

THE KASHMIR CONFLICT: HOW THE INDIA-PAKISTAN TERRITORIAL DISPUTE SHAPES CHINA'S REGIONAL SECURITY

Malaika Shahid

Student of BS Political Science and International Relations, University of Management and Technology (UMT),
Lahore.

s2023126002@umt.edu.pk

Corresponding Author:
Malaika Shahid

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the international relations dimensions of the Kashmir conflict, particularly looking at how the war between India and Pakistan regarding the territory affects China's security interests in the region. Historically considered a bilateral problem, the conflict has turned into a trilateral security problem with China joining the mix because it has fundamental interests in the area due to its annexation of Aksai Chin, investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and its collusive relationship with Pakistan. Through classical realism, the article attempts to illustrate how China's national interest, in terms of power, security, and strategic advantage, increasingly engages South Asia. The study points out that any change in the Kashmir status quo, especially India's 2019 removal of Article 370, poses severe risks for China's territorial claim and economic corridor, which results in diplomatic and military opposition. Furthermore, the conflict's proximity to China's volatile Xinjiang province increases the risk of terrorist blowback and forces the issue of external instability to be viewed through the prism of internal security. The article argues that China has multiplied its roles and is deeply engaged in the Kashmir conflict, and requires their regional security considerations for any approach aimed at conflict resolution.

Keywords: Territorial Dispute, National Sovereignty, Security Dilemma, Aksai Chin.

INTRODUCTION

The Kashmir conflict is a multi-dimensional dispute that has persisted for decades and continues to affect the political and security dimensions of South Asia. Although it is perceived as a contest between India and Pakistan, the situation is much more intricate. China's increasing involvement in the Kashmir issue conflicts with its previously latent position, as now it has transformed, alongside its strategic, economic, and security interests, into an engaged power with direct concern in regional disputes. The post-2019 developments concerning the territorial dispute over Jammu and Kashmir are making China reevaluate its regional security strategies, thus shifting the existing power dynamics in South Asia alongside straining

China's long-term strategic objectives in the region. Aside from their border confrontations with India over Aksai Chin, China also needs to mind its strategically critical investments in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is the prime artery of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and stir geo-strategic interests. (Paul, 2024) Unlike any other conflict, China's engagement in the Kashmir issue cannot be attributed to unintended and passive interests. Sustained the-territory-of-interests claims are fortified alongside designed alliances with Pakistan, predisposing the Chinese stand of aggression toward contours of the Kashmir question, thus resulting in forming a responsive position. China's decisive

step toward antagonising relations with India, furthering the Sino-Indian Conflict of 1962, was claiming Aksai Chin, which is still marked with opposing Indian sentiments and control over what India sees as the region of Ladakh. For China, Aksai Chin is strategically irreplaceable as it serves as a vital corridor connecting Xinjiang and Tibet. Since then, border conflicts threaten relations and escalate sporadic conflicts around the Line of Actual Control (LAC), where the Galwan Valley clash of 2020 starkly illustrates the ongoing tension that simmers within the tranquillity (Smith, 2021) elicits particular reference.

The unilateral actions taken by India after the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, i.e., conferring Special Status to Jammu & Kashmir and bifurcating the former state into two Union Territories- Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, did invite immediate rebuke and concern from both Pakistan and China. China, especially, has been quite firm in denying the formalisation of Ladakh as a union territory, which, alongside the excluded border areas, overlaps with the Chinese-claimed areas in Aksai Chin. To them, this stands as an irrevocable position shift on the part of India and a unilateral change by India to exert control on a very sensitive border region, Tellis 2020 sec. 4.1 Later insert page numbers. Hence, the intensive military infrastructure expansion, deployment of border garrisons, and the so-called combined fighting in the forward areas of Ladakh reflect a newer strategic posture for China. (Raazia, 2021)

Regarding economic aspects, the result of these actions is that Kashmir has become militarised and more heavily fortified, which indicates a change in China's deemed necessary by China. Beijing, strengthening China's position over other regional actor, the conflict becomes militarised in their worldview. The only remaining option to safeguard the border is economically and structurally. CPEC runs through Gilgit, it entails the development of strategically placed free trade zones and modern transport, a connected road and railway network. Intensifying the militarisation of borders also takes place here. Transitioning Kashmir into a multicultural economic region can improve China's outlook on the world as it integrates into proxy regions' economy and geopolitics as they actively weaken. India's single-handed inclination

towards bolstering infrastructure in Ladakh undercuts Beijing's refers to it as a tributary state. Consequently, these are the reasons why the Region has allied itself with the Maritime region bordering each other. (Ali, 2024)

