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The present study has focused on the origin of disputes between India and Pakistan leading to four armed conflicts at different points of time and the US policy response towards them. The US responses to these conflicts were largely shaped by its national interest, Cold War dynamics, prevailing geo-strategic considerations and the nature of its bilateral relationships with India and Pakistan. Consequently, there was no uniform pattern of US responses to four armed conflicts fought by India and Pakistan.

When the first Indo-Pakistani armed conflict took place over the issue of Kashmir in October 1947, the US was deeply involved in Cold War politics. Due to its preoccupation with 'Containment of Communism', the US initially avoided playing an active role in the resolution of the conflict. Kashmir was seen as a local conflict fought in a remote area with little strategic significance. South Asia appeared far removed from the major theatres of Cold War confrontation and its place was almost negligible in the basic Cold War calculus of the US. The focus of the Truman Administration was mainly concentrated on Western Europe, East Asia and the Middle East, given the high-level disorder and instability prevailing in those areas of strategic significance. In fact, in relative terms India and Pakistan were considered peripheral to core US national security interest and foreign policy priorities at that time. At the same time, the US was equally aware of the alarming power vacuum and the socio-political instability in the region generated by the abrupt termination of British rule.

The Truman Administration was concerned that the prevailing unsettled situation could make the region vulnerable to Communist penetration. In this context, the US
emphasized the need for India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes bilaterally through dialogue and end the conflict soon, so as to prevent any possible Communist encroachment to the region. Thus, the broad objectives of the US policy were to facilitate the resolution of Indo-Pakistani conflict, promote regional cooperation and ultimately to orient both the countries towards the US-led Western bloc, and away from Communist bloc.

The Truman Administration hoped to pursue those goals through a variety of diplomatic, economic and military means, all of which were to be developed in coordination with Britain. Initially, Washington supported the British initiative in the affairs of the region avoiding any direct American involvement and followed a policy of neutrality and even-handedness towards India and Pakistan.

What are the factors, which contributed to such a policy decision? As already mentioned, the US was already over-committed globally due to its policy of 'Containment of Communism'. Washington could ill afford to devote its energy and resources to a region, which lay on the periphery of American foreign policy priorities. Secondly, there was a convergence of American and British interests in the region. Washington calculated that Britain could play a more effective role in the South Asian state of affairs and in attaining the necessary policy objectives in the region. Due to its historic ties with South Asia and the continuing connection through the British Commonwealth, Britain then possessed substantial influence in the region. Thirdly, the Truman Administration contemplated that open support to either India or Pakistan would inevitably alienate the other, and hopelessly complicate the prospects of an amicable resolution of prevailing disputes in the region. Lastly, an American initiative could attract Soviet attention and give the latter a pretext to interfere in the region. In view of these considerations, the Truman Administration adopted a policy
of exerting indirect influence towards South Asia, of working through the British to maintain a pro-Western balance of power in the region.

However, contrary to the US expectation, Britain’s mediation role proved ineffective and London failed to accomplish the task envisaged by Washington. As no early end to the fighting in Kashmir could be achieved and the prolonged conflict in Kashmir headed towards a stalemate, Washington reluctantly accepted increased responsibility to stop the fighting and resolve the dispute. Truman Administration perceived that the resolution of Kashmir dispute was the essential prerequisite for regional stability in South Asia, which was an important American policy goal in the region. Nevertheless, wary of over-involvement, the US policy makers clearly opted for a limited American role. Even this limited US engagement failed to find a solution to the conflict. Gradually Washington realized that it could no longer avoid deeper involvement in the region. Such perception was reinforced by reports of renewed fighting and the likelihood of an all-out India-Pakistan war in the absence of an early cease-fire. The US was also worried because of the gradual erosion of the Western influence in Asia, continuing military triumphs of the Communist forces in the Chinese civil war and the colonial conflicts in Indochina and Indonesia. These factors elevated the importance of early settlement of the Indo-Pak conflict in the foreign policy priorities of the US.

Ultimately Washington became directly engaged in the negotiation process and played a lead role to settle the conflict and stop fighting. From this analysis it is quite clear that there was some degree of ambiguity and inconsistency in the US policy. Initially the Truman Administration resolutely avoided any active role to end the conflict, but was equally eager to press for an early cease-fire. Even after deciding to play a direct role to find a settlement to the conflict, Washington remained wary of
over-involvement. But step-by-step, the US did play more and more active role and ultimately was able to forge a cease-fire and end the first round of Indo-Pak war. The US initially followed a neutral and even-handed approach, but it gradually started blaming India for the Kashmir imbroglio. This trend was more pronounced in the diplomatic efforts to find a Kashmir settlement after the end of the fighting.

