

Exploring Non-Traditional Security Threats as a Bridge to Conflict Resolution Between Pakistan and India

Nidaa Shahid

Associate Director, Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: info@casslhr.com

Ameer Abdullah Khan 

Senior Research Associate, Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding: baloch.ameerabdullah@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the role of non-traditional security threats as potential catalysts for cooperation and conflict management between Pakistan and India. Non-traditional security threats such as socio-economic disparities, resource scarcity, large-scale migration, environmental degradation, and humanitarian crises, transcend national borders to challenge the traditional notions of adversarial relationships. This paper explores how shared vulnerabilities and interdependencies between the two states necessitate collaborative efforts despite historical animosities. The paper proposes workable policy considerations, including the development of regional disaster management frameworks and joint research initiatives, to augment cooperation amidst longstanding political tensions. The analysis highlights the potential of this cooperation to lead towards conflict management and resolution. This paper also provides insights into pathways for sustainable peace and regional stability.

Key Words: Non-Traditional Security Threats, Pakistan-India Relations, Regional Cooperation, Conflict Management, Sustainable Peace.

1. Introduction

South Asia, a region located at the cross-roads of Global North and Global South, has historically served as a bridge linking the East and West. This unique position makes it ground-zero for the interplay of global power rivalries. Powers such as the United States (US), former Soviet Union, China and the Great Britain have all viewed this region with great interest at one time or the other in a bid to dominate it.

This is perhaps one of the reasons that the dominant security discourse in this region has remained that of traditional security challenges with great powers pitting the South Asian states against each other. This discourse has not left much room for the

leaderships of South Asian states, especially in Pakistan and India, to focus their energies on a number of non-traditional security challenges.

Non-Traditional security threats are typically understood to encompass a wide array of non-military challenges which can have an impact on the security of states and societies. The differentiation between traditional security threats and non-traditional security threats varies as different scholars view through different lens. According to the Chinese General Xiong Guangkai, these threats transcend national boundaries, are transnational in character, go beyond the military sphere, and often appear suddenly and unexpectedly¹.

Various scholars have looked at the definition and scope of the matter from various perspectives, each highlighting different facets of this complex issue. Richard Ullman, one of the earliest proponents of broadening the concepts of security has defined non-traditional security as 'anything which can degrade the quality of life of people or narrow the range of policy options available to the leadership, private or non-governmental entities within a state'.²

Berry Buzan, a pivotal figure of the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, defines non-traditional security as, "Challenges to the security of human societies stemming from non-military sources such as climate change, infectious diseases, terrorism, and economic instability."³

Paul Williams, viewing the non-traditional security threats from the lens of international relations and conflict studies describes non-traditional security challenges as threats to national and international security that emerge from non-military sources, often involving transnational dynamics including environmental degradation, migration and large-scale pandemics.⁴ His definition primarily focuses on the environment related aspect of non-traditional security.

In Pakistan and India's case, socio-economic disparities; food and water scarcity; as well as weak and underdeveloped economic infrastructure are among the top non-traditional challenges, many stemming from the historical legacy of the British colonial rule. Lately, environmental degradation has added another element to the non-traditional challenges in this region.

This regional discourse also includes historical animosity; whereby traditional security challenges continue to dominate. Traditional rivalries, political and economic policies have compelled the two states to allocate the bulk of resources towards their respective state-centric security paradigms. A significant portion of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)'s of both states is allocated to their defence budgets and other non-developmental expenditures, leaving minimal resources to

¹ Dr Raja Muhammad Khan, "Non-Traditional Security Threats to South Asia," Margalla Papers, (2009), 51, <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/issue/download/4/218>.

² Ullman, Richard H. "Redefining Security." *International Security* 8, no. 1 (1983): 129. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538489>.

³ Andrew T. H. Tan, J. D. Kenneth Boutin, "Non-traditional Security Issues in Southeast Asia", Select Pub. for Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies U of California, 2001

⁴ Paul Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge; 2nd edition (May 17, 2012), 37.

address non-traditional threats. This practice not only perpetuates societal deprivation but also exacerbates inter-state conflicts and rivalries.

