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Topic of Research: The State to Nation Balance: A Key to Explaining Regional War and Peace in South Asia

Findings

The high extent of the state-to-nation imbalance in South Asia is a major cause of high war propensity of the region. The countries in South Asia share with each other attributes such as state weakness and presence of strong subnational and extra-national forces. The subnational forces combine with state weakness to generate internal incongruence, and the extra-national forces combine in different ways to produce external incongruence. Tremendous societal heterogeneity and the extensive dispersion of national groups across borders is a widespread political feature of the region. Societal linkages and historical antecedents work through different frames of national and state-building and amplify the degree of external incongruence. This, in turn, enhances the power of pan-national and transborder forces as well as revisionist states and irredentist movements.

Regional power interests affect the context, direction and execution of specific wars and conflicts, but do not explain the basic tendency of the region to engage in warfare and violent conflict. Wars have erupted against the conventional logics of the balance of power and distribution of capabilities in the region: India's material advantage in terms of military capabilities and strategic edge deterred Pakistan's revisionist exercises in 1947 and 1965, although by itself India's superior military capability, economic and geostrategic position could not check Pakistan's resort to force.

The 1947 war erupted in the context of global power disengagement. Competing National territorial self-images rather than power considerations or material factors catalyzed the war

between regional actors operating under relative autonomy. The state-building projects required exerting control over land recognized as one's national territory and levelling out variance. Both regional states required extension of sovereignty over Kashmir to achieve national coherence. The high level of the state-to-nation imbalance that plays out in Kashmir arena accounts for the strength of Pakistan's revisionist tendency and of India's powerful rejection of Kashmiri ethnic and religious groups that align with Pakistan's religious based national vision or at least rely on it to challenge India's sovereign control in the sector.

India and Pakistan constitute the most influential regional actors and Kashmir arena has historically served as a fulcrum for balancing their respective national visions. In this sense, Kashmir conflict acts as the receptacle to a major interstate regional dynamic. The concentration of state and non-state violence over the decades in Kashmir is partly explained by this logic. A strong movement of state-seeking ethnic nationalism is another factor that interacts with the regional incongruence dynamic. It imparts return effects to regional patterns. The Kashmir sector thus is not only a historical arena of competing Indian and Pakistani nationalisms but an active point of group level incongruence, which combines with different types of stateness to influence conflict patterns in and outside Kashmir. The enduring interstate rivalries feed and are fed by the conflict in Kashmir. Several regional interstate confrontations that risked escalation, were caused by the radical revisionist challenges that are encouraged by Pakistan but may originate independently.