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Domestic Politics and Systemic Constraints in Pakistan's India Policy

Rajesh Basrur¹

Analysts commonly treat the Pakistan-India relationship as intractable or as an “enduring rivalry.”² On the face of it, the long-standing conflict is easily explained by the tug of war over Kashmir. Like any territorial dispute, this has two facets. Internally, each state is motivated by inchoate but powerful notions of identity around which their claims to that hapless land are wrapped. Externally, the wars and crises between the two incomplete nations are similar to historical contests over land, most famously the prolonged Franco-German dispute over Alsace-Lorraine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As I will show, identity differences may shape a relationship in important ways, but they are not immune to sudden turns of the political tide.

This paper looks primarily at three questions. First, why has Pakistan persisted with a costly policy of challenging India that has failed repeatedly to obtain full control of a Kashmir that has been divided between them since the 1940s? Second, why did Pakistan reverse its position and come close to bringing the protracted dispute close to a mutually agreed end circa 2007? And third, why did Pakistan then back out of an impending deal by 2008, revert to its old revanchist position, and revive a zero sum strategy that had never quite worked? The answers to these questions are best obtained by examining the interplay between the twin dynamics of domestic and inter-state politics.

Theoretically, I take as my starting point the neoclassical realist approach, which looks at how domestic politics shapes states' strategic responses to the incentives offered by the international system. But neoclassical realists, like realists of earlier generations, tend to treat the international system indiscriminately as a realm of anarchy and conflict, a misreading of reality which they have retained with remarkable consistency. In contrast, I argue that states are in important respects constrained by a high degree of interdependence, which prevents them from doing certain things and encourages them to do others. It is this complex systemic “structure” and its interplay with domestic politics that shapes the decisions of policy makers.

The central argument I make is as follows. Identity has long been a powerful driver of Pakistan's strategy toward India despite the structural weaknesses and repeated failures it has faced. With the advent of nuclear weapons, notwithstanding the early promise of an aggressive superficially low-cost strategy, the outbreak of crisis underlined the risk of war and gave Pakistan strong incentives to alter its position on

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² T. V. Paul, ed., *The India-Pakistan Conflict: An Enduring Rivalry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Kashmir. However, though nuclear risk compels states to avoid war, it does not compel them to resolve their disputes. Whether the latter occurs depends on the costs perceived by powerful domestic players. Under the present political dispensation in Pakistan, the interests of the army determine how the state responds to incentives for peace. Those interests allowed Pakistan under Pervez Musharraf to seek a rapprochement with India. But as the army's position became uncertain, it asserted its power over the new civilian government and revived its former strategy of fostering tensions with India in order to secure its domestic position.

In the next section, I elaborate on the theoretical framework I have alluded to above. The subsequent section, which responds to the central questions raised earlier, charts the course of Pakistani strategy. Finally, I draw out the implications of my analysis for the future – not by predicting what is to come, but by laying out the alternative courses that may be followed depending on the nature of the civil-military balance in Pakistan.

Systemic Incentives, Domestic Politics and International Relations Theory

Historically, realism, which has a rich tradition going at least as far back as Thucydides and Kautilya, has held that international politics is a realm of self-centred states behaving in repetitive patterns within an anarchic international system. These patterns are characterized by endemic conflicts of interest and by the search for power, which is the sole guarantee of survival in an environment in which the potential for war is ever-present. From this perspective, state strategies and behaviour are best understood as responses to the anarchic structure of the international system and the distribution of power within it.³ Such an approach has much to tell us about international politics, but there is also much that it does not. It is not particularly helpful in explaining phenomena that are apparent in general form, such as why liberal democratic states are at peace with one another or why nuclear-armed states avoid war. More narrowly, it does not tell us why states reverse long-established foreign policy positions, such as why the Soviet Union threw in the towel and ended the Cold War.⁴ In South Asia, a structural approach offers no explanation for why Sri Lanka in the mid-1990s chose to reverse its preference for a distant relationship with India and call for free trade and defence cooperation agreements.⁵ This last example is particularly relevant here since it has a bearing on the possibility of peace between Pakistan and India. Policy change does not necessarily derive from structural change, but may result from domestic factors and the ways in which they interact with systemic ones.

³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973). John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

⁴ Some realists think they can explain the end of the Cold War. See, e.g. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating A Landmark Case for Ideas," *International Security*, 25, 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 5-53. But their case is far from convincing, since the outcome was hardly inevitable and it is at least equally arguable that the Soviet decision can only be explained by domestic factors. See, e.g. Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behaviour and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Robert D. English, "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End," *International Security*, 26, 4 (Spring 2002), pp. 70-92.

