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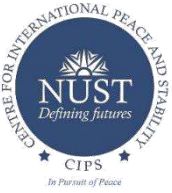
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NUST JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE & STABILITY

Contents

Articles

Essays

The Rohingya Crisis: Ethnic Marginalization and Statelessness

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Abstract

The situation in Myanmar involves the unfortunate plight of the Rohingya, an ethnic minority group who have been deprived of citizenship rights and compelled to seek refuge outside their homeland. The Rohingya endured severe conditions characterized by genocide, torture, executions, and rape. The study elucidates the fundamental and immediate factors contributing to conflict, specifically focusing on critical actors involved in the Myanmar Rohingya crisis. It also comprehends conflict dynamics using the Gurr Model, specifically designed to analyze ethnic disputes. The study examines the systematic denial of fundamental rights, including personal growth, safety, and cultural identity, that ethnic minorities experience. This oppression has resulted in the emergence of insurgent factions that have resorted to armed resistance to reclaim their citizenship status and secure their rights. The oppressive military operation resulted in the displacement of the Rohingya population, who sought refuge in camps for displaced persons. By adopting a qualitative approach and collecting data from secondary sources, such as research papers and opinion articles, as well as primary data from speeches by Myanmar's leadership, the paper presents a comprehensive overview of the situation in Myanmar concerning the Rohingya. An in-depth examination of the conflict reflects that the resolution of the conflict hinges upon the exertion of pressure by major powers and international organizations on Myanmar's military to reinstate democracy and enhance the conditions in the Rakhine state. This is crucial for facilitating the repatriation of the Rohingya minority and reconstructing the infrastructure to meet their fundamental human needs.

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Rohingya, minority groups, ethnic conflict, Rakhine state, genocidal intent, human rights

Introduction

The nature of global conflicts has evolved, shifting from traditional interstate battles to a more complex terrain where state and non-state actors engage in combat with one another. Several states have enacted discriminatory laws that have fuelled prolonged conflict, with Myanmar serving as a prominent example. Myanmar is among the countries that have enacted policies targeting the Rohingya minority and have also been complicit and at times actively supported the ethnic cleansing. Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, the Rohingya Muslim minority ethnic group has faced systemic violence and oppression at the hands of the Myanmar government (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2019). In the latest wave of violence in 2017, around 40,000 Rohingya were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in Bangladesh, including vulnerable groups such as older adults, children, and women (Fareed, 2022). The state's kinetic measures resulted in rendering people stateless, depriving them of citizenship status, and compelling them to seek asylum in neighbouring states, thus exacerbating the refugee problem in Myanmar. The conflict arose from the state's decision to strip the Rohingya population of their statehood and deny them citizenship, classifying them as undocumented migrants from Bangladesh. Considering the human rights violations and condemnation from the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada imposed sanctions, but Myanmar continued to commit grave human rights violations (Brooten et al., 2015).

A significant political shift was observed during the 2020 general elections, as Aung San Suu Kyi emerged victorious. However, on February 1, 2021, she was apprehended and placed under house arrest by the military authorities (BBC, 2022). She faced allegations of corruption, election fraud, and inciting a situation akin to a civil war in the country. The prevailing circumstances resulted in intensified and stricter suppression of the civilian population in Myanmar, who were protesting against the military's rule (Regan & Yeung, 2021).

In light of these developments in Myanmar, this paper aims to address the following questions:

- What are the fundamental and immediate factors contributing to the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and how can the international community effectively tackle these issues to resolve the conflict and facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of the Rohingya population?
- How has the systematic denial of fundamental rights and identity to the Rohingya ethnic minority contributed to the emergence of armed resistance and ongoing conflict in Myanmar?

The hypothesis of the study is: 'The systematic denial of fundamental rights and identity recognition to the Rohingya minority, combined with the failure of international actors to intervene effectively, has perpetuated armed resistance and prolonged the conflict in Myanmar. A resolution requires sustained international pressure on Myanmar's military to restore democracy and ensure the repatriation and reintegration of the Rohingya population.'

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze the complex dynamics of the Rohingya crisis through the lens of the Gurr Model of Ethnic Conflict. The qualitative approach was selected for its strength in providing an in-depth understanding of social phenomena and its ability to explore the multi-dimensional factors contributing to Rohingya's plight. The research draws on primary and secondary sources. Primary Sources, including statements and speeches by government leaders, international organizations, and policymakers, were critically analyzed. These include official declarations, interviews, and public addresses related to the Rohingya crisis, offering firsthand insights into policy decisions and international responses. Secondary Sources include a thorough review of academic literature and reports from international bodies such as the United Nations, think tanks, and NGOs. These sources provided context and allowed triangulation to ensure the reliability of the findings. The analysis also included cross-referencing data from secondary sources to validate findings and ensure a comprehensive perspective.

Myanmar: Demographics and Socio-Economic Profile

Myanmar has a unique geography, with the country bordering four states: Laos and Thailand to the east and southeast, and Bangladesh and India to the northwest, along with China to the northeast. With approximately 55.44 million inhabitants, Myanmar is one of the largest countries in Southeast Asia in terms of population. The religious demography is dominated by Buddhists, who are 88 %, Christians represent 6%, and Muslims account for 4% (United States Department of State, n.d.). Furthermore, the Rohingya population possesses an Indo-Aryan ethnic identity and primarily resides on the outskirts of Myanmar's Rakhine State, near the border with Bangladesh. The Rohingya minority in Myanmar, distinguished by their unique language and customs, differs from the Buddhist majority. These cultural and religious distinctions have exacerbated prolonged conflict and intensified divisions.

According to the United Nations, the country is classified as one of the least developed states. This classification is primarily due to its underdevelopment, which is generally linked to the military's control (The World Academy of Sciences, n.d.). Formerly known as Burma, the government officially changed its name to the 'Republic of the Union of Myanmar' in 1989 under the military junta (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 2012). After 2010, the country began transitioning toward a limited form of democracy, primarily influenced by growing pressure from major global powers such as the UK and the US. These countries imposed economic sanctions due to concerns over the lack of democratic governance and repeated human rights violations. In 2008, the military drafted a constitution that granted itself extraordinary powers, thereby ensuring its continued dominance over political decision-making (Beech, 2018). Therefore, it expands influence in the politics and economy of the state.

Historical Context of the Conflict

In the 18th century, the region of Rakhine was ruled by Hindu Kingdoms and was subsequently taken over by the Burmese king (Bhonsale, 2015). Afterwards, Burma was colonized by the British, allowing unrestricted movement of individuals throughout the subcontinent. In World War II, the Rohingya, a minority population of Muslims, supported the British, intending to join East Pakistan. At the same time, the Buddhist majority sided with Japanese forces to oppose British colonial rule. After Burma's independence in 1948, authorities expected the Rohingya to migrate to

Bangladesh, but they chose to remain in Rakhine, viewing it as their ancestral homeland.

Among Myanmar's 135 recognized ethnic groups, the Rohingya have long been denied citizenship. This exclusion is based on Section 3 of the country's citizenship law, which grants automatic citizenship only to those whose ethnic groups have been settled in Myanmar since before 1823 (Online Burma/Myanmar Library, 2019). Minority groups in Myanmar may apply for naturalization by proving their ancestors migrated to the country before 1848. Although the Rohingya claim ancestry dating back a thousand years to Arab merchants and other groups who have been in the region for generations.

However, the government views them as descendants of British-era migrants and, therefore, considers them ineligible for citizenship. The Rohingya's claims have been rejected due to a lack of documentary evidence. As a result, the Rohingya faced increasing discrimination and, in 1978, launched armed resistance against the Burmese government. In response, the state carried out 'Operation Dragon King,' forcing over 200,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh (Mahmud, 2024). The military utilized coercion, persecution, and sexual assault as methods to compel the Rohingya population to depart (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2018).

The Myanmar government has historically justified its actions toward the Rohingya by citing concerns over national security and territorial integrity (Egreteau, 2016). Officials often portray the Rohingya as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, thereby denying their rightful claim to citizenship and justifying restrictive measures under the guise of combating insurgency and maintaining order (Gravers, 2015). These policies are also framed as necessary to preserve socio-political stability, with the government leveraging ethnic and religious tensions to rally domestic support (Leider, 2018).

Rohingya Became Stateless

The Rohingya community lost their citizenship and became stateless in 1982 when the government enacted the Citizenship Act. This law granted citizenship to 135 officially recognised ethnic groups but excluded the Rohingya, leaving them without legal rights to reside in Rakhine State (International Commission of Jurists, 2017). In response, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, the largest paramilitary group representing Rohingya separatists, was formed, which was later merged with other factions to establish the Rohingya National Army, aimed at resisting the oppression faced by the minority. The government's denial of citizenship further restricted their access to healthcare, education, and employment.

In 1991, the military launched 'Operation Clean and Beautiful Nation,' a brutal crackdown that forced around 250,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh (Refugee Council of Australia, 2015). Tensions between communities in Rakhine State escalated into violence in 2012 following allegations of sexual assault and murder involving individuals from both Muslim and Buddhist groups. Without a formal investigation, armed groups and security forces launched a widespread crackdown on the Muslim minority. Homes were burned, and reports of abuse emerged, resulting in the displacement of over 10,000 Rohingya.

In 2016, the Arakan Salvation Army, a militant group, was formed and carried out limited attacks against police and security forces, citing retaliation for previous violence (Southeast Asia Program at Cornell University, 2019). In the subsequent year, around 30 police posts were assaulted, leading to the deaths of 12 police personnel.

This incident created a crisis among the Rohingya civilian population (McPherson, 2017). As a reaction, the security forces responded with extreme violence and suppression, resulting in the deaths of 6,700 Rohingya individuals, including women and children. According to Médecins Sans Frontières (2017), many lives were lost, and 288 villages were destroyed, leading to a severe refugee crisis. A United Nations assessment estimates that since the conflict began in August 2017, around 400,000 Rohingya men, women, and children have fled their homes in Myanmar's Rakhine State (Wildman, 2017).

Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Myanmar, asserted that 50% of the Muslim villages are secure and undamaged, just as they were prior to the occurrence of the crisis (Steger, 2022). This implies that the other 50% have been destroyed and set on fire. Furthermore, the military has strategically deployed landmines along the Dhaka-Bangladesh border, intending to impede the return of Rohingya individuals.

The Myanmar Government's Stance

The Myanmar government's response to allegations of human rights violations against the Rohingya Muslims reflects a persistent narrative of denial, framed around national security and sovereignty. Authorities have consistently rejected the use of the term Rohingya, instead insisting on Bengalis to reinforce the claim that the group consists of foreign nationals and illegal immigrants. In one instance, the government condemned a United Nations official for referring to the group as Rohingya, stating that the term is not recognized by the state (Ferrie, 2015). The hate speech has played a critical role in inciting and exacerbating violence against the Rohingya population

In response to international accusations of human rights violations, the Myanmar government portrayed its actions in Rakhine State as necessary measures to combat terrorism and maintain national security. For instance, Aung San Suu Kyi, during the peak of the Rohingya crisis, defended the military's actions by framing them as counter-insurgency operations rather than ethnic cleansing or genocide. In her speech at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in December 2019, Suu Kyi acknowledged that 'armed conflict' had occurred in Rakhine State. However, she avoided addressing the specific allegations of widespread atrocities against the Rohingya, such as mass killings, rapes, and forced displacement. Instead, she argued that 'if war crimes have been committed by members of Myanmar's Defence Services, they will be prosecuted through our military justice system, in accordance with Myanmar's Constitution' (Transcript: Aung San Suu Kyi's speech at the ICJ in full, 2019). This statement reflects the government's approach of denying systemic abuses while committing to address individual cases of misconduct internally, rather than through international mechanisms.

Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya by the Myanmar State?

Ethnic cleansing is generally understood as a deliberate policy by one ethnic or religious group to remove another group from specific geographic areas through violence, intimidation, or other coercive means. The systematic actions against the Rohingya population, including mass displacement, destruction of villages, and reports of violence, align with the 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' (*UN human rights chief points to 'textbook example of ethnic cleansing' in Myanmar*, 2017). The minority community has been subjected to violence, leading to relocations. These individuals have sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and primarily Bangladesh. The Myanmar state has consistently employed oppression and brutality as

a deliberate policy against the Rohingya population since the conflict began. According to the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission Report on Myanmar, the 600,000 Rohingya living in Myanmar fear persecution and the threat of genocide (OHCHR, 2019).

Critical stakeholders in the Myanmar-Rohingya conflict

Identifying the key actors in the Myanmar-Rohingya crisis is crucial, as these individuals and groups directly shape the conflict.

Internal Stakeholders

The Myanmar state, as the primary perpetrator of crimes against Muslims during the Myanmar-Rohingya Crisis, has consistently denied the Rohingya people's historical claims and refused to recognize them as a legitimate ethnic group within the nation (International Crisis Group, 2020). Moreover, the Buddhist nationalists have played a significant role in exacerbating the conflict, particularly by opposing the voting rights of the Rohingya. In 2015, these nationalists organized protests that led to President Thein Sein's temporary invalidation of the Rohingya's identification cards (Martin, 2017).

Moreover, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) was designated as a terrorist organization. This designation led to escalated violence against military and police forces, resulting in military counter-offensives that frequently targeted unarmed civilians. (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Also, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, has faced international criticism for failing to recognize the atrocities committed against the Rohingya by the Myanmar Army (Fortify Rights, 2018).

External Stakeholders

External actors are individuals or organizations that have raised concerns about the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. One prominent actor addressing the situation is the United Nations, which has repeatedly called on the Myanmar government to take meaningful action. However, these appeals have been largely dismissed by the government. According to a 2019 assessment by the UN Fact-Finding Mission, the conditions in Myanmar have continued to deteriorate, with a high risk that acts of genocide may occur (OHCHR, 2019). In addition, the UN panel recommended that Myanmar's military chief be prosecuted at the International Criminal Court for the crime of genocide. The United Nations Secretary-General has called for urgent action, highlighting that the situation has escalated into the world's fastest-growing refugee crisis and a profound humanitarian and human rights emergency (*Amid 'humanitarian and human rights nightmare' in Myanmar…*, 2017).

Analytical Framework

The Gurr Model of Ethnic Conflict serves as the theoretical framework for interpreting the collected data, emphasizing the role of deprivation and grievances in driving ethnic conflict. This makes it especially relevant for understanding the systemic marginalization and persecution of the Rohingya population. The analysis is guided by thematic interpretation and centers on three core aspects:

1. **Relative Deprivation:** Identifying disparities between the Rohingya and other groups in Myanmar.

2. **State Policies**: Assessing the actions and inactions of the Myanmar government that exacerbate tensions.
3. **International Responses**: Evaluating the role of global actors in addressing or neglecting the crisis.

Gurr's Model

According to the Gurr model, as shown in figure 1 below, depriving individuals within a group of fundamental rights leads to grievances within that group. The unattended grievances of the marginalized minority might lead to their mobilization against people in positions of authority, exacerbating discrimination and inequality. This mobilization can result in a rebellion, as the group may employ offensive strategies to safeguard its rights. The influential group responds to the uprising with repression, intensifying the strife and violence. This recurring pattern can persist, resulting in protracted confrontations that are difficult to resolve (Gurr, 1993).

Figure 1. Gurr Model

The Gurr Model of instrumental theories effectively elucidates the Myanmar state's perpetration of atrocities against its marginalized ethnic minority. To contribute to this debate, we will examine the dispute surrounding the patterns of warfare that emerged following the end of the Cold War. Gurr's (2000) article on 'Ethnic warfare on the Wane' provides evidence of a pacifying trend since the mid-1990s and predicts a further drop in ethnic conflict, countering the alarming forecasts of growing ethnic violence. By utilizing updated data on ethnic groups and their involvement in ethnic civil wars, this study assesses the accuracy of Gurr's claim regarding the decline in ethnic violence. The research examines whether increased government accommodative policies toward ethnic groups can reasonably account for the reduction in ethnic civil conflict. The findings of this study strongly support the view that promoting group rights, regional autonomy, power-sharing, democratization, and peacekeeping efforts are effective strategies for fostering peace.

The Rohingya, however, have endured prolonged marginalization and denial of fundamental rights by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar. Since the country transitioned to autonomy, they have been denied access to education, healthcare, employment, and citizenship, and have been stigmatized as undocumented immigrants. Prejudice and longstanding discrimination have led some members of the Rohingya community to mobilize and form armed groups, such as the ARSA, to defend their communities and resist systemic violence. In response, state authorities launched harsh crackdowns targeting insurgent groups like the Rohingya National Army and ARSA.

However, government actions extended far beyond these factions, resulting in widespread violence against civilians, including children, women, and the elderly, along with reports of rape, mass killings, and village burnings. These actions triggered a large-scale refugee crisis, as thousands of Rohingya fled to escape military brutality. This sustained pattern of violence and discrimination has evolved into an ethnic conflict, marked by the systematic targeting and expulsion of the Rohingya by those in power, particularly the Myanmar military. According to Gurr's theory, such outcomes

emerge from unresolved grievances, which fuel group mobilization, state repression, and ultimately, protracted and difficult-to-resolve conflict (Cederman et al., 2017)

Determinants of Structural Existence

Social unrest, upheavals, and military coups mark Myanmar's post-independence history. Moreover, the civil-military rift hampered the nation's development, well-being and growth. The military administration stirred nationalist sentiment among Buddhist extremists, leading to state-sanctioned discriminatory measures against Muslim ethnic minorities. In response to coercive state-led policies, the local factions took up arms, contesting the internal security of the state (Albert & Maizland, 2020). These security crises have forced minority communities to flee across borders, particularly into Bangladesh. Once displaced, these groups face systemic marginalization as they are designated illegal immigrants, exacerbating their vulnerability.

Military Rule and Rohingya Persecution

Since Myanmar came under military administration, the political environment has become increasingly hostile to the protection of human rights and individual freedoms. Numerous violent incidents involving human rights abuses have been reported. For example, a group of Buddhist extremists set fire to an entire Rohingya village, forcing its residents to flee their homes (*Buddhist mob sets fire to Rohingya village*, 2014). The state's discriminatory policies favour the Buddhist majority while targeting the Rohingya Muslim minority, appeasing hardliners and reinforcing military dominance. The rise of insurgent groups and ongoing power struggles between Buddhist nationalists and military factions have created a deeply troubling situation in which the Rohingya are systematically marginalized and forced to abandon ancestral lands (Rahman, 2024).

Socio-Economic Factors

Socioeconomic factors played a considerable role in exacerbating the crisis. The economic policies implemented by the Myanmar government were discriminatory, causing severe hunger and unemployment within a specific community. According to World Bank research, Rakhine is the most underdeveloped region in the country, with a poverty rate of 78% (International Organization for Migration, 2016). The prevailing socioeconomic conditions have compelled some members of the Rohingya community to resort to armed resistance as a way of asserting their rights. However, this has further heightened the existing security challenges. The revocation of their citizenship has resulted in their exclusion and marginalization, denying them access to economic opportunities and social rights.

Cultural Identity and Perception as Root Causes of Prejudice

Culture is deeply connected to individual identity, shaping a unique personality. The discrimination faced by the Rohingya partly stems from their distinct cultural and religious identity, which differentiates them from the majority in Myanmar. The Rohingya community speaks a distinct language that differs from the official language of Burma, and government policies have limited their ability to practise cultural traditions. For example, Muslim individuals are required to present photographs to authorities before marriage, where the bride is without a hijab and the groom has no beard (Albert & Maizland, 2020). Furthermore, due to their involvement in opposition during World War II, these two groups have a troubled past, resulting in longstanding

hostility. From the beginning, Buddhists have consistently rejected the presence of Rohingya in their territory.

Rohingya Migration Trends

The majority of Rohingya are migrating to Bangladesh, which borders Myanmar's Rakhine State. According to the UN Refugee Agency, nearly 900,000 Rohingya currently reside in the Cox's Bazar district, home to the largest refugee camp in the world. The Bangladeshi government has relocated some refugees living in Cox's Bazar to an offshore island. While they can move freely within the island, travelling to the mainland requires official permission. About 100,000 Rohingya have fled to Malaysia, where they live in harsh conditions due to their undocumented and stateless status (Kim, 2020). In India, roughly 8,000 Rohingya are officially registered; however, estimates suggest the real number could be as high as 40,000 (India Says to Deport All Rohingya..., 2017). Several Rohingya individuals have also sought sanctuary in Indonesia and Thailand.

Post-Coup Crisis and the Plight of the Rohingya

The Myanmar military staged a coup following the general elections, in which the NLD, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, secured a decisive victory. In the aftermath, the military seized power under Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing. The coup drew widespread international condemnation from the global media, the United Nations, and key actors, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. The country soon descended into civil unrest, a crisis further worsened by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The United Nations reported that attacks on healthcare workers significantly disrupted Myanmar's pandemic response (UN News, 2021). Amid this turmoil, the Rohingya population faced increased vulnerability, with restricted access to healthcare and necessities due to the military regime's negligence and discriminatory practices.

The Rohingya people, already displaced by military-led atrocities, continued to endure harsh conditions both in refugee camps in Bangladesh and within Myanmar's Rakhine State. In overcrowded and unsanitary camps, they lacked access to necessities and adequate humanitarian aid, which greatly worsened the spread of disease, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the international community, including the United Nations, exerted pressure on both Myanmar and Bangladesh to protect the Rohingya during the crisis, meaningful action remained limited. While countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States provided aid to improve camp infrastructure, these short-term measures proved insufficient. However, lasting solutions, such as political mediation, rehabilitation, and reconciliation, were essential. Without legal status, protection, or access to fundamental rights, the Rohingya remain stateless and vulnerable.

Weak Commitment to Liberal Democracy in Myanmar

Myanmar has shown a limited commitment to liberal democracy, mainly due to prolonged military dominance, ethnic divisions, and authoritarian traditions. Since independence in 1948, the military (Tatmadaw) has controlled the country for most of its history. Even during the democratic transition from 2011 to 2021 under Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD, the military retained significant power behind the scenes. Ethnic divisions have played a major role in weakening Myanmar's commitment to liberal democracy. The country is home to more than 135 recognized ethnic groups (Al Jazeera, 2017), yet the Bamar majority has historically dominated politics. This has led

to the marginalization of ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya, fueling long-standing tensions and conflict. The exclusion of these groups and the denial of equal rights have hindered the formation of a unified national identity and obstructed democratic development.

The Bamar majority's dominance has marginalized ethnic minorities, including the Rohingya, who are denied citizenship and fundamental rights under the 1982 Citizenship Law. This exclusionary policy framework reflects the limited pluralism essential for liberal democracy. According to Diamond (1999), liberal democracy requires not just competitive elections but also the protection of minority rights, adherence to the rule of law, and the separation of powers, all of which are deficient in Myanmar.

Contrasting International Responses: The Former Yugoslavia and the Rohingya Crisis

The contrasting international responses to the crises in the former Yugoslavia and Myanmar stem from factors such as geopolitical interests, the nature of each conflict, and the strategic importance of the regions. In the case of the former Yugoslavia, the international community, particularly NATO and European countries, intervened during the 1990s to halt ethnic cleansing and atrocities against Muslim minorities, most notably in Bosnia and Kosovo. Several factors drove this intervention. First, the conflict in Yugoslavia occurred in Europe, a region of significant strategic importance to Western powers, particularly during the post-Cold War period.

The proximity of the conflict to NATO member states and the potential for destabilisation in the heart of Europe made it a priority for international intervention. Additionally, the atrocities committed during the Yugoslav wars, including the Srebrenica massacre, generated widespread international outrage and pressure on governments to take action. The existence of robust international legal frameworks, such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), also facilitated coordinated intervention efforts.

In contrast, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has not seen the same level of international intervention, despite widespread human rights violations. Several factors contribute to this disparity. Myanmar is located in Southeast Asia, a region where Western powers have historically had less strategic interest compared to Europe. The geopolitical stakes are different, and the global powers involved are more focused on maintaining regional stability and balancing China's influence. The international response has been further complicated by the fact that Myanmar's military has maintained close ties with powerful neighbouring countries like China and India, which have significant economic and strategic interests in the region.

These countries have generally opposed foreign intervention in Myanmar's internal affairs, limiting the options available to the international community. Moreover, Myanmar's strategic partnerships with China and Russia have shielded it from substantive UN-led interventions, with both nations consistently vetoing resolutions at the Security Council. Additionally, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) adheres to the principle of non-interference, further limiting regional pressure. Furthermore, the international legal mechanisms available to address the Rohingya crisis have been less effective. While the United Nations has condemned the atrocities, efforts to hold Myanmar accountable through the International Criminal Court (ICC) or other international legal bodies have faced significant challenges, including opposition from key global powers.

International Approaches to the Rohingya Crisis: Pathways and Challenges

International community intervention, while challenging, remains a critical pathway for addressing the Rohingya crisis due to Myanmar's persistent disregard for minority rights and its entrenched authoritarian governance. Practical implementation could involve a phased approach: first, diplomatic pressure through sanctions and targeted actions against Myanmar's military leadership to weaken their hold on power; second, coordinated humanitarian efforts led by the United Nations and regional organizations to ensure the safety and rehabilitation of displaced Rohingya, and finally, international oversight of democratic reforms and reconciliation processes within Myanmar. Although intervention faces hurdles, such as geopolitical interests and regional non-interference norms, it stands as a feasible option when other avenues, including bilateral negotiations and internal reforms, have consistently failed.

