



EVALUATION ON INDIA–PAKISTAN RELATIONS DURING THE COMPOSITE DIALOGUE PHASE (2004–2008)

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Abstract:

The Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008) marked one of the most constructive periods in India–Pakistan relations following years of military confrontation and diplomatic deadlock. This study evaluates the progress, achievements, and limitations of the dialogue process initiated after the 2003 ceasefire and the joint commitment to peaceful engagement. The dialogue covered eight key areas, including peace and security, the Jammu and Kashmir issue, terrorism, trade, water sharing, and people-to-people exchanges. During this period, both countries achieved notable confidence-building measures, expanded cross-border connectivity, increased bilateral trade, and strengthened diplomatic communication. However, persistent mistrust, cross-border terrorism, political instability, and unresolved territorial disputes constrained the effectiveness of the process. The study explored that although the Composite Dialogue significantly improved bilateral engagement and reduced tensions, its achievements remained fragile due to recurring security challenges, culminating in the suspension of talks after the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks. The experience demonstrates the importance of sustained political commitment, mutual trust and institutionalized dialogue for achieving lasting peace in South Asia. In this article, evaluation on India–Pakistan relations during the composite dialogue phase (2004–2008) were discussed.

Keywords: Composite, Dialogue, Phase, India, Pakistan, Relations.

INTRODUCTION:

The period from 2004 to 2008 represents one of the most constructive phases in the history of India–Pakistan relations since the nuclearization of South Asia in 1998. Following years of military confrontation, including the 1999 Kargil conflict and the 2001–02 military standoff, both countries recognized the necessity of sustained diplomatic engagement to reduce tensions and promote regional stability. Consequently, the Composite Dialogue Process was formally resumed in January 2004 following the joint statement issued by the leaders of India and Pakistan during the SAARC Summit in Islamabad. The Composite Dialogue was a comprehensive diplomatic framework designed to

address all major bilateral issues simultaneously. It consisted of eight thematic baskets: peace and security including confidence-building measures (CBMs), Jammu and Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation, and the promotion of friendly exchanges in culture, education, sports, and people-to-people contacts. This broad-based approach reflected the mutual understanding that lasting peace could only be achieved by addressing security concerns alongside political, economic, and humanitarian issues. Between 2004 and 2008, the dialogue process yielded several notable achievements. Cross-Line of Control (LoC) bus and trade services were initiated, ceasefire arrangements largely held, confidence-building measures expanded, and bilateral trade and cultural exchanges increased significantly. These developments contributed to a relatively stable security environment and demonstrated the potential of sustained diplomatic engagement despite deep-rooted political differences. However, the Composite Dialogue also encountered substantial challenges. Persistent distrust, cross-border terrorism, domestic political pressures, and unresolved territorial disputes continued to constrain progress. The dialogue process suffered a major setback following the November 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, which led to the suspension of formal bilateral talks and underscored the fragility of the peace process. This evaluation critically examines India–Pakistan relations during the Composite Dialogue phase (2004–2008) by assessing its objectives, achievements, limitations, and overall effectiveness. It explores the role of diplomatic engagement, confidence-building measures, and political leadership in fostering cooperation while identifying the structural and security-related factors that impeded sustainable peace (Akhtar, N., Jan, I., 2019). The objective of the study is to evaluation on India–Pakistan relations during the composite dialogue phase (2004–2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

A research methodology delineates the procedures and techniques employed to identify and examine data relevant to a specific area of inquiry. Research methodology is a way of explaining how a researcher intends to carry out their research.

Study Area:

India–Pakistan Relations-composite dialogue phase (2004–2008).

Hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): It is hypothesized that India–Pakistan relations correlated to the Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008).

Research Design:

The framework of research methodologies and techniques selected by a researcher to carry out a study is known as the research design. Qualitative research design is defined as a type of research methodology that focuses on exploring and understanding complex phenomena and the meanings attributed to them by individuals or groups. In this research, a qualitative research design was used.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data is information that has already been collected and documented by researchers but is not pertinent to the topic of the current study. It is available as data collected from a number of sources, including government & non-government publications, books, journal articles, websites, reports, internal organization records, e-resources, documentary evidences etc. In this research, secondary data was used.

