

The Indo-Pakistani Conflict in Light of the “Islamic Bomb”

Geneva Paper 36/25

Arthur Lusenti
June 2025



GCSP
Geneva Centre for
Security Policy

The Geneva Centre for Security Policy

The Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP) is an international foundation that aims to advance global cooperation, security and peace. The foundation is supported by the Swiss government and governed by 55 member states. The GCSP provides a unique 360° approach to learn about and solve global challenges. The foundation’s mission is to educate leaders, facilitate dialogue, advise through in-house research, inspire new ideas and connect experts to develop sustainable solutions to build a more peaceful future.

The Geneva Papers and l’Esprit de Genève

With its vocation for peace, Geneva is the city where states, international organisations, NGOs and the academic community work together to create the essential conditions for debate and action. The Geneva Papers intend to serve this goal by promoting a platform for constructive and substantive analysis, reflection and dialogue.

Geneva Papers Research Series

The Geneva Papers Research Series is a set of publications offered by the GCSP.

The Geneva Papers Research Series seeks to analyse international security issues through an approach that combines policy analysis and academic rigour. It encourages reflection on new and traditional security issues, such as the globalisation of security, new threats to international security, conflict trends and conflict management, transatlantic and European security, the role of international institutions in security governance and human security. The Research Series offers innovative analyses, case studies, policy prescriptions and critiques, to encourage global discussion.

All Geneva Papers are available online at:
www.gcsp.ch/publications

ISBN: 978-2-88947-124-9

© Geneva Centre for Security Policy, June 2024

The views, information and opinions expressed in this publication are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of the GCSP or the members of its Foundation Council. The GCSP is not responsible for the accuracy of the information.

Cover photo: tishomir, Shutterstock.com

About the author

Arthur Lusenti is a Research and Project Officer at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy’s Research and Policy Advice Department, where he has worked since 2022. His research and writing focus on international security, defence policy, and the impact of emerging technologies on military capabilities and warfare. He holds a Master’s in International Affairs from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and diplomas in Political Science from the University of Geneva and Social Sciences from Sciences Po Paris. He also serves in the Swiss Armed Forces (SAF) and is attached to the SAF Staff.

Contents

Executive summary	4
I. Introduction	5
II. The South Asian subcontinent’s strategic chessboard	6
A. Nuclear deterrence theory and the Indo-Pakistani conflict	
B. Is Pakistan’s nuclear capability really targeted at India?	
III. Pakistan and India: nuclear capability and diplomacy	15
A. From hot wars to cold peace	
B. Competition between nemeses: the textbook case of Afghanistan	
C. Cooperation despite conflict: the Composite Dialogue, CBMs, energy and trade	
IV. Domestic and transnational issues	20
A. The praetorian state and nuclear capability	
B. The “Islamic bomb”	
C. The “Islamic bomb” and multilateral diplomacy: the UN and OIC	
V. Conclusion: beyond deterrence	36
Endnotes	38
Geneva Papers Research Series	47

Executive summary

The ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan date back to 1947, when both nations gained independence from British rule. Subsequent discord and enmity, manifesting in the cultural, political, ideological, and diplomatic spheres – and on occasions escalating to a state of (limited) military confrontation – have rendered the resolution of these tensions impracticable.

The conflict underwent a significant shift in 1998 with Pakistan’s first test of a nuclear bomb, a development that followed India’s acquisition of its nuclear capability in 1974. After this, the nuclear dyad that emerged transformed a latent regional conflict into a potential hotspot of global relevance, with the potential for nuclear Armageddon.

It is evident that if Pakistan’s use of its nuclear capability as a tool to deter India has been effective in terms of the exercise of “hard power”, Pakistan has also employed its nuclear programme and capability as a “soft power” instrument of statecraft. This capability enabled Islamabad to punch above its weight on the global stage, seeking to unify the world Muslim community around its so-called “Islamic bomb” and by engaging more proactively through multilateral channels such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations.

This Geneva Paper aims to provide a historical perspective on the episodic escalations (and thus far the subsequent de-escalations) of tensions between India and Pakistan. In order to achieve this objective, the nuclear dimension of the conflict is analysed. It has been widely demonstrated that a variety of uses underpin nuclear capabilities, thus explaining why some states, despite the enormous costs involved, embrace the nuclear path. This also sheds light on how and why nuclear adversaries can step back from the brink of nuclear war.

I. Introduction

Anyone who has once seen the beating retreat ceremony at the Wagah border crossing (the only legal land transit point between India and Pakistan) would understand that this daily martial display by Indian and Pakistani troops epitomises what is, in essence, a fratricidal struggle.¹ In fact, the Indo-Pakistani relationship is characterised by the strongest kind of adversity: an enmity based on perceived cultural and religious differences that manifest as opposing worldviews, ultimately resulting in antagonistic political projects. This concept is encapsulated by Maalouf’s idea of “*identités meurtrières*”, or the notion that modern societies encourage their citizens to adopt a national narrative characterised by fear of the “other”.² The Indo-Pakistani conflict is further exacerbated by the natural geopolitical discomfort of both states: India is culturally diverse and territorially lacking clear natural frontiers, while Pakistan is largely an artificial geographical entity centred on its Islamic identity and fragmented by ethnic antagonisms.³ The nuclear dyad established in the region is the ultimate manifestation of the Indo-Pakistani adversity, leaving little hope for reconciliation between the two sides.

II. The South Asian subcontinent’s strategic chessboard

In his speech after Pakistan was created in 1947, its founder, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah, expressed his willingness to see Pakistan evolve in a peaceful regional environment, despite the difficult circumstances that marked the emergence of the country, such as famines, massive population movements and huge numbers of deaths following the British withdrawal from India. Yet from the onset, security issues have been of existential importance to the newly created state, notably because of its enmity with its larger neighbour, India.⁴ Almost eight decades on, the Indo-Pakistani conflict has been periodically reignited by border skirmishes or terrorist attacks. After both counties had acquired nuclear weapons, periods of rising tensions have threatened to spiral out of control into nuclear war, pushing the world to the brink of catastrophe, as was the most recent case in early May 2025.⁵

The current nuclear status quo on the Indian subcontinent emerged on 29 May 1998, when the world woke up to a new paradigm: following India’s five Pokhran-II nuclear bomb tests earlier in May, Pakistan had become the world’s seventh declared nuclear power after completing its Chagai-I nuclear test in Balochistan province.⁶ Islamabad’s tests were an evident message to India: “When India opted for nuclear weapons under the leadership of a Hindu nationalist party, proponents of Islamic identity in Pakistan deemed it a national duty to respond in kind”.⁷ These events implied great consequences for the Indo-Pacific region, which had already been marked by the resurgence of power politics.⁸

To understand the Indo-Pakistani conflict, it is essential to study its nuclear dimension, which undoubtedly encapsulates the crux of the current standoff between the two countries. Such a study requires putting the conflict in its historical context in order to grasp its particularity and draw similarities with other examples of nuclear weapons states. Historians of nuclear deterrence would consider that Pakistan’s 1998 nuclear tests were not particularly problematic, because they re-established a strategic equilibrium between it and India.

In support of this perception, post-Second World War history had seen the emergence of opposing nuclear powers that had not resulted in a nuclear winter.⁹ The US-Soviet nuclear dyad was peacefully managed and gave birth to a system of non-proliferation that remains – at least partly – in place today.¹⁰ Similarly, President de Gaulle’s establishment of the French nuclear-armed *Force de frappe* in 1963, coupled with France’s departure from NATO’s integrated command in 1966, never produced anything more than political tensions.¹¹ The People’s Republic of China also developed its nuclear military capacity at the beginning of the 1960s to protect itself from the Soviet Union after Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s revisionist communist stance had led to the Sino-Soviet split. Since then, China had joined the International Atomic Energy Agency in

1984 and ratified a number of disarmament and non-proliferation treaties between 1984 and 2005.¹² India’s acquisition of the nuclear bomb was at least partly motivated by the desire to balance its northern neighbour, and, since India’s first nuclear weapons test in 1974, the two countries have observed relatively normal relations, punctuated by minor border skirmishes.¹³ As Kenneth Waltz claimed in his classic debate with Scott Sagan in *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*, “Nuclear weapons restore the clarity and simplicity lost as bipolar situations are replaced by multipolar ones”.¹⁴

In this debate, Sagan argued that “more [nuclear weapons] will be worse”.¹⁵ This rationale is based on the idea that nuclear proliferation somewhere leads to proliferation everywhere, creating an uncontrollable arms race with the potential to destroy the planet. Sagan’s argument captured the reasons driving Pakistan’s nuclear ambitions, highlighted by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s comment in 1965 that “If ... India builds the atom bomb ... Pakistan will eat grass or leaves, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own”.¹⁶ Peace and deterrence are possible when states understand that mutually assured destruction (the insane logic of which is summed up by its acronym, MAD) is not worth any ideological or territorial divergence.¹⁷ But the Indo-Pakistani nuclear dyad partly lacks this common understanding, because Islamabad mostly sees it in “zero-sum” terms: Pakistan defines its security as an absence of threat from its neighbour, and India is dissatisfied with the equilibrium that Pakistan’s nuclear capability had introduced.

Prior to testing its own nuclear capability, Pakistan had been active in nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia during the 1960s-1970s. In 1979, President Ayub Khan proposed India’s and Pakistan’s adherence to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while in 1987, the Pakistani government offered a bilateral test-ban treaty.¹⁸ India refused these propositions. In parallel, the efforts by the established nuclear powers to incorporate India into the “global nuclear order” and their unwillingness to do the same for Pakistan represented a threat to the non-proliferation regime and the state of the South Asian security framework.¹⁹

At the time, India and Israel were the most recent states to sign a nuclear deal with the United States, but it was not prepared to sign a similar deal with Islamabad. This led Pakistan to develop what Mendelbaum has called the “orphan state factor”, or the idea that Pakistan has been left as a de facto nuclear state isolated from the non-proliferation system by the US superpower.²⁰ Policymakers in Pakistan view the US inclusion of India and Israel in the de facto nuclear group as “technological apartheid” aimed at punishing Pakistan. This imbalance in the non-proliferation system increases the likelihood of miscalculation, and Pakistan’s growing feeling of being left out is not likely to encourage it to act with restraint as a nuclear power. A clear example of this phenomenon is Pakistan’s refusal to adhere to the international talks on the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. Indeed, Islamabad argued that “Pakistan has fallen behind India in producing fissile materials and insist[s] that this fissile

material gap be addressed as part of any talks”.²¹ Additionally, the fact that Asia contains four nuclear powers (six if Israel and Russia are included) and will possibly see others arise in the foreseeable future proves that “Without a clear and mutually understood threshold, the question of when a war has gone nuclear will be more complex”.²²

A. Nuclear deterrence theory and the Indo-Pakistani conflict

Schelling highlights that nuclear weapons can have two objectives: compellence and deterrence. The theory behind the concept of compellence is that nuclear weapons are primarily a means of forcing other actors to act in ways they would not otherwise have done.²³ Deterrence, on the other hand, can be defined as “an attempt by party A to prevent party B from undertaking a course of action which A regards as undesirable, by threatening to inflict unacceptable costs upon B”.²⁴ In other words, nuclear weapons are primarily a means of preventing conflict that can be mobilised to threaten an unacceptable scale of retaliation against an aggressor and can thus act as a factor for stability.

These two schools of thought have different views on the usefulness of nuclear weapons. Essentially, the deterrence school argues that the introduction of nuclear weapons has fundamentally changed the nature of international relations and conflicts, rendering large-scale conventional warfare unlikely. In this case, scholars have been talking about a “nuclear revolution”.²⁵ However, the compellence school of thought argues that nuclear capabilities are not intrinsically different from previous types of armaments and are essentially unable to prevent conventional wars. This school of thought trumpets the “irrelevance of nuclear weapons”, which are ultimately seen as destabilising factors.²⁶ A succinct review of the rationales of the “nuclear revolution” and “nuclear irrelevance” theories will permit a better understanding of the issues at stake.

The focal point of the “nuclear revolution” argument is that, given nuclear weapons’ potential for massive and widespread destruction, rational decision-makers would prefer any alternative to pressing the red button. The destructive potential of nuclear weapons has been steadily increasing since 1945, and it is widely known that the current arsenals of the United States and Russia contain weapons that are between a thousand and ten thousand times more powerful than the Little Boy nuclear bomb that the United States dropped on Hiroshima.²⁷ As Brodie argues, the appearance of nuclear weapons changed the essence of war and defence policy: “Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them”.²⁸

According to this theory, nuclear capability is an instrument of peace: the unacceptable threat it introduces deters any conflict that could arise between

nuclear states or allies of nuclear states. Jervis concludes that “the threat to retaliate with a nuclear strike is a peaceful tool in the hands of a state that wished to preserve its territory and independence in the face of an adversary who sought to deprive them of it”.²⁹ Following the same logic, scholars have argued that the presence of nuclear weapons has motivated states to be more cautious on the international stage and that diplomacy has therefore been prioritised.³⁰ If disputes and episodic skirmishes between nuclear powers have not entirely disappeared, quantitative studies have shown that violent conflict significantly diminishes when states possess nuclear weapons.³¹

The “nuclear revolution” case has serious limitations, however. Firstly, it treats most nuclear weapons as interchangeable units, giving the illusion that all nuclear weapons around the world are equal. The reality is much more complicated: nuclear weapons can be made of plutonium or uranium materials; triggered by thermonuclear or fission mechanisms; designed for strategic or tactical purposes; carried by missiles and bombers or attached to fighter jets; conveyed by air-, sea- or land-based launching systems; hidden underground or deployed at launching sites, etc. Secondly, this thesis does not focus on delivery devices, which are almost as important as the nuclear warheads they carry.³² The increasing gap in missile technologies, especially in terms of their accuracy, and the growing inequality in the possession of anti-missile systems between nuclear powers are other key determinants of the “balance of deterrence”.³³ Finally, the argument that nuclear capability provides a state with a game-changing advantage is invalidated by the examples of the Falklands War between Argentina and Britain in 1982 and the Sino-Soviet conflict over the Ussuri River in 1969. Both conflicts were initiated by a non-nuclear state against a nuclear-armed power. Additionally, the argument that the absence of war between great powers is due to nuclear deterrence is scientifically unverifiable, since it is impossible to prove that conflict would have occurred in the absence of nuclear weapons.

