

Echoes of Conflict in South Asia: Human Lives in the India-Pakistan Rivalry (Post-2014)

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Abstract

The conflict between India and Pakistan represents a critical issue in South Asian geopolitics, with profound implications for human security. While national security has traditionally dominated discussions, this study identifies a significant gap in understanding how military tensions affect the well-being of civilians. The research explores how the ongoing India-Pakistan proxy war, particularly post-2014, has exacerbated human security challenges. These include infringements on human rights, hindered economic progress, and strained diplomatic ties. By emphasizing the socio-economic impact of these tensions, this study aims to provide a framework for addressing conflict through a human-centric approach. The perpetual cycle of retaliation and counter-retaliation may result in persistent infringements of human rights, hindered economic progress, and strain diplomatic ties. In the absence of a resolution, the current disagreement may easily escalate into a drawn-out war. This situation has the potential to solidify differences, prolong violence, and significantly weaken stability in the region.

Keywords: Arms Race, Human security, State Security, South Asia.

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1. Introduction

"Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind."-John F. Kennedy

National security has long been a cornerstone of political discourse, especially since the Cold War era when American ruling elites first popularised the concept. Initially, the idea of national security emerged as a strategic tool to justify the arms race and the broader geopolitical tensions of the Cold War (Dalby,1992). During this period, the United States, in its quest to contain the spread of communism and assert its global influence, redefined the strategic security of the nation-state under the umbrella of "national security." This redefinition positioned "hard power", the use of military force and coercive tactics as the primary instrument for shaping foreign policy, not only in the United States but also across the globe (Kampmark,2008). The Cold War era marked a significant shift in how states perceived and pursued security. The concept of national security became synonymous with military strength and defence capabilities, overshadowing other facets of human and state security. The American emphasis on national security resonated worldwide, leading to an arms race that saw nations investing heavily in military capabilities, often at the expense of social and economic development. Over time, the allure of the "national security" label extended beyond the military domain, permeating various aspects of state policy (Amalia et al.,2007). Governments began appending the term "security" to a broad spectrum of issues, thereby broadening the scope of national security to include economic, environmental, food, and health security, among others. In recent years, this expanding security framework has also integrated the notions of water and cyber security. This expansion reflects an understanding that national security is not solely about protecting borders from external threats but also about safeguarding the well-being of a nation's citizens from diverse risks. However, prioritizing national security often comes at a cost.

State policies tend to elevate security concerns above economic, social, and welfare dimensions, sometimes neglecting the broader needs of society. This focus can lead to the militarisation of various aspects of governance, where resources are disproportionately allocated to defence and security sectors, leaving critical areas like education, healthcare, and social welfare underfunded. The end of the Soviet Union, as well as the subsequent decline of communism as a global ideological force, marked a turning point in international relations. The dissolution of the Soviet Union not only

signalled the end of the Cold War but also paved the way for the unchecked expansion of capitalism across the globe (Babu,2016). This global shift facilitated the spread of neoliberal economic policies, which primarily benefited wealthy minorities while exacerbating inequalities for the broader population. The triumph of capitalism in the post-Cold War world order often came at the expense of social equity, as market-driven policies prioritised profit over people, further entrenching the divide between the rich and the poor. The concept of national security has evolved into a multifaceted paradigm that extends beyond military might to encompass various dimensions of statecraft. However, its dominance in political discourse often masks the underlying socio-economic disparities and marginalization of vulnerable populations. As nations continue to grapple with traditional and non-traditional security threats, there is a growing need to balance national security with the imperative of human security ensuring that the well-being of all citizens, not just the security of the state, remains at the forefront of policy considerations.

