

COVERT DIPLOMACY AND NON-KINETIC STATECRAFT: THE EVOLUTION OF INDIA-PAKISTAN RIVALRY (2018–2023)

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Abstract

Relation between India and Pakistan have been traditionally characterized by military confrontation, territory-related problems and direct engagement. Indo Pakistan strategic rivalry has seen some major changes, especially during 2018 – 2023. This period has demonstrated a clear transition towards non-kinetic and institutionally mediated contests. India has managed to align its statecraft by focusing on covert diplomacy, which is an indirect, undeniable and structurally embedded strategy through international institutions, economic regimes, strategic partnerships and global narrative construction. Using a qualitative interpretivist approach, the study analyse how India has been able to make use of multilateral platforms, financial governance structures and reputational mechanisms in order to influence the results that are not favourable to Pakistan. The process has led to the creation of a reputation asymmetry whereby India's image of being a responsible and emerging power internationally offers diplomatic protection. While, placed Pakistan in a discourse of danger, instability and lack of compliance. This transformation, presents theoretical constructs, Boat Bridge Doctrine and Anshan Model. The former views national power as internally produced capacity based on addressing internal fault lines while the latter gives a practical model that if adopted can sail a nation through the turbulent waters of global politics

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towards glory. Combined, the frameworks represent a unified perspective on the way modern power can be produced and used on escalation-limited grounds. The transformation of India-Pakistan rivalry is indicative of wider tendencies in international politics whereby power is being exercised less through use of kinetic means and more through non-kinetic ones. The capacity of Pakistan to respond well will only be achieved through a complete re-set of its statecraft i.e. an inner consolidation, geo-economic involvement and a long-term narrative reconstruction.

Keywords: *India Pakistani Rivalry, Non-Kinetic Statecraft; Diplomacy; Asymmetric Warfare; Reputational Asymmetry.*

INTRODUCTION

India-Pakistan rivalry has a long and unstable history of existence in international politics. The history of relations between the two countries is determined since their independence as separate states in 1947 by the territorial conflicts, the ideological disagreement, and the frequent military confrontation. The wars of 1947, 1965, and 1971, followed by the Kargil conflict of 1999, have reinforced a scholarly understanding of the relationship as one primarily defined by kinetic engagement and crisis escalation dynamics (1). The Line of Control has been the centre of constant tension even during relatively peaceful times, which points out the presence of a root cause of such a rivalry. Nevertheless, this classical model is becoming inadequate in terms of explaining modern trends. Although nuclear deterrence has greatly diminished the chances of the full-scale war, it has not lowered the level of strategic rivalry (2). In its place, competition has adjusted to institutional limitations of nuclearization, globalization and increasing role of international institutions. Nuclear deterrence stabilizes conflict at the military level but often displaces competition into alternative domains where escalation thresholds are less clearly defined (3).

This changing environment puts the years 2018 to 2023 in the critical period during which India-Pakistan rivalry has taken a new direction. India adopted a type of non-kinetic statecraft by apply such indirect means of influence that are executed by means of economic leverage, institutional involvement, and the creation of narratives. This shift reflects a broader transformation in international relations, where power is exercised not only

through material capabilities but also through the ability to shape norms, perceptions and decision-making structures (4). This shift is especially clearly depicted in the foreign policy of India at the time. Its expanding economic potential has improved its status in the world, where it can now interact with the leading powers and the multilateral institutions on an effective manner. India's strategic alignment during this era, with the United States and its partners in the Indo-Pacific has provided it with increased diplomatic capital, allowing it to project influence beyond its immediate region (5). This alignment is not only military based but also goes to the economic and institutional spheres which further strengthens the role of India in the world order.

Meanwhile, India has exercised an advanced capability of integrating its strategic interests into the international institutional structures. India is one example as it has been able to indirectly influence the counterterrorism outcomes and compliance standards through engagement with financial governance mechanisms. Such processes often appear technocratic and neutral, yet they can produce significant political and economic consequences for targeted states (6). This power to act through the institutional means is a type of diplomacy that is delicate and efficient at the same time without taking the risks of being bluntly coercive. Pakistan, on the other hand, has been exposed to various structural issues which limited its diplomatic prowess (7). Its bargaining power curtailed due to economic instability and the governance concerns have hurt its credibility in the international forums (8). These internal vulnerabilities not only reduce Pakistan's capacity to engage proactively but also made it more susceptible to external pressure (Barthwal, 2019). Reputational considerations are especially important in such a setting where a negative view of a certain situation can be converted into a concrete economic and diplomatic expense.

