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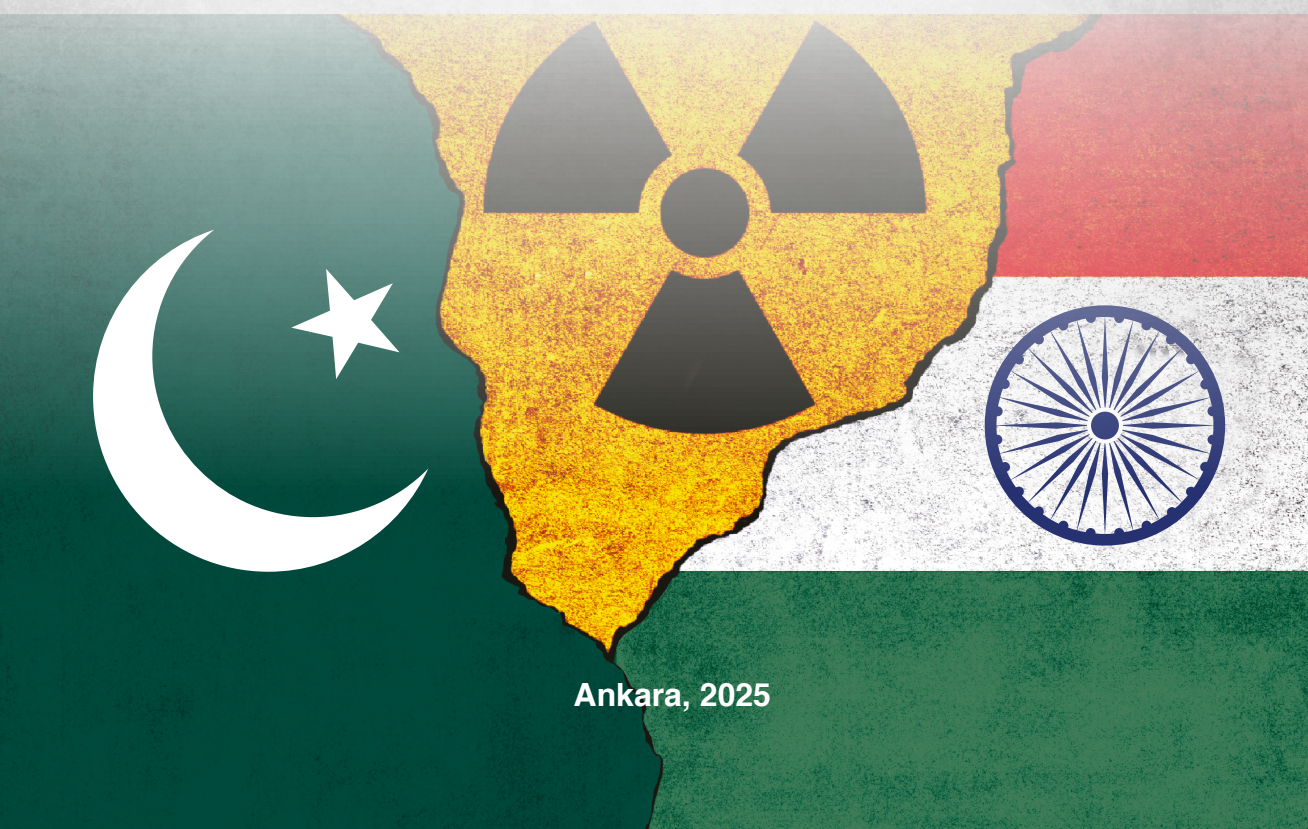
Neither War nor Peace:

The Enduring Conflict of Pakistan and India



Ankara, 2025

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FOREWORD

Wars and global crises continue to have widespread impacts on the international system in the 21st century. They have the potential to cause significant harm beyond physical destruction. Damage to personal relationships, the spread of misinformation, and the undermining of the core values that hold us together as a global community are just a few examples.

As the Turkish Academy of Sciences (TÜBA), we recognize that accurate and objective information is always important, but becomes even more critical in times of conflict. Science serves as a crucial instrument for societies seeking to identify the root causes of conflict and envision sustainable pathways to peace. This is the core mission of our Academy and TÜBA International Relations Working Group, which continues to examine global developments with care and urgency.

In previous years, TÜBA published two significant reports. The first addressed the unlawful invasion of Ukraine and its global implications (*TÜBA*, 2022). The second focused on the devastating conflict in Gaza (*TÜBA*, 2023), which has highlighted the danger of genocide. The destruction of civilian infrastructure, the targeting of children and families, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid have shocked the world. This demanded that scientists also raise their voices.

Now, our attention turns to the long-standing and dangerous tension between Pakistan and India. This conflict is about more than just regional issues. Both countries have nuclear weapons and multicultural identities. The risks of miscalculation or escalation are real and terrifying. This is especially the case in times of global economic and national security fragility. A confrontation here would not stay within borders; it could affect the entire planet. This is precisely why this report is so important.

This report provides a thorough scientific, historical and legal analysis of one of the most fragile and dangerous conflicts of our time. Its purpose is not to assign blame, but rather to shed light on the complex realities of the situation in a clear and balanced manner. Only through understanding can informed dialogue begin, and only through dialogue can we find the path to peace. We believe that scientific institutions have a duty to uphold the principles of human rights, justice and peace through evidence-based research, integrity and critical thought. We would like to emphasise once again that it is easy to start a war, but difficult to end one.

It is essential for national leaders and decision-makers to recognize the need for increased caution when dealing with international issues that are complex, deeply rooted and carry significant risks. Instead of engaging in constant testing of each other's boundaries, it is recommended that nations seek to resolve their disputes through peaceful dialogue and cooperation. After all, global conflicts continue to dominate the agenda, resulting in significant human suffering and considerable challenges.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the TÜBA International Relations Working Group members and the distinguished experts and researchers whose contributions made this work possible. Their efforts are academic and deeply moral. When silence becomes complicity, truth must be spoken. We hope this report will contribute meaningfully to global understanding and support the shared pursuit of peace.

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Neither War nor Peace: The Enduring Conflict of Pakistan and India

Abstract

This work analyses the escalation of the India–Pakistan conflict in 2025 and its regional and global consequences. Rather than viewing the crisis merely as a bilateral standoff, it is considered as a complex geopolitical challenge shaped by historical grievances, nuclear deterrence dynamics, internal politics and shifting regional alliances. The aim of the study is to develop a more detailed understanding of the crisis through a balanced, multidimensional approach that emphasizes critical analysis rather than attributing responsibility. This study employs qualitative research and process tracing methods to examine the historical trajectory of the conflict, offering a comparative perspective between current dynamics and earlier periods of tension. It draws on a wide range of sources, including current academic literature, diplomatic communications, media discourse and think tank evaluations. The study closely examines how crisis response approaches, national discourse, and societal attitudes impact whether tensions escalate or diminish. The study further considers the broader implications of the conflict for international security, particularly in light of the fact that both Pakistan and India possess nuclear capabilities. The risks of miscalculation or limited war escalating into a broader catastrophe remain acute. In this regard, the potential roles of third parties, especially Türkiye, are analysed. Türkiye's evolving foreign policy, diplomatic tradition and regional engagement position it as a potential mediator in the resolution of international tensions. Unlike most Western-centric accounts, this research effectively contextualises the crisis by examining Türkiye's historical and strategic alignment, its role in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, and its potential diplomatic opportunities. The study addresses the security concerns of both sides with equal sensitivity across five scenarios, emphasising the urgent need to restore diplomatic channels and multilateral dialogue.

Keywords
India-Pakistan Conflict, Nuclear Deterrence, Kashmir Dispute, Regional Security, Türkiye's Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

The Pakistan-India crisis is not just a border disagreement between two neighbouring countries. It is also a deeply complex situation that affects global security, nuclear deterrence, crisis management and the stability of the entire region (Sadiq & Ali, 2022; Lou, 2022). This is why it requires more than political attention; thoughtful academic engagement is also necessary. Scholars specialising in subjects such as international relations, security studies (Bilgin, 2016), strategy and South Asian affairs can provide valuable insights to help us grasp the broader implications of such high-stakes conflicts, informing more peaceful approaches for both Türkiye and the international community.

The April 2025 crisis between India and Pakistan is one of the rare areas of geopolitical tension that has the potential to directly impact not only the South Asian region but also global security (Singh, 2025). The possession of nuclear weapons by both countries is a structural difference that sets these crises apart from other regional conflicts (Zia, 2022; Suh, 2022). The potential for conflicts that begin at the conventional level to reach the nuclear threshold soon is a matter of concern for the international community (Larsen, 2023; Kwong et al., 2025).

While the presence of nuclear weapons could potentially enhance deterrence in India-Pakistan relations, it appears to trigger a "risk management under crisis" dynamic (Brustlein**,** 2021; Golts, 2024). Pakistan's nuclear doctrine, which does not exclude the "first use" option, and India's military strategies (Abbasi & Ullah, 2022), which remain doctrinally defensive but can become operationally aggressive, have the potential to contribute to a rapid escalation of the crisis (Tasleem, 2016; Tasleem & Ramana, 2024).

This shift in the conflict dynamic in South Asia (Bastaki et al., 2024) could be seen as a game of uncertainty in the nuclear shadow (Spencer-Churchill & Mehmood, 2025), rather than a classic power struggle (Sethi, 2022). Recent developments in the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot incidents have demonstrated that conventional attacks may not be limited and could potentially escalate to direct air force confrontations (Salik, 2023; Kurita, 2023). The nationalist rhetoric of both countries, which resonates with significant domestic audiences, has the potential to influence the management of crises in a manner that is deeply intertwined with domestic politics. This could potentially limit the flexibility of leaders to de-escalate tensions (Morgan, 2008). These domestic and foreign policy dynamics transform the crisis from a mere diplomatic dispute between the two countries into a security challenge with multidimensional consequences, such as regional instability, radicalization, and potential waves of migration.

The 2025 crisis represents, first and foremost, a prime example of the profound and recurrent tensions that arise between nuclear-armed states (Roudani, 2025). This enables a pragmatic evaluation of nuclear deterrence theories and models of crisis escalation. From an academic perspective, the course of such crises in the gray area between conventional conflict and nuclear threat is instructive in terms of applying theoretical knowledge to the field.

Secondly, the ongoing crisis between two rising powers, Pakistan and India, underscores the prevailing tensions within a world system undergoing a transition to multipolarity (Aras & Sert, 2025). The divergent approaches adopted by China, the United Stated (US), and Russia in addressing this crisis offer valuable insights into the future of the global order and the architecture of regional security (Miller, 2024). Consequently, the crisis is not merely a matter of concern to South Asia; it also carries significant implications for the future of global politics.

For Türkiye, this crisis is particularly important in the context of its new multilateral foreign policy vision, its quest for influence in the Islamic world, and its reestablished strategic relations with Asia. In light of Türkiye's historical connections and ongoing defense industry collaboration with Pakistan, as well as its expanding economic ties with India, it is evident that Türkiye possesses the potential to assume the role of a mediator, maintaining an impartial stance between all involved parties.

Furthermore, the preponderance of academic studies in Türkiye in the domains of strategic studies, regional studies, and crisis management is predominantly centered on the Middle East. Nevertheless, a region as dynamic, densely populated, and strategically significant as South Asia remains underrepresented in the academic focus of Turkish scholars. The objective of this report is twofold: first, to address the aforementioned gap in the literature, and second, to expand Türkiye's capacity for regional analysis. This crisis has emerged as a notable and prioritized subject of academic inquiry, both in terms of Türkiye's escalating diplomatic profile and the adaptation of academic knowledge to contemporary developments.

It would be wise to consider the implications of this crisis in the context of nuclear weapons, the adaptability of deterrence doctrines, the stance of political leadership, and the international system's limited capacity to intervene in such situations. In this context, the management of the crisis has become a shared responsibility not only of the countries involved but also of regional and global actors.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical relationship between India and Pakistan commenced with the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition, a process that ranks among the most distressing of the 20th century (Sohal, 2025). Since then, the relationship has been characterized by a recurring pattern of systematic mistrust, conflict, and crisis. The concept of partition encompasses more than mere political borders; it is also influenced by social traumas, mass migrations, and sectarian violence. The post-independence founding identities of both countries positioned the "other" in the other state, which led to the development of relations on a structurally unstable foundation (Khan, 2017; Kumar & Kothari, 2016). Nevertheless, the prevailing perspective posits that the colonial legacy exerted a profound influence on these processes.

Colonial Legacy and the West's Ambivalence

The British exercised dominion over 94 percent of the territory that constitutes South Asia in the present day (Guneratne & Weiss, 2014). In this regard, one approach to understanding the contemporary politics of South Asia is to consider the state of the institutions and political forms that the region inherited from British rule. Indeed, the political associations that contemporary states embody, except for Nepal, are the legacy of a specific empire, while modern state formations emerged with the British (Guneratne & Weiss, 2014, p. 7). Modern political leaders in South Asia are still debating and expressing concern about the region's cultural and political legacy from colonial times. In this regard, the question of the influence of British colonialism on the region's transformation is frequently raised (Purushotham, 2020). In the context of their respective colonial histories, both Pakistan and India have been compelled to adopt certain concepts, including sovereignty, nation-states, borders, and political organization. These concepts proved to be incongruent with the socio-cultural milieu of these nations. In the context of the Western world, these concepts emerged as a result of the resolution of conflicts. However, in the cases of Pakistan and India, these concepts catalyzed numerous conflicts, thereby impeding the development of regional consciousness and the process of integration. The rewriting of history in terms of "us and them" further fueled hostilities (Guneratne & Weiss, 2014).

The British policy of "divide and rule" was not solely predicated on issues of borders and sovereignty; it also deliberately left regions like Kashmir in a state of limbo. The fundamental argument of this study is that the colonial power deliberately instigated conflict as it withdrew from the region. Despite its departure, the actors

in the region persisted in engaging in conflict, thereby impeding their capacity to pursue their genuine interests due to the prevailing state of instability. Even in the absence of British military presence in the region, the British would have impeded the consolidation of regional actors and been able to influence the actions of states in a manner consistent with their interests. This narrative bears a striking resemblance to the historical context of the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India concerning the Kashmir region. Indeed, both countries have engaged in three out of four of the large-scale wars they have ever fought because of their disputes over Kashmir. While other conflicts and tensions have emerged for analogous reasons, it is indisputable that Kashmir occupies a distinctive position in this context (Mishra, 2016).

This ambivalence of the West can be observed in the dynamics of the Cold War period after the British withdrawal from the region. During the Cold War, the US utilized Pakistan as a "buffer state" against the Soviet Union through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Conference for Mutual Economic Assistance (CENTO) in the 1950s (Krishnan, 2023). This approach was characterized by a division of labor, with the US providing support to Pakistan and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) offering assistance to India, leading to the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and the exacerbation of the ongoing conflict. In addition to the repercussions of the aforementioned dualistic nature of the international system during the Cold War, it is also noteworthy that the West exhibited an ambivalent behavior in the process of countries' nuclear capacity development. The US' decision to sanction India and punish Pakistan in 1998, despite both countries having tested nuclear weapons, exemplifies a clear double standard (Haass & Halperin, 1998). Even today, the fact that India is regarded as a strategic partner for the West while Pakistan is considered a useful ally during the war on terror and a problematic ally afterwards can be interpreted as an indicator of inconsistency.

The colonial legacy and the persistent ambivalence of the West have been identified as one of the factors the absence of trust between states. This has been compounded by the substantial military presence and significant investment in defense, the instability of political regimes in the states, and the robust bureaucracy in Pakistan and India. This legacy resulted in the establishment of borders that contributed to the formation of states, with the legitimacy of states being contingent on sovereignty. The constant fear of neighbors and the memory of foreign interference in the form of colonialism led the region's nation states to prioritize a regional understanding of sovereignty (Mishra, 2017). While the long-term implications of sovereignty swaps can be favorable, states such as Pakistan and India have seldom initiated measures to address the issue of sovereignty. The historical record indicates a predominant pattern of conflict rather than regional integration between the two countries.

