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Pakistan-India Bilateral Relations and Application of Environmental Peacebuilding

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PAKISTAN-INDIA BILATERAL RELATIONS AND APPLICATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

*Omaid Farooq Khan**

Abstract

The recent Pulwama incident has further strained the already tense relationship between India and Pakistan. India's violation of the UN resolution on Kashmir has exacerbated the situation, leaving both countries with seemingly no common ground or shared challenges to bring them to the dialogue table and build confidence and trust for a sustainable relationship. This paper proposes a peace-initiating process prioritising cooperation on common environmental challenges to improve bilateral relations between Pakistan and India. Environmental peacebuilding, which focuses on shared ecological challenges and provides a platform for dialogue and cooperation between rival states, has been explored for a couple of years. However, the cooperative dimensions of environmental peacebuilding have yet to be studied in bilateral relations between Pakistan and India. This paper provides a brief qualitative analysis of relations between two countries, highlights the potential for environmental peacebuilding to improve their relationship, and addresses challenges to successfully implementing this approach.

Keywords: Environmental Peacebuilding, Climate Change, Common Environmental Challenges, Bilateral Cooperation, CBMs.

Introduction

Pakistan and India are facing significant environmental challenges due to frequent climate changes and share similar vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, traditional border disputes, including the Line of Control (LOC), Sir Creek, and Kargil, have hindered bilateral relations since their inception in 1947. These outstanding issues have led to cross-border terrorism and unnecessary interference. As a result, the balance of terror and power has defined bilateral relations between Pakistan and India. Moreover, since Prime Minister Modi assumed office, their bilateral relations have completely stopped, particularly following the Pulwama episode.

Since the devastating floods in 2009, the two neighbouring states have grappled with common environmental challenges that have hurt their economies. Heat waves and floods in Pakistan and India were among the top ten climate-induced disasters that resulted in significant human and financial losses. The year 2022 served as a stark reminder that the South Asian region, home to Pakistan and India, is the

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world's most disaster-prone region. It has recently been exposed to the impacts of human-induced climate patterns such as floods, smog and drought in dry seasons. Last year, April was the warmest month of the year, just before the monsoon season, followed by devastating floods from June to September in Pakistan and India. Similarly, India recorded similar extreme weather events for 241 days during the first nine months of 2022.

Air pollution and smog are other shared environmental challenges Pakistan and India face. In December 2022, when smog reached its critical level, cities in Pakistan and India made it to the list of the world's most polluted ones. These common and shared environmental challenges have harmed the economies of both neighbouring states. Pakistan has recently witnessed cascading disasters in 2022, with record-breaking heat during summer and unprecedented monsoon rains in the mid-year, resulting in billions of dollars in losses to the national economy, over a thousand deaths, and millions displaced. According to the World Bank, climate-induced disasters in Pakistan have affected nearly 75 million people and resulted in over \$29 billion in losses in the last three decades. Similarly, India lost \$10 billion to unprecedented floods in 2019 alone. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the climate stresses mentioned above and environmental challenges will become more frequent and severe, impacting the already vulnerable states in South Asia. Pakistan and India face common and shared ecological challenges, yet both states have never discussed them in their bilateral relations.

India-Pakistan Bilateral Relations Over the Years

The evolution of Pakistan-India bilateral relations has been explained through realism, structural realism, and rational choice theory, which have prevailed in the zero-sum game between the two rivals breeding nothing but distrust, suspicion and malignancy. The ideological differences have not led to conducive and productive outcomes except a few times, which fell victim to events shattering confidence and trust in their bilateral relations.

