Perpetuating the Kashmir Imbroglio: Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict Theory and the Interplay of Communal Identities, Human Needs Deprivation, and External Interventions

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Abstract

This paper applies the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory, as developed by Edward Azar, to examine the Kashmir conflict, arguing that it is a paradigmatic example of identity-motivated, needs-based conflict perpetuated by governance

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failures and international connections. The research employs qualitative documentary research, drawing on primary and secondary sources, to investigate how the Kashmir case between 1947 and 2025 reflects four key variables of Azar (communal content, human needs deprivation, governance and state role, and international linkages). The evidence shows that the partitioning of colonies established hard Hindu-Muslim communal borders, which autocrats later used to organise political forces. The denial of security, identity and participatory needs as systemic violence makes the grievance cycles continue, and the centralisation of the administration in India and the proxy Pakistan support has delegitimised the state structures. External interventions such as cross-border terrorism and the involvement of great powers have caused internationalised local tensions. Upon reviewing the analysis, it becomes clear that Kashmir exhibits all four PSC preconditions in their most severe manifestations, which explains why traditional diplomatic techniques have not yielded a solution. The article is important to conflict studies because it not only generalises the PSC theory to South Asian nuclear-armed confrontations but also shows that cross-border terrorism serves as a linkage mechanism to the international system, converting bilateral conflicts into regional security threats. The implications

are that to achieve sustainable transformation, it is necessary to consider all four variables simultaneously by providing inclusive governance reforms, satisfying human needs, and maintaining independence from external spoilers.

Keywords: Kashmir war, Protracted Social Conflict theory, Edward Azar, India-Pakistan relations, cross-border terrorism.

Introduction

The Kashmir conflict is one of the oldest existing conflicts in contemporary international relations that has been in the limelight since the 1947 partition of British India. It has led to the death of over 70,000 individuals, the displacement of millions, four interstate conflicts, and has caused two nuclear-armed nations to be twice on the eve of nuclear war (Ganguly, 2016; Schofield, 2021; Ganguly et al., 2003; Wirsing, 2003). Although there was a strong track record of diplomatic discussions, United Nations intervention, and frequent bilateral negotiations, the conflict is still going on at its core, as the Pahalgam attack in April 2025 and the subsequent escalation of Operation Sindoor show (Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022; Srivastava, 2021; Tanwar, 2019).

Such unresolved intractability has led to critical scholarly interest in asking why the conventional methods of conflict-resolution approaches never worked (Mishali-Ram, 2019; Lyon, 2008; Rizvi, 1992). Two mainstream paradigmatic frameworks have limited existing studies in Kashmir, which poorly incorporate the multi-dimensional nature of the conflict. The conceptualisation of Kashmir based on realist approaches views Kashmir as a conflict over territory between the two states, which the system of power balances or intermediary actions between sovereign entities can address (Mishali-Ram, 2019; Cheema, 1992). Liberal paradigms of peace-building focus on institutional structures and confidence-building strategies, assuming that rational actors within the state can form a convergent compromise (Lyon, 2008; Ganguly, 2016). The main limitation of both paradigms is that they dismiss the origins of Kashmiri populations and modes of communal identity formation as fundamental, disregard the deprivation of basic human needs, and the failures of governance as the cause of regional volatility in a systematic way (Punjabi, 1992; Tanwar, 2019; Srivastava, 2021; Lamb, 1997).

The Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory, presented by Edward Azar, constitutes an analytically superior model for explaining the intractability of Kashmir (Azar, 1990; Azar & Burton, 1986; Cohen & Azar, 1981). PSC framework incorporates four variables which are interdependent and they are: (1) formation of communal content and identity groups; (2) deprivation of human needs by security, development, political participation, identity; (3) failures of governance and disarticulation of relations between states and society; (4) international interconnections that anchor local grievances into larger regional frameworks (Azar, 1990; Azar & Burton, 1986; Burton, 1990). PSC reconceptualises protracted conflicts as an ongoing process based on the systematic denial of ontological human needs, unlike conventional models that view conflicts as discrete events that diplomatic bargaining can resolve. These needs are urgent, and their suppression is bound to create a feeling of insecurity and violent mobilisation (Burton, 1990; Rubenstein, 2001). The originality of this study lies in its comprehensive four-variable approach to Kashmir over the entire period of 1947-2025, providing a total overall operationalisation that has not been presented elsewhere in the literature (Tanwar, 2019; Srivastava, 2021; Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022).

Cross-border terrorism presents a serious issue that requires attention, as it serves as a focal point in modern security discussions and is a topic that scholars often consider when studying the sponsorship of militant networks by Pakistan (Perkovich & Dalton, 2016; Tanwar, 2019). Instead of simply accepting this controversial notion at face value, this analysis places cross-border violence in perspective within the context of the PSC theory, which focuses on international interconnections and processes. This research reveals that cross-border militant activity is symptomatic of the protracted nature of the conflict, rather than a causal element, which is a condition, not a cause. Such an analytical method can interpret more nuanced than the Indian version of externally-funded terrorism or the Pakistani version of indigenous liberation struggle (Anonymous, 2004; Cronin, 2009; Wirsing, 2003).