Rising Insecurity and Reproducing Identities

The British-promoted artificial division, a point emphasized in postcolonial analyses of colonial history, served to exacerbate existing tensions between Muslim and Hindu communities. The formation of the identities (Anderson, 2006) of Pakistan and India was significantly influenced by the anti-colonial struggle; however, these identities were also constructed through the process of othering (Tejani, 2014). The role of communal power struggles and security dilemmas in this process of othering must be acknowledged (Pu, 2022). As the British withdrew, the security dilemma between Muslims and Hindus led to the establishment of two separate states. The Muslim-majority regions have asserted the need for a separate state, citing concerns that remaining a minority within a unified India would compromise their security. This profound sense of insecurity has led to the formation of Pakistan, a nation that came into existence when the Muslim-majority regions demanded a separate state. In response, Pakistan defined itself as a "Muslim state," while India adopted a secular identity. This separation was driven by the need for survival, yet it simultaneously engendered profound security concerns and the fomentation of rivalry among the parties involved (Chandra, 2015).

This security dilemma has led to the establishment of Pakistani and Indian identities as mutual rivals. Pakistan has defined itself through its "Islamic identity," whereas India has set out with the claim of a pluralist secularism (Sohal, 2021). Consequently, while Pakistan self-identified as the "homeland of Muslims," India was defined as a "secular pluralist state." Although India initially adopted a secular-democratic discourse, the rise of Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) began to transform the existing identity and became increasingly central to politics, as is evident in the present day (Ünlü, 2020). The ideological movement known as Hindutva, drawing its inspiration from the Hindu faith, has been a catalyst for the escalation of identity conflicts, transforming them into a confrontation between two rival faiths. This has led to a marked hardening of religious nationalisms in both India and Pakistan (Sohal, 2022). In the course of history, the reproduction of identities has come to influence the domestic and foreign policies of nations, thereby amplifying their capacity to incite crises between these two states (Nawaz, 2024).

The division was not only characterized by a pervasive sense of mistrust but also by a conspicuous absence of institutional structures. The inability to manage the conflict was due to the absence of an institutional framework. In this regard, it could be argued that the division represented an instance of inadequate institutionalization and coordination failure. The aforementioned process was exacerbated by the absence of institutional cooperation. Had there been a more robust federative structure and minority rights mechanisms during the process of achieving independence, it is possible that the rupture would not have been so violent. However, following independence, each country adopted a distinct model of governance. Any analysis of the post-partition transformation processes in these countries must take into account

the intricate dynamics of class relations. For instance, the landowning elite in India and the military-bureaucratic elite in Pakistan have profited from this process. Conversely, the majority of the population experienced violence and migration. These class dynamics persist in the state and societal relations of the two countries, influencing all forms of policy-making (Karamat, 2019).

History of the Kashmir Issue

The Kashmir issue continues to be one of the most fundamental and chronic problems in India-Pakistan relations to this day. The crisis's origins can be traced to the ambiguity surrounding the future of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir during the partition of British India in 1947 (Chadha, 2005; Sohal, 2025). At the time of partition, the princely states were granted the autonomy to determine their political allegiance, whether it be to India or Pakistan. However, the state of Jammu and Kashmir exhibited distinctive characteristics. Despite the preponderance of the Muslim population in Kashmir, the region was ruled by a Hindu monarch, Maharaja Hari Singh. The Maharacha demonstrated a preference for maintaining a connection with India, which was predominantly Hindu at the time, despite the aspirations of the majority Muslim population to align with Pakistan. This decision provoked profound dismay among the Muslim community, inciting widespread communal discord (Dasgupta, 2002).

Muslim unrest and mobilization precipitated the annexation and the inaugural experience of war in Kashmir. In 1947, Maharacha requested military assistance from India due to the threat posed by armed groups seeking to join Pakistan and take control of Kashmir (Khattar, 2025). The Nehru administration, which was in power at the time, made the condition that the region of Kashmir be incorporated into India to receive the promised assistance (Dasgupta, 2002). Consequently, on October 26, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh formally endorsed the accession agreement, thereby integrating the region into India's sovereign domain. In response to this development, India deployed troops to the region, and Pakistan responded. Consequently, the First India-Pakistan War ensued. The First Kashmir War concluded with a ceasefire in 1949, facilitated by the United Nations (UN). However, this cessation of hostilities proved insufficient to address the underlying causes of the Kashmir conflict. The division of Kashmir into two separate entities had now become a reality. The geopolitical landscape of the region is characterized by the presence of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, which are under Pakistani control, and Jammu and Kashmir, which is under Indian control. Notably, Jammu and Kashmir is predominantly Muslim. In addition to the geographical division, this demographic division corresponded to the moral question at the heart of the Kashmir conflict. The Kashmiris residing within the territory under Indian administration exhibited a clear reluctance to be incorporated into India, yet they found themselves unable to evade the oppressive nature of Indian governance (Bose, 2003).

The ongoing situation in Kashmir has given rise to not only military crises but also crises of international law. Consequently, it has been regarded as a prime example of the shortcomings of international law and international legal institutions. The UN Security Council recommended a plebiscite in the region in its Resolution 47 of 1948. However, this resolution was never implemented. The parties involved were unable to reach a consensus on the preconditions for the plebiscite and the military presence in the region. It is evident that Pakistan has historically favored and endorsed the utilization of international law. In contrast to Pakistan, which has demonstrated a willingness to engage with international legal mechanisms, India has historically preferred to avoid such involvement (Korbel, 1953). This approach has historically served as the foundation for India's fundamental stance. Historically, India has regarded the matter as an "internal affair" of its own, maintaining either the stance that it pertains exclusively to its interests or the position that it should be resolved bilaterally with Pakistan. Historically, during periods of heightened tensions between the two nations, India has consistently sought to avoid the internationalization of the Kashmir issue (Subbiah, 2004).

In light of these circumstances, the Kashmir region has been a recurrent topic on the global agenda since the 1950s, particularly within the context of status debates and insurgency. Since the 1950s, India has asserted its claim to Kashmir as an integral part of its territory (Kataria et al., 2025), bestowing upon the region a special constitutional status (Article 370 of the Constitution) (Kumar Aryal & Muneer, 2023). In response, Pakistan maintained its position and continued to defend the right of the people of the region to self-determination (Majid, 2022). Popular movements in Kashmir have, at times, mobilized with both pro-Pakistan and independenceist demands. The 1990s witnessed a particularly intense period of tension, as the region under Indian administration experienced a surge in both armed resistance and widespread civil unrest (HRW, 2019). During this period, India maintained a significant military presence in the region, which faced criticism from various communities, especially those in the Western world, due to alleged human rights violations (OHCHR, 2019; Ahlawat & Izarali 2020). On the contrary, Pakistan continues to advocate for a resolution of the issue through international legal mechanisms, although it faces accusations from India of supporting certain armed groups in Kashmir.

The year 2019 marked significant changes in the course of events and the political landscape of Kashmir under the leadership of the Modi administration. After coming to power in 2014, the Modi government prioritized economic reformism in its early years. The government aimed to approach the Kashmir issue from a liberal perspective during this period, using economic development as a tool. However, the Modi administration, which shifted more towards Hindu nationalism due to the economic crises that intensified in its second term, also changed its policy in Kashmir. On August 5, 2019, the government led by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra

Modi took the significant step of revoking Article 35A and 370 of the Constitution (Kuszewska, 2022), thereby terminating the special status that had previously been accorded to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (Menski & Yousuf, 2025). This step was characterized by Pakistan as a violation of international law, while India defended it as "administrative integration." After these events, India has designated Kashmir as a federal territory directly under the jurisdiction of New Delhi, thereby revoking its autonomy and effectively abrogating its constitution. This development, therefore, precipitated a new wave of crisis in the region and incited the residents to revolt. In this context, the Modi administration implemented the most stringent policies in history and initiated an extensive militarization campaign in the region. After these events, India has been the subject of considerable criticism and condemnation from the international community for its violations of human rights (Menski & Yousuf, 2025).

The contemporary Kashmir dispute has evolved into a multifaceted crisis for the entire global community, encompassing issues of identity, sovereignty, self-determination, human rights, and security (Bhat, 2019; Majid, 2022). Furthermore, China's assertion of territorial claim to the Ladakh region, accompanied by its recent takeover of the Aksai Chin region, has transformed this issue into a trilateral conflict (Paldan, 2025). The fact that China's global vision, the Belt and Road Initiative, traverses the Pakistan-controlled Kashmir region has elicited concerns not only from India but also from global actors such as the US, which is pursuing a balancing policy against the rising China (Anwar & Atif, 2025). Consequently, the Kashmir region has evolved into a multifaceted geopolitical issue of significant concern to the global political landscape. Moreover, Kashmir has emerged as a symbolic locale within the Islamic world, signifying the plight of Muslims facing persecution. In this context, countries such as Türkiye, Malaysia, and Iran have issued periodic statements on the issue, while Kashmir has frequently been included on the agenda of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Preceding Major Crises

The ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan have frequently emerged as a result of disputes over identity politics and violations of sovereignty, particularly in the context of territorial border conflicts. In the contemporary era, crises have been influenced by domestic politics and characterized by multi-layered dynamics, including nuclear deterrence during the Cold War and, more recently, great power rivalry. Pakistan and India engaged in four major wars in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999, respectively. Except for the 1971 East Pakistan War, all of these wars were fought over the Kashmir region. In addition to these four major wars, there have been several near-war crises following the 2001 Indian Parliament Attack and the 2019 Pulwama and Balakot Attacks (Raghavan, 2024). The most recent crisis, which transpired on May 7, 2025, once again centered on the Kashmir region. Although

a ceasefire was formally established on May 10, subsequent mutual declarations of ceasefire violations by the involved parties suggest that the crisis has not yet fully abated. While this recent crisis has not yet reached the level of a war, it has been the closest to one among the previous crises, and it has sparked the nuclear winter debate more than any of the previous ones.

The underlying causes of all wars and crises are typically related to domestic unrest that is supported by opposing forces or an infiltration attempt in the other country. For instance, the first war in Kashmir (1947-1948) was provoked by Maharaja Hari Singh's request for Indian assistance following the incursion of pro-Pakistani tribal militias into Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, the 1965 war, also known as Operation Gibraltar, ensued as a result of Pakistan's strategic initiative to support insurrections against Hindu rule in Kashmir. The war in East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh, was initiated by India's involvement in the nation's civil war. Similarly, the Kargil War in 1999 transpired due to Pakistani forces' incursion into the Indian-administered Kargil region. Following the 2000s, the impetus for these crises shifted towards proxy group dynamics, as evidenced by India's allegations of Pakistan's responsibility for the 2001 parliament attack and the 2019 Pulwama suicide attacks. In the aftermath of the Pulwama attacks, India initiated a series of countermeasures, including an airstrike on the Balakot area within Pakistan on February 26 (Hilali, 2004).

The First Kashmir War (1947-1948) and the war in 1965 were followed by the intervention of international actors, such as the UN and the Soviet Union, to mediate a ceasefire and conclude the conflict through agreements, such as the Tashkent Agreement (1965). During the 1965 and 1999 wars, India's military superiority had a significant impact on Pakistan's national image and led to domestic political consequences. However, the Kargil War is noteworthy as it was the first war in which the limits of nuclear deterrence were tested, as it was the first direct war fought when both countries possessed nuclear weapons. In the 2019 Pulwama and Balakot crises, a novel phenomenon emerged: a mutual use of air power between two nuclear-armed countries. This development led to a comprehensive discussion, with both India's failure and Pakistan's success being thoroughly examined. Furthermore, information warfare and efforts to establish psychological superiority through social media garnered significant attention during this period (Altaf, 2023).

Except for the unique circumstances that define specific cases, the armed conflicts and crises that have transpired between Pakistan and India, most notably the Kashmir issue, can be regarded as archetypal illustrations of the security dilemma in its broader context. The ongoing conflict was characterized by a state of perpetual uncertainty, as each party harbored reservations regarding the intentions of the other, leading to an environment of perpetual mistrust and the risk of armed conflict (Krepon, 2005). The Kargil Crisis, in particular, exemplifies a complete absence of information and

perilous provocation. Pakistan miscalculated India's reaction, and the dissemination of misinformation engendered a state of heightened tensions, which ultimately led to armed conflict. Once more, the presence of power imbalance and geopolitical competition resulted in unavoidable confrontations. The dissolution of Pakistan in 1971 was, in fact, a consequence of India's pursuit of regional hegemony. Since that time, India has pursued a greater number of regional strategies, while Pakistan has developed balancing strategies, including nuclear armament and an alliance with China. The ongoing pursuit of power maximization by these two countries has resulted in unresolved problems. The possession of nuclear weapons by both countries engendered a certain equilibrium concerning nuclear deterrence, thereby forestalling direct warfare between the two nations. As was the case in Kargil, both parties refrained from engaging in a major confrontation, as the projected casualties were deemed to be unacceptable. However, in the context of the nuclear issue, the "stability paradox" emerged, indicating that the likelihood of nuclear warfare decreased as the probability of "ultimate defeat" diminished. Consequently, the parties that previously sought to avoid nuclear warfare may have been more susceptible to proxy wars and border conflicts (Pitafi, 2020).

The perpetual hostilities between the two nations and the inability to identify a definitive resolution to the issues have invariably given rise to inquiries regarding the inefficacy and failure of international institutions. The UN has frequently been unsuccessful in resolving issues and appeasing parties, leading to criticism in all pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis scenarios (Hasan, 2017). India's perception of Kashmir as a domestic concern or as a matter between India and Pakistan hindered the ability of international actors to intervene. This decision stemmed from India's reluctance to escalate the issue to the global stage, given its perceived limited influence within the international legal framework. Conversely, proponents of liberalism posited that the potential for conflict could be mitigated by fostering increased trade and cultural interactions between the two nations (Khan, n.d.). They further speculated that enhanced cooperation, albeit to a modest degree, might be attainable through heightened trade. Nevertheless, political discord frequently rendered these endeavors futile. Notwithstanding, the two countries have, on occasion, managed to establish and maintain positive agendas in their relations.

The historical trajectory of the two nations is not solely characterized by military crises and conflicts; it is also marked by periods of normalization, pursuit of cooperation, and the establishment of peace. In this context, peace efforts such as the Lahore Declaration (1999), the Shimla Agreement (1972), and the Agra Summit (2001) are examples of official cooperation initiatives. The repercussions of economic crises have historically fostered collaboration through economic relations, as evidenced in the 2015-2016 period (Gopalan, 2021). The fundamental question that must be addressed is the reason for the failure of these peace processes. The primary response to this question pertains to structural factors, positing that in the absence

of a resolution to underlying instabilities, such as the ongoing Kashmir conflict, the implementation of cooperation initiatives can only offer transient solutions. Conversely, institutional factors can also be highlighted (Bhatnagar & Chacko, 2019). The persistent propagation of the discourse of "enmity" by educational, media, and political institutions has the potential to perpetuate marginalization (Ahanger & Yaqoob, 2023). Moreover, the absence of the capacity to augment commercial and cultural connections hinders the process of establishing normality through the utilization of "soft power," thereby impeding the development of trust.

While a multitude of factors have been identified that can be cited as either contributing to the deterioration of relations or the development of good relations, the weakness of a common international community across South Asia should not be disregarded. In contemporary international relations, characterized by a proliferation of regional organizations and agreements, the prevailing discourse emphasizes the necessity of enhanced regional collaboration among nations. In this manner, regional norms and rules can become functional through cultural affinities. However, as evidenced by the ineffectiveness of regional international organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it can be posited that the development of a "regional community" in South Asia has been impeded. The enmity between India and Pakistan undoubtedly plays a significant role in the prevention of a normative order. Indeed, India's prioritization of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) as an alternative to the SAARC with Pakistan indicates a prevailing inclination toward regional hegemony. Indeed, India's recent border and sovereignty crises, not only with Pakistan but also with nearly all of its neighbors, including China (Kiet et al., 2025), Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan, demonstrate that the country has been the subject of criticism from regional actors (Waggy & Hassan 2023).