The idea of reputational positioning plays key role in explaining this dynamic. States in the modern international politics are not only being evaluated based on their material capacity but also their perceived dependability and adherence to international standards. Identity and perceptions are also key in the way international interactions are made whereby the action of the states will be perceived differently by the states

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involved. India's ability to cultivate a positive global image has therefore provided it with a form of diplomatic leverage that extends beyond traditional power metrics (10). Although such developments are significant, a lot of the available literature on India-Pakistan relations still dwells on the military doctrines and crisis management. Although these views have their merits, they fail to describe the trend of non-kinetic rivalry. Research on hybrid warfare and information operations offers somewhat justifications but fail to provide a consistent framework through which institutional and reputational mechanism are integrated and bring about strategic outcomes.

This paper fills this gap by theorizing the concept of covert diplomacy as a unique form of statecraft. Covert diplomacy is understood in this context as some indirect, undeniable and institutionally integrated type of interaction that relies on the global governance arrangements, economic dependence and narrative building in order to accomplish strategic goals. In contrast to conventional diplomacy, which is based on an explicit negotiation, covert diplomacy is based on structural influence, i.e. creating the environment in which decisions are made in ones favour.

In order to examine this phenomenon, two theoretical frameworks proposed in the study are the Boat Bridge Doctrine and the Anshan¹ Model. The Boat Bridge Doctrine redefines the concept of national power as the internally created capacity, which focuses on the significance of economic resilience, institutional coherence and cognitive legitimacy. As their credibility enhances their ability to shape international outcomes, states with strong internal foundations and less vulnerabilities, are better positioned to project influence externally (11). Instead of making use of isolated coercion, states are known to use a mix of institutionalizing, economic filtering and normative punishment in order to narrow the choices of their opponents over time. On the other hand, the Anshan Model provides a practical model that focuses on internal issues and mend the inner core to provide a strong base and better image abroad. Such forms of power are

¹The acronym is constructed from the names of author's (Mian Mazhar Waqas) father and mother's name i.e. Anwaar and Shahnaz.

particularly effective in a globalized world, where overt aggression is both costly and counterproductive (4).

The proposed study is qualitative and follows the interpretivist approach for analysis of phenomena that entail perception, meaning and narrative construction. The importance of this research is not limited to the India-Pakistan situation only but with the growing involvement of the international politics with non-kinetic types of competition, the mechanisms of Boat Bridge Doctrine and Anshan Model must be comprehended by scholars and policymakers. The paradigms created within this research provide the perspective of analysis of modern relationships of power, the significance of the inner strength and systemic impact on the outcomes of global politics.

Overview of Indian Diplomacy during the period 2018-2023

Recalibration of Indian Statecraft (2018–2023)

Indian diplomacy transformed in the period between 2018 and 2023 into a much more proactive and globally integrated mode instead of a more reactive and regionally confined one (12). This rebalance was not sudden or accidental but a product of a long-term shift in the foreign policy thinking of India, in which economic development, institutional involvement and strategic orientation were coming to be considered as key sources of power. India's contemporary foreign policy characterized by a shift from ideological positioning to pragmatic engagement, which allowed it to operate effectively across multiple geopolitical arenas (12).

One of the forces behind this change has been the continued economic growth in India, which also made it more attractive as a business ally. The globalization of the nation into value chains has helped the nation to gain economic relationships to be used in diplomacy, thus making the boundary between economic and political power unclear. India's growth trajectory positioned it as one of the most significant emerging economies, creating structural incentives for states and institutions to align with its preferences (13). This financial bargain has in its turn, been converted into diplomatic capital whereby India was able to influence the outcomes in a manner that goes beyond the traditional bilateral interaction.

Meanwhile, the foreign policy of India has placed more emphasis on multi-alignment, as opposed to creation of an absolute alliance. India has

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successfully engaged with diverse partners, sometimes rivals including the United States, Russia, and regional powers, without fully committing to any single bloc (14). This has made it more strategic and broadened its diplomatic boundaries. Notably, this positioning enables India to have numerous institutional frameworks to work in thus enhancing its power to affect global governance processes.

Institutional Leverage and Multilateral Strategy

This has been the strategic employment of multilateral institutions as a tool of influence of Indian diplomacy during that period. Instead of depending on an apparent bilateral confrontation approach, India has progressively incorporated its strategic aims into international regulatory and governance systems. The fact that it can be pressured and at the same time, it can be denied with a certain degree of plausibility is an attribute of what this study theorizes as covert diplomacy.

A very good example is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Even though FATF is technically a body that is dedicated to fighting money laundering and terror financing, its operations are not entirely immune to political influence (15). The long-term diplomatic involvement in the FATF-related circles led to the formulation of the discourse on the inadequacy of the compliance with Pakistan. The framing of Pakistan as a high-risk jurisdiction was not merely the result of technical assessments but was also influenced by broader geopolitical considerations where India used its influence and lobbying (16). Such institutional embedding has impacts that are much broader than the direct remit of FATF. Economic restrictions of the targeted state are the added up strain of increased scrutiny of financial transactions, increased compliance costs and decreased investor confidence. Such outcomes demonstrate how seemingly neutral institutional processes can generate significant strategic consequences (17). Notably, such effects are attained without confrontation which emphasises effectiveness of indirect pressure mechanisms.

