

India's Evolving Counter-Terrorism Posture: An Analysis of Jaishankar's Warning and the 2025 India-Pakistan Crisis

I. Executive Summary

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's assertive warning on June 9, 2025, that India will not hesitate to conduct "deep strikes" inside Pakistan if provoked by terror attacks, marks a significant re-articulation of India's hardened stance.¹ This declaration, made in the immediate aftermath of the recent military confrontation (Operation Sindoor), underscores India's shift towards a more proactive and punitive counter-terrorism doctrine.³

The four-day conflict in May 2025, triggered by the deadly Pahalgam terror attack, saw unprecedented military actions, including India's deep strikes into Pakistan and Pakistan's first-time use of conventionally armed ballistic missiles and extensive drone warfare.⁵ While a ceasefire was ultimately achieved, the crisis highlighted the escalating nature of the rivalry and the persistent risk of conflict between the two nuclear-armed states.⁶

India's "zero-tolerance" policy has evolved into a "deterrence by punishment" strategy, aiming to impose severe costs on Pakistan for supporting terrorism.⁷ This new doctrine, exemplified by Operation Sindoor's comprehensive kinetic and non-kinetic measures, signals a decisive departure from past strategic restraint, treating future terror attacks as acts of war.⁹ The implications include a redefined threshold for retaliation and a heightened, yet calibrated, risk of escalation in the volatile South Asian security landscape.

II. Introduction: A New Red Line

On June 9, 2025, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar delivered a stark message during an interaction with the Indian community in Belgium and Luxembourg, further elaborating on it in a POLITICO interview in Brussels. He unequivocally stated India's readiness to strike "deep into Pakistan" if provoked by "barbaric acts" of terrorism.¹ This declaration was not merely a diplomatic warning but a direct articulation of India's intent for retribution against terrorist organizations and their leadership, emphasizing that India "will not hesitate to strike back regardless of location".³

To underscore India's capability and resolve, Jaishankar asserted that Indian fighter aircraft and missiles had inflicted "far more extensive damage" on the Pakistani Air Force during the recent conflict, claiming this forced Pakistan to "sue for peace".¹ He pointed to "destroyed and disabled airfields on the Pakistani side" as evidence,

suggesting these could be verified through publicly available satellite imagery.³

This firm stance is rooted in India's long-standing, yet recently intensified, "zero-tolerance" policy against cross-border terrorism. Jaishankar explicitly reframed the India-Pakistan conflict as "India versus Terroristan," highlighting India's unwavering commitment to combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.⁴ He stressed the imperative "never to yield to nuclear blackmail," underscoring India's determination not to be deterred by Pakistan's nuclear arsenal in its counter-terrorism efforts.¹⁰ This strong reiteration by a senior minister, coming just weeks after a significant military confrontation, signals a formalized and publicly declared shift in India's strategic calculus regarding cross-border terrorism, reflecting Prime Minister Modi's assertion that "Operation Sindoor" is India's new policy.⁴

This public and explicit formalization of India's deterrence posture represents a significant evolution. Historically, India's responses to terror attacks, such as the 2016 surgical strikes or the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, were often reactive and followed a period of strategic ambiguity. The current explicit threat of "deep strikes" and the "India vs. Terroristan" framing, coupled with the assertion of past military superiority that "forced Pakistan to sue for peace," indicate a pre-emptive declaration of intent. This aims to shape Pakistan's future behavior by clearly defining the unacceptable threshold of provocation and the assured, severe consequences. It transforms implicit deterrence into explicit signaling, potentially reducing Pakistan's perceived room for maneuver. This formalization could reduce strategic ambiguity, which some analysts argue can prevent escalation by maintaining uncertainty. However, it also risks locking both sides into a more rigid and potentially escalatory cycle if provocations occur, as both sides' red lines become clearer and potentially closer. It also aims to influence international perception, framing India as a victim of state-sponsored terrorism and justifying its aggressive counter-measures as legitimate self-defense.

