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**SURVEILLANCE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND RESISTANCE:
A CRITICAL STUDY OF BORDER SECURITY PRACTICES
ALONG THE INDIA–PAKISTAN LINE OF CONTROL**

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ABSTRACT

The India–Pakistan border, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC), has evolved into one of the most intensely securitized frontiers in the world. This paper critically examines how the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies—such as drones, thermal imaging systems, and barbed-wire fencing—has reshaped the notion of sovereignty and state control in this volatile region. While these measures aim to curb infiltration and maintain national security, they have produced significant socio-political ramifications for borderland communities. Residents often find themselves caught between national narratives of defense and the lived reality of restricted mobility, economic marginalization, and psychological stress. Drawing upon border theory, concepts of biopolitics, and the state of exception, this study interrogates how surveillance not only fortifies borders but also disciplines populations. By analyzing policy documents, field reports, and regional case studies, the paper highlights the paradox of securing the state while undermining the security of its own citizens. The findings call for a nuanced rethinking of security frameworks that prioritize both territorial integrity and human dignity. In doing so, the paper contributes to emerging debates in critical security studies and offers policy recommendations that balance national defense imperatives with the rights of border communities.

KEYWORDS: *Border securitization, Surveillance, Line of Control, Sovereignty, Border communities.*

Introduction

The India–Pakistan border, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC), remains one of the most militarized and politically contentious frontiers in the world. Born out of the partition of British India in 1947, this boundary has not only symbolized the division of two nation-states but has also become a flashpoint of geopolitical tension, armed conflict, and ideological rivalry. The enduring dispute over the region of Jammu and Kashmir, formalized yet ambiguously delineated through the

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Simla Agreement of 1972, continues to shape strategic calculations and national security doctrines on both sides of the divide (Ganguly, 2020).

Despite multiple diplomatic engagements, confidence-building measures, and ceasefire agreements, the LoC remains volatile, frequently witnessing exchanges of fire, cross-border incursions, and civilian displacements. In this context, the securitization of the border has become a dominant state response, framed through the logic of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national defense.

Over the past two decades, India has significantly expanded its border security infrastructure. Surveillance technologies—ranging from barbed-wire fencing and infrared sensors to unmanned aerial vehicles and night-vision systems—have become central to its border management strategy (Singh & Thakur, 2021). The Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), a state-of-the-art electronic surveillance mechanism implemented along sensitive stretches of the border, reflects a broader shift from traditional patrolling to technologically enabled vigilance (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). While these advancements are often justified through the imperatives of national security and the need to curb infiltration and cross-border militancy, they also raise important questions about the broader implications of such surveillance practices—particularly for the communities inhabiting these borderlands.

The increasing reliance on technological surveillance has contributed to what scholars term the “securitized border regime,” where the border is not merely a territorial demarcation but a zone of exceptional governance (Jones, 2012). This regime produces a dual effect: on one hand, it reinforces the sovereign power of the state; on the other, it transforms the everyday lives of those residing near the LoC. For borderland communities in Poonch, Rajouri, and Uri, the presence of security installations, checkpoints, and restricted movement has resulted in both physical and psychological marginalization. Their lives are frequently interrupted by curfews, military operations, and intermittent shelling, leading to disrupted education, constrained economic activities, and social alienation (Bhattacharjee, 2018).

This dichotomy—between securing the nation and alienating its citizens—brings into focus the complex relationship between surveillance, sovereignty, and human rights. Security infrastructures are often implemented without adequate consultation with local populations, thereby constructing them as passive subjects rather than active stakeholders in national security. The very technologies designed to ensure state security may, paradoxically, undermine the security of the state’s own people by infringing upon their mobility, privacy, and socio-economic agency (Ghosh, 2020).

In this context, borderland inhabitants are situated within what Giorgio Agamben (2005) conceptualizes as the “state of exception,” wherein normal legal protections are suspended under the pretext of emergency and security.

The strategic importance of the LoC cannot be understated. As a *de facto* military boundary in a nuclearized region, it plays a crucial role in shaping South Asia’s security architecture. Yet its hyper-securitization reveals the tensions inherent in the modern nation-state’s approach to sovereignty. In the attempt to render the border impermeable, states often deploy techniques that transcend territorial control and enter the realm of social regulation and discipline. This expansion of state power is not only a matter of military strategy but also of political subjectivity—who belongs, who is protected, and who is governed through force rather than consent (Bigo, 2006).