CATALYSTS OF THE ONGOING CRISIS

As evidenced by the persistent tensions between Pakistan and India, which have persisted despite sporadic efforts to promote a period of normalization, the recurrence of hostilities may be attributed to the inability to address underlying structural factors, particularly in the Kashmir region. Consequently, while political leaders have intermittently endeavored to assume a proactive stance in the interest of cooperation, the pervasiveness of discord concerning sovereignty, independence, and autonomy has invariably undermined diplomatic relations. To illustrate, within the context of sovereignty, the unilateral transfer of all of Kashmir to India or Pakistan could be politically detrimental for both parties (Haines, 2014). In a similar vein, the pursuit of independence by the Kashmiris entails considerable risk due to the intricate demographic dynamics and the opposition from both parties involved. Notably, the concept of autonomy, once a viable prospect, has not been implemented since 2019. Consequently, alternative conceptualizations of Kashmir's status that would enhance social legitimacy have historically lacked political support. The UN Security Council has not formally addressed the Kashmir issue since 1965, and Pakistan and India have not engaged in negotiations regarding the fundamental structure of the problem (Bukhari, 2021). Recently, prominent figures such as US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have proposed mediation initiatives aimed at resolving the ongoing dispute. However, even Trump, who enjoys a favorable standing among the Indian public, may encounter significant opposition.

In addition to the parties' inability to resolve structural issues, the origins of this latest crisis can be traced back to the post-2019 status change in Indian-controlled Kashmir. The Modi administration, recognizing the need for a shift in security policy in light of the tensions that prevailed in 2019, initiated a constitutional amendment that effectively ended Jammu and Kashmir's autonomy, thereby integrating it with the central government. The Modi administration's initiation of a violent militarization campaign in anticipation of substantial opposition has not only precipitated a grave humanitarian crisis but also exacerbated existing regional hostilities (Rather, 2017). It is asserted that since the 1990s, the nation has been subjected to over 50 attacks by radical groups, and that this new norm in the region is proving to be quite costly for India. In response, India has further strengthened the grassroots support of radical groups through the implementation of additional hardening policies. Despite the promotion of an agenda that calls for renormalization with a more territorial change of governance through the 2024 elections in the state, it has not succeeded in building the trust of Kashmiri residents, who remain cognizant of the demographic change efforts being implemented (Rahman & Muneer, 2020).

While the Modi administration's novel security strategy has reinvigorated the frozen conflict zone in Kashmir, the recent escalation in violence in Jammu and Kashmir has portended the imminent emergence of a new crisis. A notable escalation in attacks on security forces in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir has been observed, particularly in the latter half of 2024. The central government's attention was once again drawn to the region in the wake of ambushes and outpost attacks, particularly in the Anantnag and Poonch regions. India has asserted that Pakistan-sponsored groups, most notably Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba, are responsible for these attacks (Bali, 2022). In contrast, Pakistan rejected these allegations, asserting that the attacks were associated with domestic resistance movements. This situation led to a resurgence of allegations concerning the involvement of proxy groups in the conflict between Pakistan and India. Additionally, it highlighted an escalation in the security challenges faced by the involved parties, particularly concerning allegations of infiltration and activities by proxy groups (Mehdi, 2024).

In addition to reigniting the debate on proxy groups, the specific situation of domestic political dynamics has also deepened this debate. Indeed, a number of these have been advanced to explore the underlying causes of the recent crisis, with several pointing to domestic political dynamics. These arguments contend that domestic political imperatives served as the predominant motivation for the crisis's occurrence. These arguments are not novel in the context of the ongoing tensions between Pakistan and India. Indeed, in the context of the 2019 crisis, there were also numerous arguments on the subject. It has been widely documented in the media that the Modi administration, confronted with a pivotal general election in 2019, utilized the Pulwama and Balakot attacks to galvanize nationalist voter support nationwide (Sreepada & Coman 2024). A similar dynamic can be observed in contemporary Indian domestic politics. The upcoming Bihar and Bengal state elections have been argued to have similarly motivated the Modi administration. It has been argued here that, in the context of the upcoming elections, which are crucial for securing a majority in both houses of parliament in the country's system, the Modi administration is trying to mobilize nationalist sentiments and gain the support of the Hindu nationalist social base. Although the caste recount agenda has garnered increased attention in the context of these state elections, Modi's subsequent deviation from the issue has served to exacerbate existing suspicions (Rao, 2025).

In the Indian context, the argument has been posited that a crisis with Pakistan could be utilized in state elections. However, within the Pakistani context, the domestic situation is characterized by a greater degree of complexity. Indeed, Pakistan's domestic politics has exhibited greater turbulence and fragmentation in recent years when compared with India's. In a nation where the military wields considerable influence, a recent surge in criticism has targeted the military elite, particularly regarding its perceived lack of legitimacy in the public's eyes. This issue has emerged as a prominent subject of discourse. This dynamic was further exacerbated

by the ongoing controversy surrounding the alleged postmodern coup against the ruling Imran Khan administration in 2022. Subsequent to these events, Imran Khan's supporters have engaged in various forms of civil disobedience, including street protests and demonstrations (Al Jazeera, 2024). In addition to these political developments, which are indicative of the decline in political trust, it can be argued that the severe economic crisis that has gripped the country in recent years has also played a major role in the weakening of public trust. Indeed, the substantial financial obligations confronting the nation have frequently incited discussions on bankruptcy and state capacity. However, the most consequential dynamic has arguably been the recent emergence of separatist movements within the country. The emergence of separatist movements, such as the Balochistan Liberation Army and the Pakistan Taliban, in their respective provinces has compelled the Pakistani state to allocate a significant portion of its resources to the fight against terrorism (Baloch, 2024). Furthermore, border tensions with Iran and Afghanistan in 2024 instigated debates that Pakistan's military elites were producing such behavior in order to rally patriots behind them in the face of declining social support.

While there is an absence of definitive evidence indicating that motivations originating from the internal dynamics of either country could have precipitated the crisis, the Jaffar Express terrorist attack in Pakistan, which transpired a month prior to the latest crisis, constituted one of the most recent developments to incite the crisis. In the train attack that resulted in 400 people being taken hostage, the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) demanded the release of what they described as political prisoners. However, the Pakistani military ended the day-long hostage crisis with a military operation. The BLA has recently engaged in a separatist struggle based on "resource nationalism," claiming that Pakistan's largest resource-rich regions do not receive a fair share of wealth. The BLA and its supporters have also accused Pakistan of selling the region to China and have often directed terrorist attacks against strategic locations such as Gwadar Port, which is important for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Verma et al., 2025). Pakistan has formally refuted the aforementioned allegations, attributing the support for the BLA to India and Afghanistan. In light of the recent attack on the Jaffar Express, allegations have been made asserting India's indirect support for the BLA militants. Earlier in 2016, Pakistan had arrested Kulbhushan Jadhav on charges of being an Indian spy tasked with organizing terrorist attacks in Balochistan and accused India of orchestrating these attacks (Latif et al., 2019). Pakistan's assertion that the train attacks were motivated by the same factors represents a recent indication that the terrorist tensions currently experienced within Pakistan's borders may extend to the regional level.

The final trigger on the road towards a renewed confrontation between Pakistan and India may be seen in the context of Great Power politics, which have long influenced the region. In the context of China's protracted ascension, the US has been implementing the "Rebalancing China" strategy since the Obama era (Chase,

2014). This strategy underwent a process of centralization during the initial Trump administration, a trend that was subsequently sustained under the Biden administration. India has been identified as a pivotal nation in China's rebalancing strategy, particularly in the context of "off-shore balancing" (Paul, 2019; Clary, 2025). This is particularly evident in the context of ocean politics, where India's regional significance has grown, as evidenced by its military and foreign policy responses to Chinese activities in the Indian Ocean. This alignment between US and Indian policies is regarded as consistent with India's regional and global strategic objectives. In this context, India has emerged as an essential element of anti-China collective structures in many new international formations, such as QUAD (US, India, Japan, and Australia) (Kiet et al., 2025). The Modi administration's relationship with the West constituted the primary axis of the ongoing crisis within the context of global power competition in South Asia.

The other pillar of the global power competition has been Pakistan in the context of its close relations with China. China, which has been making substantial investments in Pakistan for an extended period as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the primary component of the Belt and Road Initiative, has emerged as a pivotal alliance for Pakistan (Anwar & Atif, 2025). As evidenced by its recent investments, the nation has not only contributed to the development of the country's military technology but has also played a substantial role in its economic development. In this context, Pakistani territory, ranging from Pakistan-controlled Kashmir to the Gwadar Port in Balochistan, has become imperative for China's foreign policy objectives (Zhang & Malik, 2024). The evolving relationship between China and Pakistan, marked by a notable rise in Chinese influence within Pakistani politics, has elicited concerns among both the US and India. In this regard, the Kashmir region has assumed a heightened significance, not only in the context of the bilateral relations between Pakistan and India, but also with respect to the future of regional and global politics. Consequently, the observed instability in this region was indicative of a broader dynamic that influenced not only the bilateral relations between the two countries but also the regional stability as a whole.

In the context of global powers' rivalry, South Asian politics experienced a critical turning point during the Biden era. India's relationship with the US, which is crucial for maintaining a balance of power with China (Clary, 2025), has been impacted by the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. The administration under Joe Biden took a firm stance, urging India to adhere strictly to the sanctions imposed on Russia. This critical approach was directed towards the Modi administration, which, due to India's historical and cultural ties with Russia, was unable to provide the desired compliance. India has emerged as a significant beneficiary of this crisis, while Russia has effectively utilized the North-South Corridor to circumvent the embargo and sanctions imposed. Nevertheless, the Modi administration's persistent engagement with Russia has come at the cost of its relationship with Bangladesh. The Modi

administration, which had maintained a particularly close relationship with the Hasina administration, experienced the loss of this significant ally in the aftermath of the revolution in Bangladesh. The recently established government of Bangladesh, which cultivated more favorable relations with Pakistan, encountered an impasse with India on numerous issues, encompassing border disputes and matters of identity (Mostofa, 2024). Consequently, India has encountered a significant setback in its pursuit of regional dominance, while a new contentious issue has emerged in its relationship with Pakistan. In his inaugural meeting with PM Modi, US President Trump, who assumed office subsequent to the Biden era, was questioned by the press regarding the future of Bangladesh. However, Trump did not pledge any modifications and suggested that the initiative was within the purview of the Modi administration. This has led to speculation that India could adopt an assertive stance in the evolving regional dynamics (Hindustan Times, 2025).

It is possible that the final dynamic that incited the conflict prior to the recent tensions was the security dilemma engendered by the military capacities developed by Pakistan and India through the great powers. Within the broader context of regional rivalry, India, which has been engaged in a process of rapprochement with the Western world, has been acquiring military capabilities from Western countries, while Pakistan, which has been pursuing a rapprochement with China, has been obtaining military equipment from China. This dynamic has evolved into a state of heightened tension and uncertainty, akin to a Chicken Game. Despite the strategic emphasis placed on domestic production within the defense industry by both countries and the subsequent initiation of a competitive race, a parallel trend has emerged in the realm of arms imports. While India has historically engaged in substantial procurement from nations such as the US, France, Russia, and Israel, Pakistan has pursued a similar objective by seeking to enhance its capabilities through acquisitions from countries like China and Türkiye (Shah, 2021; Aslan, 2022). The Russian S-400 has been a prominent subject of discussion for India, along with French Rafale aircraft and Israeli radars. Meanwhile, Pakistan has made substantial investments in its air power capacity, ranging from the Chinese PL15E to the Turkish UAVs. Despite their status as nuclear powers, the enhanced capabilities exhibited by these two countries were perceived within the broader context of modernizing deterrence, thereby contributing to the escalating security dilemma that culminated in the crisis (Srinivasan, 2025).

HOW THE CRISIS UNFOLDED AND INTENSIFIED

On April 22, 2025, the crisis escalated when gunmen opened fire on a tourist group visiting Pahalgam, a picturesque area in Indian-controlled Kashmir. The attack resulted in the deaths of 26 individuals, including 25 Indians and one Nepalese tourist. This attack constitutes the deadliest terrorist incident in the region since the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan escalated significantly following the incident, reaching levels of conflict not observed since the Kargil conflict in 1999. The fragile peace established under the 2021 ceasefire agreement was gradually deteriorating due to political transformations and a proliferation of militant activities. Since that time, neither Pakistan nor India has violated the ceasefire, yet the current round of hostilities has been characterized by an escalation in intensity.

The Kashmir Resistance Front (KRF), a relatively obscure entity, has asserted its authorship through online channels. The Indian authorities were expeditious in establishing a connection between the group and Lashkar-e-Tayyibah, a prominent militant organization based in Pakistan. However, the KRF subsequently retracted its statement, attributing the post to hackers. However, Indian officials dismissed this assertion, characterizing it as a potential pretext to deflect responsibility and augment Pakistani influence. India has openly accused Pakistani intelligence services of orchestrating the attack, an allegation that Pakistan has firmly denied. In response, India has pledged to pursue legal action against the perpetrators (Jamkhandikar, 2025).

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, India exhibited a prompt and robust response, deploying diplomatic and military signals of considerable strength. In response to a surge in national indignation, PM Narendra Modi declared that India would pursue terrorists regardless of their location. In a significant move with far-reaching regional consequences, the Indian government suspended the Indus Waters Treaty and downgraded diplomatic relations with Pakistan. This signals a major policy shift intended to increase pressure on its neighbour. In response, Pakistan closed its airspace to Indian flights and imposed trade restrictions, further straining bilateral relations. Amid mounting public pressure, PM Modi granted the military the authority to retaliate at their discretion, leading to a sharp escalation of the crisis. The Indus Waters Treaty, which has been in place since 1960, is crucial for ensuring the water security of both Kashmir and Pakistan. Disrupting the treaty poses serious risks to millions of people and could potentially trigger a large-scale humanitarian crisis (Ranjan, 2024).

As tensions along the Line of Control (LoC) escalated rapidly, both armies were placed on high alert and clashes flared. A significant development occurred on May 7, 2025, when India initiated Operation Sindoor, a series of missile and air strikes targeting selected areas in Pakistan and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. The strikes targeted nine locations, including areas near Muzaffarabad and Khyber Pahtunhva, which India claims are harboring militants. In an official statement released by the government of India, representatives underscored the strategic approach undertaken by the nation's military forces. They explained that, in order to minimize civilian casualties, the military had deliberately avoided targeting Pakistani military installations and instead focused its efforts on destroying terrorist infrastructure.

In response, Pakistan regarded these attacks as a deliberate act of war. The nation's response was justified, as its sovereignty had been violated and it had a legitimate right to respond. In the hours that followed, the Pakistani military responded. Pakistani forces engaged in shelling of Indian positions along the LoC, and on May 10, the Pakistan Air Force initiated Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos, which translates to "impenetrable trench." The strikes were directed at Indian military bases. PM Shehbaz Sharif denounced India's actions as brutal and asserted that they would not go unaddressed. Pakistani officials alleged that they had destroyed Indian aircraft, including drones. However, India did not provide any verification of these claims. The war was also taking place in the context of social media disinformation campaigns.

For the subsequent 72 hours, the border region was subjected to an escalation in levels of violence. The civilian population suffered the most significant losses as the exchange of artillery fire and airstrikes persisted at a high intensity. According to reports from Pakistan, 31 civilians were killed and 57 were wounded in attacks by India. According to recent reports, 15 civilians have been killed, and numerous others have sustained injuries, as a result of Pakistani shelling in India. The region along the Himalayan border has become a theater of war, as evidenced by images of devastated homes, smoking ruins, and frightened locals searching for survivors amid the rubble.

Despite the ongoing and intense hostilities along the LoC, both India and Pakistan were cognizant of the escalating danger. Secret diplomatic talks led to an important development on May 10. Following a direct phone conversation between senior military officials starting from both sides, India and Pakistan agreed to halt hostilities that evening. Pakistan's Foreign Minister shared the news with the public, highlighting the country's intention to maintain peaceful ties while protecting its national interests.