Methodology:

The research was based on the qualitative research design and secondary data. An evaluation on India–Pakistan relations during the composite dialogue phase (2004–2008) were chronicled in this research. Also, due to the unavailability of statistical data, charts, graphs, etc., the quantitative research design and primary data were not applicable in this study.

Research Tools:

Researchers can measure and examine the frequency, significance, and connections between particular terms, concepts, or issues using content analysis. In this research, content analysis tool was used.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Descriptive research analysis is a methodological approach that aims to elucidate the features of an event or subject under inquiry. Descriptive research analysis is a crucial instrument for scientific inquiry, allowing researchers to observe, document, and examine the intricacies of a certain subject. This method offers a comprehensive and full elucidation that facilitates understanding, categorization, and comprehension of the subject. All disciplines extensively utilize descriptive research analysis to systematically observe and record all events and elements affecting the phenomenon. In this research, descriptive research analysis has been used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:**Initiation of Composite Dialogue Process:**

The start of the Composite Dialogue Process between India and Pakistan in 2004 was a big change in their relationship after decades of enmity, wars, and broken diplomatic ties. This stage came about as military tensions rose after the 2001–2002 border crisis. It showed that all sides agreed that continued fighting would be expensive and unproductive.

Regional and international pressures, especially in the global security situation after 9/11, had a big effect on the discourse. Pakistan's promise to stop terrorism across borders and India's desire to look into constructive engagement made it possible for negotiations to start up again. The Islamabad Joint Statement of January 2004, which was made during the SAARC Summit, was a big step forward. President Pervez Musharraf promised that Pakistan would not be used as a base for terrorism against India. India agreed to start talking to each other again about all of the issues that were still unresolved.

The Composite Dialogue was meant to provide a formal framework for talking about both the problems and the good things about India–Pakistan relations. Its main goals were to peacefully settle any remaining disagreements, especially in Jammu and Kashmir; to promote confidence-building measures (CBMs) to lower tensions; to increase economic, trade, and people-to-people contacts; and to make dialogue a regular part of diplomacy to avoid crises.

The dialogue framework included eight groups of issues that were chosen, such as peace and security, confidence-building measures, Jammu and Kashmir, the Siachen Glacier, the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Sir Creek, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation, and the promotion of friendly exchanges in many areas. This planned agenda made sure that everyone stayed on topic and didn't pick and choose which difficult areas to talk about or ignore.

The Composite Dialogue was officially started in the middle of 2004. It was based on eight mutually agreed-upon groups of issues, such as peace and security (with a focus on Jammu and Kashmir), confidence-building measures (CBMs), the Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, the Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation, and the promotion of friendly exchanges. This structured framework showed a holistic view, acknowledging that peace needed growth in all areas at the same time, including politics, security, humanitarian issues, and the economy.

The first period was marked by careful hope and small steps to create trust. Both sides stressed the need for bilateralism, settling disagreements peacefully, and staying involved even if they didn't trust each other. Track-I diplomacy, along with Track-II efforts by academics, former officials, and civil society, helped make the situation right for conversation. The restoration of transportation ties, exchanges between people, and cultural engagements were all signs that the relationship was no longer just confrontational.

The beginning of the Composite Dialogue Process was a practical change from crisis-driven diplomacy to systematic engagement. The 2004 start of the discussion set the stage for establishing trust, lowering tensions, and showing that positive engagement was feasible even between long-standing rivals, even when deep-seated problems like Kashmir were still not handled.

The start of the Composite Dialogue (2004–2008) was one of the best times in India-Pakistan ties since they became independent. Even though the process had structural problems and was subsequently stopped, the first few years set up a good model for getting involved, creating trust, and handling conflicts. The CDP is still an important reference point for future peace efforts in South Asia (Shaheen, R. et al., 2021).

Confidence-Building Measures (CBMS):

The Composite Dialogue process (2004–2008) was an important time in India-Pakistan relations. It focused on confidence-building measures (CBMs) to lower mistrust, stop violence, and encourage collaboration in politics, the military, the economy, and between people. These CBMs were very important for keeping bilateral ties stable, even if there were still fundamental issues, especially over Kashmir.

