

The Persistency of the India-Pakistan Conflict: Chances and Obstacles of the Bilateral Composite Dialogue

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Abstract

This article investigates the underlying causes for the persistency of the India–Pakistan conflict and, on this basis, the chances and obstacles of the bilateral composite dialogue initiated in 2004. In particular, it wants to provide a theoretically grounded account of the factors that facilitated and constrained the bilateral composite dialogue process. Drawing on the regional security complex theory, this article examines the rivalry between the two South Asian nuclear powers on four levels of analysis: the domestic, the regional, the interregional and the global level. The analysis shows that there have been some substantial changes on all four levels in the recent decade or so and that these changes have provided more beneficial conditions for a peace process. These changes include, inter alia, India's new regional policy, the consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attacks for the region and India's growing power capacities. However, major obstacles to the India–Pakistan dialogue and a permanent conflict resolution continue to persist: the dominant role of the military in Pakistan, conflicting national identities and the still partially contested nature of statehood in India and Pakistan, which is in the case of Pakistan linked to the growing power of Islamic fundamentalists.

Keywords

India, Pakistan, bilateral composite dialogue, peace process, regional security complex theory, national security

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Introduction

The relationship between India and Pakistan is fraught with mutual mistrust and antagonism and has been one of the most enduring and dangerous rivalries in contemporary world politics. The rivalry generated four wars, frequent skirmishes at the Line of Control (LOC), numerous crises with a high escalation potential and an arms race, which culminated in the nuclearization of both countries in 1998. After several failed attempts India and Pakistan, however, managed to establish a bilateral composite dialogue in January 2004. The dialogue initially led to considerable rapprochement and raised hope for a permanent *détente*, but the optimism was soon dashed due to persistent Indo-Pak conflict. This article seeks to shed light on the causes of the persistency of Indo-Pakistan conflict and, on this basis, investigate the chances and obstacles of the bilateral composite dialogue. The questions that the article seeks to answer are: What has prevented a permanent *détente* and conflict resolution between India and Pakistan in the past? Against the backdrop of persistent Indo-Pak hostility, how can the initiation and achievements of the composite dialogue be explained? What are the further prospects of this dialogue process after its discontinuation in the wake of the Mumbai terrorist attacks of November 2008?

The theoretical framework for the analysis is the regional security complex theory (RSCT) devised by Buzan and Wæver (2003). A basic thesis of this article is that structural factors on the four levels of analysis—domestic, regional, inter-regional and global—proposed by the theory have shaped the India–Pakistan conflict in a crucial way and that these factors have impeded a conflict resolution in the past. The RSCT is combined with insights of subaltern realism (Ayooob, 1995, 2011) and liberal international relations (IR) theory (Moravcsik, 1997, 2010). The proposed analytical approach enables us to study not only how material and non-material factors on different levels of analysis facilitate specific threat constructions and contribute to their persistence, but also how changes can occur.

The article provides a theoretically grounded study of the factors that have facilitated and constrained the bilateral composite dialogue process.¹ It aims to show that the chances for a peace process have been enhanced by changes on all four levels of analysis. These changes include, *inter alia*, India's new regional policy, the consequences of the 9/11 terrorist attacks for the region and India's growing power capacities. However, major obstacles to the India–Pakistan dialogue and a permanent conflict resolution continue to persist: the dominating role of the army in Pakistan, conflicting national identities and the still partially contested nature of statehood in India and Pakistan. This article is divided into three parts. In the first section, the theoretical framework for the analysis is elaborated. The second section outlines the process of the India–Pakistan composite dialogue. In the third section, the evolution of the South Asian security complex is analyzed on the four different levels in order to identify the deeper causes for the persistency of the conflict and the factors that have facilitated and constrained the bilateral composite dialogue process.

Integrating Subaltern Realism and Liberal IR Theory into the RSCT

According to the RSCT, the regional level of security has become more autonomous and thus important in international politics due to the process of decolonization and the end of the Cold War. 'The central idea of RSCT is that, since most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes' (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 4). A region evolves on the basis of interlinkages in the field of security that are constituted by material and ideational factors. The anarchy in the international system, geographical factors and the (regional) balance of power are as important as the construction of security in the political process (securitization), that is, an act through which a concern is framed as a security issue. In this process, ideational factors, for example, historical narratives, culture and identity, can play a crucial role (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 4/44). Accordingly, security threats and rivalries cannot simply be treated as given or natural outcomes of certain structural conditions, but as social constructions by political actors. Structure and agency are mutually constituted (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 70ff). The RSCT thus mediates, as Basrur (2006, p. 420) notes, 'the gap between neorealism and constructivism by allowing both structure and securitization to determine the content of regional security'.

A regional security complex can be defined as 'a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another' (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 44). This analysis is conducted on four levels (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 51):

1. Domestic level: stability of the state and domestic security threats;
2. Regional level: state-to-state relations within the region;
3. Interregional level: interaction with neighbouring region(s); and
4. Global level: role of super or great power in the region.

The different types of regional security complexes result from the interplay of these four levels. A regional security complex is transformed if its structure changes. These changes could occur on the domestic, regional, interregional or global level. For example, a structural transformation can emanate from regional integration processes that replace the state of anarchy, changes in power distribution or an alteration of security perceptions (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 53).

While the RSCT offers a multi-dimensional analytical framework that allows us to explore the interaction between material structures and ideational factors in the processes of securitization, the theory is partially deficient in two respects. First, the RSCT does not explicitly address the distinctive conditions and characteristics of post-colonial states, namely the (incomplete) process of state formation and the high degree of internal conflicts that critically influence securitizations.

In this regard, subaltern realism (Ayoob, 1995, 2011) offers some valuable insights, because it highlights the context of state and nation building in the so-called Third World—the imposition of the state model by external powers and the time span of both state formation and decolonization—and the resulting security predicaments of these states. Given disputed state boundaries, partially weak political institutions and a general lack of regime legitimacy, particularly in the early stages of state making, there are, for instance, strong incentives for regimes to exploit external diversions for gaining support and legitimacy. This is further exacerbated by the spatial and temporal proximity of post-colonial states and their state-building endeavours, often resulting, due to shared and disputed boundaries as well as overlapping populations, in conflicts (Ayoob, 2011, p. 178).