⁵ Rajesh M. Basrur, "Foreign Policy Reversal: The Politics of Sri Lanka's Economic Relationship with India," in E. Sridharan, ed. *International Relations Theory and South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Neoclassical realism offers explanations for unexpected policy outcomes by focusing on the domestic politics of states.⁶ For instance, states may not play the balance of power game, but may choose instead a strategy of bandwagoning, soft balancing, or even “underbalancing.”⁷ What its exponents fail to discern is that in important ways, the international system itself has changed. Where states enter into a relationship of interdependence – whether economic or military – their incentives for the use of power are sharply altered as the costs involved threaten to make victory, if there is any possible, pyrrhic in the extreme. Oddly, structural realists often argue that nuclear deterrence works very well because states possessing nuclear arms cannot afford to fight each other, yet fail to appreciate the implications of this for an analysis which rests on the distribution of power. Thus, for example, Kenneth Waltz, the doyen of neorealism, holds that inter-state politics is all about power balances, yet argues that with nuclear weapons, war is not a viable instrument of state policy.⁸ But if nuclear weapons rule out rational war, then surely this has powerful implications for the foreign and security policies of states. It means, in effect, that war can no longer be decisive in ending a dispute, which in turn raises profound questions about the utility of instruments of war. It also means that policymakers must pay unprecedented heed to the *risk* of war and give priority to minimizing it. In short, the incentives for a military solution are sharply reduced, while those for a political solution are greatly increased. This is something realists, including neoclassical realists, have yet to fully recognize.

Of course, states may not respond immediately or even fully to altered incentives. If nuclear war is too risky, and if full-scale conventional war – just a threshold away – is also hard to contemplate, then less perilous ways of applying force may still be possible. After all, nuclear powers have from time to time engaged in fighting at the margins: American and Chinese combat aircraft engaged in dogfights in Vietnam during the mid-1960s and Soviet and Chinese ground forces clashed repeatedly during the border conflict of 1969. Or they have used proxies to fight, as when Cuban troops fought on behalf of the Soviet Union in Angola during the 1970s or when the United States backed the Mujahideen against Soviet forces in Afghanistan during the 1980s. Secondly, while incentives for a political solution may exist, they may not be pursued for a long time. The Cold War went on for nearly three decades after the Cuban Missile Crisis brought home the risks of nuclear confrontation. Similarly, the Sino-Soviet face of the Cold War continued for two decades after their border fighting had ended. How states actually respond to specific systemic incentives depends not only

⁶ For overviews of neoclassical realist writings, see Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Brian Rathbun, “A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism,” *Security Studies*, 17, 2 (April 2008), pp. 294-321; Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, 51, 1 (October 1998), pp. 144-77; Randall L. Schweller, “The Progressive Power of Neoclassical Realism,” in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Feldman, eds. *Progress in International Relations Theory: Appraising the Field* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁷ Randall L. Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,” *International Security*, 19, 1 (Summer 1994), pp. 72-107; T. V. Paul, “Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security*, 30, 1 (Summer 2005), pp. 46-71; Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006)

⁸ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Kenneth N. Waltz, “Nuclear Myths and Political Realities,” *American Political Science Review*, 84, 3 (September 1990), pp. 731-745.

on the interactive character of their relationship, but in considerable part on their inner political processes at any given time.

Below, I respond to the three key questions raised at the outset to explain Pakistan's persistent efforts – even in a nuclearized environment – to wrest Kashmir from India despite regular failures; the reversal of this strategy under President Pervez Musharraf; and the collapse of this strategy in 2007. The first phase is explained in terms of the opportunities offered by Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear weapons and the continuing power of identity politics in shaping the civil-military tussle in its hybrid political system. Reversal occurred when the aggressive strategy adopted not only failed to bring the desired end, but – at a time when the military controlled the reins of domestic power – brought new and heightened risk to Pakistan's future as an aspiring nation-state. A second reversal took place when the military began to lose control of the state, thereby causing it to reassert its dominance by reviving tensions with India.

Explaining Pakistani Policy

Persistence in the Face of Failure

It is well known that domestic politics – specifically, the quest for a well-grounded national identity – has driven Pakistan's policy on Kashmir and more generally on India. About two-thirds of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority land, has remained with India since the 1947-1948 war. For Pakistanis, this represents the “unfinished business” of Partition.⁹ But the problem goes deeper, since it is not clear to Pakistanis themselves what the basis of their national identity is.¹⁰ Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who led the movement for the creation of the new state, sought political space for Muslims rather than an Islamic state; yet he promised as early as January 1948 to base law on the Sharia.¹¹ Since then, the state has been caught between its relatively secular origins and diverse perceptions, some of them radical and others moderate, of what its relationship with Islam ought to be. Simultaneously, struggles over cultural hegemony have pitted first east against west and, following the creation of Bangladesh in a second partition (1971), the Punjabi-dominated elite against the rest.¹² In the absence

⁹ Ashutosh Varshney, “India, Pakistan, and Kashmir: Antinomies of Nationalism,” *Asian Survey*, 31, 11 (November 1991), p. 1001.