The involvement of India in the G20 is another indication of how it can use multilateral platforms to achieve its strategic benefits. India became a norm leader in the international system, by positioning itself as a key player

in the global economic governance. The G20 presidency of India underlined such themes as economic stability and inclusive development, which reinforced the responsibility theme in the global community (18). This reputational positioning did not only enhance the influence of India as far as diplomatic sphere is concerned but it has an effect on the discourse as a whole in which regional issues are perceived.

Strategic Alliances and the Role of QUAD

The involvement of India in strategic groupings especially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has been instrumental in enhancing its diplomatic power. Although the concept of QUAD is largely presented as a security alliance that would enable stability in the Indo-Pacific, its effects would be far-reaching in terms of its impact in the military sphere. QUAD represents a broader alignment of political and economic interests among its members, positioning India as a key partner in shaping regional and global order (19).

This presented India with what can be termed as a reputational shield. In identifying itself with the great democratic powers, India depicted its policies sound like they add to the stability and rule based order in the world. Such alignment enhances India's legitimacy within international forums, making it more difficult for alternative narratives to gain grip (20). On the contrary, Pakistan lacked similar strategic systems, which restricted its capacity to shape the discourse on the international level.

Furthermore, the membership in QUAD and other such groupings enabled India to enjoy the benefit of networked diplomacy, wherein the power is enhanced by the joint actions (21). This network effect spills over to economic and technological spheres which further enhances the position of India. Consequently, the diplomatic efforts of India tend to have increased weight not only due to the possibilities of this country but also with the help of its partners.

Economic Diplomacy as a Strategy Tool

Economic diplomacy has become an important pillar of the diplomacy by India. India has developed structural incentives to make the states align with its strategic goals by using its market size, the potential of the investments and its contribution to the global supply chains (22). Economic

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strength provides states with a form of “quiet power,” enabling them to influence outcomes without any compulsions (23). This is most noticeable when it comes to bilateral and multilateral economic relationships. States that want to enter the Indian market will tend to adapt its preferences thus strengthening its diplomatic power. Such economic relationships are not purely transactional but are embedded within broader strategic considerations, including political alignment and institutional cooperation (24).

The imbalance between India and Pakistan in this regard is pronounced. Although the economy of India is still growing, Pakistan has been experiencing the same economic setbacks and thus it is not able to compete. Pakistan’s fiscal constraints and reliance on external assistance, factors that reduce its bargaining power in international negotiations (15). Such economic gap was directly converted into diplomatic imbalance, which bolstered the strength of India.

Narrative Construction and Media Diplomacy

Media diplomacy plays a critical role in shaping international perceptions, influencing how states are viewed by both policymakers and the public (25). Besides the institutional and economic strategies, India has been able to exhibit a more advanced method of narrative construction. It has managed to develop an image of stability, growth, and responsibility through the use of digital diplomacy, engagement with the global media and strategic communication.

The story of India underlines the fact that it is a democratic country, a fast growing country and a country that is technologically evolving. This is a depiction that is corroborated by general world narratives and is, therefore, easier to digest on the international discourse. Meanwhile, when it comes to discussing issues concerning Pakistan, they are usually placed in the context of security threats and governance problems, which contributes to the negative attitude (26). The strength of narrative is the possibility to influence cognitive structures within which information is perceived. These structures once established affect decision making in international institutions. Identities and perceptions are central to

international relations, as they determine how actions are understood and evaluated (27). The ability of India to construct its narratives as such has then afforded it a considerable strategic benefit. These components, combined, are a consistent strategy of covert diplomacy. Instead of applying open coercion, India came up with a kind of statecraft which function by structural influence. In a setting where confrontation was limited, this will enabled it to influence the outcomes in a manner that was effective and sustainable.

Notably, this strategy is not based on the action of any particular instrument but the collaboration of various mechanisms. Narrative positioning is supported through institutional involvement. Institutional power is augmented by economic power and strategic alliances contribute to all these factors (28). The outcome is an aggregate form of power which is hard to disarm because it works in more than one sphere at a given time.

This is a complicated challenge to Pakistan. Conventional answers in the form of military or reactive diplomacy cannot be used to respond to a strategy which is inherently indirect and organizationally entrenched. It is thus important to understand the nature of Indian diplomacy to come up with effective counter strategies an aspect that will be discussed later.