Beijing's involvement in the region is fuelled by China's internally motivated concern regarding the Kashmir conflict's instability spilling over into the Chinese-controlled region of Xinjiang. Xinjiang, with its Uyghur Muslim population, has experienced violence and forms of infiltrated Islamic extremism. With the possibility of radical factions within Pakistan-administered Kashmir, there lies an imminent danger to Chinese narratives of secessionist violence in Xinjiang. Thus, China has marked the conflict in Kashmir as vital to sustaining peace internally and hindering the attainment of peace externally. (Sayed, 2021).

More importantly, China's obsession with the region impacts the international sphere. The nadir of this conflict is no longer the sole focus of extreme South Asian rivalry but has invited global competition for influence. China's growing perception of India and the US's collaboration on the Quad and military logistics has been viewed as a stated aim to contain their influence in Beijing's new strategy. Hence, China is retaliating to Indian domination by deepening bilateral ties with Pakistan and actively using the southern factor of the Kashmir conflict. That left the Indus River basin with India, China, and Pakistan sandwiched into a layer of global rivalries and changing regions. (Bhattacharya, 2024). The Kashmir conflict has ceased to be simply a regional emerging tension in South Asia, as was previously noted.

It is a global issue that is of strategic importance in multiple ways, and China is at the centre of this emerging narrative. For China, the region of Kashmir intertwines with border conflicts, economic interests, political partnerships, and internal order. As India and Pakistan wage their war of sovereignty, there is a guarantee that China's deep involvement will make sure that the outcome—or deepening of conflict—will change Beijing's regional strategies. Unravelling this complexity is crucial for understanding the emerging security framework of South Asia and the geostrategic choices of the most powerful country in the contemporary world.

Research Questions:

1. What does the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan mean for the security setup in China, including areas like Aksai Chin and Ladakh?
2. How does the construction and operation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) change the regional security concept of China and make the country a key player in the Kashmir issue?
3. How do China's strategic concerns over the occupied Kashmir issue somehow impact its military and diplomatic engagement with India?

Theoretical Framework (Classical Realism):

The Kashmir conflict between India in addition to Pakistan spans a long time. People examine it from various perspectives in international relations. To grasp China's regional security attitude about this land argument, Realism fits as the best theory. Classical Realism especially applies here. This idea comes from Hans J. Morgenthau's basic work in 1948. Realism holds that countries work in a system with no rulers; they mostly want power, national benefit, along safety. Realism supposes that fights will happen in this system because interests compete, and no central power can uphold worldwide rules. (Mearsheimer, 2001).

If one looks at the various strands of explanations from the perspective of international relations, China's role and behaviour in the Kashmir conflict are reflected in the classical realist assumptions, largely considered as the linchpin of classical realism. It does not act on ideological commitments nor normative values, but rather decides by rational calculation to protect its strategic interests. (Bhattacharya, 2024) China strikes a realist note in its territorial claims over Aksai Chin, its massive investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that traverses disputed territory, and its growing military assertiveness along the Line of Actual Control. Maintaining territorial integrity, keeping regional adversaries (read: India) at bay, and broadly expanding strategic influence out of South Asia is the country's stated main objective.

The realist approach stresses the need for an emphasis on the national interest, which in turn is defined in terms of power. (Morgenthau, 1948)

China is participating in balancing behaviour with Pakistan, wherein weaker powers align against a stronger adversary to prevent domination. (Waltz, 1979). Here, China stands alongside Pakistan militarily, diplomatically, and economically to counterbalance India's regional ambitions. (Garver, 2001) The two countries do not share values; they share strategic necessity. From a realist point of view, China's stance towards Pakistan in the United Nations and other international forums is to arrest India's rise and maintain a preferable balance of power in the region. (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Another aspect of realism would see great emphasis placed on territorial security and strategic depth. Aksai Chin stands contested as a region claimed as sovereign territory by China, with significance stemming from its territorial connection between Tibet and Xinjiang, two of the more sensitive Chinese provinces. (Javaid Hayat, 2020). Any instance of instability or military advance on India's part in the neighbouring regions would hit China's internal security architecture right in the face. Hence, one could best explain China's opposition to India's constitutional changes in Jammu and Kashmir, in particular, the constitution-making of Ladakh as a union territory, from a realist defensive positionality perspective, i.e., to stop vital national borders from being undermined.