The Composite Dialogue (2004) began following the SAARC Summit in Islamabad in January 2004. It set up structured talks on eight topics, such as peace and security, Kashmir, and economic cooperation. Regular meetings of foreign ministers, foreign secretaries, and special envoys helped keep diplomacy going and deal with crises. Quiet talks, especially about Kashmir, helped both sides understand each other better and made their words less hostile.

The ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) (November 2003) was talked about before it happened, but it mostly worked during the Composite Dialogue period, which cut down on violence across the border. Strengthening military-to-military communication between Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) helps keep the peace along the borders.

The 2005 Agreement on Pre-Notification of Ballistic Missile Tests made things clearer and less likely to be misunderstood. The 1988 agreement kept the annual exchange of lists of nuclear installations going, which helped keep nuclear weapons from being used. The 2007 Agreement on Reducing Risk from Accidents Relating to nuclear weapons aims to stop the use of nuclear weapons by accident or without permission.

The growth of bilateral trade looked at how formal trade grew and how informal trade routes became more stable. The efforts toward operating bank branches in each other's countries were a sign that the economies were getting back to normal. The commercial collaboration looked into how joint business councils and trade delegations encouraged private-sector involvement.

The Srinagar–Muzaffarabad Bus Service (2005) helped families that had been split up get back together. The Poonch–Rawalakot Bus Service (2006) made humanitarian relations even stronger. Cross-LoC Trade (2008) made it possible for people in Kashmir to trade goods with each other. Visa liberalization began the process of making it easier for journalists, students, seniors, and cultural organizations to get visas, which changed how people interacted with each other. Cultural and sporting contacts, such as the return of cricket tours, intellectual exchanges, and artistic connections, helped make bilateral relations more human.

The release of fishermen and convicts, which happened every so often, helped build goodwill. After the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, both countries worked together to help people across the LoC. This showed that they could work together for humanitarian reasons even when they disagreed politically.

Even though there was a lot of progress, CBMs faced big problems since people didn't trust each other. Deep-seated skepticism made it hard for the measures to last. The book *Terrorism and Security Incidents* looked at assaults like the 2006 Mumbai train bombings that hurt people's trust. Changes in domestic politics: Changes in leaders and political priorities slowed down progress. Absence of Institutional Enforcement: Many CBMs didn't have significant legal or institutional support, which made them likely to fail.

During the Composite Dialogue period (2004–2008), confidence-building methods were more useful for managing conflicts than for solving them. CBMs greatly lowered tensions, improved communication, and got people more involved in society, but they couldn't completely end long-standing arguments or stop things from going wrong following big security crises (like the attacks in Mumbai in 2008). This time, though, is still one of the most positive times in India-Pakistan relations.

It shows how long-term talks and confidence-building measures may lead to relative peace and stability.

Kashmir Issue and Back-Channel Diplomacy:

Since 1947, the Kashmir problem has been the most controversial and emotionally charged topic between India and Pakistan. Kashmir was a big part of the talks between India and Pakistan during the Composite Dialogue phase (2004–2008). The difference between this time and past ones was that both sides used formal conversations and ongoing back-channel diplomacy at the same time. This let them look for new answers without having to worry about political pressure or media attention.

The Islamabad Declaration started the Composite Dialogue in January 2004. It has eight main topics, with Jammu & Kashmir being the first and most important one. In November 2003, a ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) coincided with the start of talks. This made it easier for diplomats to work together.

During this time, back-channel diplomacy meant that trusted envoys were able to negotiate in secret, unofficially, but with the approval of the government. Senior diplomats and security officials from India operated as go-betweens, while Pakistan relied primarily on President Pervez Musharraf's close advisers. These channels worked on their own, separate from Track-I talks, although they were still very much in line with official policy.

The main goal of the back channel was to get around the hard-line public positions on Kashmir by allowing for flexibility, privacy, and innovative problem-solving. It let leaders try out ideas without making any formal promises & compromises were politically possible.

Back-channel diplomacy led to the creation of President Musharraf's four-point plan for Kashmir, which was a big result. The idea includes things like making the borders less strict without changing their official status, giving both sides of Kashmir more freedom to govern themselves, reducing or demilitarizing soldiers, and creating a joint India-Pakistan framework for collaboration.