Pakistan-India relations have not been without turmoil. The partition itself fell victim to chaos, commotion and largely conspiracy, as justice and fairness were overlooked – mainly in the case of Pakistan. It witnessed the world's largest and most violent migration ever. It was not very long before two neighbouring countries faced each other on a battlefield over the territory of Kashmir in 1948. It was a time when the seed of animosity was sowed and watered by hatred and detest over the decades. The seedling has become a fully mature tree that gives no fruit except mistrust and suspicion and lays the foundation of hostile bilateral relations. So far, the two rival yet neighbouring states have fought four wars, two of which are rooted in territorial disputes over the region of Kashmir, i.e., 1948 and 1965. Besides, both countries experience border skirmishes frequently. Moreover, India and Pakistan's international orientation and global settings have also been opposed and conflicted. Since independence, Pakistan parted with a capitalist bloc led by the US India – overtly a

non-align state – covertly sided with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republic (USSR) and supported socialist regimes across the world generally, particularly in South Asia as in the case of Afghanistan.¹

Nonetheless, Pakistan-India bilateral relations were not always defined by animosity and continued mistrust. Both neighbouring countries have been engaged in multi-sectoral confidence-building measures (CBMs)² in military, political, economic and cultural domains, which have resulted in Track II diplomacy,³ Composite Dialogue in the 1990s,⁴ successful CBMs, particularly during the Musharraf era (2001-08).⁵ Track II diplomacy and composite dialogue fell victim to incidents like the Kargil war, and successful CBMs during the Musharraf era failed due to tragic episodes of the Samjhota Express and Mumbai Attacks. Unfortunately, the Uri attack and Pulwama attack ruined the hopes of building trust after a surprise visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Pakistan. Even Pakistan's measures to curb cross-border terrorism and ban extremist outfits in Pakistan, India does not seem serious regarding bilateral relations with Pakistan based on fair play and equality.

On the contrary, India continues the perpetual violation of LOC and working boundaries. It is always ready to sabotage China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), continued lobbying to keep Pakistan on the FATF grey list, and direct involvement in Balochistan and erstwhile FATA, keeping two neighbours away from the table of dialogue and peace process. Besides, previously India used to term the Kashmir issue as a bilateral issue, but later in 2019 unilateral, unlawful constitutional move almost delinked Kashmir from Pakistan-India bilateral relations, which has proved yet another reason for continued thwarting in their relations. Furthermore, India has repeatedly reiterated that it will generally isolate Pakistan in South Asia, particularly internationally.

India's evil intentions have been evident since the 2008 attacks in Mumbai. After the Pulwama attack, Indian Federal Minister Arun Jaitley said that India would use all diplomatic steps to alienate Pakistan from the international community,⁶ which was clear from its role at FATF. However, India's continuous lobbying at FATF to keep Pakistan on the grey list and dissemination of misinformation and disbelief against Pakistan through fake media and propaganda exposed by the Brussels-based EU DisinfoLab became a testimony to India's nefarious designs towards its neighbour. The EU DisinfoLab disclosed a coordinated network of 256 fake media outlets operating in 65 countries,⁷ stemming content to undermine Pakistan by showing the world a distorted and slanted image of Pakistan.

Equally, as mentioned earlier, the issue of Kashmir has always been a bone of contention for Pakistan and India. Their bilateral relations have been defined in the backdrop of the violent and unjust partition of 1947, which proved to be an impetus to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict between the neighbouring states. Pakistan sees Kashmir as its 'jugular vein', and India claimed Kashmir as part of mainland India, and both have repeatedly agreed to resolve the Kashmir issue through bilateral engagement. Nevertheless, strained relations witnessed new lows after the Uri attack

in 2016, followed by the Pulwama attack in early 2019. Both attacks happened in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), and as always Indian government held Pakistan responsible for the attacks, denying the fact that the region was grappled by separatist movement and arm revolt against the Indian rule has been simmering in Jammu and Kashmir valley – illegally occupied by India – since 1989. Moreover, since June 2018, Modi's government has suspended Jammu and Kashmir's government, which is another reason for tension. It halted bilateral relations in 2019 by unilaterally revoking Article 370 and Article 35-A of the Indian Constitution, violating the UN's resolution (1948)⁸ and the Simla Agreement 1972 on Kashmir.

Besides traditional security threats, Pakistan and India have also faced multifaceted non-traditional security threats for the last few decades, and their consequences can easily be observed. Since 1947, state and territorial integrity have been a cornerstone of their national policies and eventually translated into respective foreign policies. In the case of Pakistan and India, non-traditional security threats include climate change, environmental stressors, natural disasters, epidemiological diseases, outstanding border issues and energy crises. In contrast, cyber-attacks, drug trafficking, unchecked migration, and food crisis are also included.⁹ These threats go beyond the conventional security approach, which is territorial, and deal with human security.

