
1. Introduction

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Abstract

This introduction situates South Asia within the intersecting frameworks of geopolitics and conflict resolution. South Asia is shaped by three interlocking dimensions of conflict: great-power rivalry—especially among United States, China, and a regionally dominant India; enduring territorial conflicts, most notably Kashmir; and the growing influence of non-state actors and mass political mobilization driven by youthful demographics and digital connectivity. Weak regional institutionalization, exemplified by the limited effectiveness of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, contrasts with the region's entanglement in external frameworks such as Free and Open Indo-Pacific and Belt and Road Initiative. The article highlights sharp demographic, economic, and geographic asymmetries among South Asian states, linking fertile plains, mountainous hinterlands, and island spaces to distinct conflict patterns, while employing Anglo-American and Continental geopolitical traditions as complementary analytical lenses to explain overlapping rivalries and alignments. By integrating structural, regional, and societal factors, the article provides a dynamic framework for understanding South Asia's evolving conflicts and the challenges facing conflict resolution in the region.

Keywords: South Asia, Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), great power rivalry, geopolitics, Anglo-American and Continental geopolitical theories

1. The Purpose of the Report

South Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world. With the region's growing economies, various

international platforms—including the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—intersect. However, there are few regional mechanisms in South Asia, largely due to the limited scope of activities undertaken by South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). There are networks like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and the Quad, in which India (and Pakistan in the case of SCO) participates. But these are not regional forums in South Asia. The relatively underdeveloped state of regional multilateral cooperation can be attributed to the sensitivity of conflict-related issues in the region. In other words, the level of tension in South Asia is, even if potentially, very high. This requires us to examine South Asia from the perspective of conflict resolution.

This volume of *ROLES Report* offers diverse perspectives for exploring various agendas in such a dynamic and problematic region as South Asia. Each contributor brings her or his own distinctive perspective to examine potential or apparent conflicts in South Asia. The introduction does not intend to prejudice these chapters; however, this chapter may seek to first provide an overall picture of the region from the perspective of conflict resolution. This Introduction thus seeks to illustrate three dimensions of the current structure of conflict in the region.

The first is the structural tension arising from global confrontation among great powers. The strategic rivalry between the United States and China is particularly intense in the Indian Ocean, where both vie for maritime supremacy. The situation in South Asia is uniquely complex compared to other regions, due to the distinct presence of India as a regional hegemon. India is the de facto third-largest economy in the world (in terms of GDP at purchasing power parity) and a nuclear military power. It maintains significant geopolitical interests in the Indian Ocean and throughout South Asia. A critical question arises: how does the presence of this potential “third power” influence the broader superpower rivalry in the region? Many countries in the region, especially middle and small countries like the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Republic of Maldives, are subject to political tensions between the influences of China and India.¹

The second-dimension concerns territorial disputes among South Asian states. The Kashmir conflict has serious military implications that significantly affect both social and economic activities in the region. A

¹ See Chapter 2, 3 and 5 of this Report.

recent military clash between India and Pakistan was deescalated within four days, but few expect lasting stability. Ongoing confrontation between the two nuclear-armed states—especially given the disparities in their recent economic development—remains a fundamental threat to regional stability. Naturally, the Kashmir conflict also reverberates through other territorial disputes, such as those between India and China, and between Pakistan and Afghanistan.²

The third dimension involves non-state actors and mass movements in each state. Even within the context of the Kashmir conflict, numerous non-state groups have perpetrated violent acts both within and beyond the region. Movements driven by Islamic fundamentalism are prevalent across South Asia, exemplified by terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. These groups remain critical, though often hidden, in causing political instability across the region. Furthermore, the spread of Hindu nationalism under India's BJP-led government, in a country of 1.4 billion people, has exacerbated ethnic and religious tensions. There are many other forms of non-traditional threats in the region. These developments raise serious concerns for the region's future.