¹⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* (New Delhi: Manohar; London and New York: Zed Books, 2002). There has been considerable public debate in the Pakistani media on this subject. See, e.g. Ishfaq Ahmed, “Nationalism: Inclusive versus Exclusive — I,” *Daily Times*, June 29, 2010 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\06\29\story_29-6-2010_pg3_2> (all web references accessed on same day unless otherwise stated); Ahmad Faruqui, “Pakistan's Quest for National Identity,” *Daily Times*, September 4, 2005 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_4-9-2005_pg3_6>; Yasser Latif Hamdani, “Two Nation Theory,” *Daily Times*, June 7, 2010 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\06\07\story_7-6-2010_pg3_5>; Syed Jawaid Iqbal, “Rethinking Pakistan,” *News International*, August 11, 2009 <http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=192429>.

¹¹ Marc Gaborieau, “Islam and Politics,” in Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *A History of Pakistan and Its Origins*, trans. Gillian Beaumont (London: Anthem Press, 2004), p. 239. This issue has also been widely discussed. See, e.g. Yasser Latif Hamdani, “Two Nation Theory,” *Daily Times*, June 7, 2010 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\06\07\story_7-6-2010_pg3_5>; Syed Jawaid Iqbal, “Rethinking Pakistan,” *News International*, August 11, 2009 <http://www.thenews.com.pk/daily_detail.asp?id=192429>.

¹² On the problem of building a national culture, see Saadia Toor, “A National Culture for Pakistan: The Political Economy of A Debate,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6, 3 (September 2005), pp. 318-340.

of a strong internal sense of identity brought by participation in the political process, the principal source of Pakistani nationalism has been external, i.e. India and the Kashmir problem.

In congruence with this, because of the weakness of the Pakistani state and its failure to develop stable democratic institutions, the army has played a dominant role in politics.¹³ It has directly ruled the country for long periods – from 1958 to 1971, 1977 to 1988 and 1999 to 2008 – and indirectly nearly all of the time, thus giving it the character of a praetorian state. As a result, the trajectories of Pakistan’s foreign and domestic policies are invariably determined by the army’s interests. And it is in the army’s interest to justify its dominance by, first, emphasizing the security threat from India and, second, by playing the role of vanguard of the nation by continually pushing the quest to obtain Kashmir with whatever instruments it can garner or fashion.¹⁴

In contrast, Indian democracy has gradually percolated to the masses, and despite periodic outbreaks of violence and the many drawbacks in what it has delivered to its people, the bonds of national identity have strengthened steadily. The difference between their identities is clear from the positions of the two countries on Kashmir. Pakistan has – with the brief exception of the late Musharraf era – been unrelenting in its quest to obtain all of Kashmir. In contrast, India, while continuing officially to stand by its demand for the territory in its entirety, has been content with the status quo and has made no attempt to detach the Pakistan-held portion of Kashmir. As a consequence, the Pakistani response to the advent of nuclear weapons was initially not so much a rethinking about the nature of the conflict-ridden relationship with India, but a readiness to take advantage of the opening it offered by way of the “stability/instability paradox.”¹⁵ The original formulation of the concept held that while nuclear powers are afraid to fight a nuclear war, their knowledge of this commonly held fear allows them to fight conventional war without worrying too much about escalation. In practice, this has not been the case – nuclear powers have never felt the confidence to enter into full-scale conventional war. But, as noted above, they have on occasion used tactics at a level below that of full-scale conventional war to pursue strongly desired policy ends.

A series of efforts to put pressure on India had previously met with limited or no success. The 1947-48 war had enabled Pakistan to obtain a small part of Kashmir. Nothing more was added in 1965. The 1971 war – which must properly be seen as initiated by India as a consequence of the previous episodes – led to the bifurcation and weakening of Pakistan. Why then did Islamabad persist with its failed policy? In fact, for all of two decades it did not. Between 1971 and around 1990, Pakistan was materially weakened and constrained by the knowledge that military means offered

¹³ Irm Haleem, “Ethnic and Sectarian Violence and the Propensity toward Praetorianism in Pakistan,” *Third World Quarterly*, 24, 3 (June 2003), pp. 463-77; Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan: between Mosque and Military* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2005); Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Hasan-Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Ayesha Siddiqa, *Military Inc: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

¹⁴ C. Christine Fair, Keith Crane, Christopher S. Chivvis, Samir Puri and Michael Spirtas, *Pakistan: Can the United States Secure An Insecure State?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010), pp. 19-25.

