

The Indo-Pakistani War of 1965: An Alliance Power Transition Theory Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the interplay between global and regional rivalries by illustrating how alliances during the Cold War period affected the conflict between India and Pakistan in South Asia, with a focus on the US-Pakistan alliance and its consequences for the region. It applies Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) to the case of the 1965 Indo-Pak war, set within the geopolitical context of the Cold War. The study argues that, due to their implications for power redistribution and perceptions of parity, the US-Pakistan alliance pushed India-Pakistan relations onto a conflict trajectory. Pakistan's alliance with the US was driven more by rivalry with India than by any shared strategic interests, temporarily leveling the power gap between the two states. Pakistan's dissatisfaction with the South Asian regional status quo and its perceived power parity in terms of military strength contributed to the outbreak of war, as exemplified by the 1965 conflict. This paper critiques the Balance of Power theory and instead emphasizes the role of alliance-driven power transition in the 1965 India-Pakistan war. Methodologically, the research employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates historical analysis with theoretical perspectives. This study contributes a replicable framework concerning alliances, perceptions of power, and geopolitical contexts, which may offer new insights into regional rivalry and alliance dynamics.

Keywords: Alliance, Cold War, 1965 Indo-Pak War, Parity, US-Pakistan Alliance.

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Introduction

A state can choose to enter an alliance (external balancing) or develop its own military capabilities (internal balancing) to ensure its national security. The state determines the most cost-effective option by weighing the relative costs and benefits of each approach. These factors are integral to an alliance relationship, which serves as a strategic concept or goal that defines the shared responsibilities of alliance partners and outlines a common defense strategy. This includes specifying roles, missions, and the required force levels to implement agreements on command structures, base arrangements, and burden sharing (Pollack & Cha, 1995). Alliances have existed historically, in the recent past, and continue to exist today. During the Cold War, several key alliances emerged, most notably the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact, representing the US and the USSR, respectively. These alliances solidified and intensified the divisions between democratic and socialist states, raising the possibility of a wider conflict involving multiple regions, including the risk of nuclear war if hostilities broke out between opposing powers. In the early years of the Cold War, the US engaged in so many alliances, treaties, and agreements that American commentators referred to the era as one of “Pactomania” (Walt, 2023).

The alliances of both the US and the USSR expanded across many regions. Beyond Europe, South Asia also witnessed intense alliance competition, particularly between India and Pakistan. During the Cold War, Pakistan became part of the US alliance network in South Asia (Gul, Shad, & Imran, 2024). The primary motivation for Pakistan’s alliance with the US was its rivalry with India, especially over the Kashmir dispute and related issues (Gul, Munir, Shafiq & Imran, 2022). Despite differing interests and the absence of a common external threat, this rivalry led to the US-Pakistan alliance in 1954.

America’s policy towards the subcontinent during the Cold War aimed to unite the region against communist states, with the alliance with Pakistan forming part of its broader containment strategy. However, Pakistani leaders were more focused on securing military and economic support to strengthen their defenses against India than on containing communism. Meanwhile, American leaders never intended the alliance to serve as an anti-India pact or to involve the US directly in the India-Pakistan dispute.

Since its inception in 1954, the US-Pakistan alliance has experienced various ups and downs, with criticisms that the US has been a “fair-weather friend” and accusations that Pakistan has engaged in “double plays” (Komireddi, 2011; Merkey, 2011). Despite divergent interests in many key areas, the US and Pakistan have maintained a long-standing alliance.

Although Pakistan and the US were both active members of their alliance, in 1965, Pakistan—a US ally—went to war with India. This conflict strained the US-Pakistan alliance. Unwilling to take sides, the US imposed a military embargo on both countries and significantly reduced its involvement in South Asian politics. Meanwhile, the Soviets led a renewed effort to resolve the dispute, sought to strengthen ties with Pakistan, and continued

supplying weapons to India. Following the war, India's dominance over Pakistan increased, and Pakistan's growing dissatisfaction with the US prompted a shift in its security policy toward other nations (Walt, 1988).

Several studies have approached this topic from different perspectives. The most effective way to examine the balance-of-power argument is to analyze the reasons behind alliance formations. A central idea shared by all versions of this theory is that weaker states tend to band together to counterbalance great powers. This tendency results in "the recurrent formation of balances of power," as articulated by Kenneth Waltz, whose *Theory of International Politics* offers the most rigorous explanation of this concept (Waltz, 1979; Morgenthau & Thompson, 1985; Kaplan, 1957; Wagner, 1986). The balance-of-power theory continues to provide valuable insights into international politics. However, its limitations highlight the need to explore specific issues, such as the competition between the US and USSR in South Asia from 1954 to 1965 and how the power dynamics between India and Pakistan led to the 1965 war. Examining alliance formation is a logical starting point, as alliances lie at the core of the theory's predictions and hold particular significance in international politics (Booth, 2021).

Drawing on both contemporary alliance commitments in the Middle East (Walt, 1985) and traditional diplomatic history, several recent studies have examined competing theories of alliance formation. These findings suggest that states often form alliances not purely for balance-of-power reasons but as a form of *bandwagoning* to counterbalance perceived threats. Contrary to the structural balance-of-power hypothesis, this body of research reveals that states balance not only against raw power but also against a range of perceived threats.

The hypothesis of this article is grounded in Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), a recent development in power transition theory advanced by scholars such as Woosung Kim. This study is significant because it revisits alliance behavior not through the traditional balance-of-power lens—which holds that states form alliances primarily to deter threats and resist foreign aggression—but rather by exploring how enduring rivalries, such as the one between India and Pakistan, have influenced alliance dynamics.

Since their independence from Britain in 1947, India has maintained military and economic superiority in South Asia, emerging as the dominant regional power. In contrast, Pakistan has sought to challenge this hegemony by aligning itself with Cold War powers. Once Pakistan achieved relative military parity through its alliance with the United States, combined with Cold War geopolitical strategies pursued by both the US and USSR and its own dissatisfaction with India's dominance, the result was the regional war of 1965 between Pakistan and India.

The assumption of parity during alliance transitions suggests that conflicts are more likely to erupt when a challenger reaches relative equality with a dominant power. While Organski and Kugler (Organski, 1968a) argue that war arises when a challenger attains parity in terms of internal economic development, this paper builds on the concept of

parity and dissatisfaction in alliance transitions as explored by Woosung Kim in his studies on alliance dynamics.

To illustrate this, the paper examines alliance formations in South Asia since World War II, focusing in particular on the alliance commitments between the United States and Pakistan. These cases are crucial, as they allow for a rigorous evaluation of several key theoretical propositions. The study employs a framework using independent, dependent, and control variables. The independent variable is the perception of Pakistan's military capability, alliances, and political support prior to the 1965 war. The dependent variable is the outbreak of the 1965 war between Pakistan and India. The control variables include the overarching Cold War context—specifically the roles of the United States and China as external powers—as well as the political and military responses of both India and Pakistan.

Alliance transition theory

Alliance Transition Theory posits that the parity of alliance power between opposing coalitions is a critical factor in determining the likelihood of a power-transition conflict. As DiCicco and Levy (1999) highlight, Woosung Kim's research into Alliance Transition Theory demonstrates that forming alliances can significantly enhance a state's capabilities—comparable to the internal advancements achieved through industrialization and political modernization, as originally emphasized by A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler.

The central determinant of war between the alliance of a declining dominant power and that of a rising challenger is the combination of power parity between these alliances and the challenger's dissatisfaction with the prevailing status quo. The theory underscores that it is not merely the shift in national power between individual states that triggers conflict, but the balance of power between rival alliances during a transition phase that plays a decisive role.

Moreover, Kim's empirical findings suggest that the likelihood of a power-transition conflict is not primarily influenced by the point at which a rising challenger surpasses a dominant power in terms of internal economic development. Instead, the interplay between alliance-based power parity and political dissatisfaction is what most strongly correlates with the outbreak of major conflict.

In his development of Alliance Transition Theory, Kim (1989, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2002) argues that the international system tends to remain stable when the dominant power's alliance maintains a substantial advantage over the alliance of a dissatisfied challenger. In such scenarios, when the leading state and its allies possess overwhelming military and strategic superiority, the likelihood of a successful challenge is minimal, thereby reducing the risk of a power-transition conflict (Organski, 1968b). Conversely, the probability of conflict increases when the rising challenger and its coalition approach parity with the declining hegemon and its alliance. The alliance transition framework thus emphasizes that

both the level of dissatisfaction among challengers and the relative parity of alliance power are key factors influencing the likelihood of major war.

This article builds upon the previously discussed Alliance Transition Theory by applying it to the U.S.–Pakistan alliance and analyzing its implications in the context of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan. Proponents of balance-of-power theory argue that alliance formation is a common and effective strategy for augmenting state power and plays a crucial role in the emergence of major power conflicts (Claude, 1962; Gulick, 1955; Kaplan, 1957; Morgenthau, 1973). In contrast, Alliance Transition Theory suggests that dominant powers within the international hierarchy are more likely to form alliances, and, as Kim notes, when one coalition achieves significant strength, it may trigger a power transition conflict. During the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet Union actively cultivated alliances in South Asia to establish parity within their respective spheres of influence. Pakistan's alignment with the U.S., alongside India's strategic relationship with the USSR, exemplifies this dynamic. According to Kim, alliances are essential for enhancing a state's external power, and Pakistan's military and economic vulnerabilities prompted it to seek greater security through strategic alliances. The U.S.–Pakistan alliance, therefore, emerged not from shared values or objectives, but rather from Cold War-driven competition between superpowers.

Literature Review

As the Cold War expanded beyond Europe into the emerging “Third World,” newly independent nations faced immediate and significant risks. Although Pakistan was not a primary battleground of the Cold War, the possibility of an East–West confrontation along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border remained a concern for U.S. policymakers, mirroring earlier challenges encountered by British colonial authorities. With mounting tensions in Europe, the Soviet Union's successful detonation of its first atomic bomb in August 1949, and Stalin's attempts to assert control over Italy's former North African colonies, establish military bases on the Black Sea, and gain access to Iran's oilfields, U.S. officials began implementing a broader Cold War strategy between late 1949 and early 1950. As anti-colonial movements gained momentum across Southeast and East Asia, officials from the Central Intelligence Agency expressed concern, stating: “Political and social tensions have intensified along the Asian coastline as Western European powers have lost their grip. The USSR and various local Communist groups are capitalizing on these tensions.” The decolonization process in Asia further alarmed U.S. leaders, who feared that newly independent states might align themselves with Communist ideologies (Central Intelligence Agency, 1948).

The United States expanded its alliance network to South Asia in the 1950s as a result of the considerations outlined above. From the administration of President Truman through that of President Eisenhower, strong military ties with Pakistan were actively promoted by key

officials such as Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Chief of the U.S. Naval Operations; Henry A. Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Affairs; and Major General George Olmsted, Deputy to the Mutual Security Administrator. Dean Rusk, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs in 1951, also played a significant role in shaping the U.S. alliance structure in Asia. On the Pakistani side, one of the earliest proponents of a military alliance with the United States was General Muhammad Ayub Khan, then Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani Army, who began seriously considering such an alliance in August 1951 (Khan, 1963).

In his later memoirs, General Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, openly discusses the rationale behind the “close friendship and alliance” between Pakistan and the United States. “The relationship was well established by the time I took office as President,” Ayub noted. While acknowledging that political elites shaped the alliance’s core components, he emphasized his direct involvement in matters that specifically affected the defense services. “I believed it was only natural for the United States to have a keen interest in the safety and well-being of smaller powers in Asia.” He argued that the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China, and even India—despite their significant internal challenges—sought to expand their respective spheres of influence and were unlikely to agree on clear boundaries. However, a compelling factor united them: none would permit the United States, as an offshore power, to establish a permanent presence in Asia. Situated between these three major powers are several smaller nations, including Nepal, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Korea, as well as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Given their geographic location between key landmasses, these nations’ foremost concern was their security. It was therefore reasonable, Ayub contended, that such states would seek external alliances for protection. In this context, the United States appeared to be a natural ally, particularly as it also sought to expand its influence in Asia (Khan, 1967).

On May 19, 1954, Pakistan and the United States signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in Karachi, reflecting a genuine give-and-take approach. However, some experts argue that this agreement led to Pakistan’s unpopularity among Afro-Asian nations, who were concerned about India’s potential regional ambitions. Evidence suggests that the Pakistani government undertook preparatory steps during Secretary of State John Foster Dulles’ visit to Karachi in May 1953. The first Soviet thermonuclear explosion likely accelerated the urgency of forming a wartime alliance. During the meeting of the Colombo Powers in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) from April 28 to May 2, 1954, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra emphasized that South and Southeast Asia were under threat from international communism. To further reassure the United States of Pakistan’s commitment to a Southeast Asian defense organization, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan visited Washington in June 1954 (Sayeed, 1965).

Indeed, Pakistan became the only Asian nation to join both major military alliances when it entered the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later known as the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO) in February 1955. As Leicester Webb observed, Pakistan “made it embarrassingly clear that she was

primarily doing so to enhance her position against India,” despite SEATO’s provisions for military and economic assistance. At the time, Pakistan received approximately \$15 per capita in aid, compared to just \$9 per capita for India—despite Pakistan’s frequent complaints about what it perceived as a U.S. economic bias favoring neutralist India over itself, a committed American ally. Richard Weekes noted that U.S. military aid often arrived in Karachi faster than Pakistani personnel could be trained to use it. Advanced tanks and supersonic jets were delivered to American-trained forces, providing a level of capability that their original commanders could scarcely have imagined. By 1963, U.S. expenditures on military equipment and personnel training for Pakistan had surpassed \$1 billion. To further assist Pakistan in revitalizing its struggling economy, economic aid also flowed into Karachi and Dacca in the form of cash grants, loans, surplus food, industrial machinery, and thousands of technical experts (Weekes, 1964).

Table 1: Share of the US in Economic Assistance Contracted by Pakistan (1951–1965)

Years	US Economic to Pakistan (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	Total economic assistance contracted by Pakistan (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	Percentage of total economic Assistance from US
1951-52 to 1954-55	244.2	61.1	335.9	84.7	72.1
1955-56 to 1959-60	752.2	150.4	1032.3	26.5	72.9
1960-61 to 1964-65	1662.8	332.6	2979.2	595.8	55.8
1965-66 to 1969-70	1280.5	256.1	2897.3	579.5	44.2

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Table 2: Loans and Credit contracted by Pakistan with the US (1951–1965)

	Loans and Credits Contracted with US (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	Total Loans and Credits Contracted (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	US percentage of Total Loans and Credits
1951-52 to 1954-55	63.1	15.3	121.3	30.1	51.9
1955-56 to 1959-60	279.3	55.9	456.1	90.9	61.5
1960-61 to 1964-65	900.0	180.0	1961.4	392.9	45.9
1965-66 to 1969-70	895.3	179.1	2270.6	454.1	39.4

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

At least 100 Pakistani officers received public administration training in the United States through programs sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In addition, USAID supported and funded approximately 300 Pakistanis for training in public health, agriculture, and other specialized sectors (Sayeed, 1965). Between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan received between \$1.2 and \$1.5 billion in essential military equipment.

However, even more substantial economic assistance was provided in the form of various loans, grants for economic development, technical assistance programs, and agricultural commodity support under Public Law 480 and other U.S. initiatives. From 1947 through June 30, 1965, Pakistan received a total of \$3 billion in economic aid. Notably, during the Second Five-Year Plan, the United States provided \$1.7 billion in loans, grants, and other forms of support—constituting nearly 30% of the total \$5.5 billion development expenditure (Sayeed, 1965). Consequently, Pakistan remained heavily dependent on American aid for roughly a decade. Since 1960, the primary channel for this support had been the World Bank’s Aid-to-Pakistan Consortium, which included the United States, West Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Japan, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Italy. According to Pakistani journalist Qudratullah Aziz, between 1960 and 1965, “the consortium’s aid pledge to Pakistan totaled \$2.103 billion, nearly half of which was from the United States” (Aziz, 1966). The tables below provide a detailed breakdown of U.S. economic aid during the 1960s.

Table 3: Pakistan’s Share of US Official Development Assistance (1951–1965)

Years	Total US Assistance (& Million)	Pakistan’s Receipts (\$ Millions)	Pakistan’s Percentages
1960	2702	141.5	5.2
1965	4023	243.7	6.1

Source: World Bank, World Development Report (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and unpublished data obtained from the Economic Affairs Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.

Table 4: Grants Contracted by Pakistan (1951–1965)

	From US (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	Frol and Countries (\$Millions) Total	Annual average	Percentage share of US
1951-52 to 1954-55	181.2	45.3	217.6	54.4	89.3
1955-56 to 1959-60	472.9	94.6	578.2	115.6	81.8
1960-61 to 1964-65	762.8	152.6	1017.8	203.6	74.5
1965-66 to 1969-70	385.2	77.0	626.7	125.3	61.5

Source: https://www.finance.gov.pk/s_survey_0708.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

In contrast to Pakistan’s alliance strategies, India consistently championed the moral principle of non-alignment and critiqued American concerns regarding “Communist expansionism.” This stance led some members of the Truman Administration to question the feasibility of implementing an effective containment strategy in South Asia if “the greatest Asian democracy” steadfastly chose to remain outside the defense framework of the so-called free world. India’s foreign policy was firmly grounded in non-alignment. Its considerable size and regional influence enabled it to avoid formal alliances, while the legacy of colonialism fostered deep mistrust toward Western security initiatives. Nonetheless,

despite its public commitment to non-alignment, India gradually shifted away from strict adherence to this policy in response to significant security threats. Given the nature of these threats and India's geopolitical context, this shift often manifested in closer ties with the Soviet Union (Wint, 1962).

India's primary adversary has historically been Pakistan. The Indo-Pakistani conflict originates from the deep-rooted animosity between Muslims and Hindus in the subcontinent, a tension intensified by specific disputes that emerged following the partition and independence of the region (Brecher, 1952). It is hardly surprising that this conflict has dominated the security concerns of both countries ever since, given that communal violence in the aftermath of independence resulted in nearly 500,000 deaths and the displacement of approximately 10 million people (Barnds, 1972).

In contrast, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru actively sought to improve relations with India's significant northern neighbor, China, despite potential security threats. Nehru played a mediating role between China and the West during the Korean War and supported China's admission to the United Nations. When China's takeover of Tibet in 1950 posed a threat to India's border, Nehru responded with relatively modest protest and pursued a conciliatory approach. This policy saw temporary success when, in 1954, Nehru and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai announced that Sino-Indian relations would be governed by the principles of "panchsheel" or peaceful coexistence (Nehru, 1961).

Several factors motivated India's accommodation of China. Nehru highly valued "Asian solidarity," which both India and China regarded as a powerful counterbalance to imperialist domination. He believed that Sino-Indian tensions could be resolved amicably. Furthermore, Nehru saw cooperation between the two nations as a means to safeguard themselves from interference by global superpowers. Lastly, given India's ongoing conflict with Pakistan and pressing internal challenges, Nehru considered a confrontation with China as a burden India could ill afford (Halpern, 1965).

India adopted a more cautious stance toward both China and the broader Cold War powers. Unlike Turkey and Iran, India did not support the American strategy of "containing" communism, which contributed to Nehru's initially disappointing relations with the United States (Brecher, 1952).

Nehru did not perceive the Soviet Union as a significant threat and was somewhat sympathetic to socialist ideas, despite occasionally imprisoning Communists within India. India's standing in the United States was further weakened by its refusal to condemn China's involvement in the Korean War and its decision not to sign the Japanese peace treaty (Barnds, 1972). Meanwhile, Stalin viewed the former colonies largely as pawns of imperialist powers, which limited the depth of Soviet-Indian relations (Donaldson, 1974). Under these circumstances, India faced no urgent need for strong alliances as long as its relations with China remained positive and Pakistan did not become overly powerful (Marwah, 1967).

A key moment indicating India's potential shift toward Soviet support occurred when Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact in 1955. In response, Nehru invited Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin to India that same year, anticipating a more moderate stance from Stalin's successors. During this period, India received a \$112 million loan from the Soviet Union, which also backed India's position on Kashmir (Barnds, 1972b). Later in 1955, Nehru undertook a highly publicized visit to the Soviet Union, demonstrating India's diplomatic capabilities despite remaining a member of the British Commonwealth and continuing to receive economic aid from Western countries.

Methodology

The research methodology is grounded in a hypothesis derived from Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), examining the relationship between the US-Pakistan alliance and its influence on the 1965 India-Pakistan War. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines historical analysis with theoretical application to explore the interaction between alliance dynamics—specifically, the parity of power within the alliance and levels of dissatisfaction. This qualitative study adopts a historical case study design, focusing on the Cold War alliance between the United States and Pakistan and its eventual impact on the 1965 conflict. Theoretical interpretation is framed through ATT, which stems from Power Transition Theory. The study identifies an independent variable encompassing Pakistan's perceived military capability, alliance commitments, and political backing prior to the war. The dependent variable is the outbreak of the India-Pakistan War in 1965. Control variables include the broader Cold War context shaped by the involvement of powers such as the US, USSR, and China, as well as the military and political responses of both India and Pakistan during the conflict.

The data sources for this research include archival records, treaties, and policy documents related to the US-Pakistan alliance, supplemented by books, journal articles, and prior studies on Cold War alliances, balance of power, and the 1965 India-Pakistan War. The study approaches the historical military and diplomatic developments in South Asia during the Cold War period. Its analytical framework integrates Alliance Transition Theory with historical analysis to understand the dynamics of power parity and alliance-driven conflict escalation. Using a comparative methodology, the research examines the alliances between the US and Pakistan and between the USSR and India within South Asia. It further investigates internal and external factors that influenced the effectiveness and outcomes of these alliances and conflicts. The methodology includes historical contextualization to analyze Cold War-era alliance structures, focusing particularly on the US-Pakistan and USSR-India partnerships. The application of theory involves testing Alliance Transition Theory's core assumption that power parity between opposing alliances increases the likelihood of war. The case study centers on the events leading up to the 1965 India-Pakistan War, highlighting how Pakistan's military buildup was supported and enabled by

its alliance with the US. The research concludes by analyzing how variations in independent and control variables influenced the outbreak of war as the dependent variable. This study aims to extend Alliance Transition Theory from explaining international wars to addressing regional conflicts in South Asia. It challenges the Balance of Power Theory by emphasizing the primacy of alliance parity and dissatisfaction as triggers for war. The findings offer new insights into how the nature of alliances shaped under ATT contributes to conflict escalation. Overall, this methodology facilitates a rigorous analysis of the causal relationship between alliance dynamics and the India-Pakistan War of 1965 within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics.

Analysis/Findings

ATT and the 1965 Indo-Pak War

Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) posits that weaker states can enhance their power through strategic alliances, a concept reflected in Pakistan's partnership with the United States during the Cold War. Recognizing India's considerable military, economic, and demographic advantages, Pakistan sought to offset its relative weaknesses by aligning with the US. Between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan joined US-led alliances such as SEATO and CENTO, receiving over \$1 billion in military and economic aid. This support bolstered Pakistan's defense capabilities and contributed to a growing military parity with India. ATT further argues that the likelihood of war increases during power transitions when competing alliances approach parity—a dynamic evident between Pakistan and India. In this context, Pakistan's alliance with the US, strengthened indirectly by Chinese support after 1962, enabled it to challenge India's dominance, especially following India's military defeat in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Pakistan's incorporation of Western military training, doctrines, and acquisition of advanced US weaponry further reinforced this sense of parity (Fair, 2014; Gupta & Lüthi, 2016).

Facing vulnerabilities on the subcontinent from China in the north and Pakistan on both eastern and western fronts, India's regional dominance was increasingly challenged as Pakistan modernized and gained confidence in its military capabilities. Between 1954 and 1963, the US supplied Pakistan's army, navy, and air force with extensive weaponry under SEATO and CENTO agreements. The army received 200 M113 Armored Personnel Carriers, 650 Patton tanks, M36B2 Tank Destroyers, Chaffee and Walker Bulldog tanks, along with 105mm and 155mm artillery, anti-tank recoilless rifles, and Cobra anti-tank missiles. The air force was equipped with B-57 bombers, F-104 supersonic jets, nine squadrons of F-86 Sabre jets, a C-130 transport squadron, six additional aircraft squadrons, thirty helicopters, Falcon Sidewinder missiles, and a variety of bombs and rockets. Pakistan's navy was modernized with a cruiser, five destroyers, eight minesweepers, a water tanker, a submarine, and three tugboats. Alongside this hardware, Pakistani forces received training to operate these advanced systems effectively. The military formed three

combined regiments, including a squadron of M36B2 Tank Destroyers and eight Patton tank regiments; notably, Patton tank cannons were also mounted on Sherman MKII tanks, sharing armament with the M36B2. All equipment reflected frontline NATO standards, and Pakistani troops were trained to ensure interoperability with Western forces (Yeager & Janos, 1985).

Beyond Pakistan's military and economic aid from the US, India's defeat in the 1962 Sino-Indian War emboldened Pakistani leaders such as Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and General Muhammad Musa. They believed Indian soldiers lacked fighting spirit—Ayub Khan famously claimed that one Pakistani soldier was equal to three Indian soldiers in combat. Confident that the advanced military equipment supplied through SEATO and CENTO had strengthened their forces, they aimed to retake Jammu and Kashmir from India. Moreover, they thought that capturing a major city like Amritsar would pressure India into conceding Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan (Cloughley, 2016).

As previously noted, between 1954 and 1965, Pakistan received over \$1 billion in various forms, including cash, loans, credits, and US military assistance. This aid significantly enhanced Pakistan's defensive capabilities through the establishment of new military bases, the expansion and modernization of existing ones, the introduction of advanced weaponry and equipment, and the creation of two new Corps commands. Shahid M. Amin, a former Pakistani diplomat, observed that these agreements secured critical US military and economic support during Pakistan's formative years, strengthening its position against India—an advantage particularly evident during the 1965 war. The United States was granted permission to establish bases on Pakistani soil to monitor the Soviet Union, while Pakistani personnel received training from American and British advisors. Many future Pakistani presidents and generals graduated from US and British military academies during this period, resulting in the Pakistani army adopting Western, especially British, military frameworks (Amin, 2000).

The Alliance Transition Theory (ATT) highlights that dissatisfaction with the existing regional status quo can drive conflict. In South Asia, Pakistan's dissatisfaction stemmed from India's control over Jammu and Kashmir, a region Pakistan claimed as rightfully its own. This grievance intensified after India's military restructuring following the 1962 Sino-Indian War, which Pakistan viewed as a direct challenge to its Kashmir claims. Perceiving India's military as overstretched due to commitments along the Chinese border and believing Indian troop morale was low, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar and Operation Grand Slam in 1965. These operations aimed to exploit India's perceived vulnerabilities and alter the territorial status quo in Pakistan's favor (Ganguly, 1994).

Pakistan gained a qualitative military advantage over India, heightening tensions that ultimately led to the full-scale war of 1965. In April 1965, a minor border clash in the Rann of Kutch surprised the Indian Army and ended with a decisive victory for Pakistan, which was widely celebrated domestically. This success emboldened Pakistan to launch Operation Gibraltar later that year, an infiltration campaign into Kashmir aimed at provoking a local

uprising against Indian control. As a US ally, Pakistan benefited from advanced American military technology, positioning itself as a credible rival to India. The situation escalated into a full-scale war along the international border, with extensive aerial combat between both countries' air forces (Yeager & Janos, 1985). During the conflict, both armies occupied portions of each other's territory. While Pakistan claims the war ended in a stalemate, it also achieved the capture of significant Indian territory.

India demonstrated considerable numerical superiority; however, this advantage was somewhat diminished due to the extensive deployment of its forces along the Indo-China border. In contrast, the Pakistan Army possessed a notable edge in anti-tank capabilities. They effectively utilized infantry-level anti-tank weapons such as the M40 recoilless rifle and the M20 Super Bazooka, while the Indian Army primarily relied on the M40 106mm recoilless rifle mounted on Jeeps—a weapon also employed by Pakistan—for anti-tank operations. Pakistan's larger inventory of anti-tank weaponry, largely the result of substantial US military aid in preceding years, proved crucial for ambush tactics, especially when concealed in dense foliage, enabling close-range strikes against enemy tanks. Quartermaster Abdul Hamid of the Indian Army was awarded the Param Vir Chakra for destroying six Pakistani tanks with his M40 gun (Mishra, 2025).

The Pakistan Army also held a significant advantage in armored strength. Equipped with US-supplied M113 Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs), Pakistan possessed mechanized infantry capabilities that India lacked at the time. This disparity provided Pakistan with greater mobility and battlefield flexibility, allowing troops to dismount alongside tanks and engage enemy positions effectively. Pakistan operated over 756 battle tanks and tank destroyers, including Patton tanks, Sherman tanks, Chaffee light tanks, and M36 Jackson tank destroyers. Additionally, the Pakistan artillery employed American tactics such as pre-time fuses, which enabled projectiles fired at different trajectories to converge on the same target. This tactic, combined with the deployment of Weapon Locating Equipment, inflicted significant damage on advancing Indian forces during the conflict (Singh, 1991).

The 1962 Indo-China border conflict was a significant factor influencing regional dynamics. In response, Pakistan sought to strengthen its ties with China following the war. A boundary agreement between Pakistan and China was reached in 1963. In July 1964, Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited Pakistan to discuss US-China relations. During his visit to China in March 1965, President Ayub Khan secured Chinese support for Pakistan's claims over Jammu and Kashmir. Although India's defense budget rose from Rs 300 crore to Rs 800 crore following the 1962 war, much of the increase was allocated to establishing mountain divisions aimed at fortifying the country's borders (Afridi & Khan, 2016).

In terms of armored capabilities, Pakistan's Patton tanks outperformed India's primary battle tank, the Centurion Mk VII, which dated back to World War II, in firepower, range, and mobility. Prior to the conflict, General Ayub conveyed to General Musa his belief that Indian troop morale was fragile and vulnerable to well-timed, concentrated assaults. He expressed confidence that the Indian army could not withstand a determined Pakistani

offensive, famously asserting that one Pakistani soldier was equivalent to three Indian soldiers (Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, 2015).

The roles of the US and USSR illustrate the core principles of the Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), which suggests that alliances formed during periods of power transition critically impact the likelihood of conflict. The United States provided material and strategic support to its ally Pakistan, while India depended on the Soviet Union for military and diplomatic backing. This dynamic fostered a subtle rivalry between the two superpowers in South Asia. The Soviet Union steadily enhanced India's military capabilities, whereas a US arms embargo forced Pakistan to seek military aid from other countries, including China, North Korea, Germany, Italy, and France. Notably, China supplied Pakistan with over 900 tanks, MiG-19 fighter jets, and equipment for three infantry divisions. France contributed Mirage aircraft and submarines, while the Soviet Union initially provided about 100 T-55 tanks and Mi-8 helicopters; however, this support was abruptly withdrawn due to intense pressure from India. Despite these challenges, Pakistan managed to partially strengthen its military forces during this period (Central Intelligence Agency, 1986).

While Pakistan received political, military, and economic support from the United States, India increasingly turned to the Soviet Union for assistance. The USSR first entered the South Asian arms market in May 1962 by signing an agreement with India for the sale and licensed production of MiG-21 supersonic fighter jets for the Indian Air Force. Due to tensions stemming from the Sino-Indian conflict, the delivery of these aircraft was delayed, with the first batch of four arriving in February 1963 for assembly in India. The Indian government justified the purchase as a means to counterbalance the F-104 fighter jets promised to Pakistan by the US in 1961. In September 1964, the Indian Defence Minister visited Moscow and secured further agreements for the supply of light tanks, helicopters,

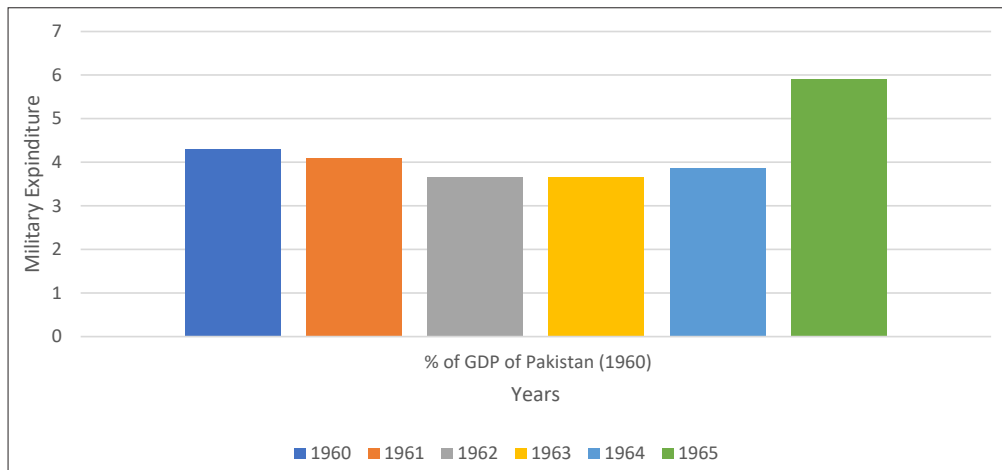


Figure 1. Defense Expenditure of Pakistan % of GDP (1960-1965)

Source: <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

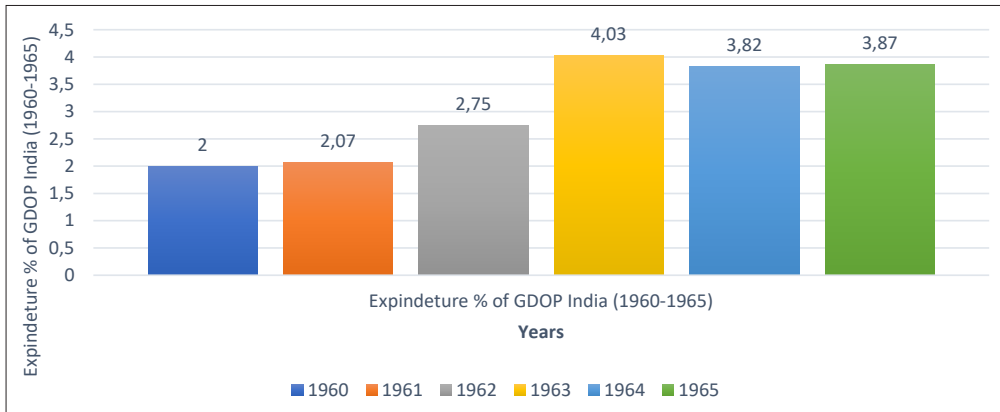


Figure 2. Defense Expenditure of India % of GDP (1960-1965)

Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=IN>

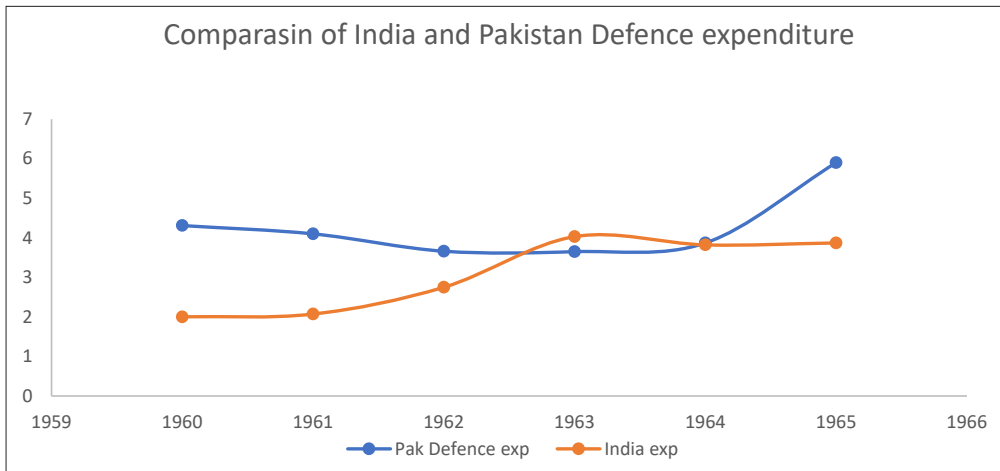


Figure 3. Comparison of India and Pakistan Defense Expenditure

Source: We, the authors, have compiled the data from the World Bank

missiles, naval vessels including submarines, and materials to support MiG manufacturing facilities in India. By 1965–66, the Soviet Union had become India’s largest single arms supplier, providing over \$300 million in military aid between 1961 and 1965 (Qureshi, 1967). Consequently, military expenditures rose significantly in both India and Pakistan, reflecting their growing reliance on foreign military assistance.

The transfer of Soviet military equipment to India raised serious concerns in Pakistan. Following the MiG agreement in May 1962, the Pakistani government lodged complaints with both the United States and the Soviet Union about the escalating competition among major powers to supply India with military resources. This dynamic threatened to upset

the regional military balance and risked increasing political instability (Hasan, 1968). Pakistan's opposition to substantial military aid flowing to India—regardless of its source—stems from fears of potential Indian aggression. India's delays in honoring agreements with Pakistan concerning the distribution of financial assets and military supplies after partition, its rigid position on the Kashmir conflict, and its ambitions to dominate South Asia and the Indian Ocean all reinforced Pakistan's perception of India as a significant security threat. Consequently, Pakistan's defense policy has prioritized maintaining military power parity, actively opposing the influx of large-scale arms into India's arsenal. This arms buildup in India has consistently triggered a reciprocal arms race in the region.

Pakistan began to feel the full impact of the Soviet arms aid program in 1965. In September of that year, the United States ceased its military assistance to Pakistan, which had been used to counter Soviet weapon shipments to India. Although the US also stopped military aid to India, the Soviet Union continued to supply New Delhi with arms. By November 1965, the Indian Air Force had received 30 MiG-21 fighters from the Soviets, who had also committed to delivering 65 medium tanks. In response to the American withdrawal, the Soviet Union intensified its military support to India. While Pakistan acquired a limited number of MiG-19 aircraft and T-53 tanks from China, concerns over Soviet arms deliveries to India were well-founded. This issue was formally raised at the governmental level during Foreign Minister Z. A. Bhutto's visit to Moscow in November 1965 (Hasan, 1968).

Following the outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan in September 1965, the US halted military and economic aid to both countries. Despite assurances, both Indian and Pakistani forces continued to use previously supplied American military equipment. Pakistan viewed this as a breach of US commitments under military agreements and expressed strong dissatisfaction over Washington's perceived lack of support. Although the US played a role in the United Nations Security Council's ceasefire resolution on September 20, its suspension of all aid was seen negatively, especially by Pakistan (Hasan, 1967). Militarily, Pakistan felt disadvantaged, as India had access to a broader array of military suppliers, while Pakistan's supplies were largely US-dependent.

The US became disillusioned with a conflict where both nations used American equipment intended for defense and anti-communism purposes. Pakistan argued that its military actions were necessary to counter India's attempts to fully annex Jammu and Kashmir, but these claims had little effect on the Johnson Administration. By July 1967, the US withdrew its military advisory group from Pakistan. In response, Pakistan declined to renew the lease on the Peshawar military base, which expired in 1969. Consequently, US-Pakistan relations deteriorated as the US became more involved in Vietnam, reducing its focus on South Asian security. During the war, the US imposed an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan, but Pakistan faced greater difficulties due to shortages of spare parts for its air force, tanks, and other military equipment, whereas India's numerical superiority helped offset such problems. The conflict concluded with a ceasefire (Kux, 2001).

Conclusion

This paper explores the dynamics of alliances and their role in shaping the likelihood of war through the lens of Alliance Transition Theory (ATT), using the 1965 Indo-Pak war as a case study. The example of Pakistan-US relations during the Cold War illustrates how alliances can influence regional power distributions and potentially trigger conflict, especially when rival states perceive parity. ATT builds on Power Transition Theory by emphasizing alliances' role in enhancing national capabilities and highlighting how alliance power parity and dissatisfaction with the status quo increase the chances of war.

Pakistan, with a relatively weaker military and economic base, sought to bolster its position against India by aligning with the US. This alignment was driven more by Pakistan's rivalry with India than by shared values or strategic interests with the US. According to ATT, perceived parity between rivals can create conditions prone to conflict, as evidenced by the 1965 war. The Cold War context was crucial, with the US-Pakistan alliance forming part of a broader US containment strategy, while the Soviet Union's growing support for India rebalanced regional alignments. These conflicting alliances not only sparked the war but also shaped its outcomes, including the eventual strain in US-Pakistan relations and Pakistan's realignment with China.

This research critiques traditional Balance of Power theories, which focus mainly on direct power imbalances between states, by showing that alliances and perceived parity within alliance networks are critical factors in conflict escalation. The 1965 Indo-Pak war exemplifies how regional rivalries, external alliances, and shifts in perceived power parity can destabilize a region and escalate tensions into war.

Methodologically, this study combines historical analysis with theoretical application, employing a mixed-methods approach that applies ATT as an analytical framework. This approach offers a more nuanced understanding than classic Balance of Power theory by accounting for how alliance dynamics and perceptions of parity increase conflict likelihood. Applying ATT to a regional conflict like the 1965 Indo-Pak war advances the field by demonstrating how global geopolitical alliances, especially during the Cold War, interact to destabilize regions and facilitate war.

Furthermore, the use of independent, dependent, and control variables strengthens the analysis of how alliance dynamics contribute to war outbreaks, providing fresh insights into how alliance perceptions and structures influence escalation. By situating the 1965 conflict within a broader theoretical and historical framework, this study challenges conventional theories and proposes a replicable methodological model for analyzing alliances, regional rivalries, and geopolitics in other conflict-prone areas.

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