

APPLICATION OF DEUTSCH'S 'COOPERATION-COMPETITION' AND COLEMAN'S 'POWER AND CONFLICT' TO KASHMIR DISPUTE AND PAKISTAN-INDIA RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the enduring Kashmir conflict and broader India-Pakistan relations through the dual lenses of Morton Deutsch's Cooperation-Competition model and Peter Coleman's Power and Conflict framework. By applying these theoretical approaches, the study highlights how entrenched perceptions of negative interdependence, mistrust, and zero-sum thinking have perpetuated the conflict. Deutsch's model reveals the conflicting motivations—both cooperative and competitive—that underpin the bilateral relationship, while Coleman's theory provides insight into how power asymmetries, deep structural biases, and legitimizing narratives obstruct meaningful dialogue. The analysis underscores that sustainable peace requires reframing the conflict from mutual antagonism to shared interest. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations for Pakistan, emphasizing trust-building, acknowledgment of past actions, cultural commonality, and a shift from power-over to power-with dynamics to create the conditions necessary for cooperative conflict resolution and regional stability.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT:

Kashmir is often referred to as the unfinished agenda of the partition of Indian Subcontinent¹. Over the past 67 years, the conflict has impaired the growth of Indo-Pakistan relations. Beyond the bilateral relations, the conflict is principally responsible for stunting regional cooperation². The two countries have fought three major wars and innumerable border skirmishes. For the last 15 years, the two countries are armed with nuclear weapons. An escalation of this conflict can result in a nuclear cataclysm. Moreover, the two countries are spending much of their respective scarce resources on building their militaries and nuclear capabilities. Resolution of Kashmir dispute will not only restore peace

to the region, it will also allow the two countries to direct their resources towards development³.

In this paper, I look at the India-Pakistan relations particularly Kashmir dispute through the application of two different but complementary theoretical models. The first part deals with the application of Morton Deutsch's 'cooperation and competition' to this protracted conflict. In the second part, I apply Coleman's 'power and conflict' to understand the dynamics of the conflict. In the third section, I put forward recommendations for Pakistan that can be considered for resolution of this longstanding dispute.

DEUTSCH'S COOPERATION COMPETITION MODEL:

Deutsch holds that parties to a conflict bring a certain orientation to the table when negotiating. This orientation can be cooperative or competitive. The orientation of the parties can ultimately be decisive in determining the outcome of the conflict. Nevertheless, Deutsch also maintains that all conflicts are mixed motive – containing both cooperative and competitive elements. The model holds that in any given situation, the goals of parties are interdependent positively or

¹ Yuvraj Krishan, *Understanding Partition: India Sundered, Muslims Fragmented*. New Delhi: Alpha Publications, 2002. 230.

² Stephen Cohen, *Shooting for a Century: The India-Pakistan Conundrum*. Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 2013. 218.

³ Rajpal Budania, *India's National Security Dilemma: The Pakistan Factor and India's Policy Response*. New Delhi: M.L. Gidwani, Indus Publishing Company, 2001. 134.

negatively. In positive goal interdependence, the attainment of the goals of one party increases the possibility of goal attainment by the other party. Conversely, in negative interdependence the possibility of goal attainment by one party makes it less likely for the other party to attain its goals. Again, no conflicts are purely negative or positive. Rather we can identify both negative and positive streaks within all conflicts⁴.

In the case of Kashmir, as I mentioned earlier that it is in the interest of both states from security and development point of view that the issue is resolved. Therefore we can assert that there exist both cooperative and competitive elements and the goals are also linked positively as well as negatively. On the one hand, it is obvious that both countries want to maximize their claim and control over the area, and on the other hand, they also have interest in deescalating the conflict and minimizing their costs both in terms of human life and economic costs.