III. The Pahalgam Catalyst: April 22, 2025

The immediate trigger for the recent escalation was the horrific terror attack in Pahalgam, Indian-administered Kashmir, on April 22, 2025. Pakistan-backed attackers stormed a village, deliberately targeting Hindu tourists by asking their religion before brutally killing them. This barbaric act resulted in 26 civilian deaths, sparking widespread outrage across India.⁹

The attack was initially claimed by The Resistance Front (TRF) via Telegram, with a statement indicating "violence will be directed toward those attempting to settle illegally." However, TRF later retracted its claim, denying responsibility and suggesting

the initial claim was the result of a "coordinated cyber intrusion".⁵ TRF is widely considered a proxy of the UN-designated Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and the nature of the Pahalgam attack was perceived as a clear attempt to incite communal violence and divide India from within.⁹

The immediate impact on India-Pakistan relations was profound. The Pahalgam attack was not seen as just another cross-border incident but as a significant escalation, marking a shift in the terror groups' modus operandi towards a deliberate strategy aimed at internal communal division within India.⁹ The explicit targeting of individuals based on their religion, particularly Hindu tourists, indicated a new and more provocative dimension to proxy warfare. This specific nature of the attack, designed to undermine India's societal cohesion, significantly lowered India's threshold for retaliation and hardened its resolve. It pushed India beyond traditional counter-insurgency responses, compelling it towards a more aggressive, state-level military and non-military response.

In response to this "gruesome terrorist attack," India's Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) swiftly approved a series of stringent measures, leading directly to the launch of "Operation Sindoor" to destroy the terror bases responsible for the attack.⁹ This perceived strategic shift in Pakistan's proxy warfare directly contributed to India's "zero-tolerance" policy evolving into a "new national security doctrine" where "any future terror attack will be treated as an act of war".⁹ The severity and communal targeting of the Pahalgam attack thus became the direct catalyst for Operation Sindoor and the subsequent, more assertive policy re-evaluation by India.

IV. Operation Sindoor: India's Kinetic and Non-Kinetic Response

A. Military Actions (May 7-10, 2025)

Operation Sindoor was conceived with clear strategic objectives: to punish the perpetrators and planners of terror and to destroy terror infrastructure across the border.⁹ India initially described these strikes as "focused, measured, and non-escalatory," explicitly stating that Pakistani military establishments were not targeted, aiming to signal restraint.⁹

On May 7, 2025, India launched missile and air strikes, codenamed Operation Sindoor, targeting nine sites across Pakistani-administered Azad Kashmir and Pakistan's Punjab province.¹⁴ These strikes primarily aimed at infrastructure linked to the UN-designated terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and Hizbul Mujahideen (HuM), including alleged headquarters and terrorist training camps.⁹ Specific sites claimed to have been targeted included the Subhan Allah

Mosque in Bahawalpur, Markaz-e-Taiba in Muridke, Abbas Mosque in Kotli District, and other camps.¹⁴

The attacks on targets in Pakistan-administered Kashmir were executed by the Indian Army's artillery regiment using precision long-range Excalibur rounds and loitering munitions, with Israeli-origin SkyStriker loitering munitions specifically mentioned.¹⁴ The Indian Air Force provided air defense during these operations. Attacks on targets in Pakistani Punjab were carried out by the Indian Air Force, reportedly using Rafale jets equipped with SCALP missiles and AASM Hammer bombs, with some analyses suggesting the possible use of BrahMos cruise missiles.⁶

India claimed significant success from these operations, reporting over 100 terrorists killed in action and 11 air bases in Pakistan destroyed or disabled.⁹ External Affairs Minister Jaishankar specifically stated that Indian air strikes had "severely degraded Pakistan's military infrastructure" and that the "proof of the pudding" was the "destroyed and disabled airfields on the Pakistani side".³ India later released satellite images purportedly showing damage at the targeted sites.¹⁴

The following table summarizes the key targets and India's claimed outcomes during Operation Sindoor:

Table 1: Operation Sindoor: Key Targets and Claimed Outcomes

Date of Strike	Target Location (Province /Region)	Associated Terror Group	Type of Target	Weapon Systems Used (Reported)	India's Claimed Outcome	Source Snippets
May 7, 2025	Bahawalpur (Punjab)	JeM	Subhan Allah Mosque (HQ/Training Camp)	Rafale, SCALP, AASM Hammer, BrahMos (possible)	Destroyed /Disabled	⁹
May 7, 2025	Muridke (Punjab)	LeT	Markaz-e-Taiba (HQ/Training Camp)	Rafale, SCALP, AASM Hammer, BrahMos	Destroyed /Disabled	⁹