The crisis was averted through the coordinated efforts of key actors such as the US, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia. In the early months of his second term, President Donald Trump announced that Washington had led extended overnight negotiations, which successfully resulted in an urgent and comprehensive cessation of hostilities.

Although the cessation of hostilities marked the end of the most intense three-day India-Pakistan conflict in nearly three decades, the crisis was not yet resolved. Only a few hours after the agreement, both sides began trading accusations of violating the newly established ceasefire, casting doubt on the durability of the truce. The ongoing gunfire and drone activities in the border regions have come to the forefront as they show the fragility of the prevailing peace. Although the standoff fell short of becoming an officially declared war, many analysts concurred that its intensity and potential for escalation surpassed that of earlier confrontations.

INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Responses to the 2025 crisis have been heavily influenced by domestic political factors and dynamics in both India and Pakistan. Particularly during its second term in office, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has steadily built its political platform around themes of nationalism and a strong stance against Pakistan. In this sense, the main goals of Modi's first term, which ran from 2014 to 2019, were economic development and a conciliation strategy regarding the Kashmir dispute. But during his second term, this approach was significantly altered. The Modi government changed its previous accommodative approach in favor of a more assertive, majoritarian agenda in response to domestic economic difficulties and the emergence of Hindu nationalist sentiment.

In India's new hardening policy, the repeal of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, was a significant turning point. By essentially ending the region's autonomy, this action revoked Jammu and Kashmir's state-level constitution and placed it under direct federal supervision. A sizeable portion of the Indian populace and the BJP's nationalist base strongly supported the action, viewing it as a rejection of compromises to separatist groups and an affirmation of national sovereignty. Although it was approved at home, the militarization of the area, which included widespread detentions, restrictions, and a protracted communications blackout, led to international criticism of the decision. Human rights groups and foreign observers denounced these actions.

The ongoing political instability in Kashmir posed a persistent challenge to India's internal security and enabled Pakistan to garner increased international attention regarding the situation. Until 2025, India's political climate continued to reward a tough stance on national security. The BJP's electoral campaign, which was predicated on a robust foreign policy, particularly in the aftermath of the 2019 retaliatory Balakot airstrikes, emerged as a pivotal element of its electoral strategy (Kuttay & Majid, 2025). Analysts have observed that the nationalist and patriotic sentiment generated by these events has been used effectively by the party, often aided by a media landscape that mirrors government narratives. A substantial surge in approval for Modi's governance was evident, as evidenced by data derived from opinion polls, subsequent to the events of 2019.

By the time India proceeded to the 2024 general elections, the political incentive to demonstrate strength had already reached unprecedented levels. In this regard, the Pahalgam attack in April 2025 prompted immediate domestic pressure for a robust response. National news outlets and public discourse had heightened demands for retaliation, and political opponents were poised to criticize any indication of

inaction. Therefore, Modi's unequivocal statements were directed towards both domestic audiences and the Pakistani government. It is evident that national security has emerged as a pivotal electoral concern in India, a phenomenon that stands in contrast to the past when foreign policy exerted a comparatively negligible influence on the electorate. This dynamic has the potential to impose constraints on Indian leaders during times of crisis, thereby rendering de-escalation a politically hazardous undertaking (Vaishnav & Mallory, 2024).

In contrast, Pakistan's domestic political landscape has been marked by instability and the pervasive influence of the military establishment. From 2023 to 2024, Pakistan encountered profound economic difficulties, characterized by elevated inflation rates, mounting debt obligations, and political instability subsequent to the ouster of former PM Imran Khan in 2022. In late 2023, amid an escalating crackdown on media outlets and opposition figures, and with the national elections being postponed, the administration led by Shehbaz Sharif was replaced by an interim government. This environment led to the weakening of the civilian government and a marked increase in the military's influence, which had traditionally been responsible for security and foreign policy, particularly in relation to India and Kashmir. Concurrently, this shift has given rise to a discourse surrounding the military establishment's legitimacy.

A public statement about the importance of Kashmir to national identity was made by Pakistan Army Chief General Asim Munir in early 2025, comparing it to a vital national asset. In this regard, a number of analysts have contended that the Pakistani leadership may view the conflict with India as a unifying tool in response to domestic pressure. But others contend that, in terms of state capability, the nation's dire economic situation also acted as a significant deterrent to broader military escalation. Pakistan's strategic approach during the crisis was subsequently impacted by this contradiction. The leadership swiftly sought a ceasefire even as it openly denounced the Indian attacks and underlined the necessity of retaliation.

This delicate balance between strategic restraint and national pride was best illustrated by the remarks made by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar during the conflict. Widespread protests and patriotic rallies that demanded a forceful response were signs of the public's strong dissatisfaction in Pakistan. A careful analysis of the political and military leadership of Pakistan, however, points to a methodical and planned strategy. A conscious attempt was made to avoid harming India's civilian population or major cities, and the attacks were carefully directed towards military installations. This moderation and the quick approval of US-mediated negotiations point to a conscious attempt to prevent unchecked escalation. It is very likely that Pakistan's military leadership carefully considered the dangers of a full-scale conflict and decided to operate within predetermined parameters.

As evidenced by the numerous developments, identity politics and national narratives in India and Pakistan have played a critical role in shaping the Kashmir conflict and the 2025 crisis. The region of Kashmir is located at the intersection of two

divergent national ideologies (Tavares, 2008). For India, the region has been, until recently, conceptualized within a broadly secular national identity. However, Modi's Hindu nationalist discourse has progressively characterized the conflict as a struggle against terrorism and separatism supported by a hostile neighbor. This framing has supported a narrative of national unity in the face of external threats.

In contrast, in Pakistan, Kashmir's status as a homeland for Muslims has been pivotal in shaping the ideological underpinnings of the nation's established state. The Pakistani state has historically endorsed the narrative of Kashmiri Muslims seeking autonomy from Indian oppression (James & Özdamar, 2005). This narrative has not only bolstered local support for Pakistan's Kashmir policy but also reinforced national identity. Consequently, political leaders in both countries have found themselves constrained by these prevailing public narratives. It is a common interpretation that compromises on the Kashmir issue are regarded as a betrayal of national ideals.

Historically, Pakistani civilian leaders who have explored peace initiatives with India have encountered resistance from hardline political factions and the military establishment. In the aftermath of terrorist attacks, Indian leaders have encountered substantial criticism from the domestic population if they are perceived as displaying a tendency towards conciliation. This dynamic has contributed to a mutual security dilemma, in which each side is suspicious of the other's intentions and feels compelled to demonstrate strength. In this vein, the 2025 crisis exemplifies how nationalist rhetoric, which profoundly resonates with local constituents, can impede the capacity of political leaders to de-escalate during periods of conflict.

The internal security dynamics in Kashmir have been shown to influence the course of the crisis to the same extent as national politics. Since 2019, India has implemented stringent security measures in the region, including the deployment of substantial numbers of troops, extended curfews, and widespread arrests. Despite the stated objective of these policies to suppress militant activity, they have resulted in significant resentment among certain segments of the local population. Indeed, the occurrence of periodic attacks, as evidenced in Pahalgam (Kumar, 2024), suggests that a segment of the population persists in its endorsement of armed resistance.

Pakistan has frequently invoked these localized attacks as substantiation for the assertion that Kashmiris are in opposition to Indian rule. Indeed, reports of large-scale protests by Kashmiri Muslims against the Pahalgam massacre were used by Pakistani officials to emphasize that the attack was damaging to the Kashmiri cause and that local public opinion could influence the strategies of groups such as the Resistance Front. This intricate interplay between regional sentiment and interstate dynamics demonstrates that the Kashmir dispute cannot be regarded as a mere bilateral issue. It also appears to be intimately associated with the political rights and grievances of the Kashmiri people.

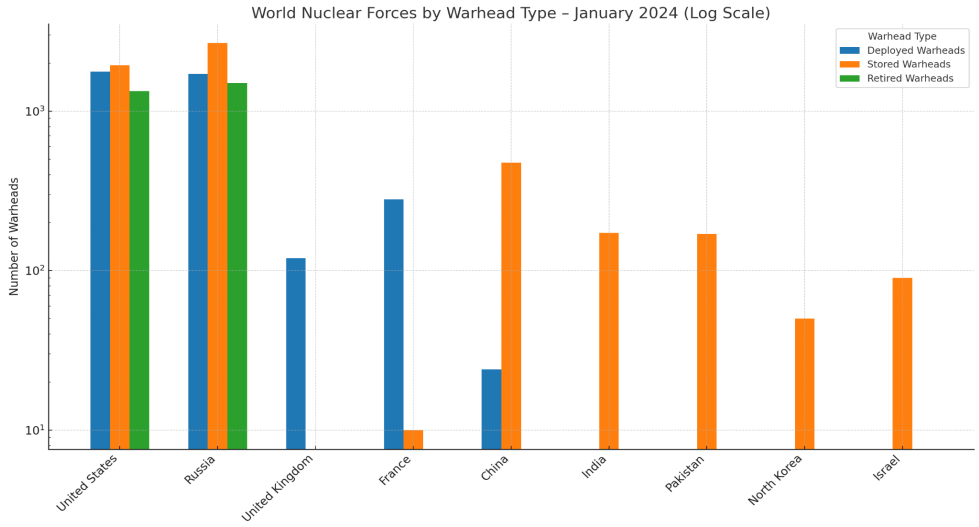
A comprehensive long-term solution must address these local factors in conjunction with the broader India-Pakistan relationship. This includes issues such as the potential restoration of India's political rights in Kashmir and Pakistan's management of proxy militant groups. The 2025 crisis demonstrates how domestic political incentives, including the BJP's nationalist position in India and Pakistan's political and economic instability, contributed to the outbreak of violence and shaped its boundaries. It is reasonable to hypothesize that these factors will play a decisive role in future conflicts.

MILITARY BALANCE AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The military capabilities and strategic doctrines of both nations have had a considerable impact on the trajectory of conflict between India and Pakistan (Al Jazeera, 2025b). Both countries possess the largest military forces in South Asia; however, the conventional equilibrium of power is not equal. India has demonstrated a considerable quantitative superiority in terms of military manpower, equipment, and defense expenditures. As of 2024, India's defense expenditure was approximately US$86 billion, placing it fifth globally in terms of defense spending. In contrast, Pakistan's military budget was approximately US$ 10.2 billion.

With regard to the composition of its armed forces, India maintains a combined military force of approximately 5.14 million individuals, encompassing active-duty personnel, reservists, and semi-military units. In comparison, Pakistan's corresponding figure is approximately 1.70 million. This asymmetric ratio is also evident in the equipment sector. India's military aviation fleet exceeds 2,200 aircraft, whereas Pakistan's is estimated to be approximately 1,400. Additionally, India possesses a main battle tank fleet of about 3,150, while Pakistan's is estimated at 1,839. Furthermore, India's navy possesses a significantly larger tonnage and is better equipped for offshore operations, while Pakistan's naval forces are primarily designed for coastal defense (Global Firepower, 2025).

Chart 1.
World Nuclear Forces by Warhead Type (January 2024) (SIPRI, 2024; redesigned)



The ramifications of this imbalance are substantial. In the event of a full-scale war, India's larger and more diverse military arsenal, including advanced fighter aircraft, modern naval platforms, and missile defense systems, is likely to challenge Pakistan's conventional defense capabilities. In response to this challenge, Pakistan has adopted asymmetric strategies, particularly the modernization of nuclear weapons, to counterbalance India's superiority (SIPRI, 2024). Furthermore, India has alleged that Pakistan has adopted the use of proxy militant groups.

This strategic environment gives rise to what is referred to in the extant literature as the "stability-instability paradox." While nuclear deterrence has been demonstrated to play a role in preventing large-scale wars by maintaining strategic stability, it has also been observed to enable smaller conflicts and provocative actions at lower thresholds. Following India and Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, the two nations have demonstrated an effort to avoid a full-scale war, though they have experienced numerous crises and limited conflicts. These include the Kargil conflict in 1999, the military stalemate in 2001-2002, intermittent border skirmishes in subsequent years, and airstrike exchanges in 2019 and 2025. It is important to note that all of these events transpired within the broader context of nuclear deterrence.

Conversely, the nuclear doctrines of Pakistan and India have been shown to influence military decision-making processes. The Republic of India has formally adopted a "No First Use" policy, thereby pledging to refrain from the use of nuclear weapons unless attacked first. The strategy outlined therein includes a commitment to substantial retaliation in the event of a nuclear attack. This doctrine aims to deter Pakistan from using nuclear weapons while preserving India's ability to conduct limited conventional operations without crossing the nuclear threshold.

In contrast, Pakistan has opted not to adhere to the No First Use policy. The doctrine stipulates that in the event of an existential threat, the nation reserves the right to initiate the first use of nuclear weapons (Wolfson & Dalnoki-Veress, 2022). This approach is encapsulated in the concept of "full spectrum deterrence," which encompasses the potential utilization of tactical nuclear armaments within the theater of war. In response, Pakistan has developed short-range nuclear-capable missile systems, such as the NASR (also known as Hatf 9), to serve this purpose.

The strategic equation created by this doctrinal difference is extremely delicate. Swift strikes, including limited armored operations in line with the "Cold Start Doctrine," are made possible by the nation's asymmetric conventional forces. Such moves, however, run the risk of inciting a tactical nuclear reaction from Pakistan, which would stop the advance of Indian forces. Pakistan aims to lessen its conventional disadvantage by lowering the bar for nuclear deployment in order to prevent significant Indian military assaults.

India's and Pakistan's nuclear doctrines were found to have a direct impact on their operational choices during the 2025 crisis. Targeting militant camps and avoiding Pakistani military installations, the Indian strikes were purposefully directed against non-state actors. This decision is most likely the result of a conscious attempt to respond to the Pahalgam attack without stirring up tensions. India acted within the limits known as Pakistan's nuclear red lines by limiting its military response to terrorist targets.

A similar justification served as the basis for Pakistan's subsequent countermeasures. By concentrating their offensives on Indian military installations in Jammu and Kashmir and the border areas, Pakistani forces adopted a targeted strategy as opposed to the traditional tactic of attacking central or southern India. There was some reciprocal restraint evident in the geographic concentration of hostilities within the Kashmir theater. The fact that neither side has mobilized for a full-scale war or escalated the conflict outside of this region is noteworthy. Notably, no attacks have been launched against the nation's infrastructure, strategic economic hubs, or major population centers.

Previous conflicts have established precedents that align with this pattern of behavior. For example, India performed its operations solely on the Indian side of the LoC during the Kargil conflict in 1999, using few tactical maneuvers at high altitudes, and avoided crossing into Pakistan. In the Balakot incident of 2019, India chose to target what it described as a terrorist facility rather than attack a Pakistani military installation. Pakistan responded by attacking Indian military points in Jammu and Kashmir instead of residential areas. The scope and nature of military operations that are allowed in times of crisis are limited by nuclear deterrence, as these rulings show.

The argument continues to emphasize, however, that although nuclear weapons can act as a deterrent to full-scale conflict, they do not completely remove the possibility of war. There is evidence, in fact, that terrorism-caused crises and limited conventional conflicts are growing more common and occasionally more audacious. Being the first recorded instance of direct conflict between the air forces of two nuclear-armed states, the 2019 exchange is significant. The addition of missile strikes to the 2025 crisis further intensified it.

These findings point to a changing strategic landscape where both nations are carefully adjusting their military postures in an effort to keep violence levels below thresholds that might otherwise lead to a wider conflict or nuclear escalation. This conduct can be described as "cliff politics" being practiced in the context of nuclear deterrence. This phenomenon creates new kinds of risk, such as the potential for poor judgment or misinterpretation of intentions.

