



ISSN (E): 2959-0272

ISSN (P): 2710-0502

Volume 7 Issue 1 Year 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59111/JPD.007.001.0236>

India's Role In Distorting Pakistan's National Perception During The War On Terror: The Psychological Insights From The Rajamandala Theory

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Abstract

Geopolitics is a key concept in international relations used to understand how geography shapes national politics and interstate relations. Coined by Rudolf Kjellén (1917), geopolitics views the state as a living territorial organism influenced not only by legal structures but also by geography, economy, culture, and human power. Building on this idea, Kaplan (2012) argues that geography fundamentally influences foreign policy, national power, and strategic behaviour, as physical features such as mountains and plains shape security and vulnerability. This geographical determinism is also reflected in Kautilya's Rajamandala theory, which conceptualizes international politics as interest-based rather than idealistic. In this framework, the central state (Vijigishu) is surrounded by concentric circles of states, with the immediate neighbour (Ari) viewed as a natural enemy, justifying policies of war, strategic alliances, and dual tactics. Applying this model to India–Pakistan relations, Pakistan, as India's immediate neighbour, fits the role of Ari in India's geopolitical outlook. Historical evidence shows India's consistent use of direct and indirect strategies against Pakistan, including psychological and informational warfare. India's involvement in the 1971 crisis through Mukti Bahini support, its media strategy during the 1999 Kargil conflict, and its narrative manipulation during the post-2000 Global War on Terror demonstrate a sustained foreign policy approach aimed at weakening Pakistan's international standing.

Keywords: Global War on Terror, Rajmandala, Pakistan's national image, India's animosity

Introduction

The term geopolitics is predominantly used in international relations discourse to understand the geographical factors that impact political dynamics on the national level and state-to-state relations on the global level. The term geopolitics was first coined by the political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1917, defined as a state being a territorial organism shaped by geography. According to Kjellén(1917), states are the organic entities having a cycle of birth, growth, adaptability, evolution, and even decline. In order to study the state, consideration must go beyond legal and institutional frameworks and include pertinent factors like geography, human power, economy, and culture; all these elements profoundly impact the nature of how states interact with one another¹. Building upon the element of geography, Kaplan(2012), in his prominent work *Revenge of Geography*, argues that geography is a driving factor behind foreign policy making and implementation. This is because geography is a fundamental factor impacting global politics, national power, and historical dynamics. Moreover, the geography of a nation further defines its strategic dimensions and policy factors to protect the state against enemies. For instance, mountains play a role as a hindrance to enemy attack, and plains breed vulnerability². Keeping in view the vitality of geography, Acarya Cakaya, also known as Kautilya, formulated a concept, Rajamandala, embedded in geopolitics and geostrategy. According to Rajamandala theory, also known as the circle of states, the interactions amongst states aren't idealistic, but rather interest-based. The Vijigishu-the would-be conqueror-is in the centre surrounded by states in a circle of different categories. The state in the first circle, i.e., immediate neighbour, is Ari, ie, an enemy to Vijigishu, with whom the policy of Vighraha, ie, war, is used, and against Ari, the dual policy of Dvaidhibhava, ie, peace with one and war with another, is utilized on the maxim that enemy of your enemy is your

¹ Rudolf Kjellén, *The State as a Living Form* (1917)

² Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012).

friend³. Analysing the dynamics of India and Pakistan, the two nations sharing the past of partition, India's strategic orientation towards Pakistan reveals the adversarial foreign policy ambitions rooted in geopolitical proximity, considering Pakistan to be its concentric enemy. Being India's immediate neighbour, hence an Ari, Pakistan has been a primary target of India's aggression, direct as well as indirect. Particularly, by stratagem, history has been a witness to the fact that India has been strategically leveraging upon Pakistan's internal challenges to project a psychological influence against Pakistan⁴. The so-called humanitarian intervention by India and training the Mukti Bahini against West Pakistan led to the 1971 succession⁵. Furthermore, in the 1999 Kargil War, India utilized the Rajamandala theory and used tool of media as a tool to distort Pakistan internationally. In post 2000 world, the Global War on Terror is an important case study revealing India's foreign policy agenda to strategically utilize regional crises aimed at damaging Pakistan's sovereignty. During the War on Terror times, India played a pertinent role in distorting Pakistan's national image through means of information warfare, narrative manipulation, and by investing in the development of an EU disinformation lab. India significantly utilized the Kashmir issue and historical grievances against Pakistan.⁶

This paper examines the case study of Pakistan's participation in the Global War on Terror and the consequences the state had to face. The research deductively focuses on India's role in distorting the perception and national image of Pakistan during the era of the Global

³ N. K. Surpi, N. N. A. N. Avalokitesvari, and I. M. G. S. Untara, "Mandala Theory of Arthaśāstra and Its Implementation towards Indonesia's Geopolitics and Geostrategy," Jayapangus Press: Jurnal Penelitian Agama Hindu 4, no. 3 (2020), <https://jayapanguspress.penerbit.org/index.php/JPAH>

⁴ Talat A. Malik and S. Qayyum, "Indian Political Doctrines: Understanding Internal Security Dynamics of India Impacting Pakistan," *Margalla Papers* 26, no. 1 (2022): 18–33, <https://doi.org/10.54690/margallapapers.26.1.95>

⁵ Navine Murshid, "India's Role in Bangladesh's War of Independence: Humanitarianism or Self-Interest?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 52 (2011): 53–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41719989>

⁶ M. S. Afridi, "India's Strategic Information Warfare: Challenges and Policy Options for Pakistan," *NDU Journal* 38, no. 1 (2024): 77–93, <https://ndujournal.ndu.edu.pk/index.php/site/article/view/184>

War on Terror using a grounded theory approach, interdisciplinary in nature, integrating theories and concepts from fields of political science, psychology, and international relations.

