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Indian Hegemonic Design in South Asia: Implication for Regional Stability

Abstract: *India's political expansion in the south Asia region has arisen a question in scholars' minds, is India perceive itself as a regional hegemonic power? Since Indian 14th Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the oath, a visible change can be seen in Indian external behavior. PM Modi is adopting a new policy and is present as a major actor in Global politics. The security domain of the South Asian region is the center of flux because of two rival nuclear powers India and Pakistan. The craze of acquisition of nuclear power cannot be retracted by both states but it is a matter of concern to maintain credible deterrence. This paper will elaborate in detail how Indian hegemonic designs can impact regional stability.*

Key Words: India Hegemonic Design, South Asia, Regional Stability, Modi, Global Politics

Introduction

The region of South Asia is politically fickle and economically underdeveloped in the entire world. The countries in this region have developmental differences but socially and culturally are homogeneous. Although it has a common history, political dissension is causing a curb in increasing intra- regional uniformity. Regional integration is apparently tackling many challenges. However, this region has adopted a type of institutionalization. The South Asian region is historical and geographical the region can be identified as one entity. The colonization era deeply agitated its peace and led the region to mistrust because of political conflicts. The South Asian region has also had religious, ethnic, and economical. These differences resulted in much discord economically and socially. [_\(Karim, 2014\).](#)

South Asia is equal in size to Europe, but its population is twice. This region has a wonderful strategic position because of its coast and sea links with central Asia, the Middle East, and East Asia. Therefore, South Asia has much influence on international politics and the economy. The states in this region have various cultures, ethnic groups, and languages. These differences are threats to its stability and making this region religiously conflictual and creating further issues. Social stability and progress in economic activities in South Asia will lead to stability and advancement in the region. The United State of America (THE USA) and China both have an eagle eye on the development of The South Asian region and intervening through regional's big players India and Pakistan. [JICA\(JICA, 2012\)](#)

The security domain of The South Asian region is the center of flux because of two rival

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nuclear powers India and Pakistan. The craze of acquisition of nuclear power cannot be retracted by both states but it is a matter of concern to maintain credible deterrence. Pakistan has frequently proposed India create a 'strategic restraint authority' that averts the chances of nuclear war. There is a great need to establish such a regime by increasing cooperation. The solution to avoiding the possibility of nuclear war is only to spend fewer resources on nuclear weapon in both India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan have faced multiple problems, and both should cope with domestic issues instead of more reliance on nuclear weapons. (Zulfiqar, 2015)

Theoretical Framework

To justify this research work, Neo-classical realism theory will be used. This term was first used in 1998 to designate the work of Christensen in 1996, Wohlforth in 1993, and Schweller in 1998. These attempts were made to explain the foreign policy as well as the security policies of great powers. It aptly goes with this research work as it deals not only with the structure of international politics but the domestic factor of a state and their complex interactions. The core objective of neo-classical is to examine how the distribution of power in the international system, motivations, and subjective structure of states towards the international system shapes their foreign policy. Realists of neo-classical theory rejected the idea of neo-realism that systemic pressures will instantly affect a unit's behavior. However neo-classical realism applies assumptions such as national interest, anarchy, survival, distribution of power, the effect of structure agents, and security to analyze international politics. Therefore, neo-classical realism is used to justify the Foreign Policy of India towards Pakistan. This theory investigates the foreign policy of India, threats to Pakistan's security doctrine, self-interest, and subjective structure of Pakistan towards the region as well as international politics.

Epistemological and Ontological Position of the Study

In Qualitative research, the endgame is to dig out

the meaning of people's experiences, texts, circumstances, and objects. Qualitative researchers focus on extracting meaning from the data, which constitutes words and texts. Epistemology and ontology are the two dimensions of research. Ontology deals with the nature of social reality i.e., what can be known and how while epistemology relates to what is valid knowledge and how is it obtained. The epistemological position of this research is post-positivist. The ontology of this study is objective (the social and political world is an objective reality), the researcher views the world through an objective lens where every phenomenon and its impact can be observed empirically.