Advocacy efforts should focus on addressing structural barriers within international institutions, such as the UN Security Council's veto mechanism, that often hinder timely and effective responses to humanitarian crises. Collaboration among middle-power nations, such as Canada and Norway, could spearhead initiatives to reform aspects of global governance, particularly in promoting more equitable and responsive international decision-making. Beyond the restoration of democratic governance, international engagement should prioritize the implementation of inclusive policies that safeguard the rights of ethnic minorities. In the context of Myanmar, this includes advocating for the revision of the 1982 Citizenship Law and the establishment of constitutional protections for minority groups. Regional organizations, particularly ASEAN, could assume a more active role by adopting human rights-based frameworks that move beyond the traditional principle of non-interference.

To address the Rohingya refugee crisis, international support in the form of financial and technical assistance to host countries, especially Bangladesh, is critical. A regionally coordinated framework, supported by ASEAN and relevant international bodies, could help standardize refugee protection, service delivery, and resettlement procedures. For longer-term integration, efforts should include access to education and vocational training to reduce dependency and promote self-reliance among refugees. While the notion of territorial autonomy remains complex and politically sensitive, future discussions on durable solutions must be grounded in international law and involve inclusive, multilateral dialogue to ensure legitimacy and feasibility.

Conclusion

Despite the imposition of sanctions and widespread condemnation from international actors, the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar remains dire. Those who remain in Rakhine State continue to be denied citizenship, security, recognition, and the basic opportunities essential for personal development. To address these longstanding grievances, the Myanmar authorities must engage in constructive dialogue with Rohingya representatives, including armed groups where relevant, and commit to granting full citizenship and legal recognition to the Rohingya people.

The international community, especially organizations like the United Nations and influential countries such as the United States and China, must increase its engagement. This includes implementing targeted sanctions in response to Myanmar's ongoing human rights abuses, along with consistent diplomatic pressure on its military leadership. Global stakeholders have a moral obligation to value human life and defend

the rights of persecuted minorities without discrimination. Humanitarian efforts must also be expanded to improve living conditions for displaced and stateless Rohingya populations, many of whom are suffering inhumane conditions. Restoring citizenship is crucial, not only to ensure access to basic rights but also to allow the Rohingya to live with dignity and security in their own country.

Furthermore, restoring democratic governance in Myanmar must remain a top priority. The military's systematic repression has destabilized the country and led to armed resistance, particularly in Rakhine State, which threatens both national and regional stability. In an age where statelessness strips people of identity and basic protections, the ongoing suffering of the Rohingya exposes major flaws in the international response, especially within organizations like the United Nations that were created to promote human rights and maintain global peace. The international community must act decisively, not only to alleviate suffering but also to reaffirm the principles of justice, dignity, and equal rights for everyone.

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Unveiling the Triggers: Analyzing factors behind the Targeted Killings of the Hazara Community in Balochistan, Pakistan

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Abstract

This article investigates the multifaceted factors contributing to the systematic and targeted killings of the Hazara community in Balochistan, Pakistan, a persistently vulnerable minority group in the country. The Hazara community has faced a relentless wave of violence and persecution for decades, often resulting in tragic loss of life. Through a comprehensive examination of historical, political, and social dynamics, this study seeks to shed light on the root causes and drivers of this ongoing crisis. A qualitative research method has been employed, with primary data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted via Zoom. Respondents included scholars, entrepreneurs, academics, activists from the Hazara community, as well as individuals from other communities residing in Balochistan. The analysis encompasses a range of critical aspects, including the social and historical context of the Hazara community in Balochistan, the influence of regional geopolitics, sectarian divisions, and the role of extremist elements. Furthermore, it explores the dynamics of state response, or the lack thereof, and its impact on the security and well-being of the Hazara community. The article also examines the broader implications of these targeted killings on human rights, social cohesion, and political stability in the region. By delving into these contributing factors, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the Hazara community in Balochistan and offers insights into potential strategies for mitigating violence and promoting greater tolerance and inclusivity in the region

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Introduction

Pakistan is a multicultural and multilingual society, with Islam being the predominant religion, followed by approximately 96% of the population (Mehfooz, 2021). Within Islam, there are various sects, with the majority of the population belonging to either the Sunni or Shia sects. The Hazara community in Pakistan predominantly adheres to the Shia sect. The inimitable facial features of the Hazaras and their attachment to the Shia community make them identifiable and vulnerable to attack (National Commission for Human Right Pakistan, 2018). The Hazaras comprise a smaller ethnic group within the Shia community, along with other ethnic groups who also adhere to Shia Islam (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023). Two key factors make them a prime target for sectarian extremist groups: their distinct physical features and the enclosed communities, or ghettoes, they have established in various parts of the country (Jafree, Nadir, Mahmood, & Burhan, 2023).

The most widely accepted theory regarding the origins of the Hazara people is that they are of mixed racial heritage with Mongolian ancestry. Certain Mongol tribes migrated to eastern Persia, present-day Afghanistan, where they integrated with the local population. Over time, this group formed a distinct community that came to be known as the Hazara (Yusuf, 2011). Although Hazaras are one of the major ethnic groups in Afghanistan, they have long faced political and educational marginalization. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, followed by prolonged conflict and civil war, significantly altered the lives of the Hazara population (Ashrafian, 2023), eventually forcing many to migrate to neighboring countries.

Today, more than 900,000 Hazaras reside in Pakistan, with approximately 500,000 living in Quetta, Balochistan. The majority of them belong to the Shia sect. In rural areas, Hazaras typically speak Hazaragi, an eastern dialect of Persian (Farsi), while many urban Hazara also speak other languages, including standard Persian, Urdu, and English (European Asylum Support Office, 2015).

Balochistan, a mineral-laden region has been a target of social and physical abuse and is known for military operations against the estranged elements. But now something more powerful and more damaging to the government has emerged; the Hazara genocide and the conspiracy theories that surround it. The Hazaras have been targeted by militants at their workplace, markets, mosques, while traveling to Iran, participating in religious processions of Shias, and while commuting for daily work (Ijaz, 2018). Sometimes they were attacked by suicide bombers, and gunmen opened fire at them which forced them to confine into ghettoization in Quetta's neighborhood. The restricted movement due to the fear of killings has caused economic hardships for the community. These overbearing circumstances which have truncated access to education, and economic incentives have forced them to flee form Quetta to other parts of Pakistan and abroad.

Therefore, in this research paper, we sought to answer the following question(s):
1. What is the historical origin of the conflict in the Hazara community?
2. What are the underlying factors that contribute to the vulnerability and exacerbating violence of the Hazara community in Balochistan?

Ethnic Conflict and State Response

Violent ethnic conflicts and ongoing tensions in Balochistan stem from multiple factors, including political marginalization, economic deprivation, and an enduring identity crisis. These issues have persisted for years without a comprehensive or effective response to address them. The state policy is a security-centric approach that includes military operations, forced disappearances, and suppression of dissent, which has exacerbated grievances among Baloch nationalists. The lack of implementation of the NFC award and the 18th Constitutional Amendment has been considered a failure to address the core grievances of the Baloch people (Ejaz et al., 2023).

The role of geopolitical rivalries (India, Iran, and the US) and external interventions, exploiting the grievances of the people in an already volatile region, fuels the conflict further, complicating the conflict resolution in Balochistan. Despite the abundance of natural resources in Balochistan and their continuous extraction, the region remains underdeveloped due to insecurity and the mismanagement of these resources (Mushtaq & Khan,2023).

Historical perspective, Dual Focus on Religious and Ethnic Conflict

The historic, political, socio-economic factors shaped the current political and security landscape of Balochistan. Siddiqi (2012) traces the history of Balochistan from the colonial era to the post-9/11 period to explain how external interventions, including those by the US, Iranian concerns, and Pakistani state policies, have escalated tensions in the region. The study is notable for its balanced approach to religious militancy e.g., Lashkar-e-Taiba, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jundullah and ethnic nationalism e.g., Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and other nationalist groups. It explains how these distinct, yet mutually reinforcing forces interact in ways that complicate Pakistan's security landscape. The historical challenges of Balochistan and its dual, intertwined dynamics of jihadist militancy and ethnic insurgency contribute to a broader societal security dilemma.

In their article, *Sectarian Violence in Balochistan and the Theory of Othering* Muhammad, Wan Ali, Furuoka, and Yusoff (2024) analyzed sectarian violence in Quetta, Balochistan, through the lens of the theory of Othering, a sociological concept that explains how dominant groups marginalize or dehumanize those perceived as different. The article focuses on the marginalization of the Shia Hazara community in Quetta and explores how they have been excluded and targeted by Sunni majority groups. It argues that the sectarian divide has been intensified by political, economic, and historical factors, which have led to the Hazara community's political marginalization, violence, discrimination, and socio-political exclusion.

The ethnic nationalist movements, separatist, and religiously motivated militant groups are actively involved in the destabilization of Balochistan. The lack of education, lack of infrastructure, and political marginalization of Baloch people are the factors contributing to the recruitment of militants by militant groups including BLA, Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), TTP, and Ansarul Rehmat-ul-Islam (ARE) (Azam, 2020) .

Mental Health of Hazara Community

There is alarming level of PTSD, depression and anxiety among Hazara Shias and the community's daily struggle and fear of violence discrimination, economic hardship and

social isolation due to systemic violence, discrimination, and systemic neglect (Jafree, Hasnain Nadir, Mahmood, & Burhan, 2023).

Identity Politics against Baloch in Iran and Pakistan: Trapped between Religion and Ethnicity. It examines how the intersection of ethnicity, religion, and regional dynamics has led to targeted violence and discrimination against Hazara Shias in the province (Siddiqi, 2012). Pakistan and Iran contextualize the current grievances within colonial and post-colonial power dynamics.

The interplay between British and Persian expansionist policies is traced to uncover the root causes of Baloch fragmentation, offering a compelling analysis of the Baloch people's plight in both Iran and Pakistan. This analysis is framed within the broader dynamics of identity politics, structural violence, and state fragility. Khan and Laoutides (2024) apply Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence, providing a strong analytical foundation for the study. They argue that institutionalized discrimination and systematic economic deprivation have fueled conflict and resistance to state policies among the Baloch population. Identity markers such as ethnicity and sectarian affiliation shape the nature of Baloch resistance differently in Pakistan and Iran. This unique status of the Baloch people contributes to a deeper understanding of state–minority conflicts in both countries.

Hussain, Ali, and David (2022) trace the roots of violence against the Hazara Shia community from the colonial era to contemporary times, examining various socio-political factors that have contributed to their marginalization and persecution. The study explores the role of identity politics in fueling sectarian conflict against the Hazara Shias in Balochistan.

Meanwhile, Shah (2019) investigates how sectarian violence against the Hazara Shia community is portrayed in Pakistani media. The study analyzes the framing techniques used by mainstream media outlets in reporting Hazara Shia killings and examines how such media representations influence public opinion and governmental responses.

Kamruzzaman, Williams, Wardak, Cowley, Ayobi, Zadran, and Kabir (2022) examine the socioeconomic effects of sectarian violence on the Hazara Shia population in Quetta, Pakistan. The study focuses on the impact of continuous targeted attacks, including psychological trauma, economic marginalization, and displacement, as well as the long-term consequences for the community's livelihoods and overall well-being.

Methodology

This study conducted semi-structured interviews with members of the Hazara community, including leaders, activists, scholars, entrepreneurs, academics, and other relevant stakeholders via Zoom. The interviews were scheduled based on participant preferences and feasibility, with detailed notes taken to capture important insights and nuances. Open-ended questions were used to collect qualitative data on participants' perspectives, experiences, and views related to the targeted killings and the broader sociopolitical context.

All interview materials were transcribed and carefully reviewed. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, particularly concerning the persecution of the Hazara community, the anonymity of respondents has been strictly maintained. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and divergent viewpoints. To incorporate a broad spectrum of perspectives, secondary data from credible sources was also gathered and analyzed. These sources include reports, news articles, academic research papers, government documents, and publications by

human rights organizations. This secondary data serves to contextualize and reinforce the findings from the interviews.

Purposive sampling was used to select interview participants with firsthand knowledge of the Hazara community's experiences, ensuring diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Thematic Breakdown of Local Voices

The following themes have been extracted from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with respondents from the Hazara community residing in various parts of Balochistan. These themes highlight the underlying reasons behind the targeted killings of Hazaras in the region. The identified factors have been categorized and are elaborated in the table below:

Table 1. Thematic Analysis

Theme I	**The Continuation of Ethnic Rancor:** This theme highlights the persistent tensions between different ethnic groups.
Theme II	**Communal Factor**: This theme examines how communal relationships and societal dynamics within the community influence the groups. Social cohesion, local culture, and community engagement play significant roles in shaping attitudes and behaviours.
Theme III	**Targeted Sectarian Violence:** This theme addresses the ongoing issue of sectarian violence faced by the Hazara community, particularly targeted attacks carried out by extremist groups. This violence is driven by deep-rooted ethnic and sectarian tensions and has resulted in significant loss of life and community trauma.
Theme IV	**Involvement of the Hazara Community in Intra-Community Killings** This theme explores the troubling phenomenon of intra-community violence within the Hazara community
Theme V	**Land Mafia:** This theme examines the influence of land mafia activities on the Hazara community, where illegal land grabs and conflicts over property rights have exacerbated socio-economic challenges. The land mafia often targets vulnerable communities, exploiting their situation for profit and creating an environment of fear and instability.
Theme VI	**Terrorist infiltration from Afghanistan**: This theme addresses the issue of terrorist infiltration from Afghanistan into the Hazara regions, where extremist groups exploit the porous borders to launch attacks, recruit members, and instigate violence. This phenomenon poses a significant threat to the safety and stability of the Hazara community.
Theme VII	**Geo-Strategic Significance of Balochistan and the Role of External Actors**: This theme explores the geo-strategic importance of Balochistan, a region rich in natural resources and

	vital for regional connectivity, and how external powers influence local dynamics. The interests of various countries in the area can exacerbate tension and conflict, impacting the Hazara community and other local groups
Theme VIII	**The Role of Iran:** This theme examines the complex role of Iran in relation to the Hazara community, particularly considering historical, cultural, and political ties. Iran's influence can have both supportive and destabilizing effects on the Hazara population, shaped by its geopolitical interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Determinants of Ethnic Cleansing of Hazaras

The Continuation of Ethnic Rancor

The ethnic cleansing of the Hazara community is not a new phenomenon. They have been the target of ethnic cleansing, persecution, massacre, and target killings in Afghanistan (Amin & Muhammad, 2023). The massacre of Hazaras in Mazar-i-Sharif, the Robatak Pass, the Yakawlang, and the Afshar operation by the Taliban is the manifestation of the ethnic rancor against the community. The Afghan Taliban leaders have threatened them to leave the country or to convert to the Sunni school of thought. In the mid-19th century, their brutal history of persecution began when more than half their population was killed or forced into exile (Yusuf, 2011). The extremist outfits i.e. Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) and LeJ fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan and were involved in the ethnic cleansing of Hazaras. These outfits have strong links with Afghan-based terrorist factions who consider Hazaras infidels. The Afghan Hazaras fled to Balochistan which gave rise to the persecution of Hazaras in the province.

The fall of the Taliban and the installation of the new political government in Afghanistan in 2001 ended the existing threats and chauvinism that they were experiencing earlier (Amin & Muhammad, 2023). However, the attacks against Hazaras by the Taliban forces have been documented even during President Karzai's regime. The fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan and later their settlement in Quetta has made the situation more perilous for the Hazaras in Quetta (Khan,2008). The Presence of LeJ, SSP, and the groups that had the support of the Taliban in Pakistan has increased the security risks for Hazaras living in Balochistan. Different factors are contributing to the killings of Hazaras in Balochistan, but the continuation of these fanatical sentiments is one of the factors.

Communal factors

The majority of migrated Hazaras settled in Quetta and its outskirts. Quetta is one of the most polarized and ethnically divided cities in Pakistan. The fact that major ethnic factions, Baloch, Pashtun, and Hazaras, are geographically concentrated and segregated has played a huge role in facilitating and reinforcing the ethnic divide (Kakar, 2019). Ethnic identity has deeply permeated the socio-political fabric of Quetta, to the extent that nearly all political parties are organized along ethnic lines, regardless of whether their agendas are explicitly ethnically motivated. The Hazara community holds some political representation in the Balochistan Provincial Assembly. The Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) currently has two seats in the assembly. In addition, the community has established the Tehreek-e-Suba Hazara (TSH), a party that advocates

for the creation of a separate province to safeguard Hazara interests and ensure political and social protection. Hazaras have distinct facial features that make them easily identifiable, distinguishing them not only from other ethnic groups but also from other Shia communities in Balochistan and across Pakistan. Because of this visibility, many Hazaras have been forced to conceal their ethnic identity, particularly when traveling outside their community enclaves. In recent years, due to rising societal discrimination and persistent security threats, many Hazaras have relocated to areas predominantly inhabited by members of their own community. As a result, for their own safety, they often avoid interactions with outsiders and take precautions to hide their identity in public spaces.

Targeted Sectarian Violence by Extremist Groups

Sectarian tensions in Quetta date back to colonial-era policies and were further intensified in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, due to the rise of religious militancy, the influence of the Taliban, and ongoing geopolitical proxy conflicts. The persecution of Hazaras in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime negatively impacted the inter-religious harmony that had existed in Pakistan prior to the 1980s. Historically, Sunni-Shia conflict was rare in Pakistan, and especially in Balochistan.

Many Hazaras migrated from Afghanistan and settled in Quetta, where they established distinct enclaves within the provincial capital. The first notable instance of sectarian violence occurred in 1999, when a member of the Hazara community was attacked. This incident laid the groundwork for future grievances and rising tensions between the two sects (Grare, 2007).

Instability in Afghanistan, coupled with the U.S.-led War on Terror, prompted religious extremists to flee into Pakistan through its porous border, thereby undermining the region's peace and social cohesion (Tellis, 2008).

Before the 1980s, sectarian violence between the Sunni and Shia was rare and usually transpired during the Muharram processions (Gonzalez, 2013). However, several major regional and domestic developments served as catalysts for the rise of sectarian politics and subsequent violence. These included the 1979 Iranian Revolution, General Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies in Pakistan, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year. Together, these events significantly altered the religious and political landscape of the region, fuelling sectarian tensions across Pakistan. The Shia community harboured resentment toward Zia-ul-Haq's Islamization policies, which favoured the Deobandi Sunni school of thought and were closely aligned with Saudi interests. The growing influence of the Deobandi tradition contributed to the radicalization of both Sunni and Shia communities in Pakistan (Fatıma, 2018).The Sunni community consider Hazaras as 'others' that serves to justify their dehumanization, exclusion, violence and to deny them their basic human rights which includes healthcare, right to education, and the right to freedom of movement (Muhammad et al., 2024).

Following the Iranian Revolution, the new Iranian government began supporting the Shia community in Pakistan, while the Sunni community received backing from Saudi Arabia. Shias perceived the growing influence of the Deobandi school under Zia-ul-Haq's regime as a direct threat to their existence. In response, they established the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Jafaria (TNF) in 1979 to defend their religious and political rights. In reaction, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) supported the formation of SSP, aimed at countering Shia influence in Pakistani society (Abbas, 2010).

The Shia-Sunni conflict escalated over time, with both sides engaging in targeted assassinations of military and government officials, as well as civilians. These sectarian tensions persisted even after the death of Zia-ul-Haq. In subsequent years, both TNF (later known as TJP) and SSP attempted to enter mainstream politics by aligning with major political parties such as the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), though these alliances were short-lived.

Eventually, both organizations splintered into more radical offshoots, Sipah-e-Muhammad (SM) on the Shia side and LeJ on the Sunni side. Since 2003, the Hazara community has been systematically targeted by groups like LeJ, illustrating how sectarian violence against Hazaras has been perpetuated under ideological and political patronage.

Following the War on Terror, Pakistan experienced a surge in terrorist activities. Extremist groups operating in and across the Afghan border, often with external support, carried out targeted attacks throughout the country. Their objective was to destabilize Pakistan by striking strategically sensitive areas to create widespread impact. These religiously motivated groups also deliberately targeted the country's ethnic and sectarian fabric, exacerbating existing divisions within society (Abbasi, 2013). Pakistan is a country with diverse ethnic, and cultural communities. These groups target the Baloch, Pashtun, and Hazaras to create fault lines in it. With this regard, the Hazaras are the most vulnerable and easily identifiable due to their distinctive features.

Most recently, in December 2020, eleven coal miners were brutally killed by an extremist group. The miners were abducted, and after an identity parade confirmed their affiliation with the Hazara community, they were executed at close range by the terrorists. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for the attack (Yousafzai, 2021, January 3). This is not the first targeted attack on the Hazara community; it's a continuation of targeted attacks on the community by extremist groups. Members of the Hazara community have been targeted by extremist outfits through various violent means, including suicide bombings, planted explosives, and abductions. Both the IS and LeJ claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at a market in Hazara Town, where 21 people were killed, including nine Hazaras and two security personnel. One of the deadliest attacks on the community occurred in 2013 at a snooker club, where an initial explosion was followed by a car bomb ten minutes later, resulting in 96 deaths and injuring nearly 150 people (Ahmad, 2019).

In 2014, a bus carrying Hazara pilgrims returning from Iran was attacked in Mastung. Militant groups such as TTP and its splinter factions have claimed responsibility for 467 attacks across Pakistan. In 2016, another bus transporting Hazaras was ambushed by a gunman, killing four women and injuring one other passenger. In a separate incident in 2017, four members of the Hazara community were killed in a targeted shooting by an unidentified sniper (Ahmad, 2019).

LeJ is the radical offshoot of SSP that has had little bearing on ties was created in 1996 by Riaz Basra, Malik Ishaq, and Akram Lahori. The group conducted attacks against the Shia community to marginalize them and in 2001 President Musharraf banned the group to curb the sectarian violence. The group has been implicated by security in the two incidences of bombing Shia mosques in 2000 and 2004. They have also targeted government officials, security personnel, and Christians throughout Pakistan (Abou, 2020).

In 2011, the LeJ issued a written threat against the Shia community which was circulated in Quetta. The letter was written both in English and Urdu addressing the Shia population that they are worthy of killings and Pakistan is a country where they have no right to live. In the letter, they referred to the killings of Hazaras in Afghanistan as a successful *Jihad* and urged them to continue this in Pakistan until they completely wipe out the Hazaras from every nick and corner of Pakistan. Furthermore, they mentioned that they would make Quetta the graveyard of Shi'ite Hazaras and would destroy their businesses and houses by bombing them (Human Rights Watch.,2014).

Figure 1. Fatalities from Sectarian Violence in Province (2011 – 2018)
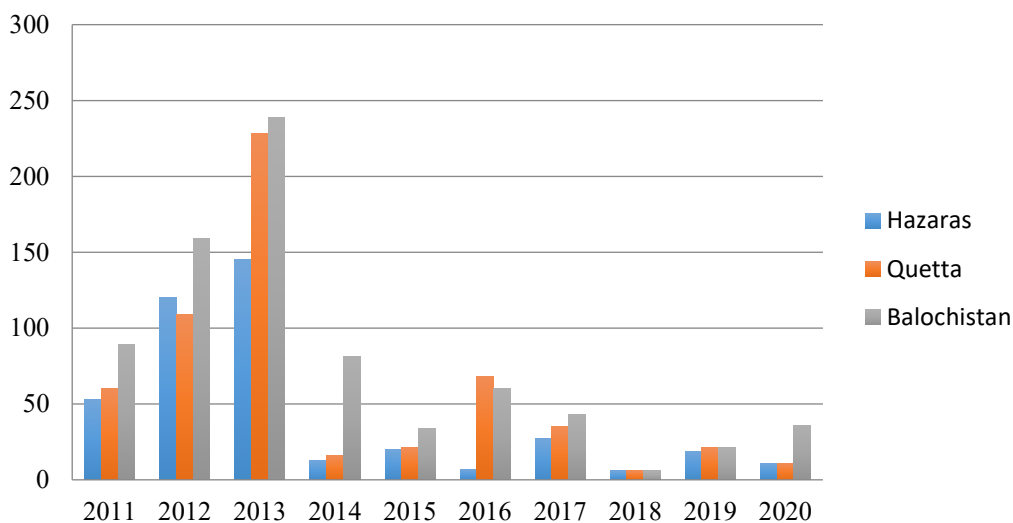
Source: Author

The figure above clearly illustrates how sectarian violence in Balochistan has disproportionately targeted members of the Hazara community. Between 2013 and 2018, LeJ and its affiliated groups, along with the Islamic State (IS), claimed responsibility for 399 and 271 attacks across Pakistan, respectively. LeJ and its offshoots, whose stated objective is to transform Pakistan into a Sunni-only state through violent means, saw a decline in activity in 2018 due to intensified military operations.

