

Gallup Pakistan History Project - Weekend Read 13 ‘Pakistan-India

Relations & the United States’: by Murad Javed (Research Fellow, Gallup Pakistan History Project)

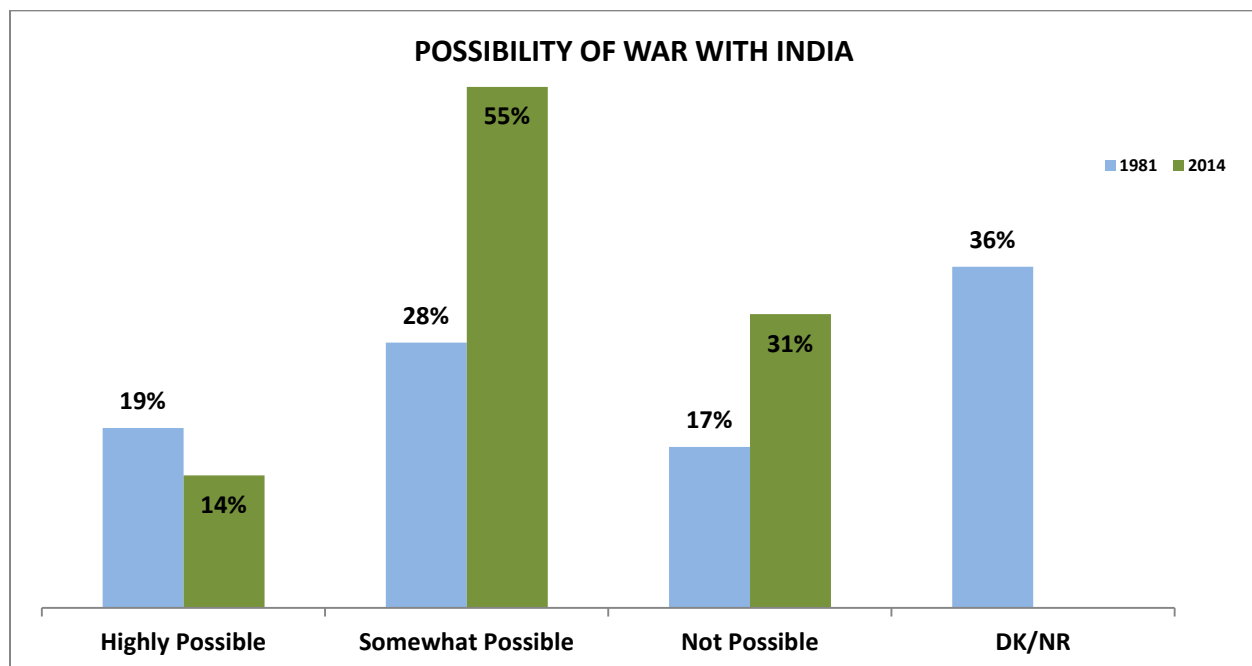
India and Pakistan’s relations are perhaps the one of the most complicated and precariously balanced act in international relations. The emotions and history embedded in the origins of the two countries, and the continued tensions and complications carried over through unresolved issues deeply inform the political relationship between the two countries. Since 1947, the two countries have gone through cycles of all-out hostility – in the form of open warfare – to periods of normalization. Perhaps, most critically, the complicated political tensions and military relations drove the two countries towards developing and deploying nuclear weapons in their military arsenals as the most extreme threat and option available to the leadership in the two countries. More than a billion people live under what appears to be permanently strained relations, and the very real threat of warfare, and the spectre of a suicidal nuclear holocaust. Perhaps, it was the deep-seated hostility and the continually escalating tensions between the two countries that made President Bill Clinton to remark in the year 2000, “The most dangerous place in the world today, I think you could argue, is the Indian subcontinent and the line of control in Kashmir”.¹

