

India's Military Posture and Pakistan's Security Imperatives

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Abstract

This article provides a critical analysis of the evolving military stance of India and its repercussions for Pakistan's security within the larger strategic context of South Asia. It posits that the historical legacy of partition, ongoing territorial conflicts, and entrenched strategic distrust have perpetuated a lasting rivalry between these two nuclear-armed nations. The research asserts that India's current security posture is increasingly influenced by military modernization, changes in doctrine, and the rising impact of Hindutva-inspired strategic ideologies, which together bolster coercive strategies towards Pakistan. The article evaluates significant developments, such as shifts in India's military doctrines, advancements in defense capabilities, and the military escalation observed in May 2025, to determine their effects on regional deterrence and strategic stability. Additionally, it investigates the rise of new warfare dimensions, including cyber warfare, information operations, drone technology, and changing nuclear dynamics, arguing that these factors have created a novel regional security landscape. The study concludes that achieving lasting peace in South Asia necessitates an acknowledgment of strategic realities, the revival of bilateral dialogue, the establishment of institutionalized crisis management frameworks, and renewed efforts to address long-standing disputes.

Keywords: Operation Marka-e-Haq, Hindutva, drone war, regional security

The contemporary history of South Asia was immensely shaped by the crucible of a hasty and ill-managed partition. The division was not merely a political event but a cataclysm that unleashed widespread bloodshed, triggering a deep and enduring animosity between the newly born nations of India and Pakistan. A 'moth-eaten and truncated'¹ state of Pakistan came into being, having its two wings of confederation, the

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¹ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, address to the All-India Muslim League Council, Delhi, June 17, 1947, quoted in Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 339.

West and the East positioned around the flanks of its maiden antagonist. A prevailing belief among many Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was that Pakistan was a fragile entity destined to eventually reunite with India. This perception was not merely speculative; it was a matter of diplomatic record. In a letter to the Nawab of Bhopal on 9 July 1948, Nehru articulated this conviction, writing: ‘Ultimately, I have no doubt that India and Pakistan will come close together...some kind of a federal link. There is no other way to peace. The alternative is...war’.² For Pakistan, however, this patronizing assumption was not a promise of future peace but an existential threat. This mindset inculcated the seeds of insecurity and put survival of Pakistan at stake since day one.

The prevailing historical analysis that the British decolonization of the subcontinent was rushed and incomplete which left Pakistan and India with conflict fault lines and ensnared both states into conflicts.³ The trail of this animus easily leads to the issues rooted in the pre-independence unresolved disputes now turned into protracted conflicts. Thrice gone to war and several skirmishes and crises, their strife ranges from disputes on territorial claims, division of resources and assets, economic anxieties, entrenched strategic misperceptions and aftermaths of mass migration, to the exacerbation of the region’s security balance through an arms race and nuclearization.⁴ The result is a long and chequered history replete with mistrust and misunderstanding putting regional peace and lives and socioeconomic wellbeing of over 1.5 billion people at stake.⁵ Given its strategic location, population bulge, and

² Nehru to Nawab of Bhopal, 9 July 1948, Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN), VII (1998), 5-6.

³ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 1-12, 108-125, 181.

⁴ From the very outset, the 1947 division of subcontinent witnessed massive killing of Muslims and Hindus, and a large-scale migration of people from India to Pakistan and vice versa. ‘Partition is central to modern identity in the subcontinent, as the Holocaust is to identity among Jews, branded painfully onto the regional consciousness by memories of almost unimaginable violence’. Source: William Dalrymple, ‘The Great Divide: The Violent Legacy of Indian Partition,’ *The New Yorker*, 29 June 2015, accessed 12 May 2017. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/29/the-great-divide-books-dalrymple>.

