

# Perception and Reality of Pakistan's India Centric Foreign Policy

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## Abstract

*Since 1947, Indo-Pak hostility and the consequent Kabul-New Delhi bonhomie have been a recurrent feature of Pakistan's foreign policy. Being located at an advantageous geostrategic location and having proximity with the regional powers, its foreign policy remains security-driven. In the words of Western strategists, Pakistan's foreign policy is "obsessed with India." At the same time, it is often overlooked what really causes Pakistan to follow such a foreign policy orientation. This paper analyses the criticism of Pakistan's "obsessed with India" policy in the light of South Asian political history and its proximity with India and Afghanistan, to argue that Western strategic community's assertion needs to be revisited.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, India, South Asia, Politics, Foreign Policy, Geopolitics.

## Introduction

Concept of Pakistan's obsession with India can be identified as a recurrent theme in the Western strategic thinking. In May 2019, while discussing the India-Pakistan relations and Pakistan's internal security challenges, the Former CIA Director, Michael Morell made a statement that Pakistan is obsessed with India, perceives it as an existential threat and relies on terrorist groups to counter the Indian threat.<sup>1</sup> On numerous occasions, the former CIA personnel and Advisor to the US President on South Asia,

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<sup>1</sup> "Pakistan Obsessed with India, Sees as 'Existential Threat,' Ex-US Spy Chief," *Deccan Chronicles*, May 3, 2019, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/world/america/030519/pak-obsessed-with-india-sees-as-existential-threat-ex-us-spy-c.html>

Bruce Riedel has employed the same terminology. According to him, “Pakistani officer corps is still obsessed with India” and maintains close ties with terrorist outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).<sup>2</sup> Christine Fair is another famous American scholar who has frequently referred to Pakistan’s obsession with India.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Former US President Barak Obama had also reflected on the subject and regarded it a mistake on Pakistan’s part to “look at its neighbour as an “existential threat.”<sup>4</sup> On the eve of his visit to Britain in 2011, he further stated that, “he and British Prime Minister, David Cameron understood that Pakistan has been “very obsessed” with India.”<sup>5</sup>

Another renowned American scholar, Stephen P. Cohen observed that “obsession with India accompanied the birth of the Pakistan army.”<sup>6</sup> His views reflect a somewhat balanced opinion since he acknowledged that some of the Pakistani perceived threats are real and India’s aggressive stance towards Pakistan nurture its threat perception.<sup>7</sup> It is also stated by a distinguished Swedish journalist, Alistair Scrutton that “Pakistan, meanwhile, often seems stuck in its obsession with India, mired in conspiracy theories, reflecting what critics say are decades-old fears that do little to bring regional stability.”<sup>8</sup> This assertion of Pakistani “obsession” with India is not confined to these accounts only, since there are various other accounts that have also reflected on this certain discourse which seems to imply that Pakistani security concerns vis-à-vis India are without any significant substance.

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce Riedel, “Why China Loves Pakistan and India is the ‘Kabab Mein Haddi,’” *Economic Times*, July 13, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/why-china-loves-pakistan-and-india-is-the-kabab-mein-haddi/articleshow/47823426.cms>

<sup>3</sup> Christine Fair with Neil Joeck talk on “Pakistan, the Taliban and Regional Security,” at *World Affairs Council of Northern California*, March 5, 2015; Christine Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army’s Way of War* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>4</sup> “Pakistan’s India Obsession a Mistake, Obama,” *Economic Times*, May 22, 2011, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/pakistans-india-obsession-a-mistake-obama/articleshow/8514454.cms>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen P. Cohen, “The Future of Pakistan,” *The Brookings Institution* (Washington, D.C., January 2011), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 32-33.

<sup>8</sup> Alistair Scrutton, “Analysis: As Pakistan Stares at India, India Eyes the World,” *Reuters*, June 10, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-pakistan/analysis-as-pakistan-stares-at-india-india-eyes-the-world-idUSTRE6590YJ20100610>

In contrast to the selected but prominent Western scholarship, as documented above, there are various Indian commentators who view the discourse of ‘obsession’ with a different lens. As renowned Indian journalist, Jyoti Malhotra questioned Indian Prime Minister’s anti-Pakistan approach by asking why he is “so obsessed with Pakistan.”<sup>9</sup> Another Indian-Canadian scholar, Nissim Mannathukkaren observes that Pakistan’s “obsession” with India is widely recognised but this fact is dismissed that “post-independence Indian nationalism is “equally driven by an obsession with Pakistan,” which is self-defeating for India.<sup>10</sup>

Arunabha Bagchi, while citing historic reasons for both countries to be obsessed with each other, argues that India’s decisive victory against Pakistan in 1971 should have freed it from its “Pakistan obsession” but this did not happen.<sup>11</sup> Another Indian scholar, Bharat Karnad identifies China as a threat to India and not Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Various other journalistic accounts also reflect on Indian obsession with Pakistan. To them, India’s Pakistan obsession is incomprehensible given Indian dominance on various important accounts compared to Pakistan. Ironically, both American and Indian commentators seem to downplay the security threats that emanate from India and heighten security anxieties in Pakistan.