Non-traditional security threats are transnational that goes beyond the military sphere, and bear unexpected appearance critical to human security.¹⁰ Pakistan and India are the most vulnerable countries to the ravages of climate change, as both countries lack resources to counter or even mitigate the consequence of changing climate and environmental challenges on their own. In this regard, this paper explains Pakistan-India bilateral relations in the context of environmental peacebuilding, which provides a platform for cooperation over common environmental challenges. This paper is limited in its approach to covering climate change and environmental challenges as non-traditional security threats faced by Pakistan and India.

Environmental Peacebuilding

Literature is myriad with the conflict in which environment, primarily natural resources, was considered a tool for fostering -in the case of Sierra Leone- and sustaining conflict -in the case of Colombia or Afghanistan- and the cooperative dimensions of the environment have not been given due importance in intra and inter-state relations. Such an argument is based on the fact that environmental factors and changes, in most cases, are threat multipliers, eventually leading to a conflict between rival parties or states. In this regard, environmental peacebuilding is an approach which provides a platform for the parties which are in conflict to cooperate over shared environmental challenges when other means of dialogue and platforms are exhausted.

Environmental Peacebuilding is still in its nascent stage and keeps evolving. It is not a complex theory of international relations or peace and conflict studies but rather an approach or a framework for peacebuilding between two or more parties to a conflict. The primary purpose of environmental peacebuilding is to highlight common environmental issues between two rival parties and bring a shift toward CBMs by swapping political and strategic interests for ecological problems.¹¹ Though many scholars and peacebuilding practitioners have defined environmental peacebuilding, the most applicable and relevant definition of the framework of environmental peacebuilding was put forward by Anais Dresse, Itay Fischhendler, Jonas Ostergaard Nielsen and Dimitrios Zikos in their paper “Environmental Peacebuilding: Towards a theoretical framework.” They defined environmental peacebuilding as “a process through which environmental challenges shared by the parties to a violent conflict are turned into opportunities to build lasting cooperation and peace.”¹²

There are two main conditions for initiating environmental peacebuilding between two conflicting parties. First, the conflicting parties must have shared and common ecological challenges. The second is to highlight those environmental challenges which are equally detrimental to parties and have the potential to compel them to cooperate and eventually lead to sustainable or positive peace. Hence, shared and common environmental challenges trigger cooperation between parties to conflict while providing a platform for dialogue and mutual interest and eventually sustaining peace between conflicting parties.

In the context of Pakistan and India, many war experts have predicted that the new war between Pakistan and India will be over shared natural resources, primarily water resources.¹³ Repeatedly, India has threatened to scrap the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) and to use its inclusive right over Indus Water Basin and its tributaries. It is why the purpose of introducing environmental peacebuilding is to create a channel to foster cooperation over shared and common ecological challenges¹⁴ and set off dialogue and peace process where it left off in the 2000s.

The introduction of environmental peacebuilding in the bilateral relations between Pakistan and India - to restore confidence and foster communication - has become more relevant than ever. Since the Pulwama episode, the inactivity of SAARC and failed attempts of state-level meetings (at bilateral and multilateral forums), there seems to be no other shared areas or grounds for dialogue and cooperation between Pakistan and India, as cooperation over shared and common environmental challenges is one single area which has been elusive and never been discussed when it comes to their bilateral relations. Although Pakistan and India are party to IWT (1960), the treaty has never been amended or even reviewed owing to the recurring climate-induced challenges to the Indus River over decades. By looking at the strained bilateral relations between Pakistan and India, environmental cooperation has become a *raison d'être* for their bilateral relations as other political, diplomatic and different approaches to Track II diplomacy have already been exhausted, as discussed earlier.