Adding a second economic-security dimension to China's assertive realism is its investments in the CPEC. The corridor does have economic connectivity and energy security considerations via access to the Gwadar Port; it also enhances China's geopolitical influence in the Indian Ocean Region. (Smith, 2021). However, since CPEC passes through Gilgit-Baltistan territory, India claims as part of Jammu and Kashmir, threatens that the corridor, whether through war or insurgency, is a threat to China's own strategic and economic interests. (Garver, 2001). In a way, economic instruments like BRI and CPEC are by no means divorced from realism; they are strategic tools of statecraft deployed to enhance power and influence. (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The whole realist logic would be put under one more roof by China's internal security concerns in Xinjiang. Any heightening of militancy in Kashmir, particularly one associated with Islamist extremist groups, would spill over into Xinjiang and thereby destabilise the internal environment

of China. Thus, China considers a stable Kashmir (preferably under Pakistan) as an internal security advantage. China's endeavour with Pakistan on issues of counter-terrorism and policing of the borders is aligned with its larger objective of ensuring sovereignty and domestic order (Ali, 2024).

International organisations and negotiations are secondary to the real behaviours of nations that are pursued to these ends for immediate pragmatic considerations in Realist theory. (Morgenthau, 1948) (Mearsheimer, 2001). China's conduct in multilateral settings, such as its thwarting of India's attempt to designate Pakistan-based militants as terrorists in the UN Security Council, echoes the fundamental Realist assumption: these platforms matter only when they can be used to the national advantage. (Javaid Hayat, 2020). China's unwillingness to take on a mediating role between India and Pakistan while pursuing its territorial interests underlines the same standpoint about Kashmir: Realpolitik, not idealism.

The theory indeed correctly captures China's motivations, strategies, and behaviour in the Kashmir conflict. The entire set of concrete actions that China undertakes, from securing borders and sustaining economic lifelines to constraining rivals and shaping regional power structures, Hence, the Kashmir conflict implies more to China than just a bilateral matter on which it has a stake; it is essentially the bearer for defending regional hegemony, economic interests, and internal stability. (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Literature Review:

Jammu and Kashmir have been at the centre of a geopolitical tussle for so long that it could very well be one of the longest and potentially volatile issues of modern international law. However, the conflict started at the time of the partition of British India in 1947, when princely states had to decide whether to join India or Pakistan. Thereafter, an invasion took place from Pakistan into Jammu and Kashmir at the hands of tribal militias, and Hari Singh, the ruler of the region, chose to accede to India. (Butt, 2024). Thereafter, the establishment of a de facto boundary since the first Indo-Pakistan war (1947-48), an armed conflict ceased by a UN-brokered ceasefire, came into existence, known as the Line of Control

(LoC) (Paul, 2024). Since then, the erstwhile princely state has been split, with Azad Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistani administration while Jammu, the Kashmir Valley, and Ladakh in Indian administration. Both countries simultaneously claim the entirety of the territory. The agitation and turmoil would continue in the region, full-fledged war in 1965 and 1999, alongside innumerable border skirmishes, notwithstanding various United Nations resolutions calling for a referendum by which the Kashmiri people can ascertain their future. (Smith, 2021). The dispute came to a full swing in August 2019 when the Indian government changed Article 370 of the Indian Constitution unilaterally to put Jammu and Kashmir fully under its control as two separate Union territories—Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. Pakistan viewed it as an illegal annexation, primarily because of Ladakh being strategically close to the Aksai Chin area governed by the Chinese but claimed by India, and thus elicited an immediate adverse response from China. Nationalist sentiments, demographic changes, and allegations of human rights violations complicate this issue, transforming it into a territory dispute as well as a persistent ideological and political matter. (Paul, 2024). China's territorial concerns include border disputes and the Aksai Chin:

In the international relations discourse, the territorial disputes between China and India are believed to hold a crucial link with the Kashmir conflict. Aksai Chin has been the main point of contention, strategically important because China controls it and India claims it as a part of Ladakh since the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Scholars, such as (Garver, 2001), maintain that Aksai Chin remains essential to Chinese national security because it connects Tibet and Xinjiang, two troubled provinces with long histories of separatist movements. Therefore, any move by India to consolidate control over Ladakh is seen as anathema to China.