The recent series of riots in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal to oust existing governments shows that the frustration in the populations, especially the youth, is quite high among South Asian countries.³ It is said that the spread of SNS is highly relevant to the eruption of mass mobilizations.⁴ Pakistan has also experienced a series of political turmoil, while the regimes in India as well as Bhutan remain stable. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan is a consequence of recent political upheaval, while it is a result of its unique circumstance.⁵ The overall symptom in the region is the demographic trend. The populations are growing and very young. This indicates that South Asia is currently very fragile in political movements.

Obviously, these three dimensions intersect each other. The first dimensions may affect the nature of the second and the third, and vice versa. It is necessary to focus on each dimension of conflicts in or over the region to understand the nature of specific types of conflicts. At the same time, it is also crucial to look at the intersections of multiple dimensions of conflicts in the region and across multiple regions. Since South

² See Chapter 8 and 9 of this Report.

³ See Chapter 4 of this Report.

⁴ See Chapter 7 of this Report.

⁵ See Chapter 6 of this Report.

Asia is moving very dynamically, the examination of the region should also be very dynamic.

2. The Overall Picture of the Region

Here, let us compare the profiles of the countries in South Asia as regards population, economic size and economic growth.

Country	Population	Nominal GDP (US\$ billions)	Economic Growth Rate
India	1,463,865,525	4,190.00	6.2 %
Pakistan	255,219,554	No data	2.6 %
Bangladesh	175,686,899	467.22	3.8 %
Afghanistan	43,844,111	No data	No data
Nepal	29,618,118	46.08	4.0 %
Sri Lanka	23,229,470	No data	No data
Bhutan	796,682	3.42	7.0 %
Maldives	529,676	7.48	4.5 %

Table 1: Comparison of Countries in South Asia (created by the author)⁶

⁶ Worldometer, "Countries in the world by population (2025)", <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>; International Monetary Fund (IMF), "GDP, current prices" (2025), <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>, "Real GDP growth" (April 2025); and https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD. Figures of Nominal GDP of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are found in World Bank Group, "GDP (current US\$)", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD>, and figures of GDP Growth Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are found in World Bank Group, "GDP growth (annual %)", <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>. All accessed 30 September 2025.

The disparities among South Asian states are striking. India dominates demographically and economically, with Pakistan and Bangladesh—both parts of former British India—following behind. Smaller states such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan coexist in India's shadow. Sri Lanka performs comparatively well economically, while Nepal and Afghanistan lag despite large populations. Bhutan and the Maldives remain small in both demographic and economic terms.

Geography further reinforces these divergences. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh lie on fertile river plains with access to the Indian Ocean, combining land and maritime advantages. Nepal and Bhutan, landlocked by the Himalayas, face steep constraints. Island states like Sri Lanka and Maldives benefit from oceanic access but are peripheral to continental affairs. These three layers—plains, mountains, and sea—frame the demographic and economic divergence of South Asian nations.

These conditions also underpin conflict dynamics. Large plains states tend toward long-term military confrontation, backed by substantial armed forces. Mountainous states lack strategic autonomy, while China looms as an unavoidable actor across the Himalayas. Civil wars, such as Nepal's Maoist insurgency, reflected these layered pressures. Island states, historically vulnerable to external powers, remain contested arenas for Indian, Chinese, and Western influence today.

3. Political Turmoil in South Asia Countries

South Asian countries are demographically very young, with a high proportion of youth populations throughout the region. Their growing economies enable young people to have stronger political voices. Yet, if adequate social opportunities for jobs, income, and positions are not provided, this empowered youth can easily become frustrated. This demographic condition—ready to be triggered by economic, political, or social stagnation or deterioration—has become a hotbed of rapid mass mobilization and social fragility.

In Bangladesh, political transitions have typically been led by student movements. Radical students have gained political influence not only by ousting political figures of the former regime, including former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, but also by pushing for systemic reforms such as constitutional change. While their main target was the patronage politics of the ruling Awami League, resentment runs much deeper. More

recently, in Nepal, political protests broke out against the former government's decision to ban the use of social media. These protests reflected broader discontent with a corrupt political system and political elite, widespread frustration with seeing the same discredited old leaders take turns to govern and plunder, and despair over the lack of viable futures at home—forcing thousands of citizens to leave for work abroad every single day.