Hypothesis and Research Problem

The conception of geopolitics infers that the political behaviour of a state is inextricably linked to its geographical proximity. The primary IR frameworks, i.e., Realism and Liberalism, rely on institutional frameworks and national interest as primary paradigms. However, the Rajmandala theory of the circle of states provides a much South Asian focused IR perspective to view regional dynamics. The theory is built on geographical realities and identifies neighbours on such a basis, i.e., the immediate neighbour as a natural adversary (*Ari*), necessitating strategies of war (*Vigraha*) and dual tactics (*Dvaidhibhava*) to ensure the survival of the central state (*Vijigishu*). During the period of the Global War on Terror, Pakistan's contribution towards counter-terrorism was significant as a non-NATO ally. Despite this, Pakistan suffered significant challenges concerning its international perception as a state sponsoring terrorism. In this backdrop, the role of strategic manipulation by external actors was pertinent, especially India. The research, therefore, aims to deductively focus on the role of India to explore how it exercised the Kautilyan principles through information warfare, weaponisation of the Kashmir issue, and strategic culture of historical animosity due to the partition past.

Research Questions and Objectives

The paper aims to seek answers to the primary research question, stating "How Rajmandala's theory of the circle of state explains India's role in contributing to distorting Pakistan's national image during the Global War on Terror?" To further examine, secondary research questions are as follows:

- How did strategic culture play a part in foreign policy goals for waging animosity?
- How did India utilize the Kashmir issue and link it to terrorism during the GWOT era?

- How did India utilize media framing and wage an information war against Pakistan?

These questions aim to achieve the following research objectives:

- Analysing the applicability of the Rajmandala theory on contemporary South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan, dynamics.
- Evaluation of the strategic utilization of the Global War on Terrorism by India to reframe the Kashmir issue by linking it to terrorism.
- Evaluating the psychology of emotions in geopolitics of south Asian geopolitics.

Research Methodology and Design

The research is conducted qualitatively through data collection from primary and secondary sources. Using both primary and secondary research techniques aimed at finding foreign policy objectives ingrained in Rajmandala theory. Therefore, the research methodology is designed to explore the role of India during the era of the Global War on Terror to strategically damage Pakistan's national image. The primary data collection was done through conducting semi-structured interviews with notable people from International Agencies, Government of Pakistan, Media, Academia, Think Tanks, etc., mentioned in the Appendix section. The interviews conducted were utilized for thematic analysis, and their transcription was the subject of thematic coding based on Barun and Clark's(2008) six steps of thematic coding, i.e., firstly familiarizing the data collected through primary sources and their transcription. Secondly, devising codes from structured datasets. Thirdly, combining identified codes into a theme. Fourthly, revising the themes for developing analysis aligning with research objectives. Fifthly, naming the theme having relevance to the research problem. Lastly, writing the themes and analysis into structured sections aligning with academic principles of research.

Lastly, the research adheres to the principles of academic honesty and integrity, particularly regarding the usage of AI tools. It is hereby stated that the analysis and writings are the writer's own work, adhering to originality in ideas. The usage of AI is limited as a tool for assistance with improving writing styles, amending grammatical flaws, and seeking help to adhere to academic standards of research. For citation purposes, tools like Zotero and for assuring a sound grammar, tools like Grammarly were utilized.

Integrated Framework

The paper uses an integrated framework derived from theoretical underpinnings of political psychology, Rajamandala theory, and conceptual underpinnings of Strategic culture. The first theory used in this grounded approach is Political psychology. Political psychology examines how cognition, intuition, and motivation influence political behaviour, policies, and the psychological shaping of states, including politicians' attitudes, ideology, leadership, and communication⁷. One of the main areas in political psychology is how perceptions are managed and manipulated, which is a core area applied to this research. To explore this in light of geographical elements further, the Rajamandala theory is applied. The Rajamandala theory, a part of Kautilya's Arthashastra, is a foreign policy approach with proximity of geographical underpinnings. The main crux of this theory states that "Your neighbour is your natural enemy and the neighbour's neighbour is your friend," meaning that in proximity to Vijigishu, i.e., would-be conqueror, its immediate neighbour is its Ari-enemy and the enemy to Ari is friend to Vijigishu, therefore forming a mandala or circle of alternating adversaries and allies⁸. To

⁷ Stanford Political Psychology Research Group, "What Is Political Psychology?" Stanford University, accessed November 15, 2025, <https://pprg.stanford.edu/what-political-psychology>

⁸ S. Mishra, "Kautilya's Mandala Theory," *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2012): 145–148, <https://rjhsonline.com/HTMLPaper.aspx?Journal=Research+Journal+of+Humanities+and+Social+Sciences%3>

India, Pakistan is an Ari, and hence its foreign policy goals aim at damaging the Ari. To further explore India's ambitions of distorting Pakistan, the conceptual framework of strategic culture is used to explore factors serving grand strategy, ie, geopolitical order, national historical experience, political culture and ideology, and military culture⁹. From Kautilyan lens, authored in Arthashastra, strategic culture, is centred around the sixfold policy of the state: peace (sandhi) through agreements and pledges; war (vigraha) as an offensive operation; observance of neutrality (asana) for indifference; marching (yana) to prepare for action; alliance (samshraya) to seek another's protection; and double policy (dvaidhibhava) of making peace with one while waging war with another. In the case of Pakistan and India, the strategic culture of historical grievances driven by partition trauma defines contemporary interactions between the two. India's strategic culture, centred around Kautilyan thought, derives its policy against Pakistan, making Pakistan's strategic culture Indian centric, aimed at state survival and sovereignty¹⁰. The framework is further explained in the figure below

[BPID%3D2012-3-1-32#:~:text=His%20evaluation%20of%20which%20kingdoms,KAUTILYA%20ON%20WAR](#)

⁹ Muhammad Hudaya and D. A. Putri, "Strategic Culture: The Answer of International Relations Study to Overcome Challenges in the Globalized World," unpublished conference paper, 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327777482_Strategic_Culture_The_Answer_of_International_Relations_Study_to_Overcome_Challenges_in_The_Globalized_World

¹⁰ S. Mishra, "Kautilya's Mandala Theory," *Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2012): 145–148, <https://rjhsonline.com/HTMLPaper.aspx?Journal=Research+Journal+of+Humanities+and+Social+Sciences%3D2012-3-1-32#:~:text=His%20evaluation%20of%20which%20kingdoms,KAUTILYA%20ON%20WAR>

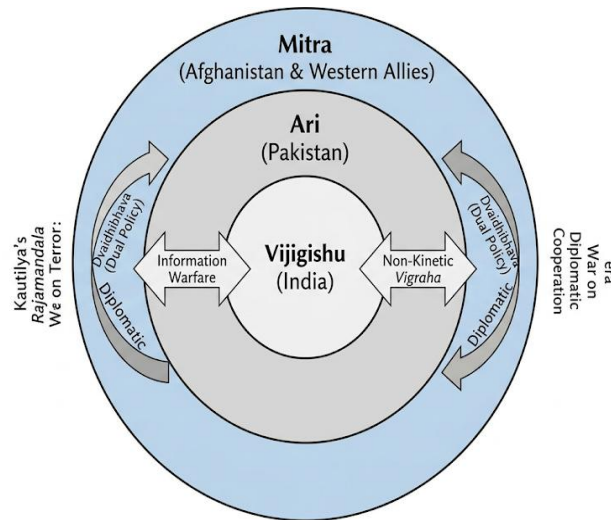


Figure 1: Illustration of the integrated framework mapping application of Rajmandala theory on the GWOT era¹¹

Pakistan's Role in War: Consequences and Impact

War on terrorism is a term used to describe the American-led global counterterrorism campaign that was launched in response to 9/11. In terms of scope and expenditure Global War on Terror is comparable to the Cold War, with an intention to represent a new phase in global political relations, having consequences for security, human rights, International Law, corporations, and government¹². The Global War on Terror became a principal security challenge¹³. The War on Terrorism implied a belief that the correct response to terrorist threats was primarily a military one, to track down and kill a hardcore of extremists¹⁴. The second half of 2001 was a catalyst that transformed world politics. The attack on the soil of the world's most powerful country posed a significant challenge to the USA's national security and its

¹¹ The pictorial representation of the integrated framework is created through AI tools, with instructions given using the original thoughts and analysis of the research.

¹² Richard Jackson and Jennifer Scott, "War on Terrorism | Summary & Facts | Britannica," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 2, 2020, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-terrorism>

¹³ P. D. Williams and M. McDonald, eds., *Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁴ Julian Borger, "War on Terror? Was a Mistake, Says Miliband," *Global Policy Forum*, January 15, 2009, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://archive.globalpolicy.org/empire/terrorwar/analysis/2009/0115Miliband.htm>

perceived role as a hegemon¹⁵. In September 2001, 19 terrorists hijacked four East Coast flights, crashing three of the airplanes into targets in New York and Washington, DC¹⁶. As the then President of the United States in his address on September 10, 2001, said, an attack on the World Trade Center was “an attack on American Soil”. George W Bush, in reaction to the attacks, gave an ultimatum to the world: “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with terrorists.”¹⁷.

Militarily, war was waged in the soil of Afghanistan, and parallel covert operations in Yemen. For this, there was a major increase in military spending by the USA for large-scale military assistance to nations that decided to ally with the USA. On intelligence grounds, there were institutional reorganizations along with a budget increase to facilitate the capture of terrorists, interning them at Guantanamo Bay, and to collaborate with foreign intelligence. Diplomatically, efforts were made to maintain a global coalition to eradicate terrorism and to counter anti-Americanism in the Middle East and subsequent areas¹⁸. On the strategic front, the war was central in international security, having multiple elements. Firstly, the 911 attack on the World Trade Centre, also known as Pearl Harbour, was a shock to the security landscape of the USA because a small group of civilians used aircraft as flying bombs to destroy the leading financial hub of the world, as well as the highly secure Pentagon. Secondly, the attack happened in parallel to the time when Bush envisioned pursuing a foreign policy of the New American Century. Thirdly, due to this ambition, it became pertinent for the USA to sustain control and hence eradicate terrorism¹⁹.

¹⁵ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006)

¹⁶ “The War on Terror – Timeline & Facts,” *HISTORY*, February 1, 2019, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline>

¹⁷ “The War on Terror – Timeline & Facts,” *HISTORY*, February 1, 2019, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.history.com/topics/21st-century/war-on-terror-timeline>

¹⁸ Richard Jackson and Jennifer Scott, “War on Terrorism | Summary & Facts | Britannica,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 2, 2020, accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/war-on-terrorism>

¹⁹ P. D. Williams and M. McDonald, eds., *Security Studies: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2018).

“Pakistan draws its strategic strength from its unique placement on the world map. It lies at the crossroads between South Asia, the Middle East, central Asian states. Closer proximity to Afghanistan, Iran, China and India further adds to its importance. The CPEC, being the flagship project of China’s One Belt One Road program that passes through Pakistan, is a major impediment for the USA and India. During the GWOT, China started rising as a challenger to US hegemony. Its GDP jumped from 5,760 billion in 2004 to 18,228 billion in 2014. The US crafted a QUAD agreement with India, Japan and Australia in 2004 for the containment of China. This gave rise to the new great games in which Pakistan, China, Iran and Russia joined one camp, and India joined the US in the opposing camp. India entered into a strategic partnership and mutual interdependence with Afghanistan. India gained more influence in Afghanistan through its mutual interdependence, marginalizing Pakistan’s regional interests by provoking anti-Pakistan sentiments amongst the Afghan nation.”²⁰. Pakistan, due to its strategic location, threat perception due to India, and economic impediments, had to participate in US led Global War on Terror as a non-NATO ally. In return, Pakistan was provided with military and financial assistance via aid. Pakistan’s airbases were given to NATO to reach and attack Afghanistan. “Pakistan was the beneficiary of the GWOT. If not us, the ruling elite was a great beneficiary. Pakistan received a great amount of funds during the coalition, amounting to billions and trillions. We also became a non-NATO ally, due to which our economic and security assistance was increased. ”²¹ Moreover, “The policy of Pakistan, run by the civil and military leadership and the politicians, was excellent. They were able to protect Pakistan's interests. Pakistan also remained relevant in the system, and it is very pertinent to stay relevant in the international system. Positive relevance should be

²⁰ Lt. Col. (R) Naeem Dar, interview by Kashaf Imran, phone call, February 22, 2023.

²¹ Dr. Riffat Hussain, interview by Kashaf Imran, Conference Room, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, March 9, 2023.

there.”²² Pakistan’s major success while fighting a foreign war was capturing and transferring over 700 Al-Qaeda operatives into the United States²³. However, the victory came at a human and material cost, due to which Pakistan had long-term impediments to suffer economically, politically, and socially²⁴. The most pressing impediment that Pakistan suffered was in the arena of soft power due to distortion of its national image, as acknowledged by late Pervez Musharraf, due to Global War on Terror, Pakistan had to face a serious image problem spanning over decades to come as Pakistan’s post 9/11 foreign policy developed a new identity on the global radar screen as “hotbed of terrorism” (Ahmad, 2013). Public opinion in Pakistan has been a challenging ground ever since the attack happened. Most Pakistanis condemned the attacks, while there were also strong reactionary sentiments against the USA, encouraged by the religious lobby and partly by pre-existing anti-American feelings²⁵. On the eve of September 11, 2001, Pakistanis found themselves in a state of confusion, with the public mood being muted. According to a news report at that time, “Unknown terrorists demolished the symbols of American and military power-the World Trade Center and Pentagon in unprecedented airborne attacks involving four hijacked commercial aircraft killing hundreds or maybe thousands of people”. The sense of grief was evident from the news reports about the fate of hundreds of Pakistanis working at the WTC. Moreover, ordinary people heaved a collective sigh of relief for Musharraf's decision not supporting Taliban²⁶. According to the former CIA station Chief of Pakistan, “Before 911 reputation of Pakistan was problematic

²² Major General (R) Inam ul Haque, interview by Kashaf Imran, IWS Solutions Pvt Ltd Office, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, December 20, 2022.

²³ S. Fayyaz, *Pakistan's Response Towards Terrorism: A Case Study of Musharraf Regime* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2020).

²⁴ T. Yamin, *Examining Pakistan's Strategic Decision to Support the US War on Terror*, Academia.edu, accessed September 13, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/20281544/Examining_Pakistan_s_Strategic_Decision_to_Support_the_US_War_on_Terror

²⁵ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006)

²⁶ T. Yamin, *Examining Pakistan's Strategic Decision to Support the US War on Terror*, Academia.edu, accessed September 13, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/20281544/Examining_Pakistan_s_Strategic_Decision_to_Support_the_US_War_on_Terror

because the perception of Pakistan for supporting militancy in Kashmir was much of that was shaped by India and particularly because of supporting the Taliban and recognizing them as legitimized government at a time when they were sanctioned for harbouring OBL. After 911 it became much more complicated as Pakistan was seen as an unambiguous supporter of the Taliban. From 2005 onwards, perception became further complicated. On one hand, Pakistan was supportive of opposing Al-Qaeda, but when the Taliban began to reassert themselves in Afghanistan and were using terrorist means against other Afghans, through using terrorist methods like launching suicide bombings against other Afghans. Pakistan's perception of having an ambiguous policy of opposing Al-Qaeda and maintaining relations with the Taliban added to the complication.”(R. Grener, personal communication, 2023). Factors like ethnicity, inequality, religious intolerance, and political instability have contributed significantly to the rise of terrorism and have impacted Pakistan's perception. Moreover, in the stage of International Affairs and Geopolitics, Pakistan suffered grave consequences of trust issues, because Pakistan's calculus at the outset of war was that if Pakistan provided clear support to the West, it would have to deal with the aftermath after the exit of Americans, as sacrificing terms with Afghanistan would impact the national security interest. This concern should have been communicated to the Americans by Pakistan.”(R. Grenier, personal communication, 2023). Moreover, “Pakistan's foreign policy options always remained very restricted. Due to this Pakistan faced a credibility gap due to lack of trust from other international actors of global politics. There was a huge trust deficit as far as Pakistan's foreign policy was concerned because of the relationship with the Afghan Taliban, because of Kashmir's jihad. So the entire Pakistan suffers even today because of that, what outside is called the duplicity of the foreign policy.” (I. Gul, personal communication, 2023). On the national level, Salik (2020) states that Pakistan, being a highly polarized society, suffered the consequences as the war required a whole nation approach, yet Pakistan as a society remained divided. Religious clergy capitalized on this