For Western authors, Pakistan’s obsession with India emanates from its mistaken sense of insecurity vis-à-vis its neighbour. To them, Pakistan is obsessed with India as an existential threat. They also think that Pakistan is preoccupied with the Indian influence in Afghanistan. Thus, Pakistan’s misguided threat perception further leads it to use terrorism as a policy tool because conventionally it cannot compete with its overwhelming eastern neighbour. This paper is an attempt to critically examine this dominant

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<sup>9</sup> Jyoti Malhotra, “Just 48 Hours into 2020 and PM Modi has Already Obsessed over Pakistan Twice,” *Print*, January 3, 2020. <https://theprint.in/opinion/modi-monitor/just-48-hours-into-2020-and-pm-modi-has-already-obsessed-over-pakistan-twice/344101/>

<sup>10</sup> Nissim Mannathukkaren, “India’s Perilous Obsession with Pakistan,” *Hindu*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-perilous-obsession-with-pakistan/article26925287.ece>

<sup>11</sup> Arunabha Bagchi, “The Pakistan Obsession,” *The Statesman*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/the-pakistan-obsession-1502456789.html>

<sup>12</sup> Bharat Karnad, *Staggering Forward: Modi and India’s Global Ambition* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 137.

discourse in the light of South Asian history and geography to determine how far Pakistani threat perception can be regarded as misguided.

The history of Pakistan-India relations testifies that since the very beginning, they are based on mutual distrust and antagonism. Similarly, in the past seven decades, the two countries could not solve their long-standing bilateral issues. Therefore, persistence of disputes and resultant hostilities on both sides prevails. However, with Narendra Modi coming to power in 2014, the bilateral relations are subject to further deterioration due to his and his party's traditional anti-Pakistan stance.

The year 2019 is marked with major developments that shed light on the historic lows in the relations. India's internal politics and election campaign of the ruling party also played an important role in this regard.<sup>13</sup> In the wake of Pulwama attack in mid-February 2019<sup>14</sup> followed by an attempted Indian surgical strike on the Pakistani side of the Kashmir border, the two countries reached at the brink of war.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the annexation of the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir into Indian Union by revoking the Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, in August 2019, by the current Indian government headed by Narendra Modi contributed further in the already tensed strategic environment of the region.<sup>16</sup>

Continuous border skirmishes and cross-border Indian shelling inside Pakistani border areas targeting civilian population are the highlights of Indian antagonism. Along with these aggressive postures, the Indian claims on Azad Jammu and Kashmir including the regions of Gilgit and Baltistan are also being made in addition to open threats of warfare to Pakistan by Indian military and political leadership. All these developments contradict

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<sup>13</sup> Rajendra Jadhav, "Anti-Pakistan Wave Helps Modi Salvage Some Votes from India's Unhappy Farms," *Reuters*, March 8, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-election-kashmir-farmers-analys/anti-pakistan-wave-helps-modi-salvage-some-votes-from-indias-unhappy-farms-idUSKCN1QP10X>

<sup>14</sup> A Suicide Attack on Indian Military Convoy in Indian Occupied Kashmir that Killed 40 Indian Troops, "Kashmir Attack: Tracing the Path that Led to Pulwama," *BBC*, May 1, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-47302467>

<sup>15</sup> In attempting surgical strikes, two Indian planes were brought down by Pakistan and one pilot was captured.

<sup>16</sup> "Article 370: What Happened with Kashmir and Why it Matters," *BBC*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>

the discourse of “obsession” revolving around Pakistan and proves that the Western strategic community’s scholarship and political opinion about Pakistan’s India “obsession” is mistaken.

The question guiding this study, in response to the aforementioned criticism, is that what actually compels Pakistan to be “obsessed” with India and whether this “obsession” is without any substance or not. This paper is an attempt to understand and deconstruct this prevalent discourse in the light of history and geography of the region involving Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Afghanistan is discussed in the context of Indian-Afghan alliance vis-à-vis Pakistan ever since the partition of British India in 1947 and due to this fact that their nexus has greatly contributed to Pakistan’s security anxieties.

Consulting geographic setting of Pakistan and historic patterns of interaction among the three contiguous neighbours is important to understand Pakistan’s threat perception and its India-centric policy. It is widely acknowledged that geography sets limits for any state’s foreign policy making. Also, geographic features particular to a state like size, location, resources and type of neighbours are fundamental factors in this regard.<sup>17</sup> In terms of geography, an American geopolitical analyst, Robert D. Kaplan explains that, “geography is the very basis for strategy and geopolitics.”<sup>18</sup> Colin S. Gray highlights that “geography, at a minimum, defines the players in international relations, the stakes for which the players contend, and the terms by which they measure their security relative to others.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, an American political scientist and prominent geopolitician of his time, Nicholas J. Spykman identifies geography as “the most fundamentally conditioning factor in the formulation of national policy because it is the most permanent.”<sup>20</sup> He further elaborated that:

Location with reference to the equator and to oceans and land masses determines nearness to the centers of power, areas of conflict, and

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<sup>17</sup> Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy I,” *The American Political Science Review* 32, no. 1 (February, 1938): 29.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Revenge of Geography, What the Map Tells us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012), 60.

<sup>19</sup> Colin S. Gray, “The Continued Primacy of Geography,” *Orbis* 4, Issue. 2 (Spring 1996): 248-49.

<sup>20</sup> Spykman, “Geography and Foreign Policy I,” 29.

established routes of communication and location with reference to immediate neighbours defines position in regard to potential enemies, thereby determining the basic problems of territorial security.<sup>21</sup>

This is exactly the predicament of Pakistan's peculiar geography which, from the outset, inherited two overtly belligerent neighbours in the form of India and Afghanistan. The border disputes with India and Afghan's irredentist claims on parts of Pakistan had set the future direction of South Asian politics based on distrust and antagonism. With this background, the focus of this paper is to trace the history of trilateral relations of Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan to understand what causes Pakistan's threat perception from these two countries.

It is widely acknowledged that foreign policy is guided by a state's national interests which vary from state to state. Certain objectives like survival, sovereignty, territorial integrity, building friendly relations with other nations, development and economic well-being of people are common to all the states. However, for a state like Pakistan, survival and maintenance of territorial integrity becomes the cornerstone of its foreign policy due to the overwhelming security threats emanating from its immediate neighbourhood.