Pakistan, the Maldives, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka are no exceptions. In Pakistan, massive political protests erupted after the ousting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in 2022, continuing into nationwide demonstrations in 2024 demanding his release. Afghanistan has remained under Taliban control since 2021, while the Maldives faces mounting economic and debt pressures. In Sri Lanka, a financial crisis triggered mass riots targeting government properties and resulted in the collapse of the Rajapaksa government in 2022. Protest slogans there overwhelmingly focused on the corruption and nepotism of the Rajapaksa family.

The political turmoil in South Asian countries share some commonalities. First, it is essentially having roots in the declining economic conditions of the region. Sri Lanka defaulted on its debt for the first time in its history, was unable to import essential crude oil, medicine and food products as the foreign revenues were almost zero along with a huge debt to China and the international community. Bangladeshi and Nepali citizens (mostly Gen Z) were fed up with diminishing employment options, corruption of the ruling class, enduring poverty and the underwhelming economic growth. Although the economies of most of the South Asian countries have reached lower middle-income level⁷ during the last two decades, the most recent predictions of the World Bank suggest lower prospects of economic growth in the region.⁸ Poor tax collection, unproductive agricultural sectors, households and firms lacking mobility and access to finance to mitigate climate shocks, and growing labor force with insufficient jobs are some of the major economic vulnerabilities⁹ in South Asia. In addition, South Asia carries an increasing share of global debt, where Afghanistan, Maldives,

⁷ World Bank. (n.d.). Lower middle income countries [Data set]. World Bank. Retrieved [29 September 2025], from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/lower-middle-income>

⁸ World Bank. (2025). South Asia overview [Web page]. Retrieved [29 September 2025], from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/overview>

⁹ World Bank. (2025). South Asia overview [Web page]. Retrieved [29 September 2025], from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/overview>

Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—are either in debt distress or at high risk of it. The region's long-term public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) external debt has nearly doubled over the past decade, from US\$221.3 billion in 2012 to US\$418.6 billion in 2022.¹⁰

Second, these poor financial and living conditions have greatly disappointed the youthful population in South Asia. The growing exposure to the global developments, and strong connectivity through digital means have enabled the South Asian youth to have stronger political voices. For instance, in Bangladesh, an "Increasingly stultifying environment for political and civil liberties, the weak economy, and the Awami League government's seeming inability to address critical issues, like the job crunch and the looming impact of climate change on such a low-lying and densely populated country"¹¹ have constituted long-standing crises in Bangladesh. In Nepal, young protesters and activists, loosely organized under the banner of a "Gen Z" movement, were comparing their own lives with one of children of the Nepali elite, which gained momentum in "NepoBaby" campaign on social media. When social media ban hit, their anger and frustration expressed on social media spilled over into a street protest.

Third, the mass protests, widely known for their amorphous, decentralized, ad-hoc, and leaderless nature, have been equipped with digital tools of mobilization have become enormously successful and in ousting long-standing rulers who lack legitimacy within a very short period. Political legitimacy in South Asia is no longer being decided based on elections alone. Even the elections that are largely free and fair (as in Nepal and Sri Lanka, though controversial in Bangladesh) are unable to defuse dramatic upsurge of discontent. For instance, the same populace who elected Gotabaya Rajapakse with much hope, forced him to flee the presidency. Political vigilantism among the youth in South Asia is rising, not only attacking and burning out the properties of officials and ministers, but attacking them and their family members physically, and humiliating them on social and mainstream media.