This investigation addresses three research questions. To begin with, to what extent do the four structural PSC variables developed by Azar solve the ongoing irresolution of Kashmir since 1947 up to 2025? Second, what role have communal identity construction and systematic human needs denial played in making Kashmir intractable in comparison to the traditional methods of resolving it? Third, what have been the

governance failures and externalities that have sustained the conflict in seven decades? Using a strict application of the PSC theory, this article shows that specific structural conditions that systematically inhibit the ontological needs of Kashmiri populations and promote, instead of redirecting, conflict dynamics cause the intractability in Kashmir, not irrationality or historical hatred (Mishali-Ram, 2019; Odaudu, 2025; Tanabe, 2025).

The article continues in the following manner: Part two defines the conceptual framework, explaining the four basic variables of the PSC theory and demonstrating how the model offers a superior analysis compared to other approaches. Section three outlines the research methodology. Section four contains the findings in thematically arranged four categories: colonial origins and collective content formations; deprivation of human needs in four dimensions of security, identity, participation, and development; governance failures that create the lack of legitimacy that is interpreted as the capture of state by outside domination; and the international connection links made through cross-border terrorism networks that are institutionalised and where bilateral conflicts transform into permanent regional security threats. Part five explores the theoretical implications, compares the explanatory power of

PSC with that of other competing frameworks, and critically evaluates cross-border terrorism within the framework of PSC. The conclusion provides a summary of the results, proposes new contributions, and explores the opportunities for future research.

Theoretical Framework: Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflicts Theory

The study employs the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory of Edward Azar as the primary analytical tool, supplemented by the Human Needs Theory (HNT) of John Burton, to explore the structural forces underlying the ongoing communal violence. The paradigm of Azar, constructed through a systematic study of intractable conflicts in multi-communal societies, provides a comprehensive perspective on how the systematic refusal of basic human needs gives rise to grievance structures that defy conventional diplomatic solutions. This theoretical synthesis combines the ontological conceptualisation of non-negotiable human requirements presented by Burton with the four-variable framework of PSC, providing a robust analytical architecture for analysing the conflict perpetuation processes and the capabilities of transformation.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Underlying Assumptions

The Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory, developed by Edward Azar, emerged from a systematic examination of communal conflicts that challenged traditional paradigms of interstate conflicts. In contrast to conventional realist theories of power distribution and the security dilemma, the PSC theory posits that today's intractable conflicts stem from the long-term failure of human needs to be met by multi-communal societies (Azar, 1981). The theory bases its ontological foundation on the fact that human beings have predetermined, non-negotiable needs (security, identity recognition, political participation, and developmental opportunities), the systematic frustration of which creates grievances that rational discourse cannot resolve and that traditional diplomatic measures cannot address (Burton, 1990).

Using the Human Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow, not John Burton, Azar presented that the needs are fundamental ontological imperatives (identity, security, recognition, autonomy, and dignity) that are non-negotiable and inbuilt into genetics (Burton, 1990). When political institutions systematically fail to meet the needs of specific communal populations and instead favour others, resentment accumulates

over time, becoming ingrained in the social fabric rather than the political situation. This synthesis of HNT gives the PSC theory its explanatory centre. In contrast to material resources, which can be divided or compensated, the non-fungible nature of these needs implies that their frustration leads to existential reactions that rational bargaining cannot resolve.

PSC framework is unique as compared to its rival theoretical approaches in that it incorporates structural, psychological, and international dimensions. Unlike the ethnic conflict theory, which focuses on primordial animosities and the greed-grievance model, which minimises violence to an economic calculus, Azar's paradigm is a synthesis of these factors into an all-encompassing architecture that explains the origin and persistence of conflict (Tanabe, 2025). The analytical power of the theory lies in the fact that it identifies four interrelated variables (communal content, human needs deprivation, governance failures, and international linkages) whose interplay creates self-perpetuating cycles of violence that can only be interrupted by targeting all four variables at once.
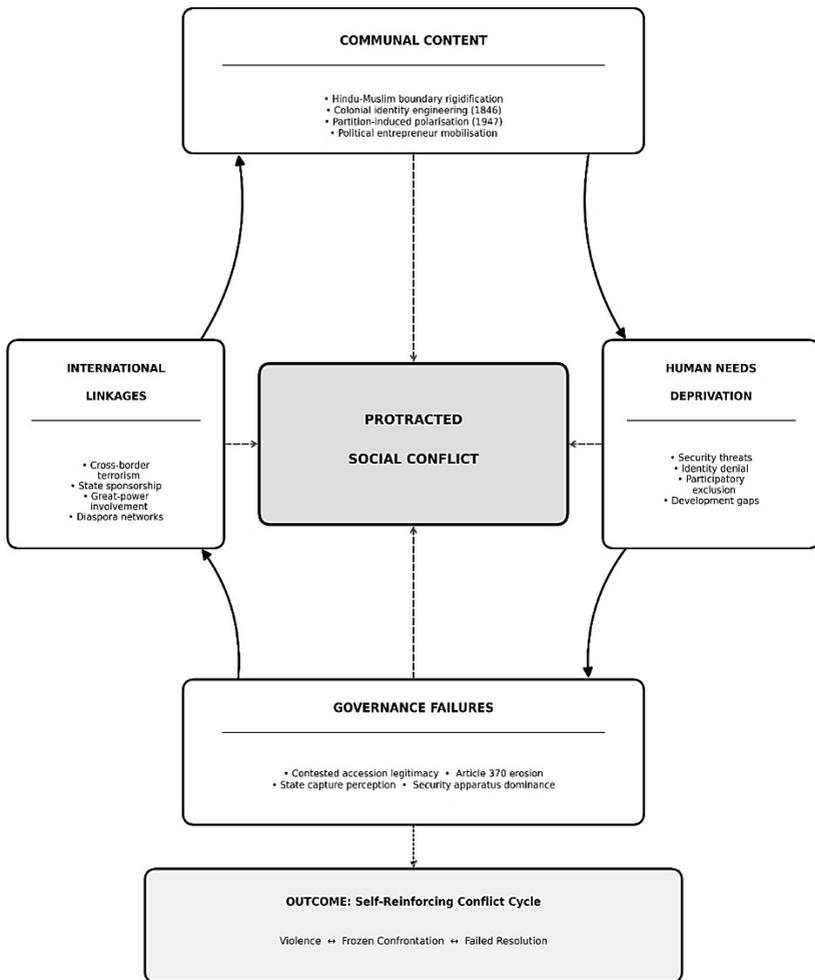
Figure 1 The Interdependent Four-Variable Framework of Protracted Social Conflict: Structural Drivers of Intractability from Communal Mobilisation to Self-Reinforcing Violence Cycles (Kashmir Case, 1947–2025).

