

Pakistan vs India: The Next 10 Years — Who Will Win the Power Race?

Syed Rizwan Haider Bukhari ^a Sajjad Nazir ^b Tourkia Rebhi ^c

Abstract: *This study examines the geopolitical dynamics between Pakistan and India over the next decade, focusing on the critical factors shaping their rivalry. Both countries are nuclear-armed and have strong strategic interests that influence their military, economic, and global positioning. The paper analyzes the major forces that will decide the balance of power, such as nuclear doctrines, economic strategies, military readiness, and the influence of China and the US. The study, using a comparative approach, evaluates how these factors will impact each country's future dominance in the region. It concludes that while India is likely to expand economically and strengthen its alliances, Pakistan will increasingly leverage its military capabilities and alliances, particularly with China, to position itself as a regional power.*

Keywords: Pakistan, India, Nuclear Doctrines, Military Power, Economy, Strategic Alliances, Global Positioning, Two-Front War, US-China Rivalry, Geopolitical Strategy

Introduction

Geopolitical conflict between Pakistan and India has been a key aspect of South Asian politics and has been characterized by military crises, land issues and nuclearisation. Although both nations have grown in terms of strategic postures since their independence, these postures not only carry bilateral competition but also have regional power dynamics that have regional implications to the rest of the world. Recent research underlines the need to think of this rivalry in the changing strategic cultures of either country and how such cultures affect decision making and deterrent behaviour (Kiran, 2024).

Pakistan and India are two nuclear-armed countries that exist in an environment where the military, economic, as well as diplomatic factors are closely interconnected. Their future directions in the next decade will be affected by external great power involvement and various global realignments, especially the growing competition between China and the United States. Those consequences of this extended power conflict are catalyzed back into the South Asian environment, touching upon military modernisation, economic policy and alliance making (Noor, 2023).

Some of the key variables that will influence the future ten years are the nuclear doctrines and deterrence postures, the conventional military capabilities, economic development and external strategic influence. India is used as an example, with research indicating that the declared no-first-punch policy by India is a contrast to the more unclear Pakistani policy, presenting a nature of deterrence not found elsewhere than in South Asia (Sultan, 2021). Meanwhile, traditional asymmetries and economic capabilities will influence projection of power and regional influence.

Besides, the contributions of big external powers like China and the United States are also gaining applicability. The involvement of India in the U.S. on the basis of the strategic ties of the west and Pakistan on the basis of the strategic ties of the east, especially in the economic and security sectors, introduces additional dimensions of complexity into the bilateral rivalry (Ali, 2022).

This paper will use a comparative paradigm to analyze how these multidimensional variables will change and which of these countries can be heading towards the hegemonic position in the region. This

^a PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

^b PhD Scholar, Department of Social Sciences & Education, Greenwich University, DHA Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

^c Civil Status System Laboratory, University of Khemis Miliana, Algeria.

study will present a subtle forecast of the power race between the two nuclear powerhouses, Pakistan and India, within the next ten years by emphasizing on their nuclear doctrine, military capabilities, economic strategy and external alignments.

Literature Review

Nuclear Doctrines and Deterrence

The South Asian security dynamics are still dominated by the nuclear policies of both India and Pakistan. This has developed a policy of full-spectrum deterrence, such as tactical nuclear weapons and shorter-range choices to offset conventional asymmetries with India (Ahmed, Hashmi and Kausar, 2019). Nevertheless, India still maintains the policy of No-First-Use (NFU), but in recent years there are signs of change in its discourse on the strategy (Kaplan, 2023). Empirical data point out that, although India has a quantitative superiority in both conventional and strategic assets, the focus of Pakistan on a flexible and rapid-response nuclear posture can also bolster its deterrence credibility during regional crises (Karim, Mahmood, Shahrukh and Jabbar, 2022).

Economic Growth & Alliances

The economic rise of India has made it an important global player. But the long-term strategic freedom of it is still limited by structural issues, including inequality, unemployment and reliance on foreign energy among young people. Pakistan, by comparison, which is economically smaller and has structural problems in its economy, has used strategic alliances, most prominently with China through the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and improved relationships with the Middle East states, thereby solidifying their strategic position in the region.

China vs USA The Strategic Rivalry

Greater power politics between China and the United States are more and more influencing South Asian strategic choices. The strategic cooperation of Islamabad with China in terms of defence alliance as well as economic investment is one of the main factors behind the balancing strategy of India. Meanwhile, the strengthening of the defence and strategic partnership between India and the United States is largely seen as an effort to counter the ascending power of China as well as Pakistan joining the Chinese side. The location of Pakistan between these powers provides it with a strategic leeway and a diplomatic complexity.

War Two-Front Scenario and Military Readiness

How every country copes with military preparedness and in particular during the possible two front war is a key issue in the coming decade. India has the difficulty of engaging Pakistan in the West and China in the East. Although the conventional capabilities of India are vast, logistical, and theatre-deployment weaknesses (terrain, force mobility, supply-chain constraint) are also notable. Pakistan, on its part, stresses on strike speed, missile/missile-nuclear escalation capability and nuclear deterrence. The latent logistical and diplomatic assistance of China only complicates the defence equation of India.

