

Indo-US Strategic Partnership and Pakistan's Security: A Theoretical Evaluation

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the impact of Indo-US strategic partnership on Pakistan's security using the lenses of balance of power and power transition theories. A theoretical evaluation through these contending theories highlights the significance of the subject as it draws same results from the both. Although these theories are considered opposed to each other, both reach at the same conclusion when applied to the Indo-US Strategic Partnership and its impact on Pakistan's security. The paper argues that power transition theory does not refute the balance of power theory in India-Pakistan context, rather it supports the latter. Changing the balance of power in South Asia is, in fact, an act of bringing transition. This analysis suggests that any power transition in South Asia shall disturb the balance of power in the region and may lead to war. The analysis, therefore, supports balance of power hypothesis that "if power balance is disturbed, it shall bring instability." It also suggests that by changing the balance of power in India's favour, Indo-US strategic partnership shall bring power transition in South Asia, and would therefore be perilous for Pakistan's security.

Keywords: Pakistan, India, United States, Power Transition, Balance of Power, Indo-US Deal

"Several world-views underlie the main strands of thought in politics and international relations. 'How power is defined, used and assessed?' is one fundamental theme in the analysis of states, nations, diplomacy and war."¹ [R. James Ferguson]

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Power is an extremely complex phenomenon, and is made all the more so by human desire to seek security of life and possession. Throughout history, the security imperative has affected the power distribution on earth and brought day-to-day sophistication in methods of search for power. Therefore, major powers always look for opportunities to gain superiority over their rivals in order to achieve hegemonic status. There are multiple reasons for such behaviour according to the Realist paradigm: international anarchic system, uncertainty about other states' intentions, and survival as the primary objective. These factors encourage states to seek power and influence vis-à-vis the others. Therefore, it is the system that encourages states to look for opportunities to maximise their power vis-à-vis other states.² The Indo-US strategic partnership is also an expression of such power politics. Signed during US President George W. Bush's visit to India in 2006, the partnership agreement aimed at substantially enhancing Indo-US cooperation in almost every field of strategic importance ranging from defence cooperation to nuclear trade. The overwhelming US tilt towards India is due to the rise of China as a major economic and military power, which poses a potential threat to the US hegemony in world politics.

China is believed to be well on its way to becoming the second largest power in the 21st century after the US. China's rise is disconcerting not only for the US, but also for its Western allies and Japan, which are gradually losing their strength to cope with upcoming challenges from China. According to some estimates, "Europe's share of global economic output will drop by half between 2000 and 2025; Japan holds the ominous status of the world's fastest-aging major economy."³ In the wake of China's rise, the US and its allies, both in Asia and Europe, will need a strong and reliable partner to balance China. Among all the emerging powers, India can be the best choice for the US to counter China, not only because of its strategic position in the region, but also because of its rivalry with China.

It is therefore no surprise that the US has chalked out a long-term strategy to bring India on par with its Western allies. According to a CIA estimate about the future international scenario, "By 2020, India's GNP will have overtaken or will be on the threshold of overtaking European

economies, potentially making it the world's third largest economy.”⁴ How China and India are going to interact in future is still uncertain, but the US policy makers think that India can be used as a counterweight against China in United States' favour. Despite such hopes, however, the Indo-US strategic partnership is still lagging behind from what was envisioned at the time of its formulation. Almost a decade after the strategic partnership agreement was inked, its goals have not been achieved. However, during the visit of President Barrack Obama to India in January 2015, some progress took place on the issues that had been slowing down the progress towards strategic cooperation between the two states. The two sides issued a declaration of friendship titled “*Chalein saath saath; forward together we go*”⁵ and reiterated their resolve to actualise the long-awaited cooperation in various areas of interest, including the nuclear deal. Discussing the US assistance to India and its importance, Keith Jones writes: “The US is determined to make India the South Asian anchor of its “Pivot to Asia.”⁶ The most recent development in Indo-US relations is the renewal of the “New Framework for Defence Relationship” that was concluded on June 3, 2015.⁷

The agreements signed during Obama's visit to India along with a renewed US commitment to support India's bid for permanent seat in the UN Security Council and deepen defence cooperation have significant implications for Pakistan, which has always been a victim of Indian ambitions for hegemony in the region. Though Pakistan faces many other challenges, its threat perception is essentially India-centric. Pakistan's national security policy has always revolved around India's military as well as technological and nuclear developments.