Perception and misperception problems can contribute significantly to the escalation of tensions during crisis situations. Indeed, there are significant risks associated with the inherent uncertainties of crisis situations. A sudden and unexpected escalation of hostilities could be caused by an inadvertent attack on critical military facilities, like command headquarters or barracks. Additionally, in combat situations, the dependability of command and control systems may be compromised, raising the possibility of unapproved or incorrect action. Additionally, despite intentions to de-escalate, attempts by one side to convey restraint may not be correctly interpreted by the other, which could result in escalation.

The changing military balance between Pakistan and India is indicative of a larger modernization trend, although the breadth and depth of advancements have evolved unevenly. India has made significant strides in this area thanks to expanded economic resources and a variety of international defense alliances. As part of its modernization efforts, India has developed precision strike weapons like the BrahMos cruise missile and several long-range ballistic missile platforms, as well as deployed multi-layered air defense systems like the Russian S-400 Triumf. Significant improvements in India's operational intelligence and targeting capabilities have resulted from advancements in surveillance technology made possible by satellites and unmanned aerial systems.

Pakistan's limited resources have led it to seek specific upgrades and rely largely on strategic assistance from China and Türkiye. Chinese J-10CE multirole fighter jets will be introduced between 2022 and 2023, and Turkish armed drones will be purchased. These are noteworthy developments. The fact that Pakistan continues to invest in its missile arsenal shows how committed it is to updating its military. China's technological assistance as well as domestic efforts are part of this initiative's multifaceted strategy. As Pakistan's top defense partner, Beijing continues to support the country's missile programs, nuclear infrastructure, and submarine and surface fleet development.

This strategic alliance has the potential to mitigate India's qualitative superiority to a certain extent. Concurrently, India stands to benefit from enhanced collaboration with Western states. The US has shared geospatial and satellite intelligence under the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), and France has supplied India with Rafale fighter jets. These alignments are indicative of the integration of South Asia's military dynamics into a broader context of great power competition. China plays a balancing role for Pakistan, while India is supported by a variety of international partners, including the US, France, Israel, and, to a limited extent, Russia (Clary, 2025).

Nevertheless, the discourse surrounding Pakistan's triumph and India's defeat during the period of heightened tensions, particularly with regard to airstrikes, warrants meticulous examination. The initiation of airstrikes by India evokes parallels with the experiences of 2016 and 2019. Following the crisis, India faced significant criticism for the perceived inadequacy of its operations. While it possessed a substantial air power capacity, it exhibited deficiencies in inter-system cohesion and integration. In the context of the ongoing crisis, reports indicating that Pakistan has shot down several aircraft belonging to rival nations in response to India's orchestration of air-to-air strikes have once again ignited the ongoing debate. The acquisition of Rafale aircraft from France, Spyder radars from Israel, and S-400 missiles from Russia by India has raised concerns regarding the nation's capacity for cohesion and integration. Conversely, Pakistan, which modernized its air force with the support of Türkiye and China, has achieved success in developing an integrated system supported by its own domestic production. Despite India's assertions regarding doctrine change and disinformation, the prevailing perspective on military strategy is predominantly focused on Pakistan's success and India's failure.

On the other hand, the nuclear balance between Pakistan and India is getting closer to parity. By 2025, both countries are expected to have between 160 and 170 nuclear warheads each. These organizations continue to create new delivery systems and produce fissile material. As part of its efforts to deter China, India has been focusing on developing its nuclear triad, with a focus on long-range missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Alternatively Pakistan has placed a higher priority on system penetration and survivability. The deployment of ground mobile launchers and the Ababeel missile, which can carry multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs), are examples of developments that point to a strategy intended to maintain credible deterrence under duress.

The arms race has accelerated as a result of this dynamic. Countermeasures are frequently prompted by technological advancements made by one party. The development of India's missile defense systems, for example, might lead Pakistan to increase its warhead stockpiles or diversify its delivery methods, which might include future sea-based capabilities. In addition to increasing the likelihood of making a mistake during times of crisis, this ongoing reciprocal dynamic adds complexity to the regional deterrence framework.

Among the many issues raised, the 2025 conflict was a sobering reminder. Even in the absence of nuclear weapons, the escalation has raised serious concerns from international observers. It has been reported that during the fighting, Pakistan's National Command Authority was put together. Pakistani authorities have refuted these claims, though. Still, the incident has sparked a renewed conversation among global experts about nuclear winter scenarios and the wider implications of South Asian nuclear exchanges.

While India continues to have a conventional military advantage on paper, Pakistan's nuclear weapons and asymmetric tactics prevent India from taking full advantage of this advantage. For more than 20 years, the nuclear deterrence strategy has helped to keep major conflicts from breaking out. On the other hand, it may also lead to a pattern of brief disputes that could escalate over time. External powers like the US and its allies, who back China and India while siding with Pakistan, further complicate the strategic environment. As the events of 2025 demonstrate, controlling escalation in these situations is still a very delicate task that can have disastrous results.

RESPONSES AND ROLES OF INTERNATIONAL POWERS

The international community responded quickly and deeply to the India-Pakistan crisis of 2025, primarily because of the immediate threat of nuclear war in South Asia. The international community, which includes the UN, powerful nations, regional organizations, and significant individual nations like Türkiye, has responded by calling for de-escalation and moderation.

An appeal for military restraint was made directly by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who expressed deep concern. He emphasized how the world can not tolerate a military conflict between India and Pakistan. At Pakistan's request, the UN Security Council held private talks on May 5, 2025, with China's backing. Even though there was no official resolution as a result of these consultations, they demonstrated how urgently the world community took the issue (Security Council Report, 2025). Despite this, the UN has come under heavy fire for allegedly failing to handle the situation at hand. India has long viewed the Kashmir issue as an "internal matter," and this dynamic is thought to be a result of that historical perspective. India's long-standing belief that direct communication with Pakistan is the only way to resolve the matter only serves to strengthen this position.

Despite India's public remarks that seemed to go against the US's stance, the US was instrumental in helping to establish the ceasefire agreement, which officially went into effect on May 10. By congratulating both nations and highlighting the success of the behind-the-scenes negotiations, President Donald Trump acknowledged the development on social media. The US has been participating in private talks while remaining neutral in public and refraining from making any accusations. US officials warned India against launching any more military offensives and urged Pakistan to respond with moderation. Washington's strategic partnership with India and its ongoing interest in preserving collaboration with Pakistan on counterterrorism and regional security matters, including those pertaining to Afghanis, were strengthened by these measures. China voiced a moderate position in favor of Pakistan and against escalation; while expressing concerns about regional stability, it expressed regret over India\'s military operations, reiterated its opposition to terrorism, but did not explicitly support or endorse Pakistan for its counterattacks.

Reports indicate that Chinese envoys have maintained contacts with leaders in both New Delhi and Islamabad, thereby reinforcing the message that further escalation is against the interests of all parties involved (Jamal, 2025). While China has refrained from unilaterally pressuring Pakistan to de-escalate tensions, it has supported informal talks at the UN and worked to prevent the passage of any statement criticizing Pakistan.

This diplomatic behavior is a prime example of China's changing involvement in South Asian crises. With its increasing engagement in the area, China is now an active stakeholder rather than merely a passive observer. A trilateral dynamic is gradually replacing the bilateral India-Pakistan conflict due to the involvement of Chinese-held territory in the Kashmir dispute and the larger geopolitical rivalry between China and India. The complicated dynamic that China's presence in the area creates makes it more difficult to resolve conflicts and calls for a more sophisticated strategic approach to regional security.

Russia, India's longtime defense ally and a nation that has always had friendly ties with Pakistan, has voiced serious concerns about the 2025 crisis. In response to the growing tensions, the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed "grave concern" and urged peaceful dispute resolution. Russia has offered to act as a mediator, citing its involvement in the Tashkent Agreement of 1965. Nevertheless, this proposal has not been formally accepted by Pakistan or India.

In an official statement, the Russian government expressed its condemnation of all forms of terrorism. Concurrently, it issued a warning to India regarding the violation of Pakistani sovereignty. This balanced approach was presumably designed to preserve Russia's long-standing defense relationship with India, one of the largest purchasers of Russian arms, and to avoid antagonizing Pakistan or China. In 2025, Russia persisted in grappling with the repercussions of its military intervention in Ukraine, while concurrently endeavoring to preserve its standing in the global diplomatic landscape. A successful mediation effort in South Asia could have been a geopolitical gain. While the US spearheaded the ceasefire initiative, Russia maintained a diplomatic presence, including during early May negotiations between President Vladimir Putin and the leaders of India and Pakistan (Al Jazeera, 2025a).

In response, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), along with multiple Muslim-majority states, voiced strong support for Pakistan's stance. The OIC, which maintains a Liaison Group in Jammu and Kashmir, convened an emergency session and issued a statement condemning the civilian casualties and calling on India to respect international law. Türkiye played a leading role in this response. The Turkish government has issued a statement urging both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and has warned of the potential for a broader conflict. The Turkish Foreign Ministry has expressed a degree of skepticism regarding India's attribution of culpability, a position that aligns with Pakistan's call for an international investigation into the April 22 attack.

This answer is consistent with Türkiye's steadfast backing of Pakistan on Kashmir. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed concerns about Kashmir at international forums and denounced Indian policies in the region, often calling for mediation but without success from India, which has maintained its position. Malaysia and Iran have also come out strongly for Pakistan. The Malaysian PM

issued a statement condemning India, as did the Iranian Foreign Ministry, urging both sides to refrain from further escalation and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Kashmir.

However the broader Islamic world shows divisions over this issue. By contrast, the Gulf Arab countries, which have close economic and strategic ties with India, have taken a more neutral stance. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been a voice of restraint in this respect, suggesting that dialogue should be facilitated without criticising India. Saudi Arabia has argued for a comprehensive diplomatic solution, avoiding any blame game. The hypothesis that this divergence reflects pragmatic considerations is subject to dispute. While Türkiye, Malaysia, and Iran emphasize ideological and humanitarian solidarity with Pakistan, the Gulf states may prefer to focus on their growing ties with India. This trend contributed to Pakistan's recent diplomatic outreach to countries like Türkiye and Malaysia, which Islamabad perceived as insufficient in response to the Gulf crisis.

Other Western actors, including the European Union (EU), have also released statements throughout the crisis (Council of the European Union, 2025). Given the UK's historical ties to South Asia and the sizeable diaspora populations from Pakistan and India, the country expressed grave concern. David Lammy, the British Foreign Secretary, has supported direct communication between India and Pakistan and called for moderation (UK Government, 2025). The EU expressed similar views and stated that it was prepared to back peace efforts via the UN.

An important defense ally of India, France denounced terrorism and tacitly endorsed India's explanation for the attacks (France in the United Kingdom, 2025). However, the declaration also urged New Delhi to stop its military actions. Germany, on the other hand, emphasized the significance of de-escalation. According to the US' position on the issue, a number of countries, including Canada, Australia, and Japan, showed their support in different ways. Among these statements of support were calls for moderation from all parties and support for the ceasefire procedure. According to reports, these governments participated in the international effort to avert future hostilities and expressed their opinions diplomatically.

The information at hand suggests that diplomatic pressure and international mediation played a key role in settling the India-Pakistan conflict in 2025. US, China, and Russia are among the major powers whose coordinated efforts have been successful in convincing both sides to defuse their conflicts. These nations had one goal in mind, despite the obvious conflict between their strategic interests: to keep India and Pakistan from going to war, especially given the possibility of nuclear war. Through both official and covert means, each power influenced either India, Pakistan, or both.

More than 30 nations reportedly contributed to the ceasefire's implementation. Reports state that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates acted as go-betweens, allowing Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Pakistani leadership to communicate.

In the aftermath of the cessation of hostilities, international involvement persisted. In point of fact, the US and the People's Republic of China have been reported to have encouraged the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to engage in informal diplomatic dialogues on the margins of multilateral meetings. These measures were presented as confidence-building initiatives. Despite India's historical stance against third-party mediation in the Kashmir dispute, its openness to accepting assistance from the US to conclude the 2025 hostilities was interpreted as a pragmatic shift in policy. In accordance with its historical approach, Pakistan has endeavored to redirect the focus toward the Kashmir dispute by leveraging international sympathy. This has prompted renewed discourse regarding potential fact-finding missions to Kashmir in prominent international forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council and the OIC (Orakzai, 2010; Aydoğan Ağlarcı, 2020). The Indian government has expressed strong opposition to these initiatives, citing concerns regarding sovereignty and the potential for foreign interference.

The crisis has also highlighted the evolution of geopolitical dynamics. The strategic partnership between the US and India has undergone certain adjustments, partly due to the necessity of preserving a functional relationship with Pakistan to avert a more profound alignment with China. Concurrently, China's escalating influence in South Asia underscores the triangular character of future crises. The stability of the region is now inextricably linked to broader global power rivalries (Krajick, 2020). In this regard, Kashmir's strategic importance is further enhanced by its location on China's Belt and Road Initiative corridors and its proximity to the US Indo-Pacific sphere of interest.

While the 2025 crisis was characterized by a bilateral approach in its immediate implementation, its resolution was marked by a multilateral process, with global ramifications. The pervasive international reaction, encompassing entities such as the UN and prominent capital cities like Washington and Ankara, underscored the notion that a future confrontation between India and Pakistan would not merely represent a regional concern but rather a grave international emergency. The global relief that ensued following the cessation of hostilities was substantial; however, it was accompanied by a sobering recognition. The capacity of the international system to manage such crises in a reactive manner is limited. This underscores the necessity for proactive conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy to be a pivotal component in future policy deliberations.

MEDIA, PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT AND DISINFORMATION

The emergence of the 'Post-Truth Era' has served to underscore the mounting significance of accurate information, as emotion-driven politics and the dissemination of disinformation have become increasingly prevalent (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Alongside the crisis's diplomatic and military aspects, there was a fierce information war. To influence both local and foreign audiences, governments and media organizations in Pakistan and India have been actively involved in managing public perception. Propaganda, disinformation, and information were strategically employed in these endeavors, underscoring the crucial part that media and communication technologies currently play in determining contemporary conflicts.

A strong nationalist tone characterized the media landscape in India during the crisis. It is clear that the government's version of events was greatly influenced by well-known Indian television news channels, which have a wide audience among the local population. The way the April 22 Pahalgam attack was covered was notable for its depiction of the event as a purposeful act of terrorism supported by Pakistan. On the other hand, India's subsequent retaliatory attacks were portrayed as both justified and successful. Indian news outlets covered the war in great detail, often praising the Indian Air Force and claiming that important militant infrastructure had been destroyed. Many of these reports were not supported by independent confirmation.

Narratives served several purposes. On the home front, they improved public spirits and strengthened the government's crisis management strategy. The Indian government's strategic narrative, which portrayed military escalation as an act of force and subsequent de-escalation as a strategic constraint, worked well for controlling public expectations without caving in to outside pressure.

During times of national emergency, similar tactics were used in Pakistan, but in a more centralized and state-influenced media landscape. Both Pakistani newspapers and television networks consistently denounced India's actions and highlighted how successful Pakistan's military response was. The story was heavily influenced by the Pakistani military's media branch, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR). The ISPR allegedly shared visual materials, such as pictures and videos, on social media sites like Twitter (X) that showed Pakistani air defense operations and Indian missile remnants.

According to the Pakistani narrative, the country reacted forcefully, albeit grudgingly, as a defensive actor. Public statements emphasized alleged successes, such as the downing of an Indian plane. These claims, however, were not independently verified.

This strategy was meant to send a message of responsibility and moderation to the international community while assuring the local populace that Pakistan is capable of defending itself.

Concurrently, Pakistani leaders made media appearances targeting foreign audiences. President Arif Alvi granted interviews to international media outlets, emphasizing Pakistan's inclination toward peaceful resolution and dialogue. The dissemination of images depicting injured civilians in Kashmir was a deliberate strategy aimed at eliciting international sympathy and portraying Pakistan as a victim of Indian aggression.

Essentially, both governments utilized the media as a crucial element of their strategic goals throughout the crisis. Information warfare has become a crucial area of rivalry, highlighting the growing importance of narrative control in conflict situations that impact public opinion, national spirit, and global perception.

