

India & South Asia — Part I

Three neighbours, three different problems. Pakistan, where the difficulty is structural and the real question is what India can realistically do about it. Bangladesh, where nearly everything works except the two things Dhaka cares about most. Afghanistan, where India is trying to re-enter a game it was pushed out of. Read the scholars, not the headlines. **Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.**

PART A India & Pakistan

01 How the rivalry is read

- **Rajesh Basrur** (*India—Pakistan Relations Between War and Peace*) — antagonism with Pakistan has occupied front stage for the best part of India's history since 1947.
- **Sumit Ganguly** and **T.V. Paul** — an '**intractable rivalry**': a string of wars and crises that leaves little room for optimism.
- **R. Harshe** — contrasting conceptions of national identity are deeply embedded in the hostility. Torn apart at independence, the two states set out to build very different kinds of nation-state.
- **Shyam Saran** — the estrangement established at partition still governs the relationship; overcoming these psychological and ideological divides requires visionary statecraft.
- **C. Raja Mohan** — structural constraints (religious nationalism, disputed territory, militant groups held as strategic assets) produce a recurring cycle of crisis and reconciliation.

02 Chronology, 1947–2025

When	What happened
Aug 1947	Independence and Partition. Rioting kills up to 10 lakh; about 1.5 crore people flee their homes.
Oct 1947	War over Kashmir. UN-brokered ceasefire on 1 Jan 1949, ratified by the Karachi Agreement , July 1949; Kashmir divided.
Jan 1949	Both accept a UNSC resolution calling for a referendum. The vote never takes place.
Sep 1960	World Bank-brokered Indus Waters Treaty signed.
Aug 1965	Second war over Kashmir; ends in a UN-mandated ceasefire.
Dec 1971	Third war; Indian intervention in East Pakistan; Bangladesh created .
Jul 1972	Simla Agreement ; accord on return of Pakistani prisoners of war.
May 1974	Pokhran test; India the first non-P5 state to test.
Dec 1989	Armed insurgency begins in Jammu and Kashmir.
May 1998	India tests five devices, Pakistan six; sanctions follow.
Feb 1999	Vajpayee's Lahore bus journey; peace accord with Nawaz Sharif.
May 1999	Kargil conflict; the United States brokers peace.
May 2001	Agra Summit ; no agreement.
Oct 2001	Attack on the Kashmir legislature building.
Dec 2001	Attack on the Indian Parliament, 14 killed; the standoff ends in October 2002 after international mediation.
Jan 2004	Musharraf–Vajpayee talks launch bilateral negotiations.
Feb 2007	Samjhauta Express bombing, 68 killed.
Oct 2008	Trade route opened across Kashmir after six decades.
Nov 2008	Mumbai attacks , 166 killed.
May 2014	Nawaz Sharif invited to the swearing-in in New Delhi.
Dec 2015	Surprise visit to Lahore.
Jan 2016	Pathankot attack .
Sep 2016	Uri attack ; "surgical strikes" across the Line of Control.
2018	Kartarpur Corridor approved; inaugurated November 2019.
Feb 2019	Pulwama attack , 40 CRPF personnel killed; Balakot air strike on the Jaish-e-Mohammed camp.
Aug 2019	Article 370 revoked ; Pakistan suspends bilateral trade and expels the High Commissioner.
Apr 2025	Pahalgam attack ; India suspends the Indus Waters Treaty and launches Operation Sindoor .

03 Level one — the system

Three levels of analysis

International Relations reads a conflict at three levels: the system, the state and the individual. All three are needed here — no single level explains why this rivalry survives every attempt to end it.

The same relationship, read three ways

SYSTEM

Strong state vs weak state · nuclear deterrence · external powers · global economic change

STATE

Contrasting national identities · secular inclusion vs Muslim separateness · domestic politics

INDIVIDUAL

Nehru, Shastri, Indira, Vajpayee, Manmohan · Jinnah, Bhutto, Zia, Musharraf

The structural position

- Both are relatively weak states in the global system. At the regional level India is a major power while Pakistan is much smaller in size, population, economy and military capability.
- Mandelbaum** — strategies are shaped by relative position in a system, which gives a **strong state vs weak state** reading:
- India (strong state)** → seeks political and economic engagement; prefers **bilateral negotiation**, which places India at an advantage; pressed for higher trade, granted **MFN status in 1995**, welcomed Pakistani cultural figures.
- Pakistan (weak state)** → prefers political and economic distancing to reduce vulnerability; prefers **multilateral frameworks** that let it draw on outside support; builds military strength for **internal balancing** and seeks allies for **external balancing**.
- Stephen P. Cohen** — the Pakistani military held an exaggerated perception of its relative strength, which produced the false optimism behind two wars. In 1947–48 Pakistan secured about a third of Kashmir; confidence was reinforced by membership of the Cold War alliance system (**SEATO 1954, CENTO 1955**).
- India's poor performance against China in 1962 emboldened the 1965 venture; the **Tashkent Agreement** (January 1966) confirmed the 1948 division.
- Early 1970s → India's position became uneasy as the United States improved ties with Beijing via Islamabad. India signed the friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in August 1971 and helped create Bangladesh in December.

04 Two systemic changes of the mid-1980s

First — the advent of nuclear weapons

- Rajesh Basrar** — nuclear rivals follow a pattern: tension rises, crises follow, fear of war then produces caution and negotiation.
- After acquiring **nuclear deterrence**, Pakistan turned to the low-cost option of **asymmetric warfare** and stepped up support to terrorist groups.
- Crisis sequence → Kargil (troops sent in the guise of *mujahideen*), the December 2001 Parliament attack and the threat of limited war, Mumbai 2008. Improvement stalled again after the beheading of an Indian soldier in January 2013.
- The **composite dialogue** of 2004 covered terrorism, nuclear risk reduction and Kashmir; both sides began to think beyond mutually exclusive claims and towards softening the LoC. Talks failed; cross-border terrorism continued.
- India then developed the **'Cold Start' doctrine**. Pakistan responded with **tactical nuclear weapons and cruise missiles**.
- External powers** remain a systemic factor: India chose non-alignment, Pakistan aligned with the United States, and from the 1980s drew nuclear materials, technology, weapons and aid from China. India's closeness to Washington has pushed Islamabad tighter into Beijing's embrace.

Cold Start

Rapid occupation of slices of Pakistani territory, to be held as bargaining material. The doctrine assumes a war fought below the nuclear threshold; Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons were designed precisely to deny that assumption.

Second — accelerating global economic change

- After the balance-of-payments crisis and the reforms, India needed foreign investment and the economic cost of instability became unaffordable. **Friedman** argued that globalisation and fast-moving information technology would not tolerate the uncertainty of regional tension and war threats.
- Positives of the 2000s → opening of trade across Kashmir (2008), the proposed **Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline**, Pakistan's promise of MFN status.
- Cultural opening → Pakistan permitted Indian films and cultural troupes after more than four decades, while worrying about *'cultural penetration'*. After Pathankot the relationship went cold and India moved to a **"SAARC minus one"** approach.
- Economically and politically the gap has widened → India secured the **NSG waiver (2008)**, the **Wassenaar Arrangement (2017)** and the **Australia Group (2018)**, while Pakistan faces political instability and economic crisis.

05 Level two — identity and politics at the state level

- Rajesh Basrar** — the two have contrasting conceptions of national identity, which makes the hostility hard to resolve. Under **Jawaharlal Nehru** India sought an *inclusive identity* rooted in secularism; **Mohammed Ali Jinnah** chose an Islamic identity based on Muslim separateness.
- Identity has an **external** component (separateness from other groups) and an **internal** one (belonging through participation). Where the internal component is weak, states reinforce it by opposing the external other.
- Kashmir and identity** → Kashmir is the symbol of an incomplete parting and of mutually exclusive identity, each side claiming the land in its own image. Sovereignty over Jammu and Kashmir supports India's claim that it can accommodate Muslims; Pakistan, weakened further by the loss of Bangladesh in 1971, remains vulnerable.
- Domestic politics** → India moved from recurrent religious, linguistic and caste conflict into a relatively stable democracy [**Pratap Bhanu Mehta**], while Pakistan has remained ethnically fragmented, politically unstable and economically weak, producing Islamic extremism and a 'culture of Jihad' [**J. Stern**].
- A fractured polity is why Pakistan has not developed the inner confidence for a healthier, more practical approach to India and to Kashmir.

06 Level three — leaders, and what they could not do

Leaders are constrained by domestic politics, geography and the international milieu, yet on occasion they shape outcomes.

Early leaderships

- **Jawaharlal Nehru** determined the course of Indian foreign policy by personality, preference and decision. **J. Bandyopadhyay** — Nehruvian policy carried a considerable contradiction between idealist and realist elements; the ambition of a global role was not backed by hard power, as 1962 showed.
- More realist figures — **Lal Bahadur Shastri** in 1965 and **Indira Gandhi** in 1971 — used the military effectively.
- By the end of the twentieth century Indian power shifted to coalitions; leaders were too weak for major initiatives.
- Pakistan lost **Jinnah** and **Liaquat Ali Khan** early; the contest for power then prevented decisive direction. **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's** populism yielded little.
- **General Zia-ul-Haq** recast Pakistan in an Islamic mould, developed the nuclear programme and kept India at arm's length. It was the military as an **institution**, rather than individual commanders, that shaped the orientation towards India.
- **Benazir Bhutto** and **Nawaz Sharif** raised high expectations and did not meet them.

Leadership in the new millennium

- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** travelled to Lahore in early 1999; the response was shallow and Kargil followed weeks later.
- **Vajpayee** and **Pervez Musharraf** → the **Agra Summit, 2001**, followed by comprehensive dialogue in 2004. Though considered the architect of Kargil, Musharraf showed a striking willingness to discard old positions.
- **Manmohan Singh** showed similar flexibility. As per **Gilani, Hasan, et al.**, by mid-2007 both sides had obliquely signalled readiness to consider dividing Kashmir permanently; a 'breakthrough' was close before Musharraf's standing collapsed.
- **Manmohan Singh** and **Asif Ali Zardari** maintained continuity; the process slowed with Pakistan's internal troubles and the **2008 Mumbai attacks**. **Nawaz Sharif**, returning in 2013, spoke of going 'the extra mile'.
- State-level constraints curb leaders. **L.K. Advani's** attempt to bridge the divide in 2005 drew accusations of going 'soft' from his own followers; **Zardari's** criticism of 'terrorists' in Kashmir in 2008 caused a storm in Pakistan.