Other scholars have advanced the “irrelevance of nuclear weapons” thesis, or the idea that, since its appearance in 1945, nuclear capability has not changed the rules of interstate military strategy. Mueller argues that the post-Second World War world order would have been just about the same without nuclear weapons.³⁴ Defenders of this approach contend that nuclear weapons are not intrinsically different from pre-nuclear armaments, or as Mueller puts it: “It is quite a bit more terrifying to think about a jump from the 50th floor than about a jump from the 5th floor, but anyone who finds life even minimally satisfying is extremely unlikely to do either”.³⁵

Remarkably, the argument is also supported by the idea that nuclear weapons have not “pacified” the world, but rather the sense of disgust with war that developed in Western societies after the First and Second World Wars.³⁶ In this regard, theories about deterrence should consider the non-military components of deterrence, such as the influence of civil society and governments’

inclinations towards peace, as well as economic factors.³⁷ Organski and Kugler add that, during the Cold War, most of the extreme crises were not settled through the mechanisms of deterrence.³⁸ According to this rationale, nuclear weapons are useful tools for a state’s defence and foreign policies. However, they cannot alone establish peace or deter a determined foe. Some historians, for example, doubt that a regime as irrational, reckless and aggressive as that of Nazi Germany would have been deterred by nuclear weapons.³⁹

The “irrelevance of nuclear weapons” theory also has its limitations. Firstly, this school of thought underestimates the destructive capability of modern nuclear warheads, which can cause unimaginable destruction, and fails to grasp the strategic consequences of this factor.⁴⁰ Secondly, this thesis fails to acknowledge that the decision-making processes behind the management of nuclear crises are completely different to those that applied in the pre-nuclear period, given this unprecedented potential for annihilation. Time-consuming diplomacy is often replaced by estimates and risk assessment formulas in which uncertainty greatly enhances the possibility of miscalculation. As one report argues, interstate conflicts potentially involving the use of nuclear capabilities are novel because states make “threats that leave something to chance”.⁴¹

In summary, how does this theoretical toolbox apply to the case of Pakistan, and what can it reveal about the present and future course of events in a nuclearised South Asia? Proponents of the “nuclear revolution” theory have argued that “the Indian and Pakistani governments, despite compelling incentives to attack one another ... were dissuaded from doing so by fear that war might escalate to the nuclear level”.⁴² With regard to possible Indo-Pakistani conflict over Jammu and Kashmir, the argument of the “nuclear revolution” thesis makes sense, because both states see themselves as restrained by the other’s nuclear capability.⁴³ Therefore, the nuclear status quo has mostly prevented military confrontation between the two states and encouraged them to favour diplomacy. As an illustration of this dynamic, they signed the Lahore Declaration in 1999, in terms of which they agreed to adopt policies “aimed at the prevention of conflicts in both the nuclear and conventional fields ... [and] intensify their composite and integrated dialogue process for an early and positive outcome of the agreed bilateral agenda”.⁴⁴

Indian strategists have also recognised that a large-scale conventional war was not an option after the 1998 Pakistani nuclear tests, and that the conflict would have to take another form. Accordingly, the two countries’ nuclear strategies seem to fit well into this understanding of deterrence: Pakistan’s doctrine is based on a low nuclear threshold (i.e. the point at which it will resort to the use of nuclear weapons) and strictly oriented at deterring a potential Indian attack.⁴⁵ Similarly, Indian nuclear doctrine is based on a “no first use” policy, i.e. it has no intention of carrying out a first nuclear strike without warning.⁴⁶ Thus, the “nuclear revolution” theory is partly verified in the Indo-Pakistani

case because nuclear capabilities have pushed the two sides to the negotiation table and have at least created a certain level of stability.

Nevertheless, the “irrelevance of nuclear weapons” thesis could also be worth considering heuristically. A closer look at the Indo-Pakistani relationship reveals that it is not conflict that has been eliminated overall, but rather large-scale conventional military confrontation. In fact, low-level conflict has surged, not diminished, since the establishment of the current nuclear status quo in the subcontinent, a phenomenon that Glaser terms the “stability/instability paradox”.⁴⁷ He and other scholars posit that “the greater the stability of the strategic balance of terror, the lower the stability of the overall balance at its lower level of violence”.⁴⁸ The idea behind this concept is that nuclear bipolarity creates a balance between two states with unequal conventional military strength, resulting in an artificial stability that is particularly problematic. Since Pakistan is theoretically on an equal footing with India in terms of nuclear capability, it can support Kashmiri irredentism and jihadist terrorism without fearing a massive conventional response from India.⁴⁹

The paradox is that India, which has a conventional weapons and manpower superiority (a 2:1 advantage in active-duty military personnel and a 1.6:1 advantage in combat-capable aircraft and tanks), is restrained from launching a punitive attack against Pakistan because the latter has a low nuclear threshold. This has led scholars to emphasise the dangerous nature of the nuclear situation in South Asia.⁵⁰ Arguably, this situation has “promoted Pakistani adventurism in the wake of the 1998 tests, thereby triggering major Indo-Pakistani crises such as the Kargil War and the 2001-2002 standoff”.⁵¹

In addition, Pakistan’s doctrinal vagueness feeds the ambiguity about the potential course of action that the Pakistani leadership would follow if the country were militarily attacked. As Narang highlights, “Pakistan describes its current nuclear doctrine as credible minimum deterrence, but its salient features are anything but minimal and emphasize all of the characteristics of a first use asymmetric escalation posture”.⁵² This is another factor that lends weight to the “irrelevance of nuclear weapons” theory: since nuclear weapons are designed to instil fear and deter, they only shift conflicts to lower (i.e. conventional) levels of violence.⁵³

Furthermore, the progressive development of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal has altered the fundamental aspects of the Indo-Pakistani nuclear relationship. Since the 1998 tests, Pakistan has focused on improving three core components of its nuclear capabilities. Firstly, it has increased the number of its warheads from two in 1998 to around 120 in 2013, and allegedly to 200 by 2020 (see Table 1). Secondly, it has made significant progress in upgrading its weapons types, notably by perfecting the quality of its highly enriched uranium supplies and producing plutonium weapons. Thirdly, it has diversified and improved its delivery systems, particularly its cruise and ballistic missiles, including the

Hatf 8 and Nasr (Hatf 9) systems.⁵⁴ These technological and strategic changes contribute to modifying the subcontinent’s deterrence landscape and, arguably, “The Pakistani nuclear build-up will heighten the risk of inadvertent nuclear [weapons] use in the region”.⁵⁵

Table 1: Growth of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal, 1998–2013

Year	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Estimated no. of nuclear weapons	2	8	14	20	26	32	38	44	50	60	70	80	90	100	110	120

Sources: B. Chakma, *Pakistan: Whither Minimum Deterrence?*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013, p.2; SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute), *SIPRI Yearbook, 2013: Armament, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford University Press, 2013.

Meanwhile, observers of geopolitical developments on the subcontinent have highlighted economic, social and political factors as explanations for the Indo-Pakistani détente of the early 2000s. This argument supports the “irrelevance of nuclear weapons” thesis, because it suggests that nuclear weapons play a minor role in regional stability. From India’s perspective, the priority is to sustain a level of economic growth that can lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and establish the country as a regional power.⁵⁶ Additionally, in 2004 the Congress Party-led administration became less adversarial towards Pakistan, as illustrated by former national security adviser Shivashankar Menon’s statement that “It therefore follows that good-neighborly relations with Pakistan, or at least normalized relations and a modus vivendi, are in India’s interest as a part of durable peace and stability in the sub-continent”.⁵⁷

However, strategists have also noted that India’s rapidly growing economy will inevitably lead to an increase in the need for raw materials and energy. This will eventually mean that India will require an ever-increasing military projection capability to ensure the safety of its maritime trade routes.⁵⁸ The economic and demographic disparities between Pakistan and India are so immense that any Indian military build-up would threaten Pakistan, a highly insecure state, which would need to strengthen and expand its military capabilities in response. Hence, this growing Indo-Pakistani conventional weapons imbalance will draw Pakistan into an arms race.⁵⁹

B. Is Pakistan’s nuclear capability really targeted at India?

These initial elements highlight the need to understand why Pakistan has invested so much effort and so many resources in developing its nuclear capabilities. While the acquisition of the bomb was seen as the solution to Pakistan’s security problems in the late 1970s, the country now faces greater challenges, ranging from economic underdevelopment to regional separatism and domestic terrorism. Additionally, Pakistan’s nuclear capability has allowed the country to play an active and visible role on the international stage. This has been achieved by labelling Pakistan’s nuclear bomb the “Islamic bomb”, which has enabled Pakistan to act as a representative of the Ummah (global Islamic community). The country has also demonstrated vocal support for the Palestinian cause and played a key role in defending the Kashmiri cause through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).⁶⁰ This Geneva Paper will examine the fact that Pakistan’s nuclear strategy, in addition to its primary objective of balancing India’s nuclear capability, is both a “hard” and “soft” security tool that helps the country attain a wide range of foreign and domestic policy objectives. In doing so, it is hoped that it will provide policymakers with a better understanding of Pakistan’s nuclear policy objectives and help them to grasp the Indo-Pakistani rivalry more effectively.

The paper argues that Pakistan’s acquisition of its nuclear capability has been driven by the desire to fulfil certain elements of its foreign and security policy, particularly concerning its stance on international issues. This has also influenced its domestic political environment. As Bacik and Salur argue, “the nuclear issue ... should be analysed also from a non-materialistic perspective, which includes several fuzzy issues such as identity, honour, pride and power”.⁶¹ To understand politics, it is important to recognise that states consider non-quantitative and non-material dimensions such as national identity, honour, prestige and power to be very important. As Thucydides observed over 2,500 years ago, fear, national interests and honour are fundamental to politics.⁶²

This seems particularly relevant in the case of Pakistan, which faces an enemy/ neighbour that is superior in most metrics of power. As a matter of survival, Pakistan cannot accept a situation where it is merely “bandwagoning onto the rise of India, which would make Pakistan an irrelevant entity and undercut the very *raison d’être* of its creation as a separate state”.⁶³ While these factors of identity and pride are difficult to quantify, they are undoubtedly at play and have likely led some international actors to support Pakistan’s nuclear-related behaviour, as highlighted by the positive reaction to the Pakistani nuclear tests in 1998 in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and Indonesia.⁶⁴ That these components are primary motivators for states to go nuclear is highlighted by the fact that other countries have examined the idea of choosing the nuclear path for similar reasons as Pakistan, such as Egypt, where “the idea of a nuclear programme ... is therefore associated with national pride”.⁶⁵

However, acquiring nuclear weapons does not come without costs on the international stage. As Peimani argues, states face seven “natural barriers” to engaging in nuclear proliferation: first, economic and industrial weaknesses; second, limited financial resources; third, fear of an unwanted nuclear arms race; fourth, fear of economic sanctions imposed by external powers; fifth, fear of diplomatic isolation on the international stage; sixth, fear of pre-emptive strikes by an opponent to destroy their burgeoning nuclear capability; and seventh, fear of becoming involved in exhausting war with adversaries.⁶⁶

Pakistan has faced some of these “natural barriers”, as well as various other consequences of its nuclear programme and acquisition of nuclear weapons. For example, the country has invested substantial financial resources in nuclear weapons development that could have been used to develop its domestic economy and infrastructure. Similarly, Pakistan’s praetorian régime (see below), its flawed institutions, and its inability or unwillingness to cope with domestic terrorism explain why “Whatever it has gained in standing among the Muslim nations by going nuclear, Pakistan’s present international image is terrible”.⁶⁷ The relative isolation that Pakistan suffers within the international non-proliferation regime is another telling cost of its nuclear weapon-related political choices.⁶⁸

III. Pakistan and India: nuclear capability and diplomacy

Since 1947, Pakistan, a state created on confessional grounds, has had to confront a neighbour that is stronger in everything from conventional forces to size of population territory and diplomatic might.⁶⁹ Contrary to Pakistan, India was initially founded as a multi-ethnic, multicultural, and plurilinguistic federal state that was supposed to serve as a home to the Hindu majority and notable Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain minorities.⁷⁰ Hence, the Indian political project gave rise to the Pakistani founding fathers' fear that Pakistan could have been integrated into India's existing political and religious landscape. In this dynamic, “Each nullified the other: rejection of its Indian past is the condition of Pakistani patriotism, and Indian secularism is a repudiation of Pakistan's schismatic nationalism”.⁷¹ Pakistani policymakers have long criticised the Indian project as mere populism and demagoguery. They claim that behind the political design of granting equal citizenship and democratic rights to people of different faiths lies the intention of creating a state for the Hindu majority that would be named “Hindustan”. From India's viewpoint, “Pakistan ... is now the very geographical and national embodiment of all the Muslim invasions that have swept into India throughout history”.⁷²

A. From hot wars to cold peace

During the 1950s, Pakistan and India were still reeling from the effects of the 1947 partition of British-controlled India, with millions of refugees on both sides of the newly drawn borders and fragile governments in Islamabad and New Delhi. Initially, policymakers in both countries envisaged a close relationship with each other, as one survivor of this era recalls: “Leaders on both sides wanted the countries to be allies, like the U.S. and Canada are. Their economies were deeply intertwined, their cultures were very similar”.⁷³ Conversely, religious and confessional grounds became the basis of political philosophies that pulled the two neighbours in different directions, convincing both governments that the other posed the greatest threat.

The climate of the early Cold War exacerbated the division between the newly formed states of India and Pakistan. Both states needed reliable allies, but in the binary system of the Cold War, their strategies once again pushed them in opposite directions. Pakistan was dissatisfied with the Soviet Union's repression of Muslim minorities in the Central Asian republics under Stalinist rule. Later, Islamabad considered the Soviet Union an adversary when its leader, Nikita Khrushchev, backed Afghanistan's plan to establish a “Pashtunistan” republic that would include significant portions of Pakistan's territory.⁷⁴ For the United States, Pakistan became an increasingly interesting player on the international stage

during the 1950s, when the Korean War, the loss of China to the communist bloc and the rise of extremist groups in Pahlavi Iran altered the regional balance of power.⁷⁵ While it is clear that relations between Pakistan and the United States have always been turbulent and driven by “issue urgency”, Pakistan’s relative integration into the Washington-led geostrategic bloc served the country well, because it was anxious about a potential communist takeover and unable to play an important role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was formed after the 1955 Bandung Conference, in which India was a key player.⁷⁶

Despite having had poor relations with Moscow until Stalin’s death in 1953, India recognised the importance of a superpower’s support when the Soviet Union blocked UN Security Council resolutions on the issue of Kashmir.⁷⁷ The emergence of the Sino-Soviet split, coupled with India’s humiliation in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, brought the two countries closer together. This process was formalised by the Soviet Union’s direct supply of MiG fighter jets to the Indian military in the same decade.⁷⁸ During the 1970s and 1980s, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev upgraded the relationship with Delhi by ratifying a Treaty of Friendship (1971), in light of the Sino-US opening led by Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai through the mediation of Pakistani ambassador Agha Hilaly. This further made India the Asian socialist bridgehead.⁷⁹ Although India was reluctant to support the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s, it accepted the situation due to the growing ties between the United States and Pakistan after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. All these elements highlight the depth and continuity of the Indo-Soviet relationship and certainly explain why “Nowhere was the demise of the Soviet Union more bemoaned than in India [because of t]he way the Cold War ... contravened the realist paradigm, of which India had been the ‘quintessential follower’”.⁸⁰ From the perspective of the Indo-Pakistani relationship, the Cold War and its immediate aftermath did a great deal to increase the divergence between the two countries.