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Analysis

From Overt Rivalry to Covert Contestation

This is a critical change in the quality of the India-Pakistan rivalry in the years 2018-2023, where an overt, kinetic conflict of India against Pakistan is replaced by a more sophisticated and stratified contest of India against Pakistan. Although the classic types of security dilemmas, like territorial conflicts, military bragging and nuclear deterrence still exist structurally, but they may lose their operational visibility in favour of indirect forms of influence. This shift can be seen as part of the more general trends within the international system, in which the price of direct warfare has risen and the utility of non-warfare methods has risen.

Traditionally, the competition has been characterised by sporadic crises, such as the Kargil Conflict, Pulwama and Balakot Crisis, which demonstrates the dangers of kinetic interactions between nuclear-powered nations. However, nuclear deterrence has created a ceiling on escalation, incentivizing both states to explore alternative avenues of competition. These options are not just subsidiary but they are becoming core to the way in which competition is being waged.

In this changing landscape, India has shown a higher ability to change its strategic orientation, to tools that do not cross the boundary of armed conflict. Pakistan, in its turn, has been relatively limited, usually reacting under the conventional patterns that are less effective in countering pressure from under the carpet. This break-off constitutes an analytical basis of what can be referred to as asymmetric non-kinetic rivalry.

The Non-Kinetic Statecraft Conceptualization

Non-kinetic statecraft is the application of non-military tools or instruments such as economic, institutional, informational and diplomatic means in strategic purposes. Although these tools are not recent, their combination into a unified approach is a major development in the behaviour of the state. Such instruments as forms of power that operate through inducement and persuasion rather than coercion. In the modern context however, these mechanisms tend to have the effect of being functionally coercive despite it not being explicitly so presented.

One important aspect of non-kinetic statecraft is that it is undeniable. Non-kinetic measures, unlike military action, are usually lurking within a wider system e.g. a global financial policy or a media system and it is hard to be able to hold anyone accountable. This vagueness makes them more effective because the target state will not be able to respond as it will come off as defensive or reactionary.

The example of the institutions, as is seen in India such dynamic. India can apply pressure by entrenching its strategic goals in a multilateralism mechanism without seeming to be partisan. Such strategies blur the line between technical compliance and political contestation, creating a form of influence that is both subtle and impactful.

Structural Power and Reputational Asymmetry.

The key concept of this analytical framework of the study is reputational asymmetry. This is the unequal distribution of credibility, legitimacy and normative congruence between states in the international system. Reputation is a kind of capital, which defines the way actions are perceived and the way stories are told. During the era of 2018 - 2023, India managed to establish a reputation of responsible, democratic and economically dynamic players. The image was strengthened by the fact that it is a member of international organizations, its positioning in line with the main powers and its stable image framing. States that align with prevailing norms of the international order are more likely to be perceived as legitimate, thereby enhancing their influence.

On the other hand, Pakistan's recurring issues to do with governance, economic stability and security have added to the unfavourable international image. Although some of these perceptions are disputed, they play a huge role in policy outcomes. Reputational deficits can translate into tangible constraints, including reduced access to financial markets and limited diplomatic support.

This disequilibrium forms a loop. Favourable views of India strengthen its capacity to construct discourses and impact institutions whereas unfavourable views of Pakistan enhance the force of external pressure. Such dynamics are socially constructed but have real-world consequences, as they shape the behaviour of both states and institutions.

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Pressure Mechanism Institutionalization.

One of the most distinguishing features of the attitude of India during this time is the institutionalization of pressure. India has not depended on its ad hoc responses, but it has incorporated its strategic goals into permanent structures that have contributed to creating influence in the long term. This institutionalization increases its efficiency and sustainability in its strategy. As an example, when Pakistan was put on the FATF grey list, the ensuing inspection brought a snowball of economic and regulatory effects that went beyond the decision made. Banks and financial institutions re-evaluated their risk-taking, shareholders re-assessed their anticipation and the cost of compliance became high. Such effects were felt even after Pakistan implemented reforms, which shows the long-term consequences of institutional choices.

Likewise, the involvement of India in international forums of governance like the G20 and other institutions of the UN has enabled it to influence the normative environment in which the regional agenda is debated. Such platforms are not merely forums for dialogue but arenas where narratives are constructed and legitimized.

Information and Cognitive Areas of Competition.

One cannot overestimate the significance of the cognitive domain. As soon as a certain story is hegemonic, it determines the understanding of the further events. Taking India as an example, moves made by it could be considered in terms of legitimacy, whereas the same made by Pakistan could be considered with a grain of salt. Such imbalance helps to cement power relations and the state at a disadvantage is finding it hard to change the minds.

The other important aspect of non-kinetic statecraft is the information domain, wherein stories, perceptions and ways of thinking are the key points. Power in this field does not take place as a result of material ability but by means of being able to influence the way in which reality is perceived. The investment that India made in its digital diplomacy and its interactions with the media of the world allowed India to create a steady and unified story. This story focuses on stability, economic development, democracy and is in

line with the expectations in the rest of the world. Such alignment enhanced the credibility of a state's messaging, making it more likely to be accepted by international audiences.