07 Kashmir — symptom, not cause

- A territorial conflict over the Kashmir region, primarily between India and Pakistan, with China claiming portions of PoK and Aksai Chin. Dates from **22 October 1947**; on the United Nations agenda since partition.
- Both claim the entire region; three wars (1947–48, 1965, 1999) and repeated skirmishes.
- **Rajesh Basur** — Kashmir is more a **symptom** than a cause; the main contradiction is a conflict of identity. It is a battle of identities, not only of territory.
- India is relatively **status-quoist**, Pakistan **revisionist**. **Pervez Musharraf** treated Kashmir as Pakistan's jugular vein; for India the core issue is cross-border terrorism.
- Pakistan argues for self-determination and cites human rights violations while ignoring Balochistan.

Why each side holds on

- For India → strengthens secular identity; strategic location for security and for countering Chinese designs; freshwater availability.
- For Pakistan → part of Islamic identity; Muslim brotherhood; water resources.

Where it stands

- **C. Raja Mohan** — India's August 2019 move is stuck in Pakistan's political throat: it can neither swallow it nor spit it out. Pakistan's current Kashmir debate is about finding a way out.
- **Ashley J. Tellis** — even if Kashmir were settled, Pakistan is unlikely to give up jihadi terrorism, since the Army's grievances are too deeply rooted to forego its most effective instrument for bleeding India.

08 The other three territorial disputes

Dispute	India's position	Pakistan's position	Where it stands
Siachen Glacier	Recognise the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) first, then demilitarise. Reads the Simla Agreement — beyond the last demarcated point NJ9842 the line runs "thence north to the glaciers" — as placing Pakistan only up to the Saltoro Ridge . Sequence: demarcation → delineation → demilitarisation.	The line runs north-east from NJ9842 to the Karakoram Pass . Demilitarisation first, by withdrawal to 1972 positions, and only then demarcation.	The Karachi Agreement of 1949 gave a vague demarcation and unspecified authority; the glacier has been contested since.
Sir Creek	The Green Line is indicative only. Relies on a 1925 map placing the boundary mid-channel, supported by mid-channel pillars built in 1924, and invokes the Thalweg Principle . Answers that the creek is navigable at high tide and used by fishing trawlers.	Claims the whole creek on the basis of the Bombay Government Resolution of 1914 , under which the eastern flank — the Green Line — was the boundary. Says Thalweg applies only to navigable channels.	92 km of marshy land separating Gujarat from Sindh , never properly surveyed. Matters for fishing rights, hydrocarbons, the EEZ and as flamingo habitat; the UNCLOS deadline has passed.
Gilgit-Baltistan	Part of undivided Jammu and Kashmir. The May 2020 grant of " provisional provincial status " is illegal ; so is the handing of parts of the region to China in 1963 and CPEC work there, treated as an attack on sovereignty .	Administers the region and upgraded it in May 2020 from a "provisional autonomous region". With China, has agreed to build five large dams in Pakistan — one of them here — under One Belt One Road .	The territorial dispute that carries the China factor directly inside it.

Thalweg Principle

Where a boundary is a waterway, it follows the centre of the principal navigable channel. India invokes it at Sir Creek; Pakistan's reply is that the creek is not a navigable channel at all.

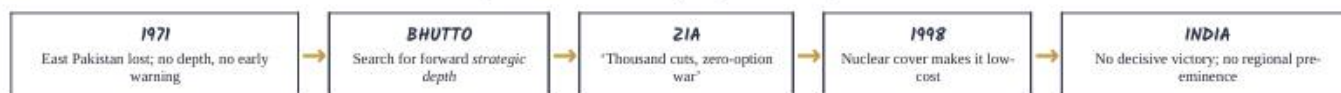
Siachen — possible solutions

- **Shyam Saran** — the two came close thrice, in **1989, 1992 and 2006**, and failed each time over trust deficit. He favours a settlement: the glacial region is a most inhospitable theatre and the extraordinary human and material costs on troops would justify a review.
- **Manmohan Singh** proposed making Siachen a 'mountain of peace' with joint exploration; the Indian Army opposed it.
- **Stephen P. Cohen** considers the dispute futile and remarks that the conflict is like two bald persons fighting over a comb.
- Options discussed → a 'glacier of peace' occupied by neither side; mutual withdrawal without delineation (undesirable and unlikely); **mutual withdrawal after jointly recording current military positions** and exchanging them as an annexure without prejudice to stated positions, pending final settlement of the LoC and AGPL — the most workable, since Pakistan agreed to it in 1992; conversion into an international site for glacial research.

09 Terrorism and ceasefire violations

- **David Scott** — a constant refrain from India is its sense of Pakistan as a state sponsoring 'terrorism'.
- Origins → support to Kashmiri and Sikh insurgents in the 1970s, part of **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's** search for forward *strategic depth*, a substitute for Pakistan's lack of depth and early warning after 1971.
- After the loss of East Pakistan, Pakistan turned to **asymmetric balancing**. **General Zia-ul-Haq** began the 'thousand cuts, zero-option war' policy. Pakistan has also aided **Khalistani separatists**.
- Despite the **Ceasefire Agreement of 2003**, cross-border violations continue and have risen since 2009. Repeated attacks such as Pathankot and Uri rendered SAARC ineffective; after the surgical strikes relations reached a point of no return.
- **The dual burden** → terrorism denies India a **decisive victory** and simultaneously limits India's ability to achieve **regional hegemony**.
- **Ashley J. Tellis** — jihadi terrorism is the perfect instrument for continuously coercing India. It gives the "deep state" plausible deniability, avoids conventional confrontations Pakistan is certain to lose, and converts Pakistan's nuclear deterrent into a licence to needle New Delhi without exposing itself to heavy retaliation.

Why terrorism became policy — the logic chain



India's earlier approach, and the choice since

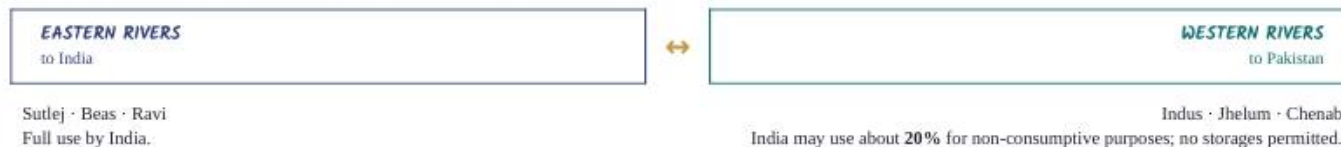
- Three decades of policy centred on stopping infiltration across the LoC, negotiating a mutually acceptable political settlement, reducing violence within Jammu and Kashmir and reinvigorating the political process. A series of popular elections followed, with violence at its lowest point in 2012.
- **Vivek Chadha** — *option one*: "more of the same". Continued talks despite occasional strikes, an offensive-defence posture along the LoC limiting infiltration and retaining moral ascendancy, sustained in the hope that domestic blowback and international aversion would eventually change Pakistan's calculation.
- **Vivek Chadha** — *option two*: premised on the Pakistan Army's vested interests being immovable. Unless India could impose costs on the Army itself, terrorism would continue with only tactical adjustment; India therefore needed pressure points against the Pakistan Army. Recent years reflect this second option.

UPSC 2020 · 10m

How does cross border terrorism impede the achievements of peace and security in South Asia?

10 The Indus Waters Treaty

Indus Waters Treaty, 1960 — how the basin was divided



Background

- Signed in **1960** between **Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Ayub Khan**, brokered by the **World Bank**.
- **Ramaswamy R. Iyer** notes the original logic: irrigation networks then had to be developed in western Punjab, now part of Pakistan.
- Restrictions were also placed on the extension of irrigation in India.
- Institutional machinery → **Permanent Indus Commission**, with neutral expert determination and **Permanent Court of Arbitration** referral; data exchange on project operation and irrigated agriculture. Under **Article V** India paid approximately **£62.06 million**; international financial assistance went to Pakistan for irrigation works.

Contention

- Pakistan has objected to Indian projects on the western rivers, for example the **Tulbul project**.
- Indian resentment centres on having conceded about **80%** of the water; **Article XII** says the treaty *may from time to time be modified*, but this requires ratification by both.

- **Iftikhar A. Drabu** — the treaty has withstood an acrimonious relationship and three wars, and is considered one of the most successful water-sharing arrangements in the world. It survived the wars of 1965, 1971 and 1999 and the standoffs of 1987, 2001–02, 2008, 2016 and 2019.

Options and considerations

- **Brahma Chellaney** → renegotiate to reflect changed geopolitical realities; India is disadvantaged as upper riparian.
- Using the treaty as a pressure point → suspend Permanent Indus Commission meetings; maximise use of the allocated share; contemplate withdrawal, particularly in response to Chinese dams on the Indus.
- **TCA Raghavan** → future negotiation is possible, including a **joint river basin authority**. **UNDP** has called on India to share the water deficit from the western rivers during lean seasons.

Is stopping the flow practical?

- Blocking flow means blocking the three western rivers, which carry more than 80% of the Indus basin's flow — achievable only by storage or diversion.
- **Diversion** → **Iftikhar A. Drabu**: 117 BCM would inundate nearly **120,000 sq km** to a height of one metre every year, or the whole Kashmir valley to seven metres in a single year. Diverting any one river needs a man-made river running hundreds of kilometres.
- **Storage** → a single Tehri-sized storage takes nearly a decade; even thirty simultaneous projects would impound water only around 2030.
- Either way Pakistan feels no impact for at least the next **30 to 50 years**, and the environmental cost of both is catastrophic.

Arguments against manipulation

- **Asma Yaqoob** → the treaty is legally a **"non-exit"** partnership; denying Pakistan access would damage India's global reputation and unsettle China and Nepal, with whom India is itself a downstream recipient.
- **Maya Mirchandani** → calls to abrogate are knee-jerk emotional responses; abrogation would alarm other countries with rights over rivers flowing from India.
- **Sayanangshu Modak** → by keeping to the treaty India strengthens its standing as a responsible upstream riparian when engaging China. Equally, since neither goodwill nor friendship — the preamble's stated spirit — now exists, critics argue India has no obligation to continue.
- Without Pakistan actually feeling any impact, abrogation would only feed lobbies within Pakistan that want relations to deteriorate.
- **Amit Ranjan** → the widening supply-demand gap has produced **water nationalism**; militant groups have taken up the issue, with March 2010 rallies in Muzaffarabad and Lahore denouncing India's "theft" of waters through "illegal dams".