The territorial entanglement became more intense, Article 370 in August 2019, which accordingly bifurcated Jammu and Kashmir and carved out Ladakh as a separate union territory. According to (Javaid Hayat, 2020), Beijing interpreted the move as an alteration in the regional territorial status quo and thus responded by escalating Chinese military activities along the

LAC, which ended tragically with the Galwan Valley clash of 2020—the first deadly tourist encounter between the two countries in decades.

Economic and Strategic Aspects: The BRI and CPEC

China's strategic interests in Kashmir emanate from its economic infrastructure investments. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a branch of the grander Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is said to pass through Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of Pakistan-administered Kashmir claimed by India. While Pant and Passi assert that India has objected vehemently to CPEC on the sovereignty argument, China perceives the corridor as an important trade and energy conduit connecting western China with the Arabian Sea through Pakistan's Gwadar Port. (Ibrar Shehzad, 2025)

Thus, this sets the stage for a confrontation of Chinese interests with Indian territorial claims. Referring to (Morgenthau, 1948), China has somewhat taken a realist approach by continuing infrastructure development in disputed areas in spite of India's objections, ignoring diplomatic concerns in favour of economic leverage and regional access. The literature confirms that the CPEC is not just a mere economic project but also a strategic asset that deepens China's physical and political engagement in the Kashmir dispute.

Domestic Issues in China:

While China's role in the Kashmir conflict too often is seen merely as a matter of territorial disputes and strategic balancing, a security interest equally worthy of mention is the domestic security of Xinjiang. The region of Xinjiang is largely a Muslim minority area where Uyghurs reside, and it has long remained an area for separatist disturbances, so central has it become in Beijing's narrative of national unity. Some authors, such as (Zhao, 2018), argue that the Chinese interest in preserving stability in Kashmir is related to the prevention of it being exported, both ideologically and in practice, to Xinjiang via Islamist extremism. The porous borders between Pakistan-administered Kashmir and western China potentially act as conduits for the infiltration of militant ideology or militants themselves to destabilise the internal frontier of China.

To impede this, China in turn has settled on a dual-track policy. One line involves close diplomatic and military ties with Pakistan, which it regarded as a buffer against chaos and radicalism through Islamabad's control of the region. (Garver, 2001). The other line involves ensuring regional de-escalation and stability so that conflicts in Kashmir do not spill into its western provinces. This explains Beijing's support for Pakistan's security operations and its insistence that a resolution to the Kashmir issue must avoid open warfare. (Butt, 2024). This situation is further complicated by China's increasing technological surveillance and securitisation of Xinjiang to create national cohesion against real and perceived threats. In this sense, Kashmir is being viewed not only as a geopolitical concern but also as a prospective security problem that carries domestic implications for China and its internal stability and counter-extremism strategies.

China's Contribution to International Diplomacy and Crisis Management:

In recent times, China has inclined toward diplomatic involvement, particularly as tensions between India and Pakistan escalate. Officially, China espouses a bilateral approach to a resolution between these two nations. However, some analysts sometimes refer to China as a crisis manager for the region. According to the United States Institute of Peace 2017, China secretly intervened to ease tensions during major confrontations, such as the Service Providers attacks of 2016 and the Bala-Kot air strikes of 2019. These are subtle interventions, largely diplomatic, to encourage restraint by Pakistan behind closed doors.

There is a strong Scepticism about China's neutrality due to its close strategic relationship with Pakistan and its rising military tension with India, especially after the Galwan Valley confrontation in 2020. China's political and economic engagement in disputed territories through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, along with China's full political backing of Pakistan in multilateral forums such as the United Nations Security Council, brings into question Beijing's neutrality as an umpire. The experts contend that China is a pragmatist and works on realpolitik, whereby strategic advantage

weighs far more than in intermediate diplomacy (Morgenthau, 1948)

Selective intervention is precisely what characterises China's crisis intervention, as it seeks regional stability to protect Chinese economic interests and to prevent a direct India-China conflict. Carefully balancing between these two ends is the perfect illustration of China trying to present itself as a guarantor of stability while simultaneously protecting its national interests in a very turbulent region. (Kuszevska, 2022). Hence, China's diplomatic moves on the Kashmir question are indicative of the broader shift from a defensive, land-focused China to one that, while still land-focused, is now also a regional manager of peripheral instability. China's Partnership and Strategic Balancing with Pakistan

