against Hari Singh, the ruler of Kashmir. As a result, Pakistan's political leadership felt the urgent need to acquire military readiness.

The competition for control over Jammu and Kashmir led to the first war between India and Pakistan in 1947. The continuation of the conflict and tension between the two countries led them to begin an arms race and helped consolidate the influence of their national security institutions.

Following this war, relations between the two countries remained calm and neither side sought to escalate the conflict. During this time, UN efforts to organise a plebiscite to determine the wishes of Kashmiris were unsuccessful, but neither country decided to intensify the conflict.

1960: Indus Water Treaty

In 1960, India and Pakistan concluded The Indus Water Treaty, which enabled them to peacefully share water from the Indus and its tributaries. As the Indus-basin irrigation system was central to survival of the ecology that sustains
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life in the northern region of South Asia, it was important for the two governments to arrive at an agreement.

The international community took an interest in the problem and made World Bank funds and technical know how available. The two countries set up a joint body to carry out the treaty and to handle disagreements. Even when India and Pakistan have been at war, they have meticulously observed their obligations under this treaty.

Although the construction of huge dams and the displacement of people, have had very destructive consequences, the fact is that the two governments did devise and run a system that maintained peace. This illustrates the ability of India and Pakistan to successfully resolve a serious problem.

1965: The Rann of Kutch

A dispute arose over disagreements regarding the border in the Rann of Kutch (a 20,000 sq. km. salt marsh). After serious skirmishes in 1965, India and Pakistan set up a special tribunal. The tribunal was strongly criticised in India, but the government carried out all its obligations. When, in accordance with the tribunal's decision, a small piece of land was given to Pakistan, the leader of the Hindu-fundamentalist Jana Sangh Party, Atal Bihari Vajpayee (who is now India's Prime Minister) tried to block the transfer, but did not succeed. The successful conclusion of the dispute demonstrates that when the two governments decide that co-operation is in their interest, they can overcome obstacles to achieve their common goals.

1965: Second Kashmir War

When Pakistan failed to get the Security Council to take new diplomatic initiatives to resolve the Kashmir dispute in 1964, it tried to compel India to make concessions by fomenting an uprising in Indian-administered Kashmir. India retaliated by attacking Kashmir and its army also crossed into Pakistan in the Punjab and Sindh. Pakistan prevented India from capturing any important towns, but as it had a small army and munitions, it would have faced difficulties if the war had continued.

As both the U.S. and the Soviet Union feared that China would enter the conflict on behalf of Pakistan, the UN Security Council called for an end to hostilities and the war stopped after seventeen days on September 22, 1965.

Pakistan's government, led by President Ayub Khan accepted an offer for mediation made by the Soviet Union. Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Khan met in Uzbekistan and concluded the Tash-kent Declaration on January 10, 1966.

This declaration became very unpopular in both countries. As both sides tried to convince people that they had achieved spectacular gains in the war, the accord was widely perceived as a bad bargain, and hard-line nationalists and religious zealots protested. In Pakistan, there was a division in the political establishment, as Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto soon left the government and criticised the declaration. The national security institutions in both India and Pakistan then became very conscious of the possible political costs of concessions to their adversaries.

1971: Another War

The second major conflict between India and Pakistan was also the result of state initiatives. In 1968, a mass movement against President Ayub Khan's authoritarian rule had led to the re-imposition of direct military rule in Pakistan, with the military promising to hold elections for an assembly to frame a new constitution, and then convert into a parliament to govern the country. After the promised elections were held in 1970, and the Bengali-nationalist
Awami League acquired an absolute majority in the assembly, the army changed its mind. Instead of handing over power to the Awami League, the army began a brutal military assault against it.

The crisis quickly escalated into a major international conflict. India claimed that the presence of millions of Bengali refugees on its territory made it a party to the conflict. India attacked East Pakistan in December 1971 and the conflict spread to the Western borders as Pakistan launched limited air strikes and made a determined military push in Kashmir. The war ended on December 17, after the Pakistan army surrendered in East Pakistan. Bangladesh then emerged as an independent state.

The conclusion of this conflict was also followed by a realistic appreciation of the new situation by the political and military leadership of Pakistan. Bhutto, Pakistan's new civilian president, held negotiations with India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. They concluded the Simla Agreement on July 2, 1972 and agreed to resolve their disputes through bilateral negotiations. They also agreed not to unilaterally alter the existing "Line of Control" dividing their armed forces in Kashmir.

1979: War in Afghanistan

Bhutto's government was replaced by a military regime when General Zia-ul-Haq seized power in 1977. He used Islamisation to legitimise his rule. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan acquired the status of a frontline state in the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. Pakistan's army was used by the U.S. to organise resistance to the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Pakistan's patronage to hard-line Islamists within the country, the massive recruitment for military and ideological training, and the spread of weapons provided by NATO countries, created a fertile ground in both Pakistan and Afghanistan for Islamic insurgency in the region.

1984: Kashmir Again

In April 1984, the Indian Army captured some mountain outposts in northern Kashmir. This placed the Indian army near Pakistan's access routes to China. Casualties claimed by the harsh climate were greater than those caused by actual fighting.

