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India-Pakistan Rivalry In May 2025, Conflict, Proxy Warfare, And Geo-Political Alignments

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Abstract

The Indo-Pak conflict depicts a case of deep mistrust due to historical and political events and cultural fallacies. Pakistan, which was created as a compromise to satisfy the two-nation theory, continues to be a threat to India's national interests. Not only this, but Bangladesh, which became independent in 1971, now also poses a threat to India with growing radicalism and alignment with Pakistan's military. In the last few decades, India has shifted its counterterrorism strategy from primarily defensive to more assertive. Military strikes against terrorist bases have become a new normal. This transformation was seen in India's surgical strikes across the Line of Control in 2016 and the Balakot airstrikes in 2019. India also intensified diplomatic efforts to isolate Pakistan globally by highlighting its alleged support for cross-border terrorism.

At the same time, India accelerated its military modernization and self-reliance in defence production, increasing defense purchases and conducting advanced weapons and missile tests to enhance readiness and deterrence. However, in May 2025, South Asia witnessed a sharp escalation in the India-Pakistan rivalry following a deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam. India responded with Operation Sindoor to punish the culprits with a series of targeted strikes on nine terrorist locations across the Pakistan-administered territories. The crisis attracted international attention as Pakistan retaliated militarily and also issued nuclear threats. In a volatile and digitally charged landscape, major powers also intervened, taking one or the other side. This paper analyses the recent developments in the Indo-Pak conflict in May 2025, the involvement of external actors including China, Turkey, and the U.S., the domestic political discourse in India, and the change in India's strategic posture.

Keywords

India-Pakistan rivalry, May 2025 crisis, Pahalgam attack, terrorism, nuclear blackmailing, geopolitical alignment, diplomatic offensive

Introduction

The India-Pakistan rivalry, rooted in the partition of 1947, remains one of the world's most intractable conflicts. While ceasefire agreements and track-two diplomacy have occasionally reduced tensions, the relationship remains prone to sudden escalations.

The conflict is intractable not only because of historical occurrences but also due to Pakistan's own insecurity, which stems from facing a neighbour that is much bigger in size and economy. Pakistan continues to implement the two-nation theory in its relations with India, and justifies that Kashmir, predominantly dominated by a Muslim population, should be a part of Pakistan, not India, though it has been facing liberation struggle and resistance in (PoK) the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir region. Pakistan has been rallying for support internationally, especially from other Muslim countries, playing its Muslim card in the OIC, though unsuccessfully. It has been sponsoring terrorists in India, especially in Kashmir, to fuel unrest and spread the false message that India has been torturing people in Kashmir. On India's part, it has given proof of Pakistan's terrorist links and support to terrorism on Indian soil umpteen times. India has good relations with other Muslim countries (except those militarily helping Pakistan against India). Not to forget the fact that India is home to the second-largest Muslim population in the world, more than Pakistan.

This paper analyses the May 2025 Indo-Pak confrontation following the Pahalgam incident using a foreign policy analysis paradigm. It employs an analytical framework to comprehend the changing dynamics of the India-Pakistan relationship, India's foreign policy responses, and the influence of other actors on the conflict's trajectory. The research alternatively utilises a conflict analysis framework to examine the structural, attitudinal, and behavioural aspects of the conflict. Nonetheless, it does not intend to deliver a thorough or exhaustive analysis of the India-Pakistan conflict, nor does it claim to offer prescriptive solutions or pave the way for conflict transformation.

From the rise of Pakistan-sponsored militancy in Kashmir since the 1980s, public sentiment has shifted from seeking independence to focusing on fundamental economic issues. Pakistan has attempted to extend militancy to create ethnic and sectarian divides. There is a parallel terror economy in Pakistan, fuelled by drug trafficking, extortion, and counterfeit currency, with significant financial support from abroad through charitable donations. Key organizations like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) operate as fronts for terrorism, utilizing madrassas and charities to solicit funds for jihad. A substantial portion of terrorism funding in Jammu & Kashmir originated from Pakistan, with various illicit activities contributing to the overall financial structure. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has historically linked drug trafficking to militant financing, maintaining a system that supports terrorist proxies. (Chaubey, S. 2025, May 9).

The continuous effort to destabilize India through a prolonged proxy war is aimed at keeping the Indian forces engaged in counterinsurgency operations. Pakistan aims to maintain low-level violence in the Kashmir valley.

In response, the Indian government has been striving to work on a coordinated action plan to safeguard national security and combat militancy, despite facing significant civilian and military casualties and economic costs. India came up with a new anti-terror doctrine in May 2025, which does not distinguish between the terrorists and the government sponsors of terrorists. This doctrine came in the wake of an unfortunate terrorist attack in May 2025.