There has been a declaration of an anti-Indian argument in every aspect of China's South Asian regional strategy by the enduring alliance it maintains with Pakistan, which has now become the first step for every Beijing foreign policy effort in the region. Scholars like (Small, 2015) Place this relationship as not just a counter-measure against India, but a very deeply institutionalised security and economic arrangement. China and Pakistan have had a historic relationship in which Pakistan was its recipient of military strength, and China shielded Pakistan diplomatically in forums like the UN Security Council, thus practising regional balancing on a larger scale. (Kuszevska, 2022). With China enabling Pakistan to exert pressure on India indirectly, in situations straining border differences between China and India, and the strategic closeness of India with the U.S. and Quad, China avoids confrontation with India. Furthermore, under the CPEC umbrella, China is investing in strategic infrastructure projects that strengthen Islamabad's geopolitical stature, thus ensuring that Pakistan remains a credible partner in Beijing's larger containment strategy of Indian influence in South Asia. (Javaid Hayat, 2020). From the realist view, China sees the revocation of Article 370 and India's infrastructural buildup along the Himalayan frontier as showing India's assertiveness, thereby actively and deliberately trying to secure its regional periphery by backing this nuclear-armed ally, sharing the concern. (Raazia, 2021). China's deep involvement, from a realist perspective, brings Kashmir not only as a

stakeholder in the dispute-related border issues but also as a co-actor in the arrangements of power in the region.

China's Partnership and Strategic Balancing with Pakistan:

China's involvement in the Kashmir conflict also intersects with its broader foreign policy agenda, especially concerning its image as a responsible global power and regional stabiliser. China, while asserting its preference for non-interference and bilateral resolution of conflicts, demonstrates a decided deviation from those principles under certain circumstances. (Ethirajan, 2025). China, for example, like never before since July-August 1967, forcefully raised the Kashmir issue at the UNSC after the post-Galwan disengagement and India's constitutional amendments vis-à-vis Kashmir. (Raazia, 2021). China wants the world to believe in their support of restraint, but, in reality, they wish to internationalise the conflict wherever it suits their strategic interests. Furthermore, these so-called acts of 'crisis diplomacy' appear to be behind-the-scenes Chinese manipulations aimed at de-escalating crises between India and Pakistan, preventing them from exploding into full-scale wars by using leverage over Islamabad. (Javaid Hayat, 2020). The balancing act is in itself highly contradictory: China seeks regional stability for the protection of its economic interests (especially in CPEC), but supporting Pakistan's territorial claims and military stance in Kashmir breaks any semblance of neutrality and engenders strategic mistrust in India. Secondly, China's military buildup along the LAC and rejecting India's claim to Aksai Chin also clearly conveys that Beijing is prepared to militarily escalate to protect the straits of depth. Thus, the Kashmir issue becomes a battlefield for China to project power as well as a testing ground for its maturing role as both a competitor and a stabiliser in the South Asian security architecture. (Zhao, 2018).

Influence on the Regional Security of China:

Normally, Kashmir is called a two-nation issue between India and Pakistan. In the present stage, of affairs, China is an increasingly strong player in this arena. China has interests here due to its control of Aksai Chin, which it retained after winning a war against India in 1962. Aksai Chin thus matters very much to China from a

geographical perspective as it offers the only crucial link between Tibet and the notoriously unstable Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China (Garver, 2001) (Smith, 2021). So, any Indian assertion of territorial claim on Ladakh hurts Chinese sentiments since it would be perceived as a direct insult to Chinese sovereignty and internal stability. Since the abrogation of some constitutional provisions in 2019 in India was a watershed moment, the Chinese have become increasingly assertive along the LAC adjacent to Ladakh militarily; the clash in Galwan Valley in June 2020, resulting in casualties, easy point to a deliberate Sino-Indian escalation (Smith, 2021). China's deepened insertion in Kashmir is created due to its economic and strategic alliance with Pakistan in many ways, and one example is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC is a multibillion-dollar infrastructure project initiated under the aegis of the BRI, which passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, which Pakistan administers, but India claims. India-Pakistan relations continue to alternate between violent confrontation, ceasefire, arms buildup, and half-hearted attempts at negotiation. Pakistan sees itself as opposed to India, and India, in turn, sees itself as being opposed to Pakistan. The conflict narrative has deeply affected Pakistan's perception of its selfhood and discouraged it from walking alongside India on the path to sovereignty (Butt, 2024). History suggests that trying to destabilise Kashmir will only destabilise India further. A militarised Kashmir would become a security threat and an issue of existence for both India and Pakistan. It is pretty much as if the two countries keep getting caught up in a cycle of violent confrontations in Kashmir on the one hand and counterinsurgency operations and ceasefire on the other. Seeking an alternative to the bilateral resolution process must be part of a backdrop for security that goes to the root cause of the intense confrontation and violence in Kashmir (Ethirajan, 2025).