				(possible)		
May 7, 2025	Kotli District (PoK)	JeM	Abbas Mosque	Excalibur rounds, SkyStriker loitering munitions	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 7, 2025	Muzaffara bad (PoK)	LeT, JeM	Shawai Nala camp, Syedna Bilal Mosque	Excalibur rounds, SkyStriker loitering munitions	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 7, 2025	Gulpur, Kotli District (PoK)	LeT, HuM	Camp	Excalibur rounds, SkyStriker loitering munitions	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 7, 2025	Barnala (PoK)	LeT	Ahl-e-Had ith Mosque	Excalibur rounds, SkyStriker loitering munitions	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 7, 2025	Mehmona Joya, Narowal Dist. (Punjab)	HuM	Camp	Rafale, SCALP, AASM Hammer, BrahMos (possible)	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 7, 2025	Tera Katlan, Sialkot Dist. (Punjab)	JeM	Camp	Rafale, SCALP, AASM Hammer, BrahMos (possible)	Destroyed /Disabled	14
May 10, 2025	Various Pakistani Air Bases	N/A (Military Infrastruct	Airfields, Hangars, Command	Decoy drones, anti-radiat	11 air bases destroyed/	3

	(e.g., Nur Khan, Rafiqi, Rahim Yar Khan, Sukkur)	ure)	Centers, Air Defense Systems	ion drones, BrahMos, SCALP, Crystal Maze, Rampage missiles	disabled	
Overall	Across Pakistan and PoK	LeT, JeM, HuM	Terror Launchpads	Multi-faceted	Over 100 terrorists killed	⁹

B. Non-Military Measures

Operation Sindoor was not confined to military actions; it encompassed a range of decisive non-military measures designed to exert comprehensive pressure on Pakistan. A pivotal non-military move was India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 in abeyance with immediate effect.⁹ This suspension is to remain in effect until Pakistan "credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism".⁹ This action carries profound and far-reaching economic consequences for Pakistan, a nation heavily reliant on the Indus river system for approximately 80% of its agricultural land and 93% of its total water use, supporting 237 million people and contributing a quarter of its GDP.⁹

Further economic pressure was imposed by India's decision to sever the primary land-based trade route between the two nations. This involved the closure of the Attari-Wagah border, halting exports of key goods like onions, and banning imports of cement and textiles, causing major disruption in economic ties.⁹

Demonstrating firm resolve on the diplomatic front, India revoked visas for all Pakistanis residing in the country and immediately deported them following the Pahalgam attack. Pakistani nationals were also prohibited from traveling to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES).⁹ On the global stage, India actively exposed Pakistan's terror infrastructure and pursued its diplomatic isolation, strengthening its position among Gulf nations and securing international support.⁹ The strength of the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi was also significantly reduced, with Defence/Military, Naval, and Air Advisors declared Persona Non Grata, and the overall staff strength cut from 55 to 30.⁹

Beyond military and diplomatic actions, a fierce information war unfolded online. India proactively countered Pakistan's "aggressive campaign" of lies and misinformation

with facts and transparency, focusing on highlighting operational success, discrediting Pakistani sources, and promoting media literacy among its citizens.⁹

Operation Sindoor, therefore, transcends a mere military strike; it represents a meticulously planned, multi-dimensional, state-level coercive strategy. The simultaneous and coordinated application of kinetic force, through military strikes deep into Pakistan targeting terror infrastructure, and non-kinetic measures, such as the abeyance of the Indus Waters Treaty, trade suspension, visa revocation, diplomatic isolation, and information warfare, demonstrates a profound shift from reactive counter-terrorism to a holistic "deterrence by punishment".⁷ This integrated approach aims to impose cumulative strategic, political, and economic costs on Pakistan, raising the threshold for future provocations beyond just military engagement. The deliberate targeting of Pakistan's economic lifelines and diplomatic standing, alongside military action, signifies a more sophisticated and sustained pressure campaign. This integrated approach signals India's willingness to leverage all instruments of state power, not just military force, to compel Pakistan to change its behavior regarding terrorism. It also sets a precedent for how India might respond to future provocations, suggesting a more unpredictable, severe, and impactful response than observed in previous crises, potentially redefining the strategic stability of the region.