During the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, disinformation and rumor propagation were prevalent on social media. As in previous India-Pakistan conflicts, users in both countries circulated fake or misleading images and videos. Some of these were video game footage that had been erroneously identified as downed Pakistani warplanes, while others included footage from unrelated conflicts in Syria or Palestine that had been falsely labeled as evidence of destruction in Kashmir.

It is evident that both state and non-state actors proactively engaged in the dissemination of information that aligned with their preferred narratives. Analysts have identified coordinated efforts by so-called "troll armies," networks of social media accounts that promote hashtags and messages supporting India or Pakistan. A content analysis of the most prevalent hashtags reveals that #BalakotPart2, which Indian users have employed to allude to the perceived continuation of the 2019 airstrikes, and #IndiaAttacks, which Pakistani users have utilized to emphasize Indian military actions, have been disseminated alongside a considerable number of misleading or unverified posts.

Government officials on both sides employed social media as a tool for real-time impact. Pakistan's Foreign Minister published a series of statements that integrated appeals for peace with allegations against India. Concurrently, Indian government officials lauded the armed forces and reiterated allegations that Pakistan sponsors terrorism. This intense flow of competing narratives engendered an information environment in which it became extremely difficult for neutral observers to distinguish truth from propaganda.

In response to the crisis, both governments implemented local information control measures. In India, the practice of journalism in conflict zones was subject to stringent regulations. The Kashmir region has experienced intermittent internet outages, a recurrent method employed by Indian authorities to contain unrest and

suppress the dissemination of potentially subversive content. Restrictions were imposed on foreign journalists, prohibiting them from accessing the frontline or affected areas. Consequently, a significant portion of the international media's understanding was derived from state-sanctioned sources or news from national networks that aligned with the official narrative.

In a similar manner, Pakistan exercised control over the dissemination of information. The organization orchestrated a guided visit for diplomats and journalists to select attack sites, with the objective of demonstrating that Indian airstrikes targeted civilian areas, including a religious school and forested regions, rather than militant infrastructure. This was a deliberate effort to undermine India's justification for the strikes and portray Pakistan as the aggrieved party. These media management tactics bear resemblance to those employed during previous crises, such as the 2019 Balakot incident, when Pakistan expeditiously escorted journalists to the site of the attack, thereby countering India's assertions of substantial damage.

Psychological operations were also executed during the conflict. A notable incident was the alleged cyber attack on Indian television broadcasts. According to reports, text messages that were critical of PM Modi were transmitted over the airwaves. Some observers speculated that the transmission may have been the result of the actions of Pakistani hackers (BBC, 2021). Despite the attempts by Indian officials to minimize the significance of the breach, the incident is indicative of the increasingly prevalent role of cyber warfare in contemporary conflicts.

In contrast, unconfirmed reports suggesting that Pakistan has deployed tactical nuclear weapons in proximity to the front lines have circulated on Indian social media. The dissemination of these reports may be intended to elicit public anxiety within Pakistan or to exert pressure on international actors by suggesting that the situation is rapidly approaching a nuclear threshold. The propagation of such disinformation can have grave strategic ramifications. In the event that a government erroneously interprets such reports as credible, it has the potential to elevate the level of military alert, which could, in turn, result in a reciprocal escalation from the adversary.

The information warfare that transpired during the 2025 crisis has had a profound impact on public perception, influencing strategic messaging and introducing novel risks. While narrative dominance can promote internal cohesion, it has the potential to mislead both the public and decision-makers, thus increasing the danger of miscalculation in volatile situations.

In the context of the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, the management of perceptions within the international community emerged as a pivotal element. The Indian

government has characterized its military operations as a counterterrorism strategy. As indicated by diplomatic communication, Operation Sindoor (Drury, 2025) was a preemptive action that was consistent with global norms concerning the attack on terrorist sanctuaries that were in place in the post-9/11 era. In the wake of the Pahalgam attack, Indian diplomats conveyed to their foreign counterparts that entities such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyibah, designated by the UN and purportedly implicated in the attack, have left New Delhi with limited recourse. This narrative was disseminated in certain Western media outlets, with headlines characterizing the operation as "India strikes terrorist camps."

In response, Pakistan centered its approach on the humanitarian aspect of the situation and the long-standing international legal disputes concerning Kashmir. The diplomats in question published opinion pieces and appeared on international networks (Jan & Ahmed, 2022). The purpose of these actions was to highlight UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir and alleged human rights violations by Indian forces (Akhtar, 2023). During closed-door Security Council consultations, Pakistan's ambassador to the UN delivered an emotional speech, during which he juxtaposed images of Pahalgam victims with images of Kashmiri civilians killed by Indian shelling. In his attempts to depict Pakistan, he endeavored to portray the nation as both a victim of aggression and a responsible actor advocating peace.

Domestically, both governments effectively managed public sentiment through the strategic dissemination of information. The Indian media demonstrated a notable reluctance to report on Indian military setbacks or civilians harmed by Pakistani shelling. Similarly, Pakistani media outlets have been accused of downplaying the severity of the crisis and the number of casualties in regions such as Muzaffarabad following Indian missile strikes. This meticulously curated discourse was designed to bolster morale and fortify national cohesion.

The depiction of the opposition was similarly influenced by strategic objectives. It is evident that Indian media outlets frequently employ disparaging terminology when referring to Pakistan's leaders, often depicting them as supporters of terrorism. Conversely, Pakistani media outlets have characterized the Indian government in ideological terms, frequently referencing PM Modi's past to challenge the moral legitimacy of Indian policy. This rhetorical polarization led to an exacerbation of social divisions and a subsequent hindrance to the potential for reconciliation.

A notable instance of disinformation was the propagation of false reports suggesting that Pakistan had lost a fighter pilot captured by Indian forces. This reference was in fact a misrepresentation of an actual incident involving an Indian pilot in 2019. Despite the subsequent debunking of the rumor, it ignited a significant degree of media speculation and public debate within India. This episode demonstrates the capacity of historical memory to amplify the impact of disinformation, even in the absence of a factual foundation.

Historically, such miscommunication has influenced crisis dynamics. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, the dissemination of misinformation by Pakistan led to strategic miscalculations. In 2025, despite the accelerated exchange of information, the fact-checking efforts of prominent global media outlets, including the BBC, Reuters, and Al Jazeera, played a pivotal role in mitigating the spread of misinformation. International fact-checkers played an active role in identifying and correcting mislabeled content; however, these corrections often fell short of the original disinformation.

It is evident that, in the context of contemporary India-Pakistan conflicts, media and information warfare have emerged as pivotal elements, occupying a central role in the broader geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century. In contrast to the earlier conflicts, which were dominated by state-controlled broadcasters and print media, more recent crises have involved real-time, unregulated dissemination through digital platforms. The 2025 conflict underscored the strategic significance of information control, which is now regarded as crucial as tactical military gains.

In the context of the ongoing conflict, both parties have endeavored to maintain a psychological advantage, instill confidence in their respective populations, and garner international support. However, this approach carries the potential to exacerbate public animosity and amplify the unpredictability of future crises. The dissemination of misinformation has the potential to not only distort public perception but also to mislead policymakers and potentially lead to an escalation based on false assumptions.

A salient benefit of the 2025 crisis was the resilience of official military communication channels, which maintained operational capacity during the event. The Directors General of Military Operations of the two countries are reported to have maintained communication, enabling direct elucidation of rumours that could potentially escalate, including those pertaining to troop movements or nuclear alert status.

In the future, institutional mechanisms to mitigate the effects of disinformation can serve as meaningful confidence-building measures. These accords may encompass bilateral agreements aimed at safeguarding media facilities during times of crisis or frameworks for the joint verification of events. However, in the context of the prevailing geopolitical dynamics, the weaponization of the media persists as a pervasive challenge, frequently resulting in the distortion of truth in the context of the ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan.

CONFLICT SCENARIOS AND STRATEGIC FORECASTS

The 2025 India–Pakistan crisis, while ultimately contained, demonstrated both the destructive potential of renewed conflict and the enduring effectiveness of deterrence mechanisms. In the future, the course of bilateral relations and the Kashmir dispute may be influenced by a number of factors, including shifts in the regional balance of power, particularly the roles of China, the US, and broader international dynamics, as well as domestic political developments within both countries (Ünlü, 2022). The following five key scenarios are outlined in order to explore possible directions for future developments, with reference to the historical context and lessons from the 2025 crisis and subsequent ceasefire.

Scenario 1: Recurring Crises and Risk of Major War

This pessimistic yet reasonable scenario entails a sequence of recurrent confrontations, with each occurrence potentially leading to uncontrolled escalation. The occurrence of militant attacks, perpetrated by entities such as Pakistan-based groups or indigenous Kashmiri actors (Jones, 2008), remains an intermittent phenomenon. Each major incident is met with Indian retaliatory measures, including sustained air strikes or limited attacks along the LoC, which may exceed the scope of previous operations.

In response to these actions, Pakistan has initiated a military response aimed at safeguarding its national reputation, thereby entering a spiral of conventional warfare. In the face of mounting domestic pressure or miscalculation, both parties may perceive de-escalation as politically or strategically unfeasible. In such a context, the possibility of a full-scale war occurring within the next decade is a distinct possibility.

The nuclear dimension, in particular, carries with it a significant degree of risk. In the event that Indian forces pose a threat to critical Pakistani military or population centers, Islamabad may contemplate the use of tactical nuclear weapons, such as a demonstration strike or the deployment of a low-yield weapon within its territory. India's declared policy of massive retaliation suggests that any Pakistani nuclear

use could trigger a large-scale Indian response. The potential consequences of a nuclear exchange, even if it were to be confined to 50 to 100 warheads, could be substantial. It could result in a significant loss of life and a substantial environmental catastrophe. Under the findings of scientific models, it is hypothesized that such an exchange could produce global climate impacts, including a so-called "nuclear winter" and mass famine.

The 2025 crisis has brought such discussions to the forefront, once again focusing on the potential planetary consequences of a regional nuclear conflict. In the absence of dialogue, the continuation of bilateral hostility engenders a state of heightened vulnerability to crisis escalation, which carries the potential to culminate in catastrophe. A simultaneous India-China conflict or a breakdown of US-China cooperation during a future crisis could severely impede conflict management. Consequently, this scenario signifies a perpetuation of prevailing tensions, exacerbated by nationalism and an unregulated arms race.

Scenario 2: Prolonged Stalemate-Cold Peace, Cold War

In this scenario, India and Pakistan avoid open war but remain locked in a deep strategic rivalry. Active negotiations over Kashmir or other disputes remain stalled. LoC persists as a zone of intermittent military operations, encompassing sniper skirmishes and tactical provocations. However, both parties exercise caution to avoid large-scale confrontations.

This "cold peace" is predicated on the principles of mutual deterrence and ad hoc international mediation. There is a lack of consensus or willingness to compromise on either side, yet both parties acknowledge the significant financial implications of escalation. India, preoccupied with contending with China and projecting itself as a global power, has relegated interaction with Pakistan to a secondary status. Pakistan is regarded as a regional hindrance that must be contained. Cognizant of its historical disadvantage, Pakistan is fortifying its strategic alliance with China and placing considerable reliance on its nuclear deterrent to ensure its position.

This scenario posits a delicate equilibrium wherein active hostilities are eschewed, while meaningful steps towards peace or disarmament remain elusive. The Kashmir region continues to be characterized by a pervasive military presence, a consequence of ongoing insurgency and counterinsurgency operations. The civilian population continues to bear the brunt of the unrest, and regional cooperation is hampered by persistent hostility.

In this scenario, international actors adopt a reactive stance, addressing each emerging crisis without implementing a comprehensive resolution framework. The current state of affairs bears a striking resemblance to the post-2002 era, which was characterized by strained coexistence and missed opportunities for economic

and strategic cooperation. This scenario is characterized by chronic instability, significant military expenditures, and persistent human costs, while circumventing the occurrence of a sudden catastrophe (Kuszewska, 2022).

Scenario 3: Gradual Détente and Conflict Management

This more optimistic scenario posits that India and Pakistan will engage in incremental measures to de-escalate tensions and forestall future crises, even in the absence of a definitive resolution to the Kashmir dispute. This scenario is predicated on the principles of practical crisis management, confidence-building, and the consensus that protracted hostilities are economically and politically costly.

Preliminary measures may encompass the enhancement of military communication protocols. A potential avenue for further collaboration between the two nations could involve the enhancement of the existing Directors General of Military Operations hotline mechanism or the establishment of supplementary communication channels between their respective air forces. The implementation of civilian crisis communication lines between leadership offices has the potential to mitigate misperceptions during emergency situations. Additionally, the two parties could choose to reaffirm the 2003 ceasefire agreement along the LoC, which had been relatively effective between 2021 and 2025, and agree to refrain from targeting critical infrastructure.

The reactivation of confidence-building measures (CBMs) is a potential course of action. These could include routine meetings between sectoral military commanders, the revival of dormant SAARC security talks, and formal agreements to avoid the deployment of high-risk assets near sensitive border areas. While these measures may not fully resolve the underlying disagreements, they could potentially reduce tensions and create a more conducive environment for diplomatic negotiations.

Changes in domestic political leadership or calculations could serve as important catalysts. A future Indian administration, whether after the current one or a recalibrated version of the present government, may undertake a reevaluation of its engagement strategies. In Pakistan, the establishment of a more stable political structure, accompanied by the consolidation of a strengthened civilian government, has the potential to unveil novel avenues for dialogue. The economic dimension has the potential to serve as a significant catalyst. Confronted by the prolonged economic crisis, Pakistan may seek to gain access to Indian markets, while Indian businesses may view trade normalization favorably, as it would yield mutual benefits.

These developments have the potential to result in clandestine back-channel negotiations. It is possible that a framework could emerge in which Pakistan takes verifiable action against anti-India militants, and in return, India eases trade restrictions and engages in quiet discussions on enhanced Kashmir autonomy or governance reforms. This approach is predicated on the gradual thawing of relations, rather than an immediate resolution.

The potential for third-party facilitation to play a constructive role is also a point of consideration. The UAE and Saudi Arabia previously engaged in back-channel diplomacy, which contributed to the temporary renewal of the LoC ceasefire in 2021. A similar role can be envisioned for the future. It is also conceivable that China and the US could identify potential areas of coordination. Both powers are endeavoring to avert a South Asian war. China could put pressure on Pakistan to stop its proxy activities, while the US could encourage India to be more flexible diplomatically.

This trajectory may, with the passage of time, bear resemblance to the post-1962 India-China relationship, characterized by an enduring territorial dispute that is managed through diplomatic channels and practical arrangements. While the attainment of full normalization remains a considerable time horizon, the aforementioned scenario would engender a reduction in violence and a more predictable regional environment, which would ultimately benefit the civilian population on both sides of the LoC.

Scenario 4: Toward a Comprehensive Settlement

This scenario, while currently remote, anticipates a long-term resolution to the India-Pakistan conflict through the sustained implementation of diplomatic innovation and political boldness. Achieving such an outcome would require a substantial transformation in strategic calculations and domestic political environments, as well as extraordinary leadership prepared to assume high-stakes risks for peace.

A notable precedent is evident in the substantial progress achieved during the back-channel negotiations between Musharraf and Manmohan Singh between 2004 and 2007. According to reports, the framework in question achieved a consensus on several fundamental principles. The LoC must be rendered functionally irrelevant by allowing free movement across it. Additionally, both sides of Kashmir must be granted significant self-government rights, and joint oversight mechanisms involving both countries must be established.

The development of a revitalized or updated version of this model could serve as a foundational framework. In the context of such an arrangement, Pakistan would be expected to permanently renounce its support for militant activities and reduce its military presence in the region of Jammu and Kashmir under its administration. In response, India has the potential to reinstate the state status and partial autonomy previously enjoyed by Jammu and Kashmir, release political prisoners, and support the establishment of institutions along the LoC to foster cooperation.