¹⁵ Glen Snyder, “The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror,” in Paul Seabury, ed., *The Balance of Power* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965).

little scope for obtaining Kashmir. But the year 1990 brought an opportunity. By this time, Pakistani confidence was bolstered by the covert acquisition of nuclear weapons at some time in the mid-1980s. Across the border, a major insurgency appeared in the Indian-held portion of Kashmir, officially known as the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). This gave Pakistan an opening to step in covertly and provide assistance to the insurgents. At about the same time, the risk of nuclear conflict began to rear its head. With the two countries now nuclear weapons-capable, a border confrontation between their armed forces – the so-called “compound crisis” of 1990 – brought to the fore an awareness on both sides that the risk of nuclear conflict was a very real one.¹⁶ Pakistani leaders faced a choice – if they pressurized India by backing militancy in Kashmir, they risked destabilizing the strategic relationship with it. If they opted for stability, it meant virtually giving up the quest for Kashmir. They chose the former course, trying to reduce the risk by adopting a deniable strategy of covertly backing militants carrying out violent and often indiscriminate attacks in Indian-held Kashmir. In 1999, similarly, they initiated a crisis in Kargil by covertly occupying territory on the Indian side of the agreed Line of Control (LoC), which led to a short but intense clash of arms.¹⁷ Though the calculation was clearly that India no longer had recourse to war against a nuclearized Pakistan, there was nevertheless a risk as India was likely to consider – and did – options short of war that could produce crises – and did.

Why did Pakistan persist with a strategy that had been dogged by failure and was likely to be risky in a nuclearized environment? The domestic political dynamic has been outlined above. The idea of Pakistan, still elusive, reinforced the vital importance of obtaining Kashmir. Its intensity meant that the attraction of a new opportunity to acquire Kashmir outweighed the risks associated with the quest. Psychologically, this was made easier by a “motivated bias,” a misjudgment that inclines people under pressure to believe they will succeed even when the odds are long.¹⁸ That bias was especially long within the army, which had long exercised control over all major strategic decisions in Pakistan’s hybrid political system.¹⁹

For the Pakistan Army, the strategy of pushing the envelope with India was also politically useful in bolstering its position in a period when Pakistan was under civilian rule. The 1990 crisis was initiated by Pakistan shortly after the shift of power in 1988 from Zia ul Haq’s military regime to an elected democratic government under Benazir Bhutto. The Kargil initiative had a similar background. At the time, power was in the hands of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, whose party held a huge majority in the National Assembly. In April 1997, Navy Chief Admiral Mansoor-ul-Haq was dismissed for corruption and in October 1998 Army Chief General Jehangir Karamat was forced to resign following a dispute over the army’s role in the National Security Council. Not long afterward, the new army chief, General Musharraf, dusted off an old plan and launched the incursion into Kargil.

¹⁶ P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Perception, Politics and Security in South Asia: The Compound Crisis of 1990* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

¹⁷ D. Suba Chandran, *Limited War: Revisiting Kargil in the Indo-Pak Conflict* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2005); Peter R. Lavoy, ed. *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 385-6.

¹⁸ Robert Jervis, “Kargil, Deterrence and International Relations Theory,” in Lavoy, ed. *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia*, pp. 385-6.

¹⁹ On hybrid systems, see Larry Diamond, “Elections without Democracy: Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy*, 13, 2 (April 2002), pp. 21-35.

Thus, the interests and perceptions of the military were critical in pushing a forceful agenda vis-à-vis Kashmir and India in a nuclearized environment. Ironically, though the Kargil strategy failed and Pakistani forces were compelled to retreat, the ensuing confrontation led to a military coup by which Musharraf displaced Nawaz in October 1999. In the meantime, the military's strategy of putting India under tremendous pressure by backing militants in Kashmir was sustained.²⁰ Pakistani assistance began with support offered to groups such as the independence-minded Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and later the more pro-Pakistani Hizbul Mujahideen, both of which had a base in J&K. Still later, the main support went to Pakistan-based groups such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Musharraf was subsequently to affirm publicly that the strategy was successful. Contrary to the widespread perception, he claimed in his 2006 memoir, Kargil achieved a signal success: "whatever movement has taken place so far in the direction of finding a solution to Kashmir is due considerably to the Kargil conflict."²¹ In an interview in 2009, he reiterated this view, adding that "Mujahideen activity" had also forced India to "come to the table."²²

Musharraf's Reversal

In practice, Musharraf's expectations of advantage did not quite work out. His claim that India was compelled to negotiate is correct, but beyond that, Pakistan obtained nothing in terms of its long-held position that all of Kashmir should be on its side of the border. If anything, Pakistan had to concede more than India in abandoning its demand for a plebiscite in Kashmir – a position it subsequently reversed.²³ The talks did move forward quite a bit, but India stuck to its guns in rejecting any change in borders. Musharraf acceded and in 2006 shifted his position significantly, suggesting joint management of Kashmir, in effect undercutting Pakistan's hitherto non-negotiable stand on full sovereignty over the territory.²⁴ He also began to cut back significantly on support for the jihadi groups fighting in Kashmir.²⁵ The separatist leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq was sufficiently alarmed to ask Musharraf to go slow on the process.²⁶ Why did Musharraf change his approach? Apart from the lack of success in obtaining major concessions from India, a number of reasons may be adduced.