LeJ has maintained strong links with al-Qaeda and has claimed responsibility for the majority of attacks against the Hazara community. The group's first major assault on Hazaras occurred during Friday prayers in 2003 in Quetta, Balochistan, resulting in 53 deaths and 57 injuries. The deadliest episode of sectarian violence in Pakistan since independence took place in January and February 2013, when coordinated bombings in Quetta killed at least 180 Hazaras. LeJ claimed responsibility for both of these devastating attacks (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Figure 2. Hazaras Casualties (2013 – 2020)
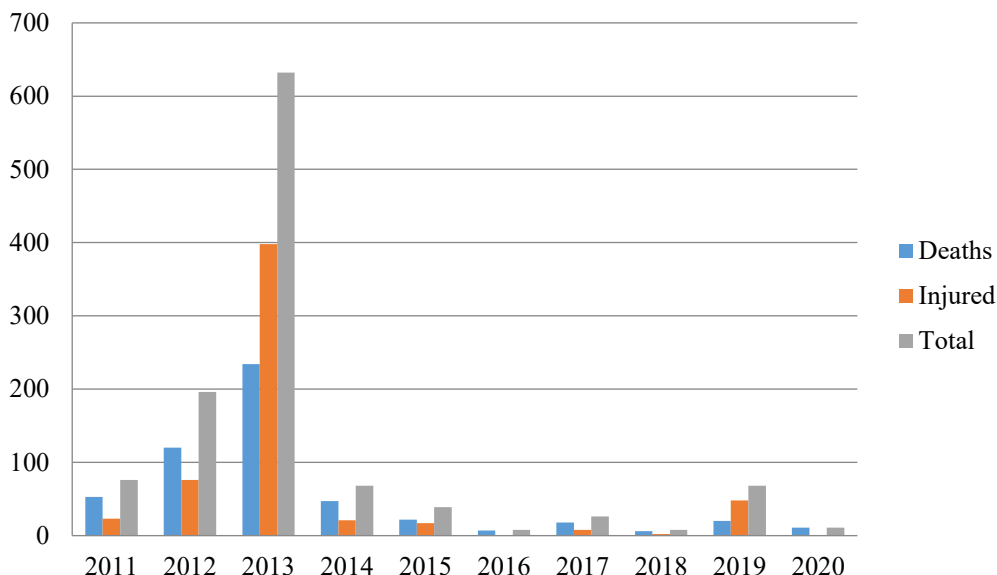
Source: Author

When asked about the involvement of LeJ in the killings, the majority of respondents from the Hazara community believed that while LeJ had been active in the past, its name is now being used by other destabilizing forces. In reference to the recent attack on coal miners, which was claimed by the IS, the community was also asked about IS's role in the targeted killings of Hazaras. Most respondents believed that IS was indeed involved, while a few disagreed, and the rest were uncertain about attributing the violence to ISIS as a sole actor.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in its 2018 report, noted that "sectarian terrorism in Balochistan has disproportionately targeted the Hazara community" (National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, 2018). This pattern is clearly reflected in the data presented in the graph above (figure 2), which shows a sharp spike in casualties in 2013, over 600 deaths and injuries combined, marking it as the deadliest year in the decade for the Hazara community. However, after 2014, the frequency and intensity of such attacks significantly declined, suggesting a shift in the nature of the violence. However, this alone cannot be considered the primary factor behind the persecution. Shia Muslims living in other parts of Balochistan, outside of Quetta, have not been similarly targeted, which supports the argument that these killings are not solely based on religious identity, as only Hazaras appear to be systematically targeted (National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, 2018).

When asked whether a sectarian element was involved in the killings of Hazaras, the majority of respondents agreed that sectarianism is indeed a factor. However, a significant number emphasized that it should not be seen as the only factor behind the violence.

Not a Sectarian Issue

The majority of respondents expressed the view that the persecution of Hazaras is not merely a sectarian issue. They noted that Hazaras and other communities had been living together peacefully in Pakistan before this wave of violence began. Even today, Shias in other parts of Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, continue to live in relative harmony. An analysis of sectarian attacks in Balochistan reveals that in many cases, Hazaras were specifically targeted and killed following an identification process.

When asked whether the killings of Hazaras a religious or political phenomenon are, most respondents believed that both religion and politics play a role. One interviewee suggested that the widespread belief in sectarian motives is a constructed narrative, stating that it is "a conceived notion inculcated in the minds of people." A Hazara student, currently studying at a private university in Lahore, echoed this sentiment. He remarked that this narrative has been deliberately injected into the community, fostering mistrust and intolerance between Sunni and Shia Hazaras. He further described the violence as a proxy war imposed on the Hazara community in the name of ethnicity and religion.

Many members of the Hazara community asserted that their persecution is not primarily religious in nature but rather exploited by religious groups to justify the violence. To support their argument, they pointed out that Hazaras have been attacked even in areas where extremist groups like LeJ have no established presence. Sajjad Ali, a painter, remarked, "These killings are not sectarian, but sectarianism is used as a justification. We have been living here peacefully for over 100 years. This is a recent phenomenon, deliberately introduced to create discord between Sunni and Shia communities." The peaceful coexistence of Shias in other parts of Balochistan, such as Jafarabad and Muradabad, further supports the argument that the persecution of Hazaras is not purely sectarian.

Involvement of the Hazara Community in Intra-Community Killings

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), in its 2018 report, documented responses from members of the Hazara community who speculated that some individuals from within their own community might be involved in the targeted killings (National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, 2018). In the present study, participants were also asked about this possibility. The majority of respondents firmly denied any such involvement by their community members. They emphasized that the Hazara community is largely educated and actively contributes to its own socio-economic upliftment. However, a minority of respondents acknowledged the possibility that a few individuals might be complicit in the violence.

One respondent, himself a direct victim of targeted attacks, categorically rejected the claim of internal involvement. He stated:

> Our community is very peace-loving. It is a part of our religious belief that if you kill one innocent person, it is as if you have killed all of humanity. We are followers of Hazrat Hussain, who sacrificed his life for the sake of peace and justice.

This perspective underscores the collective belief within the community that their values and identity are fundamentally opposed to violence and sectarian hatred.

Land Mafia

The Hazara community in Quetta enjoys relative socio-economic prosperity compared to other ethnic groups in Balochistan. With a higher level of education, Hazaras have secured a considerable number of positions in the public sector. Hazara women, in particular, are known for their entrepreneurial spirit; many have established small businesses in central parts of the city. Families that have lost their male breadwinners due to targeted violence often rely on women who now work in various fields to support their households. Despite living in a strictly traditional society, the Hazaras are notably progressive, and their women are socially active and independent.

The community has made notable strides in areas such as education, sports, and trade, surpassing many other native groups in the region. According to respondents from within the Hazara community, their socio-economic advancement may be one of the underlying reasons for their persecution. Many Hazaras are involved in the construction industry, having built markets, shopping malls, and commercial buildings across Quetta.

By 2009, the pattern of violence shifted. Terrorist groups began targeting professionals, businessmen, and influential individuals within the Hazara community. Prior to this, the primary focus of extremist violence had been on Shia religious processions and gatherings. In 2009, a Hazara cardiologist was assassinated by LeJ while parking his car at his clinic. In 2010, Dr. Nadir, another prominent Hazara figure, was shot along with his driver. These targeted killings of high-profile individuals marked a turning point; thereafter, all segments of the Hazara population became targets, whether through bombings or targeted shootings by extremist groups. The details of some of the killings are illustrated in the table below

Table 2. Hazara Killings (2000 – 2012)

	Year	Name	Profession
1.	*August 2001*	Ali Madad Changezai	Senior employee of the State Bank
2.	*August, 2001*	Abid Abbas Naqvi	Professor
3.	*September, 2001*	Attiq Hassan Naqvi	Professor of sociology
4.	*March 2002*	Haji Muhammad Jan	Senior customs officer
5.	*August,2009*	Dr. Abid Iqbal	Cardiologist
6.	*January 2010*	Dr. Nadir Khan	
7.	*April,2010*	Syed Ayub Shah	Community leader
8.	*April, 2010*	Ashraf Zaidi	Bank manager
9.	*May, 2010*	Dr.Qamber Hussain	Physician
10.	*June, 2011*	Syed Abrar Hussain	Deputy Director Sports Board and Boxing Olympian
11.	*August,2011*	Zulfiqar Naqvi	Judge
12.	*January,2012*	Walyat Hussain	Federal Investigation Inspector
13.	*January 2012*	Abid Hussain Nazish	Television Actor
14.	*April, 2012*	Mohammad Ali Ariz	Medical Doctor
15.	*October, 2012*	Sikandar Ali	Worked at the Finance Ministry of Balochistan's Government

Source: Author

Terrorist groups have targeted a wide range of individuals in Balochistan, including academics, businessmen, students, vendors, public sector employees, and artists. In 2010, nearly 80 Shias, mostly from the Hazara community, were killed in a series of attacks, with both the brutality and frequency of these incidents escalating in 2011. By 2012, terrorists began targeting individuals or groups with prominent social status. That year, six Hazara shopkeepers were killed by gunmen in Quetta. Another tragic incident involved an attack on a university bus, in which four Hazara students were killed and 28 others injured. These incidents pointed toward the possible involvement of the land mafia, as the victims were often economically stable individuals.

In April 2012, gunmen carried out a targeted attack on Prince Road, killing six Hazara shopkeepers. The motive appeared to be not just sectarian hatred but also the strategic displacement of Hazaras from economically valuable areas. These attacks forced affected families to flee, abandoning their businesses and homes, thereby enabling the land mafia to seize their properties. When respondents were asked about this issue, the majority agreed that the land mafia was likely involved in the killings. According to members of the Hazara community, one of the key motivations behind their persecution is their economic success. Hazaras owned many shops and markets in Quetta and enjoyed socio-economic prosperity. The land mafia would often pressure them to sell their properties, and if they refused, hired assassins to eliminate them.

Popular commercial areas such as Sunheri and Shabnam Markets on Jinnah Road were predominantly Hazara-owned and attracted more customers than those run by other communities. Additionally, the Hazara community's literacy rate surpasses that of neighboring Pashtun and Baloch populations. As one community member told the researcher, if there are two or three Hazara students in a class, they will surely be the top three students. This combination of educational achievement and economic success has made the Hazaras a target for both ideological and material motives.

Terrorist infiltration from Afghanistan

Pakistan has a long border with Afghanistan from where the terrorists intruded in Pakistan during the war on terror. According to the National Commission Human Rights report (2018), the terrorists infiltrating Pakistan from Afghanistan are responsible for the killings. These terrorists have established links with the local community and hired them to conduct terrorist attacks. They were not only involved in the killings of Hazaras but also targeted the Balochis and Pashtuns. The question was asked by the members of the Hazara community about the involvement of terrorists who have infiltrated Afghanistan in Pakistan. The majority were of the view that terrorists who intruded in Pakistan during the '80s and later during the war on terror were carrying out these attacks. Terrorists from Afghanistan have been involved in the killings of not only Hazaras but also Balochis, Pashtuns, and Punjabis who have been residing there for years. They have been forced to migrate to other areas of Pakistan.

Geo-Strategic Importance of Balochistan and Involvement of External Actors

Another important factor is the geo-strategic location of Balochistan and its significance for both regional and extra-regional players. Among these, India emerges as the most prominent actor. Balochistan is the centrepiece of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and any instability in the region can hinder the progress of this project, which is expected to bring prosperity and development to the province.

Pakistan has released a dossier detailing India's involvement in destabilizing Balochistan and its malign intentions against CPEC (Khan & Batool, 2025). India has been channelling funds to fuel unrest in Pakistan and is also investing heavily in Afghanistan, particularly in areas near Pakistan's border. The persecution of the Hazara community has the potential to spark sectarian conflict within Pakistan, especially given that the Shia community constitutes a significant portion of the population. This unrest could not only destabilize the country internally but also increase international pressure on Pakistan. Any instability within Pakistan ultimately serves India's broader strategic objective of undermining the country. Moreover, Balochistan's valuable resources such as the Reko Diq mines and Gwadar port which attract global interest from powers like China and India, further entangle local conflicts within the broader geopolitical rivalries of the region and beyond.

The role of Iran in Hazara Context

The geopolitical context of sectarian violence in Pakistan cannot be overlooked, particularly given the deeply rooted perception that the Shia community receives support from Iran. This narrative gained prominence during the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, who favored Sunni religious parties, especially anti-Shia groups, while Pakistan's diplomatic relations with Iran reached their lowest point. Ejaz Haider, in one of his columns, observed that the perception of the Hazara community as a proxy of Iran still persists in Balochistan (Haider, 2011).

When respondents were asked about the involvement of Iran, India, and Saudi Arabia in the conflict in Balochistan, the majority expressed uncertainty regarding Iran's direct role in the killings. However, one artist from the Hazara community shared the view that their community is caught in a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. He explained:

> Within our own community, there are two types of groups, those who rigidly follow the directions of religious scholars, and those who are liberal and progressive. Some individuals in our community have studied in madrassas funded by Iran and Iraq. While the Iraqi-funded madrassas tend to avoid political involvement, the Iranian-funded ones interfere in political matters and often brainwash students. It's very difficult to challenge these religious fanatics. Liberal and secular Hazaras oppose their influence.

Similarly, a student from the Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUITEMS) remarked that although Tehran University offers degrees in disciplines like Musicology and Visual Arts, their proxies, particularly those backed by religious clerics, consider such fields forbidden in Pakistan. He emphasized that these groups exploit religious sentiments to advance their own agendas (personal communication, 2024).

Conclusion

This egregious violence against the Hazara community can only be curbed when both federal and provincial governments promote good governance by holding terrorists accountable and dismantling their capacity to act with impunity. The government, judiciary, and security agencies must uphold international human rights obligations by prosecuting those responsible for these killings. Although Pakistan's state institutions officially deny any ties with militant organizations, such as Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)

and LeJ, as clearly stated by Major General Asim Bajwa, former Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), in 2013, the state still bears the primary responsibility to protect its citizens from all forms of security threats.

The Pakistani government must take immediate action to investigate and address the root causes of sectarian killings across the country. Focus group interviews and surveys conducted by students, workers, academics, and civil society organizations, as well as reports from national and international bodies, indicate a range of factors contributing to the persecution of Hazaras. These include both internal and external variables. One key observation is that the killings are not purely sectarian in nature, as Shia communities in other parts of Balochistan live in relative peace. This supports the argument that Hazaras are specifically targeted, rather than Shias in general. Many respondents emphasized that these acts are not religiously motivated, noting that members of different sects previously coexisted peacefully in the region.

An analysis of killings from 2012 to 2020 reveals patterns of targeted violence against the Hazara community by extremist groups. The most significant surge in attacks occurred between 2010 and 2013, followed by a steady decline. Following the tragic Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar, the Government of Pakistan launched the National Action Plan (NAP) to combat terrorism. In its aftermath, both federal and provincial governments implemented preventive measures to contain the violence, particularly in Quetta. Enhanced security for Hazara neighborhoods and for pilgrims traveling to Iran contributed to the decline in attacks on the community.

Nonetheless, the government must continue to respond to the genuine concerns of the Hazara community and hold perpetrators accountable. The data collected in this study shows that violence is not driven by a single factor; instead, it results from a complex interplay of various influences, amounting to a campaign of ethnic cleansing.

Although the government has disbanded and disarmed LeJ and other militant groups involved in sectarian violence, broader and deeper investigations are still needed. All internal and external forces behind the killings must be identified and brought to justice. There is an urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms to address the challenges faced by the Hazara community. These should include strengthened security arrangements, targeted economic support for marginalized groups, the promotion of interfaith dialogue, legal reforms, and inclusive development to help mitigate sectarian violence in Quetta and across Balochistan.

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Pakistan's Military Leadership and Defense Diplomacy: Managing Strategic Partnership with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates

*Tyela Shaffan[1] & Saira Aquil[2]

Abstract

The emerging role of Pakistan's defense diplomacy has catalyzed change in the country, with Pakistan receiving international commendation for its growing effectiveness, signaling positive progress in global perceptions of its military institutions. Viewed through the lens of a partnership between soft and hard power, defense diplomacy is not confined solely to military affairs but extends its scope to encompass both competition and cooperation among states. Pakistan's relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are largely dependent on how Pakistan carries out defense diplomacy to manage its alliance, as Pakistan's relations with these states are more defense-oriented. The Pakistan military has changed its course of action and strategic outlook of policies to play a more decisive role in regional and international diplomatic collaboration and security. Therefore, the most suitable approach is to maintain relations with both countries on a strictly bilateral track, setting aside emotional considerations and focusing instead on the state's foreign policy objectives, while effectively managing external factors that may impact these relationships. In this context, the application of defense diplomacy by the Pakistan military is particularly apt, enabling the use of soft power strategies to de-escalate tensions.

Keywords
Alliance Management, Defense Diplomacy, National Interest, Military Leadership, KSA, UAE

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Introduction

In an era of shifting alliances and regional realignments, Pakistan's defense diplomacy has emerged as a cornerstone of its foreign policy, particularly with pivotal Gulf states like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These alliances are not just mere strategic partnerships bound by historical ties, shared religious values, and mutual security interests. Instead, they are lifelines in a geopolitically volatile region. However, it should be noted that the complexities of modern diplomacy demand more than tradition; instead, they require innovation, adaptability, and leadership. As global and regional dynamics shift, these relationships face new challenges and opportunities, particularly with the growing influence of India in Gulf affairs and the increasing reliance of Pakistan on Gulf economic assistance.

Defense Diplomacy plays a significant role in fulfilling a state's diplomatic and security objectives. Given this, Pakistan's military leadership has adopted a more assertive role in managing relationships with old as well as new friends. The all-weather friendship with China, coupled with the strategic competition between the US and China, has brought defense diplomacy to the forefront in safeguarding Pakistan's strategic interests amid newly unsettled regional realities.

In the current geopolitical context, Pakistan's relations with the Gulf States, the warming of ties with Iran, the Taliban's return to power in Kabul, and the US evacuation of its citizens and allies from Afghanistan all hinge on the existence of direct channels of communication between Pakistan and the United States. This article examines the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's defense diplomacy with KSA and the UAE, analyzing the contributions of its military leadership while highlighting the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, building on recent scholarly work that has emphasized the significance of Pakistan's military engagements in the Middle East (Kamal, 2022). This study seeks to address how Pakistan's military leadership shaped defense diplomacy with KSA and the UAE. What strategic interests drive these military-diplomatic engagements? And how do evolving regional dynamics influence the sustainability of this partnership? To explore these questions, this study adopts a qualitative research design, using historical, analytical, and comparative methods. Primary and secondary data, policy documents, official statements, media reports, and academic sources are analyzed to understand the evolution of Pakistan's defense diplomacy. The focus on KSA and UAE is based on their centrality to Pakistan's regional calculus and the military's prominent role in managing these ties.

Figure 1. Theory of Alliance
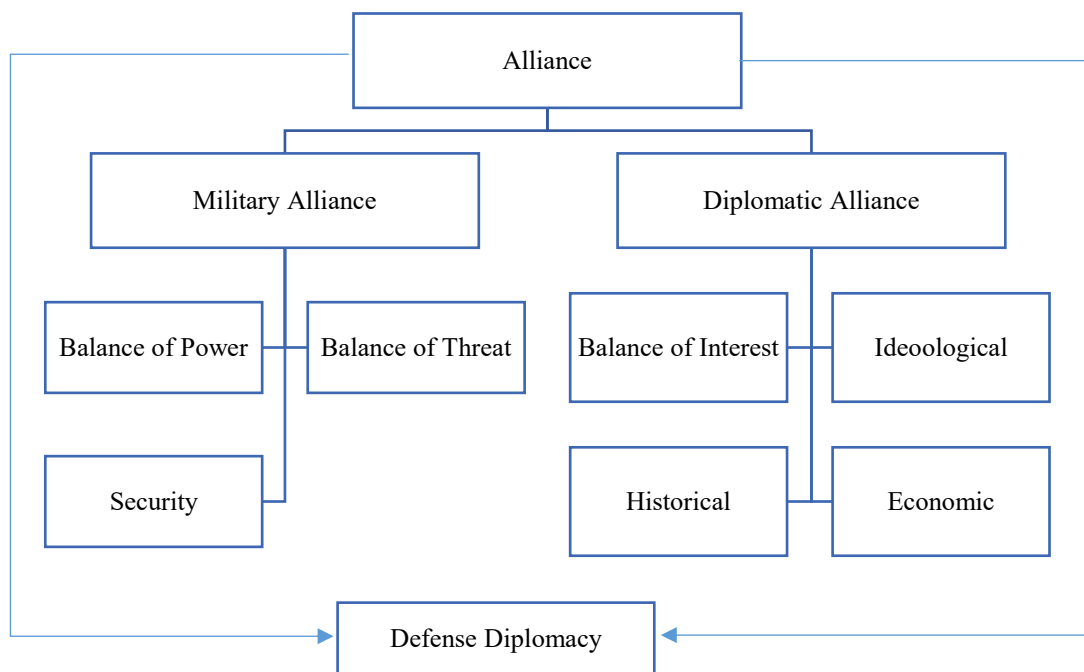
Source: Author

Alliances and Defense Diplomacy: A Conceptual Linkage

The question pertaining why states come together to form alliances is not just a unilateral dimension. Apart from the security-oriented objectives, states are also into forming alliances to satisfy the objectives that are based on political, economic, and other domestic and cultural reforms (Dwivedi, 2012). Keeping in consideration the security domain, the concepts of Alliance (see figure 1), Alignment, and Coalition are regarded as the defining elements. Alliance has been regarded as a guarantee or an assurance between states that they would stand by each other in a complex security situation and would assist each other through military power (Dar, 2018). NATO is the most significant example of an alliance, as all NATO members are responsible for the security of member states during a time of crisis.

According to Dar (2018), Stephen Walts has added another dimension, which, according to him, drives states to form alliances. In his view, it was threats that drove state behavior and not just the distribution of power. States can respond differentially to their perceptions of threat. Four possible factors act as a security threat to other states. This includes aggressive power, geographic immediacy, offensive abilities, and offensive intents (Dar, 2018). There is a variation in behavior that states adopt to secure themselves from the threats, depending on the type of alliances they form.

Walts define balancing as allying with others against the prevailing threat. He states that states can adopt balancing behavior in 2 variant ways. First, they may balance the threat by strengthening their own capabilities, a process referred to as *internal balancing*. Second, they may seek out other states with a shared perception of the threat and form alliances with them, a strategy known as *external balancing* (Morgenthau,

1948). To sum up, balancing generally refers to a state's effort to counter a prevailing threat either by enhancing its own military or political capabilities or by forming a military alliance with other states. In contrast, *bandwagoning* is defined as a strategy to preserve basic security concerns by seeking protection from a stronger and even threatening power (Liska, 1963; Schweller, 1994). In this context, the balance of threat theory offers a rational justification for alliance formation.

Another counterargument to the traditionally accepted concepts of the balance of power and the balance of threat is the concept of the *balance of interest* (Liska, 1963). Schweller (2016) challenges the notions of balance of power and threat by acknowledging that states balance to counter threats and to preserve their power and capabilities; however, he disagrees with the idea that states form alliances solely to maintain the status quo. He argues that if states are content with the existing status quo and their current power, then what compels them to engage in war and competition, especially in light of Morgenthau's concept of *maximization of power*? The balance of interest theory illustrates that alliances endure only as long as the interests of the parties are aligned. Once these interests are fulfilled, sustaining the alliance becomes increasingly difficult.

The aspect of alliance management involves planning and coordinating foreign policy preferences, synchronizing military policies, reviewing common interests, and calculating policies and actions during times of crisis (Snyder, 1990). States may exhibit two distinct behavioral phases toward an ally. In the first, both states are aligned on a particular issue or conflict, adopting a common policy and undertaking joint actions. In the second, the allied states find themselves in a conflict of interest, a situation referred to as *intra-alliance politics* or *bargaining*. Here, two options emerge: the first is to consent to the ally's interest, treating it as a common interest, which may result in engaging in a conflict or war for the ally's benefit, even if it does not serve the state's own interests. The second is to take an opposing stance, prioritizing a rational choice in the broader interest of the alliance.

In this context, two key terms apply: *abandonment* and *entrapment*. Reducing the risk of abandonment often increases the risk of entrapment, and vice versa. To avoid abandonment, states may commit firmly to their ally's choices and actions, thereby strengthening the alliance but simultaneously risking entrapment (Snyder,1990). Entrapment occurs when a state becomes drawn into supporting actions that do not serve its own interests. Conversely, a state may refuse to support its ally on a particular issue that contradicts its own interests, resulting in abandonment. The likelihood of abandonment is influenced by the degree of dependence a state has on its ally, while the risk of entrapment largely depends on the extent of shared interests.

The optimal scenario arises when two states are less dependent on one another and less influenced by each other's policies and actions. In such cases, each state can formulate and pursue its own policies without being constrained by the preferences of its ally. Kenneth Waltz (1967) encapsulates this by noting that flexibility of alignment creates rigidity of strategy. In contrast, when states are highly dependent on an ally for security, defense, or economic support, they become more vulnerable to being shaped by the ally's interests.

The core question that arises here is: what policies should a state adopt to effectively manage an alliance? Diplomacy is regarded as a primary instrument for shaping and maintaining relationships with the rest of the world, with the core objective of achieving maximum gains without resorting to conflict. It is conducted to safeguard the state's interests, sovereignty, and integrity, while ensuring it retains an influential

voice in international affairs. The nature of diplomacy enables states to secure their national interests through negotiation, goodwill, and cooperation, thereby avoiding confrontation. Consequently, the peaceful course of action, diplomacy, remains the top priority in building and sustaining inter-state relations. Conversely, the application of violent means, namely, military force, stands as a measure of last resort. The most effective approach, therefore, is to synchronize diplomacy with defense, using both as complementary tools for managing alliances.