On the other hand, there are some broader objectives which are not followed by all the states such as attainment of power at regional or international level, recognition of that power by other states and military domination in the region. These interests are termed as ambitious objectives. Indian ambitious foreign policy for attainment of regional hegemony and global power status can be identified in this regard.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the states that already have this status aspire to keep and maintain that status-quo and do not want any challenger to emerge. The United States (US) exemplifies this category.<sup>23</sup> Since there are various objectives of states in a given

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>22</sup> Manjeet S. Pardesi, "American Global Primacy and the Rise of India," *Asia Pacific Issues*, no. 129 (Honolulu: East-West Centre, March 2017):3, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/api129.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=36061>

<sup>23</sup> Former American Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that "the ultimate objective of American policy should be...that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America," *The Grand Chessboard*, xiv.

scenario, they formulate their policies to achieve their identified objectives in accordance with the means available.

In case of Pakistan, a review of the relevant literature reveals that Pakistan's security and territorial integrity, sovereignty, peaceful coexistence with its neighbours and economic prosperity are identified as its national interests. Since acquisition of nuclear power, it is also in Pakistan's interest to maintain the minimum credible nuclear deterrence against India.<sup>24</sup> Thus, national security is given the top most priority which is natural for any state. It is more important for Pakistan due to its geographical complexities arising from its two hostile neighbours.

Shortly after independence, founder of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah clearly defined Pakistan's foreign policy in terms of friendliness and goodwill towards all the nations of the world.<sup>25</sup> However, this peaceful desire of the Quaid-i-Azam could not materialise in the conflict-prone nature of South Asian politics. Soon, the regional developments headed towards conflict instead of cooperation. Realism not idealism became a forever guide to the future of the region.

### **Driving Factors of Pakistan's Foreign Policy**

Pakistan's security-oriented and India-centric foreign policy is self-explanatory to its masses. This fact is an existential reality that Islamabad faces security threats from New Delhi. However, in order to analyse the reality of Pakistan's threat perception, it seems pertinent to review the history of South Asia's geopolitical environment.

To begin with, it should be identified, at the outset, that Pakistan was not the only country that came into being in the receding period of British colonialism. It was a natural decay and eventual fall of British Empire that happened all across the world. India has not reconciled itself with the partition even after 70 years of independence.<sup>26</sup> Thus, ensuing

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<sup>24</sup> Abdul Sattar, "Foreign policy after the Cold War," address at the National Defence College, Islamabad, May 24, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah (in a broadcast talk to the United States, in February, 1948), *Speeches as Governor General* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1963), 65.

<sup>26</sup> Ram Madhav being an Indian politician and National General Secretary of Indian ruling party made a statement during an interview discussion that his party believes

developments during and immediately after the partition greatly influenced Pakistan's threat perception and foreign policy options that subsequently set the course for future conflictual relations in the region. Since then, conflict and volatility defines South Asian politics, adversely impacting any possibility of socio-economic development till this day.

### *Immediate Neighbourhood and Security Challenges*

Maintenance of peace and security is generally identified as a central theme of Pakistan's foreign relations. It was suggested by a Pakistani political scientist, Hamid Kizilbash that "anyone interested in understanding Pakistan's foreign policy has to take a closer look at the security issues facing the country and the options available."<sup>27</sup> His observation confirms the fact that the issues of foreign policy making threat perceptions of states and given circumstances are intertwined and cannot be analysed in isolation. Thus, in light of his reflection Pakistan's security challenges are reviewed in the context of history of the region.

### *Security Challenges Emanating from India*

Since its independence, threatening postures of India and Afghanistan overwhelmed Pakistan with its security concerns. The developments that accompanied the partition of British India set the future direction for Pakistan's Indo-centric foreign policy. Some of these unfortunate developments are as follows: communal violence followed by millions of traumatised refugees, intimidating statements of Indian leadership against Pakistan, emergence of Kashmir conflict and Indo-Afghan alliance at the same time resulting in Afghan hostility from early on set the future direction for Pakistan's security challenges and India-centric policy.

It has been reported that due to communal violence around "17 million people were shunted across the frontiers of Pakistan and India while

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in the idea of *Akhand Bharat* (united India) and that one day Pakistan and Bangladesh would join the Indian union through popular goodwill, "Is Modi's India Flirting with Fascism? Head to Head, *Aljazeera English*, December 25, 2015. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1W-oXZ\\_31U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1W-oXZ_31U),

<sup>27</sup> Agha Shahi, (Hamid H. Kizilbash, ed) *Pakistan Security and Foreign Policy* (Lahore: Progressive Publisher, 1989), xi.



millions vanished.”<sup>28</sup> A distinguished Pakistani diplomat, Abdus Sattar documented the developments in these words:

Although the acts of savagery took place on both sides, the policy of the rulers of the princely states of Patiala and Kapurthala was particularly virulent. They unleashed local forces to kill and expel Muslim inhabitants. In a matter of weeks they liquidated the Muslim population of some 700,000. They also sent armed men to Jammu and Kashmir to assist the Dogra forces of this state in unleashing terror. Within weeks a quarter of a million Muslims were “systematically exterminated.”<sup>29</sup>

The nature and scale of violence against civilians and their forced migration left lasting scars on people’s mind. What further aggravated the situation for Pakistan was the malintent of Indian leadership that was expressed through their statements regarding future of Pakistan as not a viable state and prospective reabsorption. There are diverse accounts reflecting on this Indian policy objective since the very beginning.

Pakistan’s fourth Prime Minister, Chaudhry Muhammad Ali documented and reflected upon his observations by stating that Indian leadership agreed to partition with anticipation of undoing it soon.<sup>30</sup> The All India Congress Committee, in its resolution accepting the demand for Pakistan, stated that in due course of history “the false doctrine of two nations would be discredited and destroyed by all.”<sup>31</sup>

M. K. Gandhi is reported to have said that, “even if the whole of India burns, we shall not concede Pakistan.”<sup>32</sup> Afterwards, he revisited his stance and forecasted that the two new countries would eventually reunite.<sup>33</sup> On June 3, 1947, Nehru also expressed his desire about the reunification of India.<sup>34</sup> The pattern of political statements continued even after the partition

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<sup>28</sup> Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 190.

<sup>29</sup> *Times*, October 17, 1947, quoted in Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy, 1947-2005: A Concise History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>30</sup> Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan* (Lahore Service: Book Club, 1988), 375.

<sup>31</sup> V.P. Menon, *The Transfer of Power in India*, quoted in S.M Burke and Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Sattar, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, 315.

as Mr. Gandhi, as early as in September 1947, threatened Pakistan by stating that if it “persistently refuses to see its proved error and continues to minimise it, the Indian government would have to go to war against it.”<sup>35</sup>

These intentions cannot simply be referred to as an emotional outcry at the specific time of history. They had certainly been the reflection of the top Indian leaderships’ policy objectives for the future of the two nations. The subsequent developments in the region involving India, Pakistan and Afghanistan proved to be a blueprint of this Indian policy. This Indian policy objective has also been acknowledged by the contemporary South Asian specialists like Stephen P. Cohen and Sumit Ganguly who acknowledged that:

“On the eve of partition, most Indian political leaders came to the conclusion that it was preferable to deny major political concessions to the “Pakistan” movement, allowing a fragmented Pakistan to come into being. Nehru and others believed the unprepared state would collapse in a matter of months or years and would then be reintegrated into India proper.”<sup>36</sup>

Hence, these verbal intimidations had further been translated into practice from early on. Territorial attainment and boundary settlement proved to be a daunting task for Pakistan. The Kashmir dispute emerged and war broke out between the two new countries immediately after the partition. A ceasefire was brokered by the United Nations (UN) upon India’s request with the condition of plebiscite. However, that plebiscite was never intended to be honoured and, over the years, Kashmir became an ‘*atoot ang*’ (integral part) of India.<sup>37</sup> Now, the special status of the disputed state has been revoked in August, 2019 and the region has been unilaterally absorbed into the Indian Union.

Partition of the two big Muslim majority provinces Punjab and Bengal left Pakistan “truncated and moth-eaten,” as acknowledged by the founding

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<sup>35</sup> Allen Campbell Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, quoted in Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen P. Cohen and Sumit Ganguly, “India,” in *The Pivotal States: A New Framework for U.S. Policy in the Developing World*, ed., Robert Chase, Emily Hill and Paul Kennedy (New York: W.W. Norton & Company), 43.

<sup>37</sup> Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, 281-315.

father Jinnah himself.<sup>38</sup> The partition awarded West Bengal and East Punjab to India, which contributed to the immense loss of human lives along with loss of skilled labour, thriving business community, industrial units, canal head works and vital sources of rivers and thousands of square miles of land. In major part, Pakistan comprised those regions of British India that were poor and underdeveloped.<sup>39</sup> The Boundary Commission further allocated Gurdaspur<sup>40</sup> and Ferozpur districts of Muslim majority in East Punjab to India that provided not just a physical link to the State of Jammu and Kashmir but control of canal head works on the Sutlej and Ravi rivers. Thus, India created first water problems for West Pakistan as early as in April 1948.<sup>41</sup>

Division of armed forces also proved to be a challenging task. India also withheld Pakistan's fair share of military supplies, except for surplus and unwanted stores. The nascent Pakistan received only damaged and unserviceable items.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, its fair share of cash balance was also withheld by India. Historian, Lawrence Ziring observes that, "every effort was made by India to truncate Pakistan territorially, to encircle it strategically and to strangle it economically."<sup>43</sup>

The hostility continued and Kashmir dispute led to the second war between Pakistan and India in 1965. Pakistan's covert infiltration into the disputed territory is widely documented that was responded by the Indian attack across the international border but the core issue remained unresolved.<sup>44</sup> Pakistan's unfortunate internal upheavals led to another war with India in 1971 when India openly provided sanctuaries to Bengali rebels. India trained them and equipped them with weapons and the two

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<sup>38</sup> Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History* (Oxford: One world Publication, 2003),45.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> The name of the district Gurdaspur is also mentioned in the Second Schedule of Indian Independence Act, 1947, as part of the new dominion, West Pakistan, but denied to Pakistan. See for details:

[http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1947/30/pdfs/ukpga\\_19470030\\_en.pdf](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1947/30/pdfs/ukpga_19470030_en.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> M. Rafiq Afzal, *Pakistan: History and Politics 1947-1971* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 29.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>43</sup> Ali, *The Emergence of Pakistan*, 375-76.

<sup>44</sup> Shahid Amin, *Reminiscences of a Pakistani Diplomat* (Karachi: Karachi Council on Foreign Relations, Economic Affairs and Law, 2009), 27-29.

launched an irregular war against Pakistan with blatant diplomatic campaign and military assaults.