faultline, siding with terrorist further distorting Pakistan's image and misinterpretation of Islam. (Salik, 2020). Rising extremism and religious militancy have posed a significant threat to Pakistan (Khan, 2015), causing heights of terrorist attacks in Pakistan. (Noor & Ajmal, n.d.). It is due to factors like political instability, militarization, terrorism, policy failures, extremism, and involvement with the Taliban that have exacerbated the negative perception of Pakistan internationally and in the global community. However, analyzing Pakistan's image and creating perception has challenged analysts, thinkers, and academicians tremendously. This is so because international media portrays Pakistan as a terrorist state, but upon visiting Pakistan, individuals find the state to be friendly and its people to be hospitable. In the preface of his book "Reimagining Pakistan," Hussain Haqqani mentions multiple perceptions of Pakistan by the international community. One of the most prominent perceptions mentioned in the book was by Richard Leiby, a Washington Post reporter. After spending one year in Pakistan, Leiby, in his interview, mentioned that "Pakistanis are pious, warm, and hospitable people." Leiby also mentioned that the bad news about Pakistan was not untrue either. Leiby emphasized that Pakistan's significant sample of population bears the socioeconomic impediments of foreign policy as well as defence policy decisions.²⁷

India's role of concentric enemy during the War

Pakistan's strategic culture, being India-centric for survival and sustenance of sovereignty, was yet another major driving factor for Pakistan to join in a coalition with the USA during the era of GWOT. With regards to the security and strategic policies of Pakistan during that time, it was imperative that, "in a community of nations, when 191 countries in the general assembly voted for the US invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan had no option but to confront the motion. Moreover, Pakistan's economy and military hardware being heavily

²⁷ Haqqānī, Ḥusain. *Reimagining Pakistan: Transforming a Dysfunctional Nuclear State*. Noida: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2018

dependent on the West, had to align its strategic interests with the US and Western powers for its survival. Pakistan draws its strategic strength from its unique placement on the world map. It lies at the crossroads between South Asia, the Middle East, central Asian states. Closer proximity to Afghanistan, Iran, China and India further adds to its importance. Pakistan has always been under threat from its eastern border; its strategic policy has always been India-centric for the protection of its geographical and ideological boundaries. Soon after the US invasion of Afghanistan, both India and Pakistan reached the verge of war when opposing forces came face to face along the eastern border.”²⁸ There were three primary underpinnings taken into account by Musharraf: firstly, India’s ambition to ally with the USA by offering its bases, and if Pakistan didn’t join, then India would have internationalized the Kashmir issue within the counterterrorism framework of the Global War on Terror. Secondly, as per security calculus, Pakistan would have been in jeopardy with regard to its strategic assets in military parity with India. Lastly, the economic infrastructure built over half a century would have been destroyed if Pakistan had not sided with the US. Moreover, it would have allowed India to repeat history and by attacking Pakistan’s faultline, ensuring its destruction²⁹. Musharraf’s foresight with regard to India was apt, as Pakistan’s role during the war bred the state immense difficulties and challenges. To which India significantly constructed narratives to reframe Pakistan’s national image adversely to ensure Pakistan is known internationally through negative connotations.

“India effectively played a major role in tarnishing Pakistan’s image. On every UN Platform, India utilized the state’s weakness to tarnish its image. On the policy level, they hired lobbyists

²⁸ Lt. Col. (R) Naeem Dar, interview by Kashaf Imran, phone call, February 22, 2023.

²⁹ Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (New York: Free Press, 2006)

to build a narrative against Pakistan. India claimed that Pakistan is the main source of terrorism, be it in Kashmir. India gained the trust of the global community.”³⁰

Exploiting faultlines and the strategic culture of historical animosity

“Fractured past, uncertain future” are the two phrases aptly used by Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry to present the crux of Indo-Pak relations in his newly published work. The root cause has been sowing the seeds of conflicts before independence. “India plays its role in destroying the image and will continue to do so. India is Pakistan’s concentric enemy who takes advantage of its internal weakness, hence it’s India’s role to portray Pakistan as a terrorist nation.”³¹ Pakistan being an Ari concentric enemy to India as per Rajamandala theory, India’s strategic thought has always been targeted at reinforcing a narrative of animosity for Pakistan. “When one reflect onto the dynamics of the creation of India and Pakistan, it is revealed that India has been against Pakistan ever since. It’s India’s national policy to wage strategic adversity against Pakistan in every capacity possible. India’s media is also definitely way stronger than ours. The embassies of India and the people who worked there during GWOT were very pro-India, and they worked solely for the national interest of India. Pakistan did not build its image positively, and this loophole was cashed in by India.”³²

To exercise its ambitions, India has been utilizing kinetic as well as nonkinetic measures against Pakistan. Even in the realm of psychological warfare, India has a history of

³⁰ Raza Shah, interview by Kashaf Imran, SPADO Office, RDF Complex Branch, Islamabad, Pakistan, February 28, 2023.