Defense Diplomacy as a Tool of Alliance Management

Traditionally, the role of the military has been associated with the use of force. Although the terms *military* and *defense* differ in their connotations, they are often used interchangeably. The term *military* refers specifically to actions and activities carried out solely by uniformed personnel, whereas *defense* encompasses the functions of the entire defense establishment, including non-uniformed professionals, the defense ministry, and national defense training programs (Muthanna, 2012). As Rogers (2012) aptly stated, Diplomats are just as essential to starting a war as soldiers are to finishing it. You take diplomacy out of war, and the thing would fall flat in a week.

However, *defense diplomacy* cannot be regarded as a wholly separate or independent concept; rather, it is a term born from the amalgamation of two distinct ideas. It is inherently oxymoronic, combining concepts of a seemingly contradictory nature. The word *defense* denotes the employment of hard power or the use of force to achieve a state's objectives and ensure national security. In contrast, *diplomacy* signifies the use of soft power, encompassing goodwill gestures, dialogue, cooperation, treaties, pacts, joint missions, and alliances across military, economic, political, and cultural domains. Merging these two concepts under one framework gives rise to the notion of *defense diplomacy*. Thus, the term refers to the application of soft power policies and the peaceful utilization of military capabilities in cooperative engagements with other states, particularly in multilateral settings (Davar, 2018; Pajtinka, 2016).

Pakistan's Defense Diplomacy

At present, the military operates beyond the traditional domain of the theater of war. Pakistan has adopted an inclusive strategy that integrates hard power, soft power, and smart power in a manner that effectively serves the state's security interests (Rizvi, 2020). In line with evolving global security trends, Pakistan has strategically employed defense diplomacy to enhance its international standing, particularly through bilateral military cooperation with Gulf states, an approach increasingly pursued by rising regional powers (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021; Usman et al., 2023).

Pakistan maintains deep defense relations with the Arab world and the broader Middle East, playing an active role in providing security to Gulf states (Kamal, 2021). Numerous joint military drills are conducted between Pakistan and its Gulf partners, and Pakistan regularly trains foreign military personnel, with many of its troops stationed in Arab states. Several Pakistani military officials also serve on deputation in these countries. Among Pakistan's most important allies are KSA, Qatar, the UAE, Oman, and Turkey, all of which look to Pakistan for defense assistance in times of crisis. Pakistan has assured KSA that it will defend its territory with full strength and capacity in the event of any threat or foreign aggression.

Pakistan has taken significant steps to strengthen its military relations with KSA and the UAE through various joint military programs, training initiatives, and defense agreements (Khan, 2019). The evolving nature of international military engagement

reflects the modern armed forces contribute not only to defense but also to diplomacy, strategic dialogue, and regional balancing, roles that Pakistan's military is actively fulfilling in its outreach to KSA and the UAE (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021).

Military Leadership as a Pivot of Diplomacy

The formulation and execution of foreign policy traditionally fall under the domain of the Foreign Office, with arrangements made to safeguard national interests, territorial integrity, and defense provisions. However, when defense-related agreements are established with another state, military consultation becomes essential (Kinne, 2018). The concept of security has evolved from its traditional framework into a more comprehensive approach, requiring coordinated efforts from both civilian and military sectors.

In addition to the traditional methods of consultation and coordination with the military and intelligence apparatus, growing defense imperatives have positioned the General Headquarters (GHQ) as an autonomous body capable of conducting diplomacy. The office of the Army Chief (COAS) has now emerged as a central pillar of diplomatic engagement, a role it did not occupy fifteen to twenty years ago (Mahmood & Chawala, 2021). There has been a notable increase in visits to GHQ, with the Army Chief holding high-level meetings not only with military counterparts from other countries but also with senior civilian officials. Foreign delegations now appear more inclined to engage on the military front.

Both General Raheel Sharif and General Qamar Javed Bajwa undertook extensive foreign visits, meeting with the civil and military leaderships of various states (Cafiero & Wagner, 2015). In the context of KSA and the UAE, their tenures saw enhanced coordination and collaboration between Pakistan and these countries at the security level. In pursuing foreign policy objectives with these states, priority is often accorded to the military dimension of engagement.

COAS, Defense Diplomacy and Alliance Management: Case of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The cornerstone of Pakistan-KSA relations lies in their deep-rooted military cooperation and coordination (Shay,2018). It was the Kingdom's need for internal security and stability, particularly after the Arab-Israel War of 1967, that necessitated the physical presence of Pakistani troops on Saudi soil, as well as the provision of military training to enhance the Saudi armed forces' capacity to handle security crises (Karim, 2019). This cooperation was later formalized through a series of defense agreements, including the *Deputation of Pakistan Armed Personnel and Military Training* pact (December 1982), the *Military Cooperation Agreement* (July 2005), and the *Provision of Military Training Services Agreement* between the Ministry of Interior of the KSA and Pakistan (May 2007) (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2007). As a result, a significant number of Pakistani military personnel are currently stationed in KSA. According to Defense Minister Khurram Dastgir, approximately 1,671 Pakistani armed forces personnel have been deployed in KSA, followed by 629 in Qatar and 66 in the UAE ("1,671 Pakistani soldiers deputed in Saudi, NA told", 2018).

A critical turning point in this alliance came with KSA's military intervention in Yemen, which sparked considerable confusion and tension between the two states. KSA formally requested military assistance from Pakistan to support its campaign in Yemen. This request, transmitted through the Foreign Office to GHQ, was met with

resistance from Pakistan's military leadership. The GHQ declined the request, citing that Pakistan's national interest did not align with KSA's military engagement in Yemen. At the time, Pakistan was already deeply involved in its own counterterrorism operations and could not afford to divert manpower, resources, and strategic capacity for external conflict. Pakistan's military had only committed to defending Saudi territory in the event of foreign aggression, not to participate in offensive military campaigns (Malik, 2020).

Despite this stance, speculations emerged that some Pakistani troops were still sent to Yemen with the consent of then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which, if true, bypassed military consensus. Such unilateral decisions by the civilian leadership on matters of security, without consulting the military, risk disrupting the delicate balance of civil-military relations and undermining the coherence of diplomatic engagement with other states. This incident strained the Pakistan–Saudi alliance and negatively impacted their economic relations.

These misunderstandings were later mitigated when General Raheel Sharif was selected by KSA to lead the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) (Boone, 2017). Although this appointment was made in his personal capacity, the Pakistan military granted him a No Objection Certificate (NOC) and formally supported his leadership. General Qamar Javed Bajwa also played a pivotal role in mending ties with Arab states. Through personal visits and diplomatic engagements, he helped defuse tensions, reestablish trust, and negotiate mutually beneficial terms. His efforts in alliance management, based on strategic bargaining and reciprocal concessions, were instrumental in the resumption of economic assistance from Arab states to Pakistan (Shoaib, 2020).

On 15 December 2015, KSA announced the formation of the IMAFT, a coalition led by KSA and comprising 41 Muslim-majority states. The alliance aimed to counter terrorism and extremism across Asia, Africa, and the volatile Middle East (Rubab, 2017). Pakistan welcomed the initiative, with then-Defense Minister Khurram Dastgir articulating that Pakistan's participation would be grounded in 'shared experience and capabilities' to counter terrorism, exchange intelligence, conduct joint trainings and exercises, and curb terror financing (Rubab, 2017).

An official Pakistani delegation, including the Prime Minister, Defense Minister, COAS, and Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (DG ISI), visited KSA to confirm Pakistan's participation in the coalition. During the visit, the Prime Minister assured the Saudi leadership of Pakistan's commitment to provide any form of assistance and security support in the event of a defense crisis (Rubab, 2017). However, KSA's request went further; it sought Pakistan's leadership in the alliance. Responding positively, Pakistan endorsed the nomination of former COAS General Raheel Sharif as the commander of IMAFT. This move signified a strong gesture of military partnership and led to the enhanced role and presence of Pakistani military personnel in the Kingdom.

Nonetheless, this decision drew mixed reactions. Several regional actors raised concerns about Pakistan's perceived neutrality, while domestic political leaders also questioned the strategic implications. General Raheel Sharif's successor, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, continued to build upon this legacy, emerging as a prominent figure in defense diplomacy. General Bajwa had previously served a three-year deputation in KSA, strengthening his familiarity with the Saudi security landscape. Under his leadership, the frequency and depth of bilateral defense engagements

increased significantly, further expanding the scope of Pakistan–KSA military relations (Karim, 2019).

General Asim Munir, after assuming the role of Pakistan's COAS in November 2022, has played a pivotal role in redefining and reinforcing Pakistan's defense diplomacy, particularly with KSA and the UAE. He made use of his proactive leadership to emphasize strategic partnerships, military capacity-building, and leveraging defense cooperation to support Pakistan's broader economic interests.

General Munir's early official visits to Riyadh in 2023 and 2024 focused on enhancing bilateral defense collaboration. During these visits, he engaged with both military and civilian leadership in KSA, aiming to scale up military training programs, joint ventures, and advisory support, especially in the areas of counterterrorism and strategic operations. He also actively explored opportunities for joint defense production aligned with KSA's *Vision 2030*, which seeks to transform the Kingdom's defense capabilities (Rizvi, 2020). These meetings reaffirmed Pakistan's enduring commitment to Saudi security, with General Munir expressing continued support for Saudi territorial integrity amid regional tensions. This aligns with historical precedents where Pakistan has stationed troops in Saudi Arabia for security purposes, a practice that General Munir has reiterated as part of defense diplomacy strategies (Iqbal, 2024).

It is, therefore, commendable that the consistent efforts of Pakistan's military leadership, alongside KSA's strategic foresight and goodwill, have sustained and advanced mutual trust and assurance between the two nations.

COAS, Defense Diplomacy and Alliance Management: Case of UAE

Pakistan and the UAE share a long-standing history of trade and economic relations that have positively contributed to the development and mutual interests of both states. Alongside its enduring involvement in the security of Gulf States, Pakistan has cultivated strategic relations with the UAE, with particular emphasis on defense cooperation and defense production. Pakistan consistently prioritizes the expansion and strengthening of military ties with Gulf partners. While the UAE possesses one of the most advanced military and defense production capabilities in the region, Pakistan has played a key role in training Gulf military personnel and maintaining an on-ground presence in the region. These factors collectively support and encourage the deepening of defense cooperation between the two nations.

As a result, Pakistan and the UAE have moved forward to enhance collaboration in defense production, joint military training programs, and both formal and informal exchanges of military personnel, ushering in a new dimension in bilateral relations (Arifeen, 2017).

General Raheel Sharif's leadership in combating terrorism, particularly through his role in the Saudi-funded Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), positioned Pakistan as an ideal military training partner for broader regional security initiatives. This perception was reinforced during the tenure of General Qamar Javed Bajwa, who broadened the scope of military diplomacy by incorporating economic elements, becoming the first military chief to directly link physical security with economic security. He actively promoted economic diplomacy with KSA and the UAE, which led to strategic investments in Pakistan that went beyond the traditional frameworks of aid or bailouts.

General Bajwa strengthened military commitments to both Gulf states while carefully maintaining a balanced approach. He aimed to alleviate concerns from regional players such as Qatar and Iran, who had previously perceived Pakistan's

support for KSA and the UAE as a threat. His approach was not limited to tactical training or aid; rather, it was a holistic strategic framework that combined defense cooperation, economic engagement, and regional diplomacy. The close relationships cultivated between successive Pakistani army chiefs and Gulf leaderships contributed not only to economic support for various Pakistani governments but also helped ease regional tensions, acting as a diplomatic tool to mediate between conflicting Gulf actors and neighboring Iran (Alam, 2020). This diplomatic initiative was complemented by Prime Minister Imran Khan's meeting with the UAE leadership in 2018, during which reports of a financial assistance package emerged to support Pakistan's struggling economy ("Imran Khan meets UAE prime minister...", 2018).

Under General Munir's leadership, Pakistan has also intensified its defense ties with the UAE. His interactions with Emirati leaders emphasized primarily combined military trainings, such as the 'Zayed Talwar' series. He fostered his contribution in mounting Pakistan's role in training Emirati military personnel, predominantly in special operations and air force capabilities. He emphasized nurturing collaboration in emerging defense technologies, including drones and cybersecurity (Iqbal, 2024).

These initiatives align with the UAE's broader goals of modernizing its military capabilities, where Pakistan's expertise in defense training has been highly valued. General Munir's efforts have also complemented Pakistan's broader economic diplomacy, as the UAE remains a key investor and financial supporter of Pakistan during its economic crisis. Recognizing the intertwined nature of economic stability and defense partnerships, General Munir has skillfully used defense diplomacy as a conduit for economic assistance. His efforts have been instrumental in securing financial aid and investments from Gulf states. In 2023 and 2024, Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged multi-billion-dollar financial support to Pakistan's economy (Qureshi, 2024). This assistance was often linked to assurances of enhanced bilateral defense collaboration and political stability in Pakistan.

By leveraging Pakistan's strategic and military strengths, General Munir has ensured that the country remains relevant in Gulf security dynamics. His leadership underscores Pakistan's value as a seasoned and dependable military partner with extensive experience in counterterrorism and regional security. He has also advocated for Pakistan's active participation in multilateral Gulf security arrangements, such as the IMCTC, as part of a broader strategy to counterbalance the growing defense partnerships between Gulf states and India. Through this comprehensive and forward-looking approach, General Munir has positioned Pakistan as an indispensable security and economic ally in the Gulf region ("General Asim Munir's Strategic Visits: Bridging Gaps with the Gulf", 2024).

Managing External Factors: What's for Pakistan's Defense Diplomacy

Certain factors must be taken into account when analyzing Pakistan's alliance with any state. In the case of KSA, the most critical consideration is the Iran factor. Although Pakistan does not maintain formal security ties with Iran, its relationship with Tehran nonetheless affects Pakistan's internal security dynamics. The Pakistan-Iran border has remained unstable, marked by recurring concerns over alleged Iranian support for terrorism in Balochistan, often in coordination with India. Incidents of cross-border terrorism and espionage have frequently been linked to networks operating from Iranian territory. Notably, Indian spy Kulbhushan Yadav's involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan was traced back to Iran, further exacerbating mistrust.

Consequently, Pakistan has not enjoyed a peaceful relationship with Iran; rather, a series of misunderstandings has defined their interactions. The historical animosity between Iran and KSA has also complicated Pakistan's diplomatic balancing, as Islamabad has long been perceived to lean in favor of Riyadh. This perception has affected Pakistan's image in the Middle East, leading to accusations of a one-sided foreign policy. Iran, in turn, has expressed mistrust toward Pakistan, which has hindered the development of a more substantial bilateral relationship.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa played a key moderating role in addressing these regional tensions. His visit to Tehran aimed to de-escalate misunderstandings and set the stage for improved bilateral relations. He offered to enhance cooperation with Iran in the defense and security sectors, marking a shift toward a more neutral and balanced defense policy. As a result of Pakistan's defense diplomacy, Iran expressed support for Pakistan's position on the Kashmir issue, an important symbolic gesture. Given the regional sensitivities, Pakistan must continue to maintain a careful balance in its relations with both KSA and Iran, strategically, diplomatically, and economically, to avoid the repetition of past missteps that could jeopardize these crucial partnerships.

Strains in Pakistan–KSA relations also became evident following Riyadh's demand for the early repayment of a $3 billion loan, of which Pakistan returned $1 billion (Rana, 2020). The rift was fueled by Pakistan's call for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take a stronger stance on the Kashmir issue, which was not well received by KSA. The Kingdom's growing economic engagement with India, now one of its closest economic partners, further complicated the situation. As a result, thousands of Pakistani workers in KSA lost their jobs, many of whom were replaced by Indian labor, exacerbating Pakistan's economic difficulties given its reliance on remittances from the Gulf region.

Despite these challenges, recent developments suggest a mutual willingness to mend bilateral ties. Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to KSA on May 7, 2021, at the invitation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, signaled a commitment to reset the relationship. Both sides signed multiple agreements and memoranda of understanding in areas including trade, economy, and environmental cooperation (Prime Minister's Office [PMO], 2021). Before this visit, COAS General Bajwa had also visited KSA and held a meeting with the Crown Prince. According to Pakistan's military, the discussions included matters of mutual interest, regional security, the Afghan peace process, bilateral defense cooperation, and connectivity. It is evident that Pakistan's military leadership played a key role in setting the stage for political reconciliation between the two states.

A similar dynamic is evident in Pakistan's relationship with the UAE. Pakistan and the UAE have shared longstanding defense and economic ties, with specific emphasis on security cooperation, particularly in the naval domain. Pakistan has trained UAE military personnel and participated in joint defense pacts. However, despite these strong military ties, the UAE's broader strategic calculations are heavily influenced by economic interests, particularly its growing partnership with India.

India has emerged as one of the UAE's most important economic partners, with deep investments across various sectors and a large Indian expatriate community holding influential positions. Compared to Pakistani workers, the Indian workforce is generally more skilled and better integrated into the UAE's economy. This gives India considerable leverage in shaping the UAE's foreign policy priorities. Although Pakistan also maintains a significant expatriate presence in the UAE, its community is

primarily concentrated in lower-income, labor-intensive sectors, making its economic influence comparatively weaker.

This divergence explains why the UAE often refrains from publicly supporting Pakistan on sensitive issues such as Kashmir. While assurances may be given behind closed doors, public diplomacy remains limited due to the risk of jeopardizing economic relations with India. General Bajwa's regular visits to the UAE during his tenure were part of a broader effort to rebalance the relationship by clarifying Pakistan's position on regional issues, including the Yemen conflict, and emphasizing Pakistan's potential as both an economic and defense partner (Alam, 2020). Through such engagements, Pakistan's military leadership sought to use defense diplomacy to improve Pakistan's image and reinforce its strategic value.

The growing role of Israel in the UAE's foreign policy also bears significance. The normalization of UAE-Israel relations has introduced a new dimension to Gulf politics. Israel, a close ally of India, exerts indirect influence over the UAE's foreign policy decisions, particularly concerning strategic alignment in the region. The UAE–Israel partnership, formalized in the Abraham Accords, strengthens India's position in the Gulf, given Israel's role as one of India's principal defense partners and the UAE's status as India's third-largest trading partner. With vast Indian diaspora communities, maritime security concerns, and regional energy dependencies, the Gulf has become a central node in India's foreign policy, with growing implications for Pakistan (Luke, 2020).

In light of this changing strategic landscape, Pakistan must approach its relationship with the UAE pragmatically. While Pakistan remains firm on its position of non-recognition of Israel, it must also safeguard its defense-based alliance with the UAE. Managing this alliance requires balancing costs and benefits while preserving national interests. Despite political differences, both countries recognize the mutual value of their defense partnership. Pakistan should continue to pursue its diplomatic objectives with the UAE through defense diplomacy, which provides critical security benefits to the Gulf state and, in return, offers Pakistan potential economic advantages. The most viable strategy for Pakistan is to maintain bilateral relations with both KSA and the UAE, prioritizing state-centric foreign policy objectives and managing external factors that could undermine these partnerships. This is how defense diplomacy, intertwined with economic diplomacy, serves as a pragmatic tool for managing alliances and advancing Pakistan's strategic interests in an increasingly complex regional environment.

The most viable strategy for Pakistan is to maintain bilateral relations with both KSA and the UAE, prioritizing state-centric foreign policy objectives and managing external factors that could undermine these partnerships. This is how defense diplomacy, intertwined with economic diplomacy, serves as a pragmatic tool for managing alliances and advancing Pakistan's strategic interests in an increasingly complex regional environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study analyzed Pakistan's evolving strategic partnerships with KSA and the UAE through the framework of defense diplomacy, underscoring the expanding role of military leadership in shaping external engagements. As there is a global transition from conventional threat models to more interconnected and multidimensional approaches in the national security agendas, Pakistan's military

diplomacy also reflects a shift towards broader strategic functions beyond battlefield preparedness.

Pakistan is increasingly pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy in the current era that is marked by complex regional rivalries, transnational threats, and economic interdependence by balancing its engagements with China, Gulf states, and Western actors to maintain strategic flexibility and reduce reliance on any single power. This shift in diplomacy indicates a growing pursuit of strategic autonomy, where military diplomacy is proactive in shaping regional alignments and advancing national interests.

Pakistan Armed Forces, beyond their geographical borders, have become active players in global peacekeeping, counterterrorism collaborations, and humanitarian operations, especially under the UN framework. These efforts contribute to Pakistan's image as a responsible international actor. Moreover, the global experience of dealing with hybrid threats, cyber conflict, and non-traditional security challenges has further widened the scope of defense diplomacy.

For Pakistan, the integration of defense diplomacy into broader foreign policy is not only a strategic necessity but a reflection of evolving state behavior in a rapidly transforming geopolitical landscape. Going forward, the ability of Pakistan's military leadership to engage constructively on the international stage, while balancing internal security demands, will be key to sustaining long-term partnerships and navigating the uncertainties of a volatile region.

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Analyzing the Convoluted Kashmir Dispute: A Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract

Kashmir is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places on the globe. However, it is also considered one of the most dangerous places as well due to the protracted Kashmir dispute between two nuclear-capable neighboring powers, India and Pakistan. The dispute emerged after the questionable partition of the subcontinent, as a result of the Radcliff Award. Neither state was ready to forgo its claim to Kashmir. However, India shrewdly was able to persuade the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, to allow Indian forces to take control of the valley even though Kashmir was a Muslim majority area. Consequently, a never-ending conflict began between the two states, which soon led to three advanced stage wars. This article aims to analyze the conflict's historical foundations, contrasting legal positions, and policies adopted by both states to manage or resolve the issue. Also, it assesses the narratives constructed by each side, while particularly focusing on recent developments including India revoking Kashmir's special status by abrogating Articles 370 and 35-A. The article paints a holistic picture vis-à-vis the enduring nature of the Kashmir dispute and the obstacles that hinder its resolution.

Keywords

Kashmir Dispute, Pakistan, India, Article 35-A, Article 370, Conflict Resolution

Introduction

On 14 and 15 August 1947, the subcontinent gained independence from the British rule, and two nations came into existence, India and Pakistan. The British rationale behind dividing the subcontinent was that the two major nations residing, Hindus and Muslims, which had opposite incompatible lifestyles, could not live in peace together (*Partition:*

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Why was British India divided 75 years ago?, 2022). This division ensures that the lucrative region remains under their influence. The ongoing events, including increasing unrest, communal tensions, and deepening political divisions, reflected a growing support for the idea that the two nations should be separated.

Even though two sovereign independent states were formed, for each nation bilateral relations remained hostile, particularly due to disputed territories, especially the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (Nicolson, 2022). Both newly created states, India and Pakistan, claimed Kashmir to be an integral part of their respective territory; India based on a Treaty of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh, the then ruler of Kashmir (Frontline, 2024); whereas Pakistan claimed it on the basis of the 3rd June partition plan (Saif, 2013). Consequently, a confrontational competition commenced between the two sides, which led to three bloody wars: 1948, 1965, and 1999.

The militarized trajectory of the Kashmir dispute highlights Pakistan's recurring strategic miscalculations shaped by shifting geopolitical imperatives. The 1948 war, first Indo-Pak conflict, was portrayed by Pakistan as an indigenous uprising supported by tribal volunteers, though it resulted in significant casualties – over 1,000 Indian and 6,000 Pakistani soldiers – without altering the territorial status quo (Gates & Roy, 2018). In 1965, Pakistan assumed that Kashmiri support, favorable terrain, and limited Indian retaliation would ensure success. Instead, it faced substantial losses and international condemnation for violating international law (Sattar, 2020). The 1999 Kargil conflict further reflected Pakistan's continued reliance on high-risk strategies despite nuclear deterrence. By attempting to seize strategic heights and sever India's access to Kashmir, Pakistan underestimated India's military response. India swiftly regained territory, and fears of escalation led to international intervention and a forced ceasefire (Tellis et al., 2001).

Two decades later, in 2019, India revoked Articles 370 and 35-A. These Indian constitutional provisions granted Kashmir considerable autonomy and offered special concessions. India recognizes that, eventually, it will have to adhere to the internationally recognized principle of the right to self-determination and conduct a plebiscite in Kashmir to resolve the dispute. By revoking Kashmir's special status, Prime Minister Modi aims to induce demographic change, transforming the Muslim-majority region into a Hindu-majority one. This shift would increase the likelihood that, if and when a plebiscite is held, Kashmir would vote to remain part of India.

Time and again, the Kashmir conflict has proved to be detrimental to global peace and security, particularly the stability of South Asia. It is also considered a primary obstacle to establishing cordial ties between India and Pakistan. To resolve this protracted conflict, numerous plans have been proposed; however, the proposed solutions have been rejected by one side or the other. To date, both sides continue to assert their claims over the territory based on their historic stances; thus, the dispute lingers on.

The aim of this undertaken study is to (1) trace the origins of the dispute stemming from the 1947 partition and the controversial Radcliffe Award, (2) deconstruct the narratives and legal justifications advanced by both India and Pakistan, (3) assess the domestic and international policies adopted by each state over time, and (4) evaluate proposed solutions and the changing dynamics of the dispute, particularly in light of India's unilateral revocation of Article 370 and Article 35-A of its Constitution.

This paper adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and critical analytical approach to examine the Kashmir dispute through primary and secondary sources, including official documents, policy statements, scholarly works, and credible media reports. It begins by outlining Kashmir's geostrategic importance, followed by an analysis of India's and Pakistan's positions and the weaknesses in India's stance. It then reviews proposed solutions, examines the special constitutional status of Indian-administered Kashmir and its revocation, and analyzes Pakistan's response post 5 August 2019. The study also assesses international reactions to the dispute and concludes with policy recommendations and a summary of key findings.