A second deficiency of the RSCT is that it does not offer a sufficient framework for studying the power structures and struggles *within* states that influence state preferences and the room for manoeuvre of political leaders. Here, the liberal IR theory is of use with its focus on how '[s]ocietal ideas, interests, and institutions influence state behaviour by shaping state preferences, that is, the fundamental social purposes underlying the strategic calculations of governments' (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 513). Accordingly, a state's domestic and foreign policies are determined by which of the many, and often conflicting, societal values and interests prevail in the political system. In other words, state preferences and behaviour are the result of domestic and transnational social pressures. While domestic social pressures derive from the formal and informal power distribution and struggles between societal actors, transnational social pressures result from the preferences and regime types of other states as well as the intensity of cross-border interactions and interdependence in the international system (Doyle & Ikenberry, 1997, p. 12; Moravcsik, 2010, p. 236ff).

The India–Pakistan Composite Dialogue

The rapprochement between India and Pakistan began in April 2003, when the Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Kashmir and made Pakistan a peace offering that was ultimately embraced by Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf. In contrast to previous talks, both sides deviated from their obstinate positions and took up talks on a broad range of issues such as confidence-building measures, disputed territories or the stimulation of bilateral trade. In the course of the bilateral composite dialogue, India and Pakistan achieved some progress in the following areas (Misra, 2007, p. 515f; Patil, 2008, p. 2f):

- A ceasefire significantly reduced military incidents along the LOC;
- Memorandum of understanding on confidence-building measures in the military sector (for example, establishment of a permanent telephone hotline between the foreign ministries, joint agreement on the notification of missile tests and demilitarization of disputed territories);

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- Memorandum of understanding on the threat of nuclear incidents and the unauthorized use of nuclear weapons;
- Joint agreement on mechanisms and strategies for combating terrorism;
- Reopening and expansion of train routes and bus services; and
- Resumption of bilateral trade, removal of non-trade barriers and establishment of trade associations to promote bilateral trade.

The talks between India and Pakistan, however, moved slowly due to recurring differences of opinion: Pakistan temporarily returned to its demand that any normalization of relations is dependent on the solution of the Kashmir dispute, whereas India held Pakistan's support of militant groups responsible for the Kashmir problem. Nevertheless, both parties could achieve progress in the framework of the dialogue, because Pakistan renounced its demand and did not consider a referendum on the status of Kashmir under supervision of the United Nations as necessary any longer. In addition, Musharraf called on the militant groups in Kashmir to enter into a dialogue with India and stated that Pakistan, in principle, agrees on acknowledging the LOC as the final border, provided that Kashmir is jointly administered by India and Pakistan. Similarly, the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh demonstrated his willingness to compromise when he declared that India could accept any solution with the exception of secession and both sides should attempt to make the border irrelevant. Finally, India and Pakistan repeatedly stressed that the peace process is irreversible (Ahmed, 2008; Betz, 2007, p. 40).

Despite this progress, the dialogue process remained very fragile and was put to a test by terrorist attacks in India (e.g., attack on local trains in Mumbai in July 2006) or on Indian institutions abroad (e.g., attack on Indian Embassy in Afghanistan in July 2008)² (Misra, 2010, pp. 45–46) and by an increasing number of incidents at the LOC in recent times (*Indian Express*, 2013). As a result, the India–Pakistan dialogue was discontinued several times for a short period. When a civilian government came to power in Pakistan in spring 2008, it was expected that the dialogue would gain new momentum. By renouncing orthodox positions in Pakistan's Indian policy, Pakistan's new president Asif Zardari seemed to be willing to open a new chapter in bilateral relations. As the first Pakistani president to do so, Zardari not only declared that India has never been a threat for Pakistan but also labelled militant separatists in Kashmir as terrorists. In addition, he proffered the possibility of abandoning Pakistan's nuclear first-strike strategy (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2008). Zardari's rapprochement initiative was, however, abruptly frustrated by the Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008.

After the terrorist attacks, carried out by the Pakistani group Lashkar-e-Taiba, New Delhi suspended the bilateral composite dialogue and blamed Pakistan for supporting and tolerating terrorist activities directed against India. Bilateral talks were eventually resumed in autumn 2011. While Pakistan accepted India's longstanding demand to support the investigation of the terrorist attacks and cooperate with Indian authorities, India agreed on delinking terrorist attacks from

the dialogue process in the future (Pandalai, 2011). However, India has not been willing to take up the bilateral composite dialogue with a more extensive agenda again due to Pakistan's insufficient cooperation with regard to the persecutions of the Mumbai terrorists and an increasing number of incidents at the LOC in recent years.³

The Evolution of the South Asian Security Complex: Causes for the Persistency of the India–Pakistan Conflict and Prospects for a Peace Process

The South Asian security complex evolved from the India–Pakistan conflict and has since been dominated by this conflict. The violent partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 transferred a domestic conflict motivated by religion and communalism between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress party onto the international level and transformed it into a military–political conflict between an Islamic Pakistan and a secular, but Hindu-dominated, India. Against this background, the predominantly Muslim Kashmir, an independent princedom during the British Raj with a Hindu ruler, became the main point of contention between the two countries (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, pp. 101–102).

In what follows, the continuities and changes in the key security dynamics between India and Pakistan are investigated on the domestic, regional, interregional and global level. However, given the very limited scope of this article, the actual processes of securitization will not be traced and mapped in detail. Instead, the focus will be placed upon the general patterns and effects of securitizations, underlying factors that condition these choices and interlinkages between the different levels. Since this article simultaneously explores the persistency of India–Pakistan conflict and the prospects for a peace process, it covers a broad time span and will thus necessarily focus on general patterns. Yet, given the changing actors and circumstances, an effort is made, where appropriate, to contextualize the arguments made.

The Domestic Level

India

India is a federal, secular, parliamentary democracy. Its unique ethnic, religious, lingual and socio-economic heterogeneity has been posing a major challenge since the state's founding. Until today, the maintenance of the territorial integrity and political order are potentially threatened by secession movements and other militant groups, with Naxalism, Islamic fundamentalism and the insurgency in the northeast being identified as the major contemporary challenges to India's internal security.⁴

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The Naxalites, whose ideological roots lie in Maoism and communism, struggle to overthrow the existing political–economic order. Originally, a rather moderate pro-peasant movement, the Naxalite insurgency, today affects around 10 Indian states or provinces and was described by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2006) as ‘the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country’. The radical wing of the Naxalite movement, mainly represented by the Communist Party of India—Maoist (CPI-Maoist), wages a so-called people’s war against the Indian state. Operating predominantly in the rural and tribal areas of India’s eastern states such as Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the party and its guerrilla fighters and irregular combatants control small tracts of territory and regularly carry out attacks against security forces, political opponents and public infrastructure. The Maoists maintain that they fight in the name of the poor, deprived and landless communities and in the absence of civil administration and police provide public goods in the affected areas through an alternative governance system. Given the militarization and expansion of the Maoist insurgency between 2005 and 2010, the Naxalite conflict became securitized and was increasingly represented as a fundamental national security threat, whereas previously the conflict was seen more as a law-and-order problem resulting from a lack of development (Sundar, 2011, p. 53).