V. Pakistan's Response and Counter-Narrative

Following India's Operation Sindoor strikes, Pakistan responded with its own military and diplomatic actions, often presenting a counter-narrative to India's claims. Pakistan asserted that India "hit back harder," and over the subsequent week, it used drones and shelling to target religious sites in India, including the Shambhu Temple in Jammu, the Gurdwara in Poonch, and Christian convents. India characterized these as "not random strikes" but part of a deliberate plan to disrupt India's unity.⁹

On May 7, 2025, Pakistan's army launched a mortar attack on Poonch, Jammu, which resulted in the deaths of one Indian soldier and 16 civilians, including a Sikh temple Ragi and 12-year-old twins, and left 43 wounded.¹³ This was considered the heaviest shelling attack since the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure, including 31 schools, hundreds of homes, and a Sikh temple.¹³

During aerial engagements, Pakistan claimed to have achieved significant success in defensive counter-air operations. It claimed to have downed multiple Indian aircraft: initially five, including three Rafales, one MiG-29, one SU-30MKI, and a Heron unmanned aerial vehicle. Later, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif claimed a

sixth Indian fighter jet, a Mirage 2000, was also shot down.¹⁴ While India did not confirm these losses, a French intelligence official and a US official assessed with "high confidence" that some Indian aircraft, including a Rafale, were indeed downed. *The Washington Post* identified three crash sites in India.⁶

On May 10, Pakistan launched "Operation Bunyan al-Marsus," targeting several Indian military bases.¹³ This conflict marked a significant shift in Pakistan's military capabilities and tactics, as it was the first time Pakistan used conventionally armed short-range ballistic missiles (Fatah-I and Fatah-II) against India and engaged in extensive drone warfare, initiating drone and missile attacks on western and northern India.⁶

Pakistan strongly condemned India's strikes as an "act of war" and a violation of its sovereignty, rejecting India's claims of targeting only terrorist infrastructure. It reported that India's strikes targeted civilian areas, including mosques, resulting in 31 Pakistani civilian deaths and 46 wounded.⁵ Pakistan also claimed that the Neelum–Jhelum Hydropower Plant was damaged by Indian shelling.¹⁴ Furthermore, Pakistan denied providing support for the Pahalgam incident and called for an independent investigation into its origins.¹⁵

Diplomatically and economically, Pakistan initially responded to India's actions by closing its border, stopping trade, and threatening to suspend all bilateral treaties with India, including the Simla Agreement.¹³ It also expelled Pakistani military advisors from its High Commission in New Delhi and reduced the overall staff strength of its High Commission.⁹

Pakistan's response was not merely defensive; it involved a deliberate counter-escalation strategy. This included targeting religious sites, heavy shelling of civilian areas, the first-time use of ballistic missiles, and extensive drone warfare.⁶ This indicates a willingness to match or even exceed India's kinetic actions, suggesting a potentially lower risk tolerance for conflict on Pakistan's side than previously assumed.⁵ The starkly conflicting claims about downed aircraft, civilian casualties, and targeted infrastructure highlight the intense information warfare that accompanied the conflict.⁶ Both sides actively sought to control the narrative, declare victory, and discredit the other's claims, making it challenging for external observers to ascertain objective facts.⁶ The "drone duels" and the first-time use of conventionally armed short-range ballistic missiles by Pakistan signify a new, more technologically advanced era of conflict in the region. This development complicates de-escalation efforts and significantly raises the risk of miscalculation, as the true extent of damage or success is often obscured by propaganda and the inherent fog of war. The

emphasis on narrative control suggests that future conflicts will be fought as much in the information domain as on the battlefield.

The following table highlights the divergent claims and counter-claims from India and Pakistan during the May 2025 conflict:

Table 2: India-Pakistan Conflict (May 7-10, 2025): Claims and Counter-Claims

Date	Event Type	India's Claim	Pakistan's Claim	Independent/Other Reports	Source Snippets
May 7	Indian Air/Missile Strikes (Operation Sindoor)	Targeted 9 terror infrastructure sites (LeT, JeM, HuM); over 100 terrorists killed; no civilian damage; 11 air bases destroyed/dismabled.	Targeted civilian areas, including mosques; 31 civilians killed, 46 wounded; strikes were "act of war."	Pakistan confirmed strikes on 6 sites, denied 2; satellite imagery showed some airfield damage.	5
May 7	Aerial Dogfight	Indian fighter aircraft inflicted extensive damage on Pakistani Air Force, forcing them to sue for peace.	Downed 5 Indian aircraft (3 Rafales, 1 MiG-29, 1 SU-30MKI, 1 Heron UAV); later claimed 6th (Mirage 2000).	French intelligence, US official assessed some Indian aircraft (including Rafale) downed; <i>Washington Post</i> identified 3 crash sites in India.	1
May 7-9	Drone Duels	Successfully intercepted	Launched drone and	India's air/missile	6