May 2025 marked one volatile nuclear flashpoint, triggered by a terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir, claimed by a Pakistan-based terrorist group that killed twenty-six tourists in a deadly assault on April 22, 2025. This incident quickly triggered a national crisis, disturbing the nuclear balance of power and the uneasy peace between the two countries. This drew global powers and reshaped India's strategic and diplomatic posture. During the India-Pakistan rivalry, drones were used by both sides for surveillance and assaults, marking the first instance of drone warfare.

The Pahalgam Attack and India's Response:

On April 22, 2025, militants from The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba with links to Pakistan-based terror networks, carried out a coordinated attack in the tourist town of Pahalgam, killing over 40 civilians and paramilitary personnel. The attack depicted cross-border planning and was allegedly coordinated with support from the known jihadist leader Masoud Azhar, who has been hiding in Pakistan. (Jamkhandikar, S. 2025)

India's response was gradual and forceful. It started with suspending the Indus water treaty (which India has always respected despite tense relations) and diplomatic moves to punish Pakistan. On 7th May, the Indian military started Operation Sindoor, conducting precision strikes on nine terror camps across the Line of Control (LoC) and deep into Pakistan-administered territories. These camps housed TRF operatives and were logistical hubs for cross-border infiltration. India achieved some tactical victories – successfully targeting known militant bases in Pakistan, firing targeted missiles into Rawalpindi, the heart of Pakistan's military, and deterring Pakistani missiles.

Pakistan responded with limited missile strikes along the LoC, leading to casualties on both sides. Most concerning was Islamabad's reactivation of nuclear rhetoric, with the Prime Minister warning that to defend Pakistan's sovereignty, it can use nuclear weapons. This threat was earlier seen during the Kargil and Pulwama-Balakot escalations.

On May 11, 2025, the Directors General of the three armed services held a press conference to discuss Operation Sindoor, stating that over 100 terrorists were killed, including those responsible for the IC 814 hijacking and the Pulwama attacks. The Army reported that five Indian soldiers lost their lives during the operation. At the same time, the Pakistan Army claimed to have suffered around 35 to 40 casualties due to artillery and small arms fire along the Line of Control from May 7 -10, 2025. (Hindu Bureau, 2025, May 14)

Both nations mutually agreed upon the decision to cease military actions, and this new understanding would not impact several recent punitive measures India has implemented against Pakistan following the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam on April 22, 2025.

Role of Other Actors and Geopolitical Alignments:

During the Indo-Pakistan conflict in May 2025, India received varying degrees of moral and diplomatic support from Russia, Israel, Afghanistan, and the United States. However, the nature and intensity of this support differed among the three nations.

Israel emerged as one of India's most vocal supporters during the crisis. It publicly affirmed India's right to self-defence.

Russia, a traditional ally of India, condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and expressed solidarity in combating terrorism. However, Moscow maintained a balanced stance, urging India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and resolve issues peacefully and diplomatically. Russia's emphasis on dialogue reflects its broader strategic interests in maintaining regional stability. Afghanistan showed full support to India.

The U.S.A. did not directly support India's military actions but emphasized the importance of a peaceful resolution and continued engagement with both nations to prevent further escalation.

Israel provided unequivocal support to India during the conflict. At the same time, Russia and the United States adopted more measured approaches, balancing their strategic interests with calls for de-escalation and peaceful resolution.

China, a traditional ally of Pakistan, issued a statement backing Pakistan's right to self-defence and blamed India for escalating the war. Intelligence reports also suggested increased Chinese military activity along the

Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh, raising concerns of a two-front war against India. China has always provided logistical, moral, and military support to Pakistan. (The Economic Times, May 19, 2025)

Tensions between China and India, the two nuclear-armed neighbours who have been in a conflictual relationship since the 1962 war, have increased since 2020. The two neighbours saw a significant increase in troops and equipment on their shared border over the last four years. Conflicts with escalation potential have also occurred during this time, including in Yangtse in December 2022 and Galwan in June 2020. Both parties worked to lower tension and stabilize the environment. Later, an agreement on patrols in Depsang and Demchok was reached in October 2024. (Chadha, 2024) It was declared in December 2024 that disengagement had been attained, and discussions were underway to expand bilateral exchanges. But the open support to Pakistan again on after the Pahalgam incident and calling India's accusation of Pakistan's involvement a propaganda has disturbed the bonhomie that was achieved with great effort.