It is posited that, over time, these steps could result in a soft formalization of the LoC as a border. This constitutes a mutual understanding: Pakistan has come to the realization that it is unlikely to achieve victory in the Kashmir Valley, and India acknowledges the impracticality of retaking Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The emphasis would shift towards enhancing governance and living conditions for Kashmiris on both sides of the divide.

The involvement of international actors as observers or economic supporters, if not as official mediators, could fortify confidence in the process. India will probably oppose external forms of mediation; however, international support could manifest in the form of development assistance, investment guarantees, or monitoring mechanisms. Institutions such as the UN, the EU, or the World Bank have the potential to serve a facilitating role.

A comprehensive agreement would also encompass the resolution of other unresolved bilateral disputes. These could include the demilitarization of the Siachen Glacier, the demarcation of the Sir Creek maritime boundary, and the establishment of new protocols for reducing nuclear risk. These measures may encompass a mutual test ban, missile notification mechanisms, or no-deployment zones.

This solution has the potential to lay the foundation for more extensive regional integration. A trade and transit corridor linking India to Afghanistan via Pakistan, historically hampered by bilateral tensions, could become viable. The enhancement of economic cooperation could also encompass the establishment of a linkage between the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and India's North-South Transport Corridor. The realization of this objective would necessitate India's strategic engagement, with the potential to establish an economic corridor that would connect Central, South, and East Asia.

The provision of incentives by great powers can serve as a catalyst for such cooperation. The US and the EU have the potential to offer trade preferences or development aid packages. It is within the realm of possibility that China could assume the role of a strategic stakeholder, thereby fostering a collaborative environment rather than one characterized by competition.

While this scenario may appear improbable within the confines of the present circumstances, historical precedent indicates that significant geopolitical transformations can occur with surprising rapidity. In the 2030s, an intergenerational leadership transition involving leaders less burdened by the legacy of past wars could accelerate this transformation. The realization of a comprehensive peace settlement would confer substantial benefits on more than 1.5 billion people, redirecting resources from conflict to development. Such a settlement would also mark the onset of a new era of regional stability.

Scenario 5: External Shocks and Strategic Realignments

This scenario explores the potential for external factors, operating beyond the confines of the India-Pakistan bilateral framework, to induce substantial shifts in regional dynamics. Rather than being the result of direct initiatives by either state, realignment could be triggered by changing global conditions, regional crises, or internal leadership transitions.

A deterioration in Sino-Indian relations exemplifies one such potential outcome. In the event of an escalation in tensions leading to open hostilities, India may consider the strategic imperative of stabilizing or neutralizing the western front to avert a two-front conflict (Narayanan & Ladwig, 2025). This strategic readjustment could entail a clandestine diplomatic initiative with Pakistan, potentially facilitated by the US or another impartial entity. The objective would be to ensure Pakistan's neutrality or, at the very least, de-escalation in exchange for economic or strategic concessions. Historical precedent exists in the form of Pakistan's neutrality during the 1962 Sino-Indian War. However, Indian strategic planners remained concerned about containment.

Conversely, the enhancement of diplomatic and trade relations between China and India could potentially trigger a strategic marginalization concern for Pakistan. In this geopolitical context, Islamabad may seek to enhance its relations with New Delhi in order to maintain its regional preeminence. A perceived shift in China's strategic calculus could encourage Pakistan to reconsider its India policy, especially if China emphasizes regional economic integration over conflict.

Domestic political developments in both countries could also contribute to a shift in the balance of power. In Pakistan, a new civilian government with a robust democratic mandate and the backing of the military might prioritize economic stability over the Kashmir dispute. On the Indian side, a shift from a dominant party system to a coalition government that is more open to dialogue could lead to a softer stance on bilateral issues.

The occurrence of external shocks has the potential to compel alterations. For instance, the prospect of a catastrophic terrorist attack or a nuclear accident could motivate governments to reevaluate the sustainability of their current security postures. A close call involving misinterpreted military actions or accidental escalation could serve as a trigger for new arms control agreements, improved communication protocols, or the institutionalization of military crisis management.

It is imperative to acknowledge the potential for the emergence of longer-term pressures within the global diplomatic and normative environments. An escalating global focus on nuclear non-proliferation (Gheorghe, 2019) and humanitarian norms could potentially amplify the reputational costs associated with ongoing militarization and intransigence in Kashmir. International campaigns that draw attention to the humanitarian impact of militarized borders and protracted conflict could gradually push both countries towards moderation.

Multilateral platforms have the potential to facilitate this transition. The revitalized SAARC, alternatively a newly established dialogue mechanism involving the UN or impartial regional actors, could function as a platform to initiate practical cooperation, if not a formal peace process.

While the scenario is not predictable, it illustrates how external stimuli, systemic shocks, and evolving norms can exert enough pressure to move India and Pakistan towards recalibration, if not reconciliation.

In evaluating the future of India-Pakistan relations, the role of middle powers such as Türkiye emerges as a salient and potentially influential variable. As Türkiye's global profile increases, it can aim to expand its influence in Asia by acting as a diplomatic facilitator in regional conflicts. Its longstanding strategic and cultural alignment with Pakistan, coupled with its interest in global conflict mediation, positions it to play a unique role in the Kashmir dispute.

One plausible course of action is the formation of an unofficial "Islamabad-Ankara-New Delhi" communication channel, through which Türkiye discreetly disseminates proposals or messages to the two South Asian states. The viability of this arrangement is contingent upon mutual appreciation and bilateral acceptance, particularly from India, which has expressed strong opposition to the involvement of third parties in mediation. Any Turkish involvement in this matter should be meticulously delineated as a supportive measure for bilateral diplomacy, as opposed to an intrusive approach.

Alternatively, Türkiye could engage through multilateral frameworks such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. It could propose a renewed autonomy roadmap for Kashmir that is modeled on international precedents. This roadmap could be framed as a humanitarian or administrative offer rather than a political solution. However, the implementation of such initiatives would necessitate meticulous calibration to avert the emergence of diplomatic resistance from India.

In all possible scenarios, nuclear deterrence continues to function as a structural backdrop. This phenomenon functions as both a constraint on escalation and a potential source of existential risk. Analysts often describe South Asia's strategic situation as "risk management under crisis," where the prevention of war through deterrence is accompanied by a constant threat of miscalculation, misinformation, or system failure.

A gradual approach has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy for mitigating this risk. The implementation of pragmatic measures, such as the enhancement of military hotlines, the promotion of transparency through the exchange of nuclear doctrines, the refinement of protocols for missile test notifications, and the evaluation of conflict prevention procedures, holds considerable potential for enhancing international security. While many of these mechanisms are already in place, there is a need to institutionalize and upgrade them.

Of the five scenarios previously delineated, the most probable near-term trajectory is Scenario 2: the perpetuation of a fragile stalemate characterized by intermittent crises. This phenomenon is indicative of the entrenched positions, political calculations, and security dilemmas that have shaped India-Pakistan relations for decades (Pu, 2022).

A transition towards Scenario 3, gradual detente, is possible if there is deliberate effort, targeted confidence-building, and favorable geopolitical conditions. The most perilous scenario, designated as "full-scale war," necessitates vigilance and effective crisis management to mitigate risk.

It is evident that the establishment of a comprehensive peace agreement, designated as Scenario 4, remains a paramount objective. While not immediately achievable, it represents a long-term vision that can shape diplomatic strategies and public discourse.

The evolving dynamics between global powers, especially the US and China, will have a considerable impact on the eventual unfolding of events. The establishment of a cooperative framework between Washington and Beijing to collectively prevent war in South Asia has the potential to engender systemic stability. Conversely, a deterioration in US-China relations could transform South Asia into a secondary theater of global competition and escalate tensions between India and Pakistan.

The 2025 crisis proved to be a critical turning point in this regard. This phenomenon underscores the fragility of the prevailing strategic equilibrium, highlighting the tenuous margins that delineate crisis from disaster. Absent proactive engagement, institutional improvements, and contributions from actors such as Türkiye, the region is likely to persist in its operation under conditions of latent volatility.

As discussed in the following section, these issues are not confined to South Asia. These concerns pertain to middle powers, international organizations, and global policy frameworks. In order to ensure that the next South Asian crisis does not escalate beyond manageable levels, a coordinated, multilateral effort is essential.

IMPACTS ON TÜRKİYE AND THE REGION

An escalation in the India-Pakistan crisis can have serious effects that go beyond South Asia. This is a concern for Western Asia, the Central Asian region, and the entire Islamic world. Türkiye remains particularly attentive to Türkiye's geopolitical strategies and their implications on regional decision-making making which is sensitive to direct and indirect interest flows.

Turkiye made deliberate attempts to increase its diplomatic outreach to Asia and the South, where they are responding by presenting themselves as a gateway to the East. South Asia has seen an increased activity of Türkiye-funded schools, NGOs, and humanitarian activities in the region. The involvement is multidimensional. The reason behind this comes from the Islamic character of the country, active membership in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the growing desire to intensively participate in the geopolitics of Eurasia.

The relations between Türkiye and Pakistan have always been described as strong and trans-political in nature. It is evident that them two nations have supported each other politically and cooperated militarily in the past. This includes joint defense initiatives, diplomatic engagements, and support on narratives regarding Norther Cyprus and Kashmir. Türkiye also supported Pakistan during the 2025 crisis and backed there calls for restraint and the international inquiry into the Pahalgam incident.

If the conflict between India and Pakistan does not come to a resolution any time soon, it is very likely that Türkiye will heightened there support towards collaborating with Pakistan. The following developments are possible: strengthened military assistance by providing naval units like MILGEM-class corvettes, T129 ATAK attack helicopters (with licenses) and armed drones. Türkiye's advanced drone system, which has already provided some aid to Pakistan, is able to significantly enhance bilateral relations in defense.

This strategic move is in line with other objectives of Türkiye which is to deploy there defense industry in Asia and establish strong alliance polices in the region. But, this trajectory is not without its drawbacks.

Due to Türkiye stance towards Kashmir, India is said to have been recalibrating its response within its foreign policy. Reportedly, India has diminished its defense procurement from Turkish firms and restricted diplomatic interactions with Türkiye in the recent years. At the same time, Türkiye has been expanding strategic partnerships with countries like Greece, Cyprus, and Armenia, which are known to clash with Turkish foreign policy. Such shifts suggest a diplomatic, economically counter Republican strategy towards Türkiye and aim at marginalization.

If Türkiye continues to maintain close relations with Pakistan, especially in ways that openly go against Indian interests or assert control over Kashmir, it is very likely that there will be further aggravation in India-Türkiye relations. The likelihood of removing Turkish companies from Indian markets increases, alongside reduced diplomatic activity and clearer alignment with regional competitors of Turkish-Iranian relations.

Considering the growing size and pace of economic growth and increasing aspirations to take part in global governance systems, the cost of estranging from India turns steep for Türkiye in terms of geopolitical and economic interests. Therefore, as much as having continuous interaction with Pakistan may have some strategic advantages, Türkiye has to weigh this deeply against what it might lose in terms of its relationship with India. It seems from the Indian side that the costs of losing Türkiye are also quite paramount. So far, Türkiye has avoided taking any confrontational position towards India's West Asia posture. This country has not so far shown any overtly hostile attitude towards New Delhi, especially concerning the Gulf and the Turkic world where India badly needs to achieve energy self-sufficiency and independence.

With President Erdoğan, Türkiye is becoming very active in the Muslim world, having positioned itself as a leader after dealing with high-profile humanitarian and political activities involving Muslims. Historically, it has been was part of Türkiye's foreign policy to advocate and actively support numerous causes like Palestine, the Rohingyan crisis in Myanmar, as well as the conflict over Kashmir - this is part of the policy regarding militarized Islam, which has emerged in response to public demand within the Muslim world. These stances are popular among the worldwide Muslim population, and rationally from the perspective of Türkiye's aim of exerting influence beyond its immediate region.

A severe dispute concerning Kashmir is said to have fueled public sentiment among Muslims. This is region is often framed as a case of oppressed Muslim people. Within this framework, it is possible for Türkiye to position itself as a benevolent defender of Muslims. This has been noticeable with respect to Türkiye's interactions with Malaysia and Iran. Together with these three states, Türkiye has form an informal bloc which has was active in defending the rights of Muslims, including in the public condemnation of India's unilateral change of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in 2019. In the same timeframe on the contrary, most of the Arab bloc took a more muted stance.

For Türkiye, the escalating dispute over Kashmir offers a chance to consolidate its position as an alleged champion of humanitarian causes among Muslim nations. Through the application of soft power, it is possible strengthen Erdoğans regime domestically and position him among the international Muslim populace. Such a leadership is argued would enable Türkiye to increase its standing in the OIC and, perhaps, enhance its diplomatic leverage abroad.

Should Türkiye attempt to mediate the Kashmir dispute, it stands to gain international esteem comparable to its role in brokering the Black Sea grain shipment agreements between Russia and Ukraine. To strategize on the matter, consider that Türkiye's fraternity with Pakistan and its former criticism of India poses significant diplomatic challenges. New Delhi will most likely brush off any Turkish mediation attempts as foreign interference.

To soften the resistance, Türkiye might focus first on humanitarian activities. The range of benefits from this initiative could include granting scholarship allocations to students from Kashmir, aiding educational exchange programs, and providing humanitarian relief in cases of displacement or damage to vital structures. Such acts would enable Türkiye to extend influence without infringing upon Indian sovereignty.

Outside political and religious alignments, Türkiye possesses noteworthy interest in fostering stability within the region. South Asia already comprises two of the world's dominant nuclear powers, significant seabed trade routes, and highly integrated economies. A military standoff would have ramifications for both global and regional market stability. During the 2025 conflict, fleeting fear of supply disruption led to a spike in global oil prices.

Outside the purviews of political and religious unity, Türkiye exhibits remarkable concern for maintaining regional stability. With the presence of nuclear arms, important sea routes, and interdependent economies, India and Pakistan mark an important region in South Asia. A crisis from either threatens both global and regional markets.

Rising tensions in 2025 led to the conflict where projected global oil prices surged as a result of anticipated supply shortages. It is important to mention that energy imports from both India and Pakistan are heavily reliant on maritime chokepoints that are exposed to the possibility of conflicts. Türkiye, who is energy dependent, suffers negative effects from economic conflicts through fields such as trade. This behavior shows the level of concern needed for stability. Hence the spike in oil prices due to conflict makes the absence of conflict important for global market equilibrium.

Additionally, the Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad (ITI) rail corridor project serves as a powerful connection with Europe and China through South and Central Asia. However, lacks strong funding for the construction. The reason lies in the instability that envelops the region which directly influences the implementation of their Central Corridor vision bringing more value to the perspective. In order for the project to come to life, the certainty of a sustained pathway through Pakistan must be established.

The existence of enduring conflict is known to deter investment and disrupt trade along this route. Pakistan's geopolitical instability also hampers Türkiye's "Asia Again" strategic vision to foster economically and diplomatically deepen ties not only

with Central Asia, Western China, but with Asia as a whole. Considering Pakistan's geographical and logistical position as a gateway to these areas, its internal security is critical for Türkiye's regional ambitions.

If Indo-Pakistan economic relations were to normalize, Türkiye would benefit heavily. As an emerging manufacturing hub, Türkiye can integrate into the developing supply chains of the increasingly accessible South Asian market. The region's robust trade routes, along with access to India and Pakistan's consumers, can bolster Türkiye exports and invite further investments.

Politically, Türkiye's interests in South Asia are diverse. The violent combat in Kashmir opens up a new avenue for shattering the long-standing leadership void in the Islamic world.

From an economic viewpoint, the advancement of peace and stability has great advantages, including trade growth and energy security. Türkiye's challenge might be to protect both its moral and practical interests by finding a balance between principled diplomacy and practical engagement.

A grave India-Pakistan dispute does not occur in a vacuum. Direct and indirect effects on Türkiye's regional concerns of this continuous conflict reach across the Middle East, Central Asia, and beyond. Gulf nations are particularly welcoming to Indian and Pakistani expats, whose safety and remittance flows are vulnerable to interruptions during crises. A spectrum of possible results may arise in the setting of armed conflict or the rise of tensions, including partial evacuations, interruptions to remittances, and the heightening of diaspora group communal conflict.