This paper critically interrogates the implications of border surveillance along the India–Pakistan LoC through two interrelated research questions: First, how does the deployment of surveillance technologies affect conceptions of sovereignty and territorial control? Second, how are local communities positioned—both materially and discursively—within this securitized space? In addressing these questions, the paper adopts an interdisciplinary lens, drawing from border theory, critical security studies, and postcolonial scholarship. The aim is not merely to assess the operational efficacy of surveillance, but to explore its broader consequences for governance, identity, and everyday life.

Methodologically, this study engages in a qualitative analysis of policy documents, security reports, and case studies from key border districts. It also incorporates insights from existing ethnographic and journalistic accounts to trace the lived experiences of borderland communities. In doing so, the paper highlights the ways in which security infrastructures, though ostensibly neutral and objective, are embedded in particular political rationalities and power structures.

Ultimately, the paper argues that while surveillance technologies may bolster the territorial reach of the state, they also risk deepening the alienation and marginalization of the very citizens they claim to protect. As border security becomes increasingly technologized and remote-controlled, there is a pressing need to reassess the ethical and political implications of such practices. Balancing national security with democratic accountability and human dignity is not only a normative imperative but also a strategic necessity in ensuring long-term peace and stability along the India–Pakistan border.

Theoretical Framework

The securitization of the India–Pakistan border must be situated within a larger theoretical context that accounts for the interplay between state power, spatial governance, and the lived realities of those residing within militarized frontiers. This section draws upon four interlocking conceptual frameworks: Giorgio Agamben’s notion of the “state of exception,” Michel Foucault’s theory of biopolitics and surveillance, critical border theory as developed by Anssi Paasi and Wendy Brown, and postcolonial critiques of sovereignty. Together, these frameworks elucidate how the border is not merely a territorial line, but a site of exceptional governance, disciplinary regulation, and contested national identity.

- ***Agamben and the State of Exception***

Agamben’s (2005) concept of the state of exception provides a crucial lens for understanding how the India–Pakistan border becomes a zone where normal juridical frameworks are suspended. In such zones, the sovereign claims the right to act outside the bounds of constitutional norms under the justification of preserving national security. This exceptionality, however, is not temporary; rather, it becomes structurally embedded, turning the border into a space of prolonged emergency. At the LoC, this manifests through the constant presence of armed forces, curfews, restrictions on civilian movement, and the discretionary power exercised by state actors. Civil liberties are not merely curtailed but structurally subordinated to security imperatives.

The border, therefore, becomes a site where what Agamben terms bare life—life stripped of political agency—is produced and regulated (Agamben, 1998). Residents of border villages, particularly in districts like Kupwara, Uri, and Poonch, are simultaneously included within the national body (as citizens) and excluded from its legal protections (as potential threats). They are governed not through rights, but through exception, often treated as suspect populations whose presence necessitates continuous surveillance. The state, in this framework, exercises sovereignty not only by defending the border from external threats but by managing the internal life of its subjects in a way that normalizes the suspension of law.

- ***Foucault’s Biopolitics and Surveillance***

Building upon Agamben’s conception of sovereign power, Foucault’s (1977, 2003) theory of biopolitics offers a complementary understanding of how modern states govern populations through mechanisms of surveillance, categorization, and normalization.

For Foucault, power operates not merely through repression but through the productive regulation of life—biopower. In the context of border governance, surveillance technologies such as thermal sensors, drones, biometric verification, and watch towers are not only tools for territorial control but also for the categorization and management of populations.

Foucault’s earlier concept of the panopticon, a metaphor for omnipresent surveillance, is particularly salient here. Borderland communities live under a constant gaze—both literal and symbolic—of the state, where visibility becomes a condition of control (Foucault, 1977). The biometric

data collected, the documentation required to move across checkpoints, and the continuous monitoring through closed-circuit cameras are all part of a wider governmental apparatus that disciplines subjects by making them visible, calculable, and, if necessary, punishable. This regime does not merely seek to control space; it seeks to control the conduct of those within it.