Diverse accounts reflect on Indian engineering of the events at that time. Declassified national archive reports also documented a detailed account of Indian involvement in East Pakistan including military and material assistance in addition to propaganda warfare through use of its state-controlled media “to stir up rebellion against legitimate government of country.”<sup>45</sup> Not many references need to be quoted in this regard because, in 2015, current Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi himself has acknowledged that dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 was a result of conspiracy with active Indian involvement and that he himself had participated in that clandestine movement sponsored by India.<sup>46</sup>

India’s blatant support to “non-state actors” and terrorists was led by multiple objectives. Other than militarily defeating Pakistan, “Mrs. Gandhi had a strong desire for India to be recognised as a major Asian power; therefore, the defeat of its neighbor would demonstrate her country’s dominance,”<sup>47</sup> and the crux of the matter she proudly claimed the Dhaka Debacle on December 16, 1971, when addressing the parliament, she stated that “India had avenged several centuries of Hindu humiliation at the hands of Muslim emperors and Sultans.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, sense of revenge and desire for dominance prevailed than prudence. Dismemberment of Pakistan with active Indian support reveals that the statements of Indian leaderships at the time of partition were in reality policy statements. As a result, Pakistan’s threat perception against India was not based on conspiracy theories.

## **Era of 1980s and South Asian Politics**

In December 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was followed by the Pakistani policy to confront the Soviet aggression with the help of world community. There were diverse factors that influenced Pakistan’s policy

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Wolf, “Pakistan: Partition and Military Succession,” Documents from US National Archives, <http://archive.is/OTV8j#selection-221.1-10.12>

<sup>46</sup> “Indian Forces Fought along Mukti Bahini,” *News*, June 8, 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Sission and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 207-8.

<sup>48</sup> V. Langer, *The Defence and Foreign Policy of India* (New Delhi: Sterling Publisher, 1998), 205.

choices at that time. Its foreign policy calculus such as its own security concerns vis-à-vis Afghanistan since 1947, threat perception with reference to Soviet desire to gain access to warm water ports<sup>49</sup> of Arabian Sea through Pakistan, Indo-Afghan-Soviet nexus in the region against Pakistan, and being in American camp against Soviet Communist threat shaped the future course of foreign relations. In those critical years, in those critical years, India tried to destabilise Pakistan overtly and covertly along with provoking a war-like situation on the border.

In 1984, the Indian occupation of Siachen Glacier is a major development that was a blatant violation of 1972 Simla Agreement which prohibited the use of military force to occupy any territory, even if it was unoccupied and contested.<sup>50</sup> According to Feroz Hassan Khan, this Indian operation greatly influenced the Pakistani strategic thinking and convinced Pakistan that Simla Peace Agreement cannot be relied upon as an assurance to Pakistan's national security.<sup>51</sup> Future developments further reinforced this strategic thinking as in 1986-87, India conducted its Brass-tacks Military Exercises (Operation) on Pakistani border involving its Army, Navy and Air Force with the deployment of 600,000 troops on Pakistani border.<sup>52</sup> These exercises were generally acknowledged as the largest since the WWI.<sup>53</sup> Former Indian Lt. General, P. N. Hoon, acknowledged in his memoir that this exercise was to build up the situation for another war with Pakistan.<sup>54</sup> All these Indian aggressions were without any provocation while Pakistan had its entire focus engaged on Afghan front with international support.

Additionally, a new phenomenon of terrorism was introduced in Pakistan during those years in the form of massive bomb blasts across the

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<sup>49</sup> A.Z. Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relation: Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan* (UK: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 62-65.

<sup>50</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 218.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>52</sup> Shaikh Aziz, "A Leaf from History: Target: Pakistani Nukes," *Dawn*, November 8, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Steven R. Weisman, "On India's Border a Huge Mock War," *New York Times*, March 6, 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/06/world/on-india-s-border-a-huge-mock-war.html>

<sup>54</sup> Aziz, "A Leaf from History."

country. Its aim was to influence Pakistan's Afghan policy.<sup>55</sup> The Indian connection to that terror campaign is also discussed in various accounts along with Afghan and Soviet agencies. A former Indian intelligence officer, B. Raman reported that, since its inception in 1968, India's intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) had close relations with Afghan intelligence agency, *Khadamat-e-Aetla'st-e-Dawlati* (KHAD) as an important source of information on Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> This relationship further evolved in the form of networking with Soviet intelligence agency, Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB). These intelligence-to-intelligence connections were reported by an Indian-American analyst, Jayshree Bajoria.<sup>57</sup> In December 1987, the US Department of State's Special Report documented the Soviet-Kabul intelligence connection to the use of terrorism against Pakistan.<sup>58</sup>

Indian security analyst, Praveen Swami, stated that during the 1980s, RAW established its operational setup in Pakistan in reaction to latter's support of the Sikh separatists in Indian Punjab and targeted both Pakistan and Sikh separatists groups.<sup>59</sup> Bajoria further quoted Swami in one of her articles that this campaign of bombing in major Pakistani cities, notably Karachi and Lahore, forced the head of Pakistan's intelligence agency, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to convene a meeting with its counterpart and define on the rules of engagement.<sup>60</sup> Another source reflecting on this account is Christine Fair who further added that "it was agreed upon that

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<sup>55</sup> Lally Weymouth, "Moscow's 'Invisible War' of Terror Inside Pakistan," *Washington Post*, March 13, 1988,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1988/03/13/moscows-invisible-war-of-terror-inside-pakistan/6e96dd11-56a5-4d1e-bc64-c333f41af17e/>

<sup>56</sup> B. Raman, *The Kaoboy's of R&AW: Down Memory Lane* (Atlanta: Lancer Publishers LLC, 2013), 97.

<sup>57</sup> Bajoria, "RAW: India's External Intelligence Agency," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 7, 2008, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/raw-indias-external-intelligence-agency>

<sup>58</sup> US Department of State, *Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington D.C., Bureau of Public Affairs), Special Report, no. 173(December 1987), 21.