Articles References:

Garver, J. W. (2001). Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century
This study explores the long-standing strategic competition between China and India. There is significant analysis of Kashmir, especially the Aksai Chin sector under Chinese administration,

yet claimed by India. The book lays down the foundation of the argument of Chinese territorial interests in the Kashmir conflict, especially concerning China's wider interests in safeguarding its western frontiers, i.e., Xinjiang and Tibet. Garver claims China has an active interest in Kashmir-bearing on security, infrastructure connectivity, and regional balance of power.

Small, A. (2015). The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics

This book provides a detailed account of the China-Pakistan strategic alliance and how concerns with India have evolved into a military and economic partnership. Small also explains how Kashmir is at the core of this alliance, not just as a territorial dispute but also as a focal point of strategic cooperation. It shows how this bilateral relationship influences projects in South Asia and offers diplomatic support to Pakistan. The book argues that the Kashmir-related conflict is no longer merely a bilateral issue but a key element in the trilateral power dynamics of the region.

Zhao, S. (2018). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and China's New Regional Diplomacy

The CPEC is analysed by Zhao as a part of larger Chinese political and strategic efforts under the BRI umbrella. The article recognises China's expanding economic interests in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, forcing it to take a much more aggressive posture in regional matters. According to Zhao, the need for China to protect its investments now found in a very sensitive conflict zone is gradually becoming an important factor in its foreign policy conduct. From China's internal perspective, one major point concerning this situation is the potential spread of Islamist extremism into Xinjiang. This just shows how CPEC has moved China from a neutral observer to a strategic stakeholder in Kashmir.

Tellis, A. J. (2020). India's Kashmir Conundrum and the China Factor

Tellis examines the strategic consequences for India following the 2019 decision to revoke Article 370 and to reorganise Jammu and Kashmir. According to Tellis, there was a change in the Chinese perspective on regional balance, especially vis-à-vis the Union Territory of Ladakh,

which borders Chinese-held Aksai Chin. Tellis thus underlined that China's swift diplomatic and military response to the problem, including the Galwan Valley skirmishes in 2020, was a reflection of Beijing's preoccupations concerning territorial integrity and strategic signalling. This article supports the argument that China's involvement in Kashmir is driven by a complex interplay of external balancing and internal security concerns.

Joshi, M. (2021). Understanding the Galwan Clash: China's Strategic Calculations and Indian Military Posture

Joshi presents a profound analysis of the Galwan Valley incident, armed violence between Indian and Chinese forces in June 2020. Joshi holds that it was not an isolated event but a manifestation of the larger Chinese effort to undermine Indian infrastructural advances and its assertion of control in Ladakh. The analysis of the paper places this incident amidst the Kashmir dispute, showing how border tensions in Ladakh are deeply entwined with both countries' competing territorial claims and strategic doctrines. It furnishes evidence of China's increasingly assertive stance in the region.

Three Key Entities in the Kashmir Conflict:

1. India

India plays a major role in the conflict as the claimant and administrator of most of Jammu and Kashmir. After the partition of British India in 1947, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was compelled to accede to India via the Instrument of Accession, which gave rise to a war between India and Pakistan. Since then, India has projected Kashmir in its works as the whole territory of Jammu and Kashmir, including the portions administered by Pakistan (Azad Jammu & Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan) and China (Aksai Chin), as an integral part of its sovereign territory. (Kuszevska, 2022).

India's position is on the constitutional, political, and security priorities. The region is not only strategically placed but also is indispensable in the making of India's national identity and territorial integrity. The Indian government has extensively spent on military defence of the region, and it considers any external involvement from Pakistan or China as an infringement on Indian sovereignty. The revocation of Article 370 in August 2019, granting special autonomy to

Jammu and Kashmir, was seen by India as a step toward deep integration and administrative normalisation of the region. However, the move met with sharp criticism from Pakistan and China, rekindling the tensions in this region. (Smith, 2021).