Similarly, Islamic terrorism continues to rank very high on India’s national security agenda. With roughly 25 known Islamist terrorist groups operating in India today and about 6,000 fatalities between 2005 and 2012, India is among the countries most seriously affected by Islamist terrorism in the world. The main focus of these terrorist activities is the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir, but other parts of India have also been a target. In particular, the devastating and tactically sophisticated terrorist attacks in the Indian financial hub Mumbai in November 2008 underscored once more the danger of Islamist terrorism. Though there has been a decline in Islamic terrorism in recent years (Hussain, 2013, p. 3ff; SATP, 2013), it is still seen by Indian policy makers as a fundamental national security challenge, since Islamist terrorism is conceived as a direct threat to the Indian model of state and national unity (Cohen, 2013, pp. 64–65). Muslim terrorists aspire not only to enforce the disentanglement of Kashmir from the Indian Union but also to disrupt the Indian secular state model as a whole by provoking anti-Muslim sentiments in India and violent counteractions by Hindu-nationalist groups or state agencies against Muslims, thereby promoting further radicalization of Muslims and Hindus and communal violence between both religious groups—and ideally further Islamization of South Asia in the long run.

The third internal security challenge is militant separatism. While the Indian government has managed to ease conflicts with secessionists in the past by conceding to them a higher degree of autonomy, there are still strivings for independence in some of India’s northeastern states, particularly in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. India’s northeast, which is connected to the Indian heartland only by the narrow Siliguri corridor between Nepal and Bangladesh, is culturally and ethnically a very diverse region with around 200 tribal groups and recurrent clashes

along religious and ethnic lines. The Indian government has pursued a multi-pronged strategy towards the northeastern region consisting of accommodation (peace and ceasefire talks, etc.) and counterinsurgency operations (Kumar, 2013, p. 164ff).

Though India has achieved a relatively high degree of political stability, the country's nation-building process is still partially incomplete and its problems in managing the numerous cleavages within Indian society have been conducive to the India–Pakistan conflict. Having been worried about external attempts to destabilize India and a potential strengthening of militant movements, Indian governments were generally less willing to compromise with regard to the Kashmir dispute. For any concession could be interpreted as a confession that India's secular, state-nationalist system of government has failed (Saideman, 2005, p. 215), and reinforce these militant movements in their belief that the Indian state is vulnerable and can be coerced to 'accept' their demands for independence or, in the case of the Maoists and some Islamic fundamentalists, even be overthrown in the long run.

Given the fact that India is amongst the countries most seriously affected by internal violence and extremism in the world (Manoharan, 2013, p. 367), there is a profound awareness among Indian policy makers for the still existing challenges to manage the country's unique internal diversity. Kashmir, the only predominantly Muslim state in India, is thus considered to be crucial to the legitimacy and integrity of India's national identity and model of state. The rise in communalist violence (e.g., the pogrom-like riots in Gujarat in 2002) and the gain in power of Hindu nationalists have further reinforced these worries (Basur, 2012, p. 20; Cohen, 2013, p. 58).

A crucial factor linking India's internal security threats with the conflict with Pakistan is the incompatible national identities and state-building ideologies of both countries. India perceives Pakistan's identity as a Muslim state on the basis of the two-nation theory as a direct threat to its secular and pluralist identity, which, in turn, challenges Pakistan's national identity. From the Indian perspective, Pakistan cannot accept India's secular, pluralist state model and the resulting claims to Kashmir, since it would jeopardize the political foundation and legitimacy of its own state model, and, therefore, attempts to disrupt and weaken India by supporting Islamic terrorist groups or separatist movements. This fear of external powers 'exploiting' India's internal diversity and cleavages can not only be attributed to the still partially contested nature of India's state formation, but also to still influential Indian historical memories of the invasions of the Indian subcontinent, which could, according to a prevalent Indian national narrative, succeed because these powers took advantage of India's internal diversity and weakness (Bajpai, 1998, pp. 159–160).

For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which emerged as the main antagonist to the Congress party in the 1990s and could successfully incorporate Hindu-nationalist ideas into India's political discourse, the conflict with Pakistan has in this respect another crucial dimension because it is framed in the context of the

‘Muslim’ invasion of the Hindu-dominated Indian subcontinent, which led to the oppression of the Hindu civilization, and is represented as a form of imperialism. The BJP regards the Indian subcontinent as a self-contained civilizational area, the Hindu civilization, which is not only understood as a religion but also as the subcontinent’s cultural foundation. Accordingly, the Pakistani state and its national identity are a relict of this invasion and challenge the ‘natural’ hegemony of Hinduism on the Indian subcontinent (Ogden, 2010; Singh, 2013b, p. 88ff).

Paradoxically, it was the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government, which initiated the bilateral composite dialogue with Pakistan. In spite of the BJP’s more belligerent and nationalistic rhetoric, Prime Minister Vajpayee pursued a relatively pragmatic Pakistan policy, which was, amongst other factors, influenced by the new nuclear context of the conflict, India’s liberal economic policies, the constraints of large coalition governments (as a result of the high fragmentation of India’s party system) and the personal ambitions of Vajpayee to leave his mark on Indian foreign policy and segregate it from the Congress’ foreign policy (Chiriyankandath & Wyatt, 2005, p. 193ff; Pardesi & Oetken, 2008, pp. 34–35). Crucially, the political opposition could hardly savage the more hawkish and nationalist BJP for being too soft on Pakistan and compromising India’s national interests.

While Vajpayee’s peace initiative opened a new chapter in India–Pakistan relations, the real progress in the bilateral composite dialogue was achieved under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.⁵ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who has been a strong proponent of the peace initiative, saw India’s foreign policy largely through the prism of socio-economic development and thus regarded a stable neighbourhood, including a normalization of relations with Pakistan, as essential. While the bilateral composite dialogue was initially quite successful, the prime minister and other proponents of the peace process faced relatively strong domestic resistance, especially after the two terrorist attacks in 2006 and 2008. On the one hand, forces within the government such as the home and the foreign ministries viewed the peace process rather sceptically. In addition, the prime minister lacked a strong power base within his own party, given Sonia Gandhi’s role as party leader and her rather ambivalent view on Pakistan. On the other hand, the growing power of the BJP in Indian politics and its more hawkish stance on Pakistan (especially when in opposition) also restricted the UPA government’s room for manoeuvre (Cohen, 2013, p. 63/74ff; ICG, 2012, p. 15/17; *Times of India*, 2014).