2. National Security v/s Human Security

As the concept of human security has evolved, it has become increasingly clear that the traditional understanding of security, focused primarily on the state, is no longer sufficient. Lloyd Axworthy, former Foreign Minister of Canada and a key advocate of human security, highlighted this shift by asserting that the meaning of security has fundamentally changed (Axworthy,2000). In an increasingly interconnected and volatile world, the primary responsibility of the state protecting its citizens has grown more complex. Human security is not just about ensuring physical safety but also about fostering an environment where individuals can thrive. It entails creating conditions in which people have access to basic necessities, can participate in political processes, and are free from fear and want. This approach aligns with the broader goals of human development, which emphasise the importance of expanding people's choices and improving their quality of life. In war-torn societies and regions marked by conflict, the protection of individuals becomes especially precarious (Hafeznia,2021). Ironically, in some instances, the state itself has emerged as a threat to the rights and welfare of its citizens. Authoritarian regimes, internal conflicts, and state-sponsored violence have demonstrated that security threats often come from within a nation's own borders. This reality underscores the need

to broaden the focus of security beyond the state, shifting it towards the protection of individual human beings.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) formally introduced the concept of human security in 1994 through a ground breaking report. This report aimed to clarify and expand the traditional understanding of security by integrating various dimensions of human well-being (Hillebrecht et al., 2013). By emphasising a combination of human rights and human development, the UNDP report aimed to address both human and social security in a holistic manner (Human Development Report 1994, 1994). This comprehensive approach marked a significant departure from state-centric security models, prioritising the safety and dignity of individuals over the territorial integrity of states. Human security, in contrast to state security, focusses on two primary approaches (Robin,2021). The first approach, which is particularly applicable in countries like Canada, involves protecting individuals from political violence and repression. This approach aims to protect citizens from political animosity, upholding their civil and political rights. However, neglecting other aspects of human security, such as economic and social rights, can result in instability due to this narrow focus on political security. The experiences of the Arab world, particularly in countries like Egypt and Libya, in these regions, the failure to address broader aspects of human security, including economic and political participation, contributed to widespread discontent, leading to uprisings and the eventual overthrow of certain governments during the Arab Spring. The second approach to human security is more comprehensive, encompassing various dimensions such as economic security, food security, and political security. This approach requires the fusion of multiple concepts to develop a robust strategy that addresses the complex needs of individuals and communities. The approach necessitates a reconsideration of state sovereignty, acknowledging the need to strike a balance between the traditional concept of sovereignty and the imperative of safeguarding human security. This reimagined sovereignty involves the state not just as a border protector but also as a guarantor of its citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms (Hama,2017).

As the world continues to grapple with complex and interconnected challenges ranging from climate change and pandemics to political instability and economic inequality, the importance of human security becomes increasingly apparent. Phrases like “A secure Europe in a better

world,” “Putting people first,” “Comprehensive security,” and the ancient Indian concept of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (the whole world as one family) signify this evolution towards a more inclusive and expansive notion of security (Babu,2016). The transition from national security to human security marks a departure from a state-centric perspective to one that prioritises individuals and communities. This broader approach seeks to address the root causes of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, which traditional national security frameworks often overlook. However, the expansion of the security concept to include a wide array of individual and social concerns presents challenges. The inclusion of various dimensions economic, environmental, food, health, water, and cyber security dilutes the original focus of national security. This broadening makes the task of prioritisation complex, as policymakers must balance a diverse set of security needs. The security and welfare of all individuals should take precedence over the narrow and often elitist concerns for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation-state. Human security advocates argue that ensuring the well-being of individuals leads to more stable and resilient societies, which in turn contributes to national and global security (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy,2007). This approach aligns with the understanding of interconnected security, where threats in one area can have ripple effects across borders and sectors. The emphasis on human security reflects a normative shift towards prioritising human rights and social justice.

3. Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research methodology based on secondary data sources to analyze the socio-economic and human security implications of the India-Pakistan conflict. The methodological approach is designed to provide an in-depth understanding of how military tensions in South Asia, particularly post-2014, have affected human security in the region. This research adopts a descriptive and analytical design, focusing on the intersection of national security and human security. It examines historical, political, and economic dynamics to assess the broader implications of the conflict on civilians and regional stability. Secondary sources include Government and institutional reports, data from credible research platforms such as the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and World Bank Group are incorporated to

evaluates the resource allocation to defense versus human development in India and Pakistan, using economic indicators like military expenditure as a percentage of GDP and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) metrics respectively.