Blood and water can't flow together. — **Narendra Modi**, after Uri, 2016. In 2019 India's water minister threatened to let **"not even a single drop of water"** reach Pakistan.

II The suspension of April 2025

- On 23 April 2025 India **suspended** the treaty, triggered by the **Pahalgam attack**.
- **Legal basis** → India invoked **Article 62 of the Vienna Convention**, arguing a **fundamental change of circumstances** caused by Pakistan's support for terrorism.
- **What India gains** → the way opens to untapped hydropower on the western rivers, an estimated **18,000 MW**, feeding energy needs and development in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Suspension, not revocation** → this allows continued diplomatic engagement and possible renegotiation; India can halt data-sharing and pause dispute mechanisms without outright abrogation.
- **Implications for Pakistan** → threatens water security in Punjab and Sindh, deepening economic crisis and political instability.
- **Diplomatic risk** → international backlash, damage to India's standing as a reliable partner in transboundary water agreements, and a precedent for future disputes.
- **Environmental and technical constraints** → ecosystem and sediment effects, and the geological difficulty of building in the seismic Himalayan region, requiring substantial investment and time.
- Pending Indian projects — the **Shahpurkandi Dam** on the Ravi, the **Ujh Dam** in Jammu and Kashmir and the **Ravi-Beas link** in Punjab — need to be expedited to feed the food bowls of India.

UPSC 2017 · ISm

"Despite the differences between India and Pakistan on various issues, Indus Water Treaty has stood the test of times." In the light of this statement, discuss the recent developments over this issue.

12 Abeyance — the word, the law, the capacity

The word India chose

- India said **abeyance**, not suspension and not termination — the choice was deliberate. **Article XII(4)** keeps the treaty in force until replaced by another ratified treaty; there is no exit clause, so a stated withdrawal would have been a plain breach.
- India's letter of 24 April 2025 cited **significantly altered population demographics** and the need to accelerate clean-energy development, and accused Pakistan of refusing modification talks and of breaching the treaty through sustained cross-border terrorism.
- India is **not a party to the Vienna Convention** on the Law of Treaties, and the IWT predates it — which is why the two sides argue past each other on Articles 60 and 62.

The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be held in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism. — **Vikram Misri**, Foreign Secretary, on the CCS decision, 23 April 2025

Is it lawful? Three positions

Scholar	Position
Nishant Sirohi (ORF)	Legal statecraft, not a breach — a proportionate and reversible countermeasure grounded in customary law. India has neither withdrawn nor diverted flows; it has paused procedural cooperation.

Rishabh Bajoria (EJIL:Talk!)	The opposite view — abeyance works like suspension and would likely fail the tests in VCLT Articles 60 and 62, since a militant attack is neither a treaty breach nor a fundamental change of circumstances.
Uttam Kumar Sinha (MP-IDSA)	India never signed the VCLT and has only re-evaluated its adherence rather than abrogated the treaty. Abeyance is a deliberate administrative action, not a symbolic gesture.

Intent versus capacity — the gap that decides the question

- The treaty allows India only **3.6 million acre-feet** (about 4.4 km³) of storage on the western rivers, against some **182 km³** flowing to Pakistan yearly. India has built about **0.7 MAF** of that entitlement.
- Permitted plants are **run-of-river** and hold little water; new large storage would take years, some to 2032. So the real pressure today is **informational, not hydrological** — halting flood data and technical exchange hurts Pakistan more than any dam can at present.
- **Action since abeyance** → sediment-flushing at **Baglihar, Salal and Dulhasti** on the Chenab without notifying Pakistan; fast-tracked Chenab hydropower — Pakal Dul (1,000 MW), Kiru (624), Kwar (540), Ratle (850), Sawalkote (1,856). J&K's installed hydropower is set to rise about 46%, from 3,540 MW to 5,164 MW, by December 2026.
- No confirmed evidence yet that aggregate flows have changed; the shift so far is legal and procedural.

Unable for now to block water flows to Pakistan, India can, however, halt the flow of information. In some ways, this could be India's most powerful current card. — **David Michel, CSIS, 1 May 2025**

The arbitration clash

- Pakistan's **Court of Arbitration** case (PCA No. 2023-01), chaired by **Sean D. Murphy**, ruled on **27 June 2025** that abeyance does not remove the Court's competence.
- India did not appear and calls the Court **illegally constituted**, while accepting the parallel **Neutral Expert** track (Michel Lino) that it had itself requested — two tracks running at once on the same dams.
- A further **Maximum Pondage award** (15 May 2026) went against India, which the Ministry of External Affairs dismissed as **null and void**.
- The clash is less about any single dam than about whether a party can walk out of a binding dispute system by relabelling its exit.

The text of the Treaty, therefore, does not provide for the unilateral 'abeyance' or 'suspension' of the Treaty. — **Court of Arbitration, Supplemental Award on Competence, 27 June 2025**

One year on — 2026

- Positions have hardened and diverged: India says the treaty is in abeyance, Pakistan says it is **fully operational and effective**. Home Minister **Amit Shah** has said it will never be restored; President Zardari objected on World Water Day, 22 March 2026.
- Pakistan raised the issue at a **UN Security Council Arria-formula meeting** on 30 January 2026.
- The basin lost about **24.8%** of perennial snow and ice cover between 2001 and 2021 — the argument that climate stress leaves both states no real alternative to cooperation, whatever the treaty's legal status.

Theory — how to frame it in an answer

- **Amal Chandra** → **coercive treaty retaliation**: a treaty becomes an instrument for imposing costs on a state accused of sponsoring terrorism — a move from liberal institutionalism toward realism.
- **Medha Bisht** → coercive diplomacy displacing **strategic idealism**, which had assumed that cooperation breeds stability. Her caution: this framing may make future cooperation harder, because it pushes aside the ecological view of shared rivers.
- **Masha Tokas** → **securitization theory** — India recast water from a technical matter into a security concern, ending the older habit of keeping the treaty apart from politics. Against this she sets **regime theory**, which the treaty exemplified for decades.

In such scenarios, power trumps principle, and realism supplants liberal institutionalism. — **Amal Chandra, Global Policy Journal, 14 May 2025**

Escalation risk

- Pakistan has drawn a red line, treating any real interruption of flows as an **act of war** — which raises the danger of miscalculation between two nuclear states.
- **Dan Haines** (UCL) → even symbolic disruption could hurt Pakistani agriculture, close to a quarter of the economy.
- **David Michel** → India's upper-riparian advantage could rebound, since China sits above India on the same river system and may copy the tactic on the Brahmaputra; touching a settled water treaty may also unsettle smaller neighbours such as Bangladesh and Nepal.

Any attempt to usurp the water of the lower riparian, or to stop it, or to divert it would be an act of war against Pakistan and would be responded to with full force, including nuclear. — **Muhammad Khalid Jamali, Pakistan's Ambassador**

13 Pulwama and Balakot

An assessment of India's response by **Zorawar Daulat Singh**:

Gains	Concerns
Pre-emptive self-defence — India asserted a right usually associated with Western powers, marking a break from restraint.	Risk of escalation into armed conflict.
Challenging proxy warfare — raised the cost of Pakistan's long-standing strategy.	Erosion of strategic restraint , which was designed to avoid unnecessary escalation.
Active defence — a proactive stance against terrorism from Pakistani soil.	Pivot state dynamics — Pakistan's ties with the United States and Saudi Arabia limit their support for India.

14 CPEC and the China factor

How Sino-Pakistan ties were built

- 1950s–60s → contacts at governmental, professional and intellectual levels, thin in political and economic content. Pakistan served as China's main bridge to the Islamic world and helped bridge the communication gap between the PRC and the West.
- 1960s–70s → Pakistan's disenchantment with the West coincided with trouble from India; the relationship was built in the aftermath of the 1962 border war. In 1963 Pakistan ceded the **Shaksgam Valley** to China, which then supplied arms, materials for the nuclear weapons programme and economic aid.
- 1965 war → of all Pakistan's supporters China spoke loudest, linking the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistan conflicts and asserting a single Indian design of expansionism. In 1971 China treated events in Pakistan as an internal affair to be settled without foreign intervention.
- 1990s → Li Peng's April 1999 visit defined a broad consensus on regional and international issues.

CPEC and its consequences

- CPEC, a flagship of the **Belt and Road Initiative**, passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- Geostrategic** → transforms China's **Malacca Dilemma** into India's **Gwadar Dilemma**.
- Geo-economic** → undercuts India's stance towards Pakistan, shifts Pakistan away from South Asian integration, and reduces the value of economic isolation as an Indian instrument.
- Manoj Joshi** and **P.S. Raghavan** → India could consider participating in regional trade if Pakistan and China open cross-South Asian routes. **Hardeep S. Puri** → maintain resistance to CPEC to safeguard sovereignty.

The relationship raises the specter that India may, in the future, face a two-front war, a scenario that would have been implausible a decade ago. — Manjari Chatterjee Miller

Implications for India

- Jayadeva Ranade** → with Chinese military power flowing into Pakistan, China straddles India on the northern, eastern and western borders, raising the prospect of a two-front war and positioning China to play a role in Kashmir. Since 2010 Pakistan is the only country with which China has an **"all-weather strategic partnership"**.
- Under Xi Jinping, China's earlier practice of managing or deferring contentious issues has been discarded for a direct and aggressive approach.
- The **'Rejuvenation of the great Chinese nation'** means "the recovery of territories that China feels it has lost through the imposition of unequal treaties by hostile foreign powers" — hence the framing of the border question as a colonial legacy, and claims to Aksai Chin, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, reinforced by stapled visas.
- The relationship is not problem-free → Chinese wariness about Islamist militants in Xinjiang and their Pakistani links, attacks on Chinese citizens in Pakistan, sporadic opposition to CPEC, and Chinese caution on Kashmir. It is nevertheless no longer a mere relationship but a genuine partnership.

15 Balochistan

- In the **southwest of Pakistan**, about half the country's territory, rich in gas, gold, copper, oil and uranium, yet among its poorest regions. **Gwadar port** gives it strategic weight.
- Unresolved autonomy** → the incorporation of Balochistan, including the formerly independent Kalat, has produced persistent grievances. **Human rights abuses**, **economic exploitation** without local benefit and **ethnic nationalism** against Punjabi dominance sustain the conflict.
- Pakistan accuses India of supporting Baloch nationalist activity; India generally maintains a non-interventionist stance but has occasionally highlighted the region's plight.
- Suhasini Haidar** → mentioning Balochistan puts pressure on both China and Pakistan, since CPEC depends on secure access through Gwadar.
- Sadanand Dhume** → the reference reflects scepticism about productive dialogue with Pakistan in present circumstances.
- Kanwal Sibal** → by raising Balochistan in his Independence Day speech, the Prime Minister put Pakistan on notice about its own internal vulnerabilities.