Deutsch further asserts that in a relationship of positive interdependence, the parties view their respective costs and gains as mutual. In a

negative interdependent relationship, the gains of one party are seen as losses by the other party. The broad universe of Pakistan-India relationship in which the Kashmir dispute is taking place is one characterized by their mutual perceptions of negative interdependence. Such a competitive relationship makes it hard for them to allow themselves to look at the positive aspects of their mutual relationship. Consequently, it makes the resolution of the dispute challenging.

Furthermore, the relationship also fulfills most of the characteristics of negative interdependence listed by Deutsch. The relationship between Pakistan and India is characterized by faulty communication, mistrust and a general expectation of disagreement even before the actual process of negotiation is initiated. In consonance with Deutsch's argument, both countries believe that a resolution is possible only if it is imposed on the other by circumstances or through superior force. Pakistan's support to non-state militant organizations in Kashmir, and India's efforts to outspend Pakistan in military expenditures are cases in point⁵.

⁴ Morton Deutsch, "Cooperation, Competition and Conflict", in eds. Morton Deutsch et al. *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 2014. 3-28.

⁵ Robert Wirsing, *Kashmir in the Shadow of War: Regional Revelries in a Nuclear Age*. New York: M.E. Sharp, 2003. 121.

Similarly, Pakistan and India have gone through extended periods of *autistic hostility* - 'breaking off communication with the other party'. In the recent memory, Pakistan and India refused to engage one another after attack on Indian Parliament in December 2001 and in the aftermath of Mumbai Attacks in 2008⁶.

In line with Deutsch's argument, the two countries see the conflict as almost purely competitive. As Deutsch predicts and I mentioned this at the beginning, it has resulted in loss for both countries. The Kashmir dispute remains unresolved, keeping the region destabilized.

The efforts to achieve a durable solution to the Kashmir dispute can be initiated from the starting point of *reframing*. Reframing is the process that allows us to look at the conflict as a mutual problem, and bringing an end to the conflict as mutually desired. As the theory suggests, communication of such reframing across to the other party should be unequivocal to build trust on both sides. As Kashmir is a major international issue, my understanding is that the efforts to reframe the conflict should also target populations on both sides. Communication dimension of this exercise can be undertaken by media and political leaders on either side.

COLEMAN'S 'POWER AND CONFLICT':

Coleman's description of power in conflict is also interesting when applied to the broader Pakistan-India relations, and particularly to the Kashmir dispute. The theory of power is especially relevant to the conflict for its explanation of the environmental factors. It is also my understanding that the resolution of Kashmir dispute is made more cumbersome by the misgivings and mistrust that exist between Pakistan and India than by real territorial or ethnographic issues.

Due to its weaker military and economy compared to India, Pakistan has existed under the fear that India wishes to do the country harm⁷. Coleman refers to such deep-seated perception about power relations as *deep structures*⁸. The historical development of such deep structures impairs our understanding of the changing dynamics of conflict, so that parties see the conflict as

⁶ Russell J. Leng, *Bargaining and Learning in Recurring Crises: The Soviet-America, Egyptian-Israeli and Indo-Pakistani Rivalries*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000. 294.

⁷ Aparna Pande, *Explaining Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Escaping India*. New York: Routledge, 2011. 104.

⁸ Peter T. Coleman, "Power and Trust", in eds. Moton Deutsch et al. *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 2014. 137-167.

something static unaffected by personal or environmental changes. For instance, there is

a common understanding in Pakistani policy circles that the only manner in which the issue of Kashmir can be resolved is through unconventional, asymmetrical warfare as India would not concede any concessions to Pakistan on Kashmir, given India's greater prowess in military and economic spheres.