Significance of Regional Stability

The term regionalism has become much important in international relations since 1945. The regional cooperation organization mostly came into existence for security concerns and defense after the end of the 2nd world war. Over the years, the trading blocs in the region have greatly obtained importance. The South Asian region has been tricky since the beginning because of its ongoing conflicts at the interstate and at the domestic level. The core interstate conflict in the region is the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. These two states are the dominant actor in this region. The Indian state struggle with Maoist insurgency in the northeast and Pakistan has dealt with chief domestic issues like terrorism. The interstate conflicts of the region especially in the context of Pakistan and India have certainly weakened the concept of regionalism in the past and continue. (Mukharjee, 2014)

Perhaps the South Asian region is the only place where all-time active armed conflicts happen under the umbrella of nuclear weapons. It's a commonly recognized deterrence breakdown between armed states India and Pakistan that shows the possibility of overwrought with acute consequences like the use of a nuclear weapon. However, apart from Indo-Pak tussles, the Sino-Indian competition is a major challenge for regional stability. Both states India and China strive for the great status of power and hegemony in the region. On the

other hand, Pak-China friendship has turned the situation in the region. [\(Tellis, 2005\)](#)

For the matter of South Asian regional stability, China and THE USA relations play an integral part in this context because both are leading and have emerged economies. The China and United State have multi-dimensional relations; both states are competing for power, diplomacy, economics, and for security interests. THE USA and China relationship is also characterized by both cooperation and competition. According to the latest trends these two elements are fluctuating in terms of bilateral relationships. China is much concerned about its neighbors in East Asia and in recent years the intensification has been observed in the aggressive elements of the China-US relationship. As China is expanding its military capabilities in the region, it is a direct threat to its competitor. THE USA and China's competition in trade and war are less acute in the other regions. The region of South Asia has deeply fallen under this umbrella.

The relationship between China and Pakistan has considered significant for regional stability. Pakistan is suffering from an acute domestic problem of Islamic terrorism, and China is much concerned about the rising extremism, instability, its impact on specific China and Pakistan relations or economic projects or threats to Chinese citizens in Pakistan. Pakistan and India's hostile relationship and the risk of war are also threatened to damage Chinese projects and interests in Pakistan and the region. China has tried to reduce the tension between both. It also kept an eagle eye on the United States and Pakistan that it should not be too close and that it imperils China's own relations with Pakistan. China also pays much attention to Pakistan to ensure a stable outcome in Afghanistan and wants that Pakistan look out for China's interests which lead up China after the withdrawal of THE USA from Afghanistan. [\(Andrew, 2014\)](#)

Apart from Pakistan, China's bilateral relationship with India is not admirable. However, the strategic interest of China related to India like cooperation, economic ties, and maintenance of security becomes a convergence in international affairs. Security competition on

the border has traditional aspects. India is an emerging power in the region, and it is deepening ties with the USA and has great concern for China because of its own interest in the region. Historically, India perceives itself as an outright rival of China and China's approach has been persistently secure that it endures bracketed with Pakistan. The relations of both states are historically hostile and a kind of normal but according to the recent changes in the region compelled both to have economic ties for betterment and prosperity in the region. [\(Khanna, 2007\)](#)

Indo-Pak Relations are Crucial for Regional Stability

The changing geopolitical position of South Asia contemplates this region as a global vital among all the major regions in the globe. India and Pakistan are the worst rivals of each other and the biggest and most vital players in this region. Pakistan has strong relations with China, and both countries have long been sharing healthy cultures, strong politics, and economic ties. China's friendship with Pakistan secures the mutual interests of both countries within and outside in the South Asian region. Both countries are treating India as a combined target and China is also encountering Indo-THE USA strategic leverage in the region. This complicated background of states also has implications on central Asia and the great game is going to be more crucial in upcoming years. [\(Ahmad, 2017\)](#)

The relations between India and Pakistan are not admirable and a threat to South Asian regional stability, but both are trying to improve their regional cooperation now. Historically Pakistan has defined its strategic position since its beginning. In 1948 war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has transferred strategic control of Gilgit- Baltistan (GB) to Pakistan. It shares a border with China and other side with Afghanistan. China Pakistan economic corridor passes through this way. The concept of balance of power is a prerequisite of a regional community of states where the states cooperate in operating shared institutions for achieving mutual interests. The failure of the UN resolution in 1948 -51 enforced to conduct of a plebiscite in Kashmir. Pakistan calls for a plebiscite for

regular issues. And India's narrative upon referendum is Pakistan's failure to withdraw its forces from Kashmir. [\(Kapur, 2018\)](#)

So, both states acknowledge the mandate of the UN, which shows the application of law to resolve the issues between India and Pakistan. The relations between India and Pakistan are not admirable and a threat to South Asian regional stability, but both are trying to improve their regional cooperation. Historically Pakistan has defined its strategic position since its beginning. In 1948 war between India and Pakistan over Kashmir transferred strategic control of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) to Pakistan. It shares a border with China and another side with Afghanistan. China Pakistan economic corridor passes through this way. The concept of balance of power is a prerequisite of a regional community of states where the states cooperate in operating shared institutions for achieving mutual interests. The failure of the UN resolution in 1948 -51 enforced to conduct of a plebiscite in Kashmir. Pakistan calls for a plebiscite for regular issues. And India's narrative upon referendum is Pakistan's failure to withdraw its forces from Kashmir. [\(Kapur, 2018\)](#).