It is clear that in the framework of India-Pakistan relations, Gulf nations, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, have sometimes taken a quiet diplomatic position. Significant reliance of both countries on the US for labor, trade, and investment grounds this curiosity. For instance, the The UAE adopted a quiet diplomatic role in the events of 2019 and 2021. Following recent rapprochement as Türkiye solidifies its relationships with Qatar and normalizes relations with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Ankara could cooperate with these Gulf nations to provide joint projects or humanitarian efforts pertaining to South Asia. Under the auspices of Islamic cooperation mechanisms, a platform for such engagement could be established.

One should realize that every nuclear escalation in South Asia would also present an environmental security hazard for Central Asia and the Middle East. Even a limited nuclear strike could interrupt monsoons, result in atmospheric cooling, and influence agriculture far beyond the immediate conflict zone, according to climate simulations. Particularly in terms of food security and regional climate resilience, such results could have immediate effects for Türkiye and its neighbors. This growth points to

a shared interest among Middle Eastern nations in supporting nuclear restraint and peace-keeping standards.

Another regional weakness should be noted in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Managing security spillovers from Afghanistan depends much on Pakistan's western borders. Should India and Pakistan engage in a military battle, Pakistan might reroute its army soldiers away from the western border area. This redeployment would possibly lower Pakistan's counterinsurgency capabilities and set circumstances ideal for the expansion of organizations like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan or regional jihad networks. With the possibility of spillover consequences extending to Central Asia, this possible scenario could jeopardize Afghanistan's stability.

Notably, via its control of Kabul airport security and participation in rebuilding projects, Türkiye has shown significant involvement in Afghanistan. The US has been able to keep a positive public opinion in Afghanistan, which is rather important. Additionally, it has a strategic interest in ensuring that Turkish Central Asia remains free from instability spreading north. An impaired Pakistani security stance might indirectly obstruct Türkiye's goals of creating safe trade and transportation routes throughout the area.

It is evident that Iran will be adversely impacted by these unfavorable scenarios. Given its proximity to both Pakistan and India, Iran could potentially experience an influx of refugees from West Pakistan in the event of a large-scale displacement (Sultan, 2022). Türkiye, an active participant in regional affairs alongside Iran, would undoubtedly be concerned about the potential influx of secondary refugees reaching Turkish territory via Iran. This potential escalation could have ramifications for the migratory pathways traversing Iran, particularly as Türkiye maintains a substantial refugee population.

The protracted India-Pakistan conflict engenders a strategic dilemma for Türkiye. This sustained support for Pakistan aligns with Türkiye's prevailing foreign policy orientation, thereby fortifying its defense and diplomatic relations. However, assuming a more neutral role or positioning itself as a potential mediator could preserve or even improve relations with India, a substantial economic and defense market with which Türkiye has struggled to establish commercial ties in recent years due to political disputes.

India has already scaled back its defense ties with Türkiye and signaled its discontent by engaging with regional rivals such as Greece, The Republic of Cyprus in the South and Armenia. If Türkiye can mutually readjust its narrative and present itself as a pragmatic actor, the two countries may rebuild their positions and unlock opportunities in trade and defense. However, any perceived endorsement of Islamist solidarity centered on Kashmir will continue to be viewed by India as interference.

A regional conflict would also affect Türkiye's position within the broader great-power framework. The US might increase diplomatic intervention in a South Asian crisis. As a NATO member, Türkiye could be drawn into coordinated responses or humanitarian missions, particularly in a post-nuclear scenario. If China visibly supports Pakistan during the conflict, Türkiye's close ties with Islamabad could indirectly align Ankara with Beijing's South Asia policy, complicating Türkiye's delicate balancing act between East and West.

The use of nuclear weapons, whether rhetorical or actual, by South Asian states undermines global non-proliferation norms. Türkiye, a NATO country without nuclear weapons but in proximity to nuclear-capable states like Israel and Iran, has a natural interest in sustaining deterrence, stability and preventing the setting of nuclear precedents.

A nuclear crisis in South Asia could trigger regional and international debates about proliferation risks and preparedness. It might also test international institutions such as NATO in terms of crisis coordination and humanitarian intervention mechanisms.

The outcome of any major conflict would reshape perceptions of regional power. A decisive Indian military victory could weaken Pakistan's strategic posture and increase its dependence on external partners like China and Türkiye. This might afford Türkiye greater influence over Pakistan's domestic and foreign policies, though Ankara has traditionally favored a strong Pakistan.

If Pakistan emerges with diplomatic gains, such as forcing India to the negotiating table under international pressure, Türkiye and its partners could leverage this momentum to raise Kashmir in international forums and shape future multilateral mechanisms. Organizations like the OIC and the UN would serve as key platforms for Türkiye to exercise soft power and narrative influence.

The India-Pakistan conflict cycle presents Türkiye and neighboring regions with a complex set of risks and opportunities. Türkiye's growing geopolitical influence and regional integration strategies are driving deeper investment in South Asian stability. A peaceful South Asia would support Türkiye's broader vision of connectivity, bridging Asia and Europe, whereas instability would force Ankara into difficult strategic choices, exposing it to economic, security, and diplomatic repercussions.

For the Middle East, peace in South Asia ensures uninterrupted energy supply chains, stability for large South Asian diaspora communities, and opportunities for investment cooperation. For Central Asia, stability could facilitate regional trade corridors linking India to Afghanistan and beyond, fostering deeper connectivity. Conversely, conflict would perpetuate South Asia's isolation and constrain cross-regional linkages.

1. Diplomacy and Foreign Relations

- Türkiye's continued alignment with Pakistan may strengthen its standing within the Muslim world and institutions like the OIC.
- However, perceived bias risks damaging bilateral relations with India, a major market and regional power, necessitating a careful balancing act.
- The Middle East may remain divided, with some states preserving neutrality to maintain ties with both South Asian powers.
- Should Türkiye successfully mediate or support dialogue efforts, it could enhance its international reputation as a conflict facilitator.

2. Economic Exposure

- A war in South Asia would disrupt regional trade and elevate global risk premiums.
- Türkiye's connectivity objectives, such as the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railway corridor and the Middle Corridor, depend on South Asian stability.
- Conflict-driven oil price volatility would also impact Türkiye's energy-importing economy.
- By contrast, peace would unlock trade routes, create new supply chains, and expand Türkiye's access to emerging South Asian markets.

3. Regional Security

- Nuclear escalation poses a transboundary environmental threat, potentially affecting Türkiye's climate and food systems.
- War could weaken Pakistan's internal security posture, enabling the resurgence of extremist groups and creating spillover risks for the West and Central Asia.
- Any mass displacement from Pakistan or Afghanistan could strain migration routes through Iran into Türkiye, exacerbating refugee pressures.

4. Geopolitical Influence

- Türkiye has an opportunity to position itself as a leader advocating Muslim causes, particularly on Kashmir.
- A successful peace framework addressing Kashmiri rights could become a diplomatic victory for Ankara.

- Escalation risks drawing in great powers like the US and China, transforming South Asia into a theater of geopolitical rivalry, which forces Türkiye to navigate complex alignments.
- A Türkiye-China-Pakistan axis could emerge, counterbalancing India's alignment with the US, Gulf states, and Indo-Pacific actors.

Historically peripheral to Indo-Pakistani dynamics, the Middle East and Central Asia are now increasingly tethered to South Asia's strategic orbit. Globalization, multipolar competition, and transnational security concerns mean that South Asia's volatility resonates more widely than ever. As a rising Eurasian actor, Türkiye will both influence and be influenced by the next phase of the India-Pakistan conflict.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis was a sobering reminder that the rivalry between these two nuclear-armed neighbors remains among the most dangerous in the world. Sparked by a devastating terrorist attack and escalating into open military exchanges, the crisis brought both countries to the brink of full-scale war. What ultimately prevented catastrophe was not restraint alone, but a combination of nuclear deterrence and swift international diplomacy. Yet while nuclear weapons may have stopped a war, they did not address the deeper conflict. Instead, they compressed the time available for decision-making, increased the stakes of every move, and left both sides managing crises rather than resolving them.

This recent confrontation revealed key trends. India, emboldened by its growing global stature and conventional military advantage, appeared more willing to employ limited force, as seen in Operation Sindoor. Pakistan responded with both bold retaliation and a pragmatic push for a ceasefire once it had signaled resolve. External powers, especially the US and China, played crucial roles in de-escalation. Their cooperation helped avert disaster, though their strategic competition could complicate future interventions. For Türkiye and the broader region, the crisis underscored that South Asian stability is no longer a distant issue. It intersects with global economic, environmental, and security concerns, and how these crises are handled will shape regional and international dynamics.

Moving beyond episodic crisis management requires a broader shift toward sustained engagement and conflict resolution. First, India and Pakistan must invest in crisis communication and nuclear risk-reduction mechanisms. This includes modernizing military hotlines, developing protocols for air and maritime encounters, and updating existing nuclear agreements. Reviving nuclear dialogue, even through backchannels or retired officials, could improve transparency and reduce miscalculation (Gheorghe, 2022). Forums like the Pugwash Conferences or UN-linked institutions can provide a neutral ground for such efforts.

Second, bilateral dialogue must resume, even on less contentious issues. Agreements on Siachen demilitarization or the Sir Creek boundary could serve as confidence-building measures. In Kashmir, both countries should recommit to the 2003 ceasefire and expand humanitarian efforts, such as facilitating medical and religious travel across the Line of Control. Quiet trilateral conversations involving Kashmiri voices would help localize and legitimize peacebuilding. International partners can support these efforts through diplomacy, technical aid, or quiet facilitation, with countries like the UAE or Türkiye playing helpful roles.

Third, trade and economic cooperation should be used as a tool for peace. Delinking commerce from politics wherever possible could unlock mutual benefits. Pakistan could offer India market access; India could ease non-tariff barriers. Regional infrastructure, like the TAPI pipeline or people-to-people corridors such as Kartarpur, could foster interdependence. Joint studies by the World Bank or Asian Development Bank could demonstrate the economic case for cooperation and help build business constituencies that favor stability.

Fourth, international mediation, even if informal, remains vital. A group of key stakeholders, including the US, China, Russia, and others, could serve as a standing contact group to promote restraint and dialogue. Track-two channels involving retired officials and experts should be supported. The UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan could be modernized with better monitoring tools. Countries like Türkiye, with links to both sides, can quietly convey messages or promote humanitarian initiatives without being perceived as partisan actors.

Fifth, addressing root causes is essential. Pakistan must continue dismantling extremist networks and maintaining cross-border restraint. India, for its part, must rebuild trust in Kashmir by restoring political rights, reducing the security footprint, and engaging with local leaders. Human rights improvements (HRW, 2023) are not only morally necessary but strategically effective in reducing militancy and international criticism. Limited intelligence cooperation on counter-terrorism could be explored, perhaps under the auspices of regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Sixth, regional frameworks must be revived. SAARC could be revitalized by focusing on areas of shared interest like health and disaster response. Trilateral discussions involving India, Pakistan, and China could eventually help shape stability norms. Türkiye and other middle powers might convene Islamic-led humanitarian platforms to suggest balanced solutions that respect sovereignty while addressing civilian needs. Western actors could reinforce these efforts by emphasizing how regional stability aligns with broader development goals.

Finally, both governments must improve public communication. Misinformation played a damaging role in the 2025 crisis. Developing joint crisis media protocols,

encouraging cross-border journalist exchanges, and working with global tech firms to manage disinformation could all help create a more informed public space. Transparency builds resilience and reduces the likelihood of miscalculated public pressure.

Türkiye can contribute meaningfully by encouraging Pakistan's counter-terrorism reforms and engaging India on humanitarian issues in Kashmir. By deepening trade ties with both countries and promoting constructive dialogue, Türkiye can act as a regional stabilizer. It could also partner with other middle powers in forming a development-focused "Friends of Kashmir" group that avoids political posturing and emphasizes local upliftment.

It is important to be aware that tranquillity between India and Pakistan will not be established rapidly or without difficulty, but it is attainable through consistent progress. Both countries must understand that their national goals, India's quest for global power and Pakistan's need for security and prosperity, are better served by cooperation than confrontation. The 2025 crisis should mark a turning point. With international support and domestic courage, the region can shift from being a flashpoint to becoming a foundation for regional cooperation and stability. The recommendations in this report offer a path forward. If pursued seriously, they can transform the India-Pakistan relationship from a cycle of escalation into a model of managed rivalry and, eventually, peaceful coexistence

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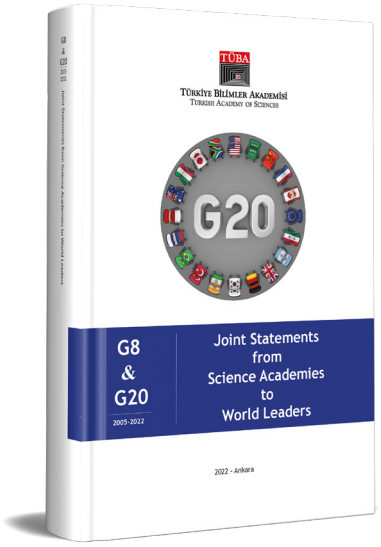
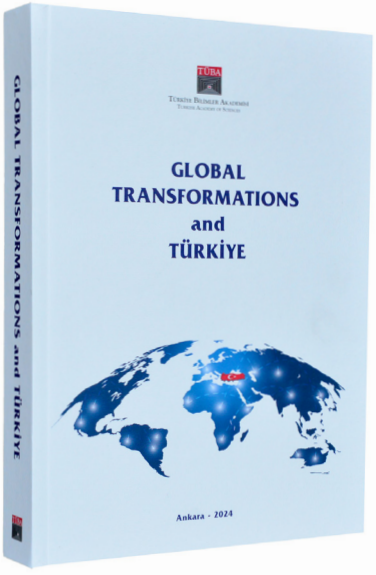


G8 - G20 Joint Statements from Science Academies to World Leaders

This work, conducted by TÜBA with a focus on international relations and science diplomacy, presents the scientific approaches offered by leaders in the scientific world at the G7, G8, and G20 meetings between 2005 and 2022. At the G20 summits, the Science-20 (S-20) working groups, consisting of science academies from the relevant countries, published joint presentations. TÜBA compiled all 41 produced during this process in "G8-G20 Joint Statements from Science Academies to World Leaders." This work, published in English, serves as a reference source and decision-support tool for policy makers and has taken its place in the scientific literature.

Global Transformations and Türkiye

The work includes contributions from academics and experts from countries in America, Asia, Europe, and Africa, addressing various global challenges such as international relations, economic transformations, migration, and technological advancements. The study is divided into thematic sections that examine significant global issues, including the importance of middle powers, the international order, and Türkiye's strategic responses to these global changes. It consists of six main sections and 36 subsections, which are: "World Dis/orders in the Age of Global Transformations", "Great Powers and Middle Powers in a Changing World", "Türkiye on the Cusp of Persistent Challenges and Global Transformations", "Challenges of Migration and New Channels of Diplomacy", "New Media, the Challenge of AI/Cyberspace and Non-state Actors", and "Challenges in Economy, Business, and Finance."



The India-Pakistan conflict is a complex issue that goes beyond the regional sphere to have a profound impact on global security, embodying multidimensional geopolitical dynamics. Titled "Neither War nor Peace", this work offers a comprehensive analysis, covering everything from the historical background and contemporary crisis dynamics to doctrines of nuclear deterrence and the strategic positioning of international actors. Prepared with contributions from the TÜBA International Relations Working Group, this study fills gaps in the academic literature and emphasises the importance of scientific reporting and data-driven diplomatic solutions.

By showcasing the role of scientific institutions in peace initiatives through the generation of scientific knowledge, TÜBA underscores the importance of diplomacy in international relations and draws attention to the potential dangers of war. This valuable reference work examines the India–Pakistan crisis on both regional and global scales, and assesses Türkiye's potential capacity as a mediator.

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