16 Why Pakistan is the hard case

- Pakistan is India's biggest foreign policy challenge — a source of threats ranging from nuclear war to lone-wolf attacks and suicide bombings, and a proxy of China. Historically India has faced its bigger threats from the western front.
- China is a greater power but a comparatively more responsible member of world politics, with some shared interests with India. Pakistan is termed a **'mad child with loaded gun'** and an example of a rogue state; hence India's **strategic restraint**. **Pratap Bhanu Mehta** treats such restraint not as weakness but as a measured response.

The challenges, stated plainly

- Taliban takeover of Afghanistan** → Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba now have a friendly regime that may look the other way or offer safe haven. **M.K. Narayanan** refers to Pakistan as the **'patron saint'** of Afghanistan's new regime.
- Right-wing Hindu nationalism in India** → Pakistan signalled a desire to improve ties in its first-ever National Security Policy while remaining concerned about Indian "military adventurism".
- Political instability and military dominance** → a deep state with a weak political regime; the military's interest lies in keeping the situation tense. **Christine Fair**, **Ayesha Siddiqi** and **Hussain Haqqani** hold that the Pakistani Army derives its sustenance from the Kashmir conflict; so long as it can sustain the perception of India as an existential threat and ideological antithesis, it continues to receive state largesse and political clout.
- The obsession with Kashmir** → makes long-term peace impossible; since the abrogation of Article 370, Pakistan has tried every diplomatic means to be heard.
- Chinese interference** → CPEC, Chinese presence on Pakistani soil, and Beijing's better relations with the Taliban.
- India's idealistic foreign policy** → **Rajiv Dogra** argues that idealist Indian leaders made repeated concessions, after which Pakistan always found new means to undermine Indian interests; India has been "hopping in confusion" over non-state actors, without an effective deterrent response or a consistent security posture.

- **Absence of an innovative counter-terrorism strategy** → **Kanwal Sibal** notes India remains in a bind, caught between peace lobbies asserting “no alternative to dialogue” and “we can choose our friends but not neighbours”, and the record of Pakistani behaviour.
- **Unchanging security dilemma** → neither side's threat perception has fundamentally changed; Pakistan's first National Security Policy mentions peace briefly and spends the rest debating New Delhi's “hegemonic” goals.

What India should do

- **Balance Pakistan in Afghanistan** → engage the Taliban realistically and build security cooperation, while bracing for a heightened threat.
- **Counter China** → form counter-alliances on the lines of **Kautilya's raja-mandala** and raise issues uncomfortable for Beijing.
- **Revive SAARC** → follow a *functionalist* approach and make Pakistan realise the benefits of cooperation, particularly while it is under economic stress.
- **Use the Shanghai Cooperation Organization** → both are members of a security-focused body; find ways to press Pakistan on terrorism.
- **Neutralise Pakistan strategically** → conventional victory has become costly and remote since Pakistan acquired credible deterrence.
- **Take the first initiative** under ‘Neighbourhood First’ → India, as the bigger country, should move first, but with caution.

17 Possibilities of cooperation

- **Rajesh Basrur** — systemic change has created conditions for cooperation. Pakistan's nuclear weapons neutralised India's conventional advantage, while India's rising economic and political power has **widened the gap** between them.
- The widened gap encourages, though it does not necessitate, long-term cooperation; India needs stability in its immediate environs to play a larger role in Asia and beyond.
- Nuclear weapons and economic trans-nationalisation together → (a) give Pakistan security from attack, reducing its sense of vulnerability; (b) produce sufficient risk to make leaders rethink; (c) create stronger incentives to cooperate.

Toward a democratic peace?

- Both moved away from zero-sum approaches to Kashmir in the early twenty-first century, loosening controls on cross-LoC movement of people and goods; state-level factors kept the movement a slow crawl.
- **Mansfield and Snyder** — democratising states are war-prone. Pakistan's unstable hybrid democracy, its mix of populism and military power, and parties outbidding each other in appealing conservatives, make democratic peace difficult.

The prospects for a ‘democratic peace’ between India and Pakistan remain limited for the near future. The truism that democracies do not fight one another applies only to developed capitalist societies, and neither is anywhere close to being that. — Rajesh Basrur

Instances of cooperation, and the economics

- The **Indus Waters Treaty**, in force through several conflicts, seen as a model for international water-sharing; SAFTA and regional cooperation during periods of calm; cultural exchange of artists; Pakistani players in the Indian Premier League; joint hosting of the **South Asian Games, 2004**.
- Political tension long kept trade low because Pakistan sought to keep India at arm's length. Trade growth does not by itself rule out political tension, as United States–China and Japan–China trade show.
- Both the **Pakistan People's Party** and the **Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)** favour more trade and investment; **Basrur** notes that internal pressures nonetheless held up MFN status, despite economic misfortune and IMF pressure.
- Trade figures → **\$521 million** (2004–05) → about **\$2.35 billion** (2012–13) → **\$329.26 million** (2020–21) → **\$1.35 billion** in April–December 2022 against \$516.36 million in all of 2021–22. One study estimates potential growth of about tenfold.
- India imposed **200% tariffs** after Pulwama and withdrew MFN status; Pakistan suspended trade after August 2019. Facilitating structures exist — the **Wagah–Attari** crossing and **SAFTA** — but advance only as far as politics allows.

18 Defeat, contain, negotiate — and the Army question

Rajesh Basrur (*The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*) identifies three tried options.

Three options tried, and the one Basrur puts on the table



- **Defeat** → Pakistan initiated war in 1948, 1965 and 1971 seeking parity; India's response was reactive in the first two, proactive in the third. Defeat made Pakistan cautious but accelerated its nuclear programme, nullifying the war option, and pushed it towards *asymmetrical balancing* through terrorism.
- **Contain** → containment worked poorly, because India chose non-alignment and avoided alliances while Pakistan built them. Continued infiltration, Kargil, the 2001 Parliament attack and Mumbai 2008 showed Pakistan could not be deterred.
- **Negotiate** → India's willingness to make and limit demands appears to have been read as weakness. Pakistan's internal fissures make abandoning revisionism difficult, as the failure of the composite dialogue showed. **Bhutto's** promise of a 1,000-year war over Kashmir and **Zia's** Islamisation further narrowed the space.

The symmetric option

Basrur's suggestion — calibrated backing of nationalist, as distinct from religious fundamentalist, forces opposed to the Pakistani state. The objection that India could not risk state failure and radicals acquiring the bomb is, in his view, exaggerated.

Assessing Indian policy

- **Rajesh Basrur** → containment yielded few dividends. India kept flagging a military option that was unviable, especially after 2002, and could not influence Pakistan's asymmetric strategy, which depended entirely on internal Pakistani factors.

- India also failed to build a strategic partnership with the United States that would have strengthened its position; a decade after offering military bases in the wake of 9/11, it was avoiding agreements on logistics support and communications interoperability, apparently wary of antagonising China — which is odd, given India's limited capacity to tackle even Pakistan.
- Rajiv Dogra** → since independence, and especially under Nehru, idealism produced concessions that Pakistan pocketed before finding new means to undermine Indian interests.
- The Army question** → any warming will happen only when the Pakistani military comes on board, so engaging the military may be more fruitful than engaging the civilian government. India's dilemma is that it deals with the civilian government but refuses to deal with the most powerful institution setting Pakistan's India policy. There are no army-to-army talks, and it is unclear whether the Indian Army, with far less influence over policy, would gain from them — or whether the Pakistan Army, whose very reason for being is a perceived existential threat, would even be inclined.

19 Policy since 2014, and its assessment

The turn

- The government began with 'Neighbourhood First' in earnest, inviting all SAARC heads of state to the swearing-in. Talks stalled after Pathankot (2 January 2016) and the Uri attack of 18 September 2016, the deadliest on security forces in two decades, killing **19** soldiers.
- India cancelled participation in the SAARC summit scheduled for Islamabad in November 2016; on **28 September 2016** it carried out "surgical strikes" across the LoC.
- John Joseph Vater** and **Yogesh Joshi** → policy has moved from **strategic restraint** to **realist strategic assertiveness**. Externally: failure to credibly deter revanchism, upsidized military and economic capability, greater freedom from international reprisal, and the threat of radicals moving from Syria to Afghanistan-Pakistan and on to Kashmir. Domestically: the 2019 electoral verdict, a strongman leadership style, nationalist support generated by confronting Pakistan, and a parliamentary majority permitting an agenda not possible under coalition constraints in 1998–2004.
- Kanti Bajpai** → the policy is 'normal anger' assertive diplomacy with explicit coalition building, defined as a '*cooperation-defection cycle*': doors kept open to preserve India's image as a responsible player and for nuclear stability, defection used to set the agenda and the precondition of ending terrorism.

At the heart of Modi's efforts is the desire to make terrorism the central focus of India–Pakistan negotiations. — Kanti Bajpai. His point: this runs counter to India's policy since the 1990s, under which a long-term composite dialogue would treat Kashmir and security as co-equal primary issues. The signal now is that India will discuss terrorism and refuse to talk about Kashmir.

- Doval Doctrine** → **defensive offence**. India's refusal to counter Pakistan's aerial riposte to Balakot with attacks on military positions in the Nausheera sector signalled defensive intent pursued through offensive means.
- Key elements** → rejection of peace talks as impractical; using India's superior position against Pakistan's vulnerabilities; and a three-fold strategy of intelligence-driven pre-emption, strategic weaponisation to disrupt terrorist infrastructure, and high-tech intelligence.

Bilateral and coalition diplomacy

- Bilateral** → the cycle of cooperation and defection. Talks were cancelled when the Pakistani High Commissioner invited Hurriyat leaders in August 2014, a practice New Delhi had overlooked for twenty years. At **Ufa** (SCO, 11 July 2015) the two agreed to an NSA-level meeting on terrorism; attacks followed at Gurdaspur (17 July) and Udhampur (5 August). After the Paris meeting of November 2015 dialogue resumed; Pathankot followed on 2 January. A joint investigation team visited Pathankot in March 2016; Islamabad cancelled the dialogue on 7 April.
- Coalition** → argued for a UN convention on terrorism; sought sanctions listing for **Masood Azhar** in February 2016; the June 2016 India–US joint statement committed both to act in the UN against three Pakistan-based organisations and to press Pakistan on Mumbai and Pathankot. An '**Acting West**' approach persuaded Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to include strong references to terrorism in joint statements.
- India also took Pakistan to the **ICJ** and worked with the **Financial Action Task Force**, drawing the distinction between a "responsible" India and a "rogue" Pakistan.