Note: Conceptualised and developed by the authors based on Edward Azar's Protracted Social Conflict theory, synthesised with John Burton's Human Needs Theory, as adapted to the Kashmir conflict.

Figure 1 shows the interdependence of four variables in the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory by Edward Azar, modified to the Kashmir conflict, of the interplay of structural drivers, communal content, deprivation of human needs, failures of governance, and international connections to create self-reinforcing violence and intractability cycles between 1947 and 2025. Its basic formulations place PSC at the centre of dynamic processes. Arrows illustrate mutual reinforcement: communal content (e.g., colonial legacy and identity engineering) causes mobilisation, which fuels human needs deprivation (e.g., security, identity, participation, and development deficits), which in turn amplifies governance failures (e.g., centralised control and state capture). These, in turn, increase international connections (not only cross-border terrorism and the involvement of great powers), leading to self-perpetuating cycles of conflict, its escalation, unsuccessful solutions, and grievances. This graphic summary highlights the

totalitarian approach of the theory, which posits that individual diplomatic efforts are ineffective unless combined with coherent variables, resulting in local tensions escalating into regional security threats.

The PSC structure is a synthesis of Azar's structural analysis combined with the Burton ontological foundation, which collaborates with four variables that are mutually dependent on one another. By combining these variables, patterns of violence are perpetuated, thereby acting as self-perpetuating. One, the communal content variable states how identity groups are created and mobilised as the primary actors of conflict situations.

The problem of communal conflicts, as analysed in the case of Palestine by Azar, is that when the boundaries of identities become solidified due to historical events, particularly the influence of colonisers that guarantees systematic favouring of specified groups of people over others (Azar, 1981). Scholars do not fundamentally argue identity diversity itself, but rather its politicisation, the moment the communal demarcation supplanted national cohesion as the primary type of loyalty; then, sub-national demarcations will subdivide the collective

action power into smaller units. The HNT provided by Burton offers a more explanatory view of this fragmentation. One of the basic human needs, identity, is such that when threatened or denied the right to exist, it leads to defensive mobilisation, despite material circumstances.

The Palestinian Arab experience demonstrates how colonial policies, which permitted the establishment of Zionist institutions and the movement of Arabs to traditional forms of protest through conferences, petitions, demonstrations, and strikes, created asymmetric political abilities that persisted across generations (Azar, 1981). This inequality becomes institutionalised as one group of individuals manages to reach supra-clan political solidarity. At the same time, pre-national identities divide the other group, preventing the integration of a response against external aggression.

The second variable that plays an explanatory role in the framework, according to an ontological analysis by Burton, is human needs deprivation. Conflicts that may require prolonged resolution efforts are those related to the systematic rejection of universal human needs (security, identity recognition, autonomy, political participation, and developmental

opportunities) rather than bargaining interests. These needs are non-fungible, as opposed to material resources that are divisible or compensable; frustration results in an existential, rather than strategic, reaction. This fundamental disparity between needs and interests, proposed by Burton, is the primary reason behind the failure of interest-based diplomatic systems. There is no compromise on security or identity, as compromising security is akin to destroying oneself, not strategic compromise.

An example of such a dynamic was the case of Palestine, where Azar termed it a twin driver: the real and perceived threats to the land of Palestine, and British policies alienated the former, easing the work of the latter to create a Jewish nation (Azar, 1981). Land is not merely a piece of land, but the material foundation of survival as a community, whether for agricultural or generational purposes. The unfulfillment of ontological needs of certain communal groups by political institutions and their distribution to other people in a systematic manner leads to resentment accumulated over generations, which makes the conflict an inherent aspect of social reality rather than a political situation.