4. Security Dynamics in South Asia

South Asia offers a particularly compelling case for examining the evolving narratives of security for several reasons. First and foremost, the region comprises predominantly post-colonial states, which have placed immense importance on developing independent national identities. Sociopolitical justice, economic development, and the eradication of radical inequalities, elements central to the Human Development Report (HDR) intricately tie these identities together. The task of nation-building in these states necessitated a broader conception of security, one that transcends the traditional realist view focused solely on state sovereignty and military might. For example, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister (1947–1964), was instrumental in shaping India's security policy around five key pillars: political democracy, a secular polity, economic development, non-alignment, and Panchsheel—often termed the “five principles of peaceful co-existence” (Lahiry, 2020). Nehru's security approach was fundamentally holistic, acknowledging that achieving true security necessitated addressing the underlying social, economic, and political factors that foster stability and peace (Ganguly et al., 2018). This broader understanding of security aligns closely with the principles of human security, which emphasise the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities. The South Asian context vividly illustrates the need for an expanded and inclusive conception of security, one that not only protects state sovereignty but also prioritises the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals. The region's history of partition, religious extremism, and ethnic conflict powerfully reminds us that military means alone cannot achieve security. As South Asian states continue to navigate the complexities of nation-building and managing diversity, the principles of human security offer a valuable framework for addressing the region's unique challenges (Acharya & Acharya, 2001). The persistent conflicts have significantly impeded its development. The Human Development Index (HDI) data for 2023 highlights the stark reality of how these conflicts contribute to the region's low rankings in human development and growth rates. The HDI rankings of

South Asian countries as per the 2023 ranking reflect the challenges these nations face in improving the well-being of their populations.

Table (1): HDI Ranking and Life Expectancy of South Asian Countries

Country	HDI Rank(2023)	HDI Rank(2021)	Life Expectance at birth in Years(2022)
Srilanka	78	76	76.6
Pakistan	164	165	66.4
India	134	135	67.7
Afghanistan	182	181	62.9
Bhutan	125	125	72.2
Nepal	146	149	70.5
Myanmar	144	145	67.3
Bangladesh	129	130	73.7
Maldives	87	88	80.8

(Source: The 2023/2024 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP))

Afghanistan’s HDI rank of 182 and its low life expectancy of 62.9 years, combined with minimal schooling opportunities, underscore the devastating impact of decades of war, instability, and foreign intervention. The ongoing conflict and the resurgence of Taliban has severely crippled the country's infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems, leading to one of the lowest HDI scores globally (Pouyan et al.,2012).

Pakistan, with an HDI rank of 164 and a life expectancy of 66.4 years, also illustrates how conflicts drain national resources that could otherwise be allocated to human development. The persistent threat of terrorism, political instability, and tensions with neighbouring India have necessitated high military expenditure, diverting funds from essential social services and infrastructure development. The economic crisis of 2023 is mostly caused by the country's unstable political structure resulting into myopic policy choices, which leads to substantial spending on non-developmental and fiscally unsustainable initiatives.

Myanmar, ranking 144th in HDI, is another example where internal conflicts, particularly the Rohingya crisis, have severely impacted human development. The country’s ongoing ethnic conflicts and military control over the government have not only led to widespread human rights violations but also hindered the provision of basic services to the population, contributing to its low development indicators (Selth, 2018). According to UN Report till year 2024, a total of 18.6 million individuals will require humanitarian aid throughout the entire nation.

Nepal, although relatively stable in recent years, still bears the scars of a decade-long civil war that ended in 2006. The country's HDI rank of 146 is indicative of the long-term effects of conflict on development. The conflict has caused lasting impacts on economic development and social cohesion, despite improvements in certain areas.