B. Competition between nemeses: the textbook case of Afghanistan

As Kaplan accurately puts it: “For India, to think of not only Pakistan but Afghanistan as part of India’s home turf is not only natural but also historically justified”.⁸¹ Afghanistan is a classic example of zero-sum competition between India and Pakistan. During the early Cold War, Afghanistan moved closer to India following the latter’s alliance with the Soviet Union, while Afghan prime minister Daoud Khan sought to strengthen ties with Moscow in response to Pakistani interference in his country’s affairs. However, this approach was undermined when Moscow unilaterally decided to invade Afghanistan in 1980, following an unsuccessful Marxist revolution in Kabul.⁸²

On the other hand, the issues of “Pashtunistan” and the “Durand line dispute” highlight the poor state of early Afghan-Pakistani relations. This went back

to the fact that Afghanistan was the only country to vote against Pakistan’s membership of the United Nations (UN) in 1947.⁸³ From 1991 until the US-led coalition overthrew the Taliban in 2001, Kabul enjoyed friendly relations with Pakistan, because “The space vacated by India ... was manipulated by Pakistan’s security establishment to implement its policy of ‘strategic depth’ – a concept that has led Islamabad to treat Afghanistan as its backyard”.⁸⁴ To symbolically mark its domination of its neighbour in its struggle against India, Pakistan has notably named all its missile systems series after Muslim invaders that reigned over Afghanistan and defeated Hindu sovereigns (Abdali, Ghaznavi, Shaheem, Ghauni, etc.)⁸⁵ Although India appeared to have gained the upper hand in the 21st century, the Taliban’s return to power in 2021 presented Pakistan with an opportunity to re-establish its influence in Afghanistan.

Due to its location, Afghanistan is of primary importance to both India and Pakistan. For Pakistan, Afghanistan is essential for ensuring energy supplies from its traditional partners in Iran and Central Asia, because it provides a natural route to the Middle East.⁸⁶ Thus, having a friendly regime in Kabul is a keystone of Islamabad’s near-abroad policy to avoid encirclement by India.⁸⁷ For New Delhi, helping the Afghan state to control its society’s most extremist fringes is a way to stabilise a region that is essential for its growing geopolitical ambitions and to increase its connectivity to the rest of Eurasia.⁸⁸ Specifically, strengthening democracy in Afghanistan is a way to bring the two countries closer together and prevent a radicalised minority from seizing power and embracing closer relations with Islamabad. Preventing Pakistani influence in Afghanistan would also keep dangerous religious extremism away from Indian-controlled Kashmir. From a global perspective, the growing partnership between China and Pakistan, coupled with the US military’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, will undoubtedly increase Afghanistan’s significance to India.⁸⁹ The increasing willingness of the United States to confront China implies that Washington will work closely with India to do so, and it is highly probable that the next US administrations will view a greater Indian involvement in Afghanistan more positively.⁹⁰

C. Cooperation despite conflict: the Composite Dialogue, CBMs, energy and trade

Despite the conflict between India and Pakistan, the “Afghanistan question” has also brought the two archrivals together to cooperate on some issues. A good illustration of this is the 2005 South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Dhaka, which established the SAARC to address shared environmental challenges and natural disasters, and it was later joined by Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.⁹¹ Another example of fruitful multiparty collaboration among India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is the ratification of the South Asian Free Trade Agreement in 2004, which aimed to lower trade barriers

and tariffs. In the energy sector, Islamabad and New Delhi have partnered with Turkmenistan and Afghanistan to build the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, which is being financed by the Asian Development Bank and will transport oil from Central Asia to the subcontinent.⁹² Cooperation in such strategic fields is a positive factor in the Indo-Pakistani relationship, as is the growing regional institutionalisation of the subcontinent.⁹³

Indeed, since 1997, India and Pakistan have decided to move beyond their issue-specific negotiations and engage more broadly in a process known as the “Composite Dialogue”.⁹⁴ This political process was instigated by Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf to decrease tensions following the 2002 military standoff. This resulted in the introduction of a series of confidence-building measures (CBMs) that covered security, economic and political issues. In terms of security, the two states introduced mechanisms to reduce uncertainty surrounding their respective military movements, such as setting up a direct hotline between the two heads of state and obliging the other party to provide advance notice of military exercises.⁹⁵

These CBMs also include the revitalisation of certain bilateral norms to enhance trust and security, such as the 1988 Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack Against Nuclear Installations and Facilities.⁹⁶ More specifically, the CBMs have allowed the two states to finally have a forum to address common threats such as terrorism and cross-border drug trafficking.⁹⁷ Additionally, both states have been able to agree on the demilitarisation of the Siachen Glacier, a contentious issue that has been ongoing since 1949, and to engage in a peaceful resolution process for the Sir Creek dispute.⁹⁸ In the realm of security, in 2017, New Delhi and Islamabad simultaneously joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (an international security organisation led by China), which could ease tensions. Despite a clear lack of trust from both sides, this shows that there is room for cooperation and improvement in the Indo-Pakistani relationship.

There have been positive developments in the commercial and economic relations between India and Pakistan. Amid growing competition among China, India, and the United States to safeguard their influence and reach regarding the key Indian Ocean sea lanes, Pakistan has every incentive to pursue non-alignment and improve its relationships with the Gulf states and African countries.⁹⁹ Since Pakistan granted India most favoured nation status in 2011, economists have emphasised the potential for closer integration between the two countries. Undoubtedly, if such potential exists, it is partly because bilateral trade is low, accounting for just over US\$ 2.5 billion in 2011.¹⁰⁰ Despite the fact that the two economies are not complementary, experts have highlighted that better reciprocal market access and trade liberalisation would benefit both countries.¹⁰¹

Greater access to the markets of neighbouring countries has long been an objective of India’s economic policy. This is evident in the India-ASEAN Treaty

of 2009, India’s willingness to join the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum and East Asia Summit, and other initiatives. Recognising the importance of the subcontinent’s countries to the development of its manufacturing and industrial production, India began drafting the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement in 2004.¹⁰² Similarly, Pakistan’s economy cannot afford to lose a market of more than one billion consumers, even though it has traditionally favoured regional integration with Central Asian states, Turkey and Iran through the Economic Cooperation Organization.¹⁰³ Overall, real improvements have been made in the areas of trade and economics between India and Pakistan, which has the potential to ease political tensions.¹⁰⁴

IV. Domestic and transnational issues

A. The praetorian state and nuclear capability

To understand Pakistan’s society, politics and nuclear strategy, it is essential to first understand the Pakistan Armed Forces (PAF). In Pakistan’s ongoing struggle for survival, the PAF is effectively the guarantor of the state’s values, identity and sovereignty.¹⁰⁵ Analysts of Pakistani politics traditionally hold that, over time, the country has evolved into a “modern praetorian state”, which, according to Perlmutter, can be defined as a system “that favors the development of [the] military as the core group and encourages the growth of its expectations as a ruling class ... constitutional changes are affected and sustained by the military which plays a dominant role in all political institutions”.¹⁰⁶ Besides its obvious role of deterring any Indian aggression, the PAF performs core tasks such as education through the Pakistan Military Academy or the management of public interests.

Jinnah himself placed the PAF at the centre of the political system, believing that, given the country’s fragile position in relation to India, a strong military was necessary to ensure Pakistan’s strategic flexibility.¹⁰⁷ The military’s domination of foreign and defence policy was enshrined in the 1956 constitution, and was reinforced by the PAF’s dominant position in the alliance with Britain, its close relationship with the United States, and its subsequent association with China.¹⁰⁸ In the early decades of Pakistan’s existence, the armed forces both imposed martial law and supported the development of democratic institutions. This culminated in the return to democratic rule in 1971 under the leadership of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his Pakistan People’s Party. This was a major achievement for the military and helped to maintain the PAF’s prestige after the humiliating defeats in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pakistani wars.

All governments have been highly dependent on the will and interests of the PAF, as evidenced by the ousting and execution of Bhutto by General Zia ul-Haq in 1977, when Bhutto leaned towards state socialism.¹⁰⁹ Later, Musharraf’s October 1999 coup to replace Nawaz Sharif’s government initiated a new era of military rule.¹¹⁰ Crucially, the country’s growing nuclear capabilities have given the armed forces even more influence over strategic policymaking since 1998. This phenomenon has been reinforced by the growth of the army’s internal economy, which has made the military virtually financially autonomous. Such developments led Siddiqi to underscore that in Pakistan, “the military no longer remained an arbiter that would return to barracks after restoring some level of political stability to the political system”.¹¹¹

The PAF’s involvement in domestic politics is multifaceted, making it challenging to understand. According to Cohen, the PAF has implemented the following principles since its inception: firstly, it has emphasised its professionalism and

competence in contrast to “incompetent” civilian governments. Secondly, its strong patriotism makes it the natural guardian of the motherland. Thirdly, the PAF has always been clear about its primary role in national governance and politics.¹¹² The PAF’s behaviour has been cyclical, alternating between periods of strong political interventionism and relative inactivity.

During Ayub Khan’s presidency (1958-1969), the army manifested a certain degree of disengagement from everyday politics, while seeking to consolidate its constitutional prerogatives.¹¹³ Later, when General Zia ul-Haq became president in 1978, he launched a campaign to “Islamise” the PAF and Pakistani society in general. His aim was to combat what he saw as the harmful foreign influences that had emerged since 1971.¹¹⁴ Crucial to Zia’s strategy to put Islam at the centre of Pakistan’s national identity was the extensive rhetoric regarding and political support for the nuclear programme after 1977: “The Zia regime expediently rallied behind the nuclear issue as one way to further an Islamic Pakistan’s identity and counter domestic and external enemies”.¹¹⁵ Musharraf’s elevation of himself from “chief executive” to president in June 2001 once again demonstrated that the PAF was pulling the strings of Pakistani politics. Moreover, it also initiated a new era in which the military took control of key areas such as foreign and defence policies.

The PAF and nuclear decision-making

In light of the political significance of the PAF and the addition of a nuclear capability to Pakistan’s military arsenal, a pivotal question for outside observers has been who is responsible for making nuclear weapons-related decisions. Research shows that personalist dictatorships¹¹⁶ tend to favour the build-up of a nuclear weapons capability to counter potential foreign interference, expand their control of the military and amass more personal power, because “nuclear weapons are unique in their ability to allow the dictator to build military capacity without simultaneously enhancing domestic threats to his survival”.¹¹⁷ On a global scale, Pakistan’s “modern praetorian state” is a hybrid regime that cannot be characterised either as a fully-fledged democracy or an authoritarian state, and was ranked 105th out of 167 countries on *The Economist*’s 2021 Global Democracy Index, with a score of 4.31 out of a possible 10 (with 10 indicating a fully democratic political system).¹¹⁸ Thus, while concerns about Pakistan’s military-led regime are valid in terms of its potential for causing nuclear weapons-related risks, other nuclear armed states rank much higher in terms of authoritarianism.¹¹⁹

The institutional development that has taken place since the 1998 nuclear tests has seriously diluted the idea that the red button is confined to the office of the commander-in-chief of the PAF. In 2000, Pakistan set up the National Command Authority (NCA) – a civilian-military body responsible for monitoring the physical security of nuclear infrastructure, the deployment of forces and the coordination of strategic organisations, which was legally formalised in

2007.¹²⁰ The Development Central Committee and the Employment Control Committee were established to oversee the development of the country’s nuclear arsenal. They are led by a triumvirate comprising the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, the prime minister and the president. The Strategic Plans Division is the administrative body responsible for implementing policies. The Pakistan Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission was established in the 1980s to provide Pakistan with access to nuclear weapons delivery devices and was placed under the direct control of the NCA after the latter had been put in place.¹²¹ Additionally, Parliament passed the Export Control Act of 2004 to ensure Pakistan’s compliance with Nuclear Suppliers Group norms for the shipping of fissile and nuclear materials. The executive, legislature and civil society all played a significant role at each stage of the development of this framework.

Since Musharraf’s modification of the prerogatives of the National Security Council, decisions regarding nuclear strategy largely depend on the prime minister and president. Since 1973, the president has almost always been a member of the military and has the constitutional authority to dissolve the prime minister’s cabinet. Although Parliament has played a minor role in nuclear decision-making, it has been able to establish a commission to investigate certain activities of the network of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the scientist who is popularly known as the “father” of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb.¹²² In this regard, a notable achievement of the civilian government in Pakistan was the strengthening of the Employment Control Committee (ECC), which is responsible for defining nuclear strategy and deciding on nuclear weapons use. The ECC includes the main government ministers and military chiefs. Even though the government is involved in this institution, most observers still believe that “it is not unreasonable to conclude that the military leadership would be the de facto decision maker since it holds the majority in the ECC. However, the military would probably ensure that the civilians shared the responsibility of the decision to use nuclear weapons”.¹²³

In terms of the Pakistani population’s role in the establishment of the country’s nuclear-related policy, one close observer of Pakistani politics argues, “it has a role in supporting, or not, a particular nuclear policy, but behind that required populist backing, it will not be a decision-changer”.¹²⁴ Undoubtedly the PAF maintains the upper hand in terms of nuclear strategy and deployment, but a series of civilian and legal powers have emerged to counterbalance the military’s dominance. It is also important to recall that Pakistan’s nuclear programme was initiated under Prime Minister Bhutto’s civilian government, and civilian leaders have been closely involved in the decision-making process ever since.¹²⁵

Terrorism as a form of nuclear risk

Following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC on 11 September 2001, many observers have imagined scenarios in which Pakistan’s nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors and be used to initiate

a nuclear war.¹²⁶ All of these scenarios are assumed to be possible in Pakistan, primarily due to its praetorian regime being permeable to radical Islamism. However, a closer look reveals that these assumptions do not correspond to reality.