In continuation of the theme from last week (the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan), this week India-Pakistan’s relations take centre stage, with an additional supporting actor in the cast: the United States of America. Since 1947, the US has been embroiled in complicated foreign policy relationships with both India and Pakistan. During the Cold War, the US and Pakistan were allied against the Soviet Union, while India’s gradualist and circumspect Government devised a policy of non-alignment in the battle between capitalism and communism. However, the United States has always understood and recognized the importance of India to the geopolitical atmosphere in South and South East Asia, as well as its potential to emerge as a leading global power. The United States has attempted to balance its relations and interests with India and Pakistan by keeping the two countries as engaged but separate partners. While it has encouraged the resolution of outstanding issues between the two countries, it has refrained from brokering game-changing normalization between the two nuclear-armed neighbours (except for interceding during periods of warfare, most notably in 1998 during the Kargil Conflict, and when relations seem to deteriorate towards complete breakdown). In essence, the United States has remained a permanently fixed character on the South Asian regional political stage, attempting to strike a delicate balance between its interests and priorities in its relations with India and Pakistan. This background permanency of the United States in this region has been fully recognized by the people of Pakistan and processed through a variety of frames and narratives to decipher who is the US’ preferred ally in the region.

¹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/687021.stm

Gallup Pakistan's rich database of historical public opinion polling in Pakistan since 1980 allows for a multidimensional study and understanding of this complicated theme. Public opinion data, frozen and preserved in time, is essential in that it allows for a nuanced understanding of the evolution of sociocultural and political narratives and frames over time. On the complicated issue of India-Pakistan relations, and the role of the United States in this complex relationship, Pakistanis have recorded their foreign policy/regional political observations and interpretations to Gallup Pakistan. This discussion makes use of Gallup's public opinion polls on a series of interconnected questions, asked nearly 30 years apart. The data available on this subject provides an interesting reading of the evolution of India and Pakistan's relationship over the last three decades.

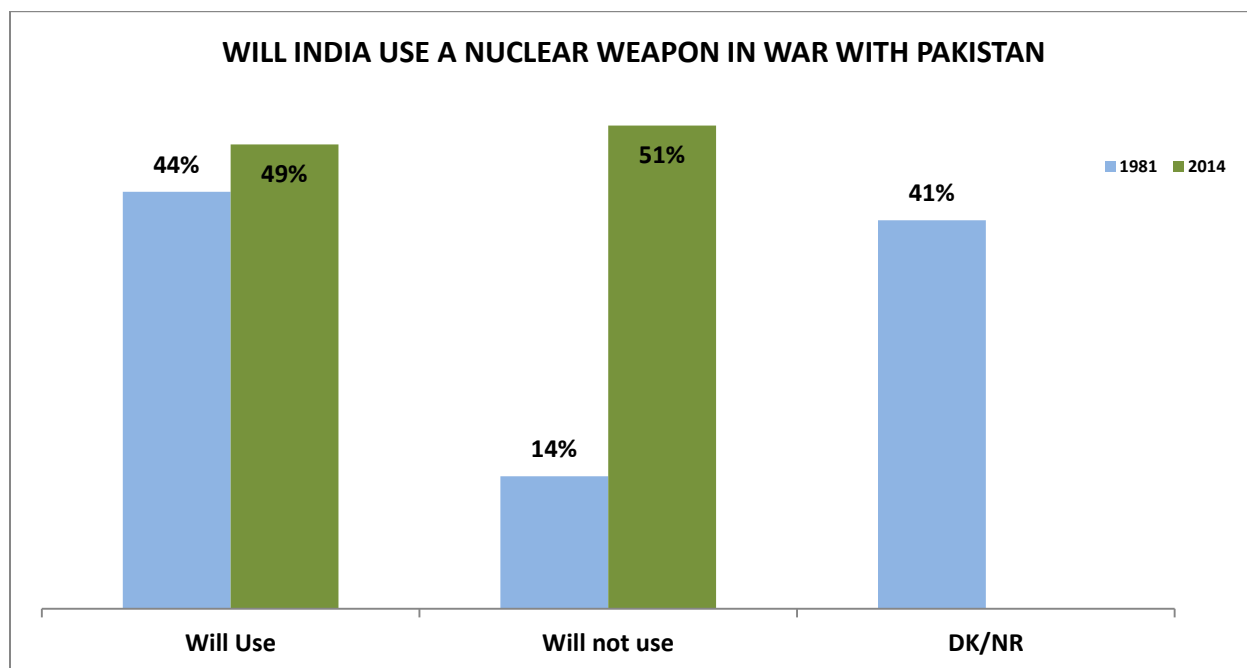
Pakistanis have lived through a series of highly strained episodes and near breakdowns into warfare with India over the course of the country's history. War is not a threat or a possibility in South Asia. Both India and Pakistan have fought each other repeatedly, at least thrice in full-scale military conflicts since 1947. Taking cognizance of this reality, Gallup Pakistan asked Pakistanis the following question in 1981 and then again in 2014: ***What is the possibility of war between India and Pakistan?*** The figure below shows Pakistanis' responses to this query, spaced thirty three years apart:



Interestingly, this data suggests that over the last thirty three years, the majority of Pakistanis become more sensitive and aware of a slight possibility of war with India. This trend is intriguing. In 1981, 36% Pakistanis were unsure regarding the possibility of a war between the two states. Since then, these unsure Pakistanis have made a switch towards assessing the threat of war between the two states as “somewhat of a possibility” – increasing from 28% in 1981 to 55%. The proportion of Pakistanis who thought that a war was highly possible between the two countries declined from 19% in 1981 to 14% in 2014. On the other hand, the proportion of Pakistanis who reject the proposition of a war between the two states has

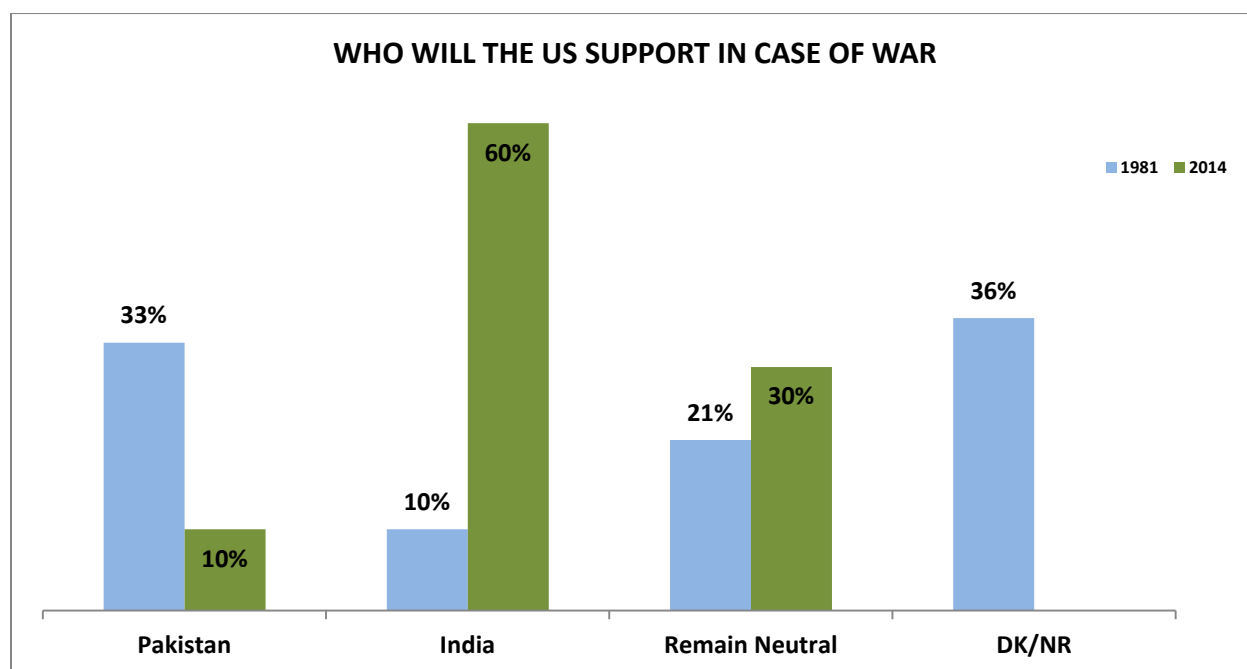
increased. In 1981, 17% Pakistanis thought that war was not a possibility between the two countries. This proportion had increased to nearly a third of all Pakistanis in 2014 (31%). This data show that over the last thirty three years, an increasing proportion of Pakistanis has developed an ambiguous assessment of the threat of war between India and Pakistan. While nearly a third of the country thinks that war with India is not possible in 2014, more than half of all Pakistanis consider this as somewhat of a possibility. This trend is indicative of ambiguities in assessment – reflecting the stalemate and ambiguity between the two states’ recent relations – with more Pakistanis coming around to the conclusion that war with India is either a non-possibility or a remote occurrence.