<sup>59</sup> Praveen Swami, "India's New Language of Killing", *Hindu*, May 1, 2014. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/indias-new-language-of-killing/article5963505.ece>

<sup>60</sup> Bajoria, "RAW."

Pakistan would not carry out activities in Indian Punjab as long as RAW refrained from creating mayhem and violence inside Pakistan.”<sup>61</sup>

Sarbjeeet Singh, Kashmir Singhand Vendra Kaushik are just few examples of Indian intelligence operators captured inside Pakistan during the 1980s. The latest example is Kulbhsuhan Jadhav, a serving Indian Naval Officer, who was arrested while operating in Balochistan. Thus, employment of terrorism by India as a tool of its foreign policy vis-à-vis Pakistan contains much relevance. However, this element is generally overlooked in the scholarly debates that are fixated on Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism.

### **Era of 1990s and Nuclearisation of the Region**

Indo-Pak hostilities intensified during the 1990s. This era is marked with the nuclearisation of South Asia and Kargil conflict. On the subject of nuclearisation, it was India that set the region on the path to nuclearisation by conducting nuclear test in 1974. After the 1971 debacle, Pakistan felt compelled to do so in which India played an active role. With nuclear tests in 1998, India directed its verbal assaults and expressed its malintent blatantly towards Pakistan. Only counter nuclear tests by Pakistan normalised the situation.

The 1999 Kargil conflict is another major development of the decade that brought the two nuclear countries to the brink of war. Centered again on Kashmir, this limited conflict initiated by Pakistan invited much criticism to the country. It happened at a crucial time when the process of political reconciliation between India and Pakistan was underway. In February 1999, the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, visited Pakistan and an agreement was signed between the two countries to resolve their bilateral issues amicably including Kashmir.<sup>62</sup> Christine Fair identifies that Kargil crisis greatly impacted the Indian strategic

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<sup>61</sup> “Why RAW Succeeds & ISI Fails?,” *Medium.com*, May 7, 2014, <https://medium.com/@gocebe/what-isi-can-learn-from-raw-274e67674f48>; Christine Fair, “Doctrinal and Technological Innovations in the Indian Armed Forces: Countering Future Terrorism and Asymmetric Threats”, January 2017, file:///E:/Defence-Primer-2017.\_Fair.pdf

<sup>62</sup> Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army and America’s War on Terror* (New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2005), 168-69.

thinking towards Pakistan. To them in case of any agreement with Pakistan there is little guarantee that it could endure.<sup>63</sup> One can recall the same impact on Pakistan's strategic thinking at the time of Siachen's occupation by India in 1984 as documented in the pages above. Thus, mutual distrust further deepened.

### **Indo-Afghan Alliance: Two-Front Scenario**

Since 1947, diverse accounts reflect on Indo-Afghan nexus against Pakistan. It has been observed that "Kabul — with the exception of the Taliban government — always has been closer to Delhi than to Islamabad."<sup>64</sup> Although Pakistan is usually accused of meddling in Afghan affairs. However, it was Afghanistan not Pakistan that initiated the hostility towards its neighbour due to its irredentist claims over parts of Pakistani territory that it inherited from British Raj. Similarly, it always pursued the policy of sponsorship to Pakistani dissident Pakhtun and Baloch groups by providing them sanctuaries and material help to cause internal strife inside Pakistan with active help from India.<sup>65</sup>

Much has been written about Durand Line and Pakhtunistan<sup>66</sup> issue as a source of Afghan hostility. However, what is usually not deliberated upon is the Afghan resentment to an extent that it deliberately played in India's hands and opened two fronts for Pakistan since the early days of latter's independence.

In the comity of nations, Afghanistan played a distinctive role by voting against the Pakistani membership in the UN on September 30, 1947.<sup>67</sup> Afghan claims over the issue of Pakhtunistan and Durand Line had become unsubstantiated in the face of referendum results at the time

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<sup>63</sup> Christine Fair, "Militants in the Kargil Conflict: Myths, Realities and Impacts," in *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict*, ed., Peter R. Lavoy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). 250.

<sup>64</sup> Fair, "India in Afghanistan and Beyond: Opportunities and Constraints," *A Century Foundation Report*, (New York: The Century Foundation, Inc, 2010): 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*; also Juma Khan Sufi, *Faraib e Natamam*, 3<sup>rd</sup>edt, Urdu (Islamabad: Sufi Publications, 2018).

<sup>66</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationships*, 52-62; Hafeez Malik, *US-Pakistan Relations and Post-Soviet Dynamics, 1947-92* (Houndmills: The Macmillan Press), 71-83.

<sup>67</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationships*, 52-3.



of partition that was held to determine the opinion of the people of North West Frontier Province (NWFP), now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The overwhelming majority voted in favour of Pakistan.<sup>68</sup> Regardless of this irrefutable public opinion, Afghanistan pursued the policy of confrontation with its new neighbour and, from early on, also employed the propaganda warfare through its press and radio to pressurise Pakistan over the issue of Pakhtunistan.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, both India and Afghanistan actively participated to ignite Pakhtun nationalism in Pakistan's Pakhtun region bordering Afghanistan. The dissident Pakhtun groups were sponsored by providing sanctuaries, training and material sources. A Pakistani American political scientist, Hafiz Malik, reflected upon the earliest Pakhtun nationalist uprising in Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas (1947-55) under the leadership of a tribal leader known as 'Fakir of Ipi.' Malik documented that Ipi along with material resources and sanctuaries, was also provided access to foreign observers through Afghan officials on Afghan soil to have access to foreign audience at the time.<sup>70</sup> India also provided financial support to his movement.<sup>71</sup> Under his leadership, the Afghan government also supported a Pakhtunistan government in exile.<sup>72</sup> It is important to notice that all this was happening at the time when Pakistan was dealing with India on the issues of Junagadh, Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir and had no desire to extend its influence in Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup>

Radio Kabul also played an instrumental role in this regard. An American distinguished scholar of Afghan history, Louis Dupree, documented his personal observations by stating that "there were Indians

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<sup>68</sup> Out of 572, 798 total registered votes, 289244 voted in favour to join Pakistan and 2874 to join India. This result marked the 51% of votes in favour of Pakistan. It is generally argued that since Congress allied provincial government boycotted the referendum upon not incorporating the choice of independence therefore; these results do not present an accurate picture of the public opinion. Fact remains that 51% of the registered voters voted in favour of Pakistan despite the boycott, see for more details, *Ali, Emergence of Pakistan*, 167.