Traditional security challenges carry high stakes and thus leave little room for the two adversaries to negotiate and give leverages. Non-traditional challenges, on the other hand, offer a plethora of opportunities for cooperation and mutual benefit, without the encumbrance of historical and political baggage. By shifting their focus to non-traditional security threats and adopting a collaborative approach, these states can mitigate the trust deficit and enhance their collective security.

While maintaining a level of deterrence for traditional security threats remains important, however, a concerted effort to address non-traditional security threats through regional cooperation in the short-term and through conflict management and resolution in the longer-run is also crucial.

The paper examines the non-traditional security challenges in Pakistan and India as well as the underlying causes of these threats to propose cooperative strategies to address them. The paper provides a deeper understanding of how Pakistan and India can achieve sustainable peace and development by expanding the ambit of their relationship beyond traditional military challenges to include collaboration for non-traditional security threats. It will also look at the potential of non-traditional security threats to be a conduit for conflict management between Pakistan and India.

2. Major Non-Traditional Security Threats Affecting Pakistan and India

The existing military-centric security landscape between Pakistan and India is increasingly being characterised by threats that transcend not only military paradigm but also traditional land boundaries. Not only are these issues all human centric, they also undermine the national security of these states on a more day-to-day basis as compared to traditional military security issues which arise from time to time.

2.1. Socio-Economic Disparities

Socio-economic disparity is a major challenge in both countries, manifesting through various domains. These include income inequality, access to education and healthcare. In India, this disparity is quite telling, with the top ten percent controlling a disproportionate majority of the resources.⁵ Adding to the wealth disparity are issues such as the brutal caste system, with people from the lower castes lacking access to basic human needs, as well as the divide between urban and rural centres and the gender bias. While the government in India has been boasting economic revival and rapid economic recovery, these policies have benefitted a select few, with the majority of the population struggling with poverty besides a lack of basic human amenities.⁶ Moreover, the marginalisation of the lower castes in India hampers national growth with a substantial portion of the workforce remaining underutilised or engaged in low-productivity and menial tasks owing to their blood status.

⁵ "Socio-Economic Inequality in India," Dhirshri IAS, 13 Dec 2023, <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-news-editorials/socio-economic-inequality-in-india>.

⁶ "India's Economy: The Good, Bad and Ugly in Six Charts," BBC, 30 Apr 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-68823827>.

The socio-economic development in Pakistan is similarly elusive. Income inequality has increased in both rural and urban areas of the country in the last twenty years; however, the magnitude of the problem remains greater in rural areas thus leading to urban-rural divide as well as income inequality. The income share of the top twenty percent of the urban population has increased by 5.7 percent in the past twenty years.⁷ This socio-economic disparity can lead to further societal fragmentation.

The elite capture of resources and political influences in both countries further entrench this disparity making this a significant non-traditional security threat in both nations. This type of inequality undermines societal cohesion and fuels discontent. The disenchantment creates fertile grounds for unrest and conflict. This can be addressed as a bilateral issue with relevant policy-makers from both states coming together to foster dialogue which spans across the border to dispel socio-economic disparities as a mutually beneficial target. This will not only enhance social stability and foster growth, but can also lead to better relations between the two states.

2.2. Access to Nutritious Food and Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is another significant challenge facing both India and Pakistan. This encompasses various dimensions, including the availability of food, access to nutritious sustenance, utilisation and stability of food sources.⁸ Since both India and Pakistan are agricultural countries, sustainable agricultural productivity plays a significant factor in food security in both states.

The disparities in access to food across different regions of India are quite stark. The National Family Health Survey indicates that 35.5 percent children under the age of five in India suffer from stunted growth, a leading symptom of chronic malnutrition.⁹ Likewise, the percentage of children between the ages of 6-23 months who receive adequate diet is only 12 percent.¹⁰

Pakistan, on the other hand, is not faring much differently and faces similar food security challenges. According to a 2024 survey by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, approximately 8.6 million people (24 percent) in different parts of the country are facing high levels of acute food insecurity with 1.6 million people in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and 7 million people in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis).¹¹

⁷ Durdana Qaisar Gillani, "Socio-Economic Disparities and an Imperative for Inclusive Economic Growth In Pakistan", *Journal Of The Research Society Of Pakistan* Volume 56, Issue No 1, (2019), <https://prdb.pk/article/socio-economic-disparities-and-an-imperative-for-inclusive-e-1945>

⁸ Muhammad Umar Farrukh et al., "Mapping the Food Security Studies in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: Review of Research Priorities and Gaps," *Global Food Security* 26 (September 1, 2020): 100370, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2020.100370>.