Although Pakistan has been expressing its concerns regarding the Indo-US strategic partnership, its implications have rarely been tested theoretically. This study seeks to fill that gap. Keeping in view Pakistan's rivalry with India, the relationship between Indo-US strategic partnership and Pakistan's security concerns can be assessed using a number of theories.

An analysis of the partnership itself manifests that it represents the future power dynamics in world politics based on an alliance model.

Moreover, Pakistan-India security relationship has also centered on maintaining the strategic equilibrium vis-à-vis each other. Since the concepts of alliance behaviour and strategic balance are integral parts of the balance of power theory, the theory looks more appropriate for our analysis. To understand the power dynamics shaped by the Indo-US strategic partnership, and their impact on strategic stability in South Asia, the power transition theory seems equally apt for our analysis.

The study suggests that Indo-US strategic partnership shall have far-reaching implications for Pakistan's security as the emergence of India as a counterweight to China will not only tilt the balance of power between China and the US in the latter's favour, it will also affect the power equilibrium between Pakistan and India. Moreover, the Indo-US strategic partnership may bring "transition" in the power structure of South Asia, destabilise the prevailing strategic balance, and create conditions for war between India and Pakistan. This shows the correlation between Indo-US strategic partnership and Pakistan's security. In order to examine the relationship among these variables, the Realist national security canon is used with the lenses of balance of power and power transition theories.

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon works of three leading Realist scholars – E. H. Carr, Hans J. Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz. The Realist school of thought considers the balance of power as the best policy to achieve security. Emphasising the importance of balance of power theory, Kenneth N. Waltz writes in his book, *Theory of International Politics*, "If there is any distinctively political theory of international politics, balance-of-power theory is it."⁸

Many would argue that the concept of balance of power has become obsolete in the current international politics, where the US is the sole superpower. This study, however, argues that the concept remains valid to explain the prevailing international politics too. The concept of balance of power finds its roots in Realism, which postulates that the dominant strategy of every state is to enhance its military, economic, and security power rather than ideals or ethics.

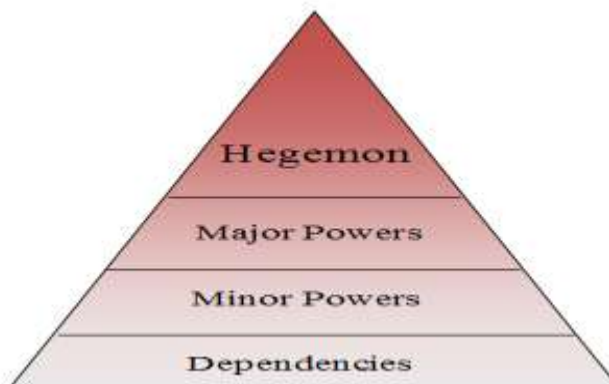
The Realism emphasises that “one must look at actual ‘real’ situation in the world, including negative aspects.”⁹ It believes in the importance of power and its significant role in politics, and that the key factor in international relations is the behaviour and outcomes, and not the ideals. Emphasising the importance of Realism, E. H. Carr argues, “one must always look at the world the way it is, not the way one would like it to be.”¹⁰ Discussing Carr’s theory of peaceful change, Mark D. Gismondi explains, “change involves a carefully constructed compromise between power and morality; without power, political reality dictates that the weaker must yield.”¹¹ Being a Realist, Carr emphasised the importance of balance of power. He said, “Maintaining a balance of power, far from being a cause of war as international liberalism had argued, it was actually the best mechanism available to nation states to prevent war.”¹² After analysing the post-first world war twenty years’ crisis, Carr argues that “attempting to develop the normative theories of international relations such as collective security had proved to be very unsuccessful.”¹³ Realists like Morgenthau view “balance of power as a baseline for regional and global stability due to its ability to deter the hegemony of single state or a coalition of states.”¹⁴ The Realists believe that a proper balance of power, in an anarchical society of states, restricts a potential hegemonic state’s efforts to upset the status quo. Balance of power, based on objectivity and without any attachment to a particular ideology, has a universal application, and promotes long-term considerations. The concept of balance of power is the cornerstone of neo-realist theory which posits that “in international relations, a balance of power exists when there is parity or stability between competing forces.”¹⁵ In a system characterised by balance of power, “a state may choose to engage in either balancing or bandwagon behavior; in a time of war, the decision to balance or to bandwagon may well determine the survival of the state.”¹⁶ The balance of power theory argues that, “states will take measures to protect themselves against the power or threats from another state. These measures can either be internal (increasing size of military) or external (making alliances).”¹⁷