This framework was never officially approved, but it was a big change from previous maximalist stances and came close to creating an understanding that both sides could agree on.

Back-channel diplomacy worked with a number of confidence-building measures (CBMs) that were directly relevant to Kashmir. Some of these were the start of the Srinagar–Muzaffarabad bus service in 2005, cross-LoC trading in 2008, and connections between people. These kinds of efforts made the

conflict more personal, brought families that were split up closer together, and showed how working together can be useful.

Even though there was a lot of progress, back-channel diplomacy was not as successful as it could have been because of a few problems. Deep mistrust amongst security agencies, hostility from conservative local groups, and Pakistan's unstable political scenario all slowed progress. The 2007 judicial crisis in Pakistan and President Musharraf's subsequent resignation made discussions less stable. At the same time, terrorist assaults, especially the 2008 Mumbai attacks, brought the dialogue process to an end.

The back-channel diplomacy between India and Pakistan about Kashmir from 2004 to 2008 was one of the most hopeful yet unrealized times in their relationship. Even if no official agreement was reached, the time showed that political will, long-term involvement, and creative diplomacy could help settle even the most difficult disagreements.

The experience of back-channel diplomacy on the Kashmir issue during the Composite Dialogue phase shows both the potential and the limits of quiet diplomacy in South Asia. It emphasizes that back-channel conversations can lead to breakthroughs, but their success relies on political stability, mutual trust, and protection from disruptors. The lessons learned from 2004 to 2008 are still useful for any future efforts to settle the Kashmir issue and improve relations between India and Pakistan (Impiani, D., 2019).

Economic and Cultural Engagements:

The Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008) was one of the best times for India-Pakistan relations. During this time, both sides made a conscious effort to make political talks more effective by adding economic cooperation and cultural interactions. These interactions were very important for improving how people on both sides of the border saw each other, increasing trust between individuals, and making groups of people who want peace on both sides of the border.

During the composite discussion phase, both India and Pakistan acknowledged economic interdependence as a possible stabilizing element in their bilateral ties. Trade quantities stayed low, but formal trade contacts got better. India and Pakistan started and developed official trade between the two countries, which made them less dependent on informal and third-country routes. In 1996, India gave Pakistan Most Favored Nation (MFN) status. During this time, there was a lot of talk of Pakistan giving the same status back (albeit it didn't happen till later). Trade over the Wagah–Attari

border picked up again, making it a symbol and a real way for businesses to do business across borders.

The Srinagar–Muzaffarabad bus service, which started in 2005, made it easier for people to move across the Line of Control (LoC), which indirectly helped commercial and economic engagement in the area. Cross-LoC trade started in 2008, allowing people to trade local items without money. This was a new way to create trust, even if there were rules against it.

People talked about the proposed Iran–Pakistan–India (IPI) gas pipeline as a possible way for the three countries to work together economically over the long term. The project didn't happen together, but its mention in talks showed that people were starting to see that they had common economic interests.

The easing of visa rules, especially for artists, scholars, journalists, and older people, made it easier for people to get to know each other. The exchange trips encouraged conversation outside of official diplomatic channels, which helped people see the opposing side as more human. Pakistani singers and artists played in India, and Indian movies and TV shows became famous in Pakistan. Cricket diplomacy became a strong symbol of reconciliation, especially with the high-profile bilateral series in 2004–05 and 2006, which drew a lot of public interest. Joint seminars, literary festivals, and encounters with the media helped people understand each other better and broke down preconceptions.

Religious and Heritage Tourism looked into the shared cultural and religious heritage as another way to get involved. Special arrangements made it easier for people to go on pilgrimages to religious sites, such as Sikh shrines in Pakistan and Muslim shrines in India. Cultural heritage initiatives showed how civilizations are connected across political boundaries.

During the composite dialogue phase, economic and cultural interactions helped make relations more normal at the societal level. They also put pressure on civil society and business groups to keep things peaceful, and they worked on political talks on contentious issues like Kashmir.