Literature Review

Given the geostrategic significance of the protracted Kashmir conflict, a vast corpus of literature has been generated, covering critical aspects of the dispute. A critical analysis of this literature helps determine and understand the role of many factors, ranging from colonial injustices and international inaction to militarization and constantly evolving bilateral hostilities, that have greatly polarized the Kashmir dispute, making it virtually unresolvable.

A common thread that is found in much scholarship on the Kashmir dispute is its historical background, particularly British India's legacy. In this regard, Schofield (2010) paints a holistic picture of the dispute's origins. She determined that the conflict emerged from the Treaty of Amritsar (1846), whereas subsequent events, the alleged Treaty of Accession (1947), and the India-Pakistan wars, further contributed to the convolution of the conflict (Schofield, 2010). Similarly, Hilali (2021) held the view that the colonial governance structures established under the Dogra dynasty later played a critical role in Kashmir's contested sovereignty and demographic anxieties. Both scholars agree that the imperial realpolitik and princely state dynamics were the foundational stones of the Kashmir dispute; the post-1947 phenomenon was merely a catalyst that exacerbated the nature and intensity of the conflict (Hilali, 2021; Schofield, 2010).

Furthermore, closely related to the historical origins are the constitutional dimensions, which have perpetuated the conflict. The ambiguous nature of the Treaty of Accession, which is the cornerstone of India's claim over Kashmir, remains a central point of interest for scholars. Schofield (2010) highlights the fact that the early diplomatic assurances of a plebiscite and autonomy were gradually supplanted by centralizing tendencies. Malik and Akhtar (2021) are of a similar opinion, as they argue that India's revoking of Article 370 constitutes a strategic erosion of Kashmir's nominal autonomy. For some time now, India has been tactfully introducing constitutional amendments to consolidate its grip over Jammu and Kashmir, clearly depicting its broader agenda of demographic engineering and settler colonialism (Manzoor & Naeem, 2023; Malik & Akhtar, 2021). While Hilali (2021) reinforces this critique, he also identifies geopolitical motivations behind India's constitutional changes, particularly in the context of Indo-Pacific power rivalries.

In addition, the nature of the India-Pakistan bilateral relations is a dominant theme across the literature. Although both states claim Kashmir to be an integral part of their territory, citing legal and moral arguments the strategies adopted by either side are largely based on militarized diplomacy, strategic ambiguity, and mutual securitization. Schofield (2010) highlights the failed mediation efforts, including the Dixon Plan and the UN Secretary-General's 1957 initiative, which illustrate Cold War alignments and bilateral diplomatic inertia as the reasons that froze the dispute into a

perpetual stalemate. Snedden (2005), addressing whether a plebiscite could resolve the Kashmir dispute, was of the view that by the early 1950s, the political, logistical, and administrative challenges had rendered the option impractical. The internal heterogeneity within Kashmir and the conflicting objectives of India, Pakistan, and Kashmiri stakeholders dismantle the simplistic notion that a plebiscite would have resolved the Kashmir issue (Snedden, 2005). Moreover, Kuszewska (2022) outlines that regional ambitions and divergent national ideologies, which have further exacerbated the Kashmir dispute, have been traditionally leveraged by both states, India and Pakistan, to advance their respective interests.

Moreover, strikingly, even though the Kashmir conflict is considered as one of the main hurdles to achieving sustainable peace and stability, the international community's role remains marginal – a fact widely criticized in the literature. Initially, the United Nations (UN) tried to be the mediator vis-à-vis Kashmir; however, amidst the geopolitics of the Cold War, priorities of the major powers changed, which, in turn, drove international institutions, and thus, the Kashmir dispute lost relevance (Schofield, 2010). Kuszewska (2022) is of a similar view; he argues that major powers consider Kashmir to be a peripheral issue, subordinated to broader strategic partnerships with India or concerns about regional stability.

India's 05 August 2019, actions have proved to be a critical inflection point and reinvigorated scholarly interest vis-à-vis Kashmir. Its revocation of Article 370 and 35-A indicates a paradigm shift in India's Kashmir policy, having far-reaching implications for regional peace and security. Hilali (2021) and Kuszewska (2022) both are of the view that this event exposes bilateralism's limitations; whereas it underscores the need for multilateral efforts to achieve an amicable solution acceptable for all parties to the Kashmir dispute. Also, these developments intensified debates revolving around autonomy and representation, reigniting demands for international mediation.

In a nutshell, the reviewed literature highlights the Kashmir dispute as multilayered, where historical grievances, legal contestations, geopolitical rivalries, and normative claims intersect to perpetuate instability. A retrospective analysis, as offered by these works, reveals not a singular conflict but a constellation of interlocking crises – of state formation, identity, sovereignty, and human rights – each demanding nuanced scholarly engagement.

Kashmir's Geostrategic Significance

Kashmir lies in the northern region of the Indian subcontinent, having latitudes of 32° and 36° N, and longitudes of 74° and 80° E. To the northeast, Kashmir is bounded by Xinjiang, China; to the east by Tibet, an autonomous region of China; to the south by Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, both Indian states; to the west by Pakistan; and to the northwest by Afghanistan. Kashmir is a landlocked region with a total area of 222,236 sq km. Out of which 106,567 sq km (48 percent) of the area comes within the Indian-administered Kashmir, which includes Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Almost 78,144 sq km (35 percent) of the area comes within Pakistan, including Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. While the territories administered by China, including the Trans-Karakoram and Aksai Chin, account for 37,555 sq km (17 percent) of the area (Global Citizen Journey, n.d.). Interestingly, in 1963, Pakistan ceded 5,180 sq km of Kashmir's territory to China under the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement (Al Jazeera, 2003). The Chinese sovereignty was legitimized and recognized by Pakistan over the land in the northern areas of Kashmir and Ladakh. India did not accept this decision and claims sovereignty over those lands (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2024).

Figure 1. Map of Kashmir Showing Disputed Borders
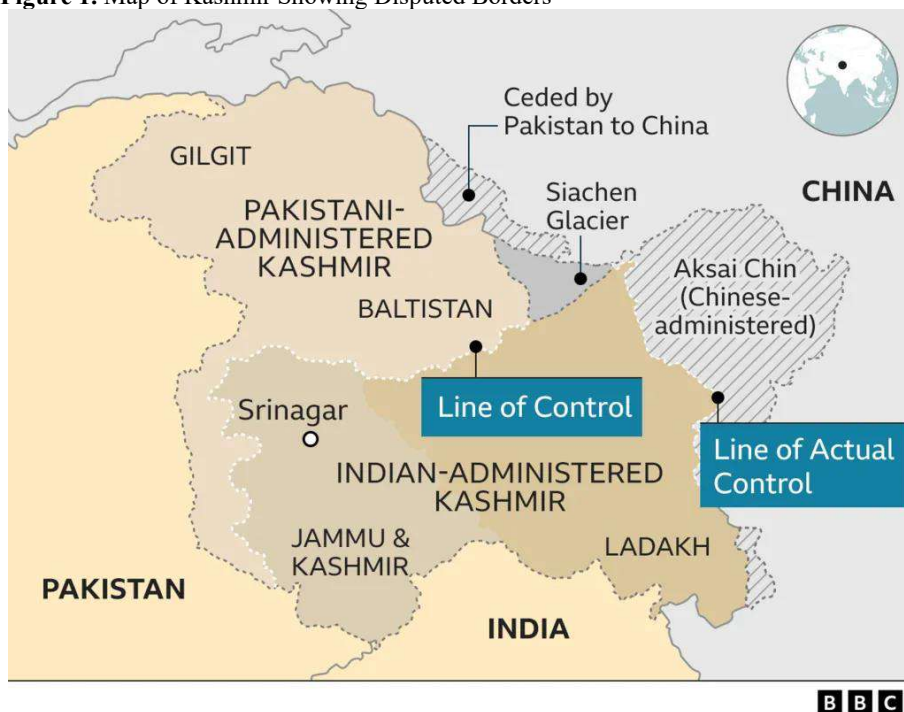
Source: (BBC News, n.d.)

The Line of Control (LoC) is a 1001 km long border (Azad Government of the State of Jammu & Kashmir, n.d.). It is not an internationally recognized boundary, but it works as the de facto border dividing the Pakistani and Indian-administered parts of Kashmir. This constitutes a dividing line in the disputed territory, which often falls prey to crossfires, bombardments, and the loss of countless innocent lives.

Kashmir's geostrategic importance to India is the fundamental reason why India cannot relinquish its claim over the territory; thus, the dispute remains unresolved. Kashmir is India's only gateway to Central Asia and Europe; without controlling Kashmir, India loses its access to these key regions. It is also important to note that the Siachen Glacier serves as the only physical barrier preventing a direct, contiguous border between China, Pakistan, and India. If a conflict were to occur between Pakistan and India, India's control over Kashmir would prevent Pakistan and China from directly linking their forces against India. For this reason, Kashmir remains a vital geostrategic asset, particularly to India's national security.

At the same time, Kashmir is just as important for Pakistan in terms of geostrategy, mainly because it is the region that Pakistan relies on for access to water. If India gets complete control of Kashmir, then it could cut the water supply of Pakistan, which, in turn, would paralyze Pakistan (Asoori, 2020). Moreover, Kashmir is the only direct link that connects Pakistan to China, thus further enhancing its great geostrategic importance, especially after the implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The geostrategic importance of Kashmir for Pakistan can be easily understood by Quaid-e-Azam's statement, "Kashmir is the Jugular vein of Pakistan,

and no nation or country would tolerate its Jugular vein remaining under the sword of the enemy" (Khan, 2020, para 1).

Furthermore, apart from all the above valid arguments about the geostrategic significance of Kashmir, more land means more resources and more power for nation-states in the realist paradigm. Both India and Pakistan are approaching this issue from a realist perspective to gain more power in the regional context.

Indian Stance vis-à-vis the Kashmir Dispute

India claims Kashmir to be its integral part and terms Pakistan to be the aggressor, as it invaded Kashmir repeatedly to gain control. India's claims vis-à-vis Kashmir are mainly based on the Treaty of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh, the then-ruler of Kashmir, in October 1947 (European Foundation for South Asian Studies, 2017). Under the Indian Independence Act of 1947, he decided to accede his princely state to the Dominion of India.

India terms Pakistan to be the warmonger, especially the acts of the then Governor General of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who ordered Pakistan's military to march into the Kashmir valley and cease its control. Even though Field Marshall Claude Auchinleck issued a stand-down order (Ankit, 2014), General Douglas Gracey, the then Commander in Chief of the Pakistani army, disobeyed the order; as a result, in May 1948, three brigades of the Pakistani Army were fighting in the valley of Kashmir (Ankit, 2016). Consequently, Maharaja Hari Singh had no other option but to request Delhi to send troops to ensure its territorial sovereignty.

In 1954, the Treaty of Accession was ratified by the State Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir (Chaudhri, 1954, p. 86). According to the resolution of Kashmir's Constituent Assembly, which was followed by the incorporation of Section 3, "the State of Jammu and Kashmir is and shall be an integral part of of India" (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2015, para 1). Here, the use of the words 'is' and 'shall be' is momentous; it describes the past and future of Kashmir with the Union of India. All Indian leaders from day one to date term the claims of both Pakistan and China to be false, having no merit whatsoever.

India terms the 1963 Pakistan-China border agreement, as per which Pakistan ceded 5180 sq. km (Shaksgam valley) of Kashmir, Indian territory, to China, to be illegal. By doing so, Pakistan has violated International Law, particularly the laws of self-determination. This agreement was concluded by the administering power, Pakistan, whereas it should have been concluded as per the free and genuine will of the Kashmiri people. India believes that Pakistan took this step only to undermine its presence in the region by allowing a Chinese military presence in Kashmir. India believes that Pakistan has illegally and forcibly occupied almost 78,000 sq. km of Indian Territory in the state of Kashmir (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2017).

Pakistani Stance vis-à-vis the Kashmir Dispute

Pakistan builds its case of Kashmir being an integral part based on the British 3rd June partition plan of the subcontinent, which clearly states that the subcontinent was to be divided into two sovereign states: Pakistan and India. The 565 princely states were to choose between the two states, based on two critical factors: popular sovereignty and geographical contiguity, as independence was not an option (Saif, 2013).

In July 1947, a commission was appointed by the British government, under the chairmanship of Sir Cyril Radcliffe, to divide the subcontinent; configure and draw boundaries in a way that could keep the Muslim and Hindu populations intact within Pakistani and Indian territories respectively (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). However, the Radcliffe award was altered by Lord Mountbatten, the then viceroy of the Indian Subcontinent, in favor of India because Lord Mountbatten was sympathetic towards the Indian Congress. He used his influence to readjust the India-Pakistan frontier. Gerrymandering was evident in the case of Ferozepur; thus, it is not so hard to believe that Radcliffe was pressurized to ensure that the area of Gurdaspur was handed over to India, providing a road link to Kashmir (Ahmad, 2003).

While arguing its claim on Kashmir, Pakistan highlights the core principle as per the 3rd June partition plan, which clearly states that a Muslim majority having territorial contiguity with the Pakistani proposed territory, such as Kashmir, should be part of Pakistan (McCarthy, 2002). Moreover, in 1941, the British conducted a census in India, which declared the State of Kashmir to be a Muslim majority state, as 77 percent of its population was Muslim (Bose, 2009). Thus, clearly indicating that Kashmir was a Muslim-majority state, and popular sovereignty was in favor of joining Pakistan. Also, historically, Kashmir was always linked to Pakistan as all its trade routes passed through Pakistan, proving territorial contiguity (Yasmeen, 2002). Pakistan believes that Kashmir was illegally ceded to India by Maharaja Hari Singh because his rule was not hereditary. However, he was appointed by the British to rule over that particular state (Pakistan Lawyer, 2020).

Weakness in the Indian Stance on Kashmir

Initially, the Dogra Maharaja refused to accede his state to either Pakistan or India. Both states wanted Kashmir to become part of their territories, but the Maharaja wanted his state to remain independent. The Maharaja's indecisiveness was causing serious political turmoil, mainly because an apparent tilt of the Maharaja towards India was being witnessed, while the Muslim-majority state wanted to join Pakistan.

Consequently, mass indigenous protests were witnessed against the Maharaja. The Maharaja used force to suppress these protests, which resulted in bloodshed. To support the Kashmiri cause, tribesmen, upon their own will, entered Kashmir, which led to more violence and civil unrest. Things were slipping out of Maharaja's hands. Thus, a defense pact was signed between Maharaja Hari Singh and India on 26 October 1947. Resultantly, under the pretense of maintaining law and order, the Indian army rushed and seized control of Kashmir.

Since seizing control of Kashmir, India claims that Maharaja Hari Singh signed a Treaty of Accession, not a defense treaty; thus, Kashmir is now an integral part of India. However, Pakistan argues that if such a document exists, India should produce it so that it can be verified. In 2016, Maharaja Hari Singh's grandson, a former governor of Kashmir and a member of India's upper house of Parliament, confirmed Pakistan's stance regarding the accession treaty. He said that his grandfather signed a defense pact, which was only for 20 years. Thus, after 1967, India has illegally occupied Kashmir (Khan, 2017). As there ceases to exist an accession treaty, the Indian government most likely produced a fabricated document, which was later ratified in 1954 by the State Assembly of Kashmir. Furthermore, the 1949 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on Kashmir barred both Pakistan and India from changing the political, territorial, or constitutional status of Kashmir (United Nations

Commission for India and Pakistan, 1949). Thus, the ratification of the questionable treaty was in clear violation of the UNSC resolution and international law.

As far as the Indian blame that Pakistan is the aggressor in Kashmir, the Pakistani military never invaded the valley. The then military Chief of Pakistan, General Gracey, refused to attack Kashmir on the Governor General's orders (Kureshi, 2017)**.** He refused to obey Jinnah's orders for two reasons: the military power was not yet shifted to either of the independent states, and Pakistan's army had scarce resources, not enough to wage a successful military offensive.

Solutions Put Forward to Resolve the Kashmir Dispute
To date, forty-nine different solutions to the Kashmir dispute have been proposed, but none have materialized, some of which are enlisted below:

Kashmir and the UNSC Resolution of 1949
In January 1949, on the Kashmir issue, the UNSC adopted a resolution that called for the complete withdrawal of forces by both India and Pakistan from Kashmir and then conducting a plebiscite to determine Kashmir's fate (United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan, n.d.). However, the 1949 resolution was passed under Chapter VI of the UN charter, making it advisory and not binding. India insisted that Pakistan first withdraw its forces from Kashmir, and then India would follow, after which a plebiscite would be held. Neither parties could come to an agreement, as a result neither was the region demilitarized nor was a plebiscite conducted (Hashmat, 2025).

Owen Dixon Plan
Pursuant to the UNSC's resolution of 1950, to find an acceptable solution to the Kashmir dispute, Owen Dixon, an Australian High Court judge, came to Kashmir. He proposed a partition-cum-plebiscite plan. The State of Jammu and Kashmir to be divided into four regions: Jammu, the Kashmir valley, including Muzaffarabad, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Ladakh (Ahmad, 1951). Ladakh and Jammu would be ceded to India, and Gilgit-Baltistan to Pakistan. To decide the fate of the Kashmir Valley, a plebiscite would be conducted. Dixon's proposal was rejected by Pakistan (Snedden, 2005). Pakistan provided an alternate plan; Kashmir to be divided into seven zones; two Muslim majority and two Hindu majority zones to be given to Pakistan and India, respectively, whereas a plebiscite to be conducted in the remaining three zones to decide their fate. Nonetheless, India rejected this proposal.

Chenab Formula
The Chenab formula was presented in the 1960s. Under this formula, Kashmir should be divided along the Chenab River. The area east of the Chenab River would be given to India, while the areas west of the river would be allocated to Pakistan (*Scenario Seven: The Chenab Formula*, n.d.)**.** This formula was next to impossible as India would have to voluntarily give up approximately 80 percent of its share of Kashmir to Pakistan. Hence, understandably, India rejected this proposal.

Musharraf's 4-Point Formula
In 2006, General Pervez Musharraf believed that to resolve the Kashmir dispute, both India and Pakistan would have to retreat from their respective stances vis-à-vis Kashmir. He put forward a 4-point formula in this regard, which included the following propositions (Fai, 2017; *Musharraf offers Kashmir "solution"*, 2006).

    i. Kashmir should have the same borders, but cross-border (LoC) movement and trade should be permitted.
   ii. Indigenous Kashmiris should have the right to self-govern, but Kashmir would not be independent.
  iii. The region should be demilitarized, but both India and Pakistan should participate in the collective defense of Kashmir.
   iv. A joint mechanism should be established in Jammu and Kashmir involving leaders and people from Kashmir, India, and Pakistan to resolve the issues faced by the people on both sides of the LoC..

This approach vis-à-vis Kashmir showcased Pakistan's willingness to resolve the Kashmir dispute, especially as Pakistan openly retreated from its historic stance of conducting a plebiscite to determine the fate of Kashmir. However, this proposal was rejected by India.

Despite numerous proposed solutions, the Kashmir dispute remains unresolved. The absence of a reconciliatory approach by both states reflects entrenched cognitive biases, which significantly contribute to the persistence of mistrust and deep-seated prejudices between the two states.

What was Indian Administered Kashmir's Special Status?

Articles 370 and 35-A were two articles of the Constitution of India that provided special concessions to the indigenous people belonging to the Indian-administered Kashmir.

- **Article 370:** Enacted in 1949, this article granted the State of Jammu and Kashmir a special status under the Constitution of India. The state retained autonomous law-making authority in nearly all domains except defense, finance, foreign affairs, and communications (*Full text of document on govt…*, 2019; Syed & Khan, 2021)**.** It maintained its own flag, a separate constitution, and imposed restrictions on property ownership by non-residents.

- **Article 35-A:** Enacted in 1954 through a Presidential Order, Article 35-A was incorporated into the Indian Constitution to preserve the special status of Jammu and Kashmir as granted under Article 370 (*Kashmir special status…*, 2019). It empowered the State Assembly to define 'permanent residents' and barred non-residents from holding government employment, purchasing land, settling permanently, or obtaining educational scholarships within the state. Moreover, indigenous Kashmiri women who married outsiders forfeited their property rights in Jammu and Kashmir, and their children were also denied the right to own property in the region.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Indian-Administered Kashmir Before and After August 5, 2019

Before	After
Article 370 granted special status to the state of J&K (J&K)	The state of J&K is divided into centrally governed Union territories (Ladakh and J&K)
J&K residents had dual citizenship: India and Kashmir	J&K residents are only Indian citizens
Kashmir was allowed to have its own Constitution	Kashmir no longer has a separate Constitution

Non-residents of J&K could not settle permanently in the state nor acquire immovable property	Any Indian can settle permanently in the state
Centre's authority was limited to Finance, Defence, Foreign Affairs, and Communication	The Centre is responsible for all matters, including administrative and local legislation
J&K had a separate flag	J&K is forced to use the Indian flag
Article 360 was not applicable in J&K	Under Article 360, the Central Government can now declare a financial emergency in J&K
Tenure for the State Assembly was 6 years	Tenure for the Union Territory Assembly is 5 years

Source: (*Kashmir factsheet 1947–2020....,*2020)

Rationale Behind India's Abolition of Kashmir's Special Status

On 05 August 2019, the Indian government revoked the special constitutional concessions given to Kashmir, with the goal to induce a demographic change by the Muslim majority into a Muslim minority (Shah, 2019)**.** India, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is trying to replicate the infamous Israeli settlement policy, as in the last few years India has started settling Hindu pundits in Kashmir (*India replicating Israeli model in Kashmir: Speakers*, 2022).

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi claims that the rationale behind abolishing Kashmir's special status was to fully absorb the state into the Union of India. Soon after retracting the constitutional provisions, on 31 October 2019, India formally divided Kashmir into two federating territories: the Jammu region and the Kashmir valley, and Ladakh**.** The Jammu and Kashmir federating unit, with a population of 12.2 million, would have its lieutenant governor appointed by Delhi and its own elected assembly with a five-year term; however, Delhi would retain most powers. Whereas Ladakh, with a population of less than 300,000, will be directly ruled by Delhi through a lieutenant governor (Ghoshal, 2019; *Kashmir Broken Up,* 2019)**.** Prime Minister Modi's actions are in direct violation of the past bilateral agreements signed between India and Pakistan, particularly the Shimla agreement and the UNSC resolution, in which it was agreed that Kashmir's ground realities would not be changed.

Post 05 August 2019: Pakistan's Kashmir Strategy

Following the revocation of Articles 370 and 35-A, the international community now increasingly views India's approach vis-à-vis Kashmir as lacking sincerity, particularly with regard to pursuing a mutually acceptable and peaceful resolution. Pakistan's initial response to India's actions followed a conventional diplomatic approach: it recalled its ambassador, suspended trade, and raised the issue at the UN (Yeung & Saifi, 2019)**.** Pakistan tactfully internationalized the Kashmir dispute, which led to an informal consultation of the UNSC – its first in nearly 50 years (The United Nations, 2019). This consultation reaffirmed that the Kashmir dispute is not an internal matter of India, but a contested issue which requires international mediation.

Stance of Various States vis-à-vis the Kashmir Dispute

States formulate policies to safeguard and promote their national interest, often at the expense of other states. The Kashmir dispute depicts this dynamic; while some states are sympathetic to the people of Kashmir, others support India's claims. Below are the perspectives of key members of the international community regarding the Kashmir conflict.

- *United States:* After India revoked Kashmir's special status and imposed a curfew to control the law and order situation, the US State Department spokeswoman issued a statement, "[the US] is concerned about reports of detentions and urges respect for individual rights and discussion with those in affected communities. We call on all parties to maintain peace and stability along the Line of Control" (Reuters, 2019, para 2). Shortly after, the US issued a more comprehensive stance vis-à-vis Kashmir (Kronstadt, 2019, p 10):

   > We want to maintain peace and stability, and we, of course, support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other issues of concern...… [Whenever] it comes to any region in the world where there are tensions, we ask for people to observe the rule of law, respect for human rights, and respect for international norms. We ask people to maintain peace and security and direct dialogue

   More importantly, the US spokeswoman outrightly denied a change in the US policy vis-à-vis Kashmir.

- *China:* In response to India's actions, China's Foreign Office expressed serious concerns, particularly over the change of Ladakh's status – an area China claims – which it deemed unacceptable. A Chinese spokesperson urged India to refrain from unilaterally altering the status quo and asked Pakistan to show restraint on the matter (Varma, 2019). Later, Chinese President Xi Jinping openly condemned India's actions. Moreover, China reaffirmed its support for Pakistan regarding all issues related to its core interests, implying the Kashmir dispute. China emphasized the need to peacefully resolve the Kashmir dispute in accordance with UNSC resolutions.

- *Russia:* Russia, formerly the USSR, has consistently supported India diplomatically, especially in relation to the Kashmir dispute – evident from the fact that it vetoed the 1962 UNSC resolution, proposed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which aimed to make the 1949 UNSC resolution binding (Simha, 2016; Zaidi & Saud, 2021)**.** Even after India's August 5, 2019, action, Russia remained one of the few countries that stood by India, terming it an internal matter, given that abrogating these Articles did not impact the LoC (Chaudhary, 2020).