Turkey openly supported Pakistan diplomatically and even deployed a symbolic warship to the Arabian Sea. Turkish drones were also widely used by Pakistan. This has led to calls in India for boycotting Turkish products and the tourism sector. This has further worsened the relations between the two countries. Not only that, every time Turkey has tried to raise the Kashmir issue in the United Nations, though India has always made clear that Kashmir is a bilateral issue.

U.S. Mediation and Ceasefire Announcement:

On 9th May 2025, a surprising ceasefire between India and Pakistan sparked widespread speculation about its underlying causes, especially after unverified reports suggested a possible nuclear radiation leak in Pakistan, which the IAEA later denied. Incidentally, U.S. President Donald Trump intervened to announce a ceasefire agreement brokered through back-channel diplomacy. The ceasefire included de-escalation measures, international monitoring along the LoC, and renewed talks on cross-border terrorism. (Hindu. May 13)

While the official narrative emphasized diplomatic back-channels and pressure from international stakeholders as the main drivers behind the ceasefire, the temporary ambiguity surrounding the nuclear speculation added a layer of uncertainty to an already complex and volatile rivalry. However, we need to remember that India has very clearly expressed that Kashmir is an internal matter and India would only welcome bilateral negotiation with Pakistan and not international intervention of any kind.

Domestic Political Reactions in India:

The crisis became a political debate in India. While the BJP government received support for decisive action, the Congress Party criticized the ruling party for its preparedness, which allowed the Pahalgam attack.

As an election year for many states, it drew sharp reactions, criticisms, and propaganda from many political parties. Many parties blamed India for acting under American pressure and jeopardising India's sovereignty.

Though the opposition supported Operation Sindoor, the infighting continued, especially between the ruling BJP and the opposition Congress Party.

As far as public support is concerned, the public has wholeheartedly expressed its support for the country from all regions and religions through peaceful gatherings, social media, and rallies.

India launched a diplomatic offensive, sending special missions led by senior diplomat and MP Shashi Tharoor to many countries. The mission aimed to present evidence of Pakistan's continued support for terrorist networks and to seek worldwide condemnation and sanctions against these entities.

India's New Anti-Terror Document:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a new 'Anti-Terror Doctrine', after the ceasefire, which stated that an equally strong retaliatory response will be inflicted in the event of a terrorist assault on India. Indian forces will determine the conditions, the time, and the way.

India will not be intimidated by the possibility of an atomic weapon. India will not distinguish between the administration that supports terror and its masters. Thus, Pakistan's long-standing strategy of evading accountability through non-state actors will no longer be effective.

Main provisions are:

- Designating terrorism as an act of war.
- Pre-emptive strikes on terror infrastructure, regardless of territorial boundaries.
- No tolerance for nuclear blackmail or asymmetric warfare.
- Enhanced international cooperation to isolate state sponsors of terror.
- The doctrine marks a significant shift from strategic restraint to proactive deterrence. (MOD, May 15)

A Critical Analysis:

Many scholars have analysed the Indo-Pak conflict from the perspective of nuclear deterrence. India's conventional military superiority ought to be deterred by Pakistan, which has acquired nuclear weapons to deter India. Expanding on the claim that "more may be better," a leading realist, Kenneth Waltz, has argued that emerging nuclear powers will employ their acquired nuclear capabilities to ward off threats and maintain peace. (Waltz, 1981) Another scholar, Scott Sagan, however, refuted this argument and said that "more will be worse" because inexperienced nuclear states are less able to manage their new weapons effectively, increasing the likelihood of an unintentional or intentional atomic conflict. (Sagan, 2203)

During the Kargil War in 1999, there was fear of a nuclear war and the possibility of an imbalance in the delicate balance of power or terror. India and Pakistan were both nuclear powers after their respective atomic tests in 1998; the conflict remained limited to conventional warfare. According to noted scholar Ashley Tellis, the Kargil crisis highlighted significant failures in Pakistan's grand strategy, revealing its inability to foresee the international backlash and isolation that followed its actions. For India, the conflict reinforced perceptions of Pakistan as a reckless and untrustworthy state, prompting India to reconsider its diplomatic engagement on the Kashmir issue and recognize the potential benefits of international attention on Pakistani actions. Key lessons from the crisis included Pakistan's realization of the high political costs associated with Kargil-like operations, yet a persistent belief in using violence to pressure India. Conversely, India learned the necessity of preparing for various threats from Pakistan and the importance of developing robust capabilities to counter surprise attacks, suggesting that covert responses may be more effective than overt military actions in future conflicts. (Tellis, 2002)

This time, in May 2025, India adopted a measured military response, choosing not to cross the Line of Control (LoC) but striking nine terrorist bases in Pakistan, thereby demonstrating strategic restraint. Military operations were used with diplomatic engagements, particularly for mobilizing global opinion against Pakistan's covert intrusion. India deterred insurgency and showed its ability to manage and defend the borders responsibly when both are nuclear-armed powers. This crisis strengthened India's resolve to counter proxy warfare without triggering a nuclear confrontation, reinforcing its credibility as a stable atomic power.