At the level of the international system, the advent of nuclear weapons had a powerful impact on the behaviour of the two states. As mentioned earlier, the expectation of gain lay behind the Pakistani strategy of exploiting the stability/instability paradox.

²⁰ Peter Chalk, "Pakistan's Role in the Kashmir Insurgency," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 1, 2001, reproduced on the web site of the RAND Corporation: <<http://www.rand.org/hot/oped/090101JIR.html>> (accessed on February 14, 2003); Shaun Gregory, "The ISI and the War on Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30, 12 (December 2007), pp. 1013-1031; Husain Haqqani, "Pakistan's Endgame in Kashmir," *India Review*, 2, 3 (July 2003), pp. 34-54.

²¹ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006), p. 98.

²² "Seeing A Watershed in Kargil," *Hindu*, July 25, 2009 <<http://www.thehindu.com/2009/07/25/stories/2009072556070900.htm>>.

²³ Asim Yasin, "Musharraf's Policies Harmed Kashmir Cause, Says Qureshi," *News International*, May 5, 2010 <http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=28650>.

²⁴ "Musharraf Suggests Joint Management of Kashmir," *News International*, March 11, 2006. <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/mar2006-daily/11-03-2006/main/main2.htm>

²⁵ Barbara Plett, "Kashmir Militants Feel the Squeeze," *BBC News*, May 2, 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/south_asia/6319975.stm>.

²⁶ Zahid Hussain, *Frontline Pakistan: The Struggle with Militant Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 117.

But the other side of the coin was soon evident. As with other nuclear rivalries, a tendency toward confrontation and crisis quickly manifested itself. The United States and the Soviet Union experienced major crises in Berlin in 1961 and Cuba in 1962; the Soviet Union and China came to blows along their border in 1969. India and Pakistan as nuclear powers confronted each other in a chain of crises in 1990, 1999, and 2001-02.²⁷ The risk of a nuclear conflict was quickly brought home to leaders on both sides and, notwithstanding much rhetoric, their actual behaviour during the crises was very cautious.²⁸ Neither side moved – even in Kargil – beyond the threshold of marginal conflict. Yet they could not have been unaware that the first step on the slippery slope to war can be an unintended one. The nuclear environment had not only taken away from the state the military instrument of power, but now compelled it to cooperate with its adversary in avoiding war.²⁹ The focus henceforth would have to be on non-military instruments.

Here, Pakistan was at a disadvantage. Economically, it had always been much smaller than India. Politically, it had sought through alliances with the United States and China to beef up its positions. But by the early years of the twenty-first century, India was breaking out of its subcontinental shell and was widely recognized as an emerging power. There was no greater evidence of this than the growing defence cooperation between it and the United States in a new game beginning to be played on the global stage: a triangular politics between them and China.³⁰ Proof of the US acknowledgement of India's strategic significance was the considerable political capital it invested in enabling India to bypass the nonproliferation regime's restrictions on nuclear trade. President George W. Bush in effect persuaded all the great powers to recognize India's status as a nuclear-armed state. Though this process was stretched out, it had already begun to gather pace from 2005. In short, while Pakistan was buffeted by political crisis, India ploughed ahead and increased the gap between them. The political window for Pakistan's use of pressure tactics on Kashmir was surely but firmly closing.

Simultaneously, the internal crisis in Pakistan worsened. The tide of militancy sweeping through the borderlands to the west grew rapidly, while extremist violence within the Punjabi heartland stepped up. Extremists occupied the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) in Islamabad and had ultimately to be ejected through a major military operation in July 2007. Members of terrorist groups like the LeT and the JeM joined the Pakistani Taliban by the thousands.³¹ Pakistan's economy faltered and debt

²⁷ P.R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press 2007); Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁸ Rajesh M. Basrur, *South Asia's Cold War: Nuclear Weapons and Conflict in Comparative Perspective* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), Ch. 4; Sumit Ganguly and Devin T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁹ For a study showing this to be an unvarying pattern, see Benjamin Miller, *When Opponents Cooperate: Great Power Conflict and Collaboration in World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

³⁰ Stephen Blank, "The Geostrategic Implications of the Indo-American Strategic Partnership," *India Review*, 6, 1, (January-March 2007), pp. 1-24.