Governance Failures and International Relations: the Enabling Environment

The third variable is concerned with the issue of governance and the state's involvement in the perpetuation of conflicts, revealing the aspect of states as creators of asymmetries rather than justice brokers. According to Azar, conflict-prone states were those institutions that were captured by the other dominant communal groups, reflecting specific interests rather than general ones. One such dynamic is the British Mandate, which facilitated the institutionalisation of Zionism at the institutional level of political power. The colonial rule established asymmetries that successor states emulated. The institutionalisation of the community's dominant institution through constitutional arrangements, elections, and security apparatus transforms failure to governance into structural violence, in which exclusion is not a one-time occurrence.

The needs theory, created by Burton, sheds some light on the reason why this form of governance generates a conflict that is difficult to resolve. When states strip a section of the population of their basic requirements for a dignified existence (physical security, developmental opportunities, political

representation, and identification), such societies have no choice but to seek other means of meeting these requirements. Privatisation of violence, which includes the privatisation of militia, armed movements, and communal defence organisations, is an understandable response for communities to state failure in providing ontological security. With this kind of fragmentation, conflict becomes very intractable: there is no single voice that is authoritative enough to make commitments and bind the society to a large extent.

The fourth variable is international linkages, which appreciates the fact that protracted conflicts rarely remain within the area boundaries. The outside actors (neighbouring states, diaspora communities, great powers, and international organisations) intervene by supporting organisations, alleviating financial burdens, and exerting pressure, thereby transforming local wars into regional or global problems. These are bilateral associations: internationalisation of national government by outside intervention and international processes interfere with local conflict calculations.

As it happened with the Palestinians, the great-power patronage becomes constitutive rather than incidental. The

wartime wavering engagements of Britain, which had previously been on the side of Zionism, were permanently solidified through the state imperial tool of the Mandate, turning it into an active party of war. This tendency was the very influence of such an effect, which Azar termed the interaction templates that endured the patron: even after the British had withdrawn, the complex of seeking external confirmation and fear of being demeaned by the world continued to affect conflict behaviour in several generations after.

Process Dynamics and Conflict Escalation: The Self-Reinforcing Mechanisms

The conceptualised systems of the integrated framework clarify the PSC evolution as a process of interdependent dynamics that lead to the change of latent tensions into open confrontation through predictable patterns. The preconditions of genesis factors include colonial disturbances and the boundary and structure of community governance that favour particular groups. The existence of these forces creates latent tensions, which are poised to be triggered by triggering events, strategic interactions, and feedback processes.

The dynamics of the processes develop as the outcome of the collision between universal human needs and structural constraints that are unable to satisfy them. Conflict behaviour will escalate when precipitating events (such as policy changes, outside intervention, or figurative provocations) elicit the mobilisation of accumulated grievances. An example of this is evident in the Palestinian case, whereby tactical asymmetries emerged: the Arabs were restricted to the modalities of state-dependent protest, whereas the Zionists were free to establish state-independent coercive resources through parallel institution-building.

This course deviation generates self-compounding spirals. The frustration of traditional protests has occasionally culminated in violence, albeit not strategically planned, well-organised, or crushed due to the inadequate preparation of the institutions. There is partisanship in the state responses compared to the non-partisan response: The response of the Arab community is collective punishment, and the response of the Jewish settlements is an appraisal or nonchalant encouragement to arm themselves. In either of the cycles, both parties measure the futility of moderation on the one hand, and the effectiveness of armed preparedness on the other.

The examination conducted by Burton explains the reason why these patterns are intergenerational. No period of unmet ontological wants disappears, and the want becomes more characteristic until the most fundamental way of changing the structural conditions of deprivation occurs. This form of interaction template, which was worked out (one side restricted to symbolic protest and occasional desperate violence, the other establishing actual coercive power through the security of the state), is inherited as the grammar of conflict, and reproduces itself even in the case of regime change and even when parties make formal peace agreements.

Cross-Border Terrorism and Applications

This discussion broadens the combined model with the international terrorism that takes place across borders as an act of the presently devastating international interconnection that continues conflicts on a long-term basis. Compared to homegrown terrorism, cross-border terrorism is intentional in that it seeks to add others to its violence by taking advantage of international spaces (physical, financial, and ideological) to be all the more effective and complicate state action. The phenomenon

operates through the principle of symbiotic relations, where state supporters provide a haven and financial resources, and the preparation and maintenance of the sponsor subsidies are plausibly deniable. Non-state organisations stake power to their benefit and extend their agendas on behalf of sponsors.

The needs theory of Burton can provide crucial information regarding this dynamic. Terrorism is a byproduct of unresolved social and political problems that the state's failure perpetuates, namely the systematic denial of ontological needs for security, recognition, and constructive participation. Through the financing of cross-border violence as a cost-effective alternative to conventional war, states institutionalise international relations, through which states can deter conflict, regardless of how well they develop bilateral diplomatic relations. These dynamics transform legitimate grievances into asymmetric violence, preventing the structural changes required to realise the actual needs.

