

Policy Options for Canada in the India-Pakistan Enduring Rivalry

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Canada's long-standing relationships with India and Pakistan have not been without their problems. Since its independence in 1947, India's relationship with Canada has been one of ebb and flow. The close relationship between Indian Prime Minister Nehru and Canadian Prime Minister St. Laurent and Pearson in the maintenance of a stable international system marked the beginning of close relations between the two states. This relationship declined in the 1970s with India's development of nuclear weapons using Canadian technology. The 1980s saw a significant revival of the bilateral relationship with a growing Indian community in Canada supporting the development of Canadian policy towards India. The Air India incident aside, Indo-Canadian relations up until 1998 were strong. With the new round of nuclear tests by both India and Pakistan in 1998, a major strain in relations between India and Canada occurred and these relations remained stagnant until 2001, with Canada finally pushing for the development of the "broader possible political and economic relationship with India". India's growing economy was certainly a major factor in this change. However, it must be noted that Canada was slow to engage India, unlike the US and the EU.

Canada's relations with Pakistan are less well developed than those with India. The political instability associated with the ebb and flow of democracy and authoritarianism has had a negative impact on Canada's relations with Pakistan. Both at the diplomatic and economic levels, relations have been uneven since 1947. While Canada has played an active role within broader multilateral forums (vis-à-vis Pakistan) such as the Commonwealth and the United Nations, the nuclear tests of 1998 froze relations between Canada and Pakistan. Since 1998, and especially since the military coup of 1999, Canada has attempted to critically engage Pakistan and assist it towards the development of a sustainable democracy.

Specifically with regards to the Kashmir conflict, the source of the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan, Canada has taken a supportive position towards India with regards to cross-border terrorism in the region, but Canada also supports the development of constructive relations between Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi in resolving the Kashmir issue. Canada has also participated in UN mandated peacekeeping operations in the region, and has also worked to ensure the functioning of democracy in the region by sending election monitors. At the rhetorical level, Canada has always been willing to lend a "helping hand" to the region of the two parties in resolving the conflict. On the nuclear issue, Canada has pushed to get both states to sign onto the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. But this is unlikely, and it is important to de-link fully the nuclear issue and other broader bilateral issues of relations between Canada and the two states reach their full potential.