Sri Lanka, with an HDI rank of 78, is somewhat of an outlier in the region. Conflict, particularly the civil war that lasted until 2009, has also impacted Sri Lanka. The post-war period has seen significant development gains, yet the long-term effects of the conflict continue to influence its economic and social landscape. The economic crisis that commenced in 2019 in Sri Lanka has had a profound and enduring impact on the whole population of the nation.

Despite its relatively high HDI rank of 87 in 2023, the Maldives has faced significant socio-political and economic issues that have impacted its progress. The political crisis that occurred in Maldives during 2014-15 prompted enquiries into the causes of the crisis, the government's management of the situation, potential internal economic and security outcomes, and the impact on regional security. As per a 2015 United Nations assessment, the Maldives was confronted with religious challenges arising from varying interpretations of religion teachings, along with a significant prevalence of drug misuse and gang violence. According to certain reports, the presence of endemic poverty and hardship in certain groups is believed to be a contributing factor to the rise in radicalisation (Samatha,2016).

Bangladesh's socio-political environment has significantly deteriorated in 2024, with a growing toll of human casualties and widespread turmoil. Mass protests around the nation have been mostly spearheaded by students and their allies, following a court order in early July that imposed job quotas for "under-represented" groups (Prakash,2024). This ruling is what initially triggered the upheaval. Thousands upon thousands of students have protested in the streets, claiming that an unfair system that restricts their employment opportunities and perpetuates social injustices is to blame. After starting out peacefully, the protests became violent when they encountered law enforcement, leaving many people hurt or killed. The issue has reached a critical level that Prime Minister Shiekh Hassina is compelled to depart from the country. The law and order of the country are on the

verge of collapse, leading to considerable mass exodus of the minority population and compelling people to flee for their safety.

India, despite being one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, has an HDI rank of 134. Its life expectancy of 67.7 years highlights the challenges it faces in improving its human development metrics. The ongoing border disputes with Pakistan, coupled with internal security challenges such as insurgencies and communal violence, necessitate high defense spending. This diverts funds from critical sectors like healthcare and education, which are essential for improving HDI outcomes. The relationship between conflict and development is complex, but the data clearly shows that countries engulfed in or recovering from conflicts face significant barriers to achieving higher HDI rankings. The diversion of resources to military spending, coupled with the destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and disruption of economic activities, severely hampers progress in health, education, and income all key components of the HDI.

4-1.India-Pakistan Conflict: Military Dominance and Human Lives

The partition of British India in 1947 into the separate states of India and Pakistan was not merely a political event but a deeply traumatic experience that has continued to shape the security dynamics of the South Asian region for decades (Naeje,2015). This division, marked by one of the largest mass migrations in history, resulted in widespread violence, loss of life, and the uprooting of millions. Deep-seated animosities sparked during this period have persisted, resulting in a legacy of mistrust and hostility between the two nations. This historical event set the stage for the Indo-Pakistani conflict, particularly over the region of Jammu and Kashmir, which both nations claim in full but control in part. The Kashmir conflict has acquired a symbolic and identity-related significance for both countries, making it one of the most intractable and enduring disputes in the world (Adhikari & Kamle,2010). The dispute over Kashmir consumes vast amounts of resources that could otherwise be redirected towards socio-economic development and remains a significant obstacle to the normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan. The evolution of religious extremism, particularly in Pakistan, has further complicated the security landscape in South Asia (Kuszewska,2022). The rise of violent Islamist extremism within Pakistan poses a significant threat not only to the country's internal stability

but also to the broader region. This phenomenon underscores the need for a security paradigm that addresses the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, lack of education, and political disenfranchisement, rather than relying solely on military solutions (Nizami et al.,2018). However, the entrenched positions of both India and Pakistan, particularly concerning Kashmir, make the resolution of these issues extremely challenging.