Pakistan, in contrast, was an event-driven story in which it had reactive rather than taking the initiative to craft a discourse. This responding posture restricted its capacity to shape cognitive frames, since it acted within the narratives which have already been created by other people. The outcome was a kind of discursive interdependence, in which Pakistan was limited in their messaging by having to react to instead of taking the initiative.

Limitations to the Strategic Response of Pakistan.

The strengths of Pakistan to react to these changing dynamics were limited by structural and internal forces. Its ability to take advantage of economic diplomacy was limited economically due to its dependence on outside financing and frequent fiscal difficulties. The scope of such limitations, keeping in mind that fiscal instability limits the policy flexibility.

At the institutional level, the Pakistani involvement in the international system of governance has been even less efficient in determining the consequences. Although it is also involved in these institutions, it has fewer chances to shape agendas and narratives. This constraint is partly a consequence of reputational asymmetry but also, it is a result of dissimilarity in diplomatic capacity and strategic coherence.

There are also political factors that make it difficult to come up with a coherent foreign policy. The instability within a country may shift the focus and resources to the long-term strategic planning, making the external engagement less effective. Consequently, the reactions of Pakistan to non-kinetic pressure are not usually integrated and proactive, but fragmented and reactive.

Along the Road to a Theoretical Synthesis.

The discussion in this paper indicates that the India-Pakistan conflict is becoming more structured and thought-oriented in terms of power, as opposed to material-based. The policy of India functions in the various areas including economic, institutional and informational resulting in a type of influence that is diffuse and cumulative. This shift causes the need to reconsider the old ideas of power and competition. Although military

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capability is also relevant, it is no longer adequate in explaining strategic outcomes. Rather, more emphasis should be made on the way in which states are creating environments that decisions are made in.

This paper thus suggests that the modern stage of the conflict can be best explained in the context of a paradigm that combines the inactive diplomacy, reputational asymmetry and institutionalized influence. The internal strength provides a base for a state to build itself in the international world. These factors interact to generate long term consequences that are not direct and have long term implications. The trends that were observed in this analysis give a basis on which a more organized theoretical model can be introduced. In particular, they are pointing to the necessity to theorize the mechanism of the indirect influence popping out from within, in a systematic and repeatable way.

Strategic Policy Framework: Reforming National Power.

There is an urgent need to completely change the strategic calculus of Pakistan in light of the modern geopolitical environment. The 21st-century 20th-century scholarship of International Relations, which has traditionally been dominated by the so-called kinetic realism, is gradually coming to the realization that power is practiced nowadays less by direct coercion or by the conquest of territories and more indirectly, structurally and reputationally (4). In this age of the complex interdependence, the power of a state to impose its will is no longer merely a matter of its size of army, but a measure of its integrity, economic viability and the plausibility of its national history. While traditional realist conceptions of military deterrence and parity remain relevant as a baseline for survival, they are increasingly insufficient for explaining strategic outcomes in environments constrained by nuclear thresholds, high-speed economic flows, and a dense thicket of global governance institutions (5).

This model has brought about a paradigm shift: the shift of firefighting approach of reactive diplomacy to proactive stability of structural statecraft. This change can be operationalized based on two original theoretical constructs: the Boat Bridge Doctrine (BBD) and the Anshan Model. The BBD assumes the external extension of a state, the BBD, to be as firm as its

internal areas, the BBD, is. On the other hand, the Anshan Model offers the procedure to implement this unified power by means of layered, non-kinetic pressure that may reduce the decisions of an enemy with time. Informed by the main principle on which the impact of the external one is an indispensable consequence of the internal order, this document is a detailed plan on how to rebuild the domestic architecture of the state. It highlights that prior to any state making it to the rough seas of global rivalry, it is of paramount importance that all the "boats (sectorial capacity) are strengthened, coordinated, and made strong to give it the required buoyancy to the sustainable bridge of diplomacy and strategy.

The Boat Bridge Doctrine (BBD): Power Sequencing.

The BBD redefines national power as an internally created phenomenon that opposes the outward-first approach that has long dominated Pakistani statecraft. It posits that sustainable international influence can only arise when a state has been able to consolidate itself inward in economic, institutional, and cognitive arenas. The name is adopted from the old technique of river crossing, where boats would be tied together on the home bank to form a bridge over the obstacle. Similarly, the Boat Bridge Doctrine changes how we think about national power as something both internally produced (within the state) and externally projected (in relation to other states). Unlike adversary-focused diplomatic models, such as those focused on either reacting to adversaries by forming alliances against them, signalling deterrence to them, etc., the Boat Bridge Doctrine sees national power as something to be developed and maintained.