		Pakistani UAVs/drones; minimal damage from Pakistani attacks.	missile attacks on western/northern India; claimed "major damages" on Indian facilities.	defense largely defeated Pakistani drone attacks; satellite imagery supported minimal Indian damage.	
May 7-10	Pakistani Artillery/Mortar Attacks	Pakistani drones and shelling targeted religious sites (Shambhu Temple, Gurdwara, convents); continued ceasefire violations.	Mortar attack on Poonch, Jammu, killed 1 Indian soldier, 16 civilians; destroyed 31 schools, hundreds of homes; damaged Neelum–Jhelum Hydropower Plant.	Heaviest shelling attack since 1971 war.	9
May 10	Pakistani Military Action	Pakistan's DGMO called Indian DGMO to request ceasefire.	Launched "Operation Bunyan al-Marsus" targeting Indian military bases; first use of Fatah-I/II ballistic missiles.	Ceasefire agreed upon after Pakistan's request.	6

VI. The Ceasefire and International Mediation

The intense military hostilities between India and Pakistan, which had lasted for four days, concluded with a ceasefire agreement on May 10, 2025, effective from 1700 hours Indian Standard Time.⁹ This understanding was reached following direct talks between the Directors General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of both sides, initiated by Pakistan's DGMO.³ Despite the formal cessation of hostilities, reports indicated that Pakistan continued to intrude into Indian civilian and military areas with UAVs and small drones, which were successfully intercepted by Indian Armed Forces. Indian field commanders were authorized to take appropriate action in case of any ceasefire violation.⁹

International actors played a crucial role in managing the crisis and facilitating the ceasefire. The United States, in particular, was instrumental in the de-escalation efforts, especially in the final hours of the conflict. President Donald Trump publicly announced the ceasefire, stating it was "mediated by the United States".⁶ U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Vice President JD Vance engaged with Islamabad and New Delhi to reinforce efforts to de-escalate the standoff, with U.S. nuclear worries reportedly heightening on May 9.⁶ The United Kingdom was also reported to have been involved in the discussions that led to the ceasefire.¹⁵

However, a notable divergence exists in the public narratives surrounding the mediation. While Pakistan acknowledged American involvement in mediating the agreement, Indian officials publicly stated that the agreement was reached directly between the two countries, denying a "broad set" of issues or a "neutral site" for talks.⁶ India also maintained that Operation Sindoor was only "paused" and continues, rather than being definitively concluded.¹⁶

This situation highlights a recurring paradox in India-Pakistan relations: the necessity of covert mediation alongside public assertions of sovereignty. The ceasefire was evidently brokered by external powers, primarily the US, yet India publicly downplayed or denied this role. This public stance allows India to project strength and autonomy, reinforcing its long-held position of preferring bilateral resolution to maintain its sovereignty and resist the internationalization of the Kashmir issue. This approach aligns with the "realism guided restraint" of the Trump administration, which aims to avoid entanglement while managing nuclear risks. The discrepancy in public acknowledgment, while potentially creating diplomatic friction, is ultimately overridden by the shared interest in preventing a full-scale war between nuclear-armed rivals. This dynamic suggests that future crises will likely continue to require discreet external intervention to prevent escalation, but the public narrative will remain one of bilateral resolution from India's side.

VII. India's Evolving Counter-Terrorism Doctrine

India's counter-terrorism policy has undergone a fundamental transformation, moving away from a historical pattern of "strategic restraint" and issuing mere public warnings of reprisal. The new approach is characterized by a more aggressive "deterrence by punishment" and "cumulative deterrence".⁷ This evolving doctrine acknowledges that Pakistani proxies may continue their assaults but aims to diminish their capabilities substantially with each strike, thereby consistently raising the costs for the adversary.⁷ This approach is anchored by "resolute and punitive strikes designed to raise the costs of aggression for the perpetrators," signifying a departure from limited penal strikes that, as witnessed in the past, have not consistently deterred Pakistan.⁸