The debate about whether climate change is a myth or a reality has long ended, and the fifth Annual Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the testimony to it. However, the effects of environmental and climate-induced changes are apparent and more severe in South Asia. Unfortunately, Pakistan and India are miserably unprepared to reduce or even mitigate the impact of environmental challenges.¹⁵ Surprisingly, both neighbouring countries face floods, water scarcity, transboundary smog and unusual locust attacks.¹⁶ In this regard, climate change is an opportunity for India and Pakistan to eliminate gridlock in their bilateral relations while cooperating on common environmental issues. Addressing the common and shared environmental challenges will end the deadlock and create a platform for dialogue and cooperation. Such cooperation will eventually resolve other conventional issues between two rivals, as advocated by the framework of environmental peacebuilding. In the longer run, environmental peacebuilding may revive the regional organisation, i.e., SAARC. In this regard, it is vital to highlight the areas in which Pakistan and India can cooperate and exploit opportunities to foster their bilateral relations.

Indus River Basin and Weaponisation of Water

Indus River Basin (IRB) is a transboundary river basin originating from the Himalayan mountain range and Tibet Plateau. The share of IRB distributed between Pakistan and India explicitly depicts its role in the lives of billions living along the basin. Pakistan and India are renowned for their agriculture sector; therefore, millions of people and their livelihood depends on its waters and tributaries.

During the last couple of decades, it has been witnessed that the share of agriculture to the GDP of Pakistan and India has been declining. By 2020, agriculture comprised 18% of the GDP, which is shrinking.¹⁷ On the other hand, Pakistan has also faced similar trends. In 2020, agriculture's share of the GDP was just 19.3%.¹⁸ Current trends of water resources in Pakistan and India bear the potential for future water wars, and coercive diplomacy between Pakistan and India can happen. Water scarcity along IRB has led India to construct dams along the water resources which flow through Pakistan and has already triggered the weaponisation of water and may compel India to violate IWT. Therefore, it is high time Pakistan and India make the best use of the platform of the Permanent Indus Commission for cooperation and addressing water resource management while considering climate-induced changes in the region.

Successive Floods and Droughts

Pakistan and India face other paradoxical yet common environmental challenges, i.e., floods and droughts. They share water resources, i.e., IRB, which has roots in the Tibetan Plateau, where Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) are common and significant sources of floods in countries where the Indus River flows. According to a study, nearly 5 million people are at risk in Pakistan and India.¹⁹ Since 2010,²⁰

Pakistan has been facing floods during every monsoon season. The torrential monsoon of 2022 has wreaked havoc across the country. Almost a third of the country was submerged as 81 districts had been declared 'calamity-hit' and 40 districts as 'flood-affected' and took the lives of over 1700 people, displaced nearly 7.9 million.²¹ The same monsoon spell devastated Pakistan and inflicted similar damages in India. India faced torrential water pouring in Assam, Gujrat, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, which took 1,800 lives and affected nearly 1.3 million people.²²

Ironically, both neighbouring countries are also facing the peril of droughts. Frequent delays of seasonal rains and agonising heat waves lead to drought-like situations in Pakistan and India. According to the reports, Pakistan crossed the water scarcity line in 2005 and would become a water-scarce by 2025.²³ Moreover, droughts have reached a critical level in parts of Balochistan and Sindh, affecting the livelihood of millions and forcing thousands to migrate to nearby localities.²⁴ Likewise, India is also facing critical water shortages across the country, which is one reason behind the construction of dams such as the Kishanganga and Baglihar dams on Pakistan's water resources in violation of the IWT. Recently, India has witnessed severe water shortages in central rice-producing states such as Bihar, West Bengal and Jharkhand, which steered India into the United Nations 'Drought Vulnerable Index'.²⁵

Pakistan and India are agriculture-based economies, and the ongoing trends of floods and droughts damage their economies. If trends continue, floods and droughts will jeopardise the outcomes of IWT and may lead to coercive diplomacy between Pakistan and India. Therefore, renewed water resource management demands close cooperation while addressing the contemporary environmental challenges and climate change, as they should have been discussed in the IWT.