Moreover, biopolitics at the border operates through a dual logic of inclusion and exclusion. While the state claims to protect its citizens, it simultaneously produces hierarchies of trust and suspicion. The distinction between the “loyal citizen” and the “potential infiltrator” is often racialized, ethnicized, or otherwise culturally marked, rendering certain populations—particularly Muslims in Kashmir—more vulnerable to arbitrary detention and surveillance (Chatterjee, 2019). Thus, biopolitical control in the borderland does not simply defend the nation-state from external threats but produces internal enemies to justify its own expansion.

- ***Border Theory: Territoriality, Sovereignty, and Erosion***

Critical border theory, particularly the work of Anssi Paasi and Wendy Brown, enables a rethinking of borders not as static lines but as dynamic socio-political constructs. Paasi (1996) conceptualizes borders as part of a broader “institutionalization of regions,” whereby borders are created, maintained, and transformed through historical processes, discourses, and practices. Borders, in this sense, are both material and symbolic—they demarcate not only territory but identity, authority, and belonging.

In the case of the India–Pakistan border, this dual function is acutely visible. The LoC is a heavily militarized frontier, yet it is also a symbolic site through which national identity is continuously reproduced. This aligns with Wendy Brown’s (2010) observation that in an era of global flows, borders are paradoxically becoming more fortified—not necessarily to stop mobility, but to perform sovereignty. As Brown notes, the rise of border walls and surveillance systems often reflects a state’s anxiety over its waning ability to regulate global capital, migration, and information flows. The investment in physical and digital border regimes, then, becomes a performative assertion of sovereign control in a world where such control is increasingly fragmented.

India’s deployment of smart fencing, biometric surveillance, and AI-enabled border security infrastructure is part of this performative sovereignty. It signals not only the capacity to defend against external threats but also the internal coherence of the nation-state. However, this also obscures the fact that such fortification often comes at the expense of the rights and lives of those who dwell near these frontiers. The LoC, in this sense, is not merely a boundary between two states but a socially constructed and actively maintained zone of governance and exclusion.

- ***Postcolonial Critiques of Sovereignty***

A postcolonial lens further complicates the understanding of sovereignty in border regions. Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee (2004) and Mahmood Mamdani (2012) have critiqued the ways in which postcolonial states reproduce colonial logics of control, particularly in peripheral regions. In India, the use of militarization and surveillance in Kashmir reflects a continuation of colonial strategies of governance, wherein frontiers are seen not as spaces for civic development but as zones to be pacified.

Postcolonial critiques emphasize that sovereignty in such contexts is not universally distributed but is spatially and socially differentiated. The Indian state, while democratic in form, often exercises authoritarian control in border regions, particularly where ethnic or religious minorities are concentrated. This asymmetry is evident in the discretionary powers granted to security forces under laws such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which remains in force in Jammu and Kashmir. These exceptional legal frameworks undermine the rule of law and reproduce colonial patterns of domination under the guise of national unity (Singh, 2021).

Moreover, the idea of the “nation” itself becomes a contested terrain. Postcolonial scholars argue that national identity is often constructed through the exclusion of certain groups—Muslims,

Kashmiris, borderland tribes—as either incomplete citizens or latent threats. Surveillance, in this context, becomes a technique not only of protection but of exclusion and othering. The border thus functions as a material and discursive space where the contradictions of postcolonial sovereignty are laid bare.

Together, these theoretical perspectives offer a multi-dimensional understanding of the India–Pakistan border as a site of exceptional governance, disciplinary control, symbolic nation-building, and postcolonial exclusion. Agamben’s notion of the state of exception explains the legal liminality of border regions, Foucault’s biopolitics highlights the ways populations are surveilled and normalized, border theory illustrates the performative and symbolic functions of fortification, and postcolonial critiques reveal the enduring coloniality of state practices. This integrated framework enables a critical interrogation of not only what the border does but how it governs, for whom, and with what consequences.