⁹ "National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)" District Level Housing Survey, Dec 2023, https://rchiips.org/nfhs/factsheet_NFHS-5.shtml.

¹⁰ "National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)."

¹¹ "Pakistan: Acute Food Insecurity Situation for March - June 2024 and Projection for July - November 2024 | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification," 23 May 2024, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1157024/>.

In both countries, the situation is particularly dire in rural areas owing to issues of access and unequal distribution. These statistics highlight the urgent need for policies that ensure food availability as well as its nutritional quality. This is another potential low-hanging fruit, ripe for collaboration between Pakistan and India as a transboundary humanitarian issue. Once resolved, this will benefit the populations of both sides.

2.3. Water Security as a Non-Traditional Security Threat

Water, as the main source of living, is of immense importance. Contention over water resources has been a long-standing dispute between India and Pakistan. This issue oscillates between traditional and non-traditional as the contention over shared river systems has led to military confrontation between the two sides, thus elevating its status to a traditional military threat.

However, in recent years, water has emerged as a significant non-traditional challenge for both countries as well. The availability and quality of water in this region has been under duress due to climate change, increasing population, land degradation, and urbanisation. All these have led to the over-extraction and pollution of available water resources, increasing the scarcity of already-scarce drinkable water.

In Pakistan, only 36 percent of the population has access to safely managed water.¹² This issue is likely to get worse in the coming years due to population growth, urbanisation and global warming. This will, in turn, impact not only food security but also municipal and industrial water needs etc. India, on the other hand, is not faring much better either, with approximately 600 million people experiencing high to extreme water stress causing more than 200,000 deaths annually.¹³

Both countries rely heavily on the contentious shared river system, which includes the Indus River, deemed to be the lifeline for populations of Pakistan and India. The water issue in this case also has a political and bilateral dimension stemming from the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 which governs the distribution of the five Indus Rivers between the two states. Issues, including dam construction and unlawful diversion of water by the upper-riparian state, in this case India, have challenged the treaty, leading to increased water stresses.

2.4. Humanitarian Crises

Humanitarian crises encompass the bulk of what constitutes as non-traditional security challenges in India and Pakistan. These crises transcend the traditional notions of security and encompass issues such as pandemics, climate change and environmental degradation, migration etc.

On their own, these issues can be tackled at a unilateral level, however the geographical proximity, environmental contiguity and sharing of natural resources between Pakistan and India warrant a more integrated approach for better handling and mitigation. This integration of efforts can also lead towards better relations

¹² “Pakistan,” Pakistan | Globalwaters.org, <https://www.globalwaters.org/current-page>.

¹³ “India’s Thirst for Improved Water Security | East Asia Forum,” February 26, 2024, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2024/02/27/indias-thirst-for-improved-water-security/>.

in the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons, as seen in 2022, heat waves, smog and melting glaciers are some of the most glaring consequences facing the country.¹⁷

In a similar fashion, India too is grappling with the devastating impacts of climate change with weather patterns becoming unpredictable and extreme. Since Pakistan and India share border proximity, the impact of climate change is a shared concern with similar implications including risks to human health, agricultural productivity, urban flooding and overwhelming of emergency services.

In this regard, enhanced early warning systems, robust infrastructure, and community-based adaptation plans are essential components of a comprehensive response to the escalating climate threats.¹⁸ All these efforts can also be scaled up to the bilateral level as a conduit for better risk mitigation and eventual conflict management between the two states.