From a philosophical standpoint, one must see the value of continued domestic stability as an ongoing development rather than as a single accomplishment. A country continues to develop internally because domestic consolidation is a continuous, iterative process. It requires constant work to maintain, and the occasional tightening of, the "knot." This allows a country to continue developing itself through self-evaluation, accountability, and assessments of its own strengths and weaknesses. The basic premise of the Boat Bridge Doctrine is simple: a nation's capacity for enduring influence abroad is a direct result of how resiliently strong it is internally. As stated above, while a country's capacity to project influence internationally is

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affected by many variables (e.g., the size of military expenditures, the number of diplomats assigned to pursue foreign policy goals, the total volume of economic resources available), all of these factors depend upon the internal vitality and institutional integrity of the society from which they originate. Therefore, the internal harmony and strength of a country will ultimately determine whether the country can present a credible position in international affairs. There are several ways in which this connection between internal strength and external influence can be illustrated:

- **Credibility and Trust:** A nation with a stable economy, strong institutions, and social cohesion is inherently more credible in international dealings. Its commitments are seen as more reliable, its policies more predictable, and its partnerships more secure. When its internal "knots" are tight, other states trust its ability to honour agreements and maintain its course even amidst global turbulence. This credibility is the bedrock of effective, long-term diplomacy. Historical examples abound, such as post-WWII Germany and Japan, which rebuilt their global standing and trust through consistent internal reform and stability (29) (30).
- **Economic Clout and Attraction:** An internally prosperous nation, especially one with a diversified and equitable economy, can offer genuine economic incentives and opportunities to its partners. It attracts foreign investment not merely for cheap labour or raw materials, but for its stable business environment, skilled workforce, and reliable legal framework. Its economic model becomes a powerful soft power asset, influencing others through example and shared prosperity, as seen in the rise of the East Asian Tigers like Singapore (31) the economic integration within the European Union (32).
- **Soft Power and Moral Authority:** A society that consistently upholds human rights, promotes justice, invests deeply in its citizens' well-being, and manages its internal affairs effectively earns moral authority and admiration on the global stage. Its cultural appeal, its esteemed educational institutions, and its deeply embedded values become powerful tools of influence, attracting partners who wish to emulate its

success or share its vision. Joseph Nye's concept of Soft Power underscores how a nation's attractiveness, rooted in its domestic values and culture, can be a more persuasive tool than coercion (33).

- **Resilience to External Shocks:** Internally strong nations are inherently better equipped to withstand external pressures, whether they be economic downturns, geopolitical tensions, natural disasters, or even acts of aggression. Their diversified economies, robust social safety nets, and unified populations allow them to absorb shocks without collapsing into systemic crisis, thus preventing external actors from exploiting their vulnerabilities. Comparative studies of nations' responses to the 2008 financial crisis (34) or COVID 19 pandemic based on internal preparedness (35) clearly illustrate this advantage.
- **Effective Resource Mobilization:** A state with efficient governance and a functioning, equitable economy can mobilize its resources (human, financial, technological) more effectively for both domestic development and strategic foreign policy initiatives. It can invest consistently in research and development, adequately fund diplomatic missions, and contribute substantively to international public goods without compromising its internal stability or overstressing its capacities. This sustained ability to contribute enhances its influence and standing.
- **Attraction of Talent and Investment:** Internal stability and prosperity create a magnet effect, attracting not only foreign capital but also skilled labour, innovative minds, and entrepreneurial spirit from across the globe. This influx of human and financial resources further strengthens the nation's internal dynamism, fosters a culture of innovation, and significantly enhances its global competitiveness and soft power, creating a virtuous cycle of growth and influence.

Applied to the India–Pakistan context, the Boat Bridge Doctrine explains why India's diplomatic initiatives have yielded asymmetric outcomes. India's sustained investment in economic reform, institutional engagement, and global narrative positioning enabled it to construct durable diplomatic bridges across multiple forums. Pakistan, by contrast, attempted outward diplomatic engagement without first consolidating its internal foundations, resulting in fragile external linkages vulnerable to reputational disruption

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(36). *The doctrine thus reframes diplomatic success not as a function of intent or moral positioning, but as the cumulative outcome of inward structural preparation.*

The Anshan Model: Accumulation of Indirect Pressure

While the Boat Bridge Doctrine explains how power is generated, the Anshan Model explains how it may be applied real world. Drawing its conceptual inspiration from the idea of gradual elevation rather than sudden assault, the Anshan Model conceptualizes power as an accumulative process achieved through layered, indirect pressure across institutional, economic, and normative domains. Rather than seeking decisive outcomes through singular actions, states employing the Anshan Model rely on incremental constraint-building that narrows the strategic options available to their adversaries over time.