India is also faced with formidable internal challenges in the Kashmir Valley in the form of insurgency, separatism, and unrest that are largely attributed to cross-border infiltration and support by Pakistan. From a security perspective, therefore, India's actions in Kashmir are aimed at maintaining internal stability against militancy, preventing the spread of militancy, and deterring regional adversaries, particularly in the hostile Himalayan frontier.

2. Pakistan

Historically, Pakistan had claimed that the territory of Jammu and Kashmir should have belonged to it as it was a region with a Muslim majority. This claim stems from the two-nation theory that led to the creation of Pakistan. Since 1947, Pakistan has therefore treated Kashmir not just as a territorial dispute but also as an ideological and existential problem related to its own identity as a nation and its regional ambitions. Pakistan administers a Kashmir on the western side of the Line of Control, commonly referred to as 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir and in the north, it administers the region of Gilgit-Baltistan. (Butt, 2024). Meanwhile, it is also demanding that a plebiscite be conducted under UN auspices to find out what the Kashmiris want, an idea that was advocated in early United Nations Security Council resolutions.

From a strategic standpoint, Pakistan uses its claim over Kashmir to internationalise its rivalry with India and to muster world sympathy for the Kashmiri cause. It has argued the causes of the conflict to back its military posture and nuclear doctrine. Kashmir has therefore been rendered a theatre of frequent border skirmishes and proxy warfare, thereby keeping it in a state of strategic tension and undermining India's efforts to achieve a level of stabilisation in the area. Pakistan has often stoked its diplomatic support vis-à-vis China and maintained an equilibrium in military capacity through deterrence vis-à-vis Indian regional preponderance. (Small, 2015).

Pakistan also views Kashmir as a gateway for Chinese investment and influence by way of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC runs through Gilgit-Baltistan in Kashmir and has hence cemented the strategic alliance between Islamabad and Beijing. Consequently, Pakistan's role in the Kashmir dispute is both territorial and strategic, focusing on offsetting India and deepening the ties between Pakistan and China. (Ibrar Shehzad, 2025).

3. China

China, while not an original party to the Kashmir dispute, has come to be the third party because of its territorial, economic, and security interests. The territory of Aksai Chin has been under Chinese control since the Sino-Indian War of 1962; India claims it to be a part of Ladakh. For China, Aksai Chin is crucial to the western limits of China as it functions as a strategic corridor from Tibet to Xinjiang, both of which have histories of separatist unrest. Therefore, any Indian claim over Ladakh, especially after the reorganisation of the state in 2019, is viewed by China as a direct strategic threat. (Small, 2015). Further deepening the involvement of China is the economic entrenchment of China in Pakistan, especially through CPEC. This multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project runs from western China to the Arabian Sea, circumventing maritime chokepoints and ensuring energy security. But, the route of CPEC through disputed territory in Gilgit-Baltistan has invited sharp protests from India, thereby placing China at the heart of a sovereignty dispute between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. (Javaid Hayat, 2020). China continues to shield Pakistan diplomatically and militarily, not only to safeguard its economic interests but also as a balancer of Indian power in the region. China's insistence on a stable yet Pakistani-dominated settlement in the Kashmir conflict has been shaped by its fear of Islamist extremism coming from Kashmir into Xinjiang. (Bhattacharya, 2024). Instability in Kashmir could embolden Uyghur separatists, disrupt border control, and undermine internal cohesion. Hence, China's engagement in the Kashmir dispute is far-reaching; it desires some maintenance of peripheral stability, safeguarding of strategic corridors, and projection of influence in South Asia.

Conclusion:

Kashmir conflict, often limitedly construed as a conflict between two countries, India and Pakistan, has transmuted into a complex regional and strategic problem with far-reaching implications for China's national security and its geopolitical considerations. This work has shown that the Jammu and Kashmir dispute is considered an inheritance of the partitioning of British India, but it is in reality a dynamic and ever-evolving security concern that directly determines the orientation of the foreign policy behaviour of China third deeply concerned player. (Raazia, 2021). Being perhaps the only big power positioned geoeconomically and geopolitically between India and Pakistan, China has filled the vacuum from the margins of the Kashmir dispute into its strategic centre.