"Operation Sindoor" serves as a prime example of this decisive departure from India's past responses, such as the 2016 surgical strikes or the 2019 Balakot airstrikes. It signaled a strategic focus towards "dismantling Pakistan's terror factories throughout the entire operational chain".⁷ The operation involved striking deep into Pakistan's heartland, including Punjab province and Bahawalpur, areas once considered out of bounds even for US drones, and which had not been targeted since the 1971 war.⁶ The operation combined advanced conventional attacks with a clear strategic message, demonstrating both "competence and resolve".⁷ It effectively "shattered the notion of an untouchable nuclear threshold" and placed Pakistan in a constrained position, thereby redefining the parameters of the conflict.⁷

This strategic shift has been formalized into a new national security doctrine. Prime Minister Narendra Modi publicly stated that "any future terror attack will be treated as an act of war," effectively eliminating the distinction between terrorists and their state sponsors.⁹ This signifies a zero-tolerance policy where India will not countenance perpetrators being put at par with victims.¹⁸ This doctrine is further complemented by sustained diplomatic and economic measures, such as the abeyance of the Indus Waters Treaty. These non-military actions are designed to impose comprehensive costs on the Pakistani state for its tacit support of and collaboration with terrorist organizations, both directly and indirectly.⁸

India's evolving doctrine, encompassing deterrence by punishment, cumulative deterrence, and treating terror as an act of war, indicates a calculated strategy to operate within the "sub-nuclear" threshold while imposing significant and escalating costs.⁷ This approach represents a dangerous game of "brinkmanship" ⁷, as it relies on the hazardous presumption that Pakistan will consistently show conventional restraint and not escalate beyond India's calibrated response. The goal is to redefine the rules of engagement, making it clear that "neither the Line of Control nor Pakistani territory

will be spared if terrorism emanates from there".⁷ This creates a "new normal" where high-intensity, limited conventional strikes are increasingly likely in response to terror attacks, even under the nuclear umbrella. It forces Pakistan to fundamentally reassess its "use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy"² by raising the economic, diplomatic, and military costs of such actions to an unsustainable level. However, it also means the risk of miscalculation and unintended escalation, potentially crossing the nuclear threshold, remains ever-present, making South Asia one of the most likely theaters for nuclear war.⁶ The shift also places greater pressure on India's intelligence and precision capabilities to maintain the effectiveness of this deterrence posture without triggering an uncontrollable spiral.

VIII. Geopolitical Implications and Future Trajectory

The 2025 crisis was the most serious military confrontation in decades between India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed rivals.⁶ While the mutual possession of nuclear weapons heavily conditioned the responses of both sides, overt nuclear signaling was notably lower compared to many prior crises, indicating a degree of calculated restraint.⁶ However, the crisis underscores that South Asia remains one of the most likely theaters for nuclear war, even if that prospect was not imminent in this specific instance.⁶ Prime Minister Modi asserted that India would not be bogged down by any "nuclear blackmail" from Pakistan, while a Pakistani minister warned India that its 130 missiles were "kept for India" and that Pakistan would use "both conventional and nuclear" weapons if India were to escalate or cut off water supplies.⁴

The conflict marked several military firsts, signaling the emergence of a new era of technological warfare. India for the first time used cruise missiles (BrahMos, SCALP-EG) on Pakistan, and Pakistan, for the first time, employed conventionally armed short-range ballistic missiles (Fatah-I, Fatah-II) against India.⁶ It was also the first instance of significant drone warfare in the India-Pakistan rivalry, with both sides using drones with the intent of causing damage and for intelligence gathering.⁵ This rapid pace of military technological change means that the contours of future India-Pakistan crises could be significantly different, with perceived setbacks and failures by both sides serving as major drivers for defense acquisitions and doctrinal innovation.⁶

The India-Pakistan relationship remains inherently crisis-prone, and these crises are likely to continue to escalate in severity over time.⁶ While both sides attempted to calibrate their escalation, they were sometimes surprised by each other's choices, occasionally perceiving responses as escalatory rather than proportional.⁶ The significant human casualties and destruction of military equipment incurred during

the crisis are likely to induce a degree of caution in the bilateral relationship in the short term, which was a probable objective of Indian policy. However, analysts point out that the underlying reasons for the conflict – India's view that Pakistan supports terrorist groups and Pakistan's view that India's actions in Kashmir cause unrest – remain unresolved.⁶