There was a direct American connection to the second round of Indo-Pak armed conflict in 1965. When serious skirmishes broke out between the Indian and Pakistani forces in the Rann of Kutch in April 1965, Pakistan used US-supplied weapons against India. It put Washington in an awkward position. Both India and Pakistan accused each other for beginning the fighting and put its case before the US accordingly. However, without assessing who was responsible for the initiation of conflict, Washington refused to blame any party and took no definite stand on this issue. Rather it put embargo on arms supply to India and Pakistan and contemplated to impose other economic sanctions creating resentment in both the countries.

As each side considered itself the victim of aggression by the other party, both came to perceive the US action as wrong and discriminatory. Their relationship with the US got so much strained that the US was unable to play even a minor mediator role to settle the conflict. Consequently, the US once again turned to Britain, which played an active role in mediating between India and Pakistan. Both Ayub Khan and Lalbahadur Shastri signed a cease-fire agreement in London on 30 June 1965, which ended the Kutch fighting.

But this truce failed to prevent the second India-Pakistan armed conflict which took place due to Pakistan’s adventurous course of action on 5 August 1965, under the code-name *Operation Gibraltar*. When the war began on 1 September, Washington took no sides and observed the proceedings with ambivalence. Although the US was
still aligned to Pakistan through military alliances like SEATO and CENTO, the Johnson Administration dismissed the notion that it owed anything to Pakistan in a conflict with India. Thus when Pakistan presented an aide-memoir calling upon the US to uphold the 1959 bilateral agreement on military cooperation and to intervene in the war on its behalf, Washington unequivocally refused to oblige Islamabad. Instead, it followed a policy of 'studied neutrality' and extended strong support to the UN’s peace efforts.

Several factors contributed to such a policy option adopted by the US. First, the US had strained relationship with India and Pakistan and less leverage over them in the 1960s. Secondly, it was deeply involved in the Vietnam crisis. Thirdly, the American policy makers had serious reservation about the emerging trend of Pakistan’s foreign policy, especially its close relationship with Beijing. Pakistan’s China gambit undermined the US policy of ‘Containment of China’. Finally, the Johnson Administration feared that any action in favour of one would definitely alienate the other party. Thus, abstaining from any direct intervention in the war, Washington considered that staying out of the vexing Indo-Pakistan conflict and playing only an indirect and supportive role to end the conflict would be the best policy option to follow.

The US policy response to the conflict annoyed both India and Pakistan. New Delhi perceived that the US arms supply to Pakistan encouraged it to launch aggression against India. Moreover, the US failed to prevent Pakistan from using American arms in its fighting against India, despite the past assurance that Washington would do so. Washington’s even-handed approach also annoyed New Delhi, because it equated the aggressor (Pakistan) with the victim of aggression (India). Pakistan was equally furious in its reaction. Despite its military alliance with the US, the Johnson
Administration not only refused to help but also imposed arms embargo at a crucial juncture. To Islamabad it was an “act of betrayal” by an ally. Since Pakistan was almost entirely dependent on the US for arms supply, Washington’s decision to impose arms embargo was extremely crucial in determining Pakistan’s capability to sustain a long-drawn war with India.

The 1965 war gave a big jolt to the American policy makers. Since 1950’s, the US had pumped massive economic and military aid to the region. Such a policy was predicated on the belief that the US could cultivate friendly and productive relations with both India and Pakistan, resolve their bilateral disputes, bring about regional stability and eventually transform both the countries into Cold War assets. Such a belief turned out to be an illusion, which got shattered when India and Pakistan fought against each other with American arms. With both the parties angry at the US policy and criticizing Washington for the imbroglio, the failure of American policy objective was clearly manifested. In fact, the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict impelled the American strategists to begin a fundamental re-evaluation of US interests and policy priorities in the subcontinent. President Johnson appeared convinced now that the importance of India and Pakistan to broader Cold War objectives was unduly exaggerated by the previous Administrations in Washington. Thus he directed that Washington should adopt a low profile in the subcontinent and pursue more limited policy objective there. Washington’s backing of the Soviet mediation offer revealed how radically the 1965 war had shaken long-held American policy assumptions about the region.

The spirit of Tashkent proved to be short-lived as India and Pakistan got entangled in another armed confrontation in 1971. In many respects the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 stands as a watershed in the history of American relations with the Indian subcontinent. It was for the first time in the long history of Indo-Pakistan conflicts
that Washington so openly showed its distinct tilt in favouring one of the two South Asian rivals and almost came to the verge of direct military intervention. It was reflected from the dispatch of Task Force 74 spearheaded by the most powerful ship of the time — USS Enterprise, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to the Bay of Bengal. Though the Nixon Administration officially maintained that it was following a policy of neutrality towards the crisis, in reality it extended unequivocal support to Pakistan. Indeed, the contradiction between what it was saying in public and what it was doing in private, opened up a ‘credibility gap’ similar to that, which had plagued the previous Johnson Administration over Vietnam. Moreover, the American media, public and Congress were clearly opposed to the Administration’s tilt policy. But the Nixon Administration overlooking this opposition blamed India as the aggressor and openly sided with Pakistan. To bypass the arms embargo, it encouraged other friendly third countries to send military aid to Pakistan. Ultimately it dispatched Task Force 74 showing open support for Pakistan.