1989: Campaign in Kashmir

Due to developments in Kashmir's civil society, a qualitative change occurred in India-Pakistan relations in 1989. A massive public campaign for Azadi (independence) emerged in the Valley of Kashmir. This movement dramatically increased the tension between India and Pakistan and brought them to the brink of full-scale war.

The Azadi campaign began peacefully and was led mostly by secular nationalists. It quickly turned violent when India's armed forces fired on peaceful public demonstrations. The Indian government then cracked down on all institutions of civil society. They used "cordon and search" operations: curfews were imposed and then house-to-house searches were carried out. There were numerous complaints of rape and torture. The Indian army eventually crushed the resistance led by secular groups.

Pakistan was initially surprised by the Azadi campaign. Once it began, Pakistan's military leadership tried to guide it in a direction that would be in its own interest. Besides the military, politically-powerful Islamist groups, were also ready to offer support to Kashmiri youth that were compelled to flee the Indian army. Weapons were easily available from the pipeline set up for the Afghan jihad. As a result, Indian armed forces continue to face effective resistance in Kashmir.

1992: The Ayodhya Mosque
The Hindu-fundamentalist Bharatya Janata Party (BJP) generally targets religious minorities for persecution and advocates a hard-line military stance against both Pakistan and China. In the 1980s, the BJP (whose members are well represented in the police) began a campaign to replace an historic mosque in Ayodhia with a Hindu temple. The BJP used this campaign to mobilise support to establish a Hindu fundamentalist and authoritarian political system.

In 1992, the BJP led an assault on the mosque and destroyed it. Violence against the Muslim minority, left at least 2000 people dead all over India. There was no serious effort by the Indian state to prosecute leaders or rank-and-file militants who committed these atrocities. The BJP benefited from this impunity and emerged as the largest party in parliament.

**1998: Nuclear Tests**

When the BJP formed the federal government in 1998, it moved swiftly to satisfy the demand of India's national security establishment to test nuclear weapons. Pakistan responded with its own nuclear tests. When the Indian and Pakistani leaders began negotiations in 1999, Pakistan's Prime Minister thanked his Indian counterpart for conducting the nuclear tests, for it had provided Pakistan the pretext to come out of the nuclear closet.

**1999: Battle in Kashmir**

In 1999, Vajpayee and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared their intent to discuss Kashmir. This did not stop the fighting in Kashmir. Later that year, it was discovered that Pakistan's army had captured strategic heights in Kashmir's Kargil region. India responded with massive force to evict Pakistan troops, and Pakistan was isolated diplomatically and agreed to leave Kargil. Differences arising from the handling of this episode led to the overthrow of Sharif by Pakistan's army. General Pervez Musharraf became the country's new ruler.

In July 2000, the Hizb-ul-Muja-heen (HM), the leading Kashmiri group resisting India's armed forces, unilaterally offered a truce. Vajpayee accepted the offer and agreed to negotiate outside the framework of the Indian constitution. The truce broke down when India rejected the HM's insistence on including Pakistan in the negotiations.

In July 2001, Vajpayee invited Musharraf for talks in India. Their meetings ended without a communiquè, as Vajpayee couldn't convince Home Minister L.K. Advani to endorse the Pakistani demand for talks on Kashmir. During Musharraf's visit to India he made a persuasive case for talks on Kashmir that was appreciated by many Indian opinion makers.

**2001: Terrorist Attacks**

The U.S. response to the September 11 attacks confronted the political leaderships of both Pakistan and India with unique challenges and opportunities. Pakistan had to quickly chose whether it would become an adversary of the U.S. and risk the expected consequences, or side with it, and confront its own Islamic-fundamentalist allies in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It chose to side with the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan.

India wanted the U.S. to categorise all Islamist resistance to Indian armed forces in Kashmir as terrorism, and it wanted endorsement for its efforts to crush them. The U.S. did declare two such Islamist groups to be terrorist organisations, but the Indian expectation that all Islamist resistance in Kashmir be categorised as "cross border terrorism" was not realised.

India watched with concern as Pakistan again emerged as a frontline state in the latest U.S. assault on Afghanistan.
as Pakistan now had the chance to improve its economy and rehabilitate itself in the Western world. Sanctions imposed on Pakistan and India after the nuclear explosions of 1998, and Pakistan's military coup of 1999, were rescinded.

On December 13, 2001, five people were killed in a terrorist attack on the Indian parliament which India said was orchestrated by Pakistani agents. India deployed its armed forces along the border and moved missiles to where they could be launched against Pakistan. Pakistan responded in similar fashion.

**2002: Ayodhia Struggle**

The confrontation over Ayodhia continues as Hindu-fundamentalist allies of India's ruling BJP are attempting to begin another campaign to construct a temple on the site of the mosque they demolished in 1992. Hundreds of people have already been killed as this campaign is being kick-started.

It is a hopeful that the Indian government's mobilisation for war, and its allies zest for religious strife has lost the Indian electorate's support. The BJP's government in India's biggest state, Uttar Pradesh, was soundly defeated in March elections.

Unfortunately, progressive and secular forces in India and Pakistan are still very weak and unable to exert meaningful influence on the policies of their governments. Until that happens, it will not be possible to begin the process of peacebuilding in South Asia.


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