The policies of the different ruling parties in both countries has led to increasing polarisation and tensions within Indian society, particularly affecting religious minorities who feel alienated and threatened by the growing majoritarian discourse. A key moment in this ideological shift was the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, which revoked the special autonomous status of Jammu & Kashmir and led to the reorganisation of the region's legal status. This action by the Indian government was widely interpreted as a longstanding political commitment to strengthen the central government's complete authority over the region (Rather,2020). India adopted a hard stance that the Article 370 was an internal concern of the country and would not tolerate external meddling, even if Pakistan could not bear the burden and went farther in escalating border tensions and making appeals in international forums (Ahlawat & Izarali,2020). The revocation of Article 370 had major effects for the people of Kashmir, intensifying the region's already volatile security situation and resulting in widespread international condemnation.

On the other side of the border, Pakistan continues to grapple with its own set of challenges, primarily revolving around the enduring dominance of the military establishment in the country's political landscape. Pakistan, often described as an ideological, praetorian state, heavily influences its internal and external policies with its security concerns, particularly those related to India. The Pakistani military's successful encroachment into political affairs has resulted in a disproportionate influence over the country's foreign policy objectives, particularly in relation to India and the Kashmir conflict (Noorali & Ahmadi,2022). This has created a situation where the military, rather than civilian decision-makers, plays the leading role in shaping Pakistan's approach to its most pressing security dilemmas (Khan,2010). Husain Haqqani, a noted scholar and former Pakistani ambassador to the United States, argues that Pakistan has struggled to develop a national identity beyond the grievances that fueled the demand for a separate state during the partition of British India (Haqqani,2004). This unresolved identity crisis has

allowed the state to cultivate a combustible mix of religion and politics, with profound implications for both domestic stability and regional security. The Pakistani state's strategy of supporting Islamic fundamentalist groups, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad, to advance its regional goals, particularly in Kashmir, has not brought any tangible success. Instead, this approach has entrenched the military's power and justified its continued dominance over civilian institutions (Rath,2010). The army's leading role in defining Pakistan's policy objectives has also ensured that a significant portion of the country's central government spending is allocated to defense, at the expense of other crucial sectors such as education, health, and infrastructure.

Kashmir's control has been a focal point of conflict between India and Pakistan since partition. The region's majority Muslim population and strategic location have made it a point of contention, with both countries using the region to solidify nationalistic and religious ideologies. For Pakistan, Kashmir represents an unfulfilled promise of partition, the idea that Muslim-majority areas should belong to Pakistan. For India, Kashmir is an integral part of its secular, multi-ethnic state, and its accession to India in 1947 is viewed as final and legally binding. The unresolved status of Kashmir has led to several wars and countless skirmishes between the two nuclear-armed neighbours (Adhikari & Kamle,2011). Despite numerous attempts at negotiation and various international interventions, the dispute remains one of the most volatile and dangerous flashpoints in the world (Balcerowicz & Kuszewska,2022). For over seven decades, India and Pakistan's historically inherited belligerent discourses have largely conditioned their bilateral interactions. This protracted antagonism has profoundly influenced the legal and political administration of the region. In Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, the situation remains tense, with frequent outbreaks of violence and a heavy military presence. For Pakistan's military and civilian leaders, the Kashmir issue continues to be a rallying point, with the region viewed as a crucial component of Pakistan's national identity and a symbol of its struggle against what it perceives as Indian aggression (Naueje,2015). On the other hand, India maintains that the accession of the entire former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir to India as final, complete, and irreversible. Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession in October 1947, a legally binding document that

validates India's claim to the entire region (Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022). Pakistan, on the other hand, disputes the legitimacy of this accession, arguing that it was forced and illegal, and that Maharaja Hari Singh had no authority to unilaterally decide the fate of the region's predominantly Muslim population (Adhikari & Kamle, 2011). These conflicting narratives have kept the dispute alive, with both countries continuing to accuse each other of aggression, human rights violations, and interference. The ongoing military confrontations, coupled with the rise of terrorism and insurgency within the region, have created a highly volatile situation that not only threatens the region's security, but also diverts significant resources away from development.