⁵ Asma Shakir Khawaja, *A Contribution to the Issue of Perceptions as a Factor in Decision-making (The Discussion on Gas Pipelines in Selected*

political influence, any recipe of conflict or cooperation for the subcontinent would have global impact. Mehdi aptly observes that:

South Asian region floats in poisonous waters. It is infected with internal and external insecurities and is precariously balanced upon fear, mistrust, bloodthirstiness, and dehumanized governance. Under the burden of militarization, poverty, violence, conditions of aid donor agencies and in the clutches of the empire of corruption, the region gasps for breath and peace. Surprisingly, the region is far from being prepared for peace.... It remains rooted in suspicion, fear, and insecurity and is reluctant to take innovative steps⁶ toward peace. It goes on doing business as usual, targeting colonialists and neocolonialists for its wretchedness, disallowing human governance and slighting human dignity and happiness, brandishing highly sophisticated weapons, gnashing nuclear teeth, screaming war and violence.... In South Asian societies, fascism and jingoism are inflamed in the name of patriotism, nationalism, and religious revivalism, and human minds and hearts are being militarized and nuclearized. But clearly the impoverished people of the region have nothing to gain from all this.⁷

Robert Jervis explicates perceptual relationship between Pakistan and India:

To take a general category of political beliefs, when one country thinks that another is its enemy, the perception of hostility is usually more central than other aspects of the image; it is used to explain much of the other's behavior and is in turn often linked to prior variables such as the other's domestic system or geographical position.⁸

A combination of overwhelming radical Hindu nationalism that has installed its strong footprint, and a political leadership with a vision that finds ways to adopt aggressive policies and postures against Pakistan, has largely hindered the prospects of sustainable peace.

English and Urdu Pakistani Newspapers), (Lahore: Faisal Publishers, 2014), 3.

⁶ Confidence Building Measures.

⁷ Syed Sikandar Mehdi, 'Rediscovering the Culture of Peace in South Asia', *Peace Review*, 10:1 (1988), 71.

⁸ Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* Robert Jervis, 1976, 299.

Achieving regional peace thus remains an illusion due to ideology driven, Hindutva inspired, ancient mythology, prestige based strategic designs, and flawed perception of self and others, manifested in Indian strategic culture.

Ruling party and the radical Hindu organizations and parties maintain a politico-social pressure on the government circles to pursue it even at the cost of sovereignty of other states.⁹ Inspired by the political success of BJP, the Indian National Congress has also adopted the strategy of ‘soft *Hindutva*’ and is described as ‘BJP’s B-team’, because both ‘believe that the Hindu voter is communal, and can only be persuaded by a communal dialectic’.¹⁰ These policy guidelines and communicative postures are among the best source to understand Indian strategic priorities. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is a living example that exhibits how bilateral conflicts of member states threaten, slow down, or even ruin any prospects and plans of regional integration.¹¹

India’s posture vis-à-vis Pakistan: Continuity, change, and crisis risks

a. Background

Bilateral relations between Pakistan and India can be defined as ‘long standing militarized competitions between the same pairs of states,’ characterized by ‘the persistent, fundamental, and long term incompatibility of goals’, between them, manifested in ‘the basic attitudes of the parties toward each other, as well as in the recurring violent or potentially violent clashes over a long period of time’.¹² Importantly, enduring rivalries ‘are not the root causes of war but

⁹ *The Nation*, ‘Sindh, Balochistan could become Part of India in Modi’s Next Term: Hindu Nationalist Leader,’ 27 July 2017, accessed 24 August 2017, <http://nation.com.pk/international/27-Jul-2017/sindh-balochistan-could-become-part-of-india-in-modi-s-next-term-hindu-nationalist-leader>.

¹⁰ M. J. Akbar, ‘Congress is BJP’s B-team,’ *Dawn* (Islamabad), 12 December 2002.

¹¹ Balijit Singh, ‘Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Problems and Prospects’, *South Asian Survey*, 12:2 (2010), 177-178.

¹² Paul Diehl, ‘Why Enduring Rivalries Do – or Don’t – End’, Review of Why Enduring Rivalries Do – or Don’t – End by Eric W. Cox, *Perspectives on Politics*, 9:1 (2005), 215; and Zeev Maoz and Ben Mor, *Bound by Struggle: The Strategic Evolution of Enduring International Rivalries* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 4-5.

constitute the context in which the majority of violent conflicts and also violent territorial changes and arms races have taken place'.¹³