Another feature of the environment of the conflict is that those with greater power defend their dominant position through 'legitimizing myths'. In accord with Coleman's argument, the two countries have always justified their tactics against the other by referring to their relative power position. As I mentioned earlier, Pakistan considers itself weaker compared to India and therefore resorts to using unconventional warfare, especially by promoting militant organizations in the Indian-held Kashmir. Many Indian leaders, on the other hand, have variously reiterated that power is the only way to deal with Pakistan. Given the above discussion based on Coleman's power analysis, Pakistan needs to consider the following questions before embarking on conflict resolution efforts with India:

1. Are there elements of Pakistan's relations with India that can be considered cooperative?
2. How does Pakistan's power measure against that of India?
3. How much does Pakistan value peace in the region and its own relationship with India?

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Pakistan should consider the following steps for creating an environment in which resolution of Kashmir dispute can appear to be a possibility:

1. Kashmir dispute provides for sufficient common ground that Pakistan and India can put in perspective in the beginning. As I mentioned in the early parts of my paper, it is in the mutual interests of both countries and their populations, especially their Kashmiri populations that the issue should be resolved. The desire to avoid pitfalls from the conflict should be the first common ground for the resolution of the conflict. Other than that, the two countries share a largely similar culture. This commonality of

culture can be instrumentalized to break the ice on negotiations, and also to reframe the issue to the respective populations in a different more collegial manner.

2. There has been a history of resolution to Kashmir dispute being thwarted by mishandling of disagreements. There has been a tendency to personalize the conflict and make the resolution of conflict difficult by resorting to personal attacks. An example of such behavior was when during the high-level Agra Summit in 2001, the two delegations headed by the respective heads of the governments failed to reach an agreement over Kashmir dispute; the Pakistani delegates blamed the 'hawkish' elements within the Indian cabinet to have foiled the efforts to resolve the issue. In order to create an environment of cooperation and positive interdependence, such claims should be avoided in future engagement.
3. Pakistan should also try to look at the issue from the Indian perspective. For instance, Indian government has to face pressures from the opposition and Indian population. It is counterproductive to expect Indian government to make immediate concessions, and to blame it for the failure of the efforts when the Indian government fails to meet the expectations of Pakistani government.
4. Pakistan needs to take responsibility for its actions that have resulted in creating an atmosphere of mistrust. An example of such responsible action will be to seek apology for the Kargil War (1999) in Kashmir where Pakistan violated the Line of Control and took over posts in the Indian side. Similarly, Pakistan can take actions against the perpetrators of Mumbai Attacks (2008). At least, judicial actions against Pakistani nationals allegedly involved in the attacks can be taken with more seriousness.
5. Research indicates that ambiguities regarding power balance often result in escalation. Pakistan should make efforts in negotiations with India whereby both countries share the details of their

military capabilities with one another every year. Such clarity regarding power, even if there exists power imbalance, will result in restraining both parties from going to war with one another.

6. For long-term resolution, there needs to be power balance between the parties. Since Pakistan and India are both nuclear states, there does exist a kind of power balance between the two states. It is by following the first suggestion that this balance can be emphasized.
7. Regional integration is becoming a source of increasing power for all participants without having to compete with one another negatively. Pakistan can also reframe its relationship with India to make it more cooperative. Coleman refers to such an approach as 'power with' as against 'power on' or 'power against'. This attitude of reframing the conflict and making it more cooperative is also supported by Deutsch's model I discussed in the first part of the paper.

CONCLUSION:

For a broad and protracted conflict such as Indo-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir poses great challenges to policy makers and conflict resolution experts. The years of investments made by either side in the conflict make it nearly impossible to achieve major breakthroughs right away. Therefore, I focused on theories that aim at creating an environment of mutual trust and understanding of the other side's point of view.

During the course of the paper, I found that the two approaches towards conflict resolution are in fact complementary and can work together with one another. For instance, Coleman argues in favor of increasing power of both parties through working together (striving for power with). Similarly, Deutsch argues in favor of focusing on the cooperative dimension of the conflict. Moreover, both the approaches look at conflict as harmful to both parties, even if in the short term one party might seem to benefit from it. Lastly, communication and avoidance of ambiguities are essential features of conflict resolution in both cases.