³¹ Tughrul Yamin, interview by Kashaf Imran, Associate Dean's Office, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, December 21, 2022

³² Colonel Mansoor Javaid, interview by Kashaf Imran, residence, Islamabad, Pakistan, February 5, 2023.

aptly targeting Pakistan because hybrid war attempts to obtain the greatest psychological impact on the moral and political-strategic resilience of the opponent. Therefore, the danger of waging such warfare is far more dangerous than ever, as it has the potential to create vulnerabilities that cause both physical and psychological injuries. Countries with greater fault lines suffering from a lack of technological advancements and economic challenges are a haven for opponents to manifest their motives. Pakistan is the pertinent example, a country with a lethargic past, unstable present, and uncertain future, that has been a victim of such warfare by its concentric enemy, India. India, in its enmity, has been exploiting Pakistan's fault lines using propaganda and disinformation to break apart Islamabad, be it the 1971 tragedy or the war on terror exploitation. One thing is clear here: for any non-conventional strategy to work and achieve its aim, the fault lines are always identified and prepared by the inherent and internal elements³³.

The First Indo-Pak War lasted until a ceasefire in January 1949, with Kashmir as the central cause of conflict. During the war, propaganda exploited regional, political, and religious dynamics to shape public perception and fuel insurgency. Government-controlled radio was strategically weaponized, reinforcing statecraft and intensifying the conflict. Moreover, Pakistan faced a major tragedy in 1971 with the separation of East and West Pakistan, a fault line that India identified and exploited as Islamabad's principal adversary. The disintegration–liberation–animosity triangle (Pakistan–Bangladesh–India), as noted by Naseer (2023), exemplifies divisive psychological operations, where actors capitalized on psyops through emotionalism, mobilization, Mukti Bahini recruitment, guerrilla warfare, and competing nationalist narratives. West Pakistan bore the harshest consequences, as Indian propaganda

³³ Salma Siddiqui, "Hybrid War and Its Psychological Impact," in *Living Under Hybrid War*, ed. Ashfaque Hasan Khan and Farah Naz (Islamabad: National University of Sciences and Technology, 2022).

deepened trust deficits and intensified societal polarization under the guise of humanitarian intervention. Lastly, in 1999 during the Kargil war, TV was a major mass media weapon used for propaganda, making the war known as “the first Indo-Pak televised war,” in which Indian media coverage, blending information and misinformation, marked South Asia’s entry into a new era of warfare³⁴. India repeated the patterns witnessed in these historic wars during the era of the war on terror and continued to exploit both internal and external faultiness.

Pakistan’s geostrategic location breeds complexities for the state. However, on retrospect, if utilized strategically, the geographical proximity of Pakistan has the potential to be used in the state’s favour. During the era of GWOT, the major fault line identified at Pakistan’s end is not utilizing its geographical potential. Because “Every foreign policy making foreign policy decision is based on bargaining. International decisions are not one-sided. When you make a decision that you want to do that, or they will demand, and you do have your own options, then you should negotiate those options. Pakistan dragged an outside war into its own country³⁵. Moreover, the reason the USA pressured Pakistan was because of Pakistan’s geopolitical and geostrategic importance. The USA wanted Pakistan to help them by giving bases and overflights. Pakistan instantly complied. In this case, all seven demands made by the Bush Administration were accepted without any quid pro quo. Pakistan could have demanded from the US to construct roads in return, to improve the railway system and demand trade concessions. Pakistan only saw the USA's ultimatum from a security angle and did not make any effort to renegotiate the initial terms and conditions. Hence, national interest was

³⁴ Imran, Kashaf. “Psychological Warfare in the Indo-Pak Conflict: Evolution from Partition to the Present.” *The DaySpring*, May 26, 2025.

<https://thedaysspring.com.pk/psychological-warfare-in-the-indo-pak-conflict/>

³⁵ Dr. Amna Mehmood, interview by Kashaf Imran, Head of Department Office, International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 22, 2022.

severely ignored”³⁶. In essence, “According to the situation in the era of GWOT, the policies were accurate, but long-term consequences of the policies were not assessed properly.”³⁷ Therefore, the War on Terror was a golden opportunity for India to destroy and attack Pakistan. India is targeting to destroy Pakistan’s image and reputation through propaganda spreading against Pakistan, particularly through the EU's disinformation lab and propaganda mechanism. India's activities were part of a long-standing strategy to weaken Pakistan. The relevance of geopolitical competition is stressed, particularly in light of India's attempts to balance Pakistan's strategic importance by forming alliances with Afghanistan. Moreover, India’s success was witnessed when Pakistan was included on the FATF's "grey list". These aspects reflect a key theme from Moisi's (2008) work, “geopolitics of emotions”. Emotions like fear, humiliation, and hope are predominantly utilized to achieve geopolitical ambitions serving national interest. Repeated political and social failures are drivers of a deep sense of humiliation for a nation, as seen historically in the case of the decline of the Arab-Islamic world. Political actors aim at exploiting this humiliation. This makes humiliation a classical tool of diplomacy and political weaponization³⁸. In the case of Pakistan, India has been aptly utilizing the humiliation aspect against Pakistan. During the war on terror, the weaponization of emotion helped India to earn Pakistan, discouraging and humiliating labels like a hotbed of terrorism, a hard country, etc. This, in a chain reaction, caused Pakistan a devastating loss in multiple aspects of its economy, diplomacy, tourism, etc. Pakistan has suffered from visa objections, and those who somehow attained visas were subjected to aggressive surveillance and had to bear ridicule at US airports in the form of slurs and abuses.

