

The Difficult Politics of Peace and the India-Pakistan Rivalry

Abstract

In this essay, I test a new theory of interstate rivalry termination against the history of the India-Pakistan rivalry. I argue that this theory, which I call domestic primacy theory, explains the inability of India and Pakistan to terminate their rivalry since 1947. Domestic primacy theory predicts that economic crises create incentives for national leaders to pursue conciliatory policies toward strategic rivals, but that these incentives are disrupted when leaders face competing power centers within their governments. This essay demonstrates that economic downturns have spurred attempts at reconciliation in the India-Pakistan relationship, but that veto players have either sabotaged these efforts directly or leaders have abandoned conciliatory policies because they feared hardliners at home. Rivalry persists in South Asia because the political motivation to pursue conciliatory policies has not coincided with the political capability to enact them.