Methodology

The securitization of the India–Pakistan border, particularly through technological surveillance and military fortification, requires a contextually grounded and ethically nuanced methodological framework. This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore how surveillance technologies and border security policies affect everyday life and notions of sovereignty in regions proximate to the Line of Control (LoC). Specifically, the districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu and Kashmir are selected as focal points, given their strategic importance, demographic complexity, and historical experience of militarization and cross-border tensions (Bose, 2003).

- ***Case Study Approach***

The case study method enables a rich, contextualized understanding of securitization practices and their socio-political effects. According to Yin (2018), case studies are particularly valuable when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred—as is the case with border securitization and local life. The choice of Poonch and Rajouri is informed by their distinct yet interconnected experiences with conflict, displacement, and state surveillance. Both districts have witnessed periodic cross-border shelling, population displacement, and significant state-led interventions in the form of fencing, checkpoints, biometric surveillance, and infrastructure development (Lamb, 2019).

By focusing on these specific districts, the study is able to unpack the layered experiences of residents who live under constant state and military scrutiny. This micro-level analysis is essential for understanding how abstract policy imperatives—such as national security—are translated into material practices that shape daily life. Moreover, these locations provide a representative lens through which broader theoretical concerns regarding sovereignty, biopolitics, and exceptionality can be explored.

- ***Data Collection: Secondary Sources and Policy Analysis***

Given the ethical and logistical limitations of conducting primary fieldwork in conflict-prone areas, the study relies on an extensive review of secondary sources, including government policy documents, legislative debates, media reports, NGO publications, and academic literature. This triangulated approach ensures both depth and credibility of analysis while maintaining the safety and ethical integrity of the research.

Key governmental documents—such as annual reports from the Ministry of Home Affairs, policy briefs from the Border Security Force (BSF), and legislative acts like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)—serve as foundational texts to understand the legal and administrative framework governing the borderlands. In parallel, media reports from reputable Indian and international news outlets (e.g., The Hindu, Indian Express, BBC) offer insights into how surveillance technologies like drones, thermal imaging, and smart fencing are deployed and represented in public discourse (Ahmed, 2022).

NGO reports, especially those from human rights organizations such as JKCCS (Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society) and Amnesty International, contribute critical perspectives on the

humanitarian consequences of militarization, including issues related to displacement, psychological trauma, and access to basic services. These sources are indispensable for constructing a holistic narrative that balances state security priorities with the lived realities of vulnerable populations.

- ***Analytical Framework***

The study employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to interpret the textual data gathered from policy documents and media sources. CDA allows for the interrogation of how power operates through language, particularly in the justification of surveillance and the depiction of borderland populations (Fairclough, 2003). By analyzing the discursive strategies through which securitization is legitimated, the study reveals the ideological underpinnings of border policy and their implications for democratic accountability and human rights.

Furthermore, the study engages in policy mapping, identifying the evolution of India's border management strategy over time, with attention to institutional changes, technological investments, and legal reforms. This historical layering helps contextualize current practices within broader trajectories of state formation, militarization, and postcolonial governance (Chatterjee, 2004).

- ***Ethical Considerations***

Conducting research on the securitization of borders in conflict-prone areas raises significant ethical challenges. The regions under consideration are not only geographically sensitive but are also politically charged and socially vulnerable. While this study does not involve direct interaction with human subjects, ethical diligence is maintained through careful curation of secondary data and critical reflection on representation. The goal is to avoid reproducing hegemonic narratives that either romanticize resistance or pathologize affected communities.

In addition, ethical rigor is ensured by prioritizing the voices and agency of local actors as represented in NGO reports and local media, rather than privileging solely state-centric or securitized narratives. The study recognizes that knowledge production about border regions is itself a political act, and thus takes care to remain reflexive about its own positionality. The academic endeavor is not to instrumentalize suffering for analytical gain but to engage critically with structures of power that shape life at the margins.

Moreover, the study adheres to the ethical standards outlined by the American Political Science Association (APSA) and Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), particularly concerning the use of publicly available data and the protection of sensitive information that could have real-world consequences for individuals or communities.

This methodological design—anchored in a qualitative case study approach, sustained by secondary data, and informed by ethical reflexivity—enables a nuanced and theoretically grounded inquiry into the securitization of the India–Pakistan border. By combining critical discourse analysis with policy mapping and ethical sensitivity, the study aims to illuminate how national security imperatives intersect with everyday life, law, and sovereignty in India's militarized frontiers.