¹⁰ Prateek Samal and Anthony Tin Yu To, "Up & coming: Unpacking South Asia's Growing Role in Global Debt", 13 March 2024, Data Blog, World Bank, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/coming-unpacking-south-asias-growing-role-global-debt>

¹¹ Joshua Kurlantzick, "Slowing Protests reveal Deep-rooted Political Challenges in Bangladesh", Council on Foreign Relations, 29 July, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/article/slowing-protests-reveal-deep-rooted-political-challenges-bangladesh>

4. Geopolitical Theory

The interplay of geography, demographics, and economics validates the application of geopolitical theories to South Asia. In spite of divergent perspectives of the articles, the insight into geopolitical factors are common throughout this volume of *Roles Review*. Chapter *, authored by the present writer, makes an explicit attempt to apply two major traditions of geopolitical thought to the region. Here, it suffices to outline their key implications.

Shinoda emphasizes two distinct traditions: Continental and Anglo-American. Their contrast lies in their worldviews. Continental Geopolitical Theory envisions the world as divided into multiple “pan-regions,” each comprising geographically contiguous states led by a hegemon. It stresses civilizational demarcation and spheres of influence. Anglo-American Geopolitical Theory frames world politics as a contest between land power and sea power. This binary opposition fosters Heartland expansion on one side and containment by maritime alliances on the other. It also provides intellectual justification for global networks of alliances and for economic and social globalism.

This enduring confrontation between Continental and Anglo-American perspectives remains highly illustrative for understanding the dynamics of South Asia today.¹²

Table 2: Comparison Between Anglo-American and Continental Traditions of geopolitics

Category	Anglo-American Tradition of Geopolitics	Continental Tradition of Geopolitics
Representative Figures	Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman	Karl Haushofer, Carl Schmitt
Worldview	Dichotomized worldview (Sea power vs. Land power; Globalist vs. Anti-globalist)	Multipolar worldview (Civilizational Zones; Regional Sphere of Influence)

¹² See Hideaki Shinoda, *Confronting Theories of Geopolitics* (Springer, 2025 forthcoming); and Hideaki Shinoda, *The Geopolitics of War* (Kodansha, 2023) (in Japanese).

Keywords	Heartland, Sea Power, Land Power, Rimland, Strategic Bridgeheads	Lebensraum (Living Space), Pan-Ideen (Pan-Ideas), Geopolitik
Characteristics	Emphasis on geographic conditions and freedom of the seas; seeks to contain land-based nations by maritime nations	Emphasis on state as an organic entity and sovereign power; favors hierarchical order based on multiple regional zones
Ideological Inclination	Compatible with modern international law; generally liberal and aligned with universalist norms	Nostalgic for 19th-century European public law; anti-universalist and often anti-liberal
Policy Orientation	Network-based alliance strategies for sea powers against land power	Strategies of territorial expansion and regional dominance

5. Continental and Anglo-American Perspectives

From the perspective of Continental Geopolitical Theory, South Asia may be viewed as a distinctive regional sphere, with India as a potential hegemonic power coexisting and competing with other great powers such as China, Russia, and the United States. By contrast, from the perspective of Anglo-American Geopolitical Theory, South Asia can be divided into zones of sea power, land power, and amphibious regions. Island countries naturally belong to the sea-power camp, while mountainous nations align with land powers. The vast coastal plain of South Asia functions as an amphibious zone. In this dichotomized worldview, the Indian subcontinent—seen as a large peninsula—becomes a critical arena of confrontation between sea powers and land powers, containment and expansion. Within this framework, any independent power within South Asia tends to be marginalized.

These two traditions are not easily reconciled; rather, they represent competing explanatory frameworks. Considering both traditions simultaneously—rather than privileging one over the other—provides deeper insight into the multiple, overlapping dynamics of the region. These theories are explanatory rather than prescriptive: they illuminate the complexity of South Asia’s conflicts without dictating particular solutions. While both traditions are relevant throughout this volume, they are most explicitly discussed in Chapter *.