The power transition theory examines how long-term shifts in power shape struggles for dominance in world politics, and why some of those struggles end up in cataclysmic wars. AFK Organski formulated this theory as a counterpoint to the balance of power theory. Its key assertion is

that, “a large power gap dividing the dominant nation from the next layer of major powers facilitates the maintenance of international order... instability arises when the power gap between the dominant nation and a challenger narrows.”¹⁸ This essentially means that peace can be achieved through inequality rather than equality. Organski argues that the international system is hierarchical in which the dominant nation sits at the top while those with 80% or more of the dominant country’s power play the role as challengers. The dominant power establishes the status quo. Some great powers are satisfied with the status quo while others are dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction can be based on historical, ideological, religious, territorial, personal, or cultural factors. The dissatisfied states want to change the status quo or the rules of the game. The power transition theory suggests:

“An even distribution of political, economic, and military capabilities between contending groups of states is likely to increase the probability of war; peace is preserved best when there is an imbalance of national capabilities between disadvantaged and advantaged nations; the aggressor will come from a small group of dissatisfied strong countries; and it is the weaker, rather than the stronger power that is most likely to be the aggressor.”¹⁹

Organski introduced a classification of states based on their relative power. States are categorised as “powerful and satisfied” and “powerful and dissatisfied” through a pyramid with the most powerful at the top and the least powerful at the bottom. Organski believes that a hierarchy of states according to their relative power can maintain a peaceful international order. However, when a great power feels that it is powerful enough to deserve the hegemonic status, it becomes dissatisfied.²⁰



Hierarchical International Order

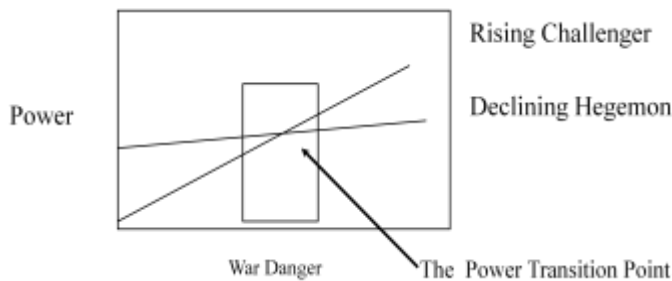
Source: Lecture by Dr. Syed Riffat Hussain at Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, November 25, 2010.

The power transition theory holds that war is most likely when the top position in the “status hierarchy” is being challenged. Conversely, peace will prevail when one state is clearly more powerful, i.e. much further up than the others in the ranking of status hierarchy. If one state is in relative decline in terms of its power capabilities, and others are closing the gap, the rising powers may feel that they do not have the recognition and advantages that they deserve and may become more inclined to go to war to defend their interests. On the other hand, the leading power may start a preventive war to stop threats from rising challengers before it is too late.²¹

Explaining the concept of power transition, Charles Kegley writes:

“During transition from developing to developed status, emergent challenger can achieve through force the recognition that their newly formed military muscle allows them; conversely, established powers ruled by risk-acceptant leaders are often willing to employ force to put the brakes on their relative decline; thus, when advancing and retreating states seek to cope with the changes in their relative power, war between the rising challenger(s) and declining power(s) has become especially likely.”²²

The power transition leads to imbalance of power. It gives a potential or option to a disadvantaged state to adopt a revisionist strategy and get rid of its underdog stature in the regional or global politics. The struggle of the disadvantaged state obviously destabilises the status quo and necessitates the advantaged state's responses to preserve the status quo or its privileged position in the system. Thus transition of power entails war.