The analytical value of the framework lies in its simultaneous combination of various levels of explanation that other approaches treat differently. The approaches of realists also concentrate on the interests of states and the rivalry in the sphere of security, but do not explain why domestic complaints

continue the international rivalry, regardless of how states execute strategic calculations. The liberal institutionalist forms encourage dialogue and financial interdependence, but fail to meet identity-based requirements that material rewards cannot satisfy. The constructivist analyses illuminate how societies socially construct communal identities; however, they do not typically focus on the structural constraints that hinder identity transformation. The created structure of PSC-HNT captures the way these perspectives converge in a condensed form, highlighting how structural conditions generate identities, identities generate needs, needs generate ungovernability, and the failure of governance creates an opportunity for outside intervention. Such a synthesis is a reaction to the existing level of security problems in which cross-border terrorism is a spoiler mechanism that is systemic of long-term conflict relations, revealing how conflicts of origin in colonial asymmetries and the persistence of needs deprivation are finding new forms of expression that are unfamiliar to the classical forms of conflict resolution. The framework thus offers both historical exposition and topical analysis to provide a detailed explanation of the conflict between structural violence and the intervention of international interests that perpetuate cycles of violence across multiple generations.

Table 1 Azar's Four-Variable PSC Framework Applied to Kashmir

PSC Variable	Theoretical Definition	Kashmir Manifestation
Communal Content	Identity groups defined by ethnic, religious, or linguistic markers rigidified through colonial intervention and political mobilisation (Azar, 1990)	The Hindu-Muslim borders developed as a result of Treaty of Amritsar (1846) and solidified by 1947 partition and politicised by rival nationalist movements (Tanwar, 2019; Rizvi, 1992).
Human Needs Deprivation	Systematic rejection of ontological human needs such as security, identity identification, political involvement and development opportunities (Burton, 1990).	Insecurity concerns through continuous violence; lack of identity through unfulfilled plebiscite; exclusion through participation via added electoral manipulation; lack of development (employment and infrastructural) (Ganguly, 2016; Lyon, 2008).

Table 1 (Continued)

PSC Variable	Theoretical Definition	Kashmir Manifestation
Governance Failures	Lack of legitimacy blame on institutions of the state seized by stronger communal organizations that represent special and not general interests in the state (Cohen and Azar, 1981).	The questionable status of accession legitimacy; incremental wastage of Article 370; the removal of the Sheikh Abdullah in 1953; the security apparatus may be viewed as a source of extra-territorial control (Thomas,1992; Punjabi, 1992).
International Linkages	The politics of the region are converted to a conflict by outsiders who support the involved local conflict by providing military, offering refuge, and intervening diplomatically (Brecher,1984).	1947 invasion by the tribes with the Pakistani assistance; institutionalised cross-border terrorism infrastructures; the Cold War and modern great-power alliances; the mobilisation of the diasporas (Perkovich and Dalton, 2016; Lamb, 1997)

Table 1: Core Variables of Protracted Social Conflict Theory: Definitions, Interdependencies, and Manifestations in the Kashmir Conflict (1947–2025)

Note: The authors conceived and developed this framework based on the Protracted Social Conflict theory of Edward Azar (Azar, 1990), combined with the Human Needs Theory by John Burton, and operationalised it through a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary literature on Kashmir.

Table 1 outlines the four interdependent variables of the Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) theory, as proposed by Edward Azar: communal content, human needs deprivation, governance failures, and international linkages. It provides brief definitions, main sub-elements, and their empirical expressions in the Kashmir conflict from partition in 1947 to 2025. As shown in the table, communal content, which draws from colonial-era engineering of identity (e.g. Hindu-Muslim divisions), triggers mobilisation and links human needs deprivation in security, identity, participation and development realms to drive governance collapse in the form of centralised state capture and lack of legitimacy in India-controlled Kashmir. These interior processes, in turn, connect to international linkages through mechanisms such as cross-border terrorism and interventions by great powers, which create self-perpetuating loops of violence. This table provides an overview of the holistic explanatory

capability of the PSC model, explaining why fragmented interventions (e.g., bilateral diplomacy) cannot break the intractability of a system, and why simultaneous reforms of all the variables remain the only way to achieve sustainable change.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative case study analysis, combined with documentary analysis, serves as the primary method of investigation to examine the variables of PSC in the Kashmir conflict between 1947 and 2025. The methodology combines secondary data from various sources to examine how the theoretical framework of Azar reflects the actual dynamics of the protracted conflict in Kashmir. This methodology aligns with case study methods used to recommend the application of PSC, which focuses on tracing processes in order to reveal causal relations between theoretical variables and empirical data (Leventis & Tsokkalides, n.d.). The research draws on a wide range of secondary literature, including academic publications that apply to PSC theory and similar conflicts, such as the original formulations of Azar, the human needs theory, as well as recent applications to cases like the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict, Rwanda, the Ethiopia-Tigray conflict, and Cyprus. The sources specific to Kashmir include a historical evaluation of partition and accession (Tanwar, 2019; Lamb, 1997), research on militancy and counterinsurgency (Srivastava, 2021; Cheema, 1992), and studies of cross-border terrorism. The Treaty of Amritsar, UN resolutions, and constitutional instruments provide fundamental legal frameworks. The research addresses potential bias by systematically incorporating a multitude of national perspectives, particularly those from India and Pakistan (Rizvi, 1992; Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022), while maintaining a primary focus on representing Kashmiri voices neutrally (Punjabi, 1992; Snedden, 2012).

Such triangulation will enable the comparative evaluation of PSC features in Kashmir and other protracted conflicts, as well as the identification of those manifestations that are particular to the context. The study operationalises Azar's four variables using his analytical framework through specific empirical indicators that undergo thematic coding. The process of identity formation and the rigidification of boundaries evaluate communal content. A systematic record of security threats, patterns of identity denial, and development

differences measures the deprivation of human needs. The governance analysis focuses on the constitutional arrangements and the perceptions held by the groups regarding legitimacy. The research pursues international interests through the intervention of neighbouring states and the dynamics of cross-border terrorism. The analysis employs systematic pattern recognition and thematic congruence with theoretical conjectures. This approach enables the discovery of repetitive patterns by evaluating data over multiple time periods and ensuring analytical rigour in linking empirical evidence with theoretical propositions.

The methodological drawbacks include relying on secondary sources to identify current developments, particularly after 2019, due to data gaps resulting from a communication blackout (Srivastava, 2021), potential selection bias in the English-language literature, and difficulties in transferring the frameworks to other settings. The research discusses these aspects through source triangulation, direct recognition of interpretive controversies, and consideration of context-dependent factors. Ethical considerations prioritise balanced representation, and the study acknowledges PSC

theory as offering analytical scaffolding, but not as providing deterministic prediction, which concentrates more on pattern identification rather than the certainty of causation.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The role of Communal Content and Identity Mobilisation in Kashmir

Kashmir's communal landscape illustrates the patterns of identity rigidification that serve as preconditions for PSC, as outlined by Azar. Prior to partition, Kashmir displayed demographic complexity: the Kashmir Valley hosted a predominantly Muslim population (almost 94 per cent), Jammu maintained a predominantly Hindu majority (more than 66 per cent), and Ladakh sustained a predominantly Buddhist community (Wirsing, 2003; Mishali-Ram, 2019). This diversity persisted throughout Dogra Hindu rule, where fundamental communal asymmetry involving a Muslim majority population under Hindu monarchical rule erupted into violent confrontation. The 1846 sale of Kashmir to Gulab Singh, a representative of the colonial elite, for seventy-five lakh rupees, which contemporaries lamented as the commercialisation of

human beings, established Hindu Rajput supremacy over Muslim communities that colonial rule later institutionalised (Tanwar, 2019; Rizvi, 1992; Cheema, 1992). The colonial administration's treatment of Kashmir illustrates how Azar structurally engineers communal division in Palestinian contexts. Afghan rule was characterised by economic exploitation, as governors generated substantial revenues through discriminatory policies (Cheema, 1992). Sikh domination subsequently imposed differential punishments for inter-community violence: killing a Hindu cost four rupees, killing a Muslim cost two rupees, while extreme taxation policies extracted up to 90 per cent of village rice crops (Cheema, 1992). These historical inequalities formed underlying grievances that future political mobilisation could leverage, demonstrating how colonial and pre-colonial systems shaped the communal content found in PSC theory as conflict preconditions.

The pre-independence period witnessed political entrepreneurs organising communities along conflicting trajectories. The National Conference, led by Sheikh Abdullah, promoted secular, democratic self-governance in alignment with Indian nationalism, while the Muslim Conference

advocated for joining Pakistan through religious solidarity (Mishali-Ram, 2019; Punjabi, 1992). The 1946 Quit Kashmir movement directly challenged Maharaja Hari Singh's legitimacy as the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, as part of India's broader anti-colonial movement (Mishali-Ram, 2019). The 1947 tribal invasion transformed these competing mobilisations into violent conflict, creating precedents where communal affiliation became inseparable from geopolitical alignment. Post-accession processes institutionalised communal boundaries through Article 370's special status and its 2019 repeal (Thomas, 1992; Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022). Modern Kashmir's communal boundaries now represent completely rigidified divisions that meet PSC's communal content preconditions.

Human Needs Deprivation: Security, Identity and Participation

Kashmir's conflict trajectory reveals systematic deprivation of human needs across all categories that Burton and Azar classified as conflict drivers. Security needs deprivation manifests through continued civilian violence: the 1947 tribal invasion atrocities, subsequent Indo-Pakistani wars across Kashmir territory, counterinsurgency campaigns since 1989, and

cross-border terrorism acts have created conditions where physical safety faces continuous threats (Lyon, 2008; Cheema, 1992; Ganguly, 2016). The Armed Forces Special Powers Act provisions, which enable military action without civilian oversight, have generated historical human rights violations that exacerbate security deprivation (Balcerowicz & Kuszewska, 2022). The 1947 tribal invasion established security deprivation patterns that persist through generations, as armed tribal members advanced rapidly and committed numerous atrocities, creating humanitarian crises (Tanwar, 2019).