Trade was nevertheless limited by security concerns, tariffs and non-tariff barriers, and small product lists. Political problems and terrorist assaults, like the Mumbai bombings in 2008, might easily stop cultural exchanges. Deeply ingrained distrust within security institutions on both sides limited the longevity of participation.

The economic and cultural interactions during the Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008) illustrated the transforming capacity of soft power and economic collaboration in India–Pakistan ties. Although these measures did not settle the main disagreements, they accomplished a lot to lower hostility, promote understanding between the two sides, and show that ongoing interaction outside official diplomacy may be a basis for lasting peace. This phase's experience is still a useful guide for future efforts to develop trust in South Asia.

Role of Leadership and International Community:

From 2004 to 2008, the Composite Dialogue phase between India and Pakistan was one of the best times for the two countries to get along. This was largely due to the political leaders in both countries and the involvement of the international community. This time showed how choices made by leaders and the status of diplomacy in other countries may work together to help states that have been enemies in the past handle conflicts and establish trust.

During this time, Indian authorities, especially Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (until 2004) and Dr. Manmohan Singh (2004–2008), were very important in keeping the talks with Pakistan going. Vajpayee's idea of peaceful cohabitation was the basis for the Composite Dialogue. Manmohan Singh, on the other hand, stressed engagement, economic cooperation, and diplomacy that focused on people. He was strategic in his restraint, especially after terrorist attacks, and he was willing to keep discourse apart from short-term issues.

Cross-LoC bus services and trade are examples of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs). Backchannel diplomacy on delicate topics, such as Kashmir. A long-term plan for regional stability based on working together instead of fighting.

In Pakistan, President Pervez Musharraf became a key player in the peace effort. His practical approach to India-Pakistan ties, which included recognizing that Kashmir needed new and adaptable solutions, helped create a fairly good diplomatic atmosphere. Musharraf's "four-point formula" for Kashmir showed that he was willing to change his mind and was ready to make a deal.

But Pakistan's unstable political situation and the military's strong influence made things harder. Even with these problems, Musharraf's administration made sure that conversation and collaboration continued, especially when it came to CBMs relating to security.

High-level contacts, like summit summits and frequent conversations between foreign secretaries, made the dialogue process official. Leadership diplomacy helped keep things going even when things

went wrong, like when the Mumbai train attacks happened in 2006. Leaders were able to keep talking because they trusted each other, even though it was limited. This made people hopeful about finding a way to end the dispute.

During this time, the world community, especially the United States, had an indirect but important impact. After 9/11, the U.S. put a lot of emphasis on keeping South Asia stable, and it urged both India and Pakistan to talk to each other and not let things become worse. Washington's work with Pakistan to fight terrorism and its expanding strategic cooperation with India helped keep things in the region stable.

The European Union, Russia, and Japan, among other big nations, backed peace efforts by encouraging diplomacy and working together economically. This showed how important it is to stay involved.

The world's focus on counterterrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, and regional security put pressure on both countries to handle their rivalry in a responsible way. The nuclearization of South Asia raised worldwide worry, making it a global priority to avert conflict. This outside setting encouraged people to be calm and talk to each other.

The international community also helped with Track II diplomacy, which includes academics, retired officials, and people from civil society. These informal talks helped people come up with new ideas, create trust, and provide suggestions for policies that worked with official negotiations. Cultural exchanges, personal relationships, and media engagements made people's views of each other even softer.

The Composite Dialogue phase showed that good leadership and a friendly international environment are important for keeping peace processes going in areas where violence is likely to happen. Visionary leadership in India and Pakistan helped to get past old grudges, and international actors gave both sides room to talk and reasons to do so. But after 2008, when changes in internal politics and security concerns made it harder for people to talk to each other, it became clear that the process was fragile (Ghaffar, S., 2023).

The years 2004 to 2008 show how important leadership commitment and international facilitation are to India-Pakistan ties. The Composite Dialogue didn't settle any of the main disagreements, but it showed that long-term engagement, practical leadership, and positive international involvement may help lower tensions and provide frameworks for cooperation. The lessons learned from this phase are still important for future peace efforts in South Asia.