2.6. Large-Scale Migration

Another subset of climate change and environmental degradation is that of population displacement and migration due to necessity. As sea levels rise or rivers flood due to unprecedented rainfall, the population living in the vicinity of these areas is forced to flee their lands and homes.

The 2022 floods in Pakistan affected more than 33 million people, out of which 7.9 million were displaced. Around 660,000 individuals had to move into relief camps and informal sites.¹⁹ Such incidents not only strain resources of regions hosting the internally displaced population, but can also lead to long-term socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, poverty, and unequal distribution of available resources, all contributing to societal degradation.

India also faces its fair share of internal displacements owing to climate related events and otherwise. The Indian states of Bihar and Assam are frequently affected by climate disasters. For example, the 2018 Kerala floods resulted in massive displacement of around one million people.²⁰

In addition to internal migration induced by environmental disasters, both Pakistan and India also play host to a substantial number of refugees from neighbouring states. This adds another layer of complexity to an already challenging situation. Pakistan has been hosting the Afghan refugees for many decades thereby burdening its socio-economic wellbeing. Similarly, India also hosts Sri Lankans, Tibetans and Rohingyas as refugees. While the influx of migrants and refugees is a challenge in its own right, it also leads to traditional security challenges, including extremism, illegal border crossing, drugs and arms smuggling etc.

This is another challenge which is shared by both states and can be a potential area of collaboration for not only sharing best practices but also for formulating joint

¹⁷ "Climate Change in South Asia."

¹⁸ "Extreme Heat Impacting Millions across India and Pakistan, UN News," 29 Apr 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1117272>.

¹⁹ "Revised Pakistan 2022 Floods Response Plan Final Report, OCHA," December 18, 2023, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/pakistan/revised-pakistan-2022-floods-response-plan-final-report-issued-15-dec-2023>.

²⁰ NDMA India, [@ndmaindia], "#KeralaFloods2018 Report as on 21 Aug 2018 Tweet, Twitter, August 21, 2018, <https://x.com/ndmaindia/status/1031796290219257857>.

policies at the regional level for better management of displaced population as well as refugees.

3. Cooperation for Non-Traditional Threats as a Catalyst for Conflict Management

In Pakistan and India's case, despite the single-minded focus on traditional and military threats, the challenges confronting both states transcend far beyond that. This necessitates an innovative approach for conflict management between the two, beyond viewing it through traditional security goggles. One of the ways to address these transnational and non-traditional threats is to look beyond the typical understanding of the adversarial relationship. This can include a more holistic cooperative mechanism between the two states which takes into account the security interests of not just the self but also the other.

To understand the potential of non-traditional security threats as potential catalysts for cooperation it is necessary to identify their common features to delimit them from traditional threats. Traditional security issues are straightforward and can therefore be prevented, through deterrence, or dealt with through military actions. The solution to traditional threats is also simple and straightforward: amassing greater military means grants states greater strength to both prevent and deal with these threats. Non-traditional threats, on the other hand, can originate within one state and travel without restriction to the other. Tackling non-traditional problems require states to cooperate, regionally or even globally, for any effective adaptation and mitigation. Since these are non-military in nature, the ways in which they are dealt with is also inherently different (Table 1).²¹

²¹ Sebastian Biba, "New Concerns, More Cooperation? How Non-Traditional Security Issues Affect Sino-Indian Relations," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 45, no. 3 (December 1, 2016): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261604500301>.

Table 1: *Comparison of Key Features of Traditional and Non-Traditional Security*

	Traditional Security	Non-Traditional Security
Theoretical foundations	Realism (and liberalism)	Critical approaches (e.g. Copenhagen School)
Type of threat	Military	Non-military (e.g. socio-political, socio-economic, and environmental)
Referent object	State	Community (may include states) and individual
Incentive	Survival and physical safety of the state	Survival of state entwined with human survival, well-being, and dignity
Scope	International	Transnational
Prevention	Possible (e.g. deterrence)	Difficult; mitigation and adaptation
Solution	Diplomatic and military; does not require cooperation	Non-military; requires cooperation

In the table, the last point about the requirement for cooperation as a solution for dealing with non-traditional challenges is a fundamental one. Cooperation forms the cornerstone of any policy to deal with these threats.