The Nixon Administration’s decision to tilt in favour of Pakistan was influenced by many considerations. In the first place, Pakistani role as a channel of communication to China and the incipient Sino-US détente predominantly shaped the Administration’s views on Pakistan. The Nixon White House believed that open support to Pakistan was essential to demonstrate to the Chinese that the US war willing to stand by an ally in a crisis. Secondly, distrusting the Indian war motives, the Nixon Administration was unduly apprehensive about the likely disintegration of West Pakistan. As has been discussed, Kissinger exaggerated the CIA report of 7 December 1971, which spoke of India’s territorial ambitions in West Pakistan and considered it crucial to dispatch Task Force 74 to the Bay of Bengal. Lastly, the warm
personal relationship between Nixon and Yahya Khan also impinged on White House’s soft attitude towards Islamabad.

Thus it is clear that a combination of factors – global, regional, strategic, political and even personal – conditioned the Nixon Administration’s pro-Pakistan policy during the 1971 war. Though the US did not directly intervene in the war and could not prevent the break-up of Pakistan, the pro-Pakistan policy of Washington had far-reaching long-term consequences. By misreading the crisis and sending the naval task force, Washington needlessly transformed a regional dispute into one, which threatened to become a big power showdown. The move brought America to the brink of a war that could have involved Russia and China. Moreover, Nixon-Kissinger tilt inflicted severe damage to Indo-US relations, while substantially enhancing Soviet influence over New Delhi. In the aftermath of the 1971 conflict, there was a distinct change in the US policy towards South Asia in general and Kashmir issue in particular. After the signing of the Shimla Agreement, Washington recognized that the resolution of all Indo-Pakistan disputes should be made on the basis of Shimla Agreement and healthy bilateralism.

The 1999 Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan was another turning point in the history of US policy towards armed conflicts of South Asia. It catalyzed a distinct shift in the American policy on Kashmir. For the first time, the US gave up the doctrine of equal culpability and made Pakistan solely responsible for initiating the conflict by violating the LoC. Terming New Delhi as a victim of aggression, Washington clearly took a pro-India stance in its policy response, which was in sharp contrast to the infamous pro-Pakistan tilt of 1971.

The Clinton Administration repeatedly emphasized the sanctity and inviolability of the LoC and strongly admonished Islamabad for attempting to redraw the borders.
Throughout the conflict, Washington called upon Islamabad to withdraw the intruders from Kargil and believed that Indian military operation to flush out the intruders from its territory was fully justified. The US also refused to support Pakistan's attempt to internationalize the Kashmir dispute in the wake of Kargil crisis. Washington backed Indo-Pakistani bilateralism instead of UN multilateralism to resolve the crisis. Even though Washington played a crucial role in resolving the Kargil crisis, it projected its role as that of a facilitator rather than a mediator.

What are the factors responsible for such a shift in the US policy approach? The immediate and most important factor was Washington's deep concern about the possibility of Kargil war escalating into a nuclear showdown between India and Pakistan. This concern about nuclear escalation impelled President Clinton to go out of the way for an early solution of the crisis. Secondly, the Clinton Administration recognized that Indo-Pak bilateralism as embodied in the Shimla Agreement and Lahore Declaration had the potential to remove the prevailing mistrust and bitterness between the two estranged neighbours, paving the way for long lasting peace in the region. Thirdly, the end of the Cold War and the changed international security scenario also shaped the US policy. Washington no longer viewed the Indo-Pakistani conflicts through the prism of Cold War. In the emerging new world order, the US began to treat India and Pakistan separately, and the Indo-US and US-Pakistan relations acquired separate momentum and direction. Finally, the issue of international terrorism had been another factor, which significantly influenced the US policy response. In the post-Cold War world order, the US identified international terrorism as the chief threat to American security interests worldwide. In this context, Washington found it hard to condone the cross-border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan, which eventually resulted in the Kargil conflict.
Conclusion

The Indo-Pakistani relations remained strained in the post-Kargil period, which witnessed the military coup in Pakistan in October 1999 and hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Kandhar in December 1999. Nevertheless, there were attempts to reduce tensions between the two neighbours. In November 2000, the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced the halting of Indian military operations in Kashmir during the holy month of Ramadan. That cease-fire was later extended for three more months. This step attracted similar measures by Pakistan. Later in July 2001, the Vajpayee-Musharraf summit at Agra tried to normalize India-Pakistan relations. But it could not make any breakthrough.