Finally, terrorist attacks by Islamists led to repeated crises and generated new mistrust between India and Pakistan. Indian policy makers, following a strategy of diversion that uses external threats to distract from internal problems (Ganguly & Thompson, 2011, p. 15), started to regularly blame Pakistan for being involved in the attacks.⁶ Though Pakistan officially denied that it provides support to terrorists and insurgents, there was some evidence that certain elements within the Pakistani army and the Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) actively supported or tolerated terrorist groups and regarded them as ‘strategic assets’ in

the fight against India (Jones, 2011, p. 82; Kapur & Ganguly, 2012, p. 111). Hence, terrorist attacks against India by groups based and trained in Pakistan could easily disrupt and jeopardize the peace process. This would be especially the case if Hindu nationalists in India decide to instrumentalize the attacks for their political interests. The successful combat of terrorism, particularly in the Indian part of Kashmir, is thus a crucial precondition for India to achieve sustainable peace with Pakistan. India, however, can only tackle Islamic fundamentalism and its other domestic security threats successfully, if it addresses the socio-economic and political causes of these conflicts such as injustice, discrimination and marginalization.

Pakistan

Pakistan has a hybrid system of government that oscillates between patrimonialism, semi-authoritarianism and semi-democracy. This uneasy mix of military autocracy and aspiring democracy, in which the military uses populism and democracy to legitimate its rule, while the civilians largely depend on the armed forces to stay in power, has remained relatively constant since Pakistan's founding and has produced alternating periods of more civilian and more military rule (Basrur, 2012, pp. 21–22; Cohen, 2013, p. 102; Qazi, 2013, p. 6). Pakistan's national identity is shaped by the idea that Hindus and Muslims cannot live together peacefully in a Hindu-dominated state. As a result, it rejects India's secular, pluralist model of state and perceived itself as the unitary state for all Muslims on the subcontinent (Nasr, 2005, p. 179/192; Pande, 2011).⁷

While India's state-building process has been relatively successful, Pakistan's state-building process is severely threatened by ethnic, religious and political cleavages. These cleavages run between conservative religious forces, who aspire a re-Islamization of society or an Islamic theocracy, and secular liberal circles, between the Punjabi majority and ethnic minorities such as the Balochs, and between a military-authoritarian and civil-democratic state governance. Crucially, there are also conflicting identity concepts about the Pakistani nation itself (Cohen, 2011a, p. 22; Kapur & Ganguly, 2012, pp. 116–117; Yasmeen, 2013, pp. 159–160).

Since the state's founding there have been four military coups in Pakistan (1958, 1969, 1977, 1999), numerous constitutional crises and five intrastate wars (1971, 1973–1977, 1986–2002, 2005–2008, since 2007). In spite of a comparably high level of political institutionalization, Pakistan has been unable to expand its monopoly on the use of force to the tribal areas in the northwest and to the province of Balochistan and to settle its various domestic cleavages and problems through these institutions (AKUF, 2013; Ganguly & Fair, 2013, pp. 122–124; Hewitt, 2010, p. 405). The army, which traditionally plays a key role in Pakistani politics, managed to further expand its power in the Musharraf era and emerged as a state within the state (cf. Haqqani, 2005; Lieven, 2011; Mazhar, 2008; Nawaz, 2009; Paul, 2014) holding a disproportionate amount of political power and exercising de facto veto power over foreign, security and economic policies. Due to

the increasing instability of state and society, there is growing concern within Pakistan and abroad that the country is on the verge of becoming a failing state and Islamic fundamentalists could seize power (see Cohen et al., 2011; Gul, 2011; Lodhi, 2011; Rashid, 2013).

Given Pakistan's incomplete and contested state-building process, the conflict with India has served until today as one of the most important identity-generating ties within Pakistani society. The different governments, particularly the military governments, have regularly exploited the conflict for political interests. In particular, the army uses the conflict with India to justify its dominant role within the state. This obsession with India and Kashmir can also be attributed to the fact that India's secular model of state, in particular the inclusion of a predominantly Muslim community in the Indian Union, poses a direct threat to Pakistan's (fragile) national identity (Cohen, 2013, p. 11/89; Fair, 2011, p. 91; Lieven, 2011, p. 185ff). As in the case of India, the conflict thus serves at the core a crucial purpose of domestic politics since it 'defends' the (still contested) statehood and can be used by political actors to gain support for or distract from internal problems. This crucial linkage between internal and external factors conditions the high level of securitization.

Similarly, the bilateral composite dialogue has been impeded by the differences between democratic and hybrid regime types. Given the dominant role of the army in foreign and defence policy making, Pakistani regimes have been relatively war prone and have tended to see relations with India through a very restricted hyperrealist and militarist prism (Paul, 2014, p. 5/73; Tremblay & Schofield, 2005, pp. 225–229). As a result, most escalations were caused by Pakistan; for instance, Pakistan tried to take advantage of India's supposed weakness after the border war with China in 1962 and to destabilize India by supporting terrorists and insurgents. At the same time, Indian policy makers, as in most democratic states (see Geis et al., 2006), have often tended to perceive a non-democratic and religious Pakistan as inherently backward, aggressive, instable or illegitimate and therefore have been generally more inclined to resort to a more aggressive foreign policy themselves. Accordingly, India, in a combination of mistrust and a sense of superiority, has contributed to escalation processes (e.g., through risky and provocative war games) and seized opportunities to weaken Pakistan (e.g., by supporting the Bengali liberation movement), thereby fuelling further mistrust and fear in Pakistan (Cohen, 2013, p. 64/94).

Escalating domestic political instability and the growing power of Islamic fundamentalists—for example, the takeover of the Swat valley by the Pakistani Taliban in 2007, almost 15,000 civilian victims of Islamist violence in the last five years, encounters in the financial hub Karachi and the growing number of terrorist attacks against state institutions—increasingly overshadow Pakistan's conflict with India, and Islamabad has been more preoccupied with tackling domestic unrest in recent years. Ironically, this development may prove to be conducive for the re-start of the bilateral composite dialogue. There is now a growing awareness within Pakistan, including the military, that Islamic extremism poses a fundamental

threat to the country, and that this threat is also partially responsible for the socio-economic crisis, which in turn could be diminished through better (economic) relations with India (Cohen, 2013, pp. 93–94; Kapur & Ganguly, 2012, p. 134; Rashid, 2010, p. 378). Pakistan's former Army Chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, acknowledged in his Independence Day speech in 2012 that Islamist fundamentalism poses a severe threat to Pakistan and concluded: 'The war against extremism and terrorism is not only the Army's war, but that of the whole nation' (ISPR, 2012). Pakistan's civilian leaders too have little interest in jeopardizing the peace process with India, when the army has demonstrated its willingness to combat Islamist insurgents and terrorists (e.g., recapturing of the Swat valley in 2009) (Mullick, 2012, pp. 93–94; Siddiq, 2011, p. 15).