Post Pahalgam has also changed geopolitical alignments in South Asia. Relations are also strained with Bangladesh. Bangladesh has also been hostile towards India since the 2024 political upheaval in Bangladesh. After Sheikh Hasina was removed from power, interim leader Muhammad Yunus moved Bangladesh closer to China and Pakistan, which alarmed India. During a visit to China, Yunus referred to India's north-eastern states as "landlocked" and claimed Bangladesh acts as their "guardian of the ocean," a statement that New Delhi views as a strategic challenge, particularly regarding the vulnerable Siliguri Corridor, also known as the "Chicken's Neck." (Pant, 2025) This corridor is a crucial land link for India to its north-eastern states and is a significant chokepoint. Yunus's comments have led India to enhance security in the area and reassess its trade relations with Bangladesh. This has resulted in restrictions on Bangladeshi exports to its north-eastern states, especially in the ready-made garments sector.

Additionally, Bangladesh's renewed diplomatic ties with Pakistan after a 15-year break, including talks on military cooperation and trade, have further strained relations with India. These developments indicate a potential strategic shift in South Asia, with Bangladesh possibly becoming a channel for Chinese and Pakistani influence, thereby challenging India's traditional dominance and raising security concerns in its north-eastern region. What fuelled fire in the worsening relations was the statement by an ex-military Commander from Bangladesh, Major General (Retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman that Bangladesh should invade and seize control of India's seven north-eastern provinces, if India launches a military strike on Pakistan in response to the terrible terror assault in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, which claimed 26 lives. He also suggested that Bangladesh work with China to make this proposal a reality. (FP News Desk, 2025)

So the Indian Sub-continent is embroiled with cross-border terrorism, rivalry, arms race between India and China, and India and Pakistan, with other countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Afghanistan hedging against one country or the other, and involvement of external actors like the USA. The presence of both belligerent state actors and non-state actors supported by Pakistan makes the security situation an imbroglio in the Indian Sub-continent.

Now the question is whether the Pahalgam incident has weakened or exposed Pakistan's evil intentions of terrorising India, rather than demonising it as India rallied for? Or actually emboldened Pakistan (a matter of sheer luck!)?

For one thing that has come out of this imbroglio is the reviving of strained US-Pakistan relations.

US-Pakistan Strategic Partnership: Geopolitics to Geo-economics:

Have the post-Pahalgam events led to bonhomie between the US and Pakistan? Was Pakistan's support to President Trump's claim of mediating the Indo-Pak war in May 2005, and India vehemently denying it, bring this bonhomie? Or as the Trump administration claims, they have successfully mediated the ceasefire through tariff diplomacy. And hence be awarded recognition as a peacemaker.

It appears that it is actually geo-economics and the critical minerals diplomacy between America and Pakistan that has led to the revival of the strained ties. As a matter of fact, in September 2025, Pakistan and a U.S. company signed a Memorandum of Understanding and committed to developing mining and processing projects and shipping consignments of rare earth and critical minerals to the United States. Islamabad has already sent out the first shipments, and Washington has expressed interest in working together on hydrocarbons and vital minerals.

Besides rekindling the defence cooperation, the two Cold War allies have also signed a defence agreement under which Pakistan will receive Medium-Range Air-to-Air (Missiles) AMRAAM from the United States. (India Today)

So it is strategic convergence that is driving these geopolitical alignments.

A Pakistan-led NATO for Muslim Countries?:

Secondly, as we see, the 2025 Indo-Pak war and the stalemate thereafter have led Pakistan to play the victim card in OIC Countries. This time, this was followed by realpolitik moves and deft diplomacy. As Pakistan has always dreamt of becoming the protector of the Islamic world, this time it has proposed NATO-like body of Islamic countries. It is offering its nuclear umbrella also. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a landmark Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement (SMDA) in September 2025, deepening their military and economic ties amid shifting regional alliances. The pact includes mutual defense commitments and potential nuclear cooperation. Signed on September 17, 2025, in Riyadh by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman the agreement states that *“any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both.”* (Pakistan’s Defense Minister confirmed that Saudi Arabia now falls under Pakistan’s nuclear umbrella, marking the first formal acknowledgment of such an arrangement. The pact is seen as a hedge against Iran for Saudi Arabia, but the deal also follows OIC countries' criticism of Israel’s strike on Doha, which alarmed the Gulf States. This pact is also important for India because Israel and India also have strategic alignments, and the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) occasionally issues statements on Kashmir and Palestine. Pakistan does not recognize Israel and has criticised Israel while supporting Palestinian statehood. India and Israel ties on the other hand have deepened in defense, agriculture, and tech. These developments are going to significantly impact regional geopolitics and power equations.