Four characteristics make the South Asian enduring rivalry particularly noteworthy: First, the India-Pakistan rivalry is more conflict- and war-prone than other enduring rivalries in terms of frequency and severity of disputes. Second, it is one of the most salient in contemporary world politics, given that both adversaries possess large and growing arsenals of nuclear weapons and that their geographic location lends them particular geopolitical prominence. Third, it involves a usually broad set of conflicted issues and qualifies as both a positional and a spatial rivalry, the former involving a competition over regional preponderance, the latter an ongoing dispute over territorial claims. A fourth particularity of the South Asian rivalry is that it falls into the category of asymmetric conflictive dyads.... In rare cases, asymmetric dyads become rivals when the weaker adversary overestimates its capabilities and, as a consequence, is perceived by the stronger state as a threatening competitor, or if other factors effectively truncate and mitigate the power asymmetry.¹⁴

Radical hyperactive Hindu nationalism in India has witnessed an emergence of aggressive posture for regional supremacy. These designs are justified by the Indian scholars under the notion of 'geopolitics and the socio-cultural composition of the region', which compels India to consider itself as the 'security manager of South Asia',¹⁵ or as West thought 'Net-security provider'. Not surprisingly, this narrative seeks to portray Pakistan as a hindrance in the achievement of such a pursuit. The former Indian Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat¹⁶ chose to reinforce this narrative, 'that the differences between India and Pakistan could not be reconciled...militaries alone do not go to war, nations go to

¹³ Paul Diehl and Gary Goertz, 'The Rivalry Process: How Rivalries are Sustained and Terminated', in *What Do We Know About War?*, ed., John Vasquez (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 83.

¹⁴ Ishtiaq Ahmad and Hannes Ebert, 'Breaking the Equilibrium? New Leaders and Old Structures in the India-Pakistan Rivalry', *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 42:1 (2015), 46-75, accessed 11 July 2017, <http://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.2015.999518>.

¹⁵ P. Venkateshwar Rao, 'Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: India's Role and Perception,' *Asian Survey*, 28:4 (1998), 419.

¹⁶ Later he became CDS of India, becoming BJP's favorite man in uniform. He dies in a plane crash.

war [and] we have to prepare ourselves accordingly'.¹⁷ The continuous modernization of India's military and its substantial defense allocations are justified by the ever-present possibility of war with Pakistan. Bipin Rawat even escalated the level of warnings by stating 'India will continue to hit Pakistan'.¹⁸ The statement was given in 2017 which still explains the nature and aim of India's posture towards Pakistan. The Indian military establishment often leverages the security threat from Pakistan and domestic instability to justify its requests for increased funding and modernization. This focus on a perpetual rival secures financial support from a public concerned with national security, despite the nation's pressing needs in other areas, such as improving its Human Development Index.¹⁹

The religious connotation and political application of the concept of *Akhand Bharat* have become an effective determinant of India's regional posture. It encourages a policy of power centralization and adds fuel to the volatile and hostile regional environment. The aspiration for *Akhand Bharat*, a vision of reunifying the Indian subcontinent, is a main pillar of Hindu nationalist thought. Many adherents consider working toward this goal a religious duty. Sadhvi Rithambara²⁰ advocated that battle against Pakistan to defend the territories of India was a sacred war, similar to the war of Kurukshetra that forms the backdrop to Krishna's conversation with Arjuna in the Gita.²¹ The geography books introduced by the BJP in the twenty thousand *Sang Parivar* schools had shown a new map of India with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tibet, Myanmar, and the kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan as integral parts of *Akhand Bharat*.

¹⁷ *Dawn*, 'Two-front War with Pakistan and China Cannot be Ruled Out: Indian Army Chief,' 6 September 2017.

¹⁸ Sudhi Ranjan Sen, 'India Will Continue to Hit Pakistan, Says Chief of Army Staff General Bipin Rawat', *Huffpost India*, 23 May 2017, accessed 12 August 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/05/23/exclusive-india-will-continue-to-hit-pakistan-says-chief-of-ar_a_22105486/.

¹⁹ India slipped down one place from 130 among the 193 countries ranked in terms of human development, says the 2025 Human Development Report (HDR) released by the UNDP. India's Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.685 puts it in the 'medium human development' category.

²⁰ She is a Hindu political activist, social worker, religious preacher, and a member of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. She achieved prominence after participating in the movement that led to demolition of the Babri Masjid in India in 1992, for which she was later indicted by the Liberhan Commission.

²¹ Kalyani Menon, *Everyday Nationalism: Women of the Hindu Right in India* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 92.