Firstly, as several studies have demonstrated, acquiring a nuclear warhead and organising an attack would be one of the most challenging tasks for terrorists.¹²⁷ Secondly, the nuclear-related motivations of terrorist groups remain unclear, because no Islamist group has shown much inclination to attack sensitive nuclear installations.¹²⁸ Thirdly, Pakistan has greatly expanded its nuclear security framework, strengthening the mandate of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission and establishing the Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Agency in 2001.¹²⁹ With US help, the government has invested in reinforcing the military security of facilities hosting nuclear warheads by equipping them with modern permissive action links that prevent theft and unauthorised use.¹³⁰ Fourthly, it is perceived that senior military personnel, including the chief of Army Staff, adhere to the principle of secularity, which implies a strict separation between their religious beliefs and their role in the army. This perception undermines the argument that the PAF is susceptible to Islamic radicalism.¹³¹

Each of these elements provides security guarantees, and because this process is shared by several agencies and state institutions, the grip of any single institution on Pakistan’s nuclear capability is diluted. All this led Donald Kerr, former US principal deputy director of national intelligence, to state that, generally speaking, “the Pakistani military’s control of the nuclear weapons is a good thing because that is an institution in Pakistan that has, in fact, withstood many political changes over the years”.¹³²

Thus, to a great extent, neither the argument that Pakistan’s praetorian regime is a significant source of nuclear instability nor the country’s internal insecurity regarding its nuclear capabilities should result in Pakistan being treated as an irresponsible nuclear stakeholder. Of course, the zero-risk scenario does not exist. However, history has shown that states that attain a significant status in the international community tend to behave more cautiously. Furthermore, it seems that, for reasons of visibility and reputation, the PAF has decided to abandon its cyclical practice of carrying out coups d’état in favour of exerting its influence more indirectly and behind the scenes.¹³³ Despite all the legal and security developments that have taken place in recent decades, there is still a risk that a fringe element of the PAF could try to gain access to the bomb.¹³⁴

However, even here, while the PAF’s role was undoubtedly strengthened by the traditional lack of any clear separation between civil and military authority in Islamic teachings, Zia’s regime – arguably the most conservative in the country’s history – still failed to bring the army into the fold of radical Islam.¹³⁵ In many ways, Pakistan and the rest of the world have incentives to work towards the normalisation of Islamabad’s nuclear status: “It is in Pakistan’s best interests and the interests of the international community to find ways in which Pakistan

can enjoy the rights and follow the obligations of other nuclear-weapon states recognized by the NPT”.¹³⁶

B. The “Islamic bomb”

“It is our right to obtain the nuclear technology. And when we acquire this technology, the entire Islamic world will possess it with us”,¹³⁷ affirmed President Zia ul-Haq at the beginning of the 1980s. By becoming the first Muslim state to acquire nuclear status, Pakistan aimed to take on a leading role in the Ummah, bringing honour and pride not only to Pakistan, but to Muslims worldwide.¹³⁸ For these reasons, Pakistan’s nuclear capability is sometimes referred to as the “Islamic bomb”, an idea that stems from former prime minister Bhutto’s belief that the Muslim world should have this capability, just like all great civilisations.¹³⁹ This “civilisationist” interpretation of international politics foreshadowed what Huntington would later describe in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*. Huntington envisioned a world divided into civilisations in which religions, cultures and shared worldviews would matter far more than national interests.¹⁴⁰ This section of the paper analyses the impact of Pakistan’s alleged “Islamic bomb”, examining the veracity of this concept as a political tool and its performativity within the Muslim world, as well as its relationship with Israel.

A majority of Muslim states and populations around the world viewed Pakistan’s May 1998 nuclear tests positively. Countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Egypt celebrated the event as a significant achievement.¹⁴¹ Saudi Arabia went further by providing 50,000 free barrels of oil per day for months to Pakistan to help Islamabad cope with the costs of going nuclear. As Abdul Qadeer Khan (the “father” of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb) recalls in his memoirs, on the day of Pakistan’s successful nuclear test in 1998, a crying woman came up to him in the street and told him, “You have made Muslims stand proudly in the world ... Inshallah we are back again on the path of greatness”.¹⁴² However, Pakistan’s nuclear ambitions have also caused several Muslim states to distance themselves from Islamabad, fearing that they would be seen as supporting a nuclear-armed regime that the international community would soon condemn.¹⁴³ It seems that the issue of the “Islamic bomb” has been highly divisive over time, acting as a double-edged sword for Pakistan, sometimes helping it significantly in terms of certain regional issues and sometimes doing more harm than good.

The “Islamic bomb”: between myth and reality

The idea of an “Islamic bomb” or “Muslim bomb” emerged in the early 1970s in the wake of the relative solidarity of Muslim states regarding the 1973 Yom Kippur War, in which Israel militarily defeated Anwar Sadat’s Egypt and Hafez Assad’s Syria. Some experts, observing the gathering of the Muslim world crystallised by the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance, assumed that such a community was planning to build an atomic bomb to liberate the region from Zionism and Western imperialism.¹⁴⁴ There was undoubtedly solidarity in the Muslim world

at that time, and Pakistan’s acquisition of its nuclear capability was the result of a transnational effort spanning three decades, combining the willingness of Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal to gain the upper hand over Iran, the eagerness of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi to threaten Israel, and the inclination of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein to definitively oust the Anglo-American hegemonic presence from the Middle East.¹⁴⁵ As Craig points out, “Libya wants it [Pakistan’s nuclear weapon] to be the nuclear sword of the Moslem world”.¹⁴⁶ To a certain extent it could be justified to talk about an “Islamic bomb”, given that the diplomatic, engineering, financial and material resources invested in the Pakistani nuclear programme have involved a dozen or so Muslim countries directly or indirectly since the 1970s.

However, those who coined the term “Islamic bomb” largely failed to understand the regional geopolitical context and intrinsic diversity of Islam, both of which call into question the feasibility of such a concept. Indeed, differences were pointed out as early as 1972, and the Iraqis, for example, did not really consider backing the Pakistani nuclear programme. The Iraqi military leadership believed that it would be better for Iraq to acquire what would be the first purely Arab-owned nuclear device later, after Pakistan had achieved nuclear capability.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, the elements of Islam’s diversity are indeed multiple and multilayered. To begin with, Muslim countries were split between the pro-US and pro-Soviet spheres of influence and the NAM during the Cold War.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, since the second half of the seventh century, Islam had been divided into several schools of thought, with no universally recognised torch bearer or leader.¹⁴⁹

In other words, as Roy points out, although it is sometimes appropriate to use the terms “Islamism” or “pan-Islamism” in relation to certain issues, the primary entities operating in the Islamic community are still nation states.¹⁵⁰ It is worth recalling that the establishment of the Westphalian system of sovereign states after the First World War, coupled with the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate, paved the way for a new era of competition for leadership of the Ummah. This competition had not been contested since the beginning of the Umayyad dynasty, through the Seljuqs, and finally the Ottomans.¹⁵¹ Since the Ottoman Empire’s dissolution in 1923, several states have been contenders for the driving seat of the Muslim world, and this was a motivating factor behind Pakistan’s nuclear buildup, as is shown by certain Pakistani officials’ willingness to retain the country’s monopoly: “we are the only Moslem country [with a nuclear weapon] and don’t want anyone else to get it”.¹⁵²

Hence, the notion of an “Islamic bomb” is fundamentally misleading, because it assumes a unity that Islam as a whole profoundly lacks.¹⁵³ For all these reasons, one can argue that the concept of an “Islamic bomb” is meaningless, just as the concepts of “Christian bombs”, “Hindu bombs” and “Francophone bombs” are meaningless. This is because there has never been a universally shared understanding of Islam, and because weapons and military strategies are

produced by states, not civilisations. Nevertheless, the concept of an “Islamic bomb” carries political weight, having been repeatedly invoked by Pakistani officials and representatives of other Muslim states.¹⁵⁴

The Pakistani political leadership has valued the idea of an “Islamic bomb” for several reasons. First of all, after the 1974 Islamic Summit in Lahore, the Pakistani leadership rhetorically adopted the idea of the unity of the Islamic world as a guiding feature of Pakistan’s foreign policy, or the “notion that each Muslim state had the right and responsibility to use all available instruments of power to protect the collective rights of the Muslim Ummah to be accorded recognition in the international system”.¹⁵⁵ Secondly, Pakistan needed financial assistance from oil-rich countries to cope with the cost of acquiring nuclear weapons, a phenomenon dating back to the early 1980s, when Libya’s Qaddafi partly financed Pakistan’s burgeoning nuclear programme.¹⁵⁶ By adopting a “civilisational” foreign policy agenda and “Islamising” its nuclear designs, Pakistan sought to garner moral and material support from both its own population and its Muslim allies, which were essential elements for adopting a more dynamic international stance.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, Pakistani officers and diplomats cultivated a heuristic vagueness around the notion of the “Islamic bomb”, sometimes claiming that the country’s nuclear capability was solely focused on India.¹⁵⁸

The leaders of Muslim states appreciated the added confidence with which Pakistan’s nuclear capability provided them. President Zia, for example, was praised by the Muslim community when he declared that Pakistan would not bow to US pressure to abandon its nuclear programme, given that Washington had not pressured Israel or India to do so.¹⁵⁹ In other words, “Pakistan used its nuclear programme to make itself unique, nuclear weapons forming part of a quest for regional leadership based on a religious community”.¹⁶⁰ Thus, to a certain extent, Muslim states embraced the idea of the “Islamic bomb” and called on Pakistan to shoulder the burden of the country’s new responsibility to protect the Ummah, as when the Egyptian theologian Mufti-e-Azam openly advocated that “all Muslim countries must rally around Pakistan to support its nuclear program”.¹⁶¹

Nevertheless, some Muslim states have also opposed Pakistan’s nuclear stance. This is particularly the case when they have supported the non-proliferation regime at Pakistan’s expense. These states see limiting Israel’s capabilities as more important than supporting Pakistan.¹⁶² Finally, some argue that if Pakistan were truly committed to an “Islamic bomb”, it would have offered a nuclear umbrella to protect at least some Muslim states. However, Islamabad has not seriously considered this option.¹⁶³ Thus, Pakistan’s proposal of an “Islamic bomb” is partly an illusion, because Islamabad is unwilling to use its capabilities for anything other than nuclear deterrence against India. To sum up, gathering the Ummah around its nuclear capability has proved to be a fruitful way for Pakistan to gain moral, financial and material support from its

fellow Muslim partners, a trend that is nevertheless limited by the country’s unpreparedness to engage collectively with Muslim states in deterring what these states consider as their greatest threat – Israel.

Relations with Israel: atoms for peace?

Due to the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict, which has united much of the Muslim community for over seven decades, Israel is understandably concerned about Pakistan’s repeated claims to possess an “Islamic bomb”.¹⁶⁴ And with good reason: “Pakistan’s nuclear hawks see the country’s nuclear program not only as an effective deterrent against Hindu India, but as a shield to protect the Muslim world against Zionist Israel”.¹⁶⁵ Pakistan and Israel have never had normal diplomatic relations since their establishment in 1947 and 1948, respectively. However, they have maintained informal contact via the United States and multilateral institutions such as the UN, and Israel took the “Islamic bomb” seriously as a potential trigger for nuclear war in the Middle East. Nevertheless, Israel and Pakistan have also made long-lasting efforts to maintain contact.¹⁶⁶

Pakistan has a dual attitude towards Israel: hostile rhetoric for the masses and a pragmatic policy when dealing with the country.¹⁶⁷ On its side, Israel has prioritised its relations with Pakistan’s arch-rival, because “India and Israel have all the essentials of a long lasting alignment such as common threat perceptions, common ideology, comparative advantages in military terms and complementary economies”.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, since India’s recognition of Israel as a sovereign state in 1992, the two countries have established a comprehensive partnership in dealing with insurgents and military equipment sales.¹⁶⁹ The strength of this relationship is evident in the fact that, despite its continuous support for the Palestinian cause, India is Israel’s second most important defence partner, accounting for 40% of Israeli arms transfers since 2010.¹⁷⁰ However, it should be noted that, despite recent developments in this relationship, Israel has always refrained from displaying direct hostility towards Pakistan. This is evident from Israeli defence minister Ariel Sharon’s refusal to cooperate with the Indian military in a pre-emptive strike on Pakistan’s Kahuta nuclear facility in the 1980s.¹⁷¹

Although Jerusalem still considers the “Islamic bomb” to be dangerous, it has also acknowledged that Israel has little to directly fear from Pakistan. As former defence minister Sharon put it in May 1998: “We do not view Pakistan as our enemy. Pakistan has never been Israel’s enemy. Pakistan has never threatened Israel. Consequently, we do not view this development as leading to a situation where the weapons are aimed at Israel”.¹⁷² A more problematic issue could have been Pakistan’s selling of technology and know-how to Israel’s real enemies such as Iraq in the 1980s, Libya later on, and potentially Iran today. However, Pakistan’s intentions regarding the transfer of such technology remain unclear, particularly given its desire to maintain an Islamic monopoly on nuclear weapons. Furthermore, Pakistani foreign secretary Ahmad Khan’s statement after the

May 1998 tests that his country had no intention of transferring any nuclear weapons to other states or “entities” was a subtle message to Israel assuring it that such weapons would not fall into the hands of the PLO.¹⁷³

In conclusion, therefore, Pakistan’s alleged “Islamic bomb” plays a paradoxical role in its relations with Israel. While it greatly enhances Pakistan’s importance in Israel’s eyes – with some Israeli newspapers even calling it an “Islamic superpower” – it is also a stumbling block in the relationship. This is because Pakistan’s “civilisational” stance of representing the Muslim Ummah makes it difficult for it to recognise Israel diplomatically and thus establish stable relations.¹⁷⁴

The issue of the “Islamic bomb” represents Pakistan’s varied objectives, revealing a complex mix of political bargaining and pragmatic interests. Pakistan has deliberately maintained a degree of ambiguity around the concept of the “Islamic bomb”, sometimes openly promoting it and at other times rejecting it. By emphasising the “civilisational” and “religious” aspects of its nuclear policy, Pakistan has given the entire Ummah a sense of pride and honour. For domestic political reasons, Pakistan’s claim to possess an “Islamic bomb” has also been central to strengthening the state’s identity and presenting it as the fortress of the Islamic world.