Global powers played varied roles in the South Asian security landscape during the crisis:

- **United States:** The US played a crucial role in managing the crisis and mediating the ceasefire, particularly in its final hours.⁶ Its approach reflected a "realism guided restraint," aiming to avoid entanglement while managing nuclear risks.¹⁷ The crisis prompted a reassessment of US policy, balancing India-Pakistan issues with the broader India-China geopolitical competition, potentially recalibrating its pro-India tilt.¹⁷
- **China:** Initially showed a biased stance, emphasizing "solid iron clad, all weather friends of Pakistan" and supporting Pakistan's sovereignty.¹⁶ However, as escalation concerns grew, Beijing returned to a more traditional message of de-escalation and urged restraint.¹⁶ The reported success of Chinese-origin weapons (J-10 fighter aircraft, HQ-9 air defense system, PL-15 air-to-air missile) in Pakistani hands during the conflict provided a morale boost in China and positioned China as a more credible and potentially popular arms provider internationally.⁶ China also views itself as part of the Kashmir dispute, linking it to its own border disputes with India.¹⁷
- **Russia:** Firmly condemned all acts of terrorism and opposed extremism, while urging both India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and resolve differences peacefully through diplomatic dialogue.⁵
- **European Union & Others:** Many nations, including the UK, France, Netherlands, Japan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran, strongly condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and expressed solidarity with India's right to self-defense and its fight against cross-border terrorism, strengthening India's diplomatic position on the global stage.¹¹

The 2025 crisis was not merely a bilateral conflict but a vivid demonstration of evolving military capabilities influenced by broader great power competition. The first-time use of advanced weaponry by both sides highlights an accelerating arms race and technological leapfrogging in the region.⁶ Crucially, China's direct support to Pakistan in terms of modern military hardware and the reported success of these systems suggest a deepening of the China-Pakistan strategic nexus.⁶ This directly impacts India's security calculus and, in turn, influences India's defense acquisitions

and its strategic partnerships (e.g., with the US and Europe), creating a dangerous feedback loop in the regional arms race. The crisis serves as a critical case study for 21st-century warfare between near-peer nuclear adversaries.⁶ It forces a re-evaluation of traditional deterrence theories under the nuclear shadow, as both sides are increasingly willing to push conventional boundaries. The role of the international community shifts from traditional mediation to a more complex task of managing technological escalation and navigating a multipolar environment where different global powers have varying interests and levels of engagement, potentially exacerbating regional instability through their strategic alignments.

The following table summarizes the diverse international reactions to the 2025 crisis:

Table 3: Summary of International Reactions to the 2025 Crisis

Country/Organization	Key Statement/Action	Specific Nuances/Context	Source Snippets
United States	Played crucial role in mediating ceasefire; urged de-escalation; stands strong with India against terrorism.	Approach reflected "realism guided restraint"; aims to balance India-Pakistan with India-China competition; India publicly denied US mediation role.	5
China	Called India's strikes regrettable; opposed all forms of terrorism; urged de-escalation.	Initially biased towards Pakistan ("iron clad friends"); success of Chinese-origin weapons in Pakistani hands boosted China's arms provider credibility; views itself as part of Kashmir dispute.	5
Russia	Firmly condemned terrorism; urged India and Pakistan to	Consistent call for diplomatic dialogue.	5

	exercise restraint and resolve differences peacefully.		
United Kingdom	Foreign Minister David Lammy condemned Pahalgam killings; expressed support for India's fight against cross-border terrorism; involved in ceasefire discussions.	Reiterated India's "zero tolerance" policy.	11
France	President Macron expressed strong solidarity with India; condemned attack; offered condolences; affirmed continued fight against terrorism.	Highlighted unwavering support for India.	11
Netherlands	PM Dick Schoof condemned attack; reaffirmed firm stance against terrorism.	Expressed condolences for horrific cross-border terror attack.	11
Japan	Defence Minister Gen Nakatani San condemned attack; expressed unwavering solidarity with India.	Supported India's fight against terrorism.	11
Saudi Arabia	Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly denounced attack as heinous act of violence; reaffirmed stance against terrorism and	Expressed deep condolences and solidarity with India.	11

	extremism.		
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Supported India's right to self-defense through Operation Sindoor; reflected zero-tolerance stance on terrorism.	Strengthened India's position among Gulf nations; highlighted UAE's role in promoting regional security.	11
Iran	President Masoud Pezeshkian called PM Modi to offer condolences; emphasized need for stronger regional cooperation against terrorism.	Personal diplomatic outreach.	11