Operation Sindoor has been included in the syllabus of schools under the same mindset. The Indian Ocean is renamed as Hindu *Mahasagar*, the Arabian Sea as *Sindhu Sagar*, and The Bay of Bengal as *Ganga Sagar*.²² This curriculum further reinforces the cultural-religious-political aspirations about reunification of the subcontinent²³ while enforcing the ideology of *Hindutva*²⁴ to eventually alter the thinking pattern of the coming generations. This policy, promotes an orthodox ancient mindset and serves to intensify religious nationalism leading to socio-political polarization, a phenomenon led to division of Subcontinent almost 78 years back. This philosophy, combined with a popular electorate slogan and the rise to power of the Hindu right including BJP as its political agenda, is one of the greatest threats to regional peace.²⁵

In general, terms 'posture' refers to a state's behaviour in multi domains. That includes military, diplomacy, economy, grand strategy etc. Ideally, there should be an alignment and compatibility among all these domains. A state's posture reflects upon her priorities in international Geopolinomics. Especially the position and the status they aspire for herself. However, due to limitations this study will only focus on strategic and military posture. Military posture refers to a country's military readiness, capabilities, strength, deployment, and doctrine.

²² Noor ul Haq, *Management of Pakistan-India Relations: Resolution of Disputes* (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2017), 4-5.

²³ Tahir Mahmood, 'A Dream Called Akhand Bharat,' *The Indian Express*, 7 January 2016, accessed 11 August 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-dream-called-akhand-bharat/>.

²⁴ This is part of the Gujarat primary school syllabus as reference literature now, as of the announcement in June, 2014. 'The Indian map should include 'countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Burma' (as it's all a) 'part of Akhand Bharat... Undivided India is the truth, divided India is a lie. Division of India is unnatural and it can be united again...'' In a book titled *Tejomay Bharat* (Shining India) he talks about how India's neighbors should not be recognized as different countries at all, and how it is all, actually a larger country that requires unification. This is also a part of the current Gujarat primary school syllabus as reference literature now, as announced in June, 2014. (Ritu Sharma, 'Man Who Got Wendy Doniger Pulped is Made 'Must Reading' in Gujarat Schools), *The Indian Express*, 25 July 2017, accessed 22 September 2017. <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/man-who-got-wendy-doniger-pulped-is-made-must-reading-in-gujarat-schools/>.

²⁵ Varun Parekh, 'Why 'Akhand Bharat' is a Pipe Dream,' *Huffpost India*, 17 March 2016, accessed 12 August 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.in/varun-parekh/why-akhand-bharat-remains_b_9461132.html.

Being an interdependent variable military posture is determined by national security strategy, ideology, threat perceptions, conflicts, domestic politics, technological advancements, economy, leadership, and geopolitical realities.

India's strategic posture can be defined, as 'coercive'. Primarily, India's state behaviour is a combination of military, diplomatic, domestic and ideological enablers that aim to assert its hegemon policies focused on acquiring place in elite club. A perception is growing among some international observers that India's regional security role is contradictory.

This view contrasts with New Delhi's strategic aim of being a 'net security provider'. It is fueled by several factors, including allegations of India's interference in the internal affairs of countries like Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA, as well as its neighbors.

Reports of extraterritorial killings,²⁶ & ²⁷ an expanding strategic program that exceeds immediate regional threat perceptions,²⁸ persistent tensions with Pakistan, and incidents of military escalation have led some critics to question the stability India brings to the region and globally.²⁹

Currently Hindutva ideology is highly visible within the Indian armed forces. This has led the politicization and potential communalization of the military at the cost of professionalism, visibly noticed before, during and post Operation Marka-e-Haq. The 'saffronisation' of Indian military is promoted through:

1. Hindu nationalist symbols and ideology, such as the installation of statues of Hindu deities like Krishna and Chanakya in army spaces.³⁰

²⁶ Shishir Gupta, 'Did India Order the Murder of a US Sikh Separatist? Here's What We Know', *Al Jazeera*, 30 November 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/30/did-india-order-the-murder-of-a-us-sikh-separatist-heres-what-we-know>.

²⁷ 'How a Killing at a Sikh Temple Led to Canada and India Expelling Each Other's Diplomats,' *PBS NewsHour*, 19 September 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-a-killing-at-a-sikh-temple-led-to-canada-and-india-expelling-each-others-diplomats>.

