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India and Pakistan: Trapped in a security paradox?

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1. Introduction

"There are few examples in the history of relations where two states have stagnated in a confrontationist mode, despite their civil societies having intense and wide-ranging commonalities. India and Pakistan, from their very inception as independent countries, have been stuck in an adversarial predicament owing to a number of reasons."¹

For more than 60 years now, the South Asian security structure has been marked by Indo-Pakistani rivalry, mistrust and violence. Since the independence of the Indian subcontinent and its partition into Hindu-dominated but nominally secular India and the newly created Muslim state of Pakistan in 1947, the relationship between both states was dominated by fear and enmity, leading to three full-scale wars² and a huge number of minor military skirmishes short of war. The disputed status of the Kashmir-region, "the root of all evil in Indo-Pakistani affairs"³, fueled the conflict repeatedly and tensions often escalated at the ceasefire line/Line Of Control (LOC) between the Indian-administered part (Jammu and Kashmir) and Pakistan.⁴ In the aftermath of the conducted nuclear tests of India and Pakistan in 1998, the tensions between them reached a new and much more threatening dimension and the arms race between both states increased. Strictly speaking, dangerous strategic competition is dominating the security paradigm of South Asia.⁵ But, unlike in Cold War Europe, in contemporary South Asia nuclear danger seems to facilitate, rather than to impede, conventional conflict.⁶ Several times in recent years, South Asia was facing the threat of nuclear escalation. In 1999, during the Kargil-crisis, the tensions between both states reached a critical level.⁷ The international community and especially the United States, while fearing a nuclear war in South Asia, insisted strongly and pressured both states to end the violence. Just a few years later in 2001, right after the 09/11-attacks, the situation deteriorated again and brought India and Pakistan on the brink of war again.⁸ Right now, nearly two weeks after the horrible terroristic attacks in Mumbai and in context to Indian officials pointing their fingers to Pakistan, a further escalation seems to be possible⁹:

¹ Dixit 2002, p. 19.

² Namely: 1947-1948, 1965, 1971. Some scholars argue that the Kargil-crisis in 1999 has to be counted as a war. However, this is not my point of view.

³ Stephens 1964, p. 238.

⁴ "Their most intractable conflict is the one over Kashmir, the mostly Muslim state whose Hindu ruler chose to join his lands to India in 1947. Pakistan contested that arrangement and invaded the territory, touching off the first Indo-Pakistani war. By the end, Pakistan controlled about one third of Kashmir. The status of the state has remained unresolved ever since", Ganguly 2002, pp. 1-2.

⁵ Ganguly and Hagerty call the post-1998 era in Indo-Pakistani relations, marked by a nuclear arms race, a period of 'fearful symmetry', see S. Ganguly/D. T. Hagerty 2006. But, I would argue that there do not exist a situation of strategic symmetry. The striking disparity in resources and power between Pakistan and India is identifiable and creates a much more dangerous situation due to the possibility of desperate pre-emptive strikes.

⁶ For a distinguished analysis of this aspect, see Kapur (2005).

⁷ "Conflict again erupted after India launched air strikes against Pakistani-backed forces that had infiltrated Indianadministered Kashmir. Fighting built up towards a direct conflict between the two states and tens of thousands of people were reported to have fled their homes on both sides of the ceasefire line", BBC-Timeline 2008.

⁸ In October 2001 38 people were killed after an attack on the Kashmiri assembly in Srinagar. In December, 14 people were killed in an attack on the Indian parliament in Delhi. India again blamed Pakistani-backed Kashmiri militants. A dramatic build up of troops along the Indo-Pakistan border ensued. See BBC-Timeline 2008.

⁹ "Concern grows of military build-up on border between India and Pakistan", Buncombe 2008. Some days later, the so-called 'Hoax call story' became public. Summarized, a hoax call to Pakistan's President Zardari- stating that India will attack if Pakistan do not cooperate – resulted into a mobilization of the Pakistani forces. For a follow-up on this see for example the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn*, http://www.dawn.net/wps/wcm/connect/Dawn%20Content%20Library/dawn/news/world/hoax-call-story-diversionary-tactic-mukherjee--ha [accessed 08.12.2008].