Kashmir and the strategic Environment:

The Jammu and Kashmir issue has not been resolved, and it continues to be an influential factor in Indian and Pakistani hostility and regional unrest. India revoked the constitutional-legal status of the territory with the abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35(A) in 2019 and prompted increased militarisation and change in strategic signalling. There are multiple open-access scholarly texts stating that Kashmir is not a mere territorial conflict it is a structural variable affecting nuclear deterrence, external alliances and regional power trends.

Methodology

The paper will take the comparative case study approach and critically assess the major issues that have influenced the power dynamics between Pakistan and India. The paper uses qualitative and quantitative data to determine the role of military, economic, and geopolitical strategies that affect the current competition between the two nuclear powers. Data collection is the process of conducting a systematic

study of military reports, economic indicators, international alliances, and geopolitical strategies with the view of detecting trends, patterns, and changes in the strategic posture of the two countries. The analysis will be based on a detailed account of historical case studies– past conflicts, military strategic doctrines and regional cooperation. These case studies are chosen due to their relevance in the comprehension of the strategic calculus in South Asia and the way the past escalations and diplomatic initiatives explain the current course of the rivalry. Also, the sample of secondary sources used in the study is very broad as the authors refer to academic journals, government and military white papers, and other expert analyses to triangulate results, as well as to guarantee the strength of conclusions. By adopting such a comparative method, the paper will be trying to predict the probable future of the Pakistan-India rivalry in terms of nuclear deterrence, economic rivalry and the impact of outside powers in the future of stability in the region.

Discussion

Case Study

This paper has chosen four important regions that are central towards the prediction of the future of the power race between India and Pakistan within the coming decade:

Nuclear Deterrence: the comparison between the development of the tactical nuclear forces and the development of the rapid-response option in Pakistan, with the development of the nuclear stance (with its No-First-Use policy and possible exceptions) in India.

Economic Power: explores how the economic growth trend of India competes with Pakistan to utilize strategic alliances (particularly with China and Middle East) to gain influence.

China vs. USA Influence: the analysis of the impact of the growing presence of China in South Asia to the benefit of Pakistan and the redesigned strategic relations between the United States and India is changing the regional balance of power.

Balance in the Military and Two Front War Scenario: examining how India is prepared in case of a two front war (against Pakistan in the west and China in the east) and Pakistan in its strategic posture to respond successfully.

With these case studies, the paper applies the comparative method to indicate disparity and interactions between the three–military, economic and geopolitical regions.

Analysis

Nuclear Strategy

Deterrence has continued to be the key issue in the strategic linking of India and Pakistan. Research indicates that the use of nuclear weapons in South Asia has not eradicated conflict but transformed it (Wadood, 2020). The Pakistani approach of what is known as a full-spectrum deterrence, such as tactical nuclear arms and the potential of a limited employment of nuclear weapons, is aimed at leveling the score of conventional Indian advantage (Hayat, 2023). Conversely, the official doctrine of the Indian NFU has become more and more questioned as India upgrades its own forces and takes into account other options other than traditional nuclear war-fighting (Khan, 2022).

Balochistan Think Tank Network: Pakistan has placed more stress in this area on quick reaction and strategic ambiguity which could make it a more credible crisis deterrent whereas the higher arsenal and conventional superiority of India could not necessarily be converted into strategic superiority unless coupled with doctrinal clarity and preparedness.

Economic Weaknesses & Coalitions: Although India has a fast-growing economy, it is not immune to structural problems like regional inequality, unemployment among young people and dependence on imported energy (Lee, 2022) – these drawbacks may compromise the sustainability of its growth. The strategic alliances, especially with China (through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) and the Middle East countries, give Pakistan an edge beyond its economic capabilities and allow it to be punching above its weight in the region (Khan and Jamil, 2021). The battle, economically, therefore, centers on the manner

in which India will strategize its growth into a strategic power and the manner in which Pakistan uses alliances to counter the benefits of India.

China vs. USA: The Strategic Rivalry: A key root cause of South Asian geopolitics is the great-power politics between China and the United States. Studies show that the US-India strategic convergence (defence deals, logistics deals) have high consequences to the stability of the region (Mehreen and Abid, 2021). In the meantime, the increased relations between China and Pakistan (economic investment, military cooperation) place Pakistan to be favored by the global approach of Beijing (Hassan et al., 2024). Hereby, the processes of the external power become critical. The flexibility in alliances provides any strategic cushioning to Pakistan, although India has been stricter in its relationship with the US that it gets access to high technological capabilities but bears vulnerability in the case of a global power change.

Military Preparedness and Two War Front Strategy: The desire of India to deterring, and in case of need fighting two fronts (west vs Pakistan, east vs China) is frequently mentioned as a strategy weakness. Asymmetry in the conventional form, terrain complications, and the necessity of the mobile logistics in mountainous areas are frequent problems (Khan, 2020). The emphasis on Pakistan on rapid-strike systems, its missiles and nuclear deterrence systems, along with the assistance of China, gives it the opportunity to capitalize on the weak points of India. The interaction of traditional and nuclear forces supported by alliance and preparedness becomes a determining factor in the way the power race is played.