Case Study Analysis: Securitization and Everyday Life Along the India–Pakistan Border

- ***Militarized Landscape: Surveillance and Territorial Control***

The Line of Control (LoC), functioning as a de facto border between India and Pakistan, has evolved into a highly militarized and technologically surveilled zone. In recent decades, the Government of India has invested heavily in fortifying the LoC with multi-layered fencing, thermal imaging systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), seismic sensors, and high-resolution surveillance cameras (Ministry of Home Affairs [MHA], 2022).

These measures, often justified under the rubric of counter-infiltration and anti-terrorism efforts, have dramatically altered the physical and social fabric of border regions like Poonch, Rajouri, and Uri.

The physical fencing—commonly referred to as the "Anti-Infiltration Obstacle System" (AIOS)—consists of a double-row barbed-wire barricade reinforced by concrete, surveillance towers, floodlights, and patrol roads (Tankel, 2011). The integration of drone-based surveillance has further intensified monitoring capabilities. While these developments are touted as technological solutions to national security, they also impose continuous surveillance over civilian populations, effectively transforming the border into a space of permanent exception and discipline.

Residents live under the constant gaze of both military forces and non-human surveillance systems. Every movement—whether agricultural activity or travel to school—is mediated by checkpoints and identity verification (Sikand, 2018). This transformation of the border into a securitized landscape exemplifies what Foucault (2007) describes as the "disciplinary society" wherein space becomes a means of biopolitical control.

- ***Psychological and Economic Impact on Border Communities***

While the state claims that enhanced border security protects the nation, the implications for borderland residents are complex and often detrimental. One of the most significant consequences of this militarization is the restriction of mobility, which adversely affects education, healthcare access, employment, and social interaction. Inhabitants of villages such as Balakote, Gulpur, and Churunda often face curfews, travel restrictions, and periodic village evacuations during military operations or shelling alerts (Khan, 2021).

These disruptions create a climate of psychological trauma, especially among women and children. Constant exposure to surveillance technologies and intermittent shelling contribute to heightened stress, anxiety, and post-traumatic symptoms (Zia, 2019). Educational institutions in border areas are frequently closed during escalations, interrupting the academic development of children and fostering a generational impact on literacy and skill acquisition (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Economically, these areas are severely disadvantaged. Agriculture, which is the mainstay for a majority of households, is compromised by restricted access to land near the fence or in firing range.

Farmers must seek special permission from the military to tend to their fields, and many abandon cultivation altogether due to fear of crossfire or injury from landmines (Mehraj, 2018). The lack of industrial or service-sector employment further compounds economic stagnation, leading to increased dependence on state subsidies or outmigration of youth.

Moreover, the militarized zone creates what Das and Poole (2004) term "zones of indistinction"—where the regular application of law is suspended and replaced by arbitrary military discretion. In such zones, property rights are tenuous, legal remedies are scarce, and civic participation is minimal. This not only undermines democratic norms but also perpetuates cycles of marginalization and disenfranchisement.

- ***Cross-Border Shelling and Civilian Displacement***

Perhaps the most immediate and violent manifestation of militarization is cross-border shelling, which has intensified in recent years despite ceasefire agreements. Data from the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP, 2023) indicates that over 5,000 ceasefire violations were reported in 2020 alone, many resulting in civilian casualties and displacement.

Villages within a 5 km radius of the LoC are especially vulnerable. Temporary displacement becomes a recurring pattern, with families forced to relocate to government schools, community centers, or distant relatives' homes during escalations (Verma, 2017). In some cases, such as in Nowshera and Tangdhar sectors, the displacement becomes semi-permanent, disrupting livelihoods and community cohesion.

Despite compensation schemes offered by the Indian government—such as ex-gratia payments and reconstruction grants—relief is often delayed, insufficient, or entangled in bureaucratic hurdles (Wani, 2022). Furthermore, displaced persons face difficulties in re-integrating due to loss of documentation, livestock, and land access.

Cross-border violence also impacts infrastructural development, as repeated shelling damages roads, schools, and health centers. The destruction of basic amenities compounds the already fragile economic and social conditions, reinforcing the peripheralization of these regions. As Agamben (2005) suggests, such conditions effectively reduce residents to a state of “bare life,” stripped of political agency and subject to arbitrary violence.

