

“The Difficult Politics of Peace and the India-Pakistan Rivalry”

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What explains the enduring nature of the India-Pakistan rivalry? Why have some periods been comparatively peaceful while others have been conflict prone? In this presentation, I proposed a distinct explanation for observed Indo-Pakistani conflict and peace-making behavior since 1947. Simply put, contested domestic politics with fractured authority at home has tended to lead to conflict abroad, while settled domestic politics has enabled peacemaking activity. This line of argument suggests that the Indo-Pakistani rivalry has persisted because fractured authority over the conduct of foreign and defense policy has complicated the ability of both states, but especially Pakistan, to pursue conciliatory policies toward the other. This argument explains the remarkable congruence between the presence of strong leaders in Pakistan—Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia ul-Haq, and Pervez Musharraf—and periods of rapprochement in the Indo-Pakistani relationship. In each episode, the period of relative peace observed alongside concentrated executive authority in Pakistan collapsed in the aftermath of the fracturing of that authority domestically. In general, when Pakistani leaders perceived they were solely responsible for foreign and defense policies, they behaved well. When power was distributed or contested across multiple power centers, Pakistan’s policies toward India became aggressive and risk acceptant. Besides providing explanatory and predictive power for the Indo-Pakistani rivalry, this argument also offers a generalizable argument that can be utilized to explain periods of rapprochement and confrontation within a broader universe of rivalries.