Over the last decade, India-Pakistan relations have seen several ups and downs, but the overall trajectory has been one of increased tension and conflict. The election of the BJP in India, with its strong nationalist agenda, and the subsequent abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir, have been key factors in the deterioration of relations. Pakistan viewed these moves as a direct challenge to its stance on Kashmir and responded with diplomatic and rhetorical aggression (Kugekman, 2019). The situation has been further complicated by the role of extremist groups in Pakistan, which continue to operate with relative impunity and have been accused of carrying out attacks on Indian soil. India has consistently demanded that Pakistan should take stronger action against these groups, but Pakistan has often countered by accusing India of human rights abuses in Kashmir ("Raising the Stakes in Jammu and Kashmir," 2020). The diplomatic channels between the two countries have been strained, with high-level talks being infrequent and often unproductive. The international community has also struggled to mediate between the two nations, given the complexity of the issues involved and the strong nationalistic sentiments on both sides. The proxy war between India and Pakistan has been a defining feature of their bilateral relations, particularly since the partition in 1947 (Hussain, 2019). This indirect conflict is characterized by one state supporting non-state actors, insurgent groups, and militant organizations to undermine the security and stability of the other. Over the past decade, this conflict has intensified, with both countries accusing each other of supporting terrorism and insurgency within their borders. This has led to a series of violent incidents, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC) in J&K, as well as in other parts of both countries

(Jauhari,2012). One of the most significant incidents in years was the attack on an Indian Army base in Uri, Kashmir, in September 2016. Four heavily armed terrorists, allegedly from the Jaish-e-Mohammed group based in Pakistan, infiltrated the base and killed 18 Indian soldiers. This attack marked one of the deadliest on the Indian military in history and led to a significant escalation in tensions between the two countries. In response to the Uri attack, India carried out what it termed "surgical strikes" across the LoC, targeting terrorist launch pads in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The strikes were intended to send a message that India would not tolerate cross-border terrorism (Bhattacharjee,2016). However, Pakistan denied that any such strikes had taken place, and the incident deepened the mistrust between the two nations. Terrorist attacks have also continued to plague India, particularly in the J&K region. The Pulwama attack in February 2019, where a suicide bomber rammed a vehicle laden with explosives into a convoy of Indian paramilitary personnel, killing 40 soldiers, was one of the deadliest attacks in years. The Jaish-e-Mohammed group claimed responsibility for the attack, further straining India-Pakistan relations. In the aftermath of Pulwama, India launched airstrikes on a purported terrorist camp in Balakot, Pakistan (Siyech,2019). This marked the first time since the 1971 war that Indian aircraft had crossed into Pakistani territory, leading to a sharp escalation in military tensions. Pakistan responded with its own airstrikes, and an Indian pilot was captured, bringing the two nuclear-armed nations to the brink of war.

Both countries have seen substantial repercussions from terrorism, resulting in a substantial deployment of their resources to counter this menace. The ongoing distrust between the two countries has prevented any possibility of working together to combat terrorism in the region. International terrorist organisations, such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), are seeking to penetrate the region in order to disrupt governments and establish an Islamic Republic. While the probability of this result is minimal, the escalation of radicalisation and the indoctrination of young individuals continue to be significant problems for the entire Indian subcontinent. The formation of a stable administration in Pakistan is essential for ensuring regional security. Throughout history, no Prime Minister of Pakistan has successfully served a complete five-year term. This volatility creates a sense of confusion among both Pakistani residents and

neighbouring countries regarding the actual leadership of the Pakistani government (Rizwan et al.,2022). Frequently, newly established governments overturn the choices made by their forerunners, resulting in uncertainty over the durability of any accords. The data retrieved from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) provides a grim snapshot of the human cost of terrorism-related activities in India and Pakistan from 2014 to 2024. Over this period, both countries have witnessed thousands of deaths as a direct result of terrorism, impacting civilians, security forces, and even the perpetrators themselves. These statistics reflect the deep-rooted and ongoing conflict that has plagued the region for decades, with severe repercussions for innocent human lives.