India has moved on from its non-aligned past. India is today an aligned state — but based on issues. — Vijay Gokhale

Positives

Defensive offence rests on realist assumptions — power checks power — while keeping the door open for dialogue preserves India's image as a responsible global player.

Harsh V. Pant → the response to terror strikes changed the fundamentals of Indian foreign and security policy. Air power used against camps deep inside Pakistani territory for the first time since 1971 shattered the myth of Pakistan's nuclear cover, opened the possibility of limited conventional war, and put the onus of escalation back on Pakistan.

Shishir Gupta → India has decided to call a spade a spade, building a pro-India lobby in the world, defending its interests by choosing friends and degrading enemies; FATF grey-listing helped isolate Pakistan.

Criticism

Kanti Bajpai → the policy has reached a dead end because Pakistan is a 'sharp power' with a high tolerance for coercion; international patience with India is wearing thin, and India risks the tag of an irresponsible power.

Rajesh Basrur → calls the policy '**instant coffee**', lacking vision and clarity of goal. **Happymon Jacob** → the '**all or nothing**' approach has failed; relations have deteriorated and violence in Kashmir has risen.

Ashley J. Tellis → counter-terrorism has damaged cadres and local leadership in the Valley, but these tactical gains are undermined by the persistent alienation of the population, which gives Pakistan plentiful opportunity to meddle.

20 Where things stand — and the 2025 conflict

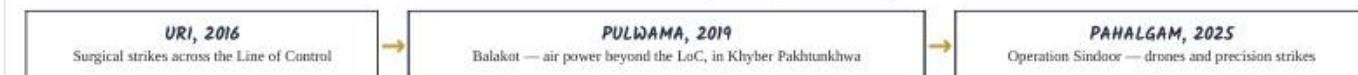
Age of minimalism

Happymon Jacob's term for the present phase — a 'cold peace' with no political will for a grand relationship, grand gestures or grand outreach.

- Happymon Jacob** → very little bilateral contact, few expectations of a breakthrough, hardly any warmth. New Delhi has learnt that peace with Pakistan demands too much time, commitment and effort with little guarantee of success; relations have been reduced to a backchannel between the Indian NSA and the Pakistan Army establishment.
- Sushant Sareen** → 2019 set the tone. Within days India shook off restraints it had imposed on itself for three decades, striking not in PoK but in Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; the August move on Article 370 killed whatever remained. At best, diplomatic relations may be restored, trade may open and travel may ease; beyond that the LoC will stay hot and terrorism will continue below the threshold of tolerance.
- Factors shaping the future → democracy and internal stability in Pakistan; the influence of the United States despite both sides rejecting mediation; agreement on a

direction for comprehensive effort on Kashmir; and recognition of the Simla and Lahore arrangements.

The escalation arc — each response goes one step further



The 2025 conflict

- Triggered by the terrorist attack at **Pahalgam**, attributed to Pakistan-based groups.
- Both sides avoided targeting civilians directly and avoided full-scale war. India framed the action as a response to terrorism rather than war against Pakistan, managing international perceptions while maintaining strategic restraint.
- The nuclear dimension hung over the conflict without escalation; crisis management and military-to-military communication mattered in de-escalation.
- **Assessment** → warfare is becoming faster and more technologically sophisticated; deterrence works up to a point, but the underlying cause, Pakistan's support for terrorism, remains unresolved.

21 Operation Sindoor — the doctrine and the debate

The sequence, in dates

- **22 April 2025** — Pahalgam; 26 civilians killed, most male and identified by religion. India attributed it to **The Resistance Front**, described as a Lashkar-e-Taiba front; Pakistan denied involvement.
- **23 April** — IWT held in abeyance; Attari check-post shut, SAARC visa-exemption entry cancelled, Pakistani defence advisors expelled, High Commission strength cut from 55 to 30.
- **7 May** — nine sites struck in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir; no Pakistani military facilities targeted. First strikes on the **Muridke** and **Bahawalpur** headquarters of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. Attacks reached deepest into Pakistani Punjab since **1971**.
- **Weapons firsts** → first Indian use of **BrahMos** and **SCALP-EG** cruise missiles against Pakistan; first India–Pakistan clash where both sides used drones to inflict damage; Pakistan's first use of **Fatah-I** and **Fatah-II** ballistic missiles.
- **9–10 May** — India struck about eleven military sites, including **Nur Khan** **airbase** near Rawalpindi. No manned aircraft crossed into the other's airspace; the fighting stayed a stand-off exchange. Pakistan launched **Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos** on 10 May.
- **10 May** — ceasefire understanding through **DGMO channels**. The United States role is disputed: Washington claimed mediation, India insists the pause was bilateral.
- **Casualties, disputed** → India claimed over 100 terrorists killed; Pakistan reported 51 dead. India acknowledged at least five service personnel lost; totals remain contested.

The doctrine, 12 May

Three pillars

Retaliation for any terror attack, on India's terms · no tolerance of 'nuclear blackmail' · no distinction between terrorists and the governments that sponsor them.

If there is a terrorist attack on India, a fitting reply will be given ... on our terms only ... India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail ... we will not differentiate between the government sponsoring terrorism and the masterminds of terrorism. — Narendra Modi, Address to the Nation, 12 May 2025

Terror and talks cannot go together ... Terror and trade cannot go together ... Water and blood cannot flow together. — Narendra Modi, Address to the Nation, 12 May 2025

What changed — the case for a new doctrine

- **Arzan Tarapore** → a change in India's **theory of victory**. India no longer expects that threatening punishment can change Pakistani behaviour; it now accepts that Pakistani intent is fixed and seeks instead to degrade terrorist capacity through repeated, direct cost imposition — cumulative deterrence, on the Israeli model of periodic degradation.
- **Happymon Jacob** → a doctrinal innovation that collapses the distinction between subconventional and conventional aggression and, with little nuclear talk on either side, calls Pakistan's nuclear bluff. His sharpest claim: Sindoor builds a **tripwire** — a terror attack means Pakistan has already begun a conventional conflict, so the burden of avoiding war shifts to Islamabad.
- **Walter Ladwig III** → a lower bar for action: a failure by Pakistan to deny space to terrorist groups is now treated as reason enough to strike.

The retaliation, rather than its threat, is the instrument of coercion — levying tangible costs that force the adversary's future attacks to be smaller or rarer. — Arzan Tarapore, War on the Rocks, 19 May 2025

The counter-case — continuity, and the costs

- **The commitment trap** → **Tarapore** argues the pledge to respond every time cedes the initiative to the terrorists and narrows India's own room to manoeuvre in a crisis. **Moeed Yusuf** and **Rizwan Zeb** trace the same dynamic back to Uri and Pulwama, where each claim of a 'new normal' raised the political price of inaction next time.
- **Sameer Lalwani**, **Shailender Arya** and **David Brostoff** → question the coercive value of **non-contact warfare**. Stand-off strikes and drones drift toward limited, incremental action that may signal resolve without imposing much real pain; the Pakistan Army treats militant proxies as an instrument of policy and has domestic reasons to keep fighting.
- **Ladwig** → a structural risk — once retaliation is guaranteed, fringe actors may stage attacks precisely to provoke a crisis.
- **Tarapore** concedes that a pure cost-imposition strategy cannot deliver peace and, on its own terms, never ends.

Calibration under the nuclear overhang

- **Christopher Clary** (*Four Days in May*) → overt nuclear signalling was **lower** than in earlier India–Pakistan crises; both sides calibrated moves and tested escalation thresholds without clearly crossing them. He reads the 8–10 May strikes through **Schelling's** theory of coercion.
- **Yusuf and Zeb** → across a quarter century these have been crises in a nuclearised environment rather than nuclear crises, because both states hold a **recessed deterrence** posture — leaning on **Vipin Narang's** account of Pakistan's **asymmetric escalation posture**. Their warning: the real hazard is a growing belief on both sides that escalation can be managed.

The power to hurt is often communicated by some performance of it. — **Thomas C. Schelling**, *Arms and Influence*, 1966 — cited in Clary

South Asian crises can most aptly be described as crises in a nuclearized environment rather than nuclear crises per se. — **Moeed Yusuf & Rizwan Zeb**, *Carnegie Endowment*, 2026

Doctrine, or only a pattern?

- **Soumya Awasthi** → a turn to **proactive compellence** — escalation-dominant, built on cost imposition meant to alter the adversary's calculus. Her caution: India has no formally published counter-terrorism doctrine, its intelligence-to-strike cycle is not routinised, and its narrative advantage faded within days.
- **Harsh V. Pant** → one year on, what emerged is a clearer **pattern of behaviour rather than a fixed doctrine**; Sinoor demonstrated a capability that still awaits institutional permanence. He also reads the wider design — by linking previously insulated areas such as water and connectivity to security, India signalled that the costs of backing proxy violence would be spread across several fronts.
- **The mediation dispute** → Trump's claim to have brokered the ceasefire cut against India's long-held rejection of third-party mediation; **Pant** calls the resulting contest a battle over narratives that served Pakistan's interest in internationalising the dispute, and holds that Washington's acceptance of India's counter-terrorism framing proved conditional rather than transformative.
- **The China factor** → **Lalwani** and co-authors note that Pakistan's use of Chinese systems and reported Chinese support hardened Indian assessments of a fused **two-front threat**.

A doctrine that exists only in battlefield execution, without doctrinal codification ... remains a half-completed revolution. — **Soumya Awasthi**, *Observer Research Foundation*, 7 May 2026

22 Theory, scholars, books

Theoretical perspectives

- **Functionalism** → despite deep conflict, cooperation on water, trade and counter-terrorism could be built by concentrating on shared economic and security benefit.
- **Sociological Liberalism** → societal ties and people-to-people interaction — cultural exchange, education, civil society — build trust and reduce the weight of nationalist rhetoric.
- **Social Constructivism** → the conflict is not only material; perceptions, historical narratives and misunderstanding shape it, so trust-building and reframing are central.