Source: Lecture by Dr. Syed Riffat Hussain at Department of Defence & Strategic Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, November 25, 2010.

Theoretical Evaluation

The relations between India and Pakistan have passed through many crises and conflicts. The region has seen various relatively stable as well as unstable periods in relations between the two countries. The history of India-Pakistan relations can be divided into two categories due to dynamic nature of their relative power.

1. Period of Maintained Balance of Power
2. Imbalance of Power and Power Transition

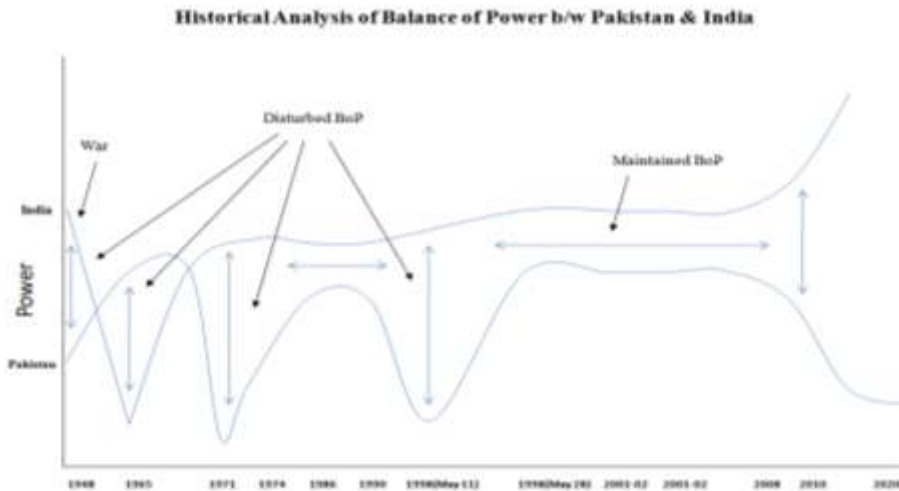
The balance of power maintained relative stability through multiple variables in different phases of history. These phases consist of relatively peaceful relations between the two countries due to balance of power.

- 1949-1962: Development phase after the Kashmir War and UN Resolutions.
- 1966-1970: Peace Period under Tashkent Declaration mediated by the former Soviet Union after the 1965 war.

- 1972-1998: Truce under the Simla Agreement and nuclear weapons development programmes with nuclear ambiguity.
- 1998-2015: Nuclear Deterrence.

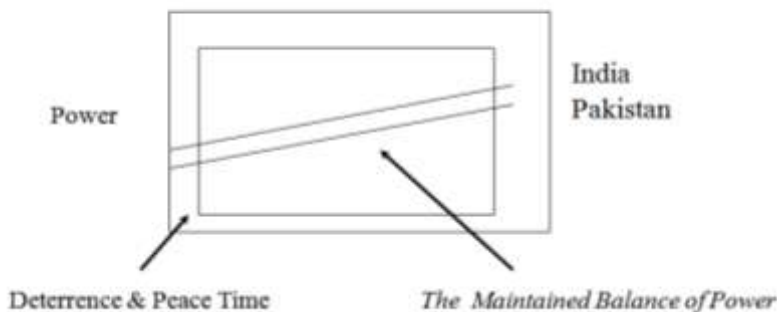
There have also been various instances which resulted in an imbalance of power between the two countries that paved the way for power transition, which resulted into severe crises and wars.

- 1948: the Kashmir War due to Pakistan's weakness because of being a newly born state with meager resources.
- 1965: War due to India's weakness because of the Indo-China war in 1962 and its defeat.
- 1971: The East Pakistan War as internal disharmony and rift provided India the opportunity to invade.
- 1984: Operation Meghdoot by India on Siachin Glacier (the world's highest battleground).
- 1986-87: Indian military exercises named "Brasstacks" near Sindh province of Pakistan.
- 1990: Indian deployments at Rajasthan in reaction to the alleged Pakistani role in the uprising in Kashmir.
- 1998: Indian threats after Pokhran tests on May 11, 1998, while Pakistan responded on May 28, 1998.
- 1999: Kargil War due to misperception by Pakistan Army after nuclear tests.
- 2001-2002: Eye-ball to eye-ball deployments after terrorist attacks on Indian parliament.
- 2008: Indian Cold Start Doctrine due to conventional warfare disparity and an underestimation of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence.