"They can say what they want, but we have no doubt that the terrorists had come from Pakistan." Sriprakash Jaiswal, India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, shortly after the Mumbai bombings.¹⁰

For lowering the tensions between both states and for avoiding a South Asian security crackdown on a nuclear level, the mechanisms and root causes of this violent spiral need to be clarified and possible mitigation strategies underscored. The comprehensive analytical categories provided by Kenneth Booth and Nicolas Wheeler ("The Welsh School of Security Studies") in their recent publication "The Security Dilemma" open the door for a substantial analysis.

2. Uncertainty, fear and the nuclear problem

"According to most security dilemma theorists, permanent insecurity between nations and states is the inescapable lot of living in a condition of anarchy."¹¹

A root cause of the security problems of India and Pakistan lies in the condition of uncertainty about the others intentions – a 'dilemma of interpretation'¹²- as a result of anarchy in international politics. As Kenneth Waltz¹³ described almost half a century ago, the system of international politics is marked by an anarchial character due to the absence of a political authority above sovereign states which could enforce law, resolve disputes and, especially, offer transperancy.¹⁴ John Herz identified that this social constellation of groups of people (states) lacking a coherent organizational unity at higher level is creating a 'security dilemma' among them.¹⁵ Under anarchy, the decision-makers in one state cannot get fully into the minds of their counterparts for understanding their intentions – "intentions are impossible to divine with 100 per cent certainty"¹⁶ – which creates an existential condition of 'unresolvable uncertainty'.¹⁷ In context to hostile relations and a violent history – a 'shadow of the past' – like between India and Pakistan, such uncertainty may result into fear and worst-case planning, what Butterfield named the 'irreducible dilemma' fueled by 'Hobbesian fear'.¹⁸ Thus, the condition of anarchy in the international system in combination with the shadow of the past in Indo-Pakistani relations paves the ground for a full-scale security dilemma between both states:

"The security dilemma is a two-level strategic predicament in relations between states and other actors [...]. The first and basic level consists of a dilemma of interpretation about the motives [...], the second and derivative level consists of a dilemma of response about the most rational way of responding."¹⁹

Anarchy fuels the dilemma of interpretation and, therefore, the security problems between Pakistan and India. The condition of uncertainty, together with the ambigious symbolism of

¹⁰ Quoted in Buncombe 2008.

¹¹ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 2.

¹² ibid., p. 4.

¹³ "With many sovereign states, with no system of law enforceable among them, with each state judging its grievances and ambitions according to the dictates of its own reason or desire - conflict, sometimes leading to war, is bound to occur. To achieve a favorable outcome from such a conflict, a state has to rely on its own devices, the relative efficiency of which must be its constant concern", Waltz 1959, p. 159.

¹⁴ Anarchy is a mayor feature of International Relations (IR) theory, although constructivists dispute the fundamental character. See for example Wendt (1992).

¹⁵ Herz 1950, p. 157.

¹⁶ Mearsheimer 2001, p. 31.

¹⁷ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 4.

¹⁸ Butterfield 1951, pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 4.

weapons – the problem of how to 'distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons'²⁰– creates mutual fear. Following the nuclearization of the Indo-Pakistani relationship the fear has been exacerbated extensively due to the possible impact of a pre-emptive nuclear attack:

"The nightmare scenario here is that if Pakistani or Indian decision-makers ever came to believe that the other was about to launch a nuclear attack, would it become rational to pre-empt in the belief that this was the only means of limiting damage from the other side's nuclear arsenal?"²¹

Anarchy's feature of uncertainty, mutual fear and the nuclear sword of Damocles in South Asia exacerbate the dilemma of interpretation between both states.