Views of scholars

- **Sumit Ganguly** (*Deadly Impasse*) → traditional deterrence models and the security dilemma are inadequate here; persistent insecurity on both sides blocks rapprochement. He characterises Pakistan as revisionist and irredentist, driven by a parochial mindset within its military establishment rather than a comprehensive national interest, and stresses the conflict of identity between Islamist Pakistan and secular India.
- **Insecurity dilemma perspective** → pathological obsession and paranoia among elites; a reductive nationalism fixated on animosity. In Pakistan, discourse is consumed by hostility towards India with minimal focus on national pride, amplified by a well-funded military establishment.
- **Dilip Hiro** → a narrative of fatal miscalculation, entrenched antagonism and reciprocal paranoia among elites.
- **Stephen P. Cohen** → a “**mutually hurting stalemate**”, in which neither party can secure victory nor sustain continued losses.
- **Hussain Haqqani** → symbolic gestures will not solve the conflict; a major shift in attitudes is required on both sides.
- Pakistan's distinctive features → a **hybrid political system** with a **dyarchic structure** in which the military wields substantial influence through a selected civilian figurehead; a **rentier state** reliant on external assistance; often characterised as a **rogue state**.

Prescriptions — who says what

Scholar	Prescription
C. Raja Mohan & Happymon Jacob	Engage the military leadership in Rawalpindi rather than only the civilian government in Islamabad.
Brahma Chellaney	Be cautious with the civil government to avoid provoking the military; re-evaluate the Indus Waters Treaty.
Shashi Tharoor	Back-channel diplomacy through the United States and Saudi Arabia; conclude the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism ; strengthen internal security and communal harmony.
Harsh V. Pant	Escalate stakes and target Pakistan's vulnerabilities; criticises inconsistency in India's response.
Pratap Bhanu Mehta	Avoid a tit-for-tat approach; take a strategic view of a conflict with many dimensions.
M.K. Narayanan	Restrained action to maintain India's image as a mature and responsible nation; cyber warfare in preference to direct military retaliation.
Happymon Jacob	Creative statecraft and out-of-the-box diplomacy; disputes the efficacy of military options.
Suhasini Haidar	Dealing with Pakistan is a strategic chess game; avoid predictable responses, tailor strategy.
Srinath Raghavan & Rajesh Basrur	India's policy has shifted from engagement to deterrence.

Two books worth naming in an answer

- **J.N. Dixit**, *India-Pakistan In War And Peace* → Kashmir will not be resolved unless the aspirations of the Kashmiri people are addressed, and India will find it hard to negotiate the demands of groups such as the JKLF and the All Party Hurriyat Conference. On Pakistan he offers a dismal but realistic picture: its military leadership will keep the issue alive, and whenever Kashmir went to the backburner Pakistan sought to internationalise it, as Kargil showed, with disregard for the Shimla Accord and the Lahore Declaration. On nuclear weapons, he attributes India's 1998 decision to the external threat from China and its links with Pakistan, India's quest for regional power status, and the discriminatory nature of regimes such as the CTBT; Pakistan followed only to match India.
- **Sharat Sabharwal**, *India's Pakistan Conundrum: Managing a Complex Relationship* → dealing with Pakistan is a game of **snakes and ladders**: every time you climb and feel progress is being made, the snake intervenes and you are lower than before. Pakistani security agencies and their terror proxies ensured the relationship hit one of the longer snakes each time it looked up. He holds that direct engagement with the Army would not change behaviour, given its hostility.

India will have to continue to count on its counter-terror capabilities and deterrence, combined with turning as much heat as possible on Pakistan in conjunction with its international partners. — **Sharat Sabharwal**

Assessment

- **Atal Bihari Vajpayee** → we can change our friends but not our neighbours. Good relations with neighbours are a precondition for a country's progress, and in an era of complex interdependence a nation's destiny is tied to its region.
- India lives in a difficult neighbourhood with no simple solutions; the record of managing these challenges is creditable, and is likely to continue through new partnerships and hard decisions.
- The way forward lies in normalisation, or at least stabilisation — innovative diplomacy, coalition building, and the wisdom **Sun Tzu** attached to understanding one's adversary. Bolstering India's integration into the global economy raises the number of stakeholders in its stability; redressing internal grievances removes what Pakistan can exploit.

PART B India & Bangladesh

23 How the relationship is described

- Uniquely rooted in shared history and geographical proximity, and marked by inherent uncertainties and complex dynamics.
- **Sheikh Hasina** described the relationship as like a flowing river, full of generosity. **S. Jaishankar** describes the current state of affairs as a **fraternal friendship**.
- For the relationship to thrive, it is often said that India should let go of historical grievances while Bangladesh should consider geographical realities.
- **Harsh Vardhan Shringla** called the relationship a **"role model"** for international affairs. **Ajit Doval** recognised Bangladesh as India's **most important neighbour**.
- **S. Jaishankar** → "if there is one example where the neighbourhood first policy has yielded good result, it is in case of Bangladesh".
- **Sreeradha Datta** → "India-Bangladesh relations reflect the complex legacy of partition, liberation, and regional geopolitics."

Geography has made us neighbors, history has made us friends. — **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**

24 Three dimensions of the relationship

Strategic	Economic	Political
Managing external threats — Bangladesh's proximity to China is both an opportunity and a challenge; stable relations are essential to mitigate undue Chinese influence.	Resource potential — oil and gas resources that can enhance regional energy security.	Regional integration — active participation in SAARC, BIMSTEC and BBIN.
Internal security — porous borders have produced illegal migration on a large scale; border security cooperation is essential.	Expansive market — a large population offering trade, investment and collaboration.	Climate change — vulnerability to rising sea levels makes Bangladesh a leading voice in climate discussions.
Counter-terrorism — Bangladesh has faced attacks linked to groups such as ISIS; collaborative counter-terrorism is essential.	Trade — Bangladesh is India's largest trade partner in South Asia; Border Haats and trade agreements have eased cross-border commerce.	Northeast security — Bangladesh borders several northeastern states, so friendly relations matter for their stability.

25 What India and Bangladesh have built

The balance sheet in one line

COOPERATION and it is substantial

Connectivity · energy · ports · health · the Land Boundary and maritime settlements



CONTENTION and it is unresolved

Illegal migration · Teesta · trade imbalance · the opening for China

Connectivity and infrastructure

- **Bangladesh India Friendship Pipeline** for supply of diesel; agreement to use **Chittagong and Mongla** seaports for transportation to India's northeastern states; the **BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement**.
- The **Feni bridge** connecting Sabroom in Tripura to Ramgarh; four of six pre-1947 rail links restored; an inland waterway between Sonamura port in Tripura and

Munshiganj; work to double air connectivity to **120 flights per week**; direct bus services between Kolkata–Dhaka–Agartala and Dhaka–Guwahati–Shillong; a **15-km** broad gauge rail line between Agartala and Bangladesh.

Energy, security, economy

- **Rooppur Atomic Energy Project**, an Indo-Russian collaboration in Bangladesh; export of **660 MW** of electricity; extradition of ULFA terrorists.
- Substantial lines of credit for developmental projects; MoUs for two special economic zones for Indian companies at **Bheramara and Mongla**; a draft agreement and two pacts on coastal shipping cooperation in 2015; the transit facility signed in June 2015.
- **Dispute resolution** → the **Land Boundary Agreement** and the **maritime boundary** were peacefully settled, the latter through acceptance of the Permanent Court of Arbitration award in Bangladesh's favour.

Health, culture, multilateral

- **9 million** Covishield doses supplied; Bangladesh accounts for more than **35%** of India's international medical patients and more than **50%** of India's medical tourism revenue. Bangladeshis form a large share of tourists in India, outnumbering all tourists from Western Europe in 2017.
- Joint commemoration of Mahatma Gandhi's birth anniversary, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's birth centenary and the 50th anniversary of the War of Liberation; cultural exchange programmes for 2015–2017 (**Kashem and Islam**).
- Work together on UNSC reform, climate change, the SDGs and protection of migrants' rights; cooperation in SAARC and BIMSTEC; Bangladesh thanked India for convening the SAARC leaders' video conference in March 2020 and creating the **SAARC Emergency Response Fund**; both are members of **IORA**, whose chairmanship Bangladesh assumed in 2021.

26 Contention I — illegal migration

- India and Bangladesh share the world's longest land border, approximately **3,700 km**. Estimates suggest **30 to 40 million** Bangladeshis are in India illegally, with notable demographic change in regions such as Tripura.
- **Causes** → lack of recognition, since Bangladesh has not fully acknowledged the extent of the problem; poor border management; push factors such as floods, poverty and historical conflict including the 1971 war; pull factors such as porous borders, corruption among law enforcement, and political motives of electoral support.
- **Challenges** → trafficking of drugs, humans and cattle; fake voter ID cards threatening democratic processes; communal tensions from demographic shifts, affecting the secular character of society; economic strain on infrastructure, healthcare and education.
- **Potential solutions** → enhanced border management including electrified fences aligned with regional security dynamics; addressing corruption among law enforcement agencies; the **Gujral Doctrine** approach of cooperating with Bangladesh on the underlying causes of poverty and unemployment; effective data management through the National Population Register; and a **work permit** system, which would reduce corruption, maintain accurate records, build goodwill, combat organised crime and protect migrants from exploitation.

UPSC 2021 · ISm

Write a brief analysis of the ethnic conflicts and cross-border migrations along India-Myanmar and India-Bangladesh borders.

UPSC 2022 · ISm

Discuss the consequences of illegal cross-border migration in India's north-eastern region.

27 Contention II — water: Farakka and Teesta

- India and Bangladesh share **54 common rivers**. A bilateral **Joint Rivers Commission (JRC)** has worked since June 1972 to maximise benefits from common river systems, but only two rivers — the Ganga and the Teesta — have been the subject of formal agreement, and the JRC has been **inactive since 2011**.

Farakka Barrage

- **Nilanjan Ghosh** → the Farakka Barrage, long the point of contention in transboundary relations, is now emerging as an **inter-state** water dispute. It was planned to enhance the flow of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly and revive the port at Kolkata downstream.
- Bangladesh was critical from the proposal stage, apprehending that enhanced flow into the Bhagirathi-Hooghly would reduce the dry season flow of the Ganges/Padma into Bangladesh.
- **What should be done** → removal of Farakka would harm ecosystem services in that part of the state. The basic problem is the flawed design of the barrage, which did not consider the **sediment variable**; ecologically informed engineering is the need of the hour. River basin commissions with powers above the federal states should be set up to prevent escalation of inter-state conflicts, and outmoded engineering paradigms should be dispensed with.