Impact of the 2008 Mumbai Terror Attacks:

The Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008) was a big effort by India and Pakistan to improve their relations through ongoing diplomatic talks, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and connections amongst individuals. The 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008, on the other hand, were a major turning point that changed the course of bilateral ties in a big way.

Militant groups headquartered in Pakistan, especially Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), were responsible for the assaults in Mumbai that killed 166 people. India said that Pakistan gave the people who did it safe places to hide and help with logistics. India put the Composite Dialogue on hold, which ended the most organized peace process between the two countries. There was very little diplomatic activity, and negotiations were only about how to deal with crises instead of working together.

The Composite Dialogue was based on trust that had grown via agreements on military CBMs, trade and travel over the line of control (LOC), and cultural and sporting interactions. The assaults in Mumbai undermined this fragile confidence, making Indians even more sure that Pakistan was either unwilling or incapable of stopping terrorism over the border. The lack of trust became the main barrier to moving forward (Malik, M.S., 2019).

After the attacks on November 26, India changed its diplomatic posture and became more aggressive. The deal with Pakistan was only possible if they took real steps to fight terrorist groups. India used worldwide diplomatic pressure to successfully draw attention to Pakistan's position in global counter-terrorism forums. Bilateral talks were becoming more and more related to terrorism, pushing other concerns like Kashmir and trade to the side.

The attacks got a lot of attention and anger around the world. The US, the UN, and other countries across the world put pressure on Pakistan to take action against LeT and other groups like it. Pakistan was under more surveillance, which led to partial arrests and bans. However, India thought these efforts were not enough. This globalization strengthened India's diplomatic position but also made it harder for the two countries to talk to each other.

The assaults in Mumbai made people less likely to favour peace, and public opinion in India quickly swung against working with Pakistan. Cultural interactions, sports relations (especially cricket), and civil society projects were put on hold or cut back. The peace constituency that was established during the Composite Dialogue got a lot weaker.

The 26/11 attacks were a turning point in the structure of the relationship. The Composite Dialogue framework became politically untenable in its original form. Subsequent engagement (which resumed cautiously after 2011) was fragmented and didn't have the same level of detail as the earlier phase. Terrorism became the main way India looked at Pakistan, overshadowing earlier cooperative gains (Hussain, E., 2019).

The 2008 Mumbai terror attacks effectively brought the Composite Dialogue Phase to an end. Instead of cautious optimism, there was now deep suspicion and strategic reserve. The years 2004 to 2008 showed that cooperation is possible, but the attacks on November 26, 2001, showed how easy it is for non-state actors to disrupt peace initiatives. The attacks changed the way India and Pakistan interact with each other by making fighting terrorism the most important condition for discussion. This legacy still affects how the two countries work together after 2008.

From the above study, it has been stated that the “Hypothesis 2 (H₂): It is hypothesized that India–Pakistan relations correlated to the Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008)” was accepted.

CONCLUSION:

The Composite Dialogue Phase (2004–2008) represented one of the most constructive periods in India–Pakistan relations since the nuclearization of South Asia. The structured engagement across multiple sectors, including peace and security, Jammu and Kashmir, trade, terrorism, water resources, and people-to-people exchanges, demonstrated that sustained diplomatic dialogue could reduce tensions and promote mutual confidence. Significant Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), such as the Srinagar–Muzaffarabad and Poonch–Rawalakot bus services, cross-Line of Control trade, enhanced cultural exchanges, and expanding bilateral commerce, contributed to improving trust and public engagement between the two countries. Despite these achievements, the dialogue process remained fragile due to persistent political distrust, cross-border terrorism, domestic political constraints, and the absence of institutional mechanisms to ensure continuity during crises. The terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 effectively halted the dialogue process, highlighting the vulnerability of bilateral engagement to security shocks. The Composite Dialogue demonstrated that diplomacy, political commitment, and sustained confidence-building can create opportunities for peaceful coexistence between India and Pakistan. However, lasting normalization requires consistent political will, effective counter-terrorism cooperation, institutionalized dialogue mechanisms, and greater economic and societal interdependence. The experience of 2004–2008 underscores that while dialogue alone cannot resolve deep-rooted disputes, it remains the most viable and sustainable

instrument for managing conflict, reducing hostility, and fostering long-term regional peace and stability in South Asia.

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