In contrast to the power transition theory, the South Asian regional system is non-hierarchical because India has not yet attained hegemonic status in the region. A balance of power system between Pakistan and India persists, which is maintained by Pakistan by adopting both internal and external balancing techniques i.e. through nuclear deterrence (arming) and external support (alliances). In the South Asian regional system, India with relatively larger army, population and economy has been struggling to establish its superiority as the hegemon in the region. The relatively powerful India poses a threat to Pakistan which seeks to maintain balance of power. Pakistan is satisfied with the status quo, while India is dissatisfied due to her aspirations for great power status and wants to upset the status quo. India's dissatisfaction is based on historical, ideological, religious, territorial, military, regional and international factors. A dissatisfied India wants to change the status quo and the rules of the game in regional politics. India wants power transition and wants to become the "Hegemonic State" of the region.

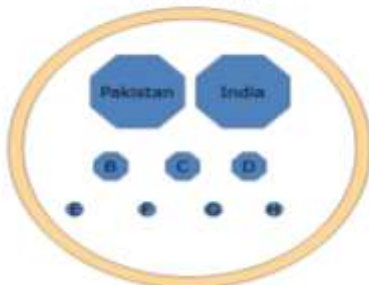
The Current Balance of Power Between Pakistan & India

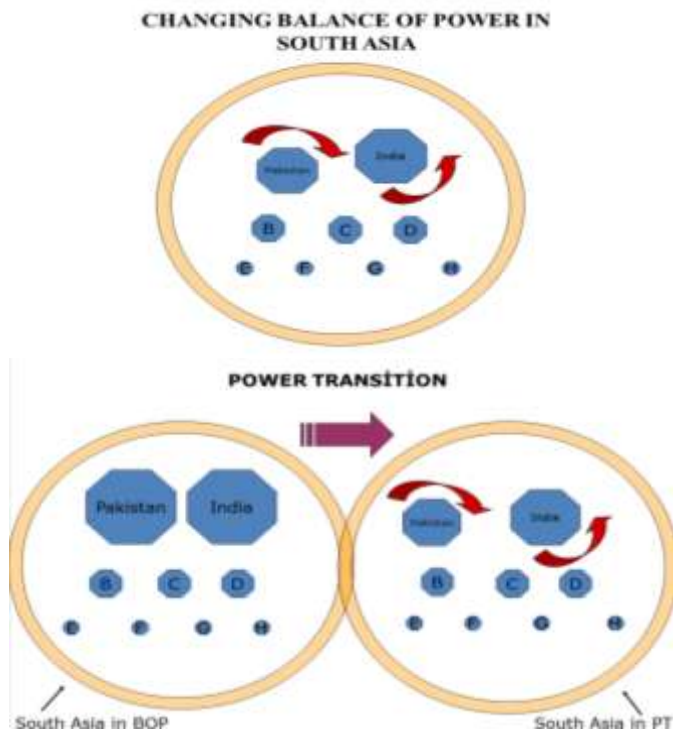


The analysis of the history of India-Pakistan relations shows that whenever the balance of power between the two states tilted in favour of one state, it always resulted in severe crises or armed conflicts. The analysis also shows that whenever there is room for power transition in the region, it creates instability. In this context, any kind of power transition in the region shall create imbalance of power that can create an opportunity for war to occur. Therefore, one may understand that the hierarchical model of power transition cannot bring stability and peace in the region while a sub-system of balance of power in the region is the only dependable strategy for peace and prosperity.

**Balance of Power vs Power Transition
Pakistan & India**

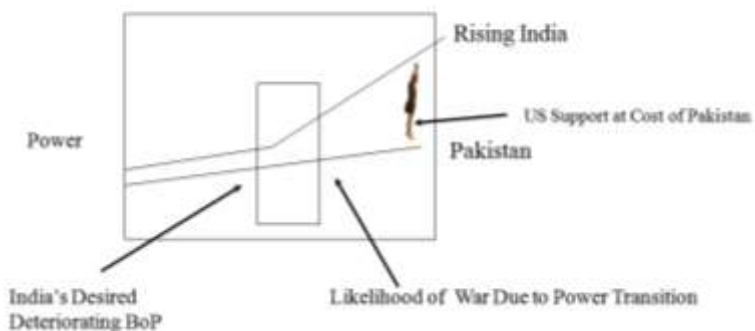
**MAINTAINED BALANCE OF POWER IN
SOUTH ASIA**





Note: B,C,D, etc. represent other states in South Asia.