- ***Narratives of Resistance and Local Resilience***

Despite the overwhelming forces of militarization and surveillance, borderland communities are not merely passive victims. Acts of resistance—both overt and covert—punctuate the lived experiences of the securitized border. These may include civil society mobilization, media advocacy, and local knowledge production that challenge dominant state narratives.

For instance, community-based organizations such as the Poonch Youth Forum have initiated digital campaigns highlighting the plight of border residents and demanding better infrastructure and policy sensitivity. Similarly, journalists from regional publications have documented the daily struggles of living under constant threat, offering a counter-narrative to securitized media portrayals (Ahmad, 2021).

In many areas, residents have developed informal early warning systems to mitigate the effects of cross-border shelling. Community leaders coordinate with district officials and army units to preemptively evacuate civilians during peak tensions. This demonstrates the agency of local populations in navigating militarized conditions with resilience and tactical adaptation.

Women’s collectives, in particular, have emerged as critical actors in promoting peace and community solidarity. Despite facing gender-specific vulnerabilities, women in areas like Balnoi and Keri organize support networks for displaced families, run informal education centers, and advocate for improved security protocols that account for civilian safety (Sharma, 2020). Their participation challenges both the militarized masculinism of border narratives and the victimization tropes prevalent in humanitarian discourse.

Moreover, the borderland communities have evolved a unique cultural identity rooted in shared hardship, mutual aid, and historical memory. Oral traditions, local festivals, and linguistic hybridity foster a sense of belonging that transcends nationalistic binaries. Such cultural resilience functions as a form of everyday resistance—what Scott (1990) calls the “weapons of the weak.”

While these acts may not amount to overt political rebellion, they signify a refusal to be silenced or entirely subsumed within the state’s securitization logic. They constitute what Butler (2004) terms “precarious lives”—lives that resist devaluation through community, memory, and mutual care.

- ***Intersections with National Sovereignty and Policy Implications***

The case study of India–Pakistan border regions complicates conventional understandings of sovereignty, which are often framed in statist and territorial terms. Instead, it reveals how sovereignty is performed, negotiated, and contested at the margins. Surveillance technologies, fencing, and military deployments signify state power, but they also expose the fragility of state legitimacy in the eyes of affected populations.

This tension calls for a rethinking of border governance. As Wendy Brown (2010) argues, walls and fences may symbolize sovereign strength, but they often betray deeper insecurities and exclusions. The paradox of securitization is that while it may deter external threats, it also alienates internal constituencies—those whose lives are deemed expendable for the sake of national integrity.

From a policy standpoint, there is an urgent need to demilitarize civilian spaces, enhance human security frameworks, and invest in socio-economic development tailored to local needs. Participatory planning, transparent grievance mechanisms, and inclusive security protocols can bridge the gap between state and society. Moreover, incorporating local voices into border policy—through panchayat bodies, civil society forums, and academic research—can foster more responsive and humane governance.

The securitization of the India–Pakistan border exemplifies a contemporary dilemma wherein state security imperatives clash with human rights and democratic values. Through fencing, surveillance, and militarization, the state enacts its sovereignty—but in doing so, it creates zones of exception where ordinary life is suspended. The case study of districts like Poonch and Rajouri reveals the deep psychological, economic, and existential impacts of this security architecture on borderland communities. Yet, within this landscape of precarity, narratives of resilience, cultural continuity, and grassroots resistance emerge as potent counterforces. These stories not only illuminate the complexities of living under militarized sovereignty but also point toward alternative imaginaries of peace, justice, and human dignity in the borderlands.

Critical Discussion: Surveillance, Sovereignty, and Identity in the India–Pakistan Borderlands

The securitization of the India–Pakistan border encapsulates broader tensions between territorial sovereignty, national security, and human rights. As a hyper-militarized zone marked by surveillance technologies and infrastructural fortification, the Line of Control (LoC) offers a unique vantage point for understanding how contemporary sovereignty is enacted, how the "enemy" is discursively constructed, and how surveillance reconfigures notions of identity and belonging among borderland populations.