- *Saudi Arabia:* The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia issued a statement expressing grave concern over India's actions vis-à-vis Kashmir. The Saudi government emphasized the need for resolving the dispute through dialogue in a manner acceptable to all parties. More importantly, Saudi Arabia reassured its support for the people of Jammu and Kashmir in their pursuit of the right to self-determination.

- *The United Nations:* The UN Secretary-General expressed concern about India's action in Kashmir, especially regarding its potential to deteriorate the

human rights situation in Indian-administered Kashmir. The UN urged all parties to show maximum restraint. On 16 August 2019, with China's support, Pakistan's request prompted informal closed-door consultations of the UNSC, which Russia also agreed to join (The United Nations, 2019). Although the meeting ended without any ensuing statement, its very convening reiterated Kashmir's status as an internationally recognized dispute.

Policy Recommendations to Resolve the Kashmir Dispute

The following are key policy prescriptions that both states, Pakistan and India, should adopt to resolve the Kashmir dispute amicably.

- India should reinstate Article 370 and 35-A of the Indian constitution to ensure that Kashmir's demography remains unchanged.
- To initiate meaningful negotiations, both sides must ensure a complete ceasefire; even the slightest border skirmish may destabilize any peace initiative.
- Imposing preconditions on negotiations will adversely affect the entire process. All stakeholders should emphasize on negotiations with a strong commitment to resolving the conflict and paving the way for peace.
- Given the deep-rooted trust deficit between Pakistan and India and the consistent failure of bilateral agreements, a critical issue like Kashmir necessitates impartial third-party mediation – ideally by an international institution like the UN – to ensure a sustainable resolution.
- Honoring the wishes of the indigenous Kashmiris is a prerequisite to achieving a peaceful solution to the protracted conflict. Thus, tripartite negotiations, with Kashmiris given a seat and an equal vote at the table, should be conducted, as was recently done to resolve the Afghan conflict.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the situation in Kashmir has been exacerbated due to India revoking Articles 370 and 35-A. The primary motive behind India's move is to change the demography of Kashmir. To do so, India is replicating the Israeli settlement policy in Kashmir, as it realizes that sooner rather than later, a plebiscite would be conducted to resolve conflict.

On Kashmir, both states hold opposing and incomprehensible viewpoints. Both states term each other to be the aggressor vis-à-vis Kashmir. India claims Kashmir as its integral part based on the alleged treaty of accession, whereas Pakistan's claim is based on the 3rd June partition plan. Hence, to date, Kashmir remains a bone of contention between the two states. Over time, numerous resolutions have been proposed to resolve the conflict. However, all were rejected by one side or the other.

Initially, the UN attempted to help resolve the conflict, but the geopolitics of the Cold War limited the effectiveness of the UN, particularly as both parties to the conflict were aligned in opposing camps. Later, after the debacle of Dhaka – the fall of East Pakistan – India tactfully incorporated a clause in the Shimla Agreement (1972) that ensured no third-party mediation/facilitation would be allowed in Kashmir; it had to be resolved bilaterally. Thus, resolution of the conflict became a far more complex task.

Through a qualitative, historically grounded approach, this research has traced the origins of the dispute to the partition of 1947 and unpacked the legal and political justifications advanced by each state. The analysis highlighted how successive policies, both domestic and international, have failed to produce a sustainable resolution.

Moreover, the paper critically assessed India's recent constitutional changes and their implications for the region.

States always safeguard their national interest; thus, the condition of Kashmiris will always be a less pressing issue. Repeatedly, the international community has and continues to express its concerns vis-à-vis Kashmir, especially the human rights conditions in Indian-administered Kashmir. It has urged both states to resolve the matter through peaceful means, while accounting for the aspirations of the Kashmiris. Now, it is high time for both states to agree on a Kashmir-led peace process. It is now up to both India and Pakistan whether they want to bury the past or let the past keep burying the future.

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Modelling Conflict and Cooperation: A Mathematical Approach to International Relations

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Abstract

Contemporary research in international relations necessitates innovative and interdisciplinary approaches that not only deepen our understanding of the complexities of the global system but also contribute to practical solutions for conflict resolution and the advancement of peace and stability. One of these integrated approaches is mathematical modelling, which includes game theory, network analysis, and dynamical system models. The game theory model offers a framework to analyse situations involving mutually dependent decision-making and the impact of these decisions on others. Likewise, network analysis and dynamical system models can be utilised to comprehend various scenarios of conflict and cooperation between states. This paper presents a hypothetical formulation of a game-theoretical model to assess the applicability of mathematical modelling to real-world situations. It discusses the use of utility functions and analyses Nash equilibrium, Pareto optimality, and the security dilemma to grasp the complexities of decision-making. The research focuses on prominent theoretical frameworks of international relations, namely realism and idealism, to demonstrate that mathematical modelling is equally effective in studying the dynamics and behaviour of an international system where sovereign states make strategic choices based on their national interests.

Keywords
Mathematical modelling, conflict resolution, game theory, geopolitical analysis, international cooperation

Introduction
The complex interplay among states in international relations has sparked longstanding scholarly interest and inquiry. Over the years, various approaches have been considered to comprehend the multifaceted dynamics underpinning statecraft, diplomatic ties,

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threat perception, conflict resolution, trade, and connectivity. On the one hand, these endeavours inspire optimism about the possibilities of progress in the field of international relations; on the other hand, many have highlighted numerous obstacles to achieving a sustainable conclusion. The real challenge is deciding whom to regard as authoritative since knowledge in this field is not as cumulative as it is in the study of natural sciences.

From the Greeks to the present day, fundamental questions concerning war and peace (in other words, conflict and cooperation) have persisted, and if they have changed, that variation is too slight to discern. This is because theorists often find themselves moving in cycles, referring to classical ideas as each peer group engages with similar fundamental inquiries influenced by their worldviews (shaped by circumstances), which results in repetitive analyses while progress remains elusive.

Today, several approaches, including realism, idealism, structuralism, conservatism, pluralism, and radicalism, lay the foundation for theories of international relations. However, nearly all these ideologies encounter challenges, as they are shaped by contextual worldviews, limiting their ability to isolate variables and produce generalisable insights. For instance, realist theories assume that conflict is inevitable, while idealist frameworks prioritise cooperative institutions. Neither tradition systematically quantifies decision-making processes or strategic interactions. This has led to repetitive, non-cumulative scholarship and reliance on subjective interpretations of historical events.

In international relations, a theory starts by identifying the factors responsible for a conflict and then proposes a hypothesis or explanatory model as a remedy. Consequently, it is not easy to deconstruct and reconstruct a phenomenon by removing it from its context. A state can be peaceful or aggressive, and these characteristics are contextual to the situation. At the same time, qualitative analysis in international relations faces limitations arising from both contextual and non-contextual elements of the definitional process unless a broad consensus on relevant terms or available variables is established. As a result, it is uncommon to assess the effectiveness of a theory solely on scientific grounds.

The complexity of the field also stems from competing methodologies: qualitative approaches encounter challenges related to standardisation, whereas quantitative methods tend to oversimplify political dynamics. For instance, the billiard-ball model (balance of power) and the cobweb approach (interdependence) underscore systemic interactions but lack the tools to predict behavioural shifts. Similarly, debates about anarchic versus hierarchic systems, although philosophically rich, fail to operationalise variables such as national interest or threat perception into testable hypotheses. To tackle this issue, an integrated approach is increasingly necessary to address the gaps left by definitional ambiguities and to seek consensus on specified variables.

In this regard, the integration of mathematical principles into international relations holds significant potential for distilling the complexities of diplomatic strategies into quantifiable, predictable models. Mathematical modelling offers a novel pathway to analyse strategic choices objectively, such as the Nash Equilibrium in a security dilemma, identify patterns in state behaviour through network analysis, and simulate scenarios like trade disputes and alliance formations to test theoretical assumptions. This paper, therefore, aims to contribute to the field of international relations by examining the capacity of mathematical modelling to elucidate the enigmas of conflict and cooperation. Through the application of game theory, network analysis,

and dynamic systems, the complex network of international relations can be scrutinised, endeavouring to reveal concealed patterns and structures influencing national behaviour. The paper transitions from mathematical approaches to the real-world landscape, seeking to bridge the gap between both disciplines and provide insights for future research.

Theocratical Framework

International relations scholarship is grounded in two dominant theoretical paradigms—realism and liberalism—which offer contextual understanding and insights into the complex dynamics of international conflicts and cooperation. Drawing on these theories, this paper attempts to integrate mathematical modelling to analyse real-world situations and aids in defining assumptions and parameters of anticipated models, suggesting effective conflict resolution strategies. For instance, realism offers views on power dynamics and state behaviour that may stimulate mathematical models of strategic interaction for a tangible conclusion (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001), such as game-theoretic frameworks that suggest cooperative behaviour, which is more likely to emerge when states repeatedly interact and share interests (von Neumann & Morgenstern, 2007), thus simulate conflict escalation or bargaining scenarios. Similarly, liberal theories emphasise interdependence and the role of international institutions and cooperation, offering valuable insights for modelling cooperative behaviour and shared interests (Kant, 1795; Keohane & Nye, 1977). It underpins network analysis models demonstrating how states significantly affect economic outcomes when examining centrality measures in international trade networks (Wasserman, 1994; Jackson, 2008; Jackson, 2010). Such models can map economic or diplomatic ties among states.

To address gaps in these paradigms, other theoretical perspectives, such as constructivism, focusing on norms, identities, and belief systems (Wendt, 1992; Cox, 1981) and institutionalism, examining decision-making processes and organisational roles (Keohane, 2005; Pierson, 1996), offer complementary insights. For instance, constructivist principles can enrich dynamical systems models by capturing how normative shifts alter state behaviour over time, while institutionalist logic can refine agent-based models to simulate collective action challenges within international organisations. This interdisciplinary synthesis, bridging political theory, computational social sciences, and mathematical modelling, enables assumptions for model design, e.g., defining rational actors in game theory vs. socially constructed agents in dynamical systems, and strengthens interpretive rigour when evaluating outcomes. Dynamical system models demonstrate that slight changes in initial situations lead to considerably different outcomes, stressing early diplomatic interventions or engagements (Hirsch et al., 1974; Strogatz, 2024).

Integrating mathematical modelling into policymaking can lead to effective and sustainable conflict resolution strategies. By formalising theoretical assumptions into testable models, e.g., realist 'power-maximising' agents versus constructivist 'norm-sensitive' agents, this approach clarifies which paradigms best explain observed behaviours. For policymakers, dynamical systems models highlight the urgency of early mediation in escalating conflicts, while network analysis identifies pivotal states capable of brokering cooperation. Explicitly linking theories to methodologies not only enhances reproducibility but also grounds abstract models in politically meaningful contexts. It is, therefore, essential to develop workable models that reflect the multifaceted nature of global politics and pave the way for effective policymaking. The

paper, while reflecting on realist and idealist approaches to conflict resolution, attempts to address several key questions, including the application of game theory in modelling conflict and cooperation scenarios, how network analysis can provide insight into states' behaviours, how to use dynamical systems models to comprehend states' relationships, and what the advantages are of employing mathematical modelling in international relations. These questions are addressed by employing mixed-methods research that integrates theoretical analysis with computational and mathematical modelling to explore the dynamics of conflict and cooperation. It utilises secondary sources and implements analytical techniques such as equilibrium analysis to identify stable outcomes of cooperation or conflict, network analysis to reveal coalition patterns, and dynamic systems analysis to assess how pre-conflict trust levels influence long-term trajectories.

International Relations: Understanding of Conflict and Cooperation

Conflict and Cooperation are two different but interconnected expressions in international relations. Cooperation is when actors adjust their behaviour to actual or anticipated preferences of others through a process of policy coordination (Keohane, 2005), aiming to yield rewards for all parties involved, though not necessarily in equal measure. Conversely, conflict or competition is goal-seeking behaviour that aims to reduce the gains available to others or to impede their want-satisfaction (Milner, 1992). Both have a significant bearing on international relations, as the notion of a modern nation-state was born out of conflict (Thirty Years' War) and led to international cooperation (Peace of Westphalia). Despite a long journey of three centuries, the most fundamental inquiries in international relations involve the root causes of interstate conflicts, methods to prevent or mitigate conflicts, and pathways leading to increased global cooperation.

Today, when addressing these inquiries, the prevailing paradigm in international relations, political realism, underscores the persistent inclination for conflict among self-interested states seeking security in an anarchic world. This environment lacks a central authority to safeguard weaker states from the powerful or guarantee their security. In turn, states seek to protect their interests by asserting control, bolstering their military capacities, and forming alliances, thus generating a security dilemma (Cerny, 2000). Consequently, realists perceive international cooperation to be infrequent, transitory, and delicate. Although in many instances, states assisted each other, especially in natural calamities and disasters, and established institutions for coexistence and global cooperation, it is still constrained by enforcement issues and each state's inclination for relative gains in any potential agreement due to its systemic vulnerability (Morgenthau, 1949; Waltz, 1979).

At its most extreme, states find themselves in a security condition characterised by mutual distrust resembling a prisoner's dilemma (Halkos et al., 2021). The equilibrium in the international system still relies on a balance of power or limited cooperation. This dynamic represents the highest attainable goal. War is viewed as a natural aspect and often described as 'diplomacy by other means,' a concept that underscores the role of war as a tool for achieving diplomatic objectives without peaceful negotiations (Clausewitz, 1989). It is important to note that international relations do not perpetually exist in a state of war; instead, they operate within the shadow of war as the ultimate arbitrator. Liberalists posit that the inevitability of war can be challenged. They emphasise interdependence and the potential for increased cooperation within the context of reduced anarchical conditions. This emphasis on the

potential for increased cooperation offers a hopeful perspective on the future of international relations (Jervis, 1999). In short, realism and liberalism are at play to seek dominance in their respective cognitive domain, translating into a chaotic disposition of world politics.

Mathematical Modelling and International Relations

Recent scholarly trends suggest a significant shift from traditional political ideologies within the international system. The strategy of containment, once aimed at protecting established political norms from communist influence, is increasingly viewed as outdated in light of a rapidly evolving global landscape shaped by advancements in automation, communication, and artificial intelligence. These changes transform the socio-political environment and affect wealth distribution and individual self-esteem. As transnational economic and financial networks become more prominent, strategies for achieving goals are moving from coercive to cooperative approaches. This shift underscores a growing scepticism toward conventional leadership styles and political decision-making, with an emphasis on negotiation and strategic thinking that prioritises long-term consequences over short-term gains. The challenges associated with realism are now being addressed within the framework of neoliberalism or through interdisciplinary approaches. In this context, one of the integrated (interdisciplinary) approaches is the mathematical modelling of conflict and cooperation. It involves translating our conceptual understanding of real-world phenomena into mathematical language to solve specific problems. It is a cyclical process, transitioning from the real world to the mathematical realm and returning to reality as demonstrated in the figure below (Krawitz et al., 2022).

Figure 1. Mathematical Modelling to Solve a Real-World Problem
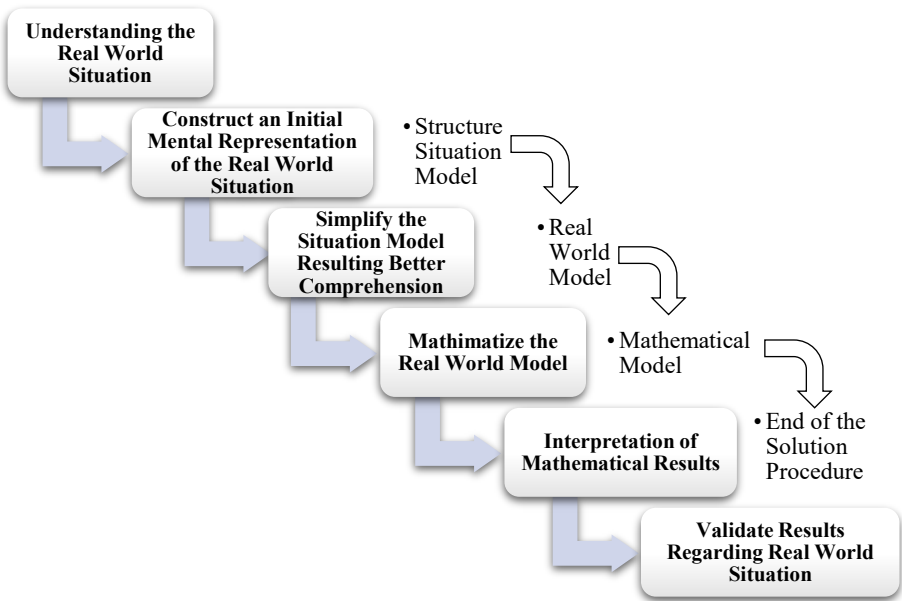
Source: Author

Mathematical modelling presents a systematic process that consists of several vital steps, as shown in the figure below. Starting from identifying and defining a real-world problem (or devising a research question), it leads to developing a theoretical framework, identifying corresponding variables (dependent and independent), and outlining their relationships. It provides a foundation for formalising an appropriate model using differential equations and statistical tools. For model inclusion, relevant data (qualitative and quantitative) is collected, followed by assessing the defined parameters of the model, inserting the data and evaluating the model's performance and validation. The model is then employed to simulate different scenarios for estimation to assess the effectiveness of various policy options by analysing results. The model's credibility rests on its refinement through new data and the insertion of emerging trends. The concluding step is communicating findings and insights using clear and accessible language to all stakeholders. This systematic approach can promote advanced theoretical understanding and help analyse complex international relations issues.

Figure 2. Process of Mathematical Modelling in International Relations
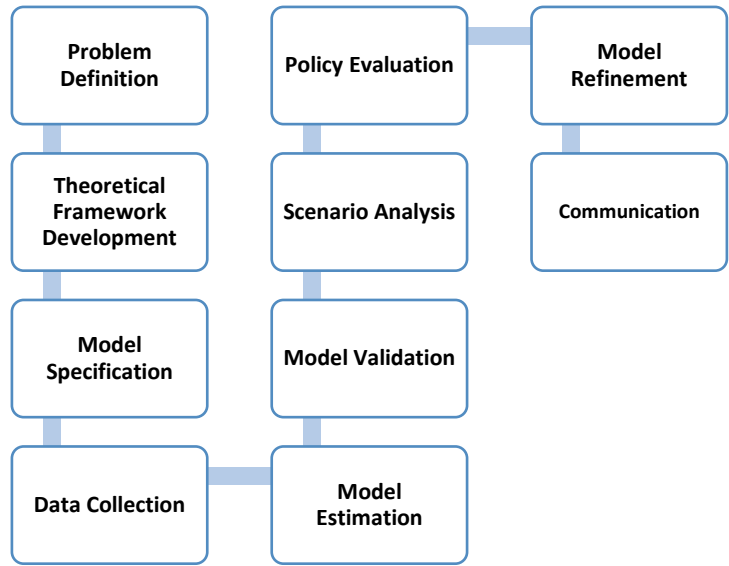
Source: Author

Taking account of realism and liberalism while focusing on security and conflict, mathematical modelling has a significant role. Various theoretical frameworks of international relations can be interpreted into mathematical models for practical analysis, such as game theory, which applies to identifying a prisoner's dilemma or security dilemma, and dynamic systems theory, which corresponds to understanding the arms race phenomenon. Realists often assume rational actors and focus on relative gains, which can be modelled using the mathematical concepts of utility maximisation and Nash equilibrium (CFI Team, 2024; Eldridge, 2024). In such models, military capability, economic power, and geopolitical position act as variables that help to analyse the dynamics of conflict and cooperation. With regard to liberals' views, emphasising cooperation, interdependence, and international institutions can be

modelled by using game theory (relevant to institutional design and cooperative games), or statistical models can be used to analyse the impact of trade on conflict. These models often assume actors with diverse preferences and a focus on absolute gains. Variables such as democracy, economic interdependence, and institutions are incorporated into liberal models to analyse the dynamics of cooperation and peace.

In applying mathematical modelling to realist and liberalist approaches, researchers formalise various models to test their hypotheses, examine different assumptions and scenarios, evaluate policy interventions, and provide a systematic understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. In order to comprehend this process, a hypothetical model combining elements of realism and liberalism (conflict and cooperation between two states) is given below.

Table 1. Model of Conflict and Cooperation

Assumptions	- Two sovereign states, State A and State B, operate in an anarchic international system. - Both possess military capabilities (M) and economic resources (E). - They have conflicting interests. Each state has the option to either cooperate (C) or conflict (K). - Resultant payoffs correspond to their security (S), economic benefits (B) and reputation (R).
Game Structure	In a simultaneous move game, states can choose between two strategies: C and K. The combination of the selected strategies determines the payoffs resulting from States' choices.
Payoff Matrix	| | A(C) | A(K) | | --- | --- | --- | | B(C) | S=3, B=2, R=1 | S=1, B=4, R=1 | | B(K) | S=4, B=1, R=-1 | S=2, B=3, R=0 |
Description of Matrix	It is a simple model structured to depict the payoffs for State A in each possible combination of strategies, where State B's strategies are implied; however, it can be structured both ways. In the given Matrix, rows represent the strategies of State A, and columns represent State B's strategies in case of conflict (K) or cooperation (C). The entries in the matrix correspond to payoffs denoted as S, B, and R (the first value for State A's payoff and the second value for State B's payoff). Numbers are the relative magnitude of payoffs referred to as Utility Value. These values **(1=Lowest, 2=Low, 3=Medium, and 4=Highest)** for State A and State B are identified. In terms of *security* e.g., 1=Border Vulnerability, 2=Minor Skirmish, 3=Deterrence, and 4=Robust Defence System), *economic benefits* (1=Low Investment and Minimal Trade, 2=Moderate Trade with Some Investment, 3=Substantial Investment and Significant Trade, and 4=Huge Investment and Major Economic Partnership) and *reputation* (0=Neutral, -1=Diplomatic Isolation and 1=International Praise with Diplomatic Recognition).
Model Equations	- State A's Utility Function: $U\_A = S\_A + \beta * E\_A + \gamma * R\_A$ (reflecting its preferences over security, economic welfare, and reputation). - State B's Utility Function: $U\_B = S\_B + \beta * E\_B + \gamma * R\_B$ (reflecting its preferences). - Dynamics: $dM\_A/dt = \alpha * (M\_B - M\_A) * K\_A - \delta * C\_A$ (capturing the impact of conflict and cooperation on military capabilities). - Dynamics: $dE\_A/dt = \varepsilon * (E\_B - E\_A) * C\_A - \zeta * K\_A$ (capturing the impact on economic resources). - Dynamics: $dR\_A/dt = \eta * (C\_A - K\_A)$ (capturing the impact on State's reputation).

Explanation of Equations	The model is based on utility function and dynamics to capture the preferences of both States and evolutions in terms of their military capabilities, economic benefits and international reputation. The utility function **$U\_A = S\_A + \beta * E\_A + \gamma * R\_A$** represents State A's preferences considering S_A is State A's security (military strength, defence capabilities, or territorial control), E_A is State A's economic welfare (GDP, trade, or resource acquisition), R_A is State A's reputation (international prestige or diplomatic influence), whereas β and γ are weights representing relative importance of economic benefits and international reputation in State's overall utility. The same is true for U_B = S_B + β * E_B + γ * R_B representing State B's policy-options.
	The dynamics equation **$dM\_A/dt = \alpha * (M\_B - M\_A) * K\_A - \delta * C\_A$** describes how State A's military capabilities (M_A) change over time because of conflict (K_A) and cooperation (C_A) with State B. In this equation, dM_A/dt shows the rate of change of State A's military capabilities over time (t). The difference in military capabilities between State A and State B is M_B - M_A. Whereas K_A shows conflict level of State A and C_A provides cooperation level of State A. α and δ are effectiveness of military actions and impact of cooperation on military capabilities. Second and third equations can also be interpreted likewise.
Variables	- M_A and M_B denote Military Capabilities (e.g., Troops and Weapons). - E_A and E_B denote Economic Resources (e.g., GDP and Trade). - C_A and C_B are Cooperation Levels ($0 \leq C \leq 1$, e.g., Diplomatic Efforts and Joint Projects). - K_A and K_B are Conflict Levels ($0 \leq K \leq 1$, e.g., Military Actions and Sanctions). - β and γ are parameters representing the relative importance of economic welfare and international reputation. - α, δ, ε, ζ, and η represent parameters regarding the effectiveness of military and economic actions and the impact of conflict and cooperation on States' reputation.
Clarification of Variables:	Variables (Military Capability, Economic Resources, Cooperation Level and Conflict Level) and parameters (relative importance of economic welfare (β), international reputation (γ), effectiveness of military and economic actions (α, δ, ε, ζ) and impact of conflict and cooperation on states' reputation (η)), used in the model clarify the meaning and context to understand the model and its dynamics.
	The dependent variables are State A's military capabilities, economic resources and reputation because their values change over time based on dynamic equations. The are independent variables, such as State A's cooperation and conflict levels and State B's military capabilities, economic resources, and cooperation and conflict levels. Their independence depends upon the influence they exert on the changes that occur among dependent variables.
Analysis Methods	- Nash Equilibrium Analysis (to determine optimal strategies). - Stability Analysis (to determine the behaviour of the system). - Sensitivity Analysis (to examine the impact of changes in parameters).
Extended Analysis	**Nash Equilibrium Analysis:** It aims to find the optimal strategies for players in a game where no player can improve payoff by unilaterally changing strategy (Nash, 1950). In the given model, it is to find the values of C_A, C_B, K_A, and K_B by using partial derivatives that satisfy the equation $\partial U\_A/\partial C\_A = 0$, $\partial U\_A/\partial K\_A = 0$, $\partial U\_B/\partial C\_B = 0$, $\partial U\_B/\partial K\_B = 0$, representing the optimal strategies (subject to the constraints $0 \leq C\_A$, C_B, K_A, K_B ≤ 1, where 0 represents no conflict or cooperation and 1 denotes full cooperation or maximum conflict). For example, $\partial U\_A/\partial C\_A = 0$ means the utility of State A remains unchanged if it changes its cooperation level (C_A) slightly, assuming that the strategy of State B is

constant. The same is the case of ∂U_A/∂K_A = 0, where the conflict level (K_A) is slightly changed. In the case of ∂U_B/∂C_B = 0 and ∂U_B/∂K_B = 0, the utility of State B does not change, cooperation (C_B) and conflict levels (K_B) are slightly changed, but the strategy of State A remains constant. It shows that no State, either A or B, can improve its utility by changing its conflict or cooperation level unilaterally when the strategy of other State remains constant.