Teesta

- A **315 km** river rising in the eastern Himalayas near Chunthang in Sikkim, flowing through West Bengal into Bangladesh and on to the Bay of Bengal; a tributary of the Brahmaputra, known as the Jamuna in Bangladesh. It originally flowed south into the Padma and around **1787** changed course eastward to join the Jamuna.
- **The dispute** → contested since 1947, when the catchment areas were allotted to India. After the JRC was set up in 1972, an **ad hoc arrangement of 1983** gave India **39%** and Bangladesh **36%**; allocation has been under discussion since 1972, with only 25% of the waters shared and the remainder unevenly divided. Bangladesh seeks a 25% share. Negotiations began in earnest after the **Ganga Water Treaty of 1996** and have made limited progress.
- Constant dam building along the Teesta in Sikkim has reduced lean season flow into Bangladesh, on which the livelihood of millions depends. As a lower riparian, Bangladesh is naturally sensitive on transboundary issues.
- **For West Bengal**, the river sustains five northern districts — Darjeeling, North and South Dinajpur, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri — among the poorest farming districts, with about **12.77%** of the state's population. There is also the matter of Kolkata port silting up and needing more water in the lean season.
- A **framework agreement** under the Manmohan Singh government faced obstacles from coalition politics and objections from West Bengal, along with complications from India's water agreements with Pakistan. The West Bengal Chief Minister vetoed the proposed treaty in **2011** but has more recently said the state is ready to share water if suitable alternatives, such as interlinking of rivers through canals, are explored with the central government.
- **Tariq A. Karim** → despite advances in other areas, the Teesta dispute remains a major concern for many Bangladeshis, and this emotional factor exacerbates tensions.
- **Jaideep Majumdar** → unresolved issues on the Teesta might weaken India's position on other water disputes, such as the Brahmaputra with China; failure could also undermine opportunities for "**Blue Water Partnerships**" in the Indian Ocean.
- **S.D. Muni** → broader strategic interests should not be impeded by narrow domestic concerns; the **Gujral Doctrine** of good neighbourly relations could serve as a basis

for resolution.

UPSC 2020 · 10m

Analyze the impact of Hydro politics on Indo Bangladesh relations.

UPSC 2022 · 10m

Discuss the steps required to realise 'hydro-co-operation' between India and Bangladesh

28 Contention III — China in Dhaka

- The starting position — Bangladesh as India's largest trade partner in South Asia and the showcase of **Neighbourhood First**. **S. Jaishankar** called it the one clear success of the policy; **Ajit Doval** called it India's most important neighbour.
- **What China brings** → the dominant share of Bangladesh's defence imports, infrastructure finance, and a standing offer on the Teesta.
- **The turn after 2024** → under interim leader **Muhammad Yunus**, Dhaka moved from cautious balancing toward closer alignment with Beijing, inviting China into the sensitive **Teesta project** and **Mongla port**.
- **Pakistan re-enters** → renewed ties including the **Aman-25** naval exercise and the first ministerial visit in thirteen years add a military edge. **Aparna Divya** and **Salman Ali Bettani** trace a possible **Bangladesh-Pakistan-China triangle** taking shape.
- **The sharpest concern** → a reported Chinese airfield at **Lalmonirhat**, close to the **Siliguri Corridor** that links India to its Northeast.
- **What India still holds** → connectivity, power trade, the settled land boundary and maritime award, health and education links, and the weight of a 3,700 km border. China can finance; it cannot relocate.

UPSC 2025 · 10m

China's growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India's leverage in Dhaka. Comment.

29 After Hasina — the verdict and the extradition question

What happened

- **August 2024** — a student-led uprising ended **Sheikh Hasina's** fifteen-year rule. She fled to India on **5 August 2024** and has stayed since.
- **17 November 2025** — tribunal ICT-1 sentenced Hasina and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to **death in absentia** for crimes against humanity during the July–August 2024 crackdown. Dhaka asked India to hand her over under the **2013 extradition treaty**.
- **The crackdown** → the **OHCHR** report of 12 February 2025 estimated up to about **1,400** killed; three-quarters of protest deaths came from firearms, many from weapons meant for war.
- **12 February 2026** — a **BNP-led alliance** won 212 of 297 declared seats; turnout 59.88%. **Tarique Rahman** became prime minister after seventeen years in exile, and renewed the extradition request in April 2026 under a **Bangladesh First** approach.

The treaty — what it allows and blocks

Provision	Effect
Article 1	Extradition may be sought of a person merely charged , not only convicted.
Article 6(1) & 6(2)	A request may be refused if the offence is of a political character — but murder and internationally recognised crimes are excluded from that category, so the exception does not fit Hasina's case.
Article 8(1)(a)(iii)	Refusal is allowed if extradition would be unjust or oppressive , or the charge was not made in good faith. India's firmer ground.
Article 10(4)	For convicts, a request needs a conviction certificate and no pending appeal . Hasina can still appeal, so a valid request cannot yet be made.
Article 21(3)	Either state may end the treaty on six months' notice .

The 2016 amendment easing evidence requirements — pushed through by Hasina's own government — now works against her. And because the treaty has no binding dispute-settlement body, each government can defend its own reading.

The debate

- **Prabhash Ranjan** → the decision is political, not strictly legal. Article 6 cannot shield her; Article 8 can. The appeal window lets India delay without a formal refusal — a legal question becomes one of timing and political will.
- **Veena Sikri** → the treaty's protection against political persecution could justify continued shelter. She raises procedural doubts about the trial: judges without experience of international-crimes law, an ordinance widening the tribunal's remit that parliament never approved, and prosecutors she sees as partisan.
- **Ranjan** accepts the trial's fairness can be questioned, yet holds that an unelected government can still run a lawful court under international law. The dispute sets **accountability for mass killings** against the charge of **victor's justice**.

At the end of the day, the call on Hasina's extradition is about politics, not so much about law. — **Prabhash Ranjan, Hindustan Times, 13 September 2024**

What it does to Neighbourhood First

- **Harsh V. Pant** and **Sohini Bose** → the Hasina years were a golden phase for Neighbourhood First and Act East, because her zero-tolerance policy on cross-border insurgents secured India's Northeast. Her fall puts connectivity through **Chattogram** and **Mongla** in doubt and revives an opposition they read as anti-India and pro-China — yet geography ties the two states together, so India must persist.
- **Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy** → one of the sharpest strategic shocks Delhi has faced, since Hasina alone had honoured India's core sensitivities. He identifies **three Indian red lines** — protection of Hindu minorities, control of anti-India militants, and caution over Pakistan and China — which the BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami have crossed before.
- **Shanthie Mariet D'Souza** → the carefully drafted treaty lets India hedge, but Delhi should expect blowback from Dhaka whatever it decides.

- **Sreeradha Datta** → India is unlikely to extradite, but letting Hasina campaign from exile deepens Bangladeshi anger; disengagement is not an option for either country.
- **Avinash Paliwal** → history rhyming with 1975, when the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman turned a trusted relationship cold. India over-invested in one leader; he calls Delhi **regime agnostic**, ready to work with whoever holds power, and expects a cool but workable reset with the BNP, much as India adjusted to Ziaur Rahman after 1975.

I think history is rhyming when it comes to India and Bangladesh. — Avinash Paliwal, CASI Deep Dive interview, 31 March 2025

The two statements to quote

As a close neighbour, India remains committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country. — India, Ministry of External Affairs, 26 November 2025

It would be a grave act of unfriendly conduct and a travesty of justice for any other country to grant shelter to these individuals convicted of crimes against humanity. — Bangladesh, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2025

30 Theory and scholars — Bangladesh

Lens	What it explains here
Liberalism	Cooperation and institutional frameworks; bilateral agreements and regional platforms such as SAARC and BIMSTEC promoting peace and shared prosperity.
Dependency Theory	Bangladesh's developmental challenges shaped by structural inequalities in the global system, producing reliance on India for resources and development.
Neorealism	Security concerns arising from the shared border and from external actors such as China influencing regional power dynamics.
Complex interdependence	Trans-boundary issues such as the Teesta, border management and trade imbalances managed alongside connectivity through BBIN and BIMSTEC.
Hedging	Why Dhaka sits between India and China without choosing either side — Al Amin. Md Abul Hasan adds a weak-state framing: the room to manoeuvre depends on the judgement of the political elite.
Offensive realism	An order without central authority forces states to guard their own security — Mearsheimer , used to explain why India and China compete over Bangladesh.
Small-state vulnerability	Hedley Bull — small states are shaped by the power struggles of their larger neighbours.

Bangladesh adopts a nuanced hedging strategy, engaging diplomatically and economically with both India and China while maintaining a position of neutrality and nonalignment. — Al Amin, Discover Global Society, 2025

Bangladesh's autonomy is fundamentally dependent on the goodwill of its political elites... failures in managing hedging relationships with each dominant power could lead to falling into the trap of geopolitics. — Md Abul Hasan, Asia and Africa Today, No. 04, 2024

Views of scholars and policy suggestions

- **Harsh V. Pant** → India should demonstrate sensitivity to Bangladesh's needs and concerns, actively understanding their perspective.
- **C. Raja Mohan** → soft power and people-to-people connections can bridge trust gaps; managing the neighbourhood demands not dominance but diplomacy.
- **S.D. Muni** → strategic collaboration is essential for regional security, particularly on terrorism and border issues. **Ayesha Siddiqi** → the strategic importance of cooperation, given growing Chinese influence in South Asia.
- **Pinak Ranjan Chakraborty** → creation of a **security community** in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Jayanta Kumar Ray** and **Muntassir Mamoon** (*India-Bangladesh Relations: Current Perspectives*) → sceptics may say India can afford indifference while Bangladesh cannot, but realities do not admit such oversimplification. With India's northeast region chronically unstable, and with China and Myanmar trying to improve relations with Bangladesh — which itself is a commercial gateway to the Northeast — India has to substantially upgrade relations to safeguard vital interests. The need to strengthen SAARC adds urgency.
- **Quality-advantage branding** → emphasise the superior quality of Indian assistance against other providers, and align support with Bangladesh's developmental needs. Increase investment, fulfil developmental promises and resolve Line-of-Credit issues; revive SAARC; increase strategic integration and explore new areas such as cyber capabilities and energy exploration.