In terms of soft and hard power, Pakistan indisputably gained from this *primus inter pares* status, pushing certain policymakers to acknowledge that currently, “capitalising on Pakistan’s Islamic identity by building close links with Muslim countries and supporting ‘Islamic causes’ remains the country’s best option”.¹⁷⁵ At the same time, Pakistan’s glorification of its nuclear might has been used to bolster the country’s perceived strength at a time when India was largely increasing its conventional military advantage.¹⁷⁶ However, Pakistan’s rhetoric and actions came at a cost, because many international actors have feared that Pakistan might share its nuclear capabilities with insecure states.¹⁷⁷ Pakistan’s behaviour has also increased tensions with India and probably fueled an even more intense arms race between the two countries.¹⁷⁸ Pakistan’s alleged illicit dealings with rogue states have also damaged its reputation and undermined its international credibility on the world stage.¹⁷⁹

Upcoming developments in the wider Middle East will probably diminish the relevance of Pakistan’s “Islamic bomb” as the regional environment moves further away from a “civilisationist” geopolitical arrangement.¹⁸⁰ Although the Abraham Accords of 2020 appeared to signal a new era of normalisation in relations between Israel and several Muslim states, particularly in the Gulf, the war in Gaza that followed Hamas’s attacks on Israel in October 2023 is likely to stall this process for the foreseeable future.¹⁸¹ These events will force Pakistan to navigate an increasingly fragmented Ummah divided along doctrinal lines and between blocs of states. Meanwhile, India’s growing economic, cultural

and diplomatic ties with Muslim states, particularly those in the Gulf, threaten the foundations of Pakistan’s religion-based foreign policy.¹⁸²

Pakistan’s decision-makers must determine whether the sporadic invocation of the concept of the “Islamic bomb” has been beneficial overall to the country’s foreign policy. As members of Pakistan’s military have acknowledged as a cold statement of facts: “The notion that nuclear weapons might enhance Pakistan’s prestige and influence in the world has no particular attraction, except as a rhetorical device to address a particular domestic audience”.¹⁸³ In light of these factors, it is reasonable to question the importance of Pakistan’s so-called “Islamic bomb” and its potential impact on the country’s international standing in the years to come.

C. The “Islamic bomb” and multilateral diplomacy: the UN and OIC

If Pakistan’s nuclear capability, envisaged as an “Islamic bomb”, did make Pakistan the leader of the Muslim world, one would expect the country to engage more with the world order’s forums. This paper identifies two main channels of engagement for Pakistan on international issues: the OIC and UN. It will link Pakistan’s engagement with these two multilateral organisations with the idea of the “Islamic bomb” by analysing how Pakistan’s nuclear capability has fueled the long-running effort to unite Muslim nation states and advance issues such as Palestinian independence and ending India’s occupation of Jammu and Kashmir.

The OIC comprises 57 member states and five observer states, representing 1.7 billion people, or around 23% of the world’s population.¹⁸⁴ Established in response to the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and the endangered safety of the Al-Aqsa Mosque (which is widely considered to be the third holiest site in Islam), the OIC is the result of an older Islamic transnational network of interdependence.¹⁸⁵ Pakistan has played an important role in this process since 1947 through its “look-west” policy towards fellow Muslim states. Importantly, Pakistan has been a pillar of the creation of international forums aimed at bringing Muslim states together: during the 1950s it planned the Ulema Conferences,¹⁸⁶ and alongside Egypt and Saudi Arabia it organised the General Islamic Conference of 1951.¹⁸⁷ There is a strong lineage between Pakistan’s and the OIC’s principles.

Since the partition of British India to form two sovereign states, Pakistan has continuously valued its Muslim identity.¹⁸⁸ Jinnah was both president of the All-India Muslim League (AIML), which advocated the establishment of a Muslim homeland in South Asia, and the main instigator, alongside Nahas Pasha, leader of the Egyptian Wafd Party, of a federation of Muslim states.¹⁸⁹ As Jinnah said in his last speech, “the drama of power politics that is being

staged in Palestine, Indonesia and Kashmir should serve as an eye-opener to us. It is only by putting up a united front that we can make our voice felt in the counsels of the world”.¹⁹⁰ The objectives of Pakistan and the Muslim communities converged thanks to their shared vision of their mutual enemies: Israel and Western imperialism.¹⁹¹

Hence, during the 1950s, Pakistan’s regional foreign policy focused on establishing forums to bring Muslim states together, primarily in the economic and industrial spheres, through the creation of an Islamic Economic Conference.¹⁹² In addition, via the UN, Pakistan supported the independence movements of Muslim societies in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. During the 1960s, it also opposed the idea of Libya and Somaliland being placed under a joint British, French and Italian UN trusteeship.¹⁹³ In sum, during the pre-OIC era, “While serving as a major spokesman of the Islamic countries and communities at the UN, Pakistan persisted in efforts to foster the spirit of Islamic unity and solidarity”.¹⁹⁴ Notably, Pakistan has also played a role as a moderator in the OIC, advocating for the reinstatement of Egypt at the Fourth Islamic Summit Conference in Casablanca in 1984. Egypt had previously been expelled for making peace with Israel following the Yom Kippur War of 1973.¹⁹⁵

Pakistan’s efforts to grant the Ummah the status of what Bull calls an “international society”, where states share “common interests and common values ... and ... conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another and share in the working of common institution”,¹⁹⁶ reflect an ongoing trend. If pre-nuclear Pakistan had already been active in uniting the Ummah, its nuclear status strengthened its credibility in this regard.¹⁹⁷ Some observers did not hesitate to link the country’s importance in the OIC, the UN and the Ummah with its nuclear capability, designating it a “torch-bearer of Muslim Ummah as the first Atomic Power in the Muslim world”.¹⁹⁸ As the saying goes, “With great power, comes great responsibility”,¹⁹⁹ and history is full of examples of polities translating their rising power into international involvement.²⁰⁰

The issue of Palestine: Islamabad’s proactive UN record

Even before Pakistan became a sovereign state, the issue of Palestine was considered essential to the Muslim inhabitants of the region that would become Pakistan, as evidenced by the AIML’s condemnation of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which permitted the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. This political organisation called for the protection of the holy places of Islam such as the Al-Quds Al-Sharif or Haram Al-Sharif sites.²⁰¹ Since the founding of the UN, Pakistan has supported the Palestinian struggle, claiming that as part of the Jazirat al-Arab (Land of Islam), Palestine should not be handed to non-Muslims.²⁰² Adopting such a position served Pakistan’s domestic and foreign policies by emphasising the country’s Islamic identity. Pakistan has generally viewed the Palestinian issue not only as a regional problem

confined to the Middle East, but also as a global issue requiring the attention of multilateral forums such as the UN due to its complexity.

Pakistan has addressed the issue of Palestine around 50 times through the UN, either via direct communiqués, letters to the Secretary-General or joint statements with the OIC.²⁰³ A closer look at the UN’s archives reveals that between 1948 and 1980 (the estimated date by which Pakistan is thought to have attained nuclear capability), Pakistan raised the issue eight times, whereas it did so 33 times in the shorter period between 1988 and 2019. Not only has the frequency of Pakistan’s advocacy for Palestine increased, but the tone adopted after 1980 has also become much harsher and more critical. In February 2009, the Pakistani government openly condemned the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in the most severe terms: “Israeli policies of targeting the civilian population, including Palestinian women and children, are tantamount to committing acts that fall in purview of international conventions against genocide and tantamount to state terrorism”.²⁰⁴ This shift in the recurrence and form of Pakistan’s engagement with the Palestinian issue highlights the country’s growing confidence on the international stage since acquiring its nuclear capability.

Pakistan has sought to take the lead in the Ummah on the issue of Palestine, a move that has drawn reactions from the country’s peers. For example, Egypt remained indifferent at best and suspicious at worst about Pakistan’s efforts to unite the Ummah on the issue of Palestine.²⁰⁵ Furthermore, Egypt has been irritated by Pakistan’s prominence within the Islamic community and on the international stage and has not hesitated to criticise Pakistan’s determination to antagonise Israel. Having itself considered taking the nuclear path between the 1970s and 1990s, Egypt has envied Islamabad’s capabilities and its role as the first Islamic nuclear power.²⁰⁶ Other significant Muslim states, such as Libya, have adopted a similarly ambivalent stance towards Pakistan’s nuclear weapons. They have praised them and supported Islamabad financially, while also being envious of the technological prowess and political breakthrough they represent. It is also assumed that Qaddafi was rebuffed by Islamabad when he tried to purchase nuclear warheads from Pakistan in the 1990s. As a result, he considered turning to India to accomplish his nuclear objectives.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, these critical reactions from Islamic countries illustrate that Pakistan has been considered a more serious player on the international stage ever since it acquired the ultimate weapon.

Jammu and Kashmir: Pakistan’s influence through the OIC

The issue of Jammu and Kashmir stems from disputes over the boundaries of these provinces between Pakistan and India following the partition of the British Raj in 1947.²⁰⁸ In April of the same year, the Radcliffe Boundary Commission ruled that the religious majority in a given area would determine its national affiliation (basically, Muslim for Pakistan and Hindu for India).²⁰⁹ Yet there were

cases where confessional and cultural components could not decide the national affiliation, notably in Gurdaspur, Kashmir and Jammu. In the case of the latter two, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, initially promised plebiscites, but they were never held.²¹⁰ Surprisingly, the Radcliffe Boundary Commission decided to award the Gurdaspur region to India, despite the local population's desire to join the newly created state of Pakistan. The region is inhabited by a marginal Muslim majority (around 53% of the overall population).²¹¹ Jammu and Kashmir were handed over to India on an indefinite basis following the local Hindu ruler's unilateral decision.²¹²

As Komireddi argues, India's efforts to remain in control of Jammu and Kashmir were fundamentally an attempt by Delhi to discredit Pakistan's *raison d'être*: “Kashmir's accession to India would instantly debunk the argument for Pakistan's invention – that Muslims and Hindus could not coexist in one state – and obliterate Pakistan's claim to be the authentic homeland of the subcontinent's Muslims that gave a gloss of purpose to its puzzling existence”.²¹³ The result is an unsatisfactory situation for all parties: Pakistan is prepared to use all means to pursue its revisionist project, including military force and the promotion of terrorism. India is unwilling to accept any territorial changes, which would set a precedent for other irredentist or separatist provinces in other Indian regions, such as Nagaland and Assam. Meanwhile, the Kashmiris are left as second-class Indian citizens. Pakistan and India also have different views on the situation in the region: India has always maintained that the issue is domestic and that it would only engage in bilateral talks with Pakistan on cross-border issues, whereas Pakistan has argued that the issue should be resolved through the UN.²¹⁴

The UN has addressed the Jammu and Kashmir problem on several occasions, notably on 17 January 1948, markedly with UN Security Council Resolution 38, and on 20 September 1965 with Security Council Resolution 211. These two resolutions, despite calling for “both the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan to take immediately all measures within their power ... calculated to improve the situation”,²¹⁵ did not include any mechanism to enforce their pronouncements on the issue. The situation in the region gradually worsened during the 1980s and 1990s, evolving from civic protest to open warfare against the Indian military, which constantly maintains a force of around 600,000 troops in the area, equivalent to one soldier for every five inhabitants in some towns, such as Srinagar.²¹⁶ But if they do not have great power backing, UN resolutions have little substantive value, and Pakistan has felt isolated on this issue. Although the UN was able to station observers along the line of control, which serves as a *de facto* border, the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is arguably one of the UN's most resounding failures.

India unilaterally declared Jammu and Kashmir an integral part of its territory by parliamentary resolution in 1957, thereby abandoning its acceptance of the self-determination process in the region.²¹⁷ Given this stalemate, Pakistan has

long invested in a diversification of its levers to influence the situation, notably by extensively using its cherished position in the OIC to advance its agenda: “Pakistan has consistently raised the issue at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference ... in order to make the Muslim World understand the problem faced by the Kashmiri people and the human rights violations in Indian-held Kashmir (IHK)”.²¹⁸

Pakistan’s obsession with the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is largely explained by its struggle for international recognition, its visceral enmity with India, and the difficulty of building a nation solely on the basis of religious affiliation. This stance was further reinforced when India began to abandon its commitment to the self-determination process for Jammu and Kashmir and to international monitoring of the issue.²¹⁹ Therefore, during the 1950s, Pakistan sought partners on the international stage and viewed every supporter as a diplomatic ally. Iran and Turkey initially supported Pakistan on the Jammu and Kashmir issue, with the Turkish speaker of the OIC Grand Assembly justifying his country’s assistance by declaring in 1993 that “Kashmir was not just your problem. This is the entire Ummah’s problem”.²²⁰

Despite important attempts in the UN to raise the issue, Pakistan was unable to gather international support during the 1960s. Historians attribute this to the fact that, following India’s defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the United States and Britain provided India with military and moral support to counterbalance communist China. Combined with Islamabad’s failure to reclaim Jammu and Kashmir during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, this led Pakistan to sign the Tashkent Agreement in 1966 that left the Jammu and Kashmir issue unresolved.²²¹ Over the next decade, Pakistan had few opportunities to assert what it saw as its rights in Jammu and Kashmir, because the Muslim states prioritised the Palestinian question after the 1973 Yom Kippur War and the 1974 Lahore Declaration.²²² Despite Pakistan’s and India’s bilateral ratification of the Simla Agreement, which called for the active implementation of UN Security Council resolutions in Jammu and Kashmir, India did not change its policy.²²³

Despite the UN’s inability to move India’s position, Pakistan was later able to make its voice heard in the OIC: at the 1991 Dakar Summit, the organisation “for the first time took notice of the grave situation and massive human rights violations [in Jammu and Kashmir]”.²²⁴ On this occasion, Islamabad succeeded in focusing the attention of member states and granting the OIC a mandate to promote Kashmir’s right to self-determination. Later, in 1995, the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers unequivocally denounced India’s non-cooperation and labelled Jammu and Kashmir “a land under colonial occupation”.²²⁵

On several other occasions, Islamabad managed to get the issue of Jammu and Kashmir onto the OIC’s agenda. By incessantly calling for Muslim unity and denouncing India’s behaviour, Islamabad was able to put pressure on India to reconsider its position.²²⁶ Some Muslim countries supported Pakistan,

including Turkey, and the latter’s president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, offered to act as mediator in 2017, but India dismissed this proposal.²²⁷ The process has intensified considerably since the 1990s, probably due to a combination of international circumstances and the confidence boost that Pakistan gained from acquiring nuclear weapons. This is also highlighted by the fact that Muslim states of different politico-religious traditions have tended to speak with one voice on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir: “when it came to Kashmir, Shia and Sunni [have] united in supporting Pakistan’s position”.²²⁸

The nuclear competition between Pakistan and India is nowhere more intense and explosive than over the issue of Jammu and Kashmir.²²⁹ On the one hand, Pakistan’s efforts to “Islamise” the Kashmir issue are part of a political project driven by its commitment to establishing the issue as a focal point for the global Islamic community.²³⁰ Conversely, Pakistan has designed a parallel strategy of supporting proxy actors to undermine India’s position on the Kashmir issue, which has involved supporting groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and the International Islamic Front. After pausing this strategy briefly to align with the United States in the wake of the “War on Terror”, Pakistan resumed these efforts.