- ***Rearticulating Sovereignty: From Territory to Governmentality***

The modern conception of sovereignty is undergoing a paradigmatic shift. Traditionally rooted in the Westphalian principle of territorial control and juridical authority, sovereignty today increasingly manifests as a biopolitical practice. Giorgio Agamben's (2005) notion of the state of exception is particularly apt for analyzing border zones, where the legal order is suspended and replaced by a permanent security logic. At the LoC, this exceptionalism is normalized: curfews, checkpoints, and extrajudicial measures are not emergency responses but daily realities.

Furthermore, sovereignty in the borderlands operates through what Michel Foucault (2003) terms governmentality—the management of populations through surveillance, categorization, and control. The Indian state's deployment of drones, biometric verification, and thermal imaging not only secures borders from perceived external threats but also disciplines and monitors its own citizens. This redefinition of sovereignty aligns with Elden's (2013) argument that territory is no longer just a static spatial unit but a set of calculative practices—technologies of power that regulate mobility, behavior, and access to rights.

The militarized governance of the borderlands, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, exemplifies a "surveillant sovereignty" that fuses security imperatives with population management. Here, sovereignty is not solely about repelling external threats but also about producing compliant, governable subjects within. Such internalization of the sovereign gaze blurs the line between security and subjugation.

- ***Constructing the 'Enemy': Security as Discursive Violence***

In securitized regimes, the construction of the "enemy" is a central ideological function. Security discourse does not merely respond to threats; it actively produces them.

As Bigo (2002) asserts, the enemy is not only external but often internalized, represented by ambiguous figures who disrupt normative constructions of national identity. Within India's national security narrative, Pakistan occupies a perennial adversarial position, and this binary logic spills over into the treatment of populations living near the LoC.

Borderland inhabitants—many of whom share cultural, linguistic, and even familial ties across borders—are subjected to heightened scrutiny and suspicion. Their proximity to the "Other" renders their loyalty questionable. In this context, the enemy is not simply an external aggressor but is inscribed onto the bodies of Indian citizens living at the margins. As Das and Poole (2004) argue, the state often governs through a "fear of the enemy within," creating a permanent condition of suspicion and conditional belonging.

This process is also mediated through the media and state discourse, which often amplify narratives of infiltration, terrorism, and betrayal. These narratives displace the complexity of lived realities with simplistic binaries. As Wendy Brown (2010) articulates, securitized borders serve both a practical and symbolic function—they police territory while also reaffirming the imagined boundaries of the nation-state. Thus, the enemy is as much a political construct as a security concern, continuously invoked to justify exceptional measures.

- ***Surveillance and the Reconstitution of Identity and Belonging***

Surveillance practices do more than monitor; they shape how individuals see themselves and are seen by the state. Drawing from Foucault's (1977) concept of panopticism, surveillance induces a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. In the border regions of Jammu and Kashmir, the omnipresence of security infrastructure—watchtowers, checkpoints, camera grids—produces a constant sense of observation. This alters not only behavior but also self-perception.

The transformation of citizens into "security subjects" is evident in the daily experiences of those living along the LoC. Their access to education, employment, and mobility is filtered through a security lens. Even benign activities such as farming or attending school can require verification and clearance. This form of biometric citizenship—where one's access to rights is mediated through data and surveillance technologies—reconstitutes identity in terms of risk, loyalty, and visibility (Amoore, 2006).

Moreover, the spatial ordering of surveillance divides communities into zones of risk and privilege.

Those residing closer to the fence or active military zones are marked as more "sensitive" and hence more stringently regulated. As Hiemstra (2013) notes, this territorial stratification of surveillance not only fragments space but also hierarchizes citizens, assigning degrees of trustworthiness based on geography.

However, surveillance does not only produce docile subjects. It also provokes forms of resistance and counter-narratives. Borderland communities often develop informal networks, cultural practices, and political vocabularies that challenge the securitized identity imposed upon them. Oral histories, local media, and grassroots activism function as sites of resilience where alternative notions of belonging and justice are articulated. These acts of micro-resistance contest the state's monopoly over the definition of citizenship and legitimacy.