India must ensure that goodwill is not transactional, but transformative. — Shyam Saran

PART C India & Afghanistan

31 After the takeover

- The Taliban takeover has made the regional security situation more fragile; Pakistan-based organisations such as **Jaish-e-Mohammed** and **Lashkar-e-Taiba** now have a regime that may look the other way or provide safe haven.
- **M.K. Narayanan** refers to Pakistan as the '*patron saint*' of the new regime. Islamabad publicly condemns these organisations while quietly permitting or supporting their operations, seeking indirect control or strategic influence to reduce space for India.
- India's counter should be to mend ties with the regime realistically, innovatively countering Pakistan's search for **strategic depth** by building security cooperation, while bracing for a heightened threat.

- There is still **no consensus in South Asia on recognising the Taliban** as the legitimate government, which makes holding a SAARC summit difficult, since barring Pakistan no member would be comfortable sharing the table with its representatives.

32 The New Great Game

- Since 2001 China's policy has moved from a non-engagement “**observer**” policy (2002–2010) to an **economics-centred agenda** (2011–2017) to a **security-dominated agenda** (post-2018), which has remained dominant since August 2021.
- Beijing's primary concerns are curbing regional instability and preventing Afghanistan from becoming a haven for groups it brands terrorist, especially **Uyghur militants**.
- China's economic interests centre on mining — the **Mes Aynak** copper mine and oil extraction in **Faryab and Sar-e-Pol** — both long on hold. BRI projects circumvent Afghan territory; Chinese policymakers worry about the effect of instability on their interests in Pakistan and Central Asia.
- **C. Raja Mohan** → closer collaboration between China and Pakistan could be a “serious challenge for India”, given India's border dispute with China and the treatment of CPEC as a threat to Indian trade and security.
- China and Russia share strong mutual interests, both focused on security and violent extremism; Russia is concerned that violence could spill into Central Asia, which it treats as its **near abroad** and exclusive sphere of influence. Neither has recognised the Taliban government, and both have criticised the American and European focus on human rights and democracy while scaling down expectations of an inclusive government.
- Post-August 2021 China's main assistance has been humanitarian aid and COVID-19 vaccines; diplomatically it has rallied support for rebuilding, calling for sanctions relief and unfreezing of Afghan assets, with Pakistan urging Western powers to engage.
- **Dr. Sanjeev Kumar** notes that a serious study by **Peking University in 2018** appreciated the Indian model of delivering major projects in Afghanistan — India's aid is more comprehensive and wider in coverage than China's, and Afghans valued that India had contributed more than the UN and NATO.
- India must therefore ensure involvement in Afghanistan's settlement to protect national interests, check China-Pakistan ambitions and engage Russia without affecting relations with the West.

33 Views of scholars — and the 2023 question

- **Sushant Sareen** → **engage, isolate, or oppose** — Indian policy should incorporate all three. While engaging the Taliban, India must reach out to its old friends, most of them in exile, to push for reconciliation; it must simultaneously isolate the Taliban without breaking ranks with the international community; and it must oppose the Taliban, not only diplomatically and politically but by covertly supporting anti-Taliban forces — a **carrot-and-stick approach**. There are never any full stops in Afghanistan, and no reason for India to put full stops in its own policy; pragmatism combined with hard-nosed moves is the way to get back in the game.
- **Vivek Katju** → the Taliban is here to stay, and India has no alternative but to deal with it even while repeating, if it wishes, the mantra of inclusive government. Maintaining contacts with leaders of the ousted Republic would be unobjectionable, especially as the Taliban itself wants them to return. The sooner India establishes a permanent presence in Kabul the better; this is not evangelism but the cold pursuit of interests, which often requires **supping with the devil, with a long spoon**.
- **Rudra Chaudhuri** → the approach will mean taking risks, assessing costs and expecting failures, and also doing everything possible to address real challenges. Facts must be taken for what they are: that Afghanistan is changing is a fact, and that the United States is leaving is a fact. As **Kissinger** argues, it is not easy to change facts; what is possible is for facts to be used. A state's decision to recognise a government is a matter of pure discretion premised on larger political gains, and India's approach should be determined by its geo-strategic interests.

UPSC 2023 · ISM

What steps has India taken to regain its foothold in Afghanistan since the Taliban has taken over the country in August 2021?

34 Power quotes

On Pakistan

The prospects for a ‘democratic peace’ between India and Pakistan remain limited for the near future. The truism that democracies do not fight one another applies only to developed capitalist societies, and neither is anywhere close to being that. — **Rajesh Basrur**

Terror and talks cannot go together. Unless and until Pakistan stops terrorist activities in India, there will be no dialogue and we will not participate in SAARC. — **Sushma Swaraj**

India will have to continue to count on its counter-terror capabilities and deterrence, combined with turning as much heat as possible on Pakistan in conjunction with its international partners. — **Sharat Sabharwal, India's Pakistan Conundrum**

Blood and water can't flow together. — **Narendra Modi, after Uri, 2016**

On China in the equation

The relationship raises the specter that India may, in the future, face a two-front war, a scenario that would have been implausible a decade ago. — **Manjari Chatterjee Miller**

India has moved on from its non-aligned past. India is today an aligned state — but based on issues. — **Vijay Gokhale**

On the 2025–26 turn

India has neither withdrawn from the treaty nor altered river flows, but paused procedural cooperation—using law, not water, for leverage. — **Nishant Sirohi, ORF, 28 April 2025**

South Asian crises can most aptly be described as crises in a nuclearized environment rather than nuclear crises per se. — **Moeed Yusuf & Rizwan Zeb, Carnegie Endowment, 2026**

Disengagement can never be an option for India and Bangladesh. — Sreeradha Datta, ISAS Brief No. 1204, 10 February 2025

India must persist as the future of South Asia is embedded in a firm Delhi-Dhaka engagement. — Harsh V. Pant & Sohini Bose, *Financial Express*, 7 August 2024

On the neighbourhood

Geography has made us neighbors, history has made us friends. — Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

India must ensure that goodwill is not transactional, but transformative. — Shyam Saran

SAARC has made significant progress over the last 35 years but the efforts towards collective collaboration and prosperity have been hampered by acts of terrorism and threats to national security. — S. Jaishankar

We can change our friends but not our neighbours. — Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Good relations with neighbours are a precondition for a country's progress; in an era of complex interdependence a nation's destiny is tied to its region.

35 Scholar index

Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy · Ajay Banga · Ajit Doval · Al Amin · Amal Chandra · Amit Ranjan · Amit Shah · Aparna Divya · Arunabha Ghosh · Arzan Tarapore · Ashley J. Tellis · Asma Yaqoob · Atal Bihari Vajpayee · Avinash Paliwal · Ayesha Siddiqi · Brahma Chellaney · C. Raja Mohan · Christine Fair · Christopher Clary · Dan Haines · David Brostoff · David Michel · David Scott · Dilip Hiro · Dr. Sanjeev Kumar · Friedman · Gilani, Hasan, et al. · Happymon Jacob · Hardeep S. Puri · Harsh V. Pant · Harsh Vardhan Shringla · Hedley Bull · Hussain Haqqani · Iftikhar A. Drabu · J. Bandyopadhyay · J. Stern · J.N. Dixit · Jaideep Majumdar · Jayadeva Ranade · Jayanta Kumar Ray · John Joseph Vater · John Mearsheimer · Kanti Bajpai · Kanwal Sibal · Kashem and Islam · Kautilya · Kissinger · M.K. Narayanan · Mandelbaum · Manjari Chatterjee Miller · Manoj Joshi · Mansfield and Snyder · Masha Tokas · Maya Mirchandani · Md Abul Hasan · Medha Bisht · Mirza Zulfiqur Rahman · Mizan R. Khan · Moed Yusuf · Muhammad Yunus · Muntassir Mamoon · Narendra Modi · Nilanjan Ghosh · Nishant Sirohi · P.S. Raghavan · Pervez Musharraf · Pinak Ranjan Chakraborty · Prabhaskar Ranjan · Pratap Bhanu Mehta · R. Harshe · Rajesh Basrur · Rajiv Dogra · Ramaswamy R. Iyer · Rishabh Bajoria · Rizwan Zeb · Rudra Chaudhuri · S. Jaishankar · S.D. Muni · Sadanand Dhume · Salman Ali Bettani · Sameer Lalwani · Sayanangshu Modak · Sean D. Murphy · Shailender Arya · Shanthie Mariet D'Souza · Sharat Sabharwal · Shashi Tharoor · Sheikh Hasina · Sheikh Mujibur Rahman · Shishir Gupta · Shyam Saran · Sohini Bose · Soumya Awasthi · Sreeradha Datta · Srinath Raghavan · Stephen P. Cohen · Suhasini Haidar · Sumit Ganguly · Sun Tzu · Sushant Sareen · Sushma Swaraj · T.V. Paul · TCA Raghavan · Tariq A. Karim · Tarique Rahman · Thomas Schelling · Uttam Kumar Sinha · Vandana Shiva · Veena Sikri · Vijay Gokhale · Vikram Misri · Vipin Narang · Vivek Chadha · Vivek Katju · Walter Ladwig III · Yogesh Joshi · Zorawar Daulat Singh

36 How UPSC has asked it

UPSC 2017 · 15m

"Despite the differences between India and Pakistan on various issues, Indus Water Treaty has stood the test of times." In the light of this statement, discuss the recent developments over this issue.

UPSC 2020 · 10m

Analyze the impact of Hydro politics on Indo Bangladesh relations.

UPSC 2020 · 10m

How does cross border terrorism impede the achievements of peace and security in South Asia?

UPSC 2021 · 15m

Write a brief analysis of the ethnic conflicts and cross-border migrations along India-Myanmar and India-Bangladesh borders.

UPSC 2022 · 10m

Discuss the steps required to realise 'hydro-co-operation' between India and Bangladesh.

UPSC 2022 · 15m

Discuss the consequences of illegal cross-border migration in India's north-eastern region.

UPSC 2023 · 15m

What steps has India taken to regain its foothold in Afghanistan since the Taliban has taken over the country in August 2021?

UPSC 2025 · 10m

China's growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India's leverage in Dhaka. Comment.

37 Today's practice

UPSC 2025 · 10m

China's growing footprint and a tangible shift in power dynamics in Bangladesh has weakened India's leverage in Dhaka. Comment.

What steps has India taken to regain its foothold in Afghanistan since the Taliban has taken over the country in August 2021?

“Despite the differences between India and Pakistan on various issues, Indus Water Treaty has stood the test of times.” In the light of this statement, discuss the recent developments over this issue.

Before you write. Every line in this capsule is a compression of a longer argument. @psirbyamitpratap

Day 42 — India & South Asia, Part II: Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives.