Identity needs deprivation operates through competing sovereignty assertions that deny Kashmiri self-determination regardless of consequences. India's assertion that Kashmir's accession settled its status, Pakistan's insistence that authorities should implement the plebiscite, and Kashmiri desires for autonomy or independence create irreconcilable frameworks, where a resolution would justify one identity claim at the expense of others (Ganguly et al., 2003; Rizvi, 1992). The plebiscite promise, which Nehru and Mountbatten initially endorsed but later abandoned, exemplifies how international commitments can create unmet expectations that generate

grievances (Lyon, 2008; Lamb, 1997). UN resolutions adopted on 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949 demanded a ceasefire, demilitarisation, and a plebiscite; however, authorities never fulfilled these sequentially, indefinitely postponing the plebiscite (Ganguly, 2003; Thomas, 1992).

Participatory needs deprivation reflects governance arrangements that exclude meaningful Kashmiri agency in determining their political destiny. Despite periodic elections, New Delhi and Islamabad have made decisions impacting Kashmir, such as accession, constitutional integration, or the abrogation of special status, without involving Srinagar (Thomas, 1992; Punjabi, 1992). State elections consistently featured low voter turnout and boycotts by both Plebiscite Front and secessionist groups, as most Kashmiris perceived governments as unresponsive (Mishali-Ram, 2019). Economic development has also received inadequate attention. Kashmir presents unemployment, low industrialisation, and tourism-dependent economies that make them vulnerable to security threats (Wirsing, 2003). This cumulative deprivation across security, identity, participation, and development dimensions creates indefinitely committed grievance frameworks that PSC theory anticipates will perpetuate conflict despite tactical accommodations.

Governance Failure and State Legitimacy Deficits

Kashmir's governance history reflects the state capture patterns and legitimacy undermining that Azar characterised as PSC perpetuators. The transition from princely autocracy through contested accession to disputed sovereignty created foundational legitimacy deficits that subsequent regimes inherited. Maharaja Hari Singh's ambivalence between independence, Indian accession, and Pakistani alignment reflected calculations of regime survival rather than popular will. When he finally acceded under invasion conditions, this created legal standing that Pakistan contested, and Kashmiris themselves rejected (Rizvi, 1992; Lamb, 1997). The non-realisation of the promised plebiscite transformed conditional accession into permanent integration without popular validation, establishing governance on legally contentious foundations (Ganguly et al., 2003).

India's Kashmir administration history demonstrates progressive centralisation processes that undermined initial autonomy provisions. Article 370's special status, intended to maintain Kashmir's unique constitutional position, gradually eroded through presidential orders extending Indian laws to the

state (Thomas, 1992). Authorities established removal patterns when elected leaders opposed New Delhi's autonomy advocacy, removing them through allegations of foreign collusion, which observers mostly viewed as punishment, as with Sheikh Abdullah, whom authorities dismissed and imprisoned in 1953 over this issue (Punjabi, 1992; Tanwar, 2019). Security apparatus development exemplifies the transformation of governance instruments from protection tools to instruments of communal dominance. From Kashmiri Muslim perspectives, Hindu-majority India's security needs seemingly capture the state apparatus, making it function to suppress Kashmiri aspirations rather than serve Kashmiri interests. The state apparatus, which functions to suppress rather than serve Kashmiri interests, represents the legitimacy deficit that PSC theory proposes as a manifestation of governance failure (Afriyie & Asomani, 2024).

International Interconnections and Cross-Border Terrorism

Kashmir's international dimension satisfies PSC's external connectivity preconditions while providing cross-border terrorism as a unique escalation mechanism. Pakistan's involvement began with the 1947 tribal invasion, which

authorities reported as a spontaneous Muslim rebellion when states actually organised it with military logistics, British officer involvement, and camouflaged regular soldiers (Tanwar, 2019; Lamb, 1997). This initial pattern established further intervention precedents: funding non-state violence with plausible deniability, exploiting local grievances for geopolitical objectives, and drawing attention through spectacular acts of violence. The 1965 Operation Gibraltar and the 1999 Kargil incursion represented conventional military applications, whereas post-1989 insurgencies and modern terrorism demonstrated asymmetric applications that challenged the limitations of nuclear deterrence (Ganguly, 2016; Cheema, 1992).

Cross-border terrorism employs organisational infrastructure that institutionalises international connectivity rather than relying on sporadic interventions. Organisations like Lashkar-e-Taiba operate training centres, recruitment systems, and operational networks that persist despite bilateral diplomatic conditions (Perkovich & Dalton, 2016; Anonymous, 2004). The 2008 Mumbai attacks revealed these linkages' sophistication: elaborate planning, real-time coordination, and target selection for maximum international attention and peace process

derailment (Cronin, 2009). Pakistan's contradictory behaviour, including arresting some operatives while accommodating others and banning organisations that reform under new names, exemplifies how state-sponsor relationships remain persistent rather than contingent. India's retaliatory capabilities face nuclear escalation risks that prevent the military destruction of these infrastructures, generating neither-war-nor-peace dynamics that PSC theory expects in international interconnection cases, which prevent local conflict transformation.