IX. Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, ignited by the barbaric Pahalgam attack and met with India's multi-dimensional Operation Sindoor, unequivocally demonstrated India's strategic shift towards a proactive, punitive counter-terrorism doctrine. External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's subsequent warning solidified this "new normal," where terror attacks will be treated as acts of war, met with deep kinetic and comprehensive non-kinetic responses. The immediate consequences included significant military engagement, a redefinition of escalation thresholds, a complex interplay of claims and counter-claims, and heightened international attention to the volatile South Asian security landscape.

Despite the ceasefire, several long-term challenges persist, shaping the future trajectory of India-Pakistan relations:

- **Persistent Threat:** The underlying issue of cross-border terrorism, fueled by Pakistan's alleged use of it as an instrument of state policy, remains unresolved, ensuring the continued potential for future provocations and crises.²
- **Escalation Risk:** The demonstrated willingness of both nuclear-armed states to employ advanced conventional weapons and engage in deep strikes significantly heightens the risk of unintended escalation, potentially crossing the nuclear threshold due to miscalculation or misperception.⁶
- **Information Warfare:** The pervasive nature of misinformation and disinformation during the conflict complicates crisis management, fuels nationalist sentiments

on both sides, and obscures objective assessment of military outcomes.⁶

- **Deterrence Uncertainty:** While India aims for "cumulative deterrence" by consistently imposing costs, its long-term effectiveness is uncertain, as Pakistan may adapt its strategies, disperse assets, and develop countermeasures, requiring India to continuously evolve its approach.⁷

Based on this analysis, the following recommendations are put forth for policymakers:

For India:

- **Sustained and Adaptive Deterrence:** Continue to refine and consistently apply the multi-dimensional deterrence strategy, ensuring that punitive actions are sufficiently severe, sustained, and targeted to impose measurable strategic, political, and economic costs on Pakistan's deep state, thereby raising the threshold for future provocations.⁸
- **Intelligence and Precision Enhancement:** Invest further in advanced intelligence gathering, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, alongside precision strike systems, to effectively identify and neutralize dispersed terror assets and counter evolving Pakistani countermeasures, minimizing collateral damage.⁷
- **Strategic Communication and Narrative Control:** Maintain clear, consistent, and evidence-based strategic communication to both domestic and international audiences, articulating the rationale behind India's actions, countering misinformation, and reinforcing its stance as a victim of state-sponsored terrorism.⁹

For Pakistan:

- **Irreversible Abjuration of Terrorism:** Credibly and irrevocably cease all forms of support for cross-border terrorism and dismantle terror infrastructure within its territory. This is fundamental to de-escalation and rebuilding trust, and crucial for alleviating international pressure.⁹
- **Strengthened De-escalation Mechanisms:** Re-establish and strengthen robust military-to-military communication channels and crisis management protocols to prevent miscalculation, manage escalation, and ensure effective ceasefire adherence during future crises.

For International Actors (especially US, China, EU):

- **Consistent Pressure on State-Sponsored Terrorism:** Maintain consistent international pressure on Pakistan to dismantle terror infrastructure and prevent cross-border terrorism, avoiding "hyphenation" of India and Pakistan on terrorism

issues to reinforce the global norm against state sponsorship of non-state actors.¹⁰

- **Robust Crisis Management Frameworks:** Develop and refine discreet, reliable crisis communication and de-escalation frameworks for nuclear-armed adversaries, acknowledging that while direct mediation might be publicly rejected, it remains vital for preventing uncontrolled escalation.⁶
- **Dialogue on Emerging Technologies:** Encourage bilateral or multilateral dialogue on the responsible development and deployment of emerging weapon systems (e.g., drones, ballistic missiles) to prevent an uncontrolled arms race and reduce the risk of technological miscalculation in a highly volatile region.⁵
- **Conditional Engagement for Stability:** Explore avenues for conditional engagement and dialogue that addresses India's legitimate security concerns regarding terrorism while also encouraging pathways for broader regional stability and conflict resolution, without legitimizing cross-border terrorism.

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