The Anshan Model provides an explanation of how influence is operationalized in contemporary limited contexts based on incremental constraint-building. Nuclearized or highly interdependent areas demand decisive results by means of a single, high-profile kinetic act, which is self-defeating. The firmness of the integrity of the "bridge" will be measured by the solidity of these separate "boats" those may be termed as components of national power, are:

- **The Foundation of Predictability (The Order):** Focuses on the reliable, just, and effective working of state organizations under clear laws, ensuring a stable political atmosphere and promoting faith in governance. This encompasses rule of law, institutional continuity, administrative competence, civic legitimacy, and robust accountability mechanisms.
- **Economics as Endurance (The Prosperity):** Describes a nation's ability to generate viable wealth, fostering dynamism, and guaranteeing that financial benefits are broadly shared, acting as the engine of national progress. Key aspects include diversified economic bases, self-funding capacity, equitable distribution of wealth, and robust public welfare systems.
- **Unity as Infrastructure (The Cohesion):** Encapsulates the strength of a

nation's social fabric, highlighting national unity, mutual trust among citizens, and strategic investment in the full human potential of its public. This is built through inclusive representation, shared national narratives, and equitable opportunity and protection.

- **Human Capital and Knowledge (The Education):** This fundamental aspect emphasizes ensuring widespread access to quality education at all levels, fostering critical thinking and innovation, and continuously developing the skills of the populace. A healthy, educated, and skilled populace is the ultimate engine of national strength, innovation, and long-term economic competitiveness, directly contributing to a more productive workforce, a healthier society, and a more engaged citizenry, all of which are vital for national resilience.
- **Credibility as Currency and Narrative Power (The Information):** Speaks about the vital role of a free, diverse, and reliable information ecosystem within a nation, ensuring that truth can flourish, citizens are well-informed, national narratives reaches the required audience (domestic and abroad) and protected from manipulation. This includes institutional integrity of data sources, media pluralism, strategic communication capacity, and high public trust in information.
- **Protection as Proof of Legitimacy (The Security):** Represents a nation's fundamental capability to protect its territory, its people, and its critical assets from all internal and external intimidations, ensuring comprehensive protection and stability. This involves civilian oversight of security forces, predictability in security responses, human-centered security approaches, and strong digital integrity.

Each component within the Anshan Model is further broken down into measurable indicators, actionable policy recommendations, and strategic benchmarks. The model advocates for continuous assessment and adaptation, recognizing that internal strength is not a static achievement but an ongoing process of refinement and responsiveness to evolving challenges. It encourages deep inter-ministerial coordination, robust public-private partnerships, and broad citizen engagement, guided by Strategic Vision, Collective National Will, and Capable Leadership which ensures that the "knotting" of the "boat" is a collective national endeavour. Thus,

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transcending top-down government directives till the individuals and embedding resilience into the societal fabric.

Counter Measures on Pakistan.

To overcome the strategy of India, there is a need to re-calibrate the statecraft of Pakistan, which focuses more on the inward consolidation, institutional credibility, and long-term narrative reconstruction. According to the Boat Bridge Doctrine and Anshan Model, the following counter-strategies are a must:

- **Inward Consolidation (Economic Resilience):** *Pakistan cannot be said to be vulnerable to external factors without internal weakness of the economic strength. Emphasis on economic stabilization and predictability of regulations is more of a strategic facilitator and creates low vulnerability to indirect pressure by international financial bodies. The "boat" on which the bridge of diplomacy is to rest is economic health.*
- **Geo-Economic Pivot and Diversification:** *Pakistan has to shift towards a geo-economic-centric rather than security-centric foreign policy. As a functional economic corridor (not only CPEC), with diversified trade partners, Pakistan will be able to interrupt the filtration vector of the Anshan Model, establishing various dependencies so that no one actor can isolate it diplomatically.*
- **Pre-emptive Institutional Action:** *Pakistan must take a lead in the multilateral forums instead of being reactionary or defensive. This includes seconding professionals to the international secretariats and participating in world norm-setting on such issues as climate change, digital governance and migration, which translates to institutional social capital that can be transformed into diplomatic assistance in times of crisis.*
- **Narrative Re-engineering and Cognitive Legitimacy:** *Pakistan will need to shift away, periodically, towards proactive, legitimizing narrative construction. It is based on emphasizing human capital, technological innovations and cultural heritage to attain the state of cognitive legitimacy the situation when the world sees the nation not as*

a state of crisis but as an essential stakeholder.

