

BOOK REVIEWS

Pakistan-India Relations: Fractured Past, Uncertain Future

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary (Book Corner Pakistan, 2025) 320

Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary's new book, titled *Pakistan-India Relations: Fractured Past, Uncertain Future*, provides a timely and comprehensively informed account of one of South Asia's most enduring rivalries between two regional nuclear powers, Pakistan and India. Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary has dedicated almost four decades to the Foreign Service of Pakistan, culminating in his appointment as Foreign Secretary from 2013 to 2017. His distinguished career also includes serving as Ambassador of Pakistan to both the United States and the Netherlands, as well as holding the position of Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the United Nations in New York. In addition, he has represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as its spokesperson.

Drawing upon decades of diplomatic experience, Chaudhary's book unpacks the historical, political, and strategic factors that shape Pakistan-India ties. His work traces the roots of Muslim-Hindu nationalism to the sixteenth century, leading to the partition of British India into Pakistan and India in 1947, and post-independence political developments climaxing in the most recent episodes of crisis and confrontation of 2025.

The book contains eight chapters in a structured manner, from historical context to contemporary geopolitical developments. It offers readers a clear, policy-oriented, and well-researched analysis of bilateral ties defined by mistrust, competing nationalisms, unresolved disputes, and intermittent yet fragile attempts at reconciliation. The book is written with conviction, clarity, and analytical precision, giving a blend of history, present, and forward-looking strategic guidance. The book, unlike most literature available, is not a polemical account but rationally advocates the perspective of Pakistan, security concerns, and diplomatic posture. He criticizes India for undermining efforts at consolidating peace with Pakistan through its rigid strategic outlook, domestic political shifts. He also points out India's use of terrorism as a political tool, and its reluctance to address the Kashmir dispute and its pursuit of regional hegemonic designs.

The introductory chapter titled, ‘Historical Overview’ lays out a concise historical explanation of factors shaping Muslim and Hindu nationalism over centuries, and how this historical baggage continues to dictate bilateral ties between the two countries. The chapter briefly touches upon the challenges faced by Pakistan as a nascent state and how both states got themselves embroiled in an enduring rivalry and mistrust, resulting in the wars of 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999. The author mentions the diplomatic turning points, including the bifurcation of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, in 1971, the Simla Agreement, Indian nuclearization of South Asia by conducting nuclear tests in 1974, the Lahore Declaration, and post-1998 nuclear tests. The chapter ends with a discussion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s era of hyper-Hindu nationalism and its practical manifestation during the May 2025 crisis. Moreover, the author argues that India’s effort to engage Pakistan in a full-fledged conventional war below the nuclear overhang would increase the risk of nuclear war in South Asia.

In Chapter 2, titled ‘The Leadership Factor,’ the writer explains the important role of leadership in managing the India-Pakistan relations. Starting from Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to contemporary leaders, such as Prime Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif and Narendra Modi, he explains how leadership personalities, political incentives, and domestic pressures have influenced and shaped bilateral ties. He notes that PM Vajpayee’s visit of 1999 and Musharraf-Manmohan discussions in the mid-2000s gave a ray of hope, yet these overtures were fragile, often undermined by mutual mistrust.

In Chapter 3 titled ‘The Kashmir Dispute’, the author has introduced the Kashmir dispute as a central bone of contention between the two states. He highlights Pakistan’s position of recognizing Kashmir as an internationally recognized dispute under United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and must be resolved in line with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. This chapter offers a clear critique of India’s evolving strategy in Kashmir, from its unilateral measures to the illegal alteration of the legal and demographic status of the region.

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The author, in Chapter 4 of the book, ‘Shadows of Terrorism,’ discusses in detail the terrorism narrative, which is often used by India to selectively avoid meaningful dialogue with Pakistan. While he acknowledges Pakistan’s internal struggle with militancy, he outlines how effectively Pakistan has taken extensive measures to dismantle terrorist networks and has cooperated with the international community in combating the menace of terrorism.

In Chapter 5, titled ‘Geopolitical Crosswinds,’ the author explains how the major global developments, including the World Wars, the Cold War, decolonization, and America’s unipolar moment, leading to the spread of liberal democracy and market economies through the Washington Consensus, had implications for the world, including South Asia. He then explores how 9/11, instability in Afghanistan, US-China rivalry, and India’s hegemonic designs in South Asia have influenced Pakistan-India relations.

In Chapter 6, titled ‘May 2025 Confrontation,’ the author explains how this episode of heightened tensions risked escalating into a larger conflict, possibly a nuclear war. He holds India responsible for its attempts to engage Pakistan in conventional warfare below nuclear overhang and argues that India learned it cannot overwhelm Pakistan even at the conventional level. He reaffirms that nuclear South Asia cannot afford adventurism or the weaponization of domestic political agendas. He expresses his concerns about the weakening of rules-based order leading to militarization and arms build-up, which can pose dangers to the regional stability of South Asia.

In Chapter 7, titled ‘Cold Peace - The Struggle for Peaceful Coexistence’, the writer highlights that the weakening of the unipolar system is compelling many states to reconfigure their alliances, reshape traditional alliances, and intensification of great-power competition. He argues that this polarized environment should push India and Pakistan to create conditions for protecting the region from ‘emerging geopolitical rivalries’ and growing ‘geoeconomic disarray’.

Chapter 8 of the book ‘Forging a New Dawn’ stated that there is an urgent need for both countries to create pathways toward peace and harmony for the people of Pakistan and India. For peace and security, he proposes a

three-point sequential agenda of bilateral engagement to minimize the risks of a kinetic confrontation. For lasting peace, he emphasizes that resolving the Kashmir dispute is important, followed by a mutual understanding and cooperation on joint counterterrorism efforts. He also calls for sustained and substantive nuclear dialogues to strengthen strategic stability. Among Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), he maintains that the efficient working of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) is a key prerequisite.

In ‘Concluding Thoughts,’ the author reiterates the main argument of the book and states that peaceful coexistence between two nuclear adversaries is the only viable path forward. He argues that this can only be possible if bilateral ties are not interpreted through the historical baggage of hostility and enmity but through the enduring interests and aspirations of their citizens.

The writer has enhanced the informed scholarship of the book by incorporating interviews of academicians, politicians, and leading national and international researchers, making the book an impartial and non-partisan asset for readers. By accepting shortcomings on Pakistan’s part as well, the author has provided a candid avenue for discussion for both parties to find common ground and revisit their strategic discourses.

However, one aspect that was clearly overlooked was the one-sided explanation of the evolution of Muslim nationalism in South Asia. The writer has confined his research to the political struggle led by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan without mentioning at length the Muslim religious movements, such as the work of Darul Uloom Deoband, the Barelvi Movement, and the Khilafat Movement, among others. It is important to study these movements as they are essential for understanding Pakistan’s current strained relations with Afghanistan and the cross-border religious linkages between Indian and Pakistani seminaries, which continue to shape bilateral ties. A detailed scholarly analysis of these movements would help Pakistan better address the multiple dimensions of rising extremism and terrorism within Pakistani society today.

Overall, the book is a valuable contribution to the literature on Pakistan-India bilateral relations from a distinctly Pakistani perspective. The main

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argument of the book is that the bilateral dialogue, though challenging, remains indispensable for peaceful coexistence. Without sustained engagements, the bilateral relationship would likely remain trapped in recurring cycles of tension and escalation.

Reviewed by Mobeen Jafar Mir, Research Officer at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad.