
The security dilemma between India and Pakistan

Since India became entirely independent in 1947, it is evolving in what New Delhi considers a hostile environment. After several territorial wars with China in the North and Pakistan in the West, Indian authorities have struggled until today with sovereignty disputes over the Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan (Hussain, 2019: 85), and the Ladakh and Tawang regions with China (Holslag, 2009). The ambition of these three powers to control the region does not help to reduce tensions.

India is possessing a large military arsenal, superior to the one of Pakistan. In 2022, India was the third country in the world with the highest military expenditures. Its annual budget was 71.1 billion US dollars. In comparison, during the last decade, Pakistani authorities rose by 70% their military budget, which only went up to 10.3 billion US dollars (Tian et al. 2023: 2).

As a consequence, Pakistani authorities are feeling threatened, and Islamabad has launched a nuclear program to try to fill the ever-lasting gap between its military forces and the ones of India (Hussain 2019: 88). The nuclear asset is seen as a shield to limit India's conventional superiority over Pakistan (Blarel 2019). This explains why India and Pakistan are one of the four United Nations' member states which have never ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Pakistan acquiring nuclear weapons was a new threat for India, which did not, at the time, possess such weapons. Following the security dilemma logic, India performed a nuclear test in 1998 to keep up with its neighbours; and Pakistan replicated, the same month, with a similar test (Hussain, 2019: 88; Blarel, 2019).

Psychological dimensions are key to the security dilemma (Fouillet, 2021: 90). On the one hand, because Pakistan felt weaker than its rival, it felt the need to strengthen and overcome India's hard power by acquiring nuclear weapons. On the other hand, India observed how its position was threatened by China and Pakistan acquiring nuclear bombs and reinforcing their armies and, consequently, applied the same logic. As tensions are continuing at the borders, the three countries continue to rise their defence budget, develop their nuclear arsenal, and increase their conventional armies (Holslag, 2009; Hussain, 2019: 89).

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