²⁸ 'India-Pakistan Missile Race Heats up, but China in Crosshairs Too,' *Al Jazeera*, 28 August 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/28/india-pakistan-missile-race-heats-up-but-china-in-crosshairs-too>.

²⁹ Karthika Sasikumar, 'India-Pakistan Crises under the Nuclear Shadow: The Role of Reassurance', *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 2:1 (January 2019), 151–69, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2019.1619229>.

³⁰ Noor Ul Huda Atif, 'From Secular Shield to Saffron Sword: Changing the Face of Indian Armed Forces,' *The Geopolitics*, 23 March 2025, <https://thegeopolitics.com/from-secular-shield-to-saffron-sword-changing-the-face-of-indian-armed-forces/>.

2. Growing influence of Hindu nationalist ideology to politicize the military promotions, extensions, postings and acknowledgments. For example, the post of CDS is created for a retired Hindutva inspired general.³¹
3. Diversity and inclusivity within the military, particularly for non-Hindu personnel has been compromised in violation of Indian constitution.³²
4. Indian 'Defence Services Staff College' advised to revise the idea of India to align with its Hindu civilizational legacy.³³

b. From Doctrine to Drive: Hindutva's Influence on Indian Military Policy

The militarization of India under the Hindutva ideology has fused religion with strategy. As reflected in the writings of General Anil Chauhan (CDS of India), military doctrines are being reinterpreted through a civilizational-nationalist lens, legitimizing perpetual hostility against Pakistan.³⁴ This politicization ensures that anti-Pakistan aggression is not only strategic but also religiously motivated, feeding into domestic politics and electoral mobilization.

Eventually, the growing influence of Hindu nationalist ideology in the military could have significant implications for India's politico-social structure at the cost of war fighting capabilities of Indian military. It could lead to increased tensions and conflicts within the military. Scholars are claiming that Indian diplomacy has been saffronised.³⁵ This term refers to the process of instilling Indian diplomacy with Hindu nationalist values, prioritizing Hindu culture and identity. This shift has

³¹ Antara Chakraborty, 'Hindu Nationalism: Impact on Multicultural Societies', *RSIS Commentary*, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 8 March 2023, accessed 1 September 2025, <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/cens/hindu-nationalism-impact-on-multicultural-societies/>

³² Noor Ul Huda Atif, *op.cit.*

³³ Prakash Menon, 'Hindu Right Is Catching India's Military Leaders Young. It Will Politicise Armed Forces', *The Print*, 3 September 2024, <https://theprint.in/opinion/hindu-right-is-catching-indias-military-leaders-young-it-will-politicise-armed-forces/2249438/>

³⁴ Newsdesk, 'Indian General's Book Sparks Debate over Political Neutrality and Hindutva Ideology in Military', *PTV World*, 8 August 2025, accessed 1 September 2025, <https://www.ptv.com.pk/ptvworld/newsdetail/10534>

³⁵ Kira Huju, 'Saffronizing Diplomacy: The Indian Foreign Service under Hindu Nationalist Rule,' *International Affairs*, 98:2 (March 2022), 424, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab220>.

led to increased emphasis on India's civilizational heritage and Hinduism in their diplomatic discourse. India has implemented diplomatic initiatives to promote Hinduism, Hindu culture and heritage, such as the celebrating International Yoga Day or the promotion of Ayurveda as alternate medicine.³⁶ Reflecting upon Hindu nationalist ideology has become a priority for Indian foreign office. At many international forums Indian diplomats prioritise point scoring on the bases of Islamophobia or hatred towards Pakistan.

Resultantly, Indian diplomacy is at its lowest. The diplomatic aggression India opted as a manifestation of strength only pushed India in diplomatic isolation. The fancy words Indian foreign policy guru's chose such as 'Strategic Autonomy,' only justified India as a 'bad bet', rightly pointed out by Ashly Telis, the famous scholar. At the same time, BJP is accused of promoting radical Hindu hyperactive nationalism on the bases of ideological rhetoric endangering security of regional and extra regional states.

c. Doctrinal Evolution and Military Modernization

India's military doctrines vis-à-vis Pakistan have consistently evolved with aggression at their core:

1. *Sunderji Doctrine (1980s)*: Envisaged mobilizing massive strike corps deep into Pakistani territory, aiming for decisive conventional victory. Its limitation was slow mobilization, exposed during Operation Parakram (2001–02).
2. *Cold Start Doctrine (CSD, 2004 onwards)*: Modified the Sunderji framework into swift, shallow thrusts under a nuclear overhang, designed to punish Pakistan without triggering full-scale war.
3. *Theatrisation of Commands (post-2019)*: India's ongoing effort to create integrated theatre commands to enhance joint warfare capability, with Pakistan as the principal operational focus.
4. *Military Modernization*: Acquisition of Rafale jets, S-400 systems, and Agni-series missiles reflects a posture of coercion and intimidation, directly altering the regional balance of power.

