

From Bilateralism to Brinkmanship

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From Bilateralism to Brinkmanship: The Fallout of Simla Agreement Suspension

Context

- On the backdrop of a **terrorist attack in Pahalgam**, which led to **nationwide mourning in India**, the Government of Pakistan has **unilaterally suspended the 1972 Simla Agreement**.
- The move reflects a reaction to India's **internal security measures in Jammu & Kashmir**, especially following developments like the **abrogation of Article 370 in 2019**.
- This development holds **critical geopolitical significance**, as it threatens to dismantle a long-standing diplomatic framework between **India and Pakistan**, raising fresh concerns over **LoC stability** and **regional peace**.

About the Simla Agreement (1972)

The **Simla Agreement** was a bilateral treaty signed on **July 2, 1972**, by:

- **Indira Gandhi** (Prime Minister of India)
- **Zulfikar Ali Bhutto** (President of Pakistan)

It was a post-war peace effort following the **1971 Indo-Pak War**, which led to the **creation of Bangladesh**.

Key Objectives

- Restoration of peace and normalization of relations
- Establishing a framework for future **bilateral dispute resolution**

- Ensuring **ceasefire line stability**, redefined as **Line of Control (LoC)**
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Main Provisions of the Simla Agreement

1. Bilateralism as the Core Principle

All disputes, including **Kashmir**, were to be resolved through **bilateral talks**, explicitly excluding any **third-party intervention**.

2. Line of Control (LoC)

- The **ceasefire line** established after the 1971 war was converted into the **LoC**.
- Both parties agreed **not to alter the LoC unilaterally**, maintaining the status quo.

3. Return of Captured Territory

- India returned over **13,000 sq. km** of territory captured during the 1971 war.
- However, India retained **strategic areas** like **Turtuk** and **Chalunka**.

4. Respect for Sovereignty and Non-Interference

- Both countries pledged **not to interfere in each other's internal affairs** and to respect **territorial integrity**.

5. Commitment to Peaceful Coexistence

- Both reaffirmed adherence to the **UN Charter**, emphasizing the use of **peaceful means** in dispute resolution.
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Why Pakistan Suspended the Simla Agreement

Pakistan's decision appears **symbolic**, but has serious diplomatic implications.

Possible Reasons

- **Reaction to India's internal measures** in J&K, including the **2019 abrogation of Article**

370.

- **Stalled bilateral dialogue**, with no recent progress on diplomatic engagement.
- **Domestic political compulsions** in Pakistan amid internal instability.
- **Strategic intent to internationalise the Kashmir issue** through forums like the UN or OIC.

Key Takeaways

- It reflects **Pakistan's dissatisfaction with the bilateral mechanism**.
- May be aimed at **gaining global sympathy** or leveraging **third-party mediation**, which **India strongly opposes**.

Implications on the Line of Control (LoC)

The Simla Agreement had served as a **restraining mechanism** for LoC hostilities. Its suspension raises the following concerns:

Strategic and Security Impacts

1. Increased Risk of Ceasefire Violations

- Without the agreement, **mutual restraint** may decline.
- Potential for **frequent skirmishes, infiltration, and escalation**.

2. Loss of Diplomatic Buffer

- The agreement provided a **framework for de-escalation** during crises.
- Suspension removes this mechanism, encouraging **brinkmanship**.

3. Third-party Engagement Risk

- Pakistan may now seek **external mediation**, which goes against **India's stated**

foreign policy principle of bilateralism.

India's Position and Diplomatic Outlook

India's Traditional Stand

- India has **consistently upheld bilateralism** as the sole approach for engaging with Pakistan.
- Firmly opposes **external involvement** in the **Kashmir issue**.

Current Implications

- India is yet to issue a formal response, but the move is expected to:
 - **Shrink space for future dialogue**
 - **Undermine mutual diplomatic trust**
 - **Reinforce India's global argument** that Pakistan is backtracking from peaceful commitments

Possible Scenarios Ahead

1. Escalation

- Potential rise in **cross-border tensions**, especially during **elections** or **terror attacks**.

2. Global Diplomatic Pressure

- **External powers** (e.g., US, China, Gulf countries) may push for a **new framework** of engagement.

Conclusion

The **suspension of the 1972 Simla Agreement** by Pakistan represents a **strategic rupture** in

bilateral diplomacy. It removes a key **peace architecture**, disrupts the **existing LoC framework**, and reopens the possibility of **internationalizing the Kashmir issue**.

For India, this development is a **challenge to its foundational principle of bilateralism**, and it may necessitate both **diplomatic recalibration** and **military preparedness**.

In the broader context, the move reflects how **regional instability, unresolved disputes, and internal pressures** can reverse decades of diplomacy, raising the stakes for **peace and security in South Asia**.



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