Also, China's growing involvement in the Kashmir dispute can be explained from a classical realist point of view through power, interest, and survival in an anarchic international system. China maintains its claim over Aksai Chin, continues to maintain troops along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), and opposes India's territorial rearrangements in Ladakh—all of these can largely be viewed as manifestations of a fundamental will to protect their sovereign interests and to deter regional adversaries. (Butt, 2024) Other security concerns also derive from its internal vulnerabilities in Xinjiang and Tibet, which border the broader Kashmir area. So, in this particular context, Beijing's actions are strategic and not tactical, as they have a long-term vision of securing their periphery and maintaining a favourable regional balance of power.

This is one big opportunity that has immensely promoted Chinese involvement is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), \$62 billion worth of infrastructure project through Pakistan-administered Kashmir. At the CPEC level, China has made immense financial and geopolitical investments, essentially linking its economic future to the stability and security of the disputed area. India's strong opposition to CPEC exemplifies how economic development projects get politicised in contested areas (Garver, 2001). Besides giving China the shortest way to the Arabian Sea, CPEC has strategic relevance to counter India's dominant position in the region and therefore gives China some leverage in a

region that is largely under American and Indian influence. Hence, the corridor sufficiently empowers China to turn from an onlooker in Kashmir to an intervening power with major stakes should hostilities erupt anew between India and Pakistan.

However, the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan further complicates the triangular rivalry. The "all-weather friendship," as it has always been referred to, ultimately runs the gamut of China's containment of India and regional balancing. By consciously counterbalancing China, Chinese armament-furnishing to Pakistan, backing of Islamabad in international forums like the United Nations, and opposition to India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) have indeed changed the whole security landscape of South Asia. (Raazia, 2021). This trilateral dynamic has dramatically altered the security architecture of South Asia, deepening the chasm of security dilemmas whose resolution tends toward arms buildup, deployment, and strategic distrust amongst the states when one state's security policy actions are viewed as threats to the other's. In such a security scenario, Kashmir serves as both an irritant and a strategic lever, which the three states manipulate and consider.

Moreover, the 2019 conversion of Ladakh into a union territory by India further aggravated Chinese concerns. China saw this as India asserting sovereignty over disputed lands, including Aksai Chin. (Garver, 2001). Hence, the ensuing physical clash at Galwan Valley in 2020 marked not only the disintegration of decades-long border management mechanisms but also signalled China's willingness to back claims with military force. These changes make it clear that Himalayan territorial disputes, including those related to Kashmir, are no longer dormant but have become active considerations in China's security calculus and frontier policy.

The Kashmir conflict, being an international concern, is intertwined with three major global trends: the rise of China, the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership, and the militarisation of disputed areas. As China seeks to propagate its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative and expansion of the strategic footprint into the Indian Ocean, the unresolved Kashmir conflict could potentially become a fault line with ramifications for regional peace and global

economic corridors. (Bhattacharya, 2024). Furthermore, the presence of nuclear weapons in all three states involved—India, Pakistan, and China—increases the stakes of miscalculation and warrants immediate de-escalation and strategic dialogue.

Drawing from these scenarios, the present study underscores a much-observed yet neglected insight: Kashmir is no longer a two-party issue, confined to the subcontinent—it is a geostrategic arena where the interests of a rising China converge with those of traditional regional adversaries. China's moves are rational in pursuing national interest, as postulated by realist theory. In defending territory, securing strategic alliances for economic expansion, or deterring borders, China acts consistently with the realist paradigm that emphasises the accumulation of power for survival and security. (Ibrar Shehzad, 2025). The Kashmir issue, in other words, continues to be a potent factor influencing and being influenced by the regional security paradigm of South Asia. Now that China has entrenched itself, the Kashmir dispute is no longer a mere bilateral issue between India and Pakistan. There has been an escalation in competition and an increasing difficulty for a closure on this issue. The way forward, in the broadest sense, is to appreciate not only the historical grievances between India and Pakistan but also acknowledge China's strategic imperatives and security concerns. (Mearsheimer, 2001). Without bringing China on board into the total Kashmir discourse and negotiations, any alternative to conflict resolution is bound to be partial and inherently unsustainable. As the geopolitical changes accrue, the India-Pakistan-China triangulation within Kashmir poses both a challenge and an opportunity, a chance either to cement it in anarchy or to recalibrate the regional order, in balanced, multilateral terms.

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