- ***Surveillance, Belonging, and Postcolonial Sovereignty***

The surveillance regime along the India–Pakistan border must also be situated within the broader historical context of postcolonial sovereignty. Postcolonial states often inherit colonial logics of control while seeking to assert their modernity through technologies of governance. In India, the securitization of borderlands can be read as both a continuation and a departure from colonial border-making. While colonial regimes used cartography and census to regulate populations, the modern state uses biometric data and real-time surveillance.

This continuity complicates the meaning of postcolonial sovereignty, which often seeks legitimacy through the same technologies and narratives once used to oppress. As Mbembe (2003) observes, postcolonial regimes may replicate "necropolitical" forms of power—where sovereignty is defined not by the capacity to ensure life but to manage death. The militarization of civilian spaces, normalization of violence, and creation of zones of exclusion at the LoC reflect such necropolitical tendencies.

At the same time, surveillance technologies represent a distinctly modern articulation of this power. The datafication of citizenship—through Aadhaar, National Population Register, and other mechanisms—produces a form of identity that is legible only through state-sanctioned metrics. These challenges traditional markers of belonging such as ethnicity, language, or community ties, replacing

them with algorithmic and biometric identifiers. For borderland populations, this shift entails a double alienation: they are both culturally marginalized and digitally scrutinized.

The critical examination of surveillance, sovereignty, and identity at the India–Pakistan border reveals the urgent need to reimagine security beyond statist paradigms. The securitized border is not just a defensive apparatus but a social institution that constructs enemies, disciplines subjects, and redefines national belonging. It reveals the contradictions of modern sovereignty, which claims universality while practicing exclusion, and promises protection while perpetuating violence.

Human security, rather than state security, should guide border governance. This entails prioritizing the rights, voices, and aspirations of those who inhabit these contested spaces. It also calls for demilitarization and the adoption of inclusive policies that recognize the plural identities and complex histories of border communities.

As long as surveillance remains the primary modality of governance in these regions, the border will continue to function not as a line of protection but as a zone of exception—where the ideals of democracy, justice, and equality are suspended. The challenge for scholars and policymakers alike is to move beyond this impasse and envision a future where sovereignty is exercised not through control but through care.

Conclusion: Reimagining the Border through Human-Centered Sovereignty

The India–Pakistan border, particularly along the Line of Control, represents more than a geopolitical demarcation; it is a dynamic and deeply contested space where the imperatives of national security, state sovereignty, and local lived experiences collide. This paper has examined the profound implications of surveillance-driven securitization on sovereignty, identity, and community belonging. The critical discussion has shown how the deployment of high-tech surveillance infrastructure and militarization not only defends territorial integrity but also redefines who belongs, who is seen, and who is rendered suspect within the nation-state.

Modern sovereignty, in this context, has shifted from territorial command to the governance of life itself—what Foucault terms biopolitics (Foucault, 2003). This transformation is neither neutral nor evenly applied. Border communities become laboratories of exception where rights are suspended and identities are filtered through security logics. Agamben’s (2005) state of exception is not a temporary deviation but a permanent architecture of governance along the LoC, normalizing exclusion and disempowerment. The enemy, as constructed by state discourse, is no longer a clearly external figure but increasingly projected onto marginalized citizens living in frontier zones, making them bear the burden of national anxiety.

Yet, even amid this landscape of surveillance and control, there is resistance—manifested through alternative narratives, community resilience, and micro-political acts of defiance. These expressions underscore that border populations are not mere subjects of security policy but active agents shaping their identities and spaces. Their experiences demand a fundamental rethinking of what security should entail.

Going forward, the challenge for policy and theory alike is to displace the state-centric paradigm with a human-centric one. Security must be disentangled from militarization and instead grounded in the well-being, dignity, and rights of borderland communities. Postcolonial states like India must confront the ethical dilemmas posed by their inherited territorial anxieties and adopt a more democratic and inclusive form of sovereignty—one that protects without erasing.

Ultimately, the India–Pakistan border, as this study argues, is a crucible for broader global questions about surveillance, identity, and the limits of sovereign power. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond control toward care, and from exclusion toward shared belonging.

“Borders may mark the limits of a nation’s land, but it is how we treat those who live along them that defines the soul of its sovereignty.”

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