In addition, the Pakistani leadership has launched efforts to link the peril of nuclear war faced by South Asia and the lack of a settlement in Jammu and Kashmir: “Pakistan also tried to make India and the international community realize the link between nuclear proliferation and the Kashmir dispute”.²³¹ The underlying message was that India’s refusal to resolve the Jammu and Kashmir dispute had left Pakistan with no choice but to acquire a nuclear deterrent in order to have its rights respected. The bomb was useful not only for deterring India, but also as a political symbol to rally the Ummah around Pakistan and as a means for Pakistan to successfully portray itself as an oppressed David struggling against the Indian Goliath.

Both the Palestine and Kashmir issues highlight Pakistan’s foreign policy as proactive, multilateral and eager to be representative of the Ummah: “Due to its active participation, Pakistan enjoys the status of a champion of the causes of developing countries and the Islamic world”.²³² Yet Pakistan’s energetic and vocal engagement through multilateral forums such as the UN and OIC, notably on the issues of Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, is limited by the country’s financial and material wherewithal. If Pakistan is currently one of the most important UN peacekeeping operations troop contributors, with around 8,500 soldiers globally engaged,²³³ its influence in this arena does not reflect its commitment in manpower.²³⁴

In addition, Islamabad provides only around 2% of the OIC’s annual budget, placing it in the same category as states such as Oman, Egypt and Iraq. This is far from the financial contributions of the most important financial contributors, namely Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, which provide 10% and 9% of the budget, respectively.²³⁵ Moreover, the lack of backing from the major powers, smaller

states’ fear of antagonising an emerging India, and a widespread conception that Pakistan is not a reliable stakeholder contribute to the lack of progress on these issues. In summary, since Islamabad has acquired its nuclear capability, a strong and multilateral engagement to raise the united voice of the Ummah has been both a goal and a means of its foreign policy. It allowed the country to develop a greater flexibility towards its most important objectives: its political struggle with India, the promotion of an Islamic identity and the consolidation of its modern state institutions.

V. Conclusion: beyond deterrence

In conclusion, it is worth analysing the costs and benefits of Pakistan’s nuclear capability, drawing on Peimani’s indicators to do so.²³⁶ Pakistan’s nuclear capability has provided the country with a military deterrent, strengthened its confessional and national identity, and increased its status in relation to major powers. It has also given the country a sense of pride in relation to fellow Muslim states and the Ummah. However, this Geneva Paper has emphasised that Pakistan has arguably encountered all of Peimani’s “natural barriers”²³⁷ since acquiring nuclear weapons. Overall, this analysis has shown that the role of Pakistan’s nuclear capability extends well beyond the mere deterrence of India, becoming one of the most significant elements of its foreign and security policy.

Firstly, Pakistan’s economic weakness means it is unable to provide adequate infrastructure and services to large parts of its population and is dependent on foreign assistance. Secondly, the costs of the nuclear programme, missile technologies and their maintenance are a heavy burden. Thirdly, Pakistan’s nuclear programme has fueled an even more intense arms race with its arch-rival, India. Fourthly, Pakistan’s violation of the nuclear non-proliferation regime resulted in the imposition of economic and diplomatic sanctions, particularly by the United States. Fifthly, Pakistan’s nuclear-armed “praetorian state” has reinforced its bad reputation in the international community. Sixthly, the threat posed by Pakistan’s nuclear programme has increased the risk of conflict, as demonstrated by India’s 1982 plan to attack the Kahuta nuclear facility. Overall, while Pakistan may have gained prestige, identity, pride and a sense of national honour from acquiring nuclear weapons, it has paid a huge price in terms of stifling its political, social and economic development for future generations. Undeniably, acquiring nuclear weapons has altered the course of Pakistan’s foreign policy.

This paper has demonstrated that focusing solely on the military and political balance of power is insufficient for understanding why states opt to acquire nuclear capabilities, despite the substantial costs they will incur by doing so. Deterring powerful adversaries and enemies remains the primary motivation for maintaining a military nuclear programme, as the cases of Iran and North Korea illustrate. If a weak state like Pakistan has come to regard nuclear weapons as a vital element of its national security, it is mainly because the international system is chaotic and based on the principle of self-help, in which “acquiring nuclear weapons offer[s] a way to ensure regime survival”.²³⁸

However, closer examination of the issue reveals that nuclear capability serves purposes beyond deterrence. It increases a country’s prestige and boosts national pride, enabling states to bolster their internal identity and gain external political leverage. This rationale lay at the heart of the British and French

nuclear programmes of the 1950s and 1960s, despite both states already being technically protected by the US nuclear umbrella.²³⁹ For France in particular, acquiring a nuclear capability was a way to achieve strategic autonomy and to pursue a policy of national *grandeur*.²⁴⁰ This remains true today, as illustrated by Pakistan’s case. Despite the martial rhetoric and sabre rattling, Pakistan’s decision-makers seem to have made the relatively clear decision that nuclear escalation against India is not an option. Instead, they appear to view their country’s nuclear capability as a useful instrument for cementing national identity and garnering support among Muslim states.²⁴¹ Thus, while assessing the deterrent features of a state’s calculus is central to understanding its decision to pursue nuclear weapons, this alone is insufficient for a full understanding of the driving factors behind this decision.

Overall, the debate on nuclear weapons and proliferation is clouded by the unverifiable assumption that these capabilities promote stability and peace through the complex mechanisms of nuclear deterrence. The argument that nuclear weapons are designed never to be used is, in fact, extremely difficult to measure. Recent declassified material has revealed how close the world has come to “nuclear folly”, whether during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and the Kuril Islands crisis in 1980, or during the NATO exercise directed from Casteau, Belgium in 1983.²⁴² As long as nuclear weapons exist on the planet, humankind will have to live with the sword of Damocles hanging over its head, accepting that its survival will depend on the skill of world leaders, the functioning of deterrence or, perhaps, simply on chance.

While scholars highlight the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and the states that possess them, they should recognise that these weapons offer a variety of ways to exert influence on the international stage. Only a comprehensive, multilateral effort led by the major powers to establish constraints, political restraint, non-proliferation obligations, and nuclear disarmament could resolve an issue that threatens all of humankind.²⁴³ These powers must show the proto-nuclear states that acquiring nuclear capability causes more harm than good. Such a sustained and profound effort would, of course, require great powers to set aside their immediate interests in order to serve the greater good of the global community. Ultimately, for the good of humankind, this would enable the international community to implement President Reagan’s advice: “Military realists tell us that they have one certainty: that a nuclear war can never be won and therefore should never be fought”.²⁴⁴

Endnotes

- 1 J. Guy, “How the Wagah Border Post Became a Symbol of India-Pakistan Rivalry”, CNN, 1 March 2019, edition.cnn.com/2019/03/01/asia/wagah-border-scli-intl/index.html.
- 2 “L'appartenance à une communauté de croyants serait ainsi, en quelque sorte, le particularisme le plus global, le plus universel; ou peut-être faudrait-il dire l'universalisme le plus tangible, le plus 'naturel', le plus enraciné”; see A. Maalouf, *Les identités meurtrières*, Paris, Grasset & Fasquelle, 2006, pp.106-107.
- 3 B. Stein and D. Arnold, *A History of India*, Chichester, UK and Malden, MA, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
- 4 F.A. Misson, “Pakistan-India Relations: A Critical Appraisal of Power Politics”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.42(2), 2022, p.54.
- 5 N. Lindstaedt, “Why Are India and Pakistan on the Brink of War and How Dangerous Is the Situation? An Expert Explains”, *The Conversation*, 7 May 2025, <https://theconversation.com/why-are-india-and-pakistan-on-the-brink-of-war-and-how-dangerous-is-the-situation-an-expert-explains-256125>.
- 6 The status of Pakistan being the seventh nuclear-armed country is reached if we agree that Israel has possessed nuclear weapons since the late 1960s. This is difficult to confirm, however, because Israel has pursued a policy of intentional ambiguity with regard to its nuclear capability. See E. Bronner, “Vague, Opaque and Ambiguous: Israel’s Hush-hush Nuclear Policy”, *New York Times*, 13 October 2010, www.nytimes.com/2010/10/14/books/14book.html?ref=bookreviews.
- 7 H.K. Nizamani, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan*, Westport, Praeger, 2000, p.111.
- 8 M. Hunter, “Indo-Pacific Chessboard: Strategic Importance of Indo-Pacific, Quad Alliance, and Maritime Power Plays – Analysis”, *Eurasia Review*, 10 May 2025.
- 9 M.W. Hoag, “On Stability in Deterrent Races”, *World Politics*, Vol.13(4), 1961, pp.505-527.
- 10 O.A. Westad, *The Cold War: A World History*, New York, Basic Books, 2017, p.287.
- 11 E.A. Kolodziej, “France and the Atlantic Alliance: Alliance with a De-Aligning Power”, *Polity*, Vol.2(3), 1970, p.245.
- 12 CGTN.com, “27 Years on, China Is Still Committed to the NPT Treaty”, 2019, news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774d334d6a4d33457a6333566d54/index.html.
- 13 J. Palmer and R. Agrawal, “Why Are India and China Fighting?”, *Foreign Policy*, 16 June 2020.
- 14 S.D. Sagan and K.N. Walt, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1995, p.14.
- 15 Ibid., p.47.
- 16 F.H. Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*, Stanford University Press, 2012, p.60.
- 17 R. Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma”, *World Politics*, Vol.30(2), 1978, pp.167-214.
- 18 F. Khan and S. Brom, *Pakistan and Israel*, Stimson Center, 2009, pp.25-26.
- 19 M. Majid, *Pakistan and the Global Nuclear Order*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016, p.93.
- 20 M. Mandelbaum, “Lessons of the Next Nuclear War”, *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1995, pp.22-37.
- 21 Z. Mian and A.H. Nayyar, “Playing the Nuclear Game: Pakistan and the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty”, *Arms Control Today*, June 2020, www.armscontrol.org/act/2010-04/playing-nuclear-game-pakistan-fissile-material-cutoff-treaty.
- 22 C.P. Twomey, “Asia’s Complex Strategic Environment: Nuclear Multipolarity and Other Dangers”, *Asia Policy*, Vol.11, 2011, p.64.
- 23 T.C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966.
- 24 J. Baylis et al., *Contemporary Strategy*, Routledge, 2021, p.59.
- 25 S.M. Walt, “Rethinking the ‘Nuclear Revolution’”, *Foreign Policy*, 3 August 2010, foreignpolicy.com/2010/08/03/rethinking-the-nuclear-revolution/.
- 26 J. Mueller, “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World”, *International Security*, Vol.13(2), 1988, pp.55-79.
- 27 P.P. Craig and J.A. Jungerman, *The Nuclear Arms Race: Technology and Society*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1990, p.108.

- 28 B. Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*, New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1946, p.76.
- 29 R. Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution: Statecraft and the Prospect of Armageddon*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, p.3.
- 30 B.B. de Mesquita and W.H. Riker, “An Assessment of the Merits of Selective Nuclear Proliferation”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.26(2), 1982, p.291.
- 31 R. Rauchhaus, “Evaluating the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis: A Quantitative Approach”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.53(2), 2009, pp.290-291.
- 32 S.P. Kapur, *Dangerous Deterrent: Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*, Stanford University Press, 2007, p.5.
- 33 M. Masood, “THAAD vs S-400: A Comparative Analysis”, *Global Village Space*, 2 July 2019, www.globalvillagespace.com/thaad-vs-s-400-a-comparative-analysis/.
- 34 J. Mueller, “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World”, *International Security*, Vol.13(2), 1988, pp.56-60.
- 35 Ibid., pp.66-67.
- 36 É. de Durand, “Europe: d’une démissionarisation l’autre”, *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 1, 2014, pp.103116.
- 37 B.M. Blechman and S.S. Kaplan, *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1978, p.132.
- 38 A.F.K. Organski and J. Kugler, *The War Ledger*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991.
- 39 A. Alexandroff and R. Rosecrance, “Deterrence in 1939”, *World Politics*, Vol.29(3), 1977, pp.404-424.
- 40 ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross), “Nuclear Weapons – an Intolerable Threat to Humanity”, 9 October 2019, www.icrc.org/en/nuclear-weapons-a-threat-to-humanity.
- 41 Schelling, 1966, p.187. See also R. Powell, “Nuclear Deterrence Theory, Nuclear Proliferation, and National Missile Defense”, *International Security*, Vol.27(4), 2003, pp.86-118.
- 42 S. Ganguly and D.T. Hagerty, *Fearful Symmetry: India-Pakistan Crises in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2005, p.9.
- 43 A. Tellis et al., *Limited Conflicts Under the Nuclear Umbrella: Indian and Pakistani Lessons from the Kargil Crisis*, RAND Corporation, 2001, p.16.
- 44 USIP (United States Institute of Peace), “The Lahore Declaration (1999) – Peace Agreements: India-Pakistan”, 6 February 2013, www.usip.org/publications/2005/01/peace-agreements-india-pakistan.
- 45 S.M. Mazari, “Understanding Pakistan’s Nuclear Doctrine”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.24(3), 2004, pp.1-20.
- 46 U. Hayat Luk, “Strategic Ambiguities in Indian Nuclear Doctrine Implications for Pakistan’s Security”, *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.13(1), 2016, p.11.
- 47 C.L. Glaser, *Analyzing Strategic Nuclear Policy*, Princeton University Press, 1990, p.46.
- 48 P. Seabury, *Balance of Power*, University of Michigan Press, 1965, p.184.
- 49 S. Ganguly and S.P. Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010, p.61.
- 50 S.D. Sagan (ed.), *Inside Nuclear South Asia*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p.187.
- 51 Ganguly and Kapur, 2010, p.74.
- 52 V. Narang, “Posturing for Peace? Pakistan’s Nuclear Postures and South Asian Stability”, *International Security*, Vol.34(3), 2010, p.58.
- 53 Ibid., p.73.
- 54 B. Chakma, *Pakistan: Whither Minimum Deterrence?*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2013, pp.2-3.
- 55 Ibid., p.6.
- 56 Ganguly and Kapur, 2010, p.70.
- 57 Indian MEA (Ministry of External Affairs), “‘India-Pakistan: Understanding the Conflict Dynamics’- Speech by Foreign Secretary, Shri Shivshankar Menon at Jamia Millia Islamia”, 11 April 2007, <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/1846/IndiaPakistan+Understanding+the+Conflict+Dynamics+Speech+by+Foreign+Secretary+Shri+Shivshankar+Menon+at+Jamia+Millia+Islamia>.