Significant power intervention provides additional international connections. Cold War alignments positioned Pakistan within Western alliances, while India remained non-aligned, leaning towards the Soviet Union during conflicts (Brecher, 1984; Lyon, 1992). Contemporary relationships feature China supporting Pakistan through infrastructure development in contested regions and UN diplomatic backing, while the United States maintains strategic partnerships with India. These alignments complicate resolution by providing external justification for opposing positions and undermining the incentives for bilateral accommodation (Ganguly et al., 2003). International organisations, especially the UN, developed

resolution frameworks that fully satisfied neither side, creating legal reference points for incompatible claims rather than providing settlement pathways. The April 2025 Pahalgam attack illustrates cross-border terrorism dynamics' resistance to decades of counterterrorism tactics, demonstrating how international interconnections remain effective despite various approaches.

CONCLUSION

This article establishes that the Protracted Social Conflict theory, as developed by Edward Azar, combined with John Burton's Human Needs Theory, provides a strong analytical framework to explain the intractability of the Kashmir conflict. However, it still requires extension to consider cross-border terrorism as a modern international linkage mechanism. The analysis has verified that Kashmir possesses all four PSC preconditions in extreme form: communal content hardened by religious boundary-drawing of partition and further identity mobilisation; deprivation of human needs across security, identity, participation and development aspects; governance failures creating legitimacy deficits that communities perceive as state capture by external domination; and internationalisation

through cross-border terrorism infrastructure that converts bilateral disputes into permanent region-wide security threats.

The theoretical value of this paper lies in its application of PSC theory to nuclear-armed adversaries, where conventional termination procedures become impossible. The nuclear dimension of Kashmir does not end the conflict but instead sustains it in a state of permanent instability, which Perkovich and Dalton (2016) describe as neither-war-nor-peace relations, where neither side wins wars or establishes a negotiated peace. Cross-border terrorism operates within this framework as a low-cost violence mechanism that perpetuates grievance narratives, demonstrates adversary vulnerability, and periodically escalates without crossing nuclear thresholds until miscalculation or intentional escalation produces results that both sides would otherwise avoid. This extension addresses a gap in Azar's initial formulation regarding how modern conflicts persist through asymmetric violence that traditional diplomatic approaches cannot counter.

The analysis validates the critique of partial intervention approaches by PSC theory. Efforts to resolve Kashmir using security approaches, such as military presence, counterinsurgency,

and border fortification, have failed to reduce violence since deep-rooted needs deprivation and governmental failures continuously generate new militants. Diplomatic programmes focusing on bilateral state relations have failed to settle conflicts, as they serve elite interests rather than community needs. Economic development programmes have not alleviated grievances, as material growth cannot replace identity recognition and participatory inclusion. The persistent pattern of progressive tactics followed by fresh violence confirms PSC theory's prediction that partial interventions addressing individual variables alone cannot achieve transformation when other factors remain active.

Policy implications align with Azar's recommendations, which advocate for integrated interventions that address all four variables simultaneously, rather than sequentially. Communal content requires reconciliation processes that accommodate multiple acceptable narratives rather than enforcing singular frameworks. Human needs fulfilment demands governance reforms that guarantee security, identity recognition, participatory opportunities, and developmental accessibility for all Kashmiri communities, regardless of religious affiliation.

Constitutional arrangements that are considered legitimate by affected populations, rather than being imposed by external forces, are essential for governance transformation. International disconnection requires Pakistan to shift strategy from calculating proxy war benefits to normalisation advantages, while great powers must address their continued enabling pressures. These interventions remain insufficient individually, and their combination represents minimum transformation requirements, not mere accommodation.

Further studies are needed to investigate the intersection of PSC theory with nuclear deterrence dynamics, particularly whether nuclear restraints that prevent termination also preclude stability-enabling indefinite protraction. Comparisons to other nuclear-armed PSC contexts would illuminate whether nuclear dimensions alter PSC patterns or merely heighten escalation dangers atop existing patterns. Additionally, researchers should explore how technological advances in cross-border terrorism, including cyber operations, drone warfare, and social media radicalisation, affect international linkage mechanisms. Azar's original approach may inadequately capture these developments. These extensions

would enhance the contemporary relevance of PSC theory while providing analytical tools for conflicts involving identity-based grievances, human needs deprivation, governance failures, and international connections in nuclear-armed scenarios.

In conclusion, the Kashmir crisis exemplifies protracted social conflict in its most intractable form, where communal polarisation systems characterised by deprivation, governance delegitimization, and violence internationalisation freeze rather than resolve disputes. The theoretical framework this article constructs, integrating PSC theory with cross-border terrorism analysis, provides insights into why Kashmir remains unresolved and what comprehensive transformation would require. Whether necessary political will exists to facilitate such a transformation remains uncertain. However, PSC theory precisely illuminates this challenge, highlighting the required scope of change rather than offering false hope through half-measures. The alternative, without integrated intervention, involves oscillating between violence and accommodation, where miscalculation or intentional escalation risks constantly threaten catastrophic consequences extending far beyond South Asia.

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