Table (2): Data on Terror related Human Killing in India and Pakistan (2014-2024)

Country	Civilians	Security Forces	Terrorist	Not Specified	Total Human Killed
India	1,913	1,364	4,145	14	7,437
Pakistan	5,110	3,305	9,078	499	17,992

(Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP))

As the Table (2) shows, India has seen a total of 7,437 deaths due to terrorism-related incidents in the past decade. This figure includes 1,913 civilians, 1,364 security personnel, and 4,145 terrorists. The high number of civilian casualties indicates that ordinary citizens often find themselves caught in the crossfire of conflicts between security forces and terrorist groups. Regions like J&K have been particularly volatile, with insurgency and cross-border terrorism being significant issues. Despite attempts to stabilize the region, the persistence of violence highlights the conflict's complexity and the deep-seated historical, political, and religious factors at play. The situation in Pakistan appears even more dire, with a total of 17,992 lives lost due to terrorist-related activities. The civilian death toll is alarmingly high, with 5,110 civilians killed, alongside 3,305 security forces personnel and 9,078 terrorists. The significant number of civilian casualties reflects the brutal impact of terrorism on the general population. Pakistan has struggled with various forms of terrorism, including religious extremism, sectarian violence, and insurgencies, particularly in regions like Khyber, Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The state's involvement in fostering certain militant groups for geopolitical reasons has also backfired, leading to

internal instability and a vicious cycle of violence that has proven difficult to break (Abbas,2021).

The statistics from both countries illustrate the immense human suffering resulting from ongoing conflicts. Civilians, who should be protected in any conflict along with security forces are especially affected. Beyond the immediate victims, the loss of life tears apart grieving families and communities. The psychological trauma inflicted on survivors and witnesses of such violence is profound, often resulting in long-term mental health issues, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. The high number of fatalities reflects the dangerous and often thankless job that is performed in order to maintain peace and order. The loss of these personnel not only affects their families but also weakens the overall security apparatus, sometimes creating a vicious cycle that forces the state to use more force, thereby exacerbating the conflict. The deaths of terrorists, while sometimes seen as a tactical success, also highlight the tragic reality of radicalization. Young people, often indoctrinated or coerced into joining extremist groups, often lose their lives for causes that ultimately bring about more destruction than change. The series of violence in India and Pakistan has far-reaching repercussions beyond the immediate loss of life. It contributes to a climate of fear and insecurity, stifles economic growth, and hinders development. Both countries have had to divert substantial resources towards defence and counter-terrorism efforts, resources that could otherwise have been invested in health, education, and infrastructure. This reallocation of funds impacts overall human development and exacerbates poverty and inequality, creating a breeding ground for further radicalisation and conflict. The persistent conflict affects the international image of both nations, limiting their ability to engage in global partnerships and economic opportunities. It also strains diplomatic relations, making it more challenging to resolve the underlying issues through dialogue and negotiation. For India and Pakistan, finding a path forward from this cycle of violence requires addressing the root causes of conflict. This includes tackling issues like poverty, lack of education, political disenfranchisement, and the ideological divides that fuel extremism. Both nations need to invest in peacebuilding measures that go beyond military solutions, emphasising dialogue, community development, and economic cooperation. The human cost of the India-Pakistan conflict is a stark reminder that in wars and conflicts, it is often the innocent who

suffer the most. A shift towards prioritising human security over territorial or ideological gains is crucial for both nations if they are to break free from the past and build a future where all their citizens can live in peace and prosperity.



Fig (1): Share of GDP in Military Expenditure of India and Pakistan (2014-2023)

(Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)

According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, India's military expenditure as a percentage of its GDP has remained relatively stable, fluctuating between 2.4% and 2.8% from 2014 to 2023. Pakistan, on the other hand, has consistently spent a higher percentage of its GDP on defence, with figures ranging from 2.8% to 3.6% during the same period. This indicates a sustained focus on military capabilities, despite the differing economic contexts of the two countries. Both India and Pakistan have invested heavily in acquiring new technology and weapons systems. India, with its larger economy, has embarked on several ambitious defence modernisation programs, including the purchase of advanced fighter jets, missile systems, and naval assets. Although Pakistan has a smaller economy, it has similarly prioritised military spending, often focussing on maintaining a strategic balance with India through nuclear deterrence and the acquisition of sophisticated weaponry from allies like China.