This Conflict Pyramid outlines conflict in three layers. Here, the top layer represents visible conflict between India and Pakistan, including observable events like wars and protests. The middle layer reflects underlying attitudes such as mistrust and animosity, cold war. The bottom layer identifies root causes, encompassing deep structural issues like Pakistan’s belief in two nation theory of Jinnah and memories of India’s partition and communal riots.

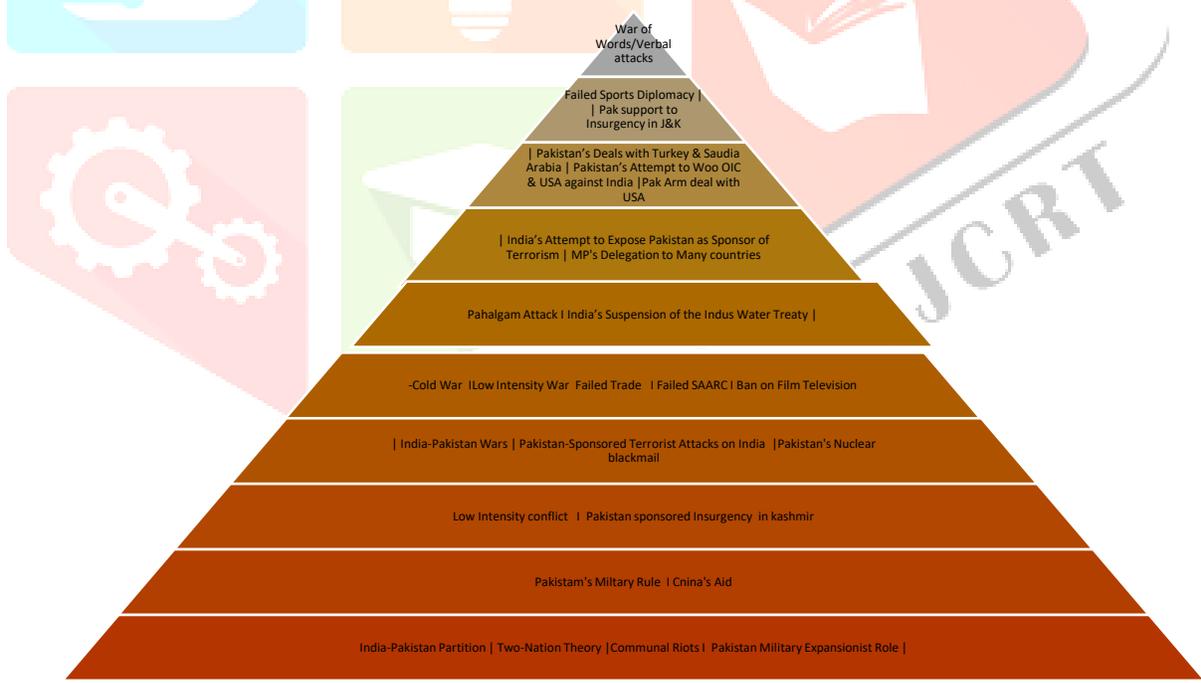


Fig. 1

CONCLUSION:

Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle—comprising contradiction, attitude, and behaviour—offers a valuable framework for examining the India–Pakistan conflict as a multifaceted and persistent struggle influenced by both structural and perceptual elements. Galtung (1969) posits that conflicts are perpetuated not solely by material contradictions but also by the antagonistic attitudes and violent behaviours that reinforce them. When applied to India and Pakistan, this model shows that the wars and hostilities between the two countries are signs of deeper and unresolved structural and psychological tensions.

The contradiction is at the centre of the conflict: the different national ideologies that came about after the Partition of British India in 1947 and the Two-Nation Theory. India's secular and pluralistic identity contrasts sharply with Pakistan's Islamic nationalism, reflecting fundamentally different conceptions of statehood and nationhood. The Kashmir dispute is the best example of this contradiction. It is a case where claims to land, identity politics, sovereignty, and human rights all come together. The problem is a sign of how the two countries see themselves and their security in different ways.