³¹ Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan on the Brink," *New York Review of Books*, 56, 10 (June 11, 2009)
<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/22730?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20

ballooned, compelling it to approach the International Monetary Fund for a bail-out.³² Two attempts to assassinate Musharraf failed by a whisker. His domestic reform efforts – to establish state control over madrasas and to push through grass-roots participation in administration through a new system of local government – yielded no significant result. As on previous occasions, the military in power produced more problems than it solved.³³

Thus, the combination of systemic and domestic factors produced a reversal of policy. Nuclear interdependence at the systemic level not only ruled out the use of military instruments, but generated new incentives for cooperation. The tough governance battle at home provided the additional incentive for a change of heart on Kashmir. There is an interesting resemblance between Musharraf's turnaround and Mikhail Gorbachev's willingness to stage a foreign policy retreat in order to tackle the Soviet Union's domestic problems. Pakistan in January 2004 entered into a "Composite Dialogue" with India that covered a range of eight issues from Kashmir to nuclear confidence building and water-related disputes.³⁴ By 2007, the negotiations had made unexpected strides on the key issue of Kashmir. It was agreed that communication and trade would be increased between the two sides of Kashmir, that the LoC would be progressively turned into a "soft" line of demarcation between them, and that the two countries would develop a mechanism to propel the process forward.³⁵ Backchannel diplomacy brought the process to the verge of what looked like a breakthrough.³⁶ But by mid-2007, Musharraf's political fortunes had ebbed and the whole process quickly unravelled.

Musharraf's Exit and the Second Reversal

By early 2007, Musharraf was in trouble. His relationship with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, deteriorated as the latter took an increasingly independent stand on a series of issues. Most dangerously, from Musharraf's point of view, he took *suo moto* notice of the disappearances of a large number of individuals arrested by security forces.³⁷ In March 2007, Musharraf suspended Chaudhry, but in July a full bench of the Court reinstated him, thereby precipitating a major crisis. In November, Musharraf declared an emergency and sacked most of the Court's judges. But the writing was on the wall: in the same

software&utm_content=772393617&utm_campaign=October+8%2c+2009+issue+_+khujdk&utm_term=PakistanontheBrink> (accessed September 22, 2009).

³² Michael F. Martin and K. Alan Kronstadt, *Pakistan's Capital Crisis: Implications for U. S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, Washington D.C., March 6, 2009.

³³ Shaun Gregory and James Reville, "The Role of the Military in the Cohesion and Stability of Pakistan," *Contemporary South Asia*, 16, 1 (March 2008), pp. 39-61.

³⁴ K. S. Manjunath, Seema Sridhar, and Beryl Anand, *Indo-Pak Composite Dialogue 2004-05: A Profile*, IPCS Special Report, 12, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, February 2006; Priyashree Andley, *Third Composite Dialogue: An Overview of Indo-Pak Relations in 2006*, IPCS Special Report, 36, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, March 2007.

³⁵ Verghese Koithara, "The Advancing Peace Process," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42, 1 (January 6, 2007), pp. 10-13.

³⁶ Steve Coll, "The Back Channel," *New Yorker*, 85, 3 (March 2, 2009)

<<http://web.ebscohost.com.ezlibproxy1.ntu.edu.sg/ehost/detail?vid=7&hid=110&sid=cefc92ae-453b-47fc-9adb-d4c024ff1f66%40sessionmgr110&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=ulh&AN=36637475>> (accessed June 24, 2009).

³⁷ Mohammad Kamran, "Decisions that Irked the Government," *Daily Times*, March 10, 2007 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2007/03/10/story_10-3-2007_pg1_6>.

month, amidst growing protests, he was forced to doff his uniform and nominate General Ashfaq Kayani as his successor. In the months that followed, an upsurge of public democratic sentiment, led by the lawyer community, eroded his position steadily till he was forced to call elections in February 2008 and ultimately to step down that August under threat of impeachment. To add to the “toxic cocktail,” terrorist violence proliferated, moving from the remote tribal region to the plains, and a spate of suicide bombings swept the country.³⁸ Ironically, the low-key negotiating process with India was simultaneously gaining momentum. As Khurshid Kasuri, then Foreign Minister, was later to describe it, the process had reached a stage “so advanced that we’d come to semicolons.”³⁹ Kashmiris were to be allowed freedom of movement on either side of the LoC, autonomy vis-à-vis their respective governments, and participation in a “joint mechanism” for governance.⁴⁰ But Musharraf’s domestic troubles meant he did not have the political clout to push the deal through.

The peace process soon ground to a halt. In January 2008, a senior Pakistani minister accused India of backing insurgents in restive Balochistan.⁴¹ In February, a phalanx of retired generals demanded a jihad to “liberate” Kashmir.⁴² On July 7, 2008, the Indian Embassy in Kabul was bombed, killing 54, including the Defence Attaché. This renewed Indian hostility as evidence was quickly forthcoming that the attack had been orchestrated by the Pakistan army’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).⁴³ From July, Pakistani and Indian troops exchanged fire periodically along the LoC, sometimes with fatal results.⁴⁴ It was apparent that the Pakistani military had abandoned Musharraf’s conciliatory approach. Since General Kayani and his colleagues had clearly been on board the peace process, the question was why they backed away from it. After all, the incentives for a rapprochement remained in place: the nuclear risk had not gone away and internal conditions were, if anything, even worse.

Externally, one important development was the increasing tension between Pakistan and India over Afghanistan.⁴⁵ India had developed a warm relationship with the Karzai regime in Kabul, had established consulates in several Afghan cities, and was constructing a major road close to the Pakistan border. Pakistani strategists felt

³⁸ J. Alexander Thier, *A Toxic Cocktail: Pakistan’s Growing Instability*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, February 2008.

³⁹ Coll, “The Back Channel.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nirupa Subramanian, “Pakistan Minister Accuses India of Stoking Unrest,” *Hindu*, January 25, 2008 <<http://www.thehindu.com/2008/01/25/stories/2008012555711200.htm>>.

⁴² Terence G. Sigamony, “Jihad Only Way to Liberate IHK: Ex- Generals,” *Daily Times*, February 6, 2008 <<http://www.thehindu.com/2008/01/25/stories/2008012555711200.htm>>.

⁴³ Mark Mazzetti and Eric Schmitt, “Pakistanis Aided Attack in Kabul, U.S. Officials Say,” *New York Times*, <August 1, 2008 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/01/world/asia/01pstan.html?em>> (accessed June 21, 2009); David E. Sanger, *The Inheritance: The World Obama Confronts and the Challenges to American Power* (New York: Harmony Books, 2009), p. 250).

⁴⁴ See, e.g. “Indian Troops Fire at Pakistani Post,” *Daily Times*, July 27, 2008 <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008\07\27\story_27-7-2008_pg1_9>; “Pak Jawans Cross LoC, Kill Soldier,” *Times of India*, June 29, 2008 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/Pak_soldiers_cross_LoC_shoot_jawan/articleshow/3298878.cms>; Praveen Swamy, “Four Pakistani Soldiers Killed in Skirmish on LoC,” *Hindu*, June 29, 2008 <<http://www.thehindu.com/2008/07/29/stories/2008072957710100.htm>>.

⁴⁵ Seth G. Jones, “Pakistan’s Dangerous Game,” *Survival*, 49, 1 (Spring 2007), pp. 15-32, see esp pp. 17-18.

threatened by what they saw as encirclement by India and their loss of “strategic depth,” a cherished concept that required them to hold sway over Afghanistan in the event of a war against their old adversary.⁴⁶ From their point of view, an additional concern was that if American forces withdrew from Afghanistan, India would fill the vacuum and, as a Pakistani general put it, “surround us and annihilate us.”⁴⁷ Besides, Pakistan has always tried to control Afghanistan since the latter does not recognize the Durand Line, which divides the two countries, leaving ethnic Pushtuns on both sides. But this does not provide an adequate explanation for the Pakistan Army’s U-turn. Pakistani fears about a US pullout were by no means new. The US had given notice of its intention to reduce its role by handing over command to NATO as early as 2005 and Pakistani as well as Afghan officials took this to mean that Washington was looking for a way out.⁴⁸ Yet Musharraf and his generals persisted with their efforts to build bridges with India.

While there is no direct evidence, it is a fair inference that what drove Kayani and his general staff to back away from a deal on Kashmir and revive tensions was the military’s increasingly uncertain domestic position. Musharraf had left the country in a shambles, the army’s reputation in shreds. There was no saying what the incoming civilian government might do. The experience with Nawaz Sharif could not but have weighed heavily with the generals. Moreover, the return of Chief Justice Chaudhry was on the cards (he was eventually reinstated in March 2009), which meant a number of military skeletons that had been stuffed in the closet by Musharraf, would come tumbling out. As it happened, they did, a notable instance being the massive loan write-offs obtained by high-ranking officers.⁴⁹ After Musharraf’s fall, the army had to lose no time in covering its less admirable actions. In September 2009, it got acting President Muhammadmian Soomro to condone the illegal sale and commercial use, including future use, of large tracts of land.⁵⁰ And of course, the question of missing persons remained. In sum, the military was in a vulnerable position. As it happens, it has held on to the reins of power without much difficulty and, at the time of writing (July 2010) remains very much in charge. But at the time of transition, with the power balance shifting away from it, the army could not have felt sanguine about its future. The revival of tensions with India was therefore calculated to shore up its position in a time of domestic uncertainty.