<sup>69</sup> Ikram Rabani, *Pakistan Affairs*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition (Lahore, Caravan Book House, 2006), 343.

<sup>70</sup> Hafiz Malik, *Soviet-Pakistan Relations*, 81-83.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>72</sup> Mujtaba Rizvi, "Pak-Afghan Relations Since 1947: An Analysis," *Pakistan Horizon* 32, no. 4 (1979): 38.

<sup>73</sup> Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relation*, 57.

controlling Kabul Radio, and they are the ones who even invented the term “Pakhtunistan.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1951, the Indian government allowed a Pakhtunistan Jirga to be held in its capital Delhi and provided the platform of All India Radio (AIR) to Afghan President of the time, Sardar Najibullah Khan for anti-Pakistani speeches.<sup>75</sup> The US declassified documents also reveal that, in 1967, a separatist movement named the United Pakhtunistan Front (UPF) was formed in Indian capital Delhi<sup>76</sup> with the political purpose to keep the issue of Pakhtunistan alive.

There is a long history of Afghan antagonism towards Pakistan. This aforementioned brief documentation is confined to direct Indian links that highlights the fact that from early on Pakistan faced a two-front situation and Afghanistan on its part displayed no less hostility than India. This Indo-Afghan nexus continued until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and developments took a different turn. Pakistan compelled by its geographic contiguity and enormous security threats facing all along, got embroiled in the Afghan conflict. As a result, Pakistan faced diverse challenges including a campaign of terrorism during the 1980s.

## 9/11 and Aftermath

A brief Taliban rule (1996-2001) is considered to be a period of cordial relations between the two countries.<sup>77</sup> Christine Fair observes that 9/11 presented opportunities for India to regain its ground in Afghanistan that was lost during the Taliban rule.<sup>78</sup> In the post-9/11 era, the Afghan political setup, return of Northern Alliance to power revived the traditional Indo-Afghan relationship.<sup>79</sup> In line with India, Afghan antagonism towards Pakistan still prevails and War on Terror has provided them new tools to create new challenges for Pakistan. Any terror incidence in India and Afghanistan is blamed on Pakistan, without any due investigation, and a

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<sup>74</sup> Stephen Ian, *Pakistan: Old Country, New Nation* (London: Penguin Publisher, 1964), 265.

<sup>75</sup> Kamal Matinuddin, *The Taliban Phenomenon: Afghanistan 1994 – 1997* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>76</sup> Paul Wolf, “Pakistan: Partition and Military Succession.”

<sup>77</sup> Fair, “India in Afghanistan and Beyond,” 8.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

particular discourse has been developed by both countries which implicate Pakistan and its intelligence agency in terrorism and world community tends to accept this. All this happened at a time when Pakistan itself became a victim of terrorism as a result of the War on Terror in Afghanistan. This happened at a time when both India and Afghanistan employed proxy warfare in the form of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that spearheaded the worst form of terrorism in the history of Pakistan.

As documented above that Western strategic community's assertions, implying Pakistan's threat perception unsubstantiated was also stressed at a time when India and Afghanistan's use of terrorism against Pakistan was being revealed not just from Pakistani authorities but from international sources as well including Indian and Afghans. This was being admitted by the TTP itself.<sup>80</sup> A well-researched account of Christiane Fair had revealed in early 2009 that Indian Mission in Iran was pumping money into Pakistan's province of Balochistan.<sup>81</sup>

The discourse of "obsession" was also being asserted at a time when, in post-2010 era, various other accounts acknowledged that the US authorities themselves acknowledged that Afghan soil was used by the TTP against Pakistan including its notorious leader Mullah Fazlullah who fled to Afghanistan to escape the Swat Operation run by Pakistani military in 2009.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the US military officials were the ones that recovered a high-ranking TTP commander Latif Mehsud from the custody of Afghan security forces in late 2013 and handed him over to the Pakistani authorities a year later.<sup>83</sup> On India-TTP links, an Indian analyst, Bharat Karnad had acknowledged that TTP was an active Indian

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<sup>80</sup> Tahir Khan, "TTP Admits to Having Safe Haven in Afghanistan," *Express Tribune*, June 26, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Quotedin Hamid Mir, "Pakistan has Proof of '3 Indian Kasabs' in Balochistan," *Foreign Affairs* (July 28, 2009) originally published in *Foreign Affairs*, March-April, 2009, <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/hamid-mir-on-the-real-reason-why-india-agreed-to-discuss-baluchistan/20090728.htm>

<sup>82</sup> Dana Priest, "Pakistani Militants Hiding in Afghanistan," *Washington Post*, November 6, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pakistani-militants-hiding-in-afghanistan/2012/11/06/609cca82-2782-11e2-b4f2-8320a9f00869\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pakistani-militants-hiding-in-afghanistan/2012/11/06/609cca82-2782-11e2-b4f2-8320a9f00869_story.html)