The Future Power Transition Between Pakistan & India



This theoretical analysis through the lenses of balance of power and power transition theories suggests that the power transition theory does provide an additional explanation for India-Pakistan relations. However, it does not cover the whole gamut of these relations because of various other variables mentioned in the theory itself. The balance of power theory has always been instrumental in stipulating the nature of relationship between the two countries. Analysis with the lens of balance of power suggests that Indo-US strategic partnership follows a pattern of competition which adopts the method of alliances among various devices of the balance of power. Although the Indo-US strategic partnership is not declared as a formal alliance, it connotes an alliance behaviour. It is still debatable whether this is defensive or offensive because different analysts have given different opinions about it. But the dominant view about the partnership is that it is offensive in nature. The study suggests that the Indo-US strategic partnership is an expression of the US policy to contain China, which has been adopted to preserve the unipolar system and ensure the survival of the US hegemony in the world; but if the US continues to support India as part of its grand strategy, its side effects may have far-reaching implications for Pakistan's security.

The study has also observed an innovative feature of the balance of power concept termed as "virtual balancing" where the word "virtue" means goodness and "virtual" means "existing in essence." The concept is derived from "virtue" that lies in the notion that balance is both a rational and a stable state of being. Equilibrium is sought *per se* because it offers more comfort and less tension for the organism or group in which it resides.²³ Moreover, it signifies the existence of balance of power in essence, though not in actual appearance, everywhere in the world politics. However, "virtual balancing" aims to "suggest" particularly in the balance of power theory based on systemic considerations that the concept is applicable not only at international system level, but it also has its separate implementation at sub-system levels. Moreover, each sub-system level balance of power has its own role to play in international politics and if the level of balance in any sub-system is affected, it not only affects other sub-systems of balance of power but also contributes to disturb the performance of the whole international system. In this context, it is assumed that more or less a system of balance of power exists at

international level among the US, China and other major players at the international political scene. And a sub-system of balance of power exists between China and India; between China and Japan; between North Korea and South Korea, etc., and a power equilibrium as well between Pakistan and India. In this equation, the India-Pakistan balance of power is a sub-system of international balance of power system. If it is disturbed, it may affect not only Pakistan but also the whole international system. This is plausible due to the modern developing trends towards globalisation in which interaction among states has merged their interests and enhanced their dependence on each other.

Conclusion

After an analysis of balance of power and power transition theories, the study concludes that it is not the system that brings war or peace rather it is the element of 'change' that brings instability. Any change in the prevailing system, whether hierarchical or balance of power, can bring instability. As far as South Asian system is concerned, it is working on balance of power principles. If any kind of change is induced in this system it will bring instability in the region. Keeping in view the historical context of India-Pakistan relations, application of the balance of power and power transition theories suggests that both theories have played a vital role in creating either stability or instability in these relations. Though both theories are considered to be opposite to each other, their comparative analysis suggests that power transition theory does not refute the balance of power theory in the India-Pakistan context, rather the former supports the latter, at least to some extent.

This study has explored some identical attributes in both the balance of power and power transition theories in terms of result orientation. Changing the balance of power in South Asia is, in fact, an act of bringing transition in South Asia. Power transition means bringing change in the prevailing power equilibrium or bringing power equilibrium in the prevailing hierarchical system. This study gains support from both theories in a sense that if power transition occurs in South Asia, it shall disturb the maintained balance of power in the region and may trigger war (as proposed by power transition hypothesis). Therefore, it supports balance

of power hypothesis that if power balance is disturbed, it shall bring instability. Hence, it can be argued that by changing the balance of power in India's favour, the Indo-US strategic partnership shall bring power transition (transition brings chances of war) in South Asia; and this would be prejudicial to Pakistan's security.

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