However, the Pakistani army has so far concentrated its counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations on those groups that directly threaten Pakistan's state institutions (such as the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan), but omitted groups that primarily carry out terrorist attacks in India and Afghanistan (such as the Jamaat-ud-Dawa). This suggests that the army and parts of the civilian political elite still see some of these Islamist groups as 'strategic assets' in the fight against India and Afghanistan, and do not want to confront them for fear that these groups may turn against the Pakistani state (Fair, 2011, p. 100; Lieven, 2011, pp. 191–192). The support and use of Islamist militancy has been a key component of Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies since the state's founding. Pakistan's army has not only provided these groups substantial financial, logistical and military assistance, but also protected them from law enforcement. Though Pakistan had some success with this strategy in the past, in recent years it has begun to suffer the consequences of losing control over some of these militant groups, many of which now attack state institutions (Haqqani, 2005, pp. 2–3; Kapur & Ganguly, 2012, p. 113/128ff).

The growing power of Islamist fundamentalism in Pakistani society (including creeping Islamization within the army) (cf. Fair, 2014; Ullah, 2014, pp. 22–27) and the dominant role of the armed forces within the state have critically influenced the evolution of the bilateral composite dialogue. While Islamist militants could jeopardize the dialogue process through terrorist attacks and raised the stakes for any Pakistani government to compromise with India on Kashmir, the army, which remains largely convinced that India will only compromise if the threat of Islamist militancy remains present, has never fully embraced the bilateral composite dialogue and thus repeatedly interfered into it. So it was General Pervez Musharraf who sabotaged the first attempt to initiate the dialogue process through a covert operation in Kashmir that led to the Kargil war in 1999. However, after his coup d'état, Musharraf advanced the bilateral composite dialogue and a potential solution of the Kashmir dispute through secret back-channel meetings. Apart from the impact of regional, interregional and global developments on Pakistani politics, which will be discussed in the following sections, Musharraf's shift of Pakistan's India policy can be attributed to two main factors: first, Pakistan's risky military and covert operations, as the Kargil war demonstrated, did not yield

the desired success and increased the danger of a nuclear escalation; second, having survived several assassination attempts by Muslim extremists, Musharraf realized the increasing danger of Islamist militancy for Pakistan's national security (Coll, 2009).

After its initial successes, however, the bilateral composite dialogue was impeded by developments in Pakistan's domestic politics. While large parts of the Pakistani army viewed the dialogue process suspiciously and did not support the envisioned mechanism to settle the Kashmir dispute, Musharraf's increasingly authoritarian rule (e.g., declaration of a state of emergency and the unconstitutional ouster of a popular Supreme Court judge) and the deteriorating internal security situation (e.g., occupation of the Red Mosque by Islamist militants) resulted in growing popular discontent and protests, which ultimately forced Musharraf to re-establish civilian rule. The Pakistan People's Party, which came to power after the elections in 2008, was highly supportive of the bilateral composite dialogue; however, the army's repeated interference in foreign policy decision-making (e.g., President Zardari had to withdraw the offer of an agreement on the non-first-use of nuclear weapons after General Kayani, the then Chief of Army Staff, rebuked him for this initiative) and the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008 led to the disruption of the bilateral composite dialogue. The army then thwarted Zardari's intention to properly investigate the Mumbai terrorist attacks at the request of the Indian government.

The consolidation of Pakistan's democracy—with the first democratically elected government to serve an entire term followed by relatively free national elections in May 2013 and a smooth transfer of power—could offer an opportunity for restructuring the power relations between civilian parties and the military and for strengthening the dialogue process with India. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, whose Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) secured a large parliamentary majority in the 2013 national elections, declared that his government will accord normalization of relations with India on a high priority and further expand the dialogue process, stirring hopes that Sharif might manage to bring the Indian policy more under the control of the civilian government and implement such a policy change (*Business Standard*, 2013; Mohan, 2013).⁸ To achieve this objective, Sharif must perform a delicate balancing act of containing and accommodating Islamist militants and the army.

The Regional Level

At the regional level, several factors have facilitated India–Pakistan conflict and prevented conflict resolution in the past. A crucial factor for the conflict's persistence is India's dominance in South Asia. India has almost 10 times as many inhabitants as Pakistan and thus makes up about 75 per cent of South Asia's total population. India's gross national product accounts for more than 80 per cent of the region's economic output and its armed forces are almost four times bigger

than Pakistan's armed forces. This Indian preponderance has inevitably led to fears of dominance among India's smaller neighbours and, in the case of Pakistan, to direct resistance. The fear of Indian dominance was driven further by India's proclamation of a regional security doctrine; by this doctrine, India claimed for itself a hegemonic role in South Asia, pointedly warned external powers to stay out of regional politics, and asserted its right to intervene in domestic politics and foreign policy of neighbouring states if such intervention was required to bolster Indian security. The influence of the Indian doctrine of regional security was manifested in several areas: for instance, India intervened in the civil war in Sri Lanka, annexed Sikkim into the Indian Union, and largely exercised veto powers over Nepal and Bhutan's foreign policy (Cohen, 2001, pp. 136–137; Malone, 2012, p. 50/105).

India's fear of external interference in South Asia stems from powerful historical memories of invasions of the Indian subcontinent. According to a prevalent Indian national narrative, these invasions underscore the geopolitical importance of South Asia making it prone to external intrusion (Bajpai, 1998, pp. 159–160). The partition of the subcontinent in 1947 further 'installed an inherent distrust of outside forces that had formed the new borders of India and Pakistan, an action seemingly undertaken to inspire instability in the region by failing to synchronize with ethnic and state borders' (Ogden, 2011, p. 5). To respond to this threat of external interference, India essentially continued the strategic behaviour of the British in the Indian subcontinent, which placed an emphasis on regional hegemony and a system of 'buffer' states for preventing invasions (Pant, 2011a, pp. 15–16).

India, however, did not establish a regional order in which the hegemon provides certain public goods and, in return, bears the higher costs or provides other incentives for regional followership such as concessions and power sharing in the framework of a regional organization. The region's different political systems, economic development paths and religious and ethnical cleavages impeded the adoption of such a cooperative-integrative policy approach. It was not until the 1980s that there was an attempt to form a regional organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (see Muni, 2010; Sáez, 2011). Due to the persistence of India–Pakistan conflict, however, the SAARC hardly brought about regional cooperation and integration. Regional economic integration, for example, by dismantling trade barriers, would have encouraged rapprochement, cooperation and convergence of interests among South Asia's states. But India and Pakistan were unwilling to tread this path. The power political dimension of the conflict—India's great power aspirations and Pakistan's unwillingness to accept the claim for hegemony by its bigger neighbour—also prevented both sides from cooperating in the field of security policy that could have contributed to regional stability and peace.