3. The South Asian security paradox

"We therefore define a security paradox as a situation in which two or more actors, seeking only to improve their own security, provoke through their words or actions an increase in mutual tension, resulting in less security all round."²²

As described above, uncertainty and, in fact, the anarchic structure of the international system has led to a 'dilemma of interpretation' between India and Pakistan. Even if one side tries to send defensive/mitigating (potentially costly) signals to the other, the fear of cheating (with unforeseeable consequences) will dominate the other side's approach as long as there do not exist any solid mechanisms of reassurance.²³ In combination with mutual fear resulting out of the Indo-Pakistani shadow of the past, 'misplaced suspicion regarding the motives and intentions' of the counterpart fuels the second level of the South Asian security dilemma, what Both/Wheeler call the 'dilemma of response'.²⁴ When the interpretation-dilemma is, somehow, settled, 'the decision-makers on both sides need to determine how to react', which comprises a significant field of tension:²⁵

If the response "is based on misplaced suspicion […] and decision-makers react in a militarily confrontational manner, then they risk creating a significant level of mutual hostility when none was orginally intended by either party; if the response is based on misplaced trust, there is a risk they will be exposed to coercion by those with hostile intentions".²⁶ When decision-makers decide to resolve this dilemma in a way according to the former path of response²⁷, which creates a spiral of mutual hostility (although neither wanted it), the situation leds to Booths & Wheelers 'security paradox'.²⁸ An example: State X, out of worst-case rationality and just for defensive reasons, opts for buying several weapons. State Y, State X's direct neighbor with both states sharing a hostile history, feels increasingly insecure due to State X's new weapons. In State Y's perspective, there is no valid reassurance concerning a defensive purpose of State X's new

²⁰ ibid., p. 45.

²¹ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 45.

²² ibid., p. 9.

²³ For an excellent analysis of the offence/defence issue, deterrence models and the 'costly' aspects of signaling, see Jervis 1976.

²⁴ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 4-5.

²⁵ ibid., p. 4.

²⁶ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 5.

²⁷ Having in mind the Indo-Pakistani 'shadow of the past', the former way of responding seems to be more rational than the latter.

²⁸ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 5

weapons.²⁹ As a result, State Y decides to arm itself, too, just for the case that State X may have hidden offensive intentions. This armament-process, in turn, seems suspicious to State X and so an arms race as well as a spiral of mutual hostility starts which might led, in the end, to a violent escalation between both states. Paradoxically, State X's efforts to increase its security led to a substantial decrease in security between both:

"The core argument of the security dilemma is that, in the absence of a supranational authority that can enforce binding agreements, many of the steps pursued by states to bolster their security have the effect – often unintended and unforeseen – of making other states less secure."³⁰

And, at least since the nuclearization of Indo-Pakistani relations in 1998, both states seem to be trapped in exactly such a security paradox.³¹ The nuclear 'boost' for the South Asian security paradox dates back to the 1970s. When India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 – it is debatable if this was only for increasing its own security against Pakistan AND China, for reasons of prestige etc. – recently after the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971³², this appeared threatening to Pakistan and led its decision-makers to start their own nuclear program.³³ With the Indian nuclear test in 1998, the alarmbells in Pakistan started to ring and its leaders felt pressured to demonstrate its nuclear capability, too. Both sides followed a defensive 'deterrence' security-paradigm, which, in the end, decreased the security between both sustantially.³⁴ A classical security paradox. Since 1998, many reasons (ballistic arms race, Kargil, out of control jihadis etc.) intensified this paradox and it deepens quicker and quicker. In context to latest developments, it seems that India and Pakistan are trapped in a security paradox.

4. Security Dilemma sensibility

"The periodic warnings by the West that India and Pakistan are on the brink of nuclear war may compound the dangers of nuclear war and become a self-fulfilling prophecy."³⁵

It is unquestionable, that the described South Asian security dilemma, with its mutual fear, its unforeseeable dynamics and its nuclear escalation potential needs reconciliation for avoiding a nightmare. The Kargil-crisis, the escalation in 2001/2002 and many other threatening circumstances underscored such a need while demonstrating the risk 'of inadvertent and

²⁹ Like already mentioned above, Jervis (1976) analysed the offence/defence issue in-depth. For a distinguished insight concerning the possibilities and conceptual weaknesses of the so-called 'Non-offensive defense' – approach, see Møller B./Däniker, G./Limone, S./Stivachtis, I. (1998).

³⁰ Jervis 2001, p. 36. But, actually, Jervis describes the outcome of a security paradox instead of a security dilemma (like he claims).