The attitude part of the triangle is clear in the deep-seated mistrust, stereotypes, and mutual suspicion that are common in public and political talk on both sides. Years of war, propaganda, and nationalistic education have made people see each other as threats to their lives. Political rhetoric and media narratives that keep hostility alive even when diplomacy is going on make these views even more entrenched. These deep-seated hostilities have resulted in what Galtung refers to as cultural violence, wherein social norms and collective memory rationalise persistent animosity and obstruct empathy or reconciliation.

Lastly, the behavioural aspect is shown by the open acts of violence and conflict, such as four major wars (1947, 1965, 1971, and Kargil 1999), cross-border terrorism, and regular fights along the Line of Control. These behaviours are cyclical and reactive, frequently instigated by political crises or militant assaults, yet fundamentally rooted in unresolved structural contradictions and antagonistic sentiments that characterise the relationship. The ongoing cycle of ceasefire violations, unsuccessful peace negotiations, and sporadic diplomatic efforts illustrates that behavioural peace cannot be achieved without altering the fundamental contradictions and attitudinal factors.

According to Galtung, the conflict between India and Pakistan is an example of the shift from direct violence (wars and attacks) to structural and cultural violence (institutionalised inequality, ideological hostility, and nationalist narratives). For peace to last, we need more than just managing conflicts or using military force to keep people from fighting. We need "positive peace," which is a state of being that comes from social justice, mutual recognition, and changing hostile attitudes. Galtung's approach emphasises that failing to address the underlying contradictions of identity, security, and recognition will result in the India-Pakistan relationship perpetually fluctuating between tenuous truces and recurring crises.

The Indo-Pak conflict depicts a case of deep mistrust due to historical and political events and cultural fallacies. Pakistan, which was created as a compromise to satisfy the two-nation theory, still continues to be a threat to India's national interests. Religion plays a role in identity politics, but the conflict has also become nationalist and geopolitical, but not pan-Islamic. Most Muslim-majority countries do not align uniformly with Pakistan against India or Israel. Instead, they balance their interests across trade, security, and diplomacy.

The tensions between these countries got worst and led to the end of cricket diplomacy between these countries in the Asia cup 2005. The Asia Cup, which brought together the top Asian cricketing nations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), will be remembered less for the cricket and more for the off-field politics. (The New York Times)

Critics are calling it India's failed diplomacy to convince the world, or more specifically, Prime Minister Modi's personal failure. Some analysts have called it a victory of Pakistan's diplomacy or brinkmanship for the isolation of India. Critics are also pointing to the domestic policies characterized by jingoism and authoritarianism in PM Modi's policies as the cause of India's isolation internationally.

But this argument fails to explain how this has triggered the deal between the USA and Pakistan on critical minerals and hydrocarbons, which is a strategic move. So is it India's failed diplomacy? Or is it Geo-economics which led to the tactical romance between President Trump and General Asim Munir, as President Trump has been known to be a skilled businessman?

As far as India's isolation is concerned, India and the USA are strategic partners despite the present setbacks and American tariffs on India; they will continue to remain partners with strategic convergence over defence, democracy, trade, and global governance based on a rule-based order. And this is not the first time India, with its unique identity and civilization, has stood firm on its stand.

While Pakistan may seek solidarity from Muslim-majority nations on specific issues, there is no bloc acting against India. Alliances today are shaped more by economic pragmatism and strategic calculus.

Besides, Pakistan itself is facing discontent and protests in the illegally occupied Kashmir called the PoK region, which is driven by decades of neglect, economic exploitation, and denial of democratic rights. The local population is increasingly questioning Pakistani control, with some demanding independence or integration with India. PoK has been treated as a strategic asset, with real power resting in Islamabad rather than local governance. Resource exploitation, especially of water, forests, and minerals, benefits other regions of Pakistan while leaving locals underserved. Heavy militarization, suppression of journalists and activists, poor education and healthcare, and infrastructure projects like CPEC favour external interests rather than the local population.

Recent protests reflect profound discontent, particularly among youth, who demand genuine autonomy, constitutional recognition, and even independence.

So, the narrative Pakistan has long used against India is being mirrored back by the people of PoK, highlighting the region's internal struggles for rights and recognition.

India has also rekindled diplomatic engagements with China. BRICS and the SCO has brought India, Russia, and China closer as partners. India has signalled a diplomatic thaw with China with the urge to grow together as developmental partners. Yet China as an all-weather friend of Pakistan continues to be a difficult neighbour to India.

Russia, on its part, has openly shown its support to India as the US continues to punish India with tariffs for buying Russian Oil. (Roy, R., & Wu, H., 2025, September 1).