Transboundary Smog

Seasonal smog is another common issue Pakistan and India have faced for the last few years. One of the fundamental causes is the high concentration of carbon in the air, which is the primary reason for global warming and eventually altering the surrounding climate. Smog can be experienced during the dry winter season in Pakistan and India. Both countries have an old tradition of 'Parali'. Burning leftover hays and stubble is common to prepare land for the following cultivating season. During the season, parts of Northern India and Eastern Pakistan are covered with black smoke for over a month, which becomes unhealthy and hazardous during the end of winter.²⁶ During the last winter season (2022), Delhi and Lahore remained among the top most polluted cities in the world for over three weeks.²⁷ Resultantly, smog is choking and affecting millions of people along the border of two neighbouring countries. According to research, 1.67 million people lost their lives in 2019 in India²⁸ and took the lives of 135,000 people in Pakistan during the same year.²⁹

Realising the fatal outcomes of smog, India established a programme called National Clean Air Program (NCAP) in 2019. Pakistan still needs a comprehensive

strategy to overcome the impact of pollution and smog. For a couple of years, smog and pollution have been politicised as politicians across the border blame their neighbours.³⁰ Therefore, as a transboundary and common environmental issue, bilateral cooperation is needed to monitor better and overcome the impacts of pollution, particularly smog.

Cooperation Under the Umbrella of ‘Loss and Damage’

The 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in November 2022 in Sharm El Shiekh (Egypt).³¹ During the Conference, the parties achieved an extraordinary agreement – ‘loss and damage’³² – that ended the decade-old debate on funding for loss and damage to developing and least-developed countries owing to consistent environmental changes. Since the inception of UNFCCC, the Conference has been divided between developed and developing countries. Developing countries have always demanded funds from developed countries for mitigating and adaptive measures to overcome the carbon footprints, as developed countries have contributed to the unprecedented amount of carbon in the atmosphere.

Pakistan and India are equally vulnerable to climate change and need financial assistance to fight against climate change. According to a study, climate-induced loss and damage are projected to cost South Asia \$518 billion by 2050,³³ which can cause unbearable conditions for Pakistan and India due to their economic and population growth. In the milieu of recent natural disasters, Pakistan has lost around \$4 billion to recurring environmental changes, and the most common natural disasters were floods and droughts.³⁴ Similarly, the situation was similar across the border as well. Floods (2019) in India caused damages of over \$10 billion.³⁵ During the 77th Session of the United Nations, Pakistan’s Prime Minister highlighted that Pakistan depicts the most devastating impact of global warming even though its carbon contribution is less than 1%.³⁶ He called on developing countries to generate climate funds to compensate for the losses and damages from environmental changes over a few decades. In response, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for securing climate funds to fight climate change. Owing to the common environmental challenges and shared objectives concerning climate change, Pakistan and India – along with vulnerable state – has the potential to lead a group which can strengthen the case of ‘loss and damage’ at international forums.

Plague of Locusts

Furthermore, Pakistan and India face another common problem, i.e., locust attacks.³⁷ During the last few years, locust attacks have been widespread in Asia, particularly in Pakistan and India. Both neighbouring states are equally exposed to this non-traditional threat. Moreover, its impacts certainly have been exacerbated due to environmental and climatic changes.³⁸ Locust attacks are common in Pakistan in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh and Rajasthan in India and inflict damage to wheat,

rice and lentil crops. Most recently, both countries have decided to communicate and share information regarding the locust's movement through a common platform, i.e., FAO's Commission for Controlling the Desert Locust in South-West Asia (SWAC).³⁹ In this regard, controlling and monitoring locusts' attacks along the Pakistan-India border bear the potential of cooperation over common challenges linked to recurring environmental changes.

Conclusion

While highlighting the common environmental challenges faced by Pakistan and India, it can be seen that both countries face similar environmental challenges and have the potential for cooperation. Since 1947, both rival yet neighbouring states have been at odds regarding their bilateral relations. The outstanding Kashmir issue and India's hegemonic design to disintegrate and denigrate Pakistan have constantly jeopardised bilateral relations. Though Composite Dialogue, Lahore Declaration, cricket diplomacy and other means of CBMs did play a substantial role in strengthening bilateral relations, events like the Uri and Pulwama and the exposition of India's malicious design against Pakistan through the platform of FATF and EU DisinfoLab have led to the new lows in their bilateral relations. By looking at the contemporary outlook of bilateral relations between Pakistan and India, common and shared environmental challenges such as water scarcity and droughts, transboundary smog, joint efforts to secure financial support in the context of loss and damage, and locusts attack provides an opportunity for the two rival states to cooperate by bringing them to the dialogue table.

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