<sup>83</sup> "Pakistan Taliban Chief Latif Mehsud' Repatriated," *BBC News*, December 7, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-30368500>

card in Pakistan.<sup>84</sup> The RAW-TTP link was also revealed by former TTP commander Ehsanullah Ehsan upon his arrest in early 2017.<sup>85</sup>

In this regard, the watershed development was the arrest of Indian serving naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav in early 2016. He was detained by the Pakistani authorities while crossing from Iran into Balochistan. His confessions of running and sponsoring a terrorist network inside Pakistan proved to be irrefutable evidence that exposed Indian-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan.<sup>86</sup> Kalbushan was sentenced to death by Pakistani military court in April 2017. His case was taken to International Court of Justice (ICJ) by India, refuting the Pakistani investigations and demanding Jadhav's release. In July 2019, ICJ's decision put a stay on his death sentence till the final decision and advised Pakistan to provide consular access to Jadhav.<sup>87</sup> At the same time, the ICJ did not dismiss or challenge the Pakistani evidences that had been presented before the court which determined the validity of the Pakistani evidence and concerns it expressed all along about Indian connection to terrorism in post-9/11 Pakistan. On the other hand, allegations against Pakistan as a state "sponsoring terrorism" continued unabated with discourse of "obsession with India."

### **Analysing the Discourse of "Obsession"**

The study acknowledges that geographic factors immensely influence the countries' foreign policy directions as analysed by Spykamm. Similarly, orientation of states' foreign policies is greatly influenced by their concerns to territorial survival and threat perceptions. These considerations become paramount and cornerstone of states' foreign policy when immediate neighbours pose a threat to state's national survival. This study identifies that in case of Pakistan, its geographic location, bounded by two threatening

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<sup>84</sup> "RAW Supports Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, Acknowledges Indian Analyst in Top Daily," *Express Tribune*, September 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1515080/raw-supports-tehreek-e-taliban-pakistan-acknowledges-indian-analyst-top-daily/>

<sup>85</sup> Ehsanullah Ehsan interview with Salim Safi in JIRGA (Urdu), *Geo News*, May 13, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSS5COM6wMY>

<sup>86</sup> "Transcript of RAW Agent Kulbhushan's Confessional Statement," *Dawn*, March 13, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> "ICJ Stays Indian Spy's Execution," *News*, May 19, 2017.

neighbours has greatly influenced its foreign policy choices which were described as “obsessed” with India.

To deconstruct this perception, this study examined the historic and contemporary accounts to understand whether there is any substance to the claim that Pakistan is “obsessed” with India or not. In doing so, it identified that there is much substance to Pakistan’s threat perception that originates from its geographic configuration encircled by the two belligerent neighbours. Similarly, there is persistence of the challenges on both eastern and western fronts faced by Pakistan since the early days of its independence. Afghanistan still challenges the validity of international border between the two countries, calls for Pakhtunistan are still echoed. The dissident groups of Pakistan and even terrorists are still sheltered in Afghanistan. It is a documented fact Afghan soil is still used by India to cause troubles in Pakistan.

On the Indian front, Kashmir dispute still persists. The calls for *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) are not a secret anymore. Open threats of war and aggression have become a norm from Indian side without causing any concern at international level. Similarly, there is convergence of Indian-Afghan interests against Pakistan as it has always been the case as documented. By revisiting the historic accounts, this study identifies that India-Pakistan-Afghanistan hostility is a defining feature of South Asian politics. Also, use of proxies and terrorism is also a recurrent phenomenon in the region especially by India and Afghanistan against Pakistan since the early days of partition. Dominant discourse, however, generally highlights Pakistan as a state sponsoring terrorism in the region while Pakistan itself faced an unprecedented wave of terrorism at the hands of terrorists supported by the Indo-Afghan alliance since 9/11.

Similarly, in the light of the above mentioned documentation, a question arises that what other policy orientation could have possibly been employed by Pakistan other than security oriented and India-centric since threats to its very survival and territorial integrity are still emanating from India to this day? It also needs to be acknowledged, at this point, that it is not bigger India but threatening India that leads to India-centric foreign policy of Pakistan. Otherwise, China is far greater than India on every account but Pakistan has cordial relations with the former.

This paper also argues that there is indeed substance to Pakistan's threat perception towards India, but the discourse of "obsession" does not explain Pakistan's strategic behaviour. It can best be described as India-centric not as "obsessed" with India because it is in response to genuine security threats emanating from India. On the other hand, as identified by some Indian authors, it is India that is actually obsessed with Pakistan given its physical, economic and military capabilities and amount of attention it gives to Pakistan. To them, the level of Indian capabilities does not explain this Indian obsession with its much smaller neighbour. Therefore, Western strategic community's discourse of Pakistan's "obsession" with India needs to be revisited in the light of historic and contemporary developments.

## **Conclusion**

Analysis of South Asian history since partition establishes the fact that geography is central to states' foreign policy since geography determines location, neighbours and opportunities or constrains for peace or conflict. These factors determine the states' allocation of resources towards traditional or non-traditional security requirements. A study of Pakistan's brief history in the light of South Asian geopolitics reinforces the fact that there is substance to Pakistan's threat perception vis-à-vis India and Afghanistan. Pakistan's security threats are still persistent with the Indian hegemonic designs in the region coupled with Indo-Afghan nexus and in addition to continuous Afghan instability and spill-over effects of ongoing War on Terror. For Pakistan, India's threatening posture manifests itself through constant cross-border shelling in Pakistani areas, through use of Afghan soil against Pakistan and through intimidating statements (given by state officials including Prime Minister Modi and Army chiefs). Thus, Indian persistent enmity exhibits that Pakistan's threat perception is not mistaken and correspond to the realities it faces in the conflict-prone region.