

# **Post-Pahalgam Indo-Pak Escalation and Its Implications**

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## **Introduction**

In the afternoon of May 12, 2025, people in the Subcontinent breathed a sigh of relief as the news of an Indo-Pak ceasefire started to break. Tensions between the two arch-rivals flared up following the carnage of twenty-six people by militants near Pahalgam in the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) on April 22, 2025. As usual, Indians were quick to blame Pakistan for sponsoring the horrific killings of innocent tourists. Pakistan