This bonhomie was short-lived. It was shattered by ghastly terrorist attacks on the Jammu and Kashmir State Assembly on 1 October 2001, and on Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001 by Pakistan sponsored terrorists. The attack led to a rapid deterioration in India-Pakistan relations. Enraged by terrorist attack, New Delhi recalled its High Commissioner from Islamabad and cut off all communication links with Pakistan. India also gave an ultimatum to Pakistan to end cross-border terrorism and extradite twenty Pakistan-based terrorists wanted by New Delhi. To step up the pressure on Pakistan, India made full-scale mobilization of its Army, Navy and Air Force along the Western borders and the Arabian Sea, which was the largest such event since 1971 war. Pakistan also mobilized its troops along the borders and threatened nuclear attack against India in case of war. These developments brought both India and Pakistan dangerously close to an all-out war.

Like in the past, the US emerged as the principal intermediary in the international effort to defuse the crisis in the subcontinent. Gravely concerned by the fearful prospects of a devastating war with nuclear overtone, and the consequent repercussions on its ongoing military operation against Taliban and Al Qaeda in
Afghanistan, the Bush Administration acted swiftly and decisively to prevent the impending conflict. Several top American officials were involved in the intensive diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the crisis. The dispatch of US Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of State and Assistant Secretary of State to South Asia in quick succession reflected the determination of President George W. Bush to remain actively engaged with India and Pakistan to dissuade them from going to war.

After intense US pressure, President Musharraf in a speech on 12 January 2002, promised to end Pakistan’s use as a base for terrorism, and to crack down on Islamic extremists. In early June 2002, India took the first steps towards de-escalation after getting categorical assurances from the US that the President Musharraf had agreed to put an end to cross-border infiltration on a permanent basis. New Delhi was also assured that Washington would hold Islamabad accountable for cross-border terrorism. Ultimately, the US activism succeeded in ending the ten-month-long military standoff between Indian and Pakistani military and the possibility of another India-Pakistan war.

It is to be noted that ever since 11 September 2001 terrorist attack on the US, Pakistan has once again become a ‘front-line’ state and a key ally of the US in the war against international terrorism. In this context, there were apprehensions that while dealing with India-Pakistan hostilities, the US policy would be relatively more favourable towards Pakistan. But such apprehensions were proved wrong by the US policy response during and after the 2002 Indo-Pakistani military standoff. Of late, Washington has intensified its pressure on Islamabad to give up terrorism as an instrument of State Policy. The present US position is that both India and Pakistan

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should negotiate directly for a peaceful and bilateral settlement of all their disputes and differences. The US has recognized that the festering hostilities between the two nuclear capable neighbours have made the entire South Asian region volatile and unstable. Moreover, it has wide ranging security ramifications not only for the region but even beyond. As the sole super power of the world, the US has placed 'stability' at the top of its international agenda. Washington found the never-ending Indo-Pakistani hostilities, as antithetical to its long-term interests and has become more objective, pragmatic and rational in its approach towards the Indo-Pakistani rivalry. It sincerely desires that the South Asian neighbours would gradually realize the futility of their hostilities and eventually tread on a path of adjustment, accommodation and peaceful coexistence.

It is evident from the above analyses that the US policy responses have had profound impact on the course and outcomes of the India-Pakistan conflicts in one way or the other. Indeed, the US has involved itself in the conflict management process in the Indian subcontinent more actively than any other country. It is increasingly recognized that the US is the only country, which could play a pivotal role in resolving the unceasing hostility and ever present rivalry between India and Pakistan. The unique position of America is derived from the fact that Washington is now having excellent bilateral relations with both New Delhi and Islamabad and thus has substantial leverage over both.

Given India's aversion to third party mediation in any Indo-Pakistani dispute, the US has tried to play the role of a facilitator, and not mediator. Pakistan has long been eager for international involvement - especially the US intervention - in its disputes with India. In a subtle change of its position, which reflects the improved Indo-US relations, New Delhi does not oppose American efforts to facilitate a reduction of
Indo-Pakistani tensions, although it continues to be against third party mediation. Thus it can be concluded that the US largely made diplomatic efforts to manage conflicts between India and Pakistan. The US role changed form time to time depending on global and regional considerations and the level of closeness between Washington and New Delhi and Washington and Islamabad. It ultimately came to conclude that only New Delhi and Islamabad could resolve their rivalry and reach an understanding over all their disputes, including Kashmir and the US could only try to help the process.