Conclusion

Domestic politics has been a powerful propellant of Pakistan’s strategic policy toward India. In the early decades after independence, this strategy utilized not only diplomatic means to obtain control of Kashmir, but military instruments as well, until the defeat of 1971 brought a period of moderation. Thereafter, Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons gave it security from Indian attack and, notwithstanding the risk,

⁴⁶ Rizwan Hussain, *Pakistan and the Emergence of Islamic Militancy in Afghanistan* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), p. 172. Hussain later notes that General (retired) Mirza Alam Beg, who had first articulated this concept, had by 2002 declared that it had “no military logic.” Cited, *ibid*, p. 194, note 35. This made sense in a nuclear weapons environment where the need to disperse forces in conventional combat was no longer applicable.

⁴⁷ Sanger, *Inheritance*, p. 244.

⁴⁸ Jones, “Pakistan’s Dangerous Game,” pp. 17-18.

⁴⁹ Rauf Klasra, “Five Generals Also Got Their Loans Written OFF,” *News International*, December 6, 2009 <http://www.thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=25928>.

⁵⁰ Syed Irfan Raza, “‘Misuse’ of Military Land Condoned,” *Dawn*, September 3, 2008 <<http://www.dawn.com/2008/09/03/top18.htm>>.

the opportunity to press its advantage via the stability/instability paradox by backing militancy in Kashmir and launching the Kargil enterprise. At junctures when the army was on the back foot – 1990, 1999 and 2007-08 – the army took the offensive against India through subconventional means. Openings were provided by developments in Indian domestic politics and especially by India's inability to come to terms with militancy and public discontent in J&K.⁵¹ However, the crises that followed and his inability to extract concessions persuaded Musharraf to reverse policy and opt for a negotiated solution in which Pakistan would make major concessions and abandon the claim to all of Kashmir. This was an acceptable solution for the army as long as its own position was secure. As Musharraf's political star waned, the army, seeking to restore its declining position, revived its offensive policy toward India and the peace process that appeared to have come close to fruition collapsed.

What does this imply for the future? Clearly, Pakistan's options are limited. Military action is ruled out. The use of jihadis to pressurize India has yielded no movement toward the acquisition of Kashmir. On the contrary, it has produced an internal threat as many of the jihadis once used against India have turned against their backers. But while it may not be in the country's interest to persist with a failed policy, it remains in the army's interest to do so in order to underline its claim to being the saviour of national solidarity. It is clear from the preceding analysis that, as long as the army is insecure, it is likely to push a policy that keeps the embers of tension with India smouldering. Current conditions do not offer much room for optimism. The civil-military balance remains uncertain as the major political parties jockey for advantage, the Supreme Court pursues a strong agenda emphasizing the rule of law that threatens both civilian and military leaders, and the army is determined to retain its hold on the body politic. For the return of a meaningful peace process, any one of three developments must occur, each of which requires a satisfied army. The first possibility is that the army decides to return to the barracks permanently, which requires a fundamental reorientation on its part. The second is that the army and the civilian community, including the judiciary, reach a stable equilibrium in which the army's interests as a major political player are protected. And the third is that the army once again takes hold of the reins of power directly. At the present juncture, it is not at all clear which course the country's politics will take.

From the theoretical perspective, this paper has shown that a proper understanding of Pakistan's India policy requires an analysis of the interaction between the dynamics of the international system and that of domestic politics. The realist position, which emphasizes conflicts of interest and the distribution of power, misses a key component of real world politics: the interdependence produced by nuclear weapons. As shown above, the nuclearization of the Pakistan-India relationship has not only made the use of military power unviable, but created a mutual interest in risk avoidance – an imperative that repeated crises have highlighted.⁵² But while the

⁵¹ This paper is restricted to an analysis of Pakistani policy. A more comprehensive approach could usefully examine the interaction between systemic and national levels of analysis with regard to India as well. For a brief attempt to do so, see Rajesh M. Basrur, "Indien und Pakistan: Auf Einem Neuen Weg?" (India and Pakistan: On A New Course?), transl. Christine Schweitzer, *FriedensForum* (Peace Forum), Bonn, 4/2008, pp. 28-29.

⁵² Critics may say that risk is exactly what the Pakistan Army was willing to take in Kargil and in backing cross-border terrorism. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that this strategy was conceived as a *low-risk* strategy – particularly because it is "deniable" – whereas the really big risk

interdependence produced by nuclear weapons represents a new and powerful incentive to cooperate, it cannot by itself ensure a stable framework of cooperation. The extent of cooperation and stability ultimately rests on domestic politics. The future of Pakistan's relationship with India thus rests to a large degree on the domestic power equation in Pakistan, more specifically the position of the army in it. Neoclassical realists would do well to appreciate that policy is not simply the domestic response to an unchanging system, but that the system itself has changed in important ways, which makes for a complex interaction between the two levels of analysis.

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looms when a crisis builds up, which is precisely when the army has observed great caution on the ground.