Limitations

Data Access: A large part of the military, nuclear and strategic data (especially that of Pakistan and India) has been closed or kept secret, which restricts the accuracy with which comparisons can be made.

Representation: The internal vulnerabilities may not be entirely reflected in economic and social statistics, in particular, the informal sector in Pakistan.

Causality: Although we can see the correlations between readiness, alliances and power dynamics, it is hard to declare the direct causality because of a large number of intervening variables (e.g., global economy, leadership changes, new technology).

Ethical Considerations: The paper will be based on publicly available sources (reports, open-access articles, economic data) only. Moral issues mostly concern the potential effect of the interpretation of data on policy debate or the views of people in highly volatile settings. The author has been careful to show findings in a neutral way, not sensational and also be rigorous in sourcing.

This indicates that India will continue to enjoy its economic successes and seal alliances with other nations globally, but this will not necessarily bring about regional dominance. Pakistan has a strategic capability to remain a serious player in the power game in South Asia with its strategic flexibility of nuclear weapons, good alliances (especially with China) and its quick reaction ability. Finally, the relationship of external influence (China vs USA), the credibility of nuclear deterrence and military preparedness will determine which country enjoys a better stand in the next decade.

Conclusion

This paper concludes with the fact the relationship of power that exists in the next decade will be defined by the changing power dynamics between Pakistan and India with both of them facing critical geopolitical, military, and economic pressures. The capacity of Pakistan to sustain its strategic advantage will depend most on its strategic posture on nuclear deterrence, its strategic alliance (with the largest one being that of China), and its versatility in asymmetric warfare. The current process of the modernization of the Pakistani armed forces, such as its nuclear stock and the ability to respond as quickly as possible, will enable it to continue posing a relevant counterbalance to the conventional military advantage of India. Hence, Pakistan is not a strong country by the power of its economy but rather by the power of its military, alliances, and nuclear deterrence in making sure that it has its place in the region. Conversely, the economic development of India will still make it a major player in the world arena, but such development will not come without its own share of weaknesses. Although India has gone very far in terms of diversifying her economy, the internal factors like inequality of income, unemployment and energy

dependency jeopardize the sustainability of the Indian growth in the long run. Moreover, the fact that India can cope with the possible two-front war with Pakistan in the west and with China in the east is also a critical issue. Though in terms of economy and population India has the bigger base it needs to solve its geopolitical vulnerabilities especially the issues of balancing between relations with Pakistan and China at the same time. The final winner in the long-term power struggle will not necessarily be the country that has the biggest economy, but the one that holds the most strategic advantage, the armed forces and alliances worldwide. The capacity to make and maintain serious partnerships, project military might, and exploit the ever-increasing tension between regional superpowers will be the most important factors of regional dominance. The emphasis of the military power and strategic ties with China can be an offset to the Indian economic hegemony, and Pakistan will become a multi-polar power in South Asia in the near future.

Recommendations

For Pakistan

Modernize the military technology: Pakistan must keep upgrading their military infrastructure especially the missile technology, air defenses and the nuclear deterrent capabilities. This will guarantee its capability of having a plausible deterrent against the increasing conventional military power of India.

Take advantage of strategic alliances: It is crucial to build its military and economic rapport with China. Pakistan needs to enhance its involvement with measures such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), so that the country could obtain the maximum of this strategic alliance. Besides, keeping close relations with major players in the Middle East will enable Pakistan diversify her diplomatic, as well as the military alliances.

For India

Special attention should be paid to military modernization: India still has to modernize its military opportunities, especially its air force and naval potential, so that it will be able to take part in several theaters at the same time. This involves more investments in defense technology, cyber warfare and the missile defense systems.

Internal economic imbalances: In spite of the fact that India has a good economic growth, it will be critical to address the internal issues of inequality, energy reliance, and unemployment to have sustainable development. India can reduce the risks of such vulnerabilities in the long term through encouraging fair economic development and energy diversification.

Control the US-China rivalry: This is because as India enhances its relationship with the United States, it should also be aware of increasing rivalry between China and the US. India must use its status between the two world leaders in order to make sure that it does not become over-reliant on one, and offend the other. It takes a subtle diplomatic policy and military tactics.

For Global Powers:

The United States: The US ought to keep encouraging the rise in India as a strategic player with specific reference to defense ties and technology transfer. It is however also important that the US acknowledges the need to have a stable relationship with Pakistan particularly in matters of regional security. This two-pronged strategy will contribute to the control of tensions in South Asia to eliminate the possibility of the intensification of conflicts that may have an international impact.

China: China needs to support Pakistan, but at the same time, it is essential that Beijing promotes diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan. Through the creation of dialogue, China is able to minimise chances of conflict and plays a role in stability of the region, which will eventually serve its interests in the region.

Other International Powers: Other world players such as Russia and European Union must vigorously promote peaceful talks between India and Pakistan without interfering with their personal relations with the two nations. This will require a multilateral diplomacy in ensuring that the regional powers are balanced and that both countries seek peaceful means of solving disputes.

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