6. FOIP, SCO, BRICS and SAARC

The United States, Japan, and Australia view India as a key partner in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) framework, reflecting the Anglo-American tradition of geopolitics. These three Pacific allies, bound since the Cold War, exemplify the sea-power alliance. Their strategy has long focused on securing “bridgeheads”—peninsulas of the Eurasian continent such as the Korean Peninsula, Indochina, the Arabian Peninsula, and Europe. The Indian subcontinent is another such peninsula, and thus a central concern for sea powers. This explains why the British Empire—the champion of sea power in the imperial age—attached such importance to ruling British India. The nineteenth-century “Great Game” between Britain and Russia over Afghanistan epitomized Britain’s effort to contain land power to safeguard this peninsular bridgehead.

During the Cold War, the United States bypassed non-aligned India and relied on Pakistan as a regional stronghold. As Soviet influence advanced into Afghanistan during the 1970s, Washington’s strategy intensified at the root of the subcontinent. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the United States—at the height of its hegemony—invaded Afghanistan (and later Iraq at the foot of the Arabian Peninsula). Following its gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan, the strategic importance of India rose, and Quad meetings became regular platforms to invite India closer to the U.S. and its allies. These developments may be understood as sea powers striving to secure access to the Indian subcontinent as a critical bridgehead.

Meanwhile, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the United States scaled back in Afghanistan. China may be considered an “amphibian” power: a coastal state along Inner Crescent

(Mackinder) or the Eurasian Rimland (Spykman).¹³ Its influence expands neither through U.S.-style alliance networks nor through the territorial expansion characteristic of the Russian Heartland. Instead, Beijing advances along land and maritime “Silk Roads,” reflecting a traditional Mandala-style influence of Chinese empires. The China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) complements the BRI, extending along the Inner Crescent. In South Asia, both India and Pakistan seek to benefit from China’s growing influence by participating in the SCO.

BRICS overlaps with the SCO in its core membership—China, Russia, and India—but India’s role differs in each. While India joined the SCO alongside rival Pakistan as part of China’s broader vision, it is an original core member of BRICS. BRICS embodies the Continental tradition, emphasizing regional spheres led by dominant powers: India in South Asia, China in East Asia, Russia in Eurasia, Brazil in Latin America, and South Africa in Africa. India’s overwhelming weight in South Asia secured it a founding place in BRICS. However, India has resisted admitting other South Asian states to BRICS, despite the interest of Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. This contrasts sharply with Russia’s push to expand BRICS in the Middle East and Africa, and China’s openness to including Southeast and Central Asian states. Whereas Russia and China see expansion as a tool of influence, India’s regional rivalries and unstable relations limit its enthusiasm. Despite BRICS’ recent dramatic expansion, India remains its only South Asian member—a “half-hearted” practitioner of Continental geopolitics. SAARC is not yet regarded as a functional regional body in South Asia due to the fact that India’s leadership in the region is not fully recognized by regional member states.

The overlapping presence of FOIP, SCO, BRICS, and SAARC in South Asia highlights both the relevance and the ambiguity of applying these two geopolitical traditions in the twenty-first century. As long as India leads the Non-Aligned Movement and distances itself from other great-power frameworks, the simultaneous—and often contradictory—application of Continental and Anglo-American theories will continue.

¹³ Halford J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History” in Halford J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (National Defense University Press, 1942); and Nicholas J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, edited by Helen R. Nicholl; with an introduction by Frederick Sherwood Dunn; (Archon Books, 1969, c1944).

7. Perspectives of the Articles

While these broader perspectives frame the geopolitical context of South Asia, the articles in this volume each bring distinctive approaches to conflict-related issues in the region. Together, they offer diverse insights into the dynamics of South Asia through the lens of conflict resolution.

Following this Introduction, Hideaki Shinoda's Chapter 2 under the title of "The Kashmir Conflict in the 21st Century from the Perspective of Confronting Theories of Geopolitics and the Narratives of the War on Terror and the Clash of Civilizations" situates the Kashmir conflict within South Asian geopolitics using Anglo-American and Continental geopolitical traditions. It contrasts strategic sea-land power logic with civilizational fault lines, highlighting how the 2025 India–Pakistan clash reflected Global War on Terror and Clash of Civilizations narratives. Despite India's dominance, Kashmir remains asymmetrically contested, giving the conflict enduring global significance in a multipolar world.