Stability Analysis: It analyses the behaviour of a system, whether it maintains or restores its equilibrium when acted upon by forces tending to displace it (Nagurney & Zhang, 1996, p.15). Stability analysis is carried out using different methods. The model, the behaviour of the system around the equilibrium point (C_A*, C_B*, K_A*, K_B*) can be analysed by Jacobian matrix of partial derivatives, such as J=∂(dM_A/dt, dE_A/dt, dR_A/dt, dM_B/dt, dE_B/dt, dR_B/dt)/∂(C_A, C_B, K_A, K_B). It is used to measure how changes that take place in variables (cooperation and conflict levels) affect the rate of change in other variables (military capabilities, economic resources and international reputation)

Sensitivity Analysis: It analyses how changes in parameters affect the behaviour of a system or how different values of independent variables affect dependent variables. It is used under certain conditions (Vipond, 2024). It involves partial derivatives of utility functions and dynamics equations with respect to parameters (β, γ, α, δ, ε, …): ∂U_A/∂β, ∂U_A/∂γ, ∂U_A/∂δ, ∂U_B/∂β, ∂U_B/∂γ, ∂U_B/∂δ, (dM_A/dt)/∂α, (dM_A/dt)/∂δ, … For example, ∂U_A/∂β measures change in the Utility of State A (U_A) with respect to a small change in parameter β, and (dM_A/dt)/∂δ measures change in the rate of change of State A's military capabilities (dM_A/dt) regarding a small change in parameter δ. Sensitivity analysis helps to understand how the system responds to changes in the parameters and results in optimal policy decisions and enhances system resilience

Source: Author

        The model above (Payoff Matrix) incorporates descriptive variables and mathematical equations to study the dynamics of conflict and cooperation between states (A and B). In the given scenario, the strategic interaction between both states in a simultaneous move is known as a normal-form game in game theory. At the same time, it combines elements of realism, emphasis on military capabilities and security, and liberalism, focus on cooperation and economic benefits, to analyse the conditions under which cooperation emerges, the impact of different strategies on security, economic, and reputational outcomes. These outcomes are based on the choices adopted by both states, capturing trade-offs between security, economic benefits and reputation. The model highlights the complexity of decision-making in anarchic international systems.

        From a realist's viewpoint, states may choose conflict as a rational approach to pursue their interests, even if it yields suboptimal outcomes. The pursuit of security by one state can lead to insecurity for another state, showing the security dilemma. If State A perceives that State B will act against it, even then, it is rational for State A to choose conflict to guarantee its security. Mearsheimer contends that pursuing security primarily drives states and will engage in conflict when necessary to achieve it (Mearsheimer, 2014). Therefore, the existence of a security dilemma is validated. Now, if State A increases its military capability, that would also lead to State B's perception of insecurity and prompt State B to enhance its military capabilities. While pondering the security dilemma, Jervis explains how states fortifying their security can sensitise insecurity for others (Jervis, 1978). If State A has military superiority, it can dissuade

State B from opting for the option of conflict. Waltz maintains that military capability is critical to states' behaviour and subsequent outcomes (Waltz, 1979).

According to liberalists, cooperation is possible among states in an anarchic system; however, it is often challenging due to the risk of defection and thus needs credible commitments. Oye observes that there are hitches to attaining cooperation in anarchic systems, which necessitate credible commitments (Oye, 1986). Although the model illustrates the same, even when states share common interests, it emphasises institutions' role in facilitating cooperation among states and reducing the risk of conflict. A similar view was put forward by Keohane, saying that international cooperation is possible even in the absence of a central authority, but it is because of the development of international institutions (Keohane, 2005). The model further explains how cooperation levels and states' reputation influence their behaviour and resultant outcomes, similar to Krasner, who examines the role of international institutions in shaping states' behaviour and promoting cooperation (Krasner, 1983). The model also verifies the liberalist assumption of interdependence and explains how economic interdependence incentivises cooperation among states seeking to avoid conflict. It is a key factor in promoting peace and stability (Russett & Oneal, 2001). Additionally, the model emphasises the importance of states' reputation in maintaining cooperative behaviour and credibility. Mercer argues that states are motivated to maintain a reputation for credibility and reliability (Mercer, 1996).

Game Theory and Conflict and Cooperation

Game theory is an effective instrument of applied mathematics used in modelling across various disciplines to analyse how decisions are being made and their impact on others. It is an analytical tool to examine a situation in which mutually dependent decision-making occurs that necessitates each participant (player) to take others' strategies into account while making decisions, even if they have similar, opposing, or divergent interests (Davis & Brams, 2024). The application of game theory in international relations has already been demonstrated in the abovementioned model, which helps to understand the decision-making in a complex system and determines the resulting outcome. However, the preferences and beliefs of states involved in the situation significantly shape the outcomes. There are approaches like Prisoner's Dilemma, Chicken Game, and Stag Hunt that help to investigate the situation thoroughly in one way or the other. For example, a prisoner's dilemma occurs when mutual defection (conflict) occurs as a dominant strategy of both states. Chicken Game corresponds to cooperation or defection based on states' belief systems and preferences (Osborne & Rubinstein, 1994). Stag Hunt leads to cooperation as the optimal strategy for both states (Skyrms, 2004). The resultant outcomes are again analysed by using various methods like Nash Equilibrium (representing a situation where neither state can unilaterally improve its payoff by changing strategy) and Pareto Optimality, representing a situation in which no state can increase its payoff without affecting the other state (Ingham, 2024; Brisset & Gillon, 2015).

Keeping the complexity of decision-making in international relations in view, there is a dire need to select an appropriate model cautiously, as it also involves the motivational level and other dynamics of states (players) in the given context. Following is a hypothetical mathematical formulation of the game theoretical model based on a specific assumption and game structure to determine whether game theory applies to real-world scenarios. It is an extension of the model discussed above with

extended parameters in a more formalised and concise manner, facilitating in-depth analysis and problem-solving.

Table 2. Mathematical Formulation of the Game Theoretical Model

Assumption	In the absence of a centralised authority, there is a strategic interplay between two States (P1 and P2), having a contentious association. Both States have distinctive strategies (S1 and S2) to cooperate (C) or defect (D). Their Payoffs (linked to each strategy) are characterised by utility functions (U1 and U2), which highlight the concerns and preferences of each State. $U\_1 \{S\_1, S\_2\}$ and $U\_2 \{S\_1, S\_2\}$ will be the payoffs of State 1 and State 2, respectively.
Game	In this game between two States (P1 and P2), where they do not trust each other, both have a choice (S1, S2) to make either cooperate (C) or defect (D) to achieve the desired outcome (U1, U2). U1 and U2 are the number of points that states (P1 and P2) get, respectively, for each combination of their choices. Therefore, G=<P1, P2>, {S1, S2}, {U1, U2}> represents a strategic contest.
Equations/Analysis	• **Nash Equilibrium:** A situation in which no State can improve its payoff (utility) by unilaterally changing its strategy, assuming that the other State will keep its strategy unchanged. In that case, the Nash equilibrium can be identified by using the equations $\partial U1/\partial S1 = 0$ and $\partial U2/\partial S2 = 0$. Here, $\partial U1/\partial S1 = 0$ represents that there is no change in P1's payoff by changing its strategy, and $\partial U2/\partial S2 = 0$ represents no change in P2's payoff by changing its strategy. • **Pareto Optimality:** Pareto Optimality, in a situation where no State can improve its payoff without making other State suffer. Mathematically, it can be represented as $\partial U1/\partial S1 + \partial U2/\partial S2 = 0$ (any improvement for one State comes at the expense of the other). • **Security Dilemma:** In a hypothetical situation where cooperation leads to a lesser outcome than defection for both States or vice versa. It is mathematically represented as U1(C,C) < U1(D,D) and U2(C,C) < U2(D,D), where U1(C,C) < U1(D,D) represents that P1 gets a lower payoff by cooperating when P2 cooperates and U2(C,C) < U2(D,D) represents that P2 gets a lower payoff by cooperating when P1 cooperates. In a Security Dilemma, the payoff for both States defecting (D,D) is often more significant than the payoff for both States cooperating (C,C), but less than the payoff for one State defecting and the other State cooperating (D,C or C,D).

Source: Author

Keeping Table 2 in consideration, real-world examples related to the model are available. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union (P1 and P2) were engaged in a strategic interplay regarding nuclear arsenals (i.e., an arms race). They had a choice to engage in cooperation (C) in order to reduce the number of their nuclear weapons or opt for defection (D) by augmenting their military capabilities (weapon stockpiles). The payoffs associated with each strategy were influenced by mutually assured destruction (MAD), where cooperation led to heightened security and defection would increase vulnerabilities. When both states defect (D) rather than cooperate (C), there is a possibility of a security dilemma, aside from the fact that

cooperation would yield positive outcomes for both. Security Dilemma often arises from the apprehension of being exploited or targeted by the other state, eventually culminating in suboptimal results for both states. In the case of the Cuban Missile Crisis, a Nash equilibrium appeared when both states, the United States and the Soviet Union, agreed to withdraw their missiles because neither state could improve the outcome by independently changing its strategy, assuming that the other state's strategy remained unchanged. However, the Nash equilibrium does not need to guarantee Pareto optimality. It indicates that there are alternative strategies that yield better results. For example, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change opted for cooperation (C) to reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions. It leads to a Pareto optimal outcome because reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions would benefit all states.

The Game theory model provides insight into the hitches faced by states while opting for cooperation in an anarchic system because states often struggle to balance their security concerns and potential advantages. It also highlights the significance of credibility, trust and communication for states involved in strategic interaction, as they have to make credible commitments necessary to achieve cooperative outcomes. Drawing realist and liberalist conclusions out of the model, it emphasises that there is a need to balance out states' interests and collective gains.

Network Analysis and International Relations

Network Analysis is a set of techniques derived from network theory, which has evolved from Computer Science to demonstrate the power of social network influences (Smiraglia, 2015). These techniques are used in various interdisciplinary fields, including international relations, to study the interactions or relationships among a diverse range of actors (or states) within a network or system, such as diplomatic interactions, economic relationships, security alliances, transnational networks, etc. In network analysis, nodes represent states; edges denote the connections between states, and potential outcomes incorporate the network's structure, unveiling clusters, centrality measures and other characteristics for understanding conflict and cooperation. Centrality measures calculate the degree, closeness, betweenness and eigenvector centrality to categorise influential states in a network. Clusters of states with shared characteristics are distinguished by using community detection algorithms in order to study different patterns of conflict or cooperation. Identifying the shortest paths between states helps to analyse chances for mediation or arbitration (Hafner-Burton et al., 2006; Hoffman & Lebovic, 2012; Martin & Harnisch, 2010).

The network analysis approach identifies potential strategic points of influence to foster cooperation or mitigate conflicts. In a real-world example, the European Union (EU) demonstrates the cooperation among European states that share characteristics and behaviours towards EU institutions in pursuit of common objectives, economic integration, and security collaboration. Another example is the United States and China, as they have pivotal positions in the international system. Both have elevated centrality scores and claim multifaceted relationships in diversified spheres, such as diplomacy, trade, and security. There are various techniques for network analysis, such as Graph theory (Carlson, 2024), Network Visualisation (e.g., Gephi, NetworkX), Centrality Measures (Peng et al., 2018), Community Detection Algorithms (Mao et al., 2017), Shortest Path Algorithms (Gries, 2017) and Network Metrics. Game theory can be incorporated into the Network Analysis model to better understand conflict and cooperation dynamics in an unstructured system.

Table 3. Mathematical Representation of Network Analysis Model

Assumption	While using Graph theory, let us assume that G=(V, E) is a graph that represents a network of States in which States interact and influence each other. In this equation, V is a set of nodes (States), labelled from 1 to n, and E is a set of edges (relationships) between nodes (States), represented by pairs of nodes. There are variables, such as adjacency matrix (A), distance (D), centrality (C), and community partition (P), that collectively capture the connectivity, distances, importance, and clustering of states in the network.
Game Structure	• $G = (V, E)$ is a graph representing a network of States. • $V = \{1, 2, \ldots, n\}$ is a set of nodes (states). • $E = \{(i, j) \mid i, j \in V\}$ is a set of edges (relationships) between nodes (States). • $A = [a\_ij]$ is an Adjacency Matrix representing the edges (relationship) between nodes (States). If there is an edge between nodes i and j (i.e., they have a relationship), then $a\_ij = 1$; otherwise, $a\_ij = 0$. • $D = [d\_ij]$ is a Distance Matrix representing the shortest paths between nodes (States). In this case, d_ij represents the shortest path distance between nodes (States) i and j. • $C = [c\_ij]$ is a Centrality Matrix representing the importance of each node (State). In this case, c_ij measures the importance of node (State) i in the graph, considering various centrality metrics (e.g., degree, closeness, and betweenness). • $P = \{P\_1, P\_2, \ldots, P\_n\}$ is a set of partitions (communities) in the graph, where each P_i represents a group of nodes (States) that are densely connected within the community.
Equations	• **Graph Structure:** $G = (V, E)$ • **Adjacency Matrix (A)** can be used to calculate various network metrics, such as: o density(G) = |E| / (|V| * (|V| - 1)) o clustering_coefficient(G) = (|E| / (|V| * (|V| - 1))) * (|V| / (|E| + |V|)) • **Distance Matrix (D)** can be used to calculate the shortest paths between nodes, such as d_ij = min{k | (i, k)(k, j) ∈ E, k ∈ V} • **Centrality Matrix (C)** can be used to calculate various centrality measures, such as: i. degree_centrality(i) = |{j | (i, j) ∈ E}| ii. closeness_centrality(i) = 1 / sum{d_ij | j ∈ V, j ≠ i} iii. betweenness_centrality(i) = sum{k,l ∈ V, i ≠ k ≠ l} (d_kl - d_kj - d_jk) iv. eigenvector centrality(i) = max{λ | Ax = λx} • **Partition Matrix (P)** can be used to identify communities in the graph, such as P_i = {j | (i, j) ∈ E, j ∈ V}.
Analysis:	This model helps to find connectivity and important relationships between States (edges), shortest paths and distances between States, importance and centrality of each State, and community structure and clustering within the network. After getting detailed information, the model enables a deeper understanding of global politics and diplomacy.

Source: Author

Keeping the network analysis approach in view, the international system can be conceived as a network of sovereign states whose structure is intertwined with diplomatic, economic, and security relationships. In the real world, the EU represents a cluster of states with dense diplomatic and economic ties. Also, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) represents a network of states with shared regional interests, but it is not as densely tied as the EU. The adjacency matrix indicates the presence or absence of diplomatic relations, trade agreements, and security alliances between the states. In the contemporary world scenario, the United States is maintaining a dense network of economic and diplomatic relationships with European states. Similarly, China has a robust network of trade agreements with Asian states. While defining the most effective path for cooperation or conflict, the distance matrix helps to understand the relationship between the United States and China, thus indicating that robust diplomatic channels would be the most advantageous path in shaping their relationship. The centrality measures reveal the influence and significance of the United States and China. The United States, owing to its wide-ranging diplomatic and military presence, attains a high level of centrality in the world, whereas China's centrality scores on its increasing economic and political influence. Regarding community detection algorithms, BRICS shows a community of emerging economies with shared development goals. Network analysis can also help to understand the Russia-Ukraine conflict, amidst the role of influential states in the system.

Carrying forward the debate between realists and liberalists, the network analysis approach yields distinct outcomes. As has already been discussed, realists underline states' self-interest and security concerns while highlighting hegemonic power or potential threats to stability. The same can be determined through centrality measures *vis-à-vis* community detection algorithms, to help understand the role of alliances. On the other hand, liberalists value cooperation and shared interests among states, which a dense network of relationships and clustering patterns can indicate. States with high centrality scores act as leaders or architects of international cooperation. However, the role of international institutions and norms in shaping international relations can be identified through network structure and community detection. Both perspectives can have insights from network analysis.

Dynamical Systems and International Relations

A dynamical system approach is used to analyse evolving and complex systems while examining system dynamics, including behaviour, patterns, and trajectories. In international relations, it offers an alternative to traditional qualitative and quantitative methods by providing a dynamic and endogenous point of view, which allows for understanding the dynamic interactions between variables and making short- and long-term projections for alternative policy choices (Fisunoglu, 2018). This approach is used to understand the dynamics of conflict (modelling the escalation and de-escalation of conflicts, state interactions and the consequences of interventions), international cooperation (analysing the emergence and sustainability of cooperation mechanisms, including the roles of incentives, norms and institutions), global governance (exploring the dynamics of international institutions, systems and networks, inclusive of their adaptability and resilience), political regimes (assessing the stability and instability of political systems and impact of economic, social and political factors), and international political economy (modelling the dynamics of trade, investment and financial flows, factoring in the consequences of policy interventions and external shocks).

The key concepts in dynamical systems as applied to international relations consist of phase transitions (abrupt shifts in system behaviour, such as initiation of conflict or emergence of cooperation), attractors (stable states or patterns towards which the system gravitates, such as a stable peace or recurring conflict), bifurcations (alterations in system behaviour due to minor adjustments in parameters or initial conditions), feedback loops (cycles of cause and effect that can stabilise or destabilise the system) and nonlinearity (the occurrence where minor changes have notable and disproportionate effects). Researchers employ various computational tools, such as differential equations, agent-based modelling, network analysis, system dynamics modelling and machine learning algorithms (Ward, 2019; Weidmann, 2017). An illustrative example of modelling conflict and cooperation by using a dynamical system approach is given below.

Table 4. Mathematical Representation of a Dynamical System Model

Assumption	In an anarchic system, there is an arms race between two sovereign States (A and B). Each State's military spending is influenced by the other State's military expenditures.
Game Structure	It is a differential game in which the rate of change in military spending fluctuates over time.
Equation	• $dx/dt = \alpha y - \beta x$ (rate of change in State A's military spending) • $dy/dt = \gamma x - \delta y$ (rate of change in State B's military spending) Note: The rate of change in military spending (dx/dt) is proportional to the opponent's military spending (y) and inversely proportional to one's own military spending (x). • α represents the degree to which State A feels threatened or responsive to State B's military buildup. • γ represents the degree to which State B feels threatened or responsive to State A's military buildup. • β and δ represent the cost or burden of maintaining a high level of military spending.
Variables	• x: State A's Military Spending • y: State B's Military Spending • $\alpha, \beta, \gamma, \delta$ are constants representing States' response coefficients • t: time • dx/dt and dy/dt: Rates of change of military spending over time
Analysis	Stability of the equilibrium points Potential for escalation or disarmament

Source: Author

This model highlights the dynamic interaction between two states' military spending, in which each state's military buildup is influenced by the other state's military expenditure as well as its own military spending. This phenomenon in international relations is usually referred to as an arms race. Alternatively, it is known as stability in military spending, depending upon the values of intervening factors. A scenario in which each state tries to outspend the other is referred to as a security dilemma, where one state's military buildup leads to insecurity and military buildup in the other state, and stability in military spending, where both states reach a mutually acceptable level of military expenditure. A crude example from the real world is the

nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period. Researchers, while using historical data, can estimate parameters and stimulate dynamics to analyse how this arms race escalated and eventually stabilised (Pilch, 2001).

Keeping the dynamics and parameters of the given model (Table 4) in consideration, there are various scenarios in international relations where a dynamical system approach can be used, e.g., the formation of a mutually beneficial alliance (where both states cooperate and receive benefits), the development of a trade agreement (where both states reduce tariffs and increase trade), and the establishment of a peace treaty (where both states agree to end hostilities and cooperate on security issues). In the case of cooperation between two states, incentives or bonuses can characterise economic benefits, security guarantees, diplomatic recognition, and international prestige. Similarly, states' decisions to cooperate are influenced by political ideology, national interests, public opinion, and leadership preferences. A real-world example is the formation of the EU as a dynamic cooperation process. Using a dynamic system approach, researchers can study the EU's expansion and analyse how the cooperation levels of various states increased over time (Volgy & Others, 2012).

Dynamical systems can also study the impact of external shocks, such as economic crises, political unrest, alliance formation, and natural disasters, on international cooperation and conflict, involving a system of differential equations. Various techniques, including bifurcation analysis, chaos theory, network theory, agent-based modelling and system dynamics, are applied to understand how external shocks influence states' relationships. These methods help identify tipping points, regime changes, and the unpredictable nature of international relations under external shocks.

Case Study: Mathematical Modelling of Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The Russia-Ukraine armed conflict, which originated in 2014, was sparked by the ousting of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych, who was pro-Russia, in a popular uprising. It led to Russia's annexation of Crimea and sparked a separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine. The recent conflict is considered an extension of previous hostilities. Up till now, the conflict has resulted in a substantial death toll and displacement of a huge Ukrainian population, besides enormous economic and infrastructure loss. This ongoing armed conflict can be examined through mathematical modelling across various dimensions. For example, conflict dynamics can be analysed by using differential equations or agent-based models to simulate escalation and de-escalation of the conflict. Game theory or network analysis can be employed to understand tactics and strategies used by both states in military operations. Game theory or decision analysis helps model political negotiations and the probability of reaching a peace agreement. Econometric models can help analyse the economic impact, including sanctions and trade disruption. There are several variables available that can be used to model different facets of the conflict. Military variables include the number of troops, deployment, use of sophisticated weaponry, military equipment, and military strategies and tactics. Political variables include diplomatic efforts and negotiations, political leadership and will, and public opinion and support. Economic variables are sanctions, trade disruption, GDP, inflation, and currency depreciation. Social variables include

civilian casualties, humanitarian assistance, media, and propaganda. Besides, there are geographical, time, international, and uncertainty variables. However, the selection of variables directly correlates to the research questions and the modelling approach used.

The complexity of the Russia-Ukraine conflict holds the importance of an integrated approach employing game theory using utility functions and payoff matrices to examine strategic interactions among Russia, Ukraine and other international stakeholders, predicting the outcome; Dynamical system by developing stock and flow diagram to understand conflict dynamics and its impact, apprehending the feedback loops and nonlinear effects of diplomatic efforts, public opinion and economic sanctions; and network analysis by assigning nodes and edges weights and computing network centrality measures to comprehend inter-relationship between entities involved, structural properties of conflict network, identifying key actors and potential vulnerabilities. It is a kind of hybrid approach permitting policymakers to stimulate different scenarios and predict outcomes of various diplomatic, economic and military strategies employed in the conflict.

In the context of modelling using game theory, the simplest scenario could be a strategic interplay between Russia and Ukraine, where both states need to choose either negotiation (diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict) or escalation (through military means) to illustrate outcomes through a payoff matrix based on their strategic choices. If both states opt for negotiation (N, N), they both receive the same utility value, highlighting resolution and a degree of cooperation. Suppose Ukraine chooses negotiation and Russia opts for escalation; in that case, there is a possibility that Ukraine will receive less utility value (indicating loss) and Russia will gain maximum utility value (indicating gain), and vice versa. If both states go for escalation (E, E), then the probability of escalation (p_E) is high, denoting that the conflict will escalate into a full-scale war. In this case, the model represents a security dilemma in which both states are stuck in a cycle of escalation due to competing interests and mistrust.

Using the system dynamics approach for modelling the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a complex system, where the behaviour of one side effects the behaviour of the other, the stocks and flows signify that the military strength of Russia and Ukraine (RMS and UMS) can be increased through military buildup efforts (RMBR and UMBR), economic resources (RER and UER) can be affected by economic aid (UEAI) or sanctions (RESI). International diplomatic pressure (IDP) can be increased through diplomatic efforts (DERC). This analysis also refers to a security dilemma, as military buildups by both states mutually intensify fears, and conflict escalates further. It would also entail economic ramifications, including a substantial increase in military expenditures and depletion of economic resources (which could be covered up through aid or sanctions). International interference or diplomatic endeavours could exert pressure on both states to seek a resolution to the conflict.