³⁶ Tughrul Yamin, interview by Kashaf Imran, Associate Dean's Office, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, December 21, 2022

³⁷ Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan, interview by Kashaf Imran, Principal Office, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, April 12, 2023.

³⁸ Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2009)

Weaponization of the Kashmir Issue and Terrorism

The Kashmir Issue and Terrorism are interlinked causative factors perpetuating deep-rooted animosity between India and Pakistan. India's policy goals to weaponize terrorism and the Kashmir issue authenticate Musharaf's decision to be a US ally, as in his address, Musharaf explained that the rationale for the nation to side with the US because his critical concerns were the country's sovereignty, economy, strategic assets, and the Kashmir cause³⁹. Before exploring the dynamics of how the Kashmir issue and terrorism have been weaponized by India against Pakistan, it is pertinent to understand the concept of terrorism in its deep roots and complexities. The word "terrorism" is derived from the Latin verb "terror," meaning to tremble⁴⁰. Terrorism is a highly politicized term defined as "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to achieve a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" by the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), one of the most comprehensive databases on terrorist incidents⁴¹. Terrorism is a hybrid between warfare and crime. Terrorism is warfare when terrorist activities are executed for political purposes, leading to significant harm, and terrorists perceive themselves to be at war against enemies. Terrorism is a crime when non-state actors perpetrate it, criminal laws are violated, and violence is directed against civilians⁴². In the case of Pakistan, the state has been suffering from the security impediments linked to transnational militancy and cross-border terrorism since the Cold War era, which for India was an important factor to weaponize against Pakistan,

³⁹ T. Yamin, *Examining Pakistan's Strategic Decision to Support the US War on Terror*, Academia.edu, accessed September 13, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/20281544/Examining_Pakistan_s_Strategic_Decision_to_Support_the_US_War_on_Terror

⁴⁰ Edwin Bakker and Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Comparing Theory and Practice*, Coursera, accessed June 2, 2023, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/terrorism>

⁴¹ Valerie Hase, "What Is Terrorism (According to the News)? How the German Press Selectively Labels Political Violence as 'Terrorism'," *Journalism* 24, no. 2 (2023): 398–417, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849211017003>

⁴² David Schanzer, *Understanding 9/11: Why 9/11 Happened & How Terrorism Affects Our World Today*, Coursera, accessed June 7, 2023, <https://www.coursera.org/learn/911-attack>

along with maligning the Kashmir issue. “India was motivated to highlight the divergence between the USA’s and Pakistan’s interests. They were particularly active in highlighting this divergence after 911. India was very eager to highlight that Pakistan did very little to control the activities of al-Qaeda before 911. They also tried to suggest that there was a clear link between Pakistan’s support for al-Qaeda, refusal to work actively against al-Qaeda and Pakistan’s support for Kashmir militancy. It was a clear propaganda deployed against Pakistan by India”⁴³.

Therefore, during the war, India took the opportunity of reframing the Kashmir issue the Kashmiri insurgents as terrorists, which aligned aptly with GWOT’s narrative. India’s strategic manipulation of political issues and reframing the narrative in lines to GWOT’s narrative reflects the apt application of the Rajmandala principles of dealing with Ari through attacks and causing damage. While doing so, India played a duality, on one hand weakening Pakistan’s stature and on the other hand strengthening its own through earning nuclear legitimacy and gaining a favourable position with the Afghan government. India’s strengthening of its strategic position was done at the cost of Pakistan’s international standing. Pakistan suffered international humiliation due to being portrayed as a rogue nation, causing the US Congress to undergo debate on cutting down military and economic aid and deepening cooperation with India⁴⁴.

Information Warfare and Media Framing

⁴³ Robert Grenier, interview by Kashaf Imran, Google Meet call, May 24, 2023.

⁴⁴ Muhammad Abid Nazir and Gulshan Majeed, “Pakistan’s Decision to Join US War on Terror and Repercussion for Pakistan,” *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 2, no. 3 (2021): 509–519, [https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2021\(2-III\)43](https://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2021(2-III)43)

Propaganda, misinformation, and narrative engineering are core components and strategies utilized for centuries in warfare with the purpose of destroying the enemy without direct confrontation. Such principles of warfare are codified in the philosophy of non-Western thinkers like Sun Tzu and Kautilya. In modern warfare, the utility of such strategies has redefined warfare as more non-kinetic in approach, having a major dimension called information warfare in which media is the most pertinent tool. According to Frater and Ryan(2001), the Information Age has revolutionized modern warfare by providing commanders with decisive advantages due to the effective use of information, although it has also brought about serious vulnerabilities. Military and civilian systems are becoming heavily reliant on communications and information technologies, thus becoming the most attractive targets and vehicles of attack. Command and situational awareness technologies can equally be used to disrupt, deceive or destroy command structures to create more uncertainty than less. Contemporary command-and-control (C2) cycles have become dependent on the electromagnetic spectrum to a great extent, so this dependence constitutes a major vulnerability that an adversary can take advantage of and, at the same time, requires protection. Any operation to sabotage the C2 cycle of an enemy is collectively known as information warfare (IW), which uses information superiority through attacking the information systems and networks of an adversary and defending against them. The final aim of IW is to acquire a decisive information superiority that can be used to get the adversary under control/power⁴⁵.