³⁶ Sweta Kumari, 'Yoga: An Ancient Practice in India's Modern Diplomacy', *Vivekananda International Foundation*, 24 July 2024, <https://www.vifindia.org/2024/july/24/Yoga-An-Ancient-Practice-in-India-s-Modern-Diplomacy>

5. *Nuclear Posture Shift*: India's gradual dilution of its 'No First Use' (NFU) pledge most notably through Rajnath Singh's 2019 statement signals a move toward nuclear assertiveness.³⁷

d. The Military Escalation of May 2025: Deterrence, Multi-Domain Warfare, and Crisis Stability

Following the 2025 Pahalgam incident, India's unsubstantiated accusation against Pakistan triggered a severe military escalation. New Delhi's cross-domain strikes in May 2025, encompassing air, artillery, and cyber operations, represented a reckless gamble.

Pakistan countered with a measured but overwhelming response, achieving dominance in conventional, informational, and diplomatic theatres. The outcome constituted a strategic humiliation for India, revealing the ineffectiveness of its aggressive strategy. It has notable implications for Regional Stability;

1. *Escalation Instability*: May 2025 demonstrated the danger of rapid crises in a nuclearized environment.
2. *Security Dilemma*: India's offensive modernization compels Pakistan to strengthen its Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) posture, intensifying the arms race.
3. *Internal Destabilization*: Through TTP proxies and subversive acts like Jaffar Express, India seeks to weaken Pakistan from within.
4. *Civilizational Militarism*: Hindutva's merger with Indian strategy ensures perpetual enmity, making de-escalation unlikely.

New Normal: Post Operation Marka-e-Haq, May 2025

The 'New Normal,' established after 'Operation Marka-e-Haq,' in May 2025 cannot be ignored while articulating any regional security framework. Few of its contours are given below;

i. Non-Contact Warfare

Non-contact warfare has become an integral part of contemporary warfare. Pakistan and India effectively applied non-contact tactics to exhaust, drain and strain each other. This new normal has made technological excellence as a significant war-winning tool. Tactical

³⁷ Ashley J. Tellis, *Striking Asymmetries: Nuclear Transitions in Southern Asia* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 July 2022), accessed 1 September 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/07/striking-asymmetries-nuclear-transitions-in-southern-asia?lang=en>

application of technology to achieve strategic gains has made May 2025 crisis an index for the students of modern warfare.

The conflict saw the extensive deployment of cost-effective drones for surveillance, espionage, and strikes. India reported neutralizing 77 Pakistani drones, while Pakistan claimed to have taken down 84 Indian-operated, Israeli-made Harop drones.³⁸ Crucially, the cost of these drones was often lower than the air defense missiles used to destroy them. This cost imbalance starkly highlighted the urgent need for more affordable counter-drone systems.

Both states used precision-guided munitions, including nuclear capable BrahMos cruise missiles, to target Pakistan's counter force targets including airbases and military installations. This demonstrates the effectiveness of precision strikes in avoiding collateral damage and achieving strategic objectives.

Cyber technology expanded the warfare to digital domains, facilitating outreach to sensitive, military, strategic and public domains. Pakistan successfully launched cyberattacks targeting Indian military satellites, government websites, and critical digital infrastructure. According to Indian sources they have recorded over 1.5 million attempted cyber intrusions.³⁹

The conflict saw the electronic warfare as the new normal, with both sides jamming each other's communication systems and radar. Various sources stated that Pakistan blinded India Rafael jets through jamming their systems and connection with the base.