In Chapter 3 under the title of "Narrative Framing, Conspiracy Theories, Propaganda and Hate between India and Pakistan after the Pahalgam attack: An Analysis of Twitter Data," Sandunika Hasangani analyzes social media as a key arena of information warfare following the Pahalgam terrorist attack within the Indo-Pakistan rivalry. Using data primarily from X (formerly Twitter), it examines online narrative frames, intentions, and their offline effects. Conspiracy theories play a central role in shaping public opinion, blurring truth and paranoia, and portraying internal "traitors."

Chapter 4, Harinda Vidanage's "Evolving a Sri Lankan national security strategy in a turbulent security environment: insights from Japan," argues that over the past five years, global disorder and renewed geopolitical rivalries have reshaped security dynamics in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Sri Lanka has simultaneously faced unprecedented internal shocks, including political upheaval and economic collapse. Amid rapid domestic change, the country must craft a flexible national security strategy. This article argues that Sri Lanka can draw valuable lessons from Japan's National Security Strategy to navigate external volatility and redefine its regional security role.

In Chapter 5 under the title of "Bangladesh's Recent Political Developments in a Strategic Setting: Crisis in Bangladesh and its Regional Impacts," Md Jahangir Alam highlights that Bangladesh's growing geopolitical importance as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia places it at the center of the Free and

Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) framework. This paper examines how Bangladesh's domestic political trends—democratic backsliding and authoritarianism—intersect with FOIP objectives. It analyzes regional responses by India, China, and the United States, arguing that Bangladesh's internal politics will shape FOIP's effectiveness and regional cooperation in South Asia.

Chapter 6, Nilanthan Niruthan K. A., "The Impact of the Rise of India in South Asia," argues that India's rise is reshaping South Asia amid a shifting global order toward multipolarity, and resurgent "civilizational" narratives. The article argues that small and middle powers in South Asia will find non-alignment harder to sustain and may face pressure to choose clearer strategic alignments. Regional turbulence both complicates cooperation and accelerates India's primacy by creating governance vacuums that invite external influence.

In Chapter 7 under the title of "Political Dynamics in South Asia through the Analysis of Afghanistan under the Taliban Interim Government and Its Relations with Pakistan," Masato Toriya illustrates that after regaining control of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Taliban benefited partly from Pakistan's long-standing pursuit of "strategic depth" against India. While the Taliban have pursued multidirectional diplomacy and economic engagement, they have imposed severe domestic restrictions, especially on women, prompting international concern. Russia recognized the Taliban government, but relations with Pakistan deteriorated amid border clashes. Forced refugee repatriation from Pakistan and Iran now threatens Afghanistan's stability and humanitarian conditions.

Chapter 8, Sahani Welikala's "Trincomalee: The emerging epicenter of global power politics in the Indian Ocean," examines the overlooked strategic importance of Sri Lanka's eastern seaboard, particularly Trincomalee Harbor, in Indian Ocean geopolitics. Despite its status as one of the world's largest natural deep-water harbors and its historic naval role, Trincomalee has received limited attention compared to Colombo and Hambantota. The chapter argues that developing Trincomalee could reposition it as a key maritime and geo-economic hub, attracting major global and regional powers.

In Chapter 9, Mohammad Jawad Ali Aqa and Hideaki Shinoda discuss "Dynamism of Geopolitics over the Hindu Kush–Khorasan Area: The Trajectories of Afghanistan and Pakistan in the Midst of Geopolitical Struggles," by analyzing the Hindu Kush–Khorasan frontier as a shifting geopolitical crossroads shaped by historical turning points. Once a protective and connective zone for the Indian subcontinent, the region

became a buffer during the Great Game and Cold War. After partition, Pakistan leveraged its hybrid identity between land and sea powers. Recently, militant groups revived Khorasan's symbolic role, reinforcing enduring Afghanistan–Pakistan entanglements.