However, Pakistan and India are members of the regional cooperation organization SAARC. Pakistan has clearly put its stance in the third meeting of SAARC, the former foreign minister of Pakistan Yaqoob khan has reaffirmed the state's commitment to regional cooperation and argued that regional cooperation is much important for the establishment of common promotion of neighborly hood relations in the region. On the other hand, India's consciousness about its image can be reflected in the statement that, India should be accepted as a major power. Here is a contrast in the narrative of India and Pakistan since the beginning. India does not try to improve bilateral relations but wants its hegemony on the regional level. SARC was established to build mutual confidence and for pursuing goals, but India is trying to hold the region. (Bokhari, 1985).

Indian Desire for Hegemony in the Region

India is the biggest player in the South Asian region and the largest country by its population

and size. India wants to play a dominant role in the whole region because India considers itself a great power. To achieve and safeguard its political, economic, and political interests, India tries to influence all the internal and external policies of Pakistan as India wants to make them weaken and intends to make its hegemony in the region. With getting bigger support from THE USA, India become more confident and will continue to achieve its main objectives which play a crucial role in achieving the dominancy over its neighbor and outside the region. This diplomacy of India will confuse the security of all weaker states that share borders with India and especially Pakistan. It would lead the instability in the region and demoralize cooperation among all the regional states. [\(Ali, 2020\)](#). During the time of independence, India adopted a policy to fulfill the Indian desire for a modified world order and provide the country with security to its border and economic stability. Panchsheel and Indian non-alignment policy was appropriate for this. The core principle of panchsheel is peaceful co-existence, the term refers to non-interference in the domestic matters of the neighbors. The effort to achieve the objectives of the new world order, where all the new states would develop together was to be the purpose of Indian foreign policy [\(Aian, 2016\)](#). So, the point is that hegemony over the neighbor or in The South Asian region was not part of Indian foreign policy. On the opposite, it was against panchsheel principles and peaceful coexistence policy. Indian non-alignment policy and its assumed part of the third world head, was one of its strengths. Due to this attitude of India in the region, surrounding states felt insecure and weak because India starts to act like a big brother of the South Asian region. [\(Moore, 2010\)](#).

Indian surrounding countries Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Burma Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh are nowhere with India at per capita. In The size, economic growth, population, and human resources India are leading in all these aspects. Even the natural recourses that are available in these states do not make them competitive. Indian scholars have a debate over the dominancy of India in the entire geographical area. India is the only state which shares a coastline with six countries, while nonstates have

common borders with each other. After the occupation of Tibet, China reached the border of the Asian subcontinent, but China must face difficulty in accessibility due to the Northern terrain. K.M. Panikkar said, 'Geography constitutes the permanent basis of every nation's history' So, India has possessed rich geography because Bhutan and Nepal both are landlocked countries and cannot economically survive without the cooperation of India. Bangladesh and Pakistan both states are also dependent on India for water. [\(Ayoob, 2016\)](#)

Kanwar pal Singh Gill who has twice served as director general argued that the way India is developing must have taken the authority of bringing up the whole region. While doing this, India must accept the concept of its centrality or essentiality not as a big brother or hegemonic but as a process of sharing and friendly concerns with its all-neighboring states. But prior to doing that, it would have to tackle all the suspicions regarding its initiatives and interventions. [\(UK, 2017\)](#)

Pakistan's Approach Towards Regional Stability

Pakistan has recently moved from weak economy to a stable economy. Pakistan is trying to sustainable economy and achieving stable growth and development. It has also mitigated social inequalities but still, Pakistan is facing domestic challenges. Dr MalihaLodhi had highlighted the domestic priorities and challenges in 2016's conference. She argued that 66% of the Pakistani population is below than 30 and the biggest challenge of finding the appropriate skills and jobs for them [\(Times, 2019\)](#). These elements directly refer to instability and it's commonly known that economically and politically stable countries can defeat terrorism and militancy. Defeating the terrorist and extremist elements in Pakistan become the top priority of Pakistan. Expansion in regional stability may have stabilizing effects on domestic efforts. Pakistan's domestic condition and priorities directly real reflect the stability of the region. [\(Harvard, 2015\)](#)

Expansion in regional stability may have stabilizing effects on domestic efforts. Pakistan's

domestic condition and priorities directly reflects the stability of the region. Pakistan had pledged itself to directly hold up the reconciliation attempts in Afghanistan and has tried to improve the bilateral relations of India and Pakistan. It also remained committed to nuclear non-proliferation. It has accorded top priority to building regional cooperation. [\(Jacob, 2020\)](#). The enlargement in South Asian economic cooperation could further bring regional stability. The chief example of the advances and efforts in this arena is; China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which connects the whole continent to the Middle East as well as serves as the land bridge to Europe.