Table (3): Indicators of SDGs of India and Pakistan

Country	Poverty Headcount Ratio at \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP) (% of Population) (2021)	Unemployment, Total (% of Total Labor Force) (Modeled ILO Estimate) (2023)	Prevalence of Undernourishment (% of Population) (2021)
India	12.9	4.2	1.7
Pakistan	4.9	5.5	1.9

(Source: World Bank Group)

Table 3 presents the most up-to-date data from the World Bank Group, showing that the high military spending of both countries has a notable influence on socioeconomic development. Allocating resources to defence diverts them from poverty reduction, infrastructure development, and generating employment opportunities. India's poverty headcount ratio at \$2.15 a day (2017 PPP) stood at 12.9% in 2021, while Pakistan's was at 4.9%. As these figures highlight, the prioritization of military spending over social welfare programs exacerbates the ongoing challenges in addressing basic human needs. Additionally, both countries face substantial challenges in terms of unemployment and undernourishment, with unemployment rates at 4.2% in India and 5.5% in Pakistan as of 2023. The prevalence of undernourishment also remains a critical issue, affecting 1.7% of the population in India and 1.9% in Pakistan. The disproportionate focus on military expenditure over social welfare in both India and Pakistan has long-term repercussions for their societies. The ongoing arms race not only drains financial resources but also fosters a security environment that perpetuates mutual distrust and hostility. This, in turn, diverts attention from critical developmental issues such as education, healthcare, and poverty reduction, which are essential for improving the quality of life for the broader population. Furthermore, the emphasis on military spending over social development can lead to a vicious cycle of insecurity, where underdevelopment breeds discontent and instability, further justifying increased defense spending. Breaking this cycle requires a significant shift in policy priorities, where both nations could benefit from reallocating resources towards improving human security, which includes economic security, access to education, and healthcare.

5. Conclusion

The conflict between India and Pakistan, deeply rooted in history and exacerbated by geopolitical and ideological differences, continues to be a defining challenge for South Asia. The findings of this research reveal the profound and multidimensional impact of these tensions, particularly on human security. The data illustrates how the militarization of the region and the prioritization of state security have perpetuated cycles of violence, economic stagnation, and social instability. The disproportionate allocation of resources to defense has limited investments in essential areas such as healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation, further exacerbating

inequality and underdevelopment. For Pakistan, reduced defense spending could alleviate its ongoing economic crisis, curb inflation, and support financial stabilization efforts. India, with its ambitious developmental goals, could channel these savings into addressing critical domestic challenges and enhancing its infrastructure and human capital. The prioritization of national security over human security has not only deepened mistrust between the two nations but also marginalized communities, making them vulnerable to radicalization and violence. To address these challenges, it is imperative to shift from a state-centric to a human-centric approach to security. Policymakers in both nations must recognize that sustainable peace cannot be achieved solely through military means. Instead, prioritizing human security is vital for breaking the cycle of conflict and fostering long-term stability. Furthermore, regional cooperation mechanisms, such as SAARC and BIMSTEC, should be revitalized to facilitate dialogue and economic collaboration. Confidence-building measures, such as joint initiatives on climate resilience, cross-border trade, and counter-terrorism, could pave the way for a more stable and interconnected South Asia.

By adopting a humanist geopolitical framework, both nations can move beyond entrenched narratives of hostility and work towards a future defined by cooperation, resilience, and shared prosperity. In doing so, India and Pakistan have the opportunity to transform the narrative of their relations from one of conflict to one of hope and progress, ensuring that the well-being of their people remains at the heart of their policies.

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7. Conflict of Interest

There is no potential conflict of interest with respect to research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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