

Historical Background of Partition and Disputes (1947)

The partition of British India in 1947 laid the foundation for Pakistan–India hostility. The process was rushed and poorly managed, resulting in violence, forced migrations, and mass killings across Punjab and Bengal. The controversial Radcliffe Line left several Muslim-majority areas within India, creating a deep sense of injustice in Pakistan. The disputes over division of military assets, financial resources, and administrative institutions further soured early relations. This violent and unequal beginning produced deep mistrust that still influences political attitudes in both nations.

Kashmir Dispute — The Core Issue

The Kashmir conflict has been the central and most enduring dispute between Pakistan and India. Despite being a Muslim-majority state, Kashmir's Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, delayed deciding whether to join India or Pakistan. After an uprising and tribal intervention from Pakistan's side in 1947, India sent its troops to Kashmir following the Maharaja's conditional accession. Pakistan rejected this move, leading to the First Kashmir War (1947–48). The United Nations brokered a ceasefire, dividing the region into Pakistan-administered and Indian-administered zones. However, the promise of a plebiscite for Kashmir's people was never fulfilled, leaving the issue unresolved and a constant cause of conflict.

Early Wars and Military Confrontations

Pakistan and India have fought three major wars—1947–48, 1965, and 1971—all rooted in territorial and political disputes. The 1965 war erupted after Pakistan's attempt to liberate Kashmir through military action, while the 1971 war stemmed from the Bangladesh crisis, where India supported separatists in East Pakistan. These wars deepened hostility and reinforced military mindsets on both sides. Following defeat in 1971, Pakistan's defense policy became India-centric, focusing on deterrence and survival. Continuous military buildup diverted resources from development and made peace efforts more complex.

Political and Ideological Differences

Ideologically, the two nations were born with opposing visions. Pakistan's foundation rested on Islamic identity and the two-nation theory, while India adopted secular democracy, aiming to integrate all communities within one state. These ideological differences shaped political behavior and public narratives for decades. Pakistan viewed India's dominance as a threat to its sovereignty, while India often saw Pakistan as a product of religious division undermining secular ideals. Consequently, every political crisis or conflict became linked to national identity, deepening mistrust and competition for regional influence.

Water Disputes and Economic Issues

Control over river water became a major source of tension soon after partition. India's control over canal headworks disrupted water supplies to Pakistan's farmlands in 1948. Although the

Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 resolved some issues, disputes over dam projects like Baglihar and Kishanganga persisted. Pakistan fears that India's upstream construction could reduce its water availability, impacting agriculture and energy. Water, therefore, became not only a resource issue but also a matter of national security and survival, linking environmental and political tensions between the two states.

Border and Territorial Conflicts

Apart from Kashmir, border demarcations in Punjab and other regions also created flashpoints. The Siachen Glacier conflict in 1984, when India occupied strategic heights, intensified military rivalry. Regular ceasefire violations and cross-border skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) caused civilian casualties and diplomatic crises. Each side accuses the other of aggression and interference. These territorial conflicts fostered militarization, hardened attitudes, and undermined diplomatic dialogue efforts, reinforcing the zero-sum mindset between both nations.

Consequences and Continuing Hostility

Decades of mistrust have prevented meaningful cooperation in trade, culture, and diplomacy. Both nations continue to allocate massive resources to defense, neglecting socioeconomic development. Political rhetoric and media narratives further inflame hostility. Although several peace attempts, such as the Tashkent Agreement (1966), Simla Agreement (1972), and Lahore Declaration (1999), were initiated, none succeeded permanently due to internal political pressures and lack of trust. The nuclearization of both states in 1998 added new risks but also a deterrence balance. Despite deep-rooted animosity, public opinion polls and people-to-people contacts indicate a genuine desire for peace on both sides.