The threat of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan evokes nightmare scenarios of complete and utter destruction in a region home to more than a billion people. Gallup Pakistan asked the following question on this subject to a nationally representative sample of Pakistanis in 1981 and 2014: ***In your opinion, if there is a war between India and Pakistan, will India use the atomic weapon?*** Responses to this critical inquiry are shown in the figure below:



The data indicates that Pakistanis have increasingly developed a level of comfort while living in a region armed with nuclear weapons, and defined by constant political tensions. Since 1981, a greater proportion of Pakistanis have shifted their opinions, and now assert that even in case of a war, India will not use its atomic weapons against Pakistan? Whereas, 14% respondents held this belief in 1981, 51% respondents now favour this statement. Perhaps, this is a direct consequence of the two countries’ nuclear tests in 1998, and the development of No-First-Use Doctrine in India, as well as the creation of a series of nuclear engagement and interaction channels between the two countries. Although the proportion of Pakistanis with the belief that India would use a nuclear weapon against Pakistan has increased slightly from 44% in 1981 to 49% in 2014, the more telling shift has occurred in the minds of the majority of Pakistanis who are confident that a nuclear war can be avoided by the two neighbours.

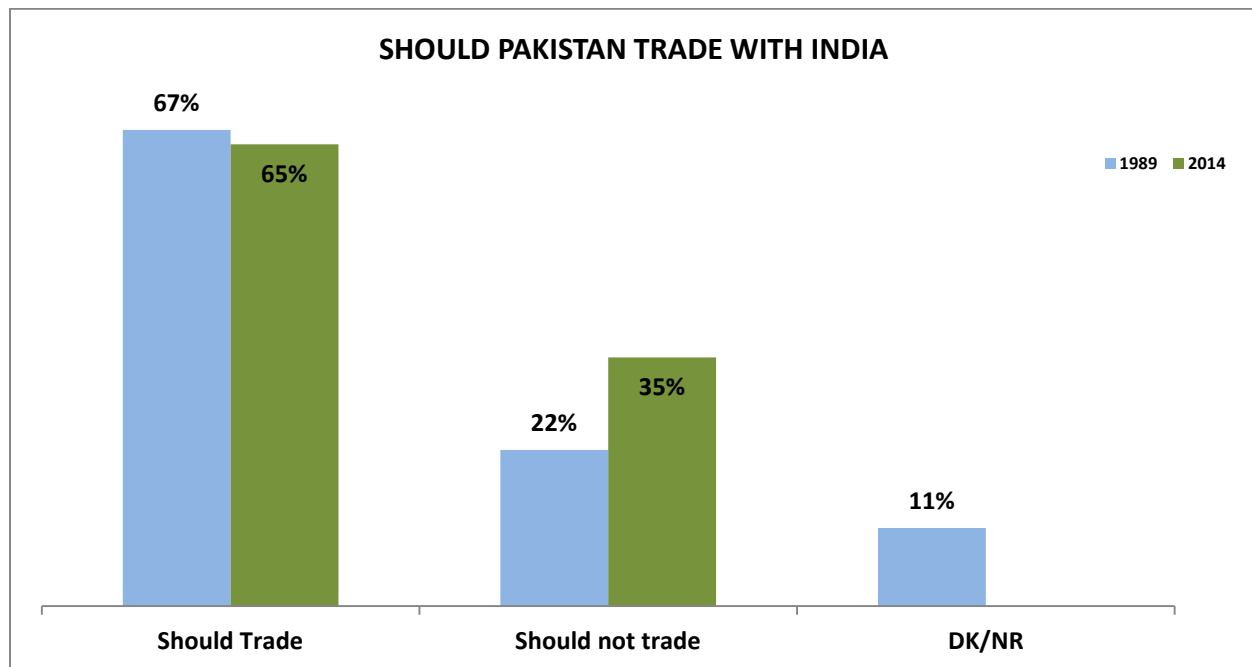
The United States' role in Pakistan and India's relations has always been a subject of intense fascination, mythologizing, and conjecture – especially in Pakistan. The country's historical experience of warfare with India, and the US' role and response in those circumstances is an important variable that affects the public opinion in Pakistan. Gallup Pakistan asked a nationally representative sample of Pakistanis the following question in 1981 and 2014: If there is a war between India and Pakistan, who do you think America will support? Results are shown below:



Pakistanis have reformulated their opinions on the US' interests and projected behaviour in case of a war breaking out between India and Pakistan. In 1981, when the US was closely aligned with Pakistan, and supported its efforts to fight and insurgent Jihad-inspired campaign against the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, 33% Pakistanis thought that the country would support Pakistan in case of a war between India and Pakistan, while 21% opined that it will remain neutral. Only 10% Pakistanis thought in that year that the US could support India in case of a war between India and Pakistan. Interestingly, 36% Pakistanis did not support any position, and remained unclear about the US' motives in 1981. However, in 2014, the post-Cold War, War on Terror era has redefined Pakistanis image and interpretation of the US' interests and support in the region. 60% now think that the US would support India in case of war with Pakistan, while only 10% think that it would support Pakistan. 30% Pakistanis think that the US would remain neutral if such a conflict materialized in 2014. This change in opinion is indicative of the altered geopolitical realities in the region, and also concurrently highlights Pakistan's complicated, often-troubled and precarious relationship with the US, and its impact on Pakistanis' understanding of the countries ties with India.

Trade has always been an important subject and thematic issue in the relations between India and Pakistan. Experts in both countries have emphasized the generation, deepening, and strengthening of trade ties between the two neighbours as a means to working towards durable peace in the region. Gallup Pakistan asked the following question to Pakistanis in 1989,

and then again in 2014: Do you think Pakistan should trade with India or not? The results are shown in the figure below:



Over the last twenty six years, the trend has moved towards an increasing support for not trading with India – although this does not change the overwhelming support in favour of trade between Pakistan and India. In 1989, 67% Pakistanis thought Pakistanis should establish trade ties with India, while this proportion has declined slightly to 65% in 2014. Nearly 11% Pakistanis were undecided on this subject in 1989. Most of these respondents have now switched their opinions to not favouring trade with India. 22% Pakistanis were against trade with India in 1989, which had increased to 35% by 2014. This data shows two important insights into the subject. First, there is an overwhelming support for establishing trade ties with India in Pakistan. This implies that most Pakistanis understand implicitly and support the hypothesis that establishment of open and normalized trade relations between India and Pakistan is a desirable objective and policy proposal for establishing peace between the two countries. Second, as the issue has become sensationalized in recent years (especially over the last five to six years), more Pakistanis have also converged around the hawkish position that trade between the two countries should remain off-limits until all political disputes are resolved.

Over the last three decades or so, Pakistanis have become increasingly ambiguous about a future war with India. Despite continuing political tensions between the two countries, a majority of Pakistanis do not see a nuclear holocaust occurring in the region, even if the two countries were to go to war. Perhaps understandably, more Pakistanis are apprehensive about the US's role in Pak-India relations. Notwithstanding these observations, the people of Pakistan remain desirous of normal relations with India. This is manifested in the historically robust support for establishing and increasing trade ties with India, which is often viewed as a road less traveled i.e. a route towards building towards lasting peace in the region.