Information dominance by Pakistan despite India's disinfo labs and massive media outreach was the new normal effectively established.

ii. Lower Nuclear Threshold

The crisis also dangerously eroded the nuclear threshold, a shift critics link to the Modi government's gamble on large-scale strikes. By targeting areas perilously close to Pakistan's core strategic assets, including the Nur Khan air base and its nuclear oversight headquarters, India dramatically heightened the risk of a catastrophic miscalculation. The most revealing moment came from Indian Prime Minister Modi

³⁸ News Desk, 'Latest Pakistan-India Conflict Heats Up Drone Arms Race', *The Express Tribune*, 27 May 2025, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2548089/latest-pakistan-india-conflict-heats-up-drone-arms-race>

³⁹ Sameer Patil, 'From Missiles to Malware: India-Pakistan Cyber Rivalry and Lessons for Taiwan', *Taiwan Insight*, 22 July 2025, accessed 1 September 2025, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2025/07/22/from-missiles-to-malware-india-pakistan-cyber-rivalry-and-lessons-for-taiwan/>

himself, who admitted his surprise at Pakistan's decisive response.⁴⁰ This admission is starkly at odds with the rationale of deterrence theory. If a state assumes its adversary will not retaliate after a strike on sovereign territory, especially near sensitive military sites, it points to a significant failure in strategic calculus and a departure from predictable, rational choice models in international relations.

iii. Conventional Deterrence

The May 2025 crisis fundamentally reshaped the regional security paradigm. Pakistan's demonstrated conventional deterrence effectively neutralized Indian aggression, irrevocably discrediting New Delhi's rhetoric of unquestioned military advantage.

The long-standing myth of India's conventional superiority and its 'new normal' doctrine of un-answered cross-border strikes is effectively debunked. In its place, Pakistan validated its Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) through a Quid Pro Quo Plus (QPQ+) strategy. This marked a profound shift from 'deterrence by punishment,' to a Pakistan-led model of 'deterrence by denial.' This framework suggests that stability in a nuclearized environment is best maintained by demonstrating the credible capability to deny an adversary's objectives at every level of the escalation ladder. Pakistan demonstrated that a 'Deterrence through Denial' combining military readiness with disciplined restraint, calibrated denial and international legal compliance can prevent South Asia's 'Doomsday Clock' from reaching midnight.⁴¹

iv. Established Superiority of Pakistan Air force

Recently the US air force expressed interest in studying Pakistan's air warfare in May Crisis to learn about contemporary tactics. Pakistan air force established the new normal of Pakistan air superiority, well acknowledged and appreciated by strategists.⁴² World had witnessed one of the largest air battles in history and the first drone war between nuclear-armed nations. Pakistan's Marka-e-Haq successfully integrated

⁴⁰ Al Jazeera Staff, 'India's Modi Says Fighting "Only Paused" in Wake of Conflict with Pakistan', *Al Jazeera*, 12 May 2025, accessed 1 September 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/12/indias-modi-says-fighting-only-paused-in-wake-of-conflict-with-pakistan>

⁴¹ Malik Qasim Mustafa, ed., *Operation Bunyanum Marsoos: Deterrence, Doctrinal Shifts, and Strategic Stability in South Asia* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, 2026).

⁴² Chappy Hakim, 'India-Pakistan Battle Changes Global Understanding of Modern Air Warfare', *Dawn*, 19 May 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1911900>

kinetic power with non-kinetic operations across air, land, sea, cyber, and information domains.

Pakistan's Dual-Domain Quid Pro Quo Plus

The evolution of Pakistan's strategy from 'minimum credible deterrence' to 'full-spectrum deterrence' exhibits its commitment to deterring all forms of Indian aggression. Pakistan would not only match Indian military reprisals but also stay one-step ahead. This strategy effectively integrates Pakistan's nuclear and conventional capabilities. Not only in Balakot but during Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos Pakistan effectively practiced this. Deterrence can only be maintained with 'threat of over-proportioned punishment', that Pakistan follows in conventional and nuclear domains.

v. Pakistan's Counter-Force Retaliation to India's Counter-Value Strike

Pakistan's response to India's attack on a counter-value target demonstrated strategic restraint and calculated precision. By deliberately choosing counter-force targets, such as military installations, command centers, and weaponry, within India, Pakistan signaled a clear intent to de-escalate while effectively degrading India's immediate military capacity. This calibrated approach successfully communicated Pakistan's capability to inflict significant costs without crossing the threshold into mass civilian escalation, thereby upholding the principles of just war and reinforcing its position as a responsible nuclear state.