Pakistan has a vital role in international forums because of its almost 200 million population and the seventh most populous country in the world. It has also the second largest state of Muslims and has an influential and critical role in the Muslim world. Since independence, Pakistan has been an active diplomatically strong player. It was a major player in diplomacy accompanying decolonization procedure in the US and elsewhere. Pakistan dedication to the multilateral diplomacy has remained high it has served as a non-permanent member of the United Nation of Security Council seven times. [\(Conversation, 2018\)](#).

Implications of India Pakistan Relations on Regional Stability

The region of South Asia is an instable region of the world. The two major states, India and Pakistan fought three wars and many armed skirmishes in the past. With the independence from British rules, the state of 'Hind' had divided Pakistan and Hindustan. People from both sides have clashes over religion and politics due to the brutal experience during the time of Independence. India and Pakistan both have nuclear weapons and are currently engaged over the conflict of Kashmir both are actively engaged to deliver these weapons. The Kashmir conflict is a big challenge for regional stability according to many experts including the director of central intelligence they have argued that the region of South Asia is the most probable international

forum where the deterrence breakdown may lead to nuclear use.

Regional stability directly relies on the India Pakistan good bilateral relations there are four dimensions which help us to understand regional stability regarding to the India-Pakistan context. Firstly, the security competition in the region defines the competitive nature of both states' relationships. Secondly the balance of Military powers and capabilities in the conventional wars between both states are more likely foreseeable in the future. The third one is lead to deterrence instability and the National strategies are the challenging aspect for regional stability in the context of India and Pakistan. The fourth Point in the stability factors is if Indo-Pak bilateral relations improve China and the United States involvement in the region could be limits and chances of regional stability can be high.

Stability comes after survival, relations of two neighboring nuclear powers is a matter of death and life for the survival of both as well as for the whole region. India and Pakistan want to survive with stability, there is no way around other than a peaceful coexistence. As nuclear radiations and nuclear debris have no boundaries, so the lethal effects of this nuclear war will destroy the whole region for the stability and integrity of the South Asian region, good bilateral relations of India Pakistan are most important.

The majority of the population of India and Pakistan are living below the poverty line. The relations of these two countries have a very significant effect on the poverty of these countries. Both countries use a very significant chunk of their GDP for defense purpose only. If Pakistan and India have good relation, this large amount of wealth will be used for the betterment of the poor population of these countries. Good relations mean trust and ultimately doors will be open for easy trade for both states that will be heavenly for GDP and the living standard of the poor in both highly populated countries. South Asia is the house of more than one fifth of the whole mankind living on the planet earth so simply we can say more than 2 billion human lives are directly affected by Indo-Pak relations.

All The South Asian countries are underdeveloped and called as third world countries, but all can be changed if the rivalry between Pakistan and India come to its end. As Pakistan's relations become normal with India, Pakistan's dependence on China will also reduce as Pakistan will become more self-sufficient and economically strong. Peaceful relations will allow both countries to gain the maximum economic benefits for the CEPC, which will be ultimately beneficial for Pakistan and the whole region of South Asia.

Conclusion

The region of South Asia has become the nuclear flashpoint in the entire world. India and Pakistan both are crucial, but the interruption of China and America also highlights the regional's importance. For instance, if any cross-border intensity will happen in form of terrorism or conventional between India and Pakistan, China's top concerns would be to limit or de-escalate the situation before turning into nuclear war. China will maintain the capability and viability of Pakistan and forcibly resist any activity that could damage the integrity of Pakistan and will also concern about the security threats in Pakistan and vice versa US will do so with India. Both major powers THE USA and China would economically, politically, and militarily support their players in the region. The eagerness of hegemony has compelled both to an Ave active interruption in the region. The extremist threats in the region have heightened Chinese concerns about instability that planted uncertainty in Pakistan. However, China's role in the region is still economic and diplomatic rather than military. The scale of China's economic resources and the nature of investments that can tackle up are consequential for regional stability. PM Narendra Modi has changed its foreign policy, India knows the world is leading the 21st century, and there is need a for big changes in domestic politics as well as external. The neo-classical theory deals with the changes in foreign Policy as the result of international politics.

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