The developments after the Pahalgam attacks and the short India-Pakistan May 2025 war have brought changes in the regional power equations. In October 2025, Amir Khan Muttaqi is set to make a historic visit to New Delhi that shows changes in India's strategic choices. Ahead of the visit, India showed its solidarity with the Taliban regime by siding with China, Russia, and Pakistan in opposing U.S. President Donald Trump's bid to regain control of the Bagram air base in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION:

The May 2025 crisis has altered the strategic equation in South Asia. India's New Anti-Terror Doctrine aims to avert future Pakistani nuclear blackmail. Pakistan's reliance on nuclear threats appears increasingly ineffective in moving ahead with its state terrorism against India. China's and Turkey's support for Pakistan may signify a shift toward bloc politics in South Asia. Moreover, Pakistan's strategic and military alliances with likeminded countries pose challenges for India.

The May 2025 escalation between India and Pakistan represented a classic example of an intractable conflict moving through the trajectory of latent escalation to de-escalation phases. It revealed the fragility of deterrence, the complexity of proxy wars, and the increasing role of global powers in regional conflicts worldwide, thus causing new geopolitical alignments.

India's new doctrine and security strategy reflect a changing posture, from reactive to assertive. However, stable peace will require a blend of strategic clarity, international cooperation, and military action against terrorism.

The India-Pakistan conflict, rooted in historical grievances and territorial disputes, continues to influence South Asia's political and global dynamics. As India asserts itself as a significant power through economic growth, military modernization, and strategic partnerships, its regional assertiveness is increasingly visible. The United States and China adopt differing diplomatic approaches toward this rivalry: the U.S. often supports India as a counterbalance to China, yet has historically maintained ties with Pakistan for strategic leverage. China backs Pakistan both economically and militarily, using it as a strategic proxy to limit India's regional influence and encircle it through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

India, Pakistan, and China are also in water and dam wars. India is an upper riparian state in Pakistan, while China is the same in India. Pakistan and China are all-weather friends. China has tremendous investments in Pakistan and strategic and economic interests to guard. Incidentally, China also plans to build a dam that can restrict the Brahmaputra in India. The Indo-Pak conflict has long influenced regional and global geopolitical alignments, and its effects are increasingly seen in other conflict zones, such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan rivalry. In recent years, Azerbaijan has supported Pakistan's position on Kashmir, reaffirming its solidarity in international forums. This support is rooted in strategic, religious, and defense ties, especially as Pakistan has backed Azerbaijan during its conflict with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. India has developed stronger relations with Armenia, providing military equipment, including radar systems and artillery, thereby cementing a strategic partnership. These alignments reflect a broader geopolitical trend where regional disputes like Kashmir and Nagorno-Karabakh are no longer confined to bilateral boundaries but are entangled in a global web of alliances, showcasing the emerging multipolar world order and the strategic recalibrations driven by shared interests and rivalries. (Kaleji, 2024)

After the ceasefire, noted geostrategic thinker Brahma Chellaney said that India "snatched defeat from the jaws of victory," reacting to the unexpected ceasefire announced between India and Pakistan. Chellaney expressed disappointment over the development, saying India has failed to learn from history and is merely repeating past strategic mistakes. He has supported an aggressive deterrence doctrine. (Chellaney, 2025) He sees Pakistan as a revisionist state that uses terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

According to Bharat Karnad, another noted strategic thinker, India must impose costs through calibrated covert operations, trans-border strikes, and an assertive military posture to raise the stakes for Islamabad.

K. Subramanian, a renowned strategic thinker, has emphasized the importance of a credible minimum deterrence posture as a cornerstone of India's national security. This strategic equilibrium allows India to focus on containment and counterinsurgency without fear of escalation into nuclear conflict. (Tellis, 2022)

George Perkovich says that India must combine coercive and bargaining measures to motivate Pakistan to stop promoting Cross-border terrorism in India. Since overt warfare is not feasible, given the fact that both are nuclear powers, India must choose both non-violent and violent options for pressuring Pakistan to take decisive action to stop terrorism that starts in its own country.

Given the fact that India has acquired all options, but Pakistan is attempting nuclear blackmail, India's new terror doctrine explicitly says that India won't bow to nuclear blackmail by Pakistan. Pakistan must be punished as to understand that promoting cross-border terrorism bears a cost. (Perkovich & Dalton,2016)

Other prominent strategic thinkers and academicians have written extensively on tackling Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and have suggested the following.