³¹ In fact, while having a deeper look on the historical development of Indo-Pakistani relations, it can be argued, that the relations have not always been in such kind of security dilemma resulting into a security paradox. Many times in history, for example in context to the first two wars between both states, there was no dilemma of intention at all. Pakistan openly behaved offensive in orientation and revived historic claims on Kashmir. According to Booth & Wheeler, such a situation with one state being a real threat to the other is not a security dilemma but rather a 'strategic challenge' (see Booth/Wheeler, p. 9). However, this chapter does not focus on the strategic challenge aspects in Indo-Pakistani relations.

³² The 1971-war between both states ended with the – from a Pakistani perspective shameful – secession of East Pakistan (todays Bangladesh). For a good overview concerning this conflict, see Palit (1972).

³³ For an overview concerning Pakistans way to the bomb (and especially the role of A. Q. Khan), see Corera (2006).

³⁴ Bidwai & Vanaik (2000) examine this problem of non-deterrence of nuclear weapons in the regional setting in Chapter 8 under the headline "The Deterrence delusion: Why nuclear waepons don't generate security".

³⁵ Thomas 2002, pp.4-5.

accidential war in the India-Pakistan nuclear confrontation over Kashmir'.³⁶ Thus, it is highly important to have valid concepts and approaches for dealing with this challenge, which might have worst-case worldwide impacts, disruptions and maybe chaos. Booth & Wheeler describe three essential approaches, three options of logic, for interpreting the conflict between India and Pakistan. The first one is based on 'realistic' understandings of reality and influenced by the condition of 'unresolvable uncertainty'. This approach does not see any possibility for mitigating the security dilemma due to - so perceived - existential conditions, what Booth/Wheeler a 'fatalistic logic'. The logic "argues that humans must continue to suffer the security dilemma as one of the necessitous conditions of politics on a global scale",³⁷ thus, in context to the South Asian situation, a nuclear escalation would be unescapable. The second one acknowledges the existance of 'unresolvable uncertainty' but argues, that "human society can ameliorate security dilemmas for a time".³⁸ According to this logic, mitigation and de-escalation is temporarily possible. The third approach, the transcender logic, argues "that human society on a global scale construct a radically new world order, and in so doing escape the the dangers of the past, such as the security dilemma", which appears somehow very idealistic.³⁹ Having in mind the complex security conditions in South Asia, the logic of mitigation seems to be a valid approach toward deescalation. A first conceptual step of this approach towards reconciliation and for lowering tensions between both states is, according to Booth/Wheeler, 'security dilemma sensibility':

"Security dilemma sensibility is an actor's intention and capacity to preceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear."⁴⁰

In other words, 'entering the counter-fear⁴¹, 'pursueing conciliatory policies to signal that one's intentions are not hostile⁴² and building confidence and trust through 'Confidence and Security Building Measures' (CSBMs) can mitigate a conflict and may lower tensions.⁴³ India and Pakistan already tried to enforce the mechanisms of mitigation of security dilemma sensibility:

"Following the nuclearization of the India-Pakistan relationship in the late 1990s, there have been moments of hope from mitigator perspectives."⁴⁴

The Lahore-summit in 1999, initiated by India's Prime Minister Vajpayee, followed by the Lahore Declaration was a trust-building iniative in terms of security dilemma sensibility. Also, the India-Pakistan agreement on a 'state of non-deployed non-weaponization' of their nuclear weapons, meaning that nuclear warheads are stored seperately from its delivery vehicles, is such a project of security dilemma sensibility and reduces mutual fear.⁴⁵ But, in context to several backlashes in the Indo-Pakistani dialogue, the security dilemma sensibility in form of CSBMs has been barely implemented. Especially the unresolved question of Kashmir and the suspicious support from Pakistan for Kashmiri secessionists and/or terror-groups hinders a substantial trust-building consensus and de-escalation. Short term sensibility measures like the Lahore dialogue – which

³⁶ See Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 44.

³⁷ ibid., p. 18.

³⁸ ibid.

³⁹ ibid. In fact, these approaches do not exist in single pure forms, but rather somehow mixed.

⁴⁰ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 7

⁴¹ ibid., p. 40

⁴² ibid., p. 47

⁴³ From a rational approach, such behaviour might be risky and costly in the case that the other side is truly hostile and offensive.