- 58 A. Thakker, “A Rising India in the Indian Ocean Needs a Strong Navy”, *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, www.csis.org/npfp/rising-india-indian-ocean-needs-strong-navy.
- 59 Ibid., p.20.
- 60 P. Hoodbhoy and Z. Mian, “Nuclear Fears, Hopes and Realities in Pakistan”, *International Affairs*, Vol.90(5), 2014, p.1135.
- 61 G. Bacik and S. Salur, “Turkey’s Nuclear Agenda: Domestic and Regional Implications”, *Uluslararası İlişkiler/ International Relations*, Vol.6(24), 2010, p.10.
- 62 G.T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2020, p.39.
- 63 Khan, 2012, p.216.
- 64 P. Hoodbhoy, *Confronting the Bomb: Pakistani and Indian Scientists Speak Out*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- 65 H. Taha, “Domestic Nuclear Context”, in South African Institute of International Affairs, *Egypt’s Quest for a Nuclear Future*, 2021, p.10.
- 66 H. Peimani, *Nuclear Proliferation in the Indian Subcontinent: The Self-Exhausting ‘Superpowers’ and Emerging Alliances*, Westport, Praeger, 2000, pp.42-43.
- 67 Hoodbhoy and Mian, 2014, p.1135.
- 68 T. Mahmood, “Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): Pakistan and India”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.48(3), 1995, pp.81-100.
- 69 Waqar-un-Nisa, “Pakistan-India Equation: Determinants, Dynamics and the Outlook”, *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.14(1), 2017, p.31.
- 70 P. Grant (ed.), *State of the World’s Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2014: Events of 2013*, London, Minority Rights Group International, 2014, p.106.
- 71 K.S. Komireddi, *Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India*, London, Hurst, 2019, p.170.
- 72 R.D. Kaplan, *South Asia’s Geography of Conflict*, Center for a New American Security, August 2010, p.10, www.cnas.org/publications/reports/south-asias-geography-of-conflict.
- 73 V. Doshi and N. Mehdi, “70 Years Later, Survivors Recall the Horrors of India-Pakistan Partition”, *Washington Post*, 14 August 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/70-years-later-survivors-recall-the-horrors-of-india-pakistan-partition/2017/08/14/3b8c58e4-7de9-11e7-9026-4a0a64977c92_story.html.
- 74 K.M. Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove: An Insider’s Account of Pakistan’s Foreign Relations Including Details of the Kashmir Framework*, Penguin India, 2015, p.93.
- 75 A. Sattar, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy, 1947-2012: A Concise History*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.46.
- 76 M. Hirsh et al., “India and Pakistan: Outlining a Path towards Peace”, *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.15(1), 2018, p.28.
- 77 Ibid., p.25.
- 78 S. Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967*, Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson Center, 2009, p.25.
- 79 A. Hilger, *Die Sowjetunion und die Dritte Welt: UdSSR, Staatssozialismus und die Antikolonialismus im Kalten Krieg 1945-1991*, München, Oldenbourg, 2009, p.181.
- 80 V. Mastny, “The Soviet Union’s Partnership with India,” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.12(3), 2010, p.85.
- 81 N. Salik, *Learning to Live with the Bomb: Pakistan, 1998-2016*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2017, p.9.
- 82 V. Kaura, “India-Afghanistan Relations in the Modi-Ghani Era”, *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol.30(1/2), 2017, pp.29-30.
- 83 Z.S. Ahmed and S. Bhatnagar, “Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations and the Indian Factor”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.60(2), 2007, p.160.
- 84 Kaura, 2017, p.30.
- 85 A. Pande, *Explaining Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: Escaping India*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p.86.
- 86 Ahmed and Bhatnagar, 2007, p.165.

- 87 Author interview with B. de Cerjat, former Swiss ambassador to Pakistan and Afghanistan, 16 April 2021.
- 88 M. Ahmar, *The Challenge of Rebuilding Afghanistan*, Karachi and Islamabad, Program on Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution, University of Karachi and Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2006, p.219.
- 89 R.D. Kaplan, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*, New York, Random House, 2011, p.78.
- 90 Kaura, 2017, pp.37-38.
- 91 Indian MEA (Ministry of External Affairs), “Dhaka Declaration, Thirteenth SAARC Summit”, 13 November 2005, mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?7055/Dhaka.
- 92 NS Energy, “Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Natural Gas Pipeline”, 2018, www.nsenergybusiness.com/projects/turkmenistan-afghanistan-pakistan-india-tapi-natural-gas-pipeline/#.
- 93 CSEP (Centre for Social and Economic Progress), “India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present and Future”, Webinar, 28 April 2021, <https://csep.org/event/india-and-asian-geopolitics-the-past-present/>.
- 94 N. Akhtar, “Composite Dialogues Between Indian and Pakistan: Challenges and Impediments”, *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol.32(3), 2015, pp.49-74.
- 95 P. Sahadevan, *Conflict and Peacemaking in South Asia*, New Delhi, Lancer’s Books, 2001, p.165.
- 96 Author interview with M. Finaud, former Head of Arms Proliferation, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 16 March 2021.
- 97 Akhtar, 2015, p.56.
- 98 Sahadevan, 2001, p.129.
- 99 Ibid., p.89.
- 100 M. Kugelman et al., *Pakistan-India Trade: What Needs to Be Done? What Does It Matter?* Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013, p.35.
- 101 K.C. Dash, “India-Pakistan Trade: Opportunities and Constraints”, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.14(1), 2013, pp.170-171.
- 102 T. Baysan et al., “Preferential Trading in South Asia”, Policy Research Working Paper No. 3813, Washington DC, World Bank, 2006.
- 103 Khan, M.S. “India-Pakistan Trade: A Roadmap for Enhancing Economic Relations”, Washington DC, Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2009, p.3.
- 104 Dash, 2013, p.173.
- 105 A. Siddiqi, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan’s Military Economy*, London, Pluto Press, 2016, p.93.
- 106 A. Perlmutter, *The Military and Politics in Modern Times: On Professionals, Praetorians, and Revolutionary Soldiers*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977, p.93.
- 107 Siddiqi, 2016, p.80.
- 108 S. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2004, p.121.
- 109 Siddiqi, 2016, p.107.
- 110 M. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2: The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760-1914*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.438.
- 111 Siddiqi, 2016, p.124.
- 112 Cohen, 2004, pp.126-128.
- 113 W.M. Dobell, “Ayub Khan as President of Pakistan”, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.42(3), 1969, pp.294-310.
- 114 Cohen, 2004, p.113.
- 115 H.K. Nizamani and K. Haider, *The Roots of Rhetoric: Politics of Nuclear Weapons in India and Pakistan*, Westport, Praeger, 2000, p.99.
- 116 A personal dictatorship is a regime in which an individual dominates the entire political system and society as a whole. This type of regime often includes the cult of personality, the use of totalitarian tools such as propaganda and the capture of the state’s bureaucracy by the ruler. Stalin, Hitler and Kim Jung Un are the best modern examples of personal dictators.
- 117 C. Way and J.L.P. Weeks, “Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation”, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 58(3), 2014, pp.709-710.

- 118 *The Economist*, “Global Democracy Has a Very Bad Year”, January 2021, www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/02/02/global-democracy-has-a-very-bad-year.
- 119 On *The Economist*’s Global Democracy Index, Russia currently ranks 124th out of 167 countries with a score of 3.31 and China 151st with a score of 2.27. More importantly, both Russia’s and China’s state of democracy has largely deteriorated since the early 2000s (Russia was considered to be a “hybrid regime” in 2006 with a score of 5.02, while China had a score of 3.14 in 2010), whereas Pakistan has consistently improved since 2006 (it had a score of 3.92 at that time).
- 120 N. Salik and K.N. Luongo, “Challenges for Pakistan’s Nuclear Security”, *Arms Control Today*, Vol.43(2), 2013, p.16.
- 121 B. Tertrais, “Pakistan’s Nuclear and WMD Programmes: Status, Evolution and Risks”, EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, Non-Proliferation Papers No. 19, July 2012, p.7.
- 122 Salik and Luongo, 2013, p.212.
- 123 G.J. Lewis and B. Tertrais, “The Finger on the Button: The Authority to Use Nuclear Weapons in Nuclear-Armed States”, CNS Occasional Paper No. 45, 2019, p.27.
- 124 Author interview with Z.I. Cheema, Director of the Strategic Vision Institute and author of “Indian Nuclear Deterrence: Its Evolution, Development and Implications for South Asian Security”, 14 April 2021.
- 125 Ibid.
- 126 A. Zafar, “Pakistan’s Nuclear Assets and Threats of Terrorism: How Grave Is the Danger?”, Henry L. Stimson Center, July 2007, pp.6-7.
- 127 M. Bunn and A. Wier, “Securing the Bomb: An Agenda for Action”, Nuclear Threat Initiative and the Project on Managing the Atom, Harvard University, May 2004.
- 128 S. Joshi, “How Terrorist Actors in Pakistan Use Nuclear Weapons for Political Influence”, *Asian Security*, Vol.16(2), 2020, pp.221-242.
- 129 SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) and DCAF (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces), *Governing the Bomb: Civilian Control and Democratic Accountability of Nuclear Weapons*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p.208.
- 130 H. Born, *National Governance of Nuclear Weapons: Opportunities and Constraints*, Geneva, DCAF, 2007, pp.13-14.
- 131 Author interview with B. de Cerjat, 16 April 2021.
- 132 P. Kerr and M. Nikitin, *Pakistan’s Nuclear Weapons: Proliferation and Security Issues*, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, 7 October 2010, p.16.
- 133 Author interview with M. Zeeshan, 25 March 2021.
- 134 Author interview with B. Tertrais, Deputy Director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique and expert in nuclear proliferation/deterrence, 31 March 2021.
- 135 V. Kukreja, *Civil-military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India*, New Delhi and Newbury Park, Sage, 1991, p.27.
- 136 T. Dalton and M. Krepon, “A Normal Nuclear Pakistan”, *Stimson Center*, 2015, p.5, www.jstor.org/stable/resrep10815.
- 137 L.S. Spector, *Going Nuclear*, Cambridge, MA, Ballinger, 1987, p.113.
- 138 S.M. Amin, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2010, p.14.
- 139 S. Weissman and H. Krosney, *The Islamic Bomb: The Nuclear Threat to Israel and the Middle East*, New York, Times Books, 1981, pp.162-163.
- 140 S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1993.
- 141 Hoodbhoy and Mian, 2014, p.1135.
- 142 *Daily Jasarat*, special supplement, 1 June 1999, https://www.loc.gov/newspapers/?fa=access_restricted%3Afalse%7Csubject%3Apakistan&all=true&dates=1900-1999&st=list.
- 143 S. Yasmeen, “Is Pakistan’s Nuclear Bomb an Islamic Bomb?”, *Asian Studies Review*, Vol.25(2), 2001, p.201.
- 144 Ibid., pp.202-203.
- 145 Weissman and Krosney, 1981, pp.51-53.

- 146 M. Craig, “‘Nuclear Sword of the Moslem World’?: The United States, Britain, Pakistan, and the ‘Islamic Bomb’, 1977–80”, *International History Review*, Vol.38(5), 2016, p.866.
- 147 Ibid., p.878.
- 148 N.S. Sheikh, *The New Politics of Islam: Pan-Islamic Foreign Policy in a World of States*, New York, Routledge Curzon, 2007, p.34.
- 149 M. Axworthy, *Iran: Empire of the Mind: A History from Zoroaster to the Present Day*, London, Penguin, 2008, pp.79–80.
- 150 O. Roy, *L'échec de l'islam politique*, Paris, Éditions Points, 2015, p.188.
- 151 J.L. Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- 152 US Embassy, Islamabad, “With Senator Hagel, Foreign Minister Kasuri Pushes for Civil Nuclear Transfers and Warns that a Military Attack on Iran Would Mean Disaster for Pakistan”, cable 06ISLAMABAD6647_a_, 17 April 2006, <https://www.dawn.com/news/642728/2006-kasuri-worried-about-us-attack-on-iran>.
- 153 M. Kaushik, “The ‘Islamic’ Content of Pakistan’s Bomb”, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.3(11), 1980, p.394.
- 154 Author interview with Z.I. Cheema, 14 April 2021.
- 155 Yasmeen, 2001, p.203.
- 156 Weissman and Krosney, 1981, pp.52–53.
- 157 Interview with B. Tertrais, 31 March 2021.
- 158 *The Tribune*, “Pakistan’s Islamic Bomb”, 14 November 2015, www.tribuneindia.com/news/archive/comment/pakistan-s-islamic-bomb-159884.
- 159 M. Rani, “Nuclear Issue in Indo-Pakistan Relations”, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol.68, 2007, p.1211.
- 160 Craig, 2016, p.862.
- 161 M. Moore and K. Kamran, “Pakistani A-Tests Seen as ‘Triumph for Islam’”, *Washington Post*, 15 June 1998, www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/15/pakistani-a-tests-seen-as-triumph-for-islam/2640ce13-a201-4f57-a57c-c8d0a741059a/.
- 162 Yasmeen, 2001, pp.207–208.
- 163 Interview with M. Finaud, 16 March 2021.
- 164 M. Yegar, “Pakistan and Israel”, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol.19(3/4), 2007, p.131.
- 165 Nizamani, 2000, p.99.
- 166 Yegar, 2007, p.138.
- 167 P.R. Kumaraswamy, “Nuclear Pakistan and Israel”, *Journal of International Issues*, Vol.6(2), 2002, p.126.
- 168 S. Noor, “Indo-Israel Relations: Repercussions for Pakistan”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.57(3), 2004, p.91.
- 169 Ibid., p.97.
- 170 M. Zeeshan, *Flying Blind: India’s Quest for Global Leadership*, Penguin Random House, 2021, p.15.
- 171 Kumaraswamy, 2002, p.130.
- 172 Quoted in *ibid.*, p.131.
- 173 Ibid., pp.133–134.
- 174 P.R. Kumaraswamy, “Beyond the Veil: Israel-Pakistan Relations”, ICSS Memorandum No. 55, Tel Aviv, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2000, p.15.
- 175 Yasmeen, 2001, p.208.
- 176 Khan and Brom, 2009, p.12.
- 177 Author interview with Z.I. Cheema, 14 April 2021.
- 178 *The Economist*, “Narendra Modi Stokes Divisions in the World’s Biggest Democracy”, 25 January 2020, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/01/23/narendra-modi-stokes-divisions-in-the-worlds-biggest-democracy>.
- 179 P.R. Lavoy, “Nuclear Proliferation Over the Next Decade”, *Nonproliferation Review*, Vol.13(3), 2006, p.441.
- 180 T. O’Connor, “The World’s Only Muslim Nuclear Power Warns Israel’s War in Gaza Must Stop”, *Newsweek*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/pakistan-warns-israel-war-gaza-must-stop-munir-akram-1838448>.