It was only after India started to liberalize its economy in the early 1990s that it developed a greater interest in the economic integration of South Asia. Since then, Indian governments have gradually placed a greater emphasis on cooperation, multilateralism, concessions and attractiveness instead of classical *machtspolitik*

in dealing with India's neighbours in South Asia (see Mohan, 2006; Raghavan, 2013; Saran, 2005; Wagner, 2005). This change in India's regional policy, embraced by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in particular, also provided the context for the bilateral composite dialogue by generating greater incentives for South Asian countries to cooperate with India and accept its leadership role, and by obliging India to abstain from using coercive means or paternalistic policies in the pursuit of its regional interests. In line with this policy change, India not only made greater concessions towards its neighbours, but also championed the revitalization of SAARC. For example, on India's initiative, a free trade agreement was concluded in 2006. In terms of dismantling trade barriers, India also made concessions to its neighbours. In addition, Pakistan indicated that it would finally grant India the most favoured nation (MFN) status. According to estimates by the World Bank, due to the impact of these measures, bilateral trade between India and Pakistan was expected to increase from US\$2.7 billion in 2011 to US\$9 billion in 2014 (*Times of India*, 2013; Wagner, 2012, pp. 2–3). The improvement in bilateral economic relations between India and Pakistan could strengthen the role of economic stakeholders in the foreign policy decision-making process. The enhancement of intra-regional trade could also lead, for the first time in the post-colonial era, to positive interdependence among the South Asian countries, particularly between India and Pakistan.

The India–Pakistan relationship was characterized by a power imbalance in the past. This power imbalance is likely to increase in the next decades due to India's relatively high economic growth rates and Pakistan's persistent domestic crisis. The further expansion of India's power would suggest a transformation in the South Asian security complex from bipolarity to unipolarity. Provided that India continues to adhere to and further broaden its cooperative-integrative regional policy, this Indian dominance could compel Pakistan to come to terms with India's hegemonic role in the region instead of attempting to match India's preponderance with foreign alliances and an offensive nuclear strategy.⁹ Maintaining the regional balance of power, by contrast, has hardly contributed to stability, as the Kargil war and the crisis of 2001/02 demonstrated.

The Interregional Level

At the interregional level, the external influence of regional great power China on the South Asian security complex is of particular importance. On the one hand, India and Pakistan's interactions with China have affected the evolvement of the India–Pakistan conflict and the bilateral composite dialogue. On the other hand, the simultaneous rise of China and India, which is linked to growing engagement of and increasing rivalry between both countries in Asia, is gradually leading to the emergence of an Asian super-complex.

Relations between India and China have been tense since the late 1950s, mainly as a result of an unresolved border conflict and their mutual great power ambitions. The border conflict led to war in 1962 and India suffered a defeat.

After the war, China formed an alliance with Pakistan and supported its military build-up, including the country's nuclear and missile programme. By building up a counterweight, the Chinese leadership tried to contain India's regional and global aspirations. Moreover, China interfered in the wars between India and Pakistan, and in the Kashmir issue (Chandy, 2000, p. 305; Kapur, 2005, p. 148/151; Malik, 2003, p. 36).

The political and military support Pakistan received from China and the United States¹⁰ has contributed to the maintenance of the India–Pakistan conflict by compensating Pakistan's inferiority vis-à-vis India. At the same time, the tense relations with China played a crucial role in India's military modernization and nuclear programme launched in the 1960s. The Indian leadership also justified India's nuclear weapons tests in 1998 on the basis of the security threat posed by China to India (Cohen, 2001, p. 179). The China factor then has impeded a rapprochement between India and Pakistan and contributed to the arms race in South Asia. Islamabad fears that India's military build-up is directed against Pakistan. India, however, worries about a deepening of the China–Pakistan alliance that would help Pakistan to maintain the regional balance of power and could mean a two-front war in case of a crisis.

India–China relations have significantly improved in recent years. The Chinese attitude towards India has changed due to India's economic rise, its nuclear weapons and the substantial changes in the United States' South Asia policy. The foundation for this rapprochement was laid in the 1990s, when India and China agreed to undertake confidence-building measures with regard to the border conflict in order to prevent incidents and mutual provocations. Although the border conflict has not been resolved yet, India and China have, however, established an institutionalized dialogue process regarding the border. In addition, China has moved away from interfering or taking sides in the India–Pakistan conflict. For instance, Beijing now considers the Kashmir conflict as a bilateral problem of India and Pakistan. The India–China strategic partnership formed in 2005 was also an important next step in institutionalizing and broadening the cooperation between the two countries (Garver, 1996, pp. 337–343; Mohan, 2004, p. 144; Yuan, 2007, p. 134). By this move, China acknowledged India's new role in world politics and attempted, with a more cooperative policy, to prevent India from forming close ties with the United States. Beijing suspects that the United States wants to establish India as a counterweight to China. Hence, the Chinese leadership wants to avoid provoking India unnecessarily by its Pakistan policy.

Despite these developments, China and India are likely to remain strategic competitors rather than real partners (cf. Mohan, 2012; Pant, 2012; Scott, 2008). China's development of ports and other strategically sensitive infrastructure projects in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is an indicator of this strategic competition. Given that Indian policy makers and the military see South Asia and the IOR as India's natural sphere of influence,¹¹ they are very suspicious of China's activities and perceive them as an attempt to 'strategically encircle India' (Ministry of Defence, 2004).

For China, its past interference in the India–Pakistan conflict had been an effective instrument to restrict India's political and strategic ambitions in South Asia and to prevent the Indian military from concentrating troops along the Sino-Indian border. As a result, in the past, China was not interested in conflict resolution or rapprochement between India and Pakistan. The rapprochement between India and China has, however, provided a window of opportunity for the Indo-Pak bilateral composite dialogue. While India will be less concerned about Chinese interference in the India–Pakistan conflict, Pakistan's strategy to entangle China into the conflict (particularly, in times of an escalation) will largely fail. The Chinese leadership's criticism of Pakistan for provoking escalations with India reflects Beijing's worry about Islamist militancy in Pakistan and its potential repercussions for China's national security (Curtis, 2012, p. 257). This restricts Pakistan's room for manoeuvre towards India, which may facilitate the dialogue process by convincing Pakistani leaders of the limited prospects of a military conflict. Though China will continue to maintain the possibility of playing the Pakistan card in case its relations with India worsen, the Chinese leadership will, due to India's growing weight in world politics, refrain from such a move as long as Beijing believes that it is possible to transform its strategic competition with India, at least partially, into a positive-sum game. This in turn also increases the prospects of the peace process between India and Pakistan.