⁴⁴ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 284

⁴⁵ See Ganguly/Hagerty 2006: p. 193.

ended shortly after its beginning with the Kargil-crisis⁴⁶ – are not enough. If the mitigationmechanisms of security dilemma sensibility should work (and they can), both sides have to cooperate on the same level and on a long-term scale. For that, Pakistan has to abandon every idea about solving the Kashmir-question militarily and, therefore, has to stop any support for secessionists and terroristic groups and has to regain power and control over those groups which are out of control right now. India's decision-makers are already showing awareness and understanding concerning Pakistan's fear,⁴⁷ but it does not cooperate deeply in questions concerning Kashmir. When both sides work together on a long scale in the logic of security dilemma sensibility, the tensions between them will be lowered substantially. India and Pakistan have to recognize that they are trapped in a security paradox and that further CSBMs are strongly needed in such a senseless and dangerous situation of nuclear and ballistic arms competition in context to virulent tensions.⁴⁸ Blame games, like recently with regards to the Mumbai-bombings, should be avoided.⁴⁹

5. The way ahead: Do international institutions matter?

For mitigating a security dilemma and/or for lowering tensions between two or more hostile and potentially inadvertial violent states, academic discussions often refered to international institutions/regimes as a possible conflict-resolution. For two reasons, these institutions do not matter at all and cannot play a mitigator-role in Indo-Pakistani hostilities. First, there is the Kashmir-problem. Although Booth/Wheeler argue that "promoting and implementing nuclear CSBMs should not be held hostage to movement on Kashmir",⁵⁰ this is nearly unthinkable while having a deeper look on the South Asian conflict structure. For Pakistan, the Kashmir-question is THE essential strategic problem which needs to be solved. It is not expectable, that Islamabad will give up its claims. At the same time - although Pakistan advocated several times for a movement on Kashmir through international institutions - India rejected the engagement of external actors or international institutions concerning Kashmir repeatedly. Until now, there is no tool at hand which might pressure India to accept external engagement. Thus, currently no internationalized mitigation-option of the Kashmir-question is on the horizon.⁵¹ And second, there is the regional nuclear setting. If the nuclear arms competition in South Asia would be limited on Pakistan and India, there might be the chance of a mitigation through international institutions. Such an nuclear institution, a regime of norms and trust-building mechanisms like open-book-policy for reducing mistrust which should be enforced equally, would have chances if the South Asian nuclear problem would be bilateral. But instead, the situation is characterized by "a particularly sensitive triangular context".⁵² India tries not only to deter Pakistan with its nuclear weapons, but also - some scholars argue this is India's strategic priority - China. For creating a

⁴⁶ "I had gone to Lahore with a message of goodwill but in return we got Kargil", Vajpayee 2002, quoted in Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 285.

⁴⁷ See for example the following quotation of an analysis by India's most influential security analysis agency, *Stratfor*, which exemplarily shows a good understanding of Pakistan's security situation: "North of Sindh is Pakistan's Punjab province, which is flatland — theoretically an ideal terrain for militants seeking to extend operations into India — and which has, after the Pashtun areas, the largest jihadist presence in Pakistan. However, this is the province in which the Pakistani military has stationed six of its nine corps — the bulk of its resources. The logic behind focusing the military in Punjab was that it is the country's core, and that its flat terrain is most susceptible to a land invasion from India. In other words, the same military configuration that was established to defend against India can contain any potential jihadist expansion within Pakistan'', Stratfor 2008.

⁴⁸ See Booth/Wheeler 2008, pp. 286-287.

⁴⁹ Concerning the current blame game issue, see for example Cole 2008.

⁵⁰ Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 287.

⁵¹ Concerning the current chances of a Kashmir-settlement, see for example Tan (2008).

⁵² Booth/Wheeler 2008, p. 287.

viable regime, China must be included. But, while China needs its nuclear deterrence capabilities for the USA...and so on. Even a person following transcender logic would agree, that such a worldwide international nuclear regime is not very likely to be established.

Therefore, the key for getting out of this South Asian security dilemma lies in the hands of India and Pakistan. For overcoming the security paradox, they have to resolve the tensions bilaterally, as fast as possible. Agreements like the one on 'non-deployed non-weaponization' are showing, that both states are increasingly aware of the need.

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