Marka-e-Haq highlighted as a watershed moment in military history, characterized by the effective use of Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs). The integration of Artificial Intelligence into Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and command-and-control systems allowed for unprecedented operational tempo. Pakistan's Cyber Command executed a sophisticated non-kinetic campaign that reportedly paralyzed 70% of India's power grid and disrupted vital military communications. By synchronizing these cyber operations with kinetic strikes, Pakistan induced a state of 'strategic paralysis' within the Indian war machine, targeting the digital and satellite infrastructure essential for modern counter-offensives.⁴³

vi. Abeyance of Indus Water Treaty (IWT)

Under any circumstances, IWT was suspended neither not disconnected nor put in abeyance since it was signed. However, Modi's weaponisation

⁴³ Malik Qasim Mustafa (ed.), *op.cit.*

of water has made negative peace more vulnerable and fragile. It has also affirmed the affirmation that India's refusal to engage in talks with Pakistan is not only against the spirit of bilateralism, propagated by India as a problem-solving mechanism but makes India non-reliable partner for any treaty and problem-solving mechanism. This situation has brought water at the centre stage of regional security calculus.

Bilateral Security Framework: New Dimension

The history of India-Pakistan relations, from the bitter legacy of Partition to the contemporary era of Hindutva-driven statecraft, reveals a consistent pattern of hostility entrenched in existential fears and competing nationalism. India's current strategic posture, as analyzed, is not a temporary deviation but an institutionalized doctrine of coercion. It is a fusion of hyper-nationalist ideology, military modernization, and a revisionist ambition for regional hegemony under the concept of *Akhand Bharat*. This posture, exemplified by the doctrinal shifts from Sunderji to Cold Start and the reckless adventurism of the May 2025 escalations, has fundamentally destabilized the regional security environment.

The events of May 2025, culminating in Operation Marka-e-Haq, established a decisive 'new normal.' They demonstrated the futility of India's aggressive strategy and exposed the critical flaws in its assumption of conventional superiority and impunity. Pakistan's robust demonstration of Full Spectrum Deterrence and Quid Pro Quo Plus, achieving dominance in conventional, cyber, and informational domains, effectively restored a balance of power. However, this balance is perilous. It exists within a landscape characterized by a lowered nuclear threshold, the weaponisation of water via the abeyance of the Indus Water Treaty, and the persistent threat of proxy warfare and sub-conventional conflict.

This new reality renders unilateral security approaches or hegemonic 'net security provider' fantasies not only obsolete but dangerously counterproductive. The traditional tools of diplomacy, including multilateral forums like SAARC, have been crippled by Hindutva driven animosity. Therefore, the pursuit of sustainable peace in South Asia is contingent upon a fundamental recalibration towards a direct, bilateral regional security approach. This approach must acknowledge the following imperatives:

1. *Recognition of Strategic Parity*: India must abandon its illusion of asymmetry and acknowledge Pakistan's proven capability to defend its sovereignty and impose significant costs at all levels of conflict.
2. *De-linking Strategy from Ideology*: The saffronisation of India's military and foreign policy, which religiously sanctifies hostility,

must be rolled back to create space for amicable engagement that is in the interests of the both the states and the region.

3. *Formalizing Crisis Stability Mechanisms*: The lessons of May 2025 necessitate urgent, formal agreements on non-contact warfare, cyber engagement rules, and reaffirmed nuclear doctrines to prevent rapid escalation from miscalculation.
4. *Re-engaging on Core Bilateral Disputes*: Lasting peace is impossible without addressing the root causes of conflict, particularly Jammu and Kashmir, through sustained dialogue.

The choice for New Delhi is clear: it can persist with an aggressive posture that guarantees mutual peril and strategic humiliation, or embrace a sober, bilateral security framework that acknowledges Pakistan as a legitimate stakeholder. The latter path, though it may seem too ideal and is fraught with obstacles, is the only viable route to securing the socioeconomic well-being of over 1.5 billion people and transforming South Asia from a region ‘gasping for breath and peace’ into one of stability and shared prosperity. The burden of initiating this shift rests primarily on India, as the larger state whose ideological and strategic choices have been the primary driver of recent escalation. Regional security must be a negotiated contract, not a dictated diktat.