In the same respect, interdependence between states to tackle shared vulnerabilities can be termed as the perfect conduit for cooperation. This necessitates a collaborative approach in spite of any traditional rivalries as no state can effectively deal with such threats in isolation. The combined global response to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the regional cooperation in ensuring that the vaccines reach the desired destination is a prime example of states cooperating with one another for a global-common despite political or military differences.

The Paris Agreement is another instance where a shared non-traditional threat and mutual vulnerability led to countries with contesting political ideologies and diverging economic interests to come together. The climate change conference known as COP28, is another instance where states gather to tackle the issue of climate change in a cooperative manner.²²

Tackling mutually destructive non-traditional security threats in a cooperative manner can also serve as a trust-building measure between traditional rivals. By working together on issues of mutual concern, states can develop a positive inter-

²² “UN Climate Change Conference - United Arab Emirates, UNFCCC,” 12 Jan 2024, https://unfccc.int/cop28?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI7LinmNeHhwMVD2IBAh1CIAtnEAAAYASAAEGJzKfD_BwE.

state relationship. Once firmly established, this can spill over into other domains such as diplomacy and conflict management and eventually conflict resolution.

4. Impediments to Cooperation Between Pakistan and India

While both states have intermittently collaborated for non-traditional threats in the past, however, these efforts did not last long due to broader geopolitical tensions between the two. For example, after the earthquake in Gujrat in India in 2001, Pakistan was quick to offer humanitarian assistance and aid to India in a gesture of goodwill. Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2005 floods in Pakistan, which also affected some areas in India, both sides again collaborated for humanitarian assistance.²³ However, this spirit of humanity did not result in any joint long-term effort for mutually beneficial bilateral disaster management strategies.

In addition, joint environmental initiatives have also been proposed from time to time for tackling shared concerns. In this regard, the two sides have discussed establishment of transboundary conservation areas which span across the border to protect biodiversity and manage shared natural resources.

However, these efforts have been overshadowed by security concerns along the border, differing national policies for environmental conservation, a lack of institutional framework for such cooperation and a lack of political will to move forward in this regard.

Central to these challenges is a profound lack of trust between the two sides. While pockets of trust have existed between the leaderships at one time or another, however there has not been a consistent effort towards building lasting trust. Moreover, the two sides have not held a formal dialogue since the halting of the India-Pakistan Composite Dialogue. In addition to this, since India's revocation of Article 370 affording the special status of Kashmir, the two sides have not had High Commissioners in each other's capitals.²⁴ One of the major reasons for this lack of trust is the continued hyper-focus on traditional security and military issues which leaves very little room for negotiations on any other front.

Moreover, the lack of any economic interdependence between the two states is another significant factor. Economic ties and interdependence often foster a level of mutual interest and investment which can lead to conflict resolution. For example, despite the severity of the border clashes across the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the confrontation between China and India did not escalate to a major conflict owing, in large part, to the \$136 billion bilateral trade between the two states.²⁵ This created a level of economic interdependence which led to a more restrained response from both sides. However, Pakistan and India have not developed a conducive economic relationship which could become a stabilising factor.

²³ "White flags at the LoC", 7 Nov 2005, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2005/nov/07nlook.htm>

²⁴ Umbreen Javaid and Naseem Sahrai, "Conflict Management between Pakistan and India: Challenges and Failures," *South Asian Studies*, 251, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/csas/PDF/16%20Umbreen%20Javaid_v31_no1_jan-jun2016.

²⁵ François Godement, "The Hot Peace Between China and India," *The Diplomat*, 12 April 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/the-hot-peace-between-china-and-india/>.

Another major impediment to cooperation and subsequently better management of the conflict is the lack of political will, especially from the current Indian government, in fostering better relations with Pakistan. While the two governments currently in power in Pakistan and India, namely the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PMLN) and the Bharatya Janta Party (BJP), have enjoyed cordial and cooperative relations in the past, however, the current leadership on the Indian side does not seem invested in building any positive relations at the government-to-government level. In this scenario, where the leadership is not ready to work towards dialogue and conflict management, working on collaborative solutions at the lower tiers of the government to deal with non-traditional security threats becomes vital.