The Global Level

Though the cold war had no determining impact on the Indo-Pak conflict due to the strong domestic and regional components of the South Asian security complex (Buzan & Wæver, 2003, p. 105), the role of the United States and the Soviet Union should not be underestimated. During the Cold War, the United States built Pakistan up as a regional ally to counterbalance Iranian nationalism after the fall of the Shah, to contain Soviet influence in the region, and to constrain India's global ambitions and its non-alignment policy, which Washington regarded as a threat to US geostrategic interests. Hence, the United States had no real interest in a conflict resolution, but concentrated its diplomatic efforts only on preventing an escalation (Kapur, 2005, pp. 132–133). Moreover, as Paul (2014) has argued, the extensive economic and military aid that Pakistan received from the United States led to a 'geostrategic curse' in the sense that it discouraged the Pakistani elites from initiating urgent economic and social reforms for generating sustainable growth and development and stabilized the power of the military as well as the landed aristocracy. This contributed to the persistence of hybrid regime types in Pakistan and the veto power of the army, which in turn impeded peace with India.

From the Indian perspective, potential US diplomatic interference in the Kashmir dispute and Washington's support to Pakistan not only posed a national security threat but also thwarted India's ambition to become a great power (e.g., sanctions against India after the first nuclear test). In the aftermath of the rapprochement

between China and the United States in the early 1970s initiated by the Nixon administration, India was confronted with a potential United States–Pakistan–China alliance, which compelled New Delhi to form a strategic partnership with the Soviet Union. For the Soviet Union, India's non-aligned stance and geostrategic location made it an important ally for containing US influence in South Asia and for building up a counterweight to China (Mahapatra, 2004, pp. 131–132).

The Soviet Union provided India with the latest weapon systems and aided the build-up and modernization of the Indian Navy. It prevented the UN Security Council from adopting anti-India resolutions, ensured uninterrupted energy supplies to India and provided an important export market for the Indian economy (Jain & Nair, 2000, p. 68f). Given the fact that both superpowers saw the India–Pakistan conflict through a geostrategic prism, they were not interested in making the resolution of the conflict a priority. To do so would have meant removing India and Pakistan's dependence on the superpowers and altering the balance of power in South Asia, thus providing India with more room to manoeuvre in pursuit of its global ambitions. This situation hardly changed until the end of the cold war. In fact, the region gained strategic importance again after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan became a highly valued partner and frontline ally of the United States again.

Operating within a unipolar world order and a globalized world economy in the post-cold war era, and affected particularly by a balance of payment crisis in the early 1990s, India began to liberalize its economy and actively tried to improve relations with the United States. These developments also had a positive impact for the bilateral composite dialogue. While economic liberalization in the 1990s stimulated a change in India's regional policy, the rapprochement between India and the United States changed the regional balance of power in India's favour. Relations between the two countries improved very quickly and even India's nuclear tests in 1998 posed no serious problem for this rapprochement process. The United States began to take a pro-India position on many issues (e.g., the Kashmir dispute), while United States–Pakistan relations started to cool down. In March 2000, India and the United States formed a strategic partnership (Gould, 2010, p. 97ff). Within the framework of this strategic partnership, both sides concluded several defence deals and signed a nuclear agreement, through which the United States recognized India as a legitimate nuclear weapons power even though India is not a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (see Ganguly et al., 2006; Pant, 2011b; Samuel, 2007).

Though Pakistan has remained an important regional partner in the 'War on Terror', the United States now has better relations with India and holds a far more critical view of Pakistan (Mohan, 2008, p. 145; Riedel, 2013, p. 177/201). Like India, the majority of United States policy makers see Pakistan as a fragile nuclear state that is a safe haven and recruitment and training base for terrorists and whose military supports and tolerates Islamist insurgents and terrorists and uses them as instruments of state policy (see Cohen et al., 2011; Fair, 2012; Khalilzad, 2012; Markey, 2013; Riedel, 2013; Schmidt, 2011). In recent years, the United States even carried out aerial attacks against suspected terrorist and insurgent camps on

the Pakistan side of the Pak-Afghanistan border, thus infringing upon Pakistan's sovereignty. Although Islamabad publicly criticized the United States for the infringing upon its sovereignty, it was evident to many that the Pakistani army, at least partially, supported the US drone attacks on the insurgents in the tribal areas (Ahmad, 2010, p. 203; Jones, 2011, p. 87). It must also not be forgotten that in May 2011, a US Navy SEAL team carried out a commando raid deep within Pakistan from its base in Afghanistan in order to capture the world's most notorious terrorist, Osama bin Laden, who was hiding in the garrison town of Abbottabad. The commando operation, launched without any prior warning to the Pakistani authorities, was a resounding success. The Navy SEALs captured and killed bin Laden and took away his body to their base from where it was eventually buried in secret at sea. Several US policy makers publicly suggested that they believed that bin Laden would not have been able to hide for so long without support from some influential elements within the Pakistani establishment, particularly the military and the ISI (Fair, 2012, p. 244; Riedel, 2013, p. 201). Summarizing the prevalent view on India and Pakistan in the United States, Wright (2011) noted:

India has become the state that we tried to create in Pakistan. It is a rising economic star, militarily powerful and democratic, and it shares American interests. Pakistan, however, is one of the most anti-American countries in the world, and a covert sponsor of terrorism. Politically and economically, it verges on being a failed state. And, despite Pakistani avowals to the contrary, America's worst enemy, Osama bin Laden, had been hiding there for years—in strikingly comfortable circumstances—before US commandos finally tracked him down and killed him.

Thus, the United States has come to regard Pakistan more as a problem or even a foe rather than an ally (Cohen, 2011b; Riedel, 2011). This has led to calls in the US Congress to restrict assistance programmes to Pakistan (e.g., Kerry–Lugar Act) and to recalibrate the United States' Pakistan policy (cf. Khalilzad, 2012; Markey, 2013; Riedel, 2013). Pakistan's external support, a crucial variable for balancing its power disparity vis-à-vis India, has thus become extremely fragile.