- **Human Capital Integration:** Capitalizing on the Pakistani diaspora and investing in education to produce a global competitive workforce. This offers non-conventional diplomatic means and soft power that can be used to bypass official levels of state blocks.
- **Strategic Minilateralism:** Going beyond large alliances to issue-based or so-called minilateral groupings, Pakistan can water down the structural dominance of New Delhi centric strategic forms. This can be achieved by establishing smaller, pliable alliances with the middle powers (e.g., Turkey, Indonesia and Central Asian Republics) over certain economic or security areas of interest.
- **Digital Sovereignty and Data Diplomacy:** Pakistan must develop national digital infrastructure to overcome digital-domain covert diplomacy. Creating autonomous data stories and ensuring information ecosystems within the country stops the cognitive infiltration that can be caused by the invasion of external parties in domestic online communication.
- **Civil-Military Institutional Synergy:** The Boat Bridge Doctrine needs a single strategic direction. Institutionalization of institutional mechanisms to align the economic policy with security requirements will guarantee that diplomatic signalling is supported by consistent domestic policy to avoid the contradictory signalling.
- **Promoting Soft image:** In addition to conventional diplomacy, Pakistan needs to create an incentive to export its creative industries (film, art, literature). A pool of world goodwill is formed by cultural presence, which serves as a form of shield against institutionalized attacks of reputation.
- **Climate and Development Diplomacy:** Repositioning Pakistan as a frontline state to the international climate crisis. Along with becoming an international partner as opposed to a security issue, Pakistan can take the global community by spearheading South-South collaboration on the topics of loss and damage and environmental justice.
- **Epistemic Community Building:** In making investments in domestic

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think tanks and academic research which can offer the intellectual ammunition on which to base discourse in the world. Pakistan can challenge the normative bases of covert diplomatic pressure at the epistemic level by generating peer-reviewed, data-driven studies that will challenge biased metrics.

Conclusion

India-Pakistan rivalry has been evolving in terms of covert diplomacy and non-kinetic statecraft in particular the years of 2018-23. Modern interstate competition is no longer characterized by only kinetic power or traditional military conflict, but rather by the capacity of states to influence the outcomes indirectly by means of institutional, economic and cognitive processes. This analysis shows that the relative strategic advantage of India during this period is not just a factor of material superiority, but rather the capacity to combine both domestic capacity and external influence mechanisms. India has successfully mobilized a kind of diffuse, persistent and hard to counter with classical strategies of power through a coordinated interaction on international institutions, strategic narrative construction, and economic signalling. This is representative of a larger shift in the politics of the world in which power is not wielded as an individual act but as a system.

To address this change, the paper proposed the original theoretical model, the Boat Bridge Doctrine (BBD) and the Anshan Model, which is set to elaborate on how non-kinetic power is generated and used. The Boat Bridge Doctrine re-conceptualizes the concept of power by making internal structural coherence the centre of state capability that rational sustainable influence on the external frontier depends on the integrity of domestic structures. In line with this, the Anshan Model gives a dynamic and working model through which the internally generated strength is conveyed into the exterior influence. The model conceptualizes statecraft as an ongoing, systemic process by focusing on diagnostic, integrative, mobilization and adaptive continuity phases. Collectively, these frameworks fill a significant gap in the body of literature by relating internal governmental formations to outside strategic results, thus providing a more comprehensive perspective

of contemporary power-relation. They transcend classical realist and liberal paradigms where it prove that in the modern-day world, power is not simply material or institutional, but structurally ingrained and built up over time.

Using these frameworks to the case between India and Pakistan, there is an inherent asymmetry in the situation. The capacity of India to balance internal consolidation with external engagement has made it build a multi-layered network of influence and the problems of Pakistan are indicative of a comparative inability to integrate systems and coherence of strategy. Such a difference helps to clarify the main point of the paper: within the context of non-kinetic statecraft, it is the strength of the structure inside that predetermines the effectiveness of diplomacy, rather than external activism. Notably, the competition is not presented in this work in deterministic terms. Rather, it emphasizes how a state like Pakistan can change by taking a systematic, internally motivated way of statecraft. With the application of the Boat Bridge Doctrine principles and utilizing them on the basis of the Anshan Model, Pakistan will gradually cease to be an actor of the international system in the reactive posture and transform into a proactive and structurally empowered actor.

On a larger scale, the results of this study can be added to the existing literature that has acknowledged the evolving nature of power in international relations. With the ongoing trends of globalization, an increasing number of states are forced to act in the domain of indirect, non-kinetic competition because of interdependence and increased cost of direct conflict makes such warfare considerably more expensive. The capability to construct resilient institutions, coherent policies, and plausible narratives, in this sense, emerges as significant, indeed more significant, than conventional military competencies. The 2018-2023 India-Pakistan relations is an important case study to understand how to move towards to structural competition eventually benefiting the mankind and public. Boat Bridge Doctrine and the Anshan Model, not only provides an explanation of this transition but also a useful roadmap on how to go about it. The models can be further generalised in future research to other regional and global settings to enhance applicability and theoretical richness.

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