When conducting a network analysis of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the mathematical modelling would entail the representation of conflict as a network, a complex web of relationships between states, international organisations, and institutions. Each node (actor) has its own attributes, such as political leaning, military strength, and economic resources, which influence its behaviour and interactions with other nodes. The edges (relationships) between nodes represent diplomatic, economic,

military, and institutional ties, which can be strong or weak, cooperative or conflictual. The weight of each edge indicates the strength of the relationship, and the type of edge (diplomatic, economic, military) indicates the nature of the interaction. The model also helps to identify central nodes (e.g., Russia, Ukraine, US, EU) that play a crucial role in shaping the conflict, analysing the cohesion of the network, revealing the strength of alliances and intensity of conflicts, simulating scenarios, such as diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict or economic sanctions imposed on Russia and predict the likelihood of conflict escalation or resolution based on network structure and node attributes. The model represents complex interdependence, highlighting how their relationships shape conflict dynamics.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a multilayered challenge necessitating an all-inclusive approach to its analysis and finding solutions. In that case, realists and idealists need a balanced approach that should take into account national interests and efforts for cooperation. In this regard, realists need to advocate for the maintenance of military deterrence to pursue national security *vis-à-vis* readiness to adopt abrupt shifts in conflict dynamics. At the same time, idealists are responsible for promoting diplomatic efforts and pushing for a sustainable negotiating process, international cooperation, and economic interconnectedness.

Conclusion

Mathematical modelling in the contemporary context of conflict and cooperation offers innumerable prospects for diversified theoretical approaches in international relations so that they can converge on a single agenda point for workable conflict resolution. Although mathematical modelling pushes for military power and strategic interests in an anarchic setting, the need for diplomatic efforts and international cooperation are not ruled out to maintain peace and stability. As it has been observed from the preceding discussion that, employing mathematical tools in analysing real-world scenarios helps provide insight into the complex dynamics of the international system, it is, therefore, imperative to adopt integrated approaches to address underlying issues driving conflicts and exploiting chances for cooperation. For instance, while addressing the issues related to terrorism, the dynamical system approach assists in understanding the propagation of terrorist ideologies, whereas network analysis identifies critical actors within terrorist networks. Similarly, exploring cybersecurity involves network analysis to investigate cyberattacks, and Game theory explores the dynamics of cyber conflict. Mathematical modelling is equally valuable for studying environmental politics, the impact of climate change, and the efficacy of international agreements. Moreover, migration flow dynamics and the influence of refugee policies can also be comprehended through modelling. These illustrations accentuate mathematical modelling in addressing crucial global issues within international relations. They provide valuable insights and foster a deep understanding of the complex dynamics that shape our world today.

However, using mathematical modelling in international relations also has its limitations and challenges. It is difficult for a mathematical model to fully capture complex human behaviour, particularly in diplomacy and state interactions. Moreover, the impulsive nature of international relations can make modelling difficult because it is hard to create reliable models accounting for all relevant variables. Mathematical

models undertake simple assumptions and manageable data, thus putting a risk of oversimplification. It may lead to omitting important factors influencing states' behaviours and outcomes. Another related challenge is the availability of accurate and quality data regarding a wide range of variables, as most of the information is kept classified or declared sensitive and not accessible to researchers. Additionally, including and weighing the importance of variables can involve an element of prejudice, which could put the model at risk and impact its accuracy and reliability. Lastly, overreliance on the modelling approach may displace human judgement and qualitative analysis and limit comprehension of the complexities involved in states' cooperation and conflict.

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Civilizational Decline or Intellectual Distortion? Interrogating Lewis's What Went Wrong?

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Bernard Lewis's *What Went Wrong?* promises an inquiry into how one of the earliest and supreme civilizations got eclipsed, fell low and failed in the course of history. Published in the aftermath of 9/11, Lewis's work is less a study of history than a rehearsal of well-worn clichés, wrapped in the authority of an eminent scholar. The question this review essay seeks to address is: How does the book reflect a reductionist, essentialist, and orientalist portrayal of the Islamic world, and to what extent does it overlook the impacts of colonialism, external interventions, and the complex histories of both the Islamic world and the West?

The Context:

Though dubbed as the 'doyen' of the Middle Eastern Studies by reviewers on the right, it is undeniable that Lewis is a flagrant Orientalist, and his opinions on the Islam and Arab civilisations has not changed much since Edward Said christened his work as 'aggressively ideological', 25 years ago. The book, published in the wake of 9/11, followed by a media campaign that saw Lewis flaunting his love for Israel and consistent disdain for contemporary Islamic societies leaves no doubt as to his lack of objectivity when approaching his research subject.

Lewis's inquiry posits the Islamic world as a civilisational problem to be solved, divided into two sets of 'wrongs' that needed to be addressed, the first being the politico-economic issues of contemporary Islamic nations and the second being the deficiencies of the historical Islamic civilizations (Alam, 2002); it is the second that Lewis is primarily concerned with in his work. The framing of his question hence implies that something went right somewhere else, namely the West, and that the Islamic world has deviated from some presumed normative path of progress. Working in a contextual vacuum, Lewis fails to ask the more important question such as why the West saw a rise in more developed capitalist societies but not the East, and therefore

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implicitly placing the Islamic world in a posture of deficiency. This kind of framing evacuates nuance and fosters a narrative of civilizational decline without attending to the unevenness of historical processes or the role of external factors, such as colonialism and it would not be wrong to assume that such a framing is done deliberately to avoid asking questions which expose the constant exploitation that Eastern societies face at the hands of West even today by dubbing their misfortune as self-inflicted.

Orientalist Tropes and Essentialism

Lewis relies thoroughly on orientalist and essentialist tropes. Even more troubling is his treatment of historical development within the Islamic world. No reform effort undertaken by Muslim societies are credited with sincerity or success. Instead he criticizes the Islamic world for lacking modern liberal institutions but makes no effort to contextualize the complexities of these processes or of the very real structural and external challenges that accompanied them. One of the more glaring omissions is Lewis's failure to acknowledge the comparatively greater degrees of civil tolerance and pluralism that existed in many parts of the Muslim world, particularly during the Ottoman era. While he fixates on the visibility of religious conservatism, most notably the veiling of women, as shorthand for cultural regression, he ignores the broader social realities of the time. When judged within their historical contexts, Islamic societies such as the Ottoman Empire often provided more religious and communal freedoms than their European counterparts. For example, the *millet* system allowed various religious communities, Christian, Jewish, and others, to govern themselves according to their own laws and customs, a level of institutionalized pluralism that had no equivalent in early modern Europe. By contrast, events like the Spanish Inquisition (1478-1834), where state machinery was deployed to persecute, forcibly convert, or expel Jews and Muslims reflect a far more draconian and intolerant social order. In choosing to overlook these comparative freedoms, Lewis not only distorts the historical record but also perpetuates a selective moral narrative.

In his portrayal of Western advancement, Lewis often romanticizes Europe, minimizing its own internal strife and contradictions while taking every chance to heighten any hint of instability in Islamic empires all the while framing their relative stability not as a strength but as stagnation. Lewis often draws a contrast between inquisitive Europeans who, he claims, made earnest efforts to understand the Islamic world, and what he portrays as complacent or inward-looking Muslims, uninterested in the wider world. Worse, he attributes the decline of curiosity solely to internal cultural failings, ignoring the impact of European imperial policies that curtailed Muslim access to knowledge and exchange. This flawed comparison ignores the fact that for much of early modern Europe, interest in Arabic stemmed less from a desire to understand Islam and more from internal Christian motivations, particularly the study of biblical Hebrew, where Arabic offered linguistic insights. Moreover, Lewis's portrayal overlooks the rich tradition of intellectual engagement within the Islamic world in the shape of scholars like al-Biruni, al-Shahrastani, and Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar, all of whom passionately studied foreign cultures and religions.

Further proof of Lewis's reductionist approach can be seen from his treatment of history as a linear and monolithic narrative which repeatedly portrays the Islamic world and the West as cohesive, unified entities, a view that ignores the rich internal diversity and constant contestations within both. This kind of binary, totalizing thinking is precisely what theorists like Antonio Gramsci (2011) warned against when

discussing social classes or political entities. For instance, to speak of "Islamic armies" or "Muslim war departments" (Lewis 2002, p.17) as if they were unified organs enacting a singular civilizational will overlooks the fragmentary, often internally conflicted nature of empires and societies, and collapses centuries of diversity into a monolithic identity. A narrative of simultaneous conquests by Islamic armies across the globe conjures a phantom entity: a 'unified Islamic military complex' that never existed, nor does it today. For Lewis these armies had only one motive: spreading Islam, a historical fallacy that overlooks the importance of other motives like political, economic, and pastoral concerns and the role of Sufi missions (Bulliet, 2004). The erasure of these peaceful modes of expansion in favour of militaristic imagery speaks to the book's ideological slant.

In collapsing the Islamic world and the West into opposing civilizational blocs, Lewis flattens out the complexity of historical alliances and enmities. The reality of a British-Ottoman alliance is inconvenient to Lewis's binary framing and so is downplayed. The actual record is one of shifting allegiances that frequently crossed religious lines, undermining the book's foundational dichotomy. Indeed, the very period Lewis seeks to explain is marked more by intra-civilizational complexity than inter-civilizational antagonism.

This Manichean lens becomes particularly dangerous in the post-9/11 context in which the book gained popularity entrenching the West/Islam dichotomy in the cultural imagination, reinforcing a narrative that has justified wars, surveillance, and discrimination. By emphasizing confrontation/ difference, Lewis contributes to a worldview in which violence between civilizations seems not only inevitable but natural. Lewis's Darwinian analysis vindicates Western dominance because they did something in the course of their growth that was 'right': hence making them the fittest candidate and hence justifying the cleansing of the 'inferior race' through racist and colonial policies.

Compounding the problem is Lewis's neglect of other civilizations and geopolitical actors. India, China, sub-Saharan Africa, and even Central Asia are treated as marginal or irrelevant to the broader story. By focusing almost exclusively on the Ottoman Empire and a few select Arab regions, Lewis gives the impression that the Islamic world is geographically and culturally narrow, and that its trajectory can be analysed in isolation from global dynamics.

Even when Lewis addresses military history, his analysis is selective and misleading. He skips over the military brilliance of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Ottomans, who innovated with artillery and firearm infantry well before their European counterparts. Instead, Lewis begins his narrative at a point of decline, retroactively projecting a sense of inevitable failure.

His take on industrialization is equally one-sided. He treats its failure in the Middle East as the result of cultural incapacity rather than structural constraints. The role of European-imposed trade policies, resource limitations, and geopolitical pressures are barely addressed.

Even when Lewis does acknowledge colonialism, he does so only to minimize it. He describes European rule in the Middle East as 'comparatively brief,' ignoring the depth of its economic, political, and social impacts. From the expropriation of land in Algeria to the partition of Palestine, European powers reshaped the region in ways that reverberate to this day.

There is a persistent tone of smug condescension that runs through the book, a kind of sly, dismissive rhetoric dressed up as wit. At one point Lewis comment that

it is 'sadly appropriate' that the first telegraph message sent from the Middle East to the outside world reported a military event: the fall of Sebastopol something he quickly follows with the punchline that the report was wrong, as the city had not yet fallen. This type of rhetorical flourish posing neutrality implies not only that the most notable events from the Middle East tend to be wars, but also that even these are reported inaccurately. And yet it leaves the question as to just how peaceful Europe has been with its staggering war casualties and imperial bloodshed over the past two centuries. Moreover, it is hypocritical of Lewis to criticise the so-called inaccuracy in the telegraph which was but a premature announcement, a common enough occurrence in any war when the US and allies have themselves been guilty of the sensationalism of the events immediately before US invasion of Iraq 2003, and the way the media was used to justify wanton military aggression with lies and propaganda.

What Went Wrong in Contemporary Context

In light of today's global political climate, *What Went Wrong?* functions less as a historical analysis and more as an ideological lens through which Islamic civilization is persistently portrayed as deficient. One of Lewis's most insistent claims is that the Ottomans, and by extension the broader Muslim world, were 'stuck in the past', unable / unwilling to adapt to the modern world. But this very notion deserves deeper scrutiny, especially when we consider contemporary examples. The very question which Lewis sets to answer is being posed in the Middle East today also and is among a plethora of questions that Lewis himself differentiates between: those who asked the question 'who did this to us?', put blame on others for their problems and those who ask, 'what did we do wrong?' are the reformists like Kamal Ata Turk. In modern day Turkey revivalists like President Tayyip Erdoğan have consciously reasserted Ottoman symbolism and religious rhetoric as part of a broader political project to reassert Turkey's Islamic identity and lost grandeur. Meanwhile remedies have also been suggested and adopted today as well in the past by the modernizers, ranging from military to economic and political reforms with mixed results.

The question lingers: Is the attempt to return towards the lost and fictitious golden era 'being stuck in the past,' or is it a strategic use of historical memory to shape modern national identity? And if this constitutes civilizational regression, why is it not read as such when similar phenomena unfold elsewhere in the US, in the shape of the MAGA movement, in India, the Hindu nationalist rhetoric under Modi or in Europe, the far-right movements. Everyone is stuck in the past, because the past is a political tool. All modern states manipulate historical memory to justify their present and secure their future. To single out the Islamic civilization for this impulse is to exoticize and pathologize the Muslim world while ignoring the fact that all civilizations wrestle with the burdens of history and the anxieties of modern life. The real question, then, is not 'what went wrong?' but why we insist on imagining that it only went wrong with the 'Other' or somewhere else?

Scholarly Alternatives:

One cannot read *What Went Wrong*? without sensing the force of what Michel Foucault (1995) might call a 'regime of truth'—a system of knowledge that presents itself as neutral and objective, while in fact reflecting the operations of power. Lewis's text is structured as if it were offering a dispassionate historical diagnosis, yet it traffics in binaries, West/East, modernity/tradition, rationality/fatalism, that echo the very colonial discourses Foucault (1995) and Said (1978) warned us about. In *Discipline*

and Punish, Foucault shows how knowledge systems are deeply embedded in mechanisms of control and normalization. Lewis, knowingly or not, contributes to such a system: the Muslim world is rendered as a passive object of study, always lagging behind, always failing to live up to the Enlightenment ideals of the West. The historical specificity of different regions, reform movements such as *Nadha* (Deuchar,2017), and intellectual traditions within the Muslim world are flattened into a single narrative of decline. In doing so, Lewis doesn't just misrepresent the past, he participates in the production of a discourse that legitimizes geopolitical hierarchies in the present.

Talal Asad's (2003) work adds further depth to this critique challenging the assumption that secularism and Western modernity are neutral or universally desirable 'end(s) of history' (Fukuyama, 1992). In *Formations of the Secular*, Talal shows how secularism itself is a culturally and historically contingent formation, one that has been deeply entangled with colonialism and imperialist modes of governance. This is crucial for reading Lewis, who treats the West's secular, liberal order as the benchmark against which Islamic societies must be measured and inevitably found wanting.

To conclude, *What Went Wrong*? is less a work of history than a polemical tract masquerading as scholarship. Its reductive binaries, ideological framing, and disregard for complexity do a disservice to the very questions it claims to explore. For readers seeking to understand the modern history of the Islamic world, it offers not clarity but confusion, not insight but invective. That it comes from one of the twentieth century's most influential Middle East historians only deepens the disappointment.

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Empowering Peace: The Impact of Women in UN Peacekeeping Missions

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Abstract

Gender balance in peacekeeping is crucial for sustainable peace and international security. Women and children are most affected by conflict, enduring displacement, sexual and gender-based violence, and limited or no access to healthcare and education. However, women remain underrepresented in peacekeeping missions, holding only a small percentage of military, police, and senior positions. This imbalance hampers peacebuilding efforts. Studies and the experience of female engagement teams show that women's involvement improves intelligence gathering, increases engagement and trust of the local population in UN peace operations, and contributes to more sustainable peace agreements. Despite this, structural underrepresentation, cultural stereotypes, inadequate facilities, and limited opportunities continue to restrict women's roles in peacekeeping. Including women in peacekeeping is not only a matter of justice but also a strategic necessity. Guided by the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and UNSCR 1325, it emphasises that inclusive peacekeeping builds trust between UN peacekeepers and local communities, protects civilians, aids in implementing UN mandates, and supports post-conflict reconstruction.

Introduction

Conflicts and wars result in massive suffering for women and children, who bear a disproportionate burden, experiencing both immediate and long-term effects of violence. According to UNHCR Protection Cluster data, in North Kivu, a province of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) bordering Lake Kivu, 66% of the 10,000 survivors who accessed gender-based violence (GBV) services in early 2023 were victims of rape. Reports of GBV have increased sharply, from 40,000 in 2021 to 78,000 in 2022, and 123,000 in 2023. (UNHCR, 2023).

To address the challenges, alleviate suffering, and promote peace, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda was officially established on 31 October 2000, with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. This landmark resolution recognized the crucial role of women in preventing conflict,

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resolving disputes, supporting peacekeeping and peacebuilding, and protecting women and children from GBV. It emphasized the importance of women's inclusion at all levels of decision-making to achieve sustainable peace (United Nations Security Council, 2000). Within this framework, the Female Engagement Team (FET) has emerged as a practical tool to access vulnerable communities, foster trust, and integrate gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations.

As Owuor (2021) observes, the mandate of the FET is to influence local populations through consistent engagement, thereby promoting stability and security. These all-female military and police units conduct interviews with victims of GBV, engage with women and girls whose voices are frequently marginalised, and support female ex-combatants in their reintegration processes. Their inclusion not only enhances operational comprehension but also fortifies the implementation of peacekeeping mandates. The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, has similarly underscored that a greater presence of women peacekeepers improves credibility and protection for communities. Female officers, especially during patrols and at checkpoints, can interact more effectively with both men and women, often promoting less confrontational and more cooperative interactions (United Nations Department of Peace Operations, 2020). The following section discusses the prospects of women in UN Peacekeeping Missions.

The Role of Gender Inclusion in Sustaining Peace

Gender equality is essential in peacekeeping and broader security operations. Conflict impacts men and women differently, with women often facing forced displacement, sexual harassment, GBV, and limited access to vital services such as education and healthcare. Female peacekeepers create safe spaces where women and girls can voice concerns and gain support, helping peacekeeping missions to respond more effectively. Furthermore, research indicates that including women in peacekeeping missions often leads to greater longevity and stability of those missions. However, barriers such as stereotypes, limited opportunities, and unequal access to training compared with male colleagues still exist. To tackle these issues, the UN launched the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy, which sets clear targets to increase women's participation in peacekeeping. The goal is not just to achieve numerical representation but also to ensure women occupy meaningful leadership positions (UN Women, 2025).

Enhancing Peacekeeping Effectiveness Through Female Engagement

On 12 May 2014, Major General Kristin Lund of Norway became the first woman appointed as Force Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Her appointment marked a milestone in the implementation of UNSCR 1325, which underscores the critical role of women in peace and security. Drawing on her experiences in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, and Liberia, contexts where cultural and social norms often limited male officers' access to communities, Lund highlighted that female peacekeepers frequently serve as the most effective bridge to local populations. In Afghanistan, 'Female Engagement Teams' succeeded in infiltrating the conservative, male-dominated society by maintaining regular interactions with local women, thereby earning their trust until they were willing to share valuable information regarding areas where the Taliban had greater influence and recruitment occurred. Similarly, in the DRC, women peacekeepers collected vital information that directly improved civilian protection and the fulfilment of mission mandates (Ivanovic, A. 2014). Therefore, female engagement facilitated the

development of greater trust with local women, thereby establishing communication channels that might have otherwise remained inaccessible. Through the elimination of gender barriers within peacekeeping frameworks, female officers have enhanced the scope, credibility, and enduring effectiveness of United Nations missions globally.

The Role of Gender Balancing in Reducing Abuse and Challenging Stereotypes

The involvement of women in peacekeeping has consistently shown positive impacts on trust-building, negotiations, and community outreach. Research shows that peace agreements with female involvement are 35% more likely to endure for at least 15 years. Increasing the proportion of women in peacekeeping by just 5% has also been linked to halving reports of abuse against civilians. While not a complete solution, this is a substantial step toward civilian protection (Security Women, 2022) Nevertheless, despite their value, women remain underrepresented: since 1992, only 6% of mediators have been women. Nevertheless, female peacekeepers are uniquely positioned to access local women in societies where gender segregation prevents interaction with male officers. This role is critical for supporting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Moreover, gender diversity in peacekeeping enhances understanding of conflict's complexity, which is often rooted in history, culture, and identity. Female peacekeepers bring perspectives that improve mandate adaptation and community engagement. Their presence has also been associated with reduced misconduct, helping build healthier relationships between locals and peacekeepers. The visibility of women in blue helmets inspires young girls in conflict zones. They serve as role models of resilience, strength, and leadership, showing that opportunities, careers and a bright future exist beyond war. As Major General Bettina Patricia Boughani, Mission Police Commissioner of MINUSMA (Mali), observed that:

> Having female police officers, gendarmes, and soldiers who are blue helmets helps show that women can carry out a security mission, and it shows young girls who dream of being police officers or gendarmes or soldiers that it is possible. I think that's really important. (Security Women, 2022).

Pakistan's Female Contribution: An Inspiration in Peacekeeping

Pakistan exemplifies significant female contributions to UN peacekeeping. It is one of the few countries that has the highest number of women staff officers and has also achieved the goal of deploying 15% women staff in UN missions. Despite progress in other areas, women represent only 2% of troop deployments. Nevertheless, Pakistan is committed to increasing this figure to 10%. Pakistan has achieved these milestones in very few years, setting an example and inspiring other countries (Naz, 20204).

Furthermore, Pakistan introduced its first Female Engagement Team (FET) to South Kivu in 2019. The 15-strong team offers a range of services to the region, including psychologists, stress counsellors, vocational training officers, gender advisors, doctors, nurses, operations officers, information officers, and logistics officers. An additional 17 Pakistani women officers also joined them. The FET received

notable recognition by the United Nations and was honoured with UN medals for its service in the Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (United Nations Peacekeeping, 2020). Moreover, in recognition of female contributions in 2024, the United Nations presented the Gender Advocacy Award to two Pakistani peacekeepers, Major Sania Safdar (Cyprus) and Major Komal Masood (Central African Republic), for their leadership and commitment to promoting UN principles in peacekeeping missions. This highlights the significant potential that female peacekeepers bring to global peace efforts. Hailing from patriarchal societies, these women have excelled in their missions and have acted as active agents of peace, setting an example and inspiration for others.

Challenges for the Female Engagement Team

Despite their critical contributions, Female Engagement Teams often face significant challenges that limit their effectiveness in peace operations, such as:

Barriers to Women's Equal Participation

Institutional policies and entrenched masculine cultures continue to restrict women's opportunities in peacekeeping. For example, in 1992, the UNFIL force commander banned women from frontline roles, demonstrating how leadership decisions can exclude women from critical responsibilities. Even today, female peacekeepers are often sidelined from decision-making positions, shaped by stereotypes that either portray women as heroic exceptions or as helpless victims, both of which oversimplify their contributions (Newby, 2019).

Women in peacekeeping also remain more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, harassment, and violence. In the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), 17% of female officers identified harassment as their greatest challenge. Historically, representation has been low: between 1989 and 1993, women accounted for only 1.7% of peacekeepers; by 2001, 4%. Today, women make up just 3.87% of peacekeepers, despite evidence that missions with female participation are more effective (Pruitt, 2016).

Adding to these barriers is the tendency to relegate women to "safe" postings, excluding them from conflict zones where their presence could have the most impact. The persistence of sexual violence within peacekeeping itself further underscores these challenges. In 2019, U.S. Senator Martha McSally testified that she was raped by a senior officer while on duty, highlighting the severity of abuse within military structures (Newby, 2019).

Hypermasculine Culture in Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping environments are physically and psychologically demanding, and women often face additional scrutiny due to biological differences and perceptions of physical inadequacy. When excused from certain tasks, this can result in staffing shortages and frustrations among colleagues, reinforcing stereotypes about their capability.

Although many male officers acknowledge women's effectiveness in engaging with communities, the absence of gender-sensitivity training can undermine this potential. Misunderstandings of cultural norms can further limit effectiveness, as

in Sudan, where female peacekeepers faced hostility for wearing trousers. Such incidents underscore the importance of cultural awareness training.

Hypermasculine military culture also contributes to women being seen as outsiders. Since most peacekeepers come from infantry backgrounds, and women in many contributing states are excluded from infantry roles, they are often perceived as slowing down patrols or lacking the stamina for operational tasks. This perception restricts women's participation and fosters tokenism, leaving them isolated, confined to "gender-friendly" roles, and pressured to prove their worth.

Additionally, female peacekeepers are often expected to support survivors of GBV despite rarely receiving specialized training. While all-female units have been successful in constabulary roles, earning community trust and effectiveness, the lack of systemic support hinders broader success. This has prompted calls for the creation of a dedicated women's Peace Corps: an elite, all-female force trained both as soldiers and as community specialists, capable of addressing gendered needs while strengthening peacebuilding (Breen & Aciro, 2015).

The global landscape is marked by instances of atrocities, from ethnic cleansing to genocide, where vulnerable populations endure unimaginable horrors. If the international community does not take decisive and effective action, the world will continue to witness these violations, with lasting repercussions for generations. Now is the time to act and strengthen the framework of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) so that, as a global community, we can work together toward a future where the horrors of war and grave human rights violations are no longer tolerated or accepted as inevitable.

Conclusion

The experience of Female Engagement Teams in the DRC illustrates how women enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions by building trust, improving communication, and ensuring peace lasts longer. Their presence challenges stereotypes, strengthens civilian protection, and provides role models for local women and girls. However, barriers such as limited leadership opportunities, cultural resistance, and entrenched military masculinities remain significant obstacles. To fully realize the benefits of female participation, peacekeeping missions must go beyond token inclusion. This requires implementing gender-sensitivity training, addressing harassment and abuse, and ensuring women have equal access to leadership positions and frontline responsibilities. Women's involvement in peacekeeping is not just a matter of fairness but a strategic necessity for lasting peace.

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