This development may act as an important incentive for the India–Pakistan peace process and facilitate the resumption of the stalled bilateral composite dialogue. Pakistan's bargaining position has weakened considerably and it is under international pressure to take action against terrorist groups and networks operating from its territory. Since Western governments see these groups and networks as a major threat (Jones, 2011, p. 70; Thakur, 2011, p. 205), it is dangerous for Pakistan to use them as strategic assets in the conflicts with neighbouring states such as India and Afghanistan. To continue to do so may lead to greater military strikes in violation of its sovereignty and even international isolation. Moreover, by continuing on the path of conflict, Pakistan today can hardly hope to internationalize the Kashmir dispute and accuse India of state terrorism. Furthermore, any decline in Pakistan's external military assistance would enable Pakistani elites to undertake necessary economic and social reforms and facilitate the further consolidation of Pakistan's democracy, which in turn would benefit the peace

process with India. On its part, New Delhi now has to worry less about external powers taking advantage of the Indo-Pak conflict in order to weaken and contain India. This may actually spur India's political elites to push ahead with a cooperative regional policy and to settle the conflict with Pakistan through a dialogue process.

Conclusion

This article investigated the causes of the persistency of the India–Pakistan conflict in order to highlight those factors that have facilitated the bilateral dialogue process as well as to assess the prospects of the India–Pakistan peace process. The analysis was grounded by RSCT, subaltern realism and liberal IR theory. While the RSCT offers a multi-level approach towards regional security issues that allows for the consistent integration of structure and agency, subaltern realism highlights the distinctive conditions of post-colonial states such as the incomplete state-building processes or the interplay of internal and external security threats, and liberal IR theory sheds light on how state preferences derive from domestic (e.g., constitutional constraints or veto players) and transnational (e.g., globalization) social pressures. The analytical approach enabled us to understand how material and ideational factors as well as internal and external conditions influence the securitization choices and negotiation behaviour of state actors.

The analysis showed that important changes in the South Asian security complex paved the way for Vajpayee's peace initiative and the onset of the bilateral composite dialogue. First, India renounced its partially imperialistic policies towards its neighbours and began to pursue a more cooperative and integrative regional policy. Thereafter, economic issues moved to the centre of Indian foreign policy, which began to be characterized by a greater awareness for interdependence and the importance of a stable regional environment for India's socio-economic development. Second, political and economic crisis and the increasing power of Islamist fundamentalists weakened Islamabad's room for manoeuvre but also led to a shift in Pakistan's threat perceptions. Third, the 9/11 terrorist attacks had far-reaching consequences for the region and improved India's bargaining position vis-à-vis Pakistan. Fourth, external powers now perceive India as a rising great power and have thus changed their policies towards India. Fifth, the external support of Pakistan has declined, thereby making it more difficult for the country to maintain the regional balance of power or opt for a military solution to the Indo-Pak conflict.

However, there remain major obstacles to a sustainable peace process and the resumption of the bilateral composite dialogue: the state-dominating role of the military in Pakistan, conflicting national identities between India and Pakistan, and contested statehood in Pakistan linked to the growing power of Islamic fundamentalists. As long as the Pakistani military (or some influential elements within it) continue to actively support and tolerate Islamic fundamentalists, dominate the Pakistani state and perceive India as an adversary, it will set clear limits to every dialogue process. Likewise, the conflicting national identities will continue to

constrain a normalization of relations between India and Pakistan. Combined with the still partially incomplete state-building processes and various extremist groupings in both countries, this adds a crucial internal dimension to the interstate conflict by generating the mutual belief that their own model of state is not recognized by the other side and the mutual fear that the other side wants to weaken or disrupt it. While India's state-building process has been more successful, Pakistan is still a fragile and crisis-ridden state. This also could impair the potential resolution of the Kashmir dispute, because the Kashmir dispute mutually affirms India's and Pakistan's national identity; hence, abandoning the territorial claim would be seen as a confession that their nation-building process has failed, thereby fuelling the resistance and militancy of separatist and other extremist forces in both countries.

With regard to the future prospects for the India–Pakistan peace process, the analytical framework applied in this article suggests that the relations between both countries will be characterized by a complex interplay of internal and external factors. While the relations between both countries have reached a higher degree of stability in the recent decade, a full normalization of relations and conflict resolution seems rather unlikely within the next few years. Domestically, Pakistan's recent democratic transition could in the long run pave the way for conflict resolution, but for the time being the civilian leaders are confronted with various domestic challenges and have arguably no political power base for pursuing peace with India. Likewise, there are still quite strong domestic constraints for a peace process in India. However, the overall decline of India's internal wars and insurgencies in recent years could, if this trend continues, lead to a shift in India's Pakistan policy and a more conciliatory stance. Externally, the relationship of both countries with the United States and China will crucially shape the peace process. In particular, the future allocation of foreign assistance for Pakistan and growing international pressure to tackle Islamist militancy are of importance. At the same time, the analysis has shown that favourable structural conditions alone are insufficient for a successful peace process; it also requires skilled political leaders who are willing to overcome prevailing patterns of thought and have the political power base to make bold decisions.

Notes

1. Though the bilateral composite dialogue has received attention in the literature (see Betz, 2007; Hussain, 2006; Misra, 2007; Padder, 2012; Patil, 2008), the existing studies do not provide a systematic, theoretically grounded account of the dialogue process.
2. It is assumed in the United States and in India that the Pakistani ISI was involved in the attack (Curtis, 2012, p. 264).
3. Interview of the author with a representative of the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 17 December 2013.
4. See, for instance, the Annual Reports of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs or Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's speeches on internal security issues (2006, 2009, 2013a).
5. This can also partially be attributed to the resistance against the peace initiative within the BJP and any concessions with regard to the Kashmir dispute (ICG, 2012, p. 15; Wheeler, 2010, pp. 330–331).

6. There are, however, also several Islamist terrorist groups in India acting independently of Pakistan (Thakur, 2011, p. 198).
7. This notion still holds true for parts of the Pakistani elite despite the fact that, with the secession of East Pakistan (today, Bangladesh), Pakistan is not any longer the single Muslim state in South Asia. The secession of Bangladesh is primarily seen as a result of the destructive influence of India (Cohen, 2013, p. 175).
8. An indicator for Sharif's attempt to repel the army's role in Pakistani politics is that his government—despite the resistance of the army—wants to push through the legal process against Musharraf.
9. The stabilizing effect of clear power imbalances is stressed by the power transition theory. See Tammen et al. (2000) and Lemke (2002).
10. The role of the United States is discussed in the next section.
11. For instance, India's maritime strategy states that the Indian Navy should 'provide insulation from external interference' in the Indian Ocean (Ministry of Defence, 2007, p. iii). Similarly, the former foreign and defence minister Pranab Mukherjee (2005) noted: '[O]ur strategic location astride the major sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean makes us a dominant maritime player in this region'.

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