5. Non-Traditional Security Threats as Catalyst for Indo-Pak Conflict Resolution

Buzan argues that people do not coincide on a single idea of security due to their moral, ideological, and normative differences.²⁶ The same is the case with Pakistan and India. However, in this scenario, the two sides can be incentivised to work interdependently to achieve common goals or objectives. The intent in this case is to reach a mutually acceptable outcome which will be beneficial to both parties. Cooperation for non-traditional challenges is not a zero-sum game, unlike traditional security issues. Through this paradigm, when problems inevitably emerge, the common enemy is the problem rather than each other, leading to a level of trust which is severely lacking in the current state of relations between both countries.

The outcome of such type of mutual-interest-based negotiations is one where credibility is built between both parties as they develop a relationship based on trust. Some of the areas of non-traditional security where the interests of both parties align and which have the potential to become conduits for cooperation and eventually conflict management have been delineated below.

5.1. Economic Interdependence, Poverty Alleviation, and Conflict Management

Non-traditional security threats, notably socio-economic disparities in both states, stress the need for greater economic cooperation. Unlike traditional political tensions, fostering economic integration and interdependence can help facilitate mechanisms for trade, investment and business-to-business ties. One of the best existing conduits for this integration is the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which has so far been burdened by non-tariff barriers and lingering political impediments.

Moreover, creating a conducive environment for economic cooperation can lead the way for both sides to foster relations at the people-to-people level. Mutual initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation, in particular through microfinance programmes can further strengthen economic interdependence while also paving the way for conflict mitigation. By aligning their economic interests and working towards common developmental goals, India and Pakistan can build trust and credibility. Overtime, this trust can form the foundation for effective conflict management, where disputes

²⁶ Buzan, Barry, and Lene Hansen. *"The Evolution of International Security Studies*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4, <https://ir101.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/buzan-the-evolution-of-international-security-studies-compressed>

are approached not as a zero-sum equation but as opportunities for cooperative problem-solving.

5.2. Water and Food Security: Enhancing Cooperation and Conflict Management

Water and food scarcity are two of the most important non-traditional security threats facing Pakistan and India, both of which demand bilateral cooperation.

The Indus Water Treaty, a foundational agreement for water sharing between the two states, has been politicised due to competing interests and traditional political rivalries. This has led to compounded impacts on both states. Collaborative management of this shared resource as well as joint infrastructure development which does not impede the water availability to the other state are vital in addressing these challenges.

One of the ways to do so is to strengthen the existing articles of the Treaty to involve the local communities in the decision-making processes, thus strengthening people-to-people contact. Joint and collaborative research for sustainable water practices can also open up crucial avenues for mutual benefit and long-term sustainability.

An intertwined issue with water security is that of food security. As agricultural countries, both Pakistan and India can benefit from collaborative research on enhancing the output. This can include technology and knowledge transfer as well as sharing of best practices to bolster crop productivity and mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change on agricultural yields.

Additionally, shared goals can make parties more inclined towards finding mutually beneficial solutions to existing or emerging disputes. It can also establish a framework where both countries gain economic and social benefits through the shared management of critical resources.

By leveraging water and food security cooperation through an interest-based negotiation framework, India and Pakistan can lay the foundation for sustainable peace and stability. This collaborative approach not only addresses pressing non-traditional security threats but also promotes regional development and resilience. Ultimately, fostering mutual understanding and shared prosperity through joint initiatives in water and food security can pave the way for better conflict management and resolution as well as enhanced regional stability.²⁷

5.3. Environmental and Disaster Management as a Conduit for Conflict Management

Climate change, as an inherently transnational issue, necessitates a collaborative approach by states at the regional and global levels. The recent development of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response Agreement is a prudent example of states formalising their informal collaborations.²⁸

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²⁸ “ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme 2021-2025 - ASEAN Main Portal,” Dec 2020, <https://asean.org/book/asean-agreement-on-disaster-management-and-emergency-response-aadmer-work-programme-2021-2025/>.