The decade-long war against terrorism occurred during a time when the digital revolution was taking place, and due to mass media, there was a 24/7 abundance of information. India strategized the digital age's dynamics to wage information warfare against Pakistan,

⁴⁵ Michael R. Frater and Michael Ryan, *Electronic Warfare for the Digitized Battlefield*, illustrated ed. (Boston: Artech House, 2001).

using media framing ensured dismantling and distortion of Pakistan's image. "India used their information network over double in multiple shifts for spreading fake news."⁴⁶ Firstly, the Indian media framed 911 incidents by developing its linkage to the Kashmir issue and portrayed Pakistan through fake news as part of a global terrorist network that attacked the USA. Secondly, journalists played their part by claiming that Kashmir militant groups were connected to Al-Qaeda. For instance, the headline "Mumbai to New York, the road passed through Kandahar" symbolically claims that terrorism in India and the US originates from the same source. Thirdly, the Indian media adopted an anti-Islamic tone deliberately aimed at ideologically distorting Pakistan and partly due to domestic reasons of fragile Muslim-Hindu relations⁴⁷. "India tried to tarnish our image by saying that Pakistan is a terrorist state and that Pakistan supports terrorist activities. When OBL was killed, India took the lead to denounce that Pakistan's military was trying to play a double game. India was instrumental in creating and spreading such propaganda against Pakistan."⁴⁸ For this, India created a disinformation lab in Europe that disgraced Pakistan worldwide for 10 to 15 years, and we lacked the ability and capacity to counter it. Moreover, India played a significant role in putting Pakistan on the FATF's gray list. India's Foreign Minister, Jai Shanker, acknowledged in a training program that it was India that kept Pakistan in FATF's gray list⁴⁹.

Concluding remarks

⁴⁶ Dr. Salma Malik, interview by Kashaf Imran, Google Meet call, May 13, 2023.

⁶⁶ Imtiaz Gul, interview by Kashaf Imran, Zoom call, March 13, 2023.

⁴⁷ Sandhya S. Bhattacharya, "The Global Impact of Terror: 9/11 and Media Framing of the India-Pakistan Conflict" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2007), Pennsylvania State University Libraries Electronic Theses and Dissertations, <https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/7900>

⁴⁸ Dr. Riffat Hussain, interview by Kashaf Imran, Conference Room, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, March 9, 2023.

⁴⁹ Dr. Ashfaq Hassan Khan, interview by Kashaf Imran, Principal Office, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan, April 12, 2023.

India is always up to Pakistan, and their army is Pakistan-specific. And they are not only watchful of Pakistan in terms of strategic and military competition, but they are also much more attentive to Pakistan in social, economic, and national affairs, and they compete with Pakistan all over the world. rather they are much ahead of Pakistan in terms of propaganda and spying activities, in terms of international linkages. And since their economy is rising, they have surpassed the UK in economic ranking. So they are more relevant for the work⁵⁰. This stance of India is deeply rooted in the Rajmandala theory and strategic culture defined by hatred against Pakistan. The research findings infer that during the War on Terror, India, being a concentric enemy to Pakistan, exercised its policy ambitions to cause damage to Pakistan by distorting its international perception and exploiting the faultiness. Even in post GWOT era, India continues to achieve its ambitions by waging animosity against Pakistan and to dismantle its statecraft. The major findings of the research and the scope of research identified are:

1. **Synthesis of research:** During the era of the global war on terror, Pakistan suffered from significant losses politically, militarily, and economically. The major impediment suffered by Pakistan was the distortion of its national image. While Pakistan's internal faultlines significantly contributed to its image issue, the external factors, especially India's efforts to link Pakistan with terrorism by weaponizing Kashmir issue, were a pertinently catalysing the distortion of Pakistan's perception. India's strategic approach was the practical implementation of Kautilyan principles and framed Pakistan as an Ari. Using the Kautilyan framing, India utilised the neighbour's enemy is your friend principle and cultivated alliance and Mitra(friendship) with the USA and consequently with Afghanistan and waged a dual policy in which on one hand mistrust was waged

⁵⁰ Dr. Amna Mehmood, interview by Kashaf Imran, Head of Department Office, International Islamic University Islamabad, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 22, 2022.

between Pakistan and the USA. Secondly, through an alliance with Afghanistan, India strategically encircled Pakistan. For this purpose, waging information warfare was a primary tool utilised by India, leveraging counter-terrorism narratives and utilising Pakistan's internal faultlines.

2. **Theoretical contribution:** Using the integrated framework of political psychology with Rajmandala theory, having conceptual underpinnings of strategic culture, the research aimed to contribute a unique perspective in South Asian Studies, exploring psychological underpinnings of regional dynamics. The theoretical contribution is timely as the evolving security architecture of South Asia reflects a shift from traditional to a non traditional warfare especially due to the era of post-truth politics. The psychological underpinnings and evolution of security architecture were further witnessed during the May 2025 confrontation between India and Pakistan, i.e., the limited operation dynamics reflected narrative manipulation, information warfare, and post-truth politics. Through this theoretical contribution, the research concluded with an underpinning stating that in this evolving security architecture, having nonkinetic elements, a Vijigishu (the would-be conqueror) is no longer dependent on traditional battles, but rather to weaken and subdue the enemy, psychological manoeuvring, weaponization of emotions, and media framing are primary weapons.
3. **Academic contribution to South Asian Studies:** The research further contributes to South Asian Studies by presenting Pakistan's perspective through the originality of ideas and further by countering India's academic domination in South Asian studies. Through this research, a contribution to South Asian studies is made by presenting the pioneer Pakistan's perspectives in International Academia.