- 181 G. Cafiero, “What Did One Year of War in Gaza Do to the Abraham Accords?”, *New Arab*, 7 October 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/what-did-one-year-war-gaza-do-abraham-accords>.
- 182 *Economic Times*, “Pakistan’s House of Cards May Be Failing, with Gulf States Openly Moving Closer to India”, 2 September 2020, economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/pakistans-house-of-cards-may-be-failing-with-gulf-states-openly-moving-closer-to-india/articleshow/77898566.cms?from=mdr.
- 183 Khan and Brom, 2009, p.11.
- 184 B. Bağış and Ç. Yurtseven, *The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation*, Center for Strategic Research, 2017, pp.10-31; B. Bağış and Ç. Yurtseven, “Turkey and the OIC: Greater Economic Cooperation, Opportunities and Challenges”, MRPA Paper No. 84049, University to Munich, 2017, p.13.
- 185 S.S. Pirzada, “Pakistan and the OIC”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.40(2), 1987, pp.14-38.
- 186 A summit of scholars aimed at studying and discussing the Islamic theology.
- 187 S.S. Khan, “Pakistan and the Organization of Islamic Conference”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.56(1), 2003, p.59.
- 188 Y. Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, p.212.
- 189 Pirzada, 1987, p.19.
- 190 S.S. Pirzada, “Quaid-e-Azam and Islamic Solidarity”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.29(4), 1976, pp.70-71.
- 191 M.S. Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986, p.111.
- 192 G.C. McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy*, New York, Harper & Row, 1983, p.76.
- 193 Pirzada, 1987, p.25.
- 194 Ibid., p.27.
- 195 Ibid., p.35.
- 196 H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, p.13.
- 197 M.B. Mistry, “Muslims in India: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile”, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.25(3), 2005, pp.399-422.
- 198 R.A. Hanif, “Pakistan, OIC and the Challenges of Muslim World”, *Journal of Punjab University Historical Society*, Vol.27(1), 2014, p.47.
- 199 This saying has been used by Voltaire, Winston Churchill, Theodore Roosevelt and even Benjamin Parker in the film *Spiderman*, but the source remains unclear. Its political use can be found in Z. Zhang and M. Liu, *With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility: China’s Belt and Road Initiative*, Beijing, New Star Press, 2016.
- 200 C. Kupchan, *Isolationism: A History of America’s Efforts to Shield Itself from the World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020, p.176.
- 201 S.S. Pirzada, *Foundations of Pakistan: All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, Karachi, National Publishing House, 1970, p.442.
- 202 Kumaraswamy, 2000, p.21.
- 203 UN (United Nations), “Pakistan Archives – The Question of Palestine”, www.un.org/unispal/country/pakistan/?wpv_view_count=4164.
- 204 UN General Assembly, “Israeli Attacks on the Gaza Strip – Pakistan Senate Resolution, Letter from Pakistan – The Question of Palestine”, A/63/718/S/2009/95, 5 February 2009, www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-184185/.
- 205 M. Bishku, “In Search of Identity and Security: Pakistan and the Middle East, 1947-1977”, *Conflict Quarterly*, Vol.12, 1992, p.39.
- 206 NTI (Nuclear Threat Initiative), “Nuclear Egypt”, July 2014, <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/egypt/nuclear/>.
- 207 K. Timmerman, “Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Cases of Iran, Syria, and Libya”, Los Angeles, Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1992, p.89.
- 208 Hanif, 2014, p.48.

- 209 F. Shakoor, “UN and Kashmir”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.51(2), 1998, p.54.
- 210 N.N. Khan, “Kashmir Issue and Pakistan’s Foreign Policy”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.54(1), 2001, p.12.
- 211 Z.A. Sialkoti, “An Analytical Study of the Punjab Boundary Line Issue during the Last Two Decades of the British Raj until the Declaration of 3 June 1947”, *Pakistan Journal of History & Culture*, Vol.35(2), 2014, pp.98-99.
- 212 M.S. Malik, “Pakistan-India Relations: An Analytical Perspective of Peace Efforts”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.39(1), 2019, p.61.
- 213 Komireddi, 2019, p.191.
- 214 M. Khan, “National Liberation Struggle of Kashmiris in the Regional and Global Setting”, PhD thesis, Department of International Relations, University of Karachi, 2000, p.18.
- 215 UNSC (UN Security Council), The India-Pakistan Question – Resolution 38 (1948), S/651, 17 January 1948, <http://unsct.com/en/resolutions/doc/38>.
- 216 R. Fareed, “India Imposes Kashmir Lockdown, Puts Leaders ‘under House Arrest’”, Al Jazeera, 4 August 2019, www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/8/4/india-imposes-kashmir-lockdown-puts-leaders-under-house-arrest.
- 217 T. Khurshid, “United Nations Security Council Resolutions: Status of the People of Jammu and Kashmir”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.36(4), 2016, p.108.
- 218 S.B. Orakzai, “Organisation of the Islamic Conference and Conflict Resolution: Case Study of the Kashmir Dispute”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.63(2), 2010, p.83.
- 219 Khurshid, 2016, p.109.
- 220 Khan, 2001, p.14.
- 221 Khurshid, 2016, p.114.
- 222 Orakzai, 2010, p.89.
- 223 Shakoor, 1998, p.67.
- 224 N.A. Baba, *Organisation of Islamic Conference: Theory and Practice of Pan-Islamic Cooperation*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1994, p.187.
- 225 Orakzai, 2010, p.90.
- 226 S. Khan, *Reasserting International Islam: A Focus on the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Other Islamic Institutions*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.96.
- 227 K. Khan and P.I. Cheema, “Modi’s Kashmir Policy: The Probable Consequence for the Security of South Asia”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.37(3), 2017, p.16.
- 228 Komireddi, 2019, p.151.
- 229 F. Shakoor, “Nuclearization of South Asia and the Kashmir Dispute”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.51(4), 1998, p.67.
- 230 J.N. Mohanty and S.K. Mohanty, “Pakistan’s Kashmir Policy: The Smoke-screen of Fundamentalist Agenda?”, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.68(1), 2007, p.138.
- 231 Shakoor, 1998, p.73.
- 232 N. Wasi, “Pakistan and the United Nations”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol.58(3), 2005, p.97.
- 233 M. Kiani, “Pakistan’s Contribution to UN Peacekeeping”, *Strategic Studies*, Vol.24(3), 2004, p.41.
- 234 J.A. Frieden et al., *World Politics: Interests, Interactions, Institutions*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2016, p.215.
- 235 I. Hossain, “The Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC): Nature, Role and the Issues”, *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol.29(1), 2012, p.300.
- 236 Peimani, 2000, pp.42-43.
- 237 Ibid.
- 238 CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies), “CSIS European Trilateral Track 2 Nuclear Dialogues: 2019 Consensus Statement”, 2020, p.3.
- 239 Author interview with M. Finaud, 16 March 2021.
- 240 C. Cogan, *French Negotiating Behavior: Dealing with La Grande Nation*, Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace Press, 2003, p.203.
- 241 S. Biswas, “How Real Is the Risk of Nuclear War between India and Pakistan?”, *BBC*, 14 May 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2e373yzndro>.

- 242** S. Plokhy, *Nuclear Folly: A History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York, W.W. Norton, 2021.
- 243** H. Müller and C. Wunderlich, “Nuclear Disarmament without the Nuclear-Weapon States: The Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty”, *Daedalus*, Vol.149(2), 2020, pp.171-174.
- 244** A.C. Shahul Hameed, *Disarmament – a Multilateral Approach*, Colombo, Lake House Investments, 1988, p.24.

Geneva Papers Research Series

- No.1 2011 G. P. Herd, “The Global Puzzle: Order in an Age of Primacy, Power-Shifts and Interdependence”, 34p.
- No.2 2011 T. Tardy, “Cooperating to Build Peace: The UN-EU Inter-Institutional Complex”, 36p.
- No.3 2011 M.-M. Ould Mohamedou, “The Rise and Fall of Al Qaeda: Lessons in Post-September 11 Transnational Terrorism”, 39p.
- No.4 2011 A. Doss, “Great Expectations: UN Peacekeeping, Civilian Protection and the Use of Force”, 43p.
- No.5 2012 P. Cornell, “Regional and International Energy Security Dynamics: Consequences for NATO’s Search for an Energy Security Role”, 43p.
- No.6 2012 M.-R. Djalili and T. Kellner, “Politique Régionale de l’Iran: Potentialités, Défis et Incertitudes”, 40p.
- No.7 2012 G. Lindstrom, “Meeting the Cyber Security Challenge”, 39p.
- No.8 2012 V. Christensen, “Virtuality, Perception and Reality in Myanmar’s Democratic Reform”, 35p.
- No.9 2012 T. Fitschen, “Taking the Rule of Law Seriously”, 30p.
- No.10 2013 E. Kienle, “The Security Implications of the Arab Spring”, 32p.
- No.11 2013 N. Melzer, “Human Rights Implications of the Usage of Drones and Unmanned Robots in Warfare”, 75p.
- No.12 2013 A. Guidetti et al., “World Views: Negotiating the North Korean Nuclear Issue”, 47p.
- No.13 2013 T. Sisk and M.-M. Ould Mohamedou, “Bringing Back Transitivity: Democratisation in the 21st Century”, 36p.
- No.14 2015 H. J. Roth, “The Dynamics of Regional Cooperation in Southeast Asia”, 35p.
- No.15 2015 G. Galice, “Les Empires en Territoires et Réseaux”, 42p.
- No.16 2015 S. C. P. Hinz, “The Crisis of the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty in the Global Context”, 36p.
- No.17 2015 H. J. Roth, “Culture – An Underrated Element in Security Policy”, 40p.
- No.18 2016 D. Esfandiary and M. Finaud, “The Iran Nuclear Deal: Distrust and Verify”, 44p.
- No.19 2016 S. Martin, “Spying in a Transparent World: Ethics and Intelligence in the 21st Century”, 42p.
- No.20 2016 A. Burkhalter, “Définir le Terrorisme: Défis et Pratiques”, 50p.
- No.21 2017 M. Finaud, “‘Humanitarian Disarmament’: Powerful New Paradigm or Naive Utopia?”, 48p.
- No.22 2017 S. Aboul Enein, “Cyber Challenges in the Middle East”, 49p.
- No.23 2019 Tobias Vestner, “Prohibitions and Export Assessment: Tracking Implementation of the Arms Trade Treaty”, 28p.

- No.24 2019 Mathias Bak, Kristoffer Nilas Tarp and Dr. Christina Schori Liang, “Defining the Concept of ‘Violent Extremism’”, 32p.
- No.25 2020 Cholpon Orozobekova and Marc Finaud, “Regulating and Limiting the Proliferation of Armed Drones: Norms and Challenges”, 47p.
- No.26 2020 Dr Gervais Rufyikiri, “Reshaping Approaches to Sustainable Peacebuilding and Development in Fragile States – Part I: Nexus between Unethical Leadership and State Fragility”, 47p.
- No.27 2020 Dr Gervais Rufyikiri, “Reshaping Approaches to Sustainable Peacebuilding and Development in Fragile States – Part II: Nexus between Unethical Leadership and State Fragility”, 44p.
- No.28 2021 Dr Gervais Rufyikiri, “Resilience in Post-civil War, Authoritarian Burundi: What Has Worked and What Has Not?”, 47p.
- No.29 2022 Kevin M. Esvelt, “Delay, Detect, Defend: Preparing for a Future in which Thousands Can Release New Pandemics”, 65p.
- No.30 2023 Stuart Casey-Maslen, “International Counterterrorism Law: Key Definitions and Core Rules”, 40p.
- No.31 2023 Anjali Gopal, William Bradshaw, Vaishnav Sunil and Kevin M. Esvelt, “Securing Civilisation Against Catastrophic Pandemics”, 50p.
- No.32 2024 Kemal Mohamedou, “The Wagner Group, Russia's Foreign Policy and Sub-Saharan Africa”, 41p.
- No.33 2024 Anila Jelesijević, “The Prospective of the Western Balkans to the EU membership: Challenges and Possible Ways Forward”, 40p.
- No.34 2024 Jean-Marc Rickli and Federico Mantellassi, “The War in Ukraine: Reality Check for Emerging Technologies and the Future of Warfare”, 53p.
- No.35 2024 Lassi Heininen, “Geopolitical Features, Common Interests and the Climate Crisis: The Case of the Arctic”, 38p.

Building Peace Together

Geneva Centre for Security Policy

Maison de la paix

Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2D

P.O. Box 1295

1211 Geneva 1

Switzerland

Tel: + 41 22 730 96 00

Contact: www.gcsp.ch/contact

www.gcsp.ch

ISBN: 978-2-88947-124-9



GCSP
Geneva Centre for
Security Policy