Disaster management and mitigation is a shared concern between Pakistan and India, one where both countries can find common ground for cooperation without any of the traditional military baggage. Collaborative efforts for the development of disaster relief infrastructure, as well as flood management and early warning systems, can pave the way for even greater environmental collaboration in the future.

Apart from managing disasters induced by climate change, both states can also collaborate for climate conservation including reforestation programmes to restore degraded ecosystems and promotion of biodiversity both on land and water. Their previous attempt at establishing a transboundary conservation area to protect biodiversity can be utilised as a jumping board to kick-start the conversation on this issue.

Through joint tackling of the climate change induced problems and development of mutual risk mitigation strategies, both states can increase their reliance on each other, leading to greater mutual trust in the longer run. This approach will also be effective for shifting the focus from a relationship based on competition to one where both recognise the benefits of working together for common goals.

Environmental cooperation can be further solidified into concrete confidence building measures fostering a stakeholder's mentality, whereby preservation of environmental disasters becomes a shared priority, leading to similar collaboration in other areas.

6. Policy Considerations

Below are a few policy considerations for Pakistani and Indian stakeholders to develop shared policies for mutually managing and mitigating non-traditional security threats as a conduit for cooperation and conflict management.

6.1. Development of Regional Disaster Management Frameworks

Much like the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management, South Asian countries can develop a regional agreement, under the aegis of the hibernating SAARC framework, to enhance disaster management capabilities within the region. As two of the major powers in South Asia, Pakistan and India can be co-sponsors of this initiative. Such joint collaborations will pave the way for better relations between the two states in the future.

6.2. Joint Research on Water Management

Joint research initiatives between Pakistan and India for sustainable water practices, focused on improving the irrigation efficiency and water conservation, can be a good starting point for managing the current deficits in the Indus Water Treaty. Such measures can be supported through bilateral funding mechanisms and academic partnerships to share best practices and develop mutually beneficial techniques.

6.3. Expanding Agricultural Cooperation

Development of joint initiatives for enhancing the agricultural practices in both states can be a good and benign initial conduit for improving relations. This collaboration can include technology development and knowledge sharing for crop diversification, as well as utilisation of emerging technologies for better crop production. This can also include exchange programmes for farmers besides other joint research projects.

6.4. Facilitating People-to-People Contacts

One of the main tenets of mitigating non-traditional security issues is the development of better people-to-people relations between the two states. This will not only facilitate awareness about non-traditional security concerns of the other side, but can also lead to better understanding and mutual trust.

6.5. Collaboration at Tracks I, 1.5 and II

For Pakistan and India, where the governments are not currently talking to each other at the Track-1 level, the 1.5 and 2 Tracks become very important for exchanging ideas, developing trust and mutual understanding specially for mitigating non-traditional threats. Such exchanges are essential for not only addressing the existing challenges but also for creating long-term sustainable cooperation.

7. Conclusion

The traditional security relationship between Pakistan and India has been longstanding and continues to challenge any and all efforts towards crisis management and cooperation. In this scenario, addressing non-traditional security challenges becomes vital for both states not only for mitigating their impact but also for fostering better relations.

Addressing these issues can also offer pathways for the two states to come to the negotiating table for cooperation and to promote regional peace, which in itself is a shared common interest. Keeping in mind the reluctance of the current Indian leadership in reopening formal conflict resolution channels with Pakistan, the path for conflict management can flow from cooperation in this non-traditional domain. While Pakistan and India continue to grapple with these issues in their isolated silos, a more prudent strategy envisages joint collaborative efforts not only for mitigating these threats but also for fostering better relations.

This can pave the way for both states to work towards areas which can be mutually beneficial and where negotiations can actually lead to substantive agreements. Traditional military threats, with their zero-sum results, offer limited pathways for cooperation, conflict management and resolution. On the other hand, non-traditional security threats are not only transnational by their very nature, but also offer positive-sum benefits for both states. Joint collaboration and development of mutually beneficial frameworks to mitigate non-traditional threats can pave the way for cooperation and conflict management in the short to medium run and conflict resolution in the long run between India and Pakistan.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

Funding

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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