- A dual-track approach emphasizes Track II diplomacy, confidence-building measures (CBMs), and civic engagement in Jammu and Kashmir. Strategic patience, promoting political outreach and dialogue to address alienation, reduce violence, and isolate Pakistan-sponsored elements.
- Non-military trust-building measures, such as improved border communication, joint monitoring mechanisms, and crisis hotlines, can reduce inadvertent escalation and support local stability.
- We should embed Pakistan's policy within a broader regional and global strategy rather than view it in isolation. Active deterrence and diplomatic manoeuvring, advocating for India to strengthen ties with other South Asian and Gulf states to isolate Pakistan while managing bilateral tensions diplomatically.

To conclude, India's counter-insurgency and diplomatic initiatives should continue to be multi-dimensional, combining credible deterrence with assertive responses, Political dialogue and outreach, calibrated military options, Non-military conflict resolution mechanisms, and Regional strategic integration. Besides, India must also be watchful of Pakistan's attempts towards insurgency in India through the Bangladesh and Nepal borders.

After India's new Anti-terrorism doctrine, its strategic posturing has become more assertive. India is concentrating on causing Pakistan's military-terrorist complex to suffer severe and rapid consequences, such as targeted attacks on terrorist infrastructure and camps. Instead of relying on future threats or symbolic gestures, India has shifted to a more direct, forceful, and assertive approach towards Pakistan's weaponisation of the Kashmir issue to justify its export of terror.

India's strategic location between the Middle East and South East Asia gives it a strategic advantage and a disadvantage. India is now flanked by countries with military governments in power, mostly hostile. What is crucial is that India, apart from being a significant military power, must also keep working on geo-economics. India must focus on economic alliances with countries and transnational corporations, and leverage its technically skilled and English-speaking population and low-cost manufacturing advantage. Since Trump's tariff war is changing trade relations, many companies located in China are willing to shift to India. Working on such economic opportunities would help ward off threats to national security.

Last, we must also work on our social capital and inclusive development goals to prevent threats from countries like Pakistan.

Besides the problem in its neighbourhood, the intervention of external actors, and India's own internal issues, there is another dilemma for India.

Whether the West, which has seen India as a counterbalance to China, would like to see an assertive, strong India, actually. Are India's difficult neighbours the only ones who want to deter India's rise, or are the global powers also uncomfortable seeing a rising and assertive India? Former U.S. President Donald Trump's remark about why Apple should not manufacture in India highlights the broader debate over Western hesitance to shift supply chains, even as India presents itself as an alternative to China.

According to Ghokle, National Security Analyst- “*Post Pahalgam and Op Sindoor, it is clear — if proof was needed — India is alone. In war, in diplomacy, in setting narratives. Not one big power stood unequivocally with India. Not Russia. Not the US. No Quad member.*” The post-Pahalgam events have confirmed an ancient geopolitical truth: “*Nations have no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests.*” (Business Today Desk, May 16, 2025)

They chose their responses depending on trade interest, neutrality, or moral pronouncements. We must take stock of all these issues, besides many others which are beyond the scope of this paper, to determine an appropriate strategy to defend India with a mix of diplomacy, realpolitik, coercion, and bargaining.

Moreover, smaller neighbours like Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc, use a hedging strategy against big neighbours like India and China, since they get better deal with bargaining than by simply maintaining good neighbourly relations with any one.

As far as Indian subcontinent is concerned, one thing is clear that India follows neighbourhood first policy, and in case of any disaster, calamity or crisis, the neighbours know that India will be available for them for economic aid, humanitarian, vaccine or infrastructural support.

So, India's diplomatic stance in the wake of events like the Pahalgam bombing is a modern development of its nonaligned foreign policy heritage, demonstrating not isolation but rather the assertion of strategic autonomy. Originally based on Nehru's idea of autonomous decision-making, India's nonalignment policy has evolved into a multi-alignment strategy that permits interaction with many power blocs without the need for official alliances.

Though the present government drifts away from Nehru's idealism and practices realism in its foreign policy. Some continuities remain there. Long-term alliances with the US, Russia, the EU, and the Gulf countries, and a mix of idealist-realist foreign policy depending on the other side.

India balances its security needs, and at the same time asserts national pride in being a uniquely civilizationally rich nation, that aspires to become a global leader. In addition, it fosters soft power projects like the International Solar Alliance and Digital Public Infrastructure diplomacy, strengthening its civilizational identity as a voice of the Global South. Amidst the fallout with the US over tariffs, PM Modi has called for self-reliance and priority to locally made products.

India's approach to crises like Pahalgam thus highlights a foreign policy that is globally bold, diplomatically resilient, and firmly independent, preserving a balance between strategic pragmatism and moral leadership.

The war of rhetoric goes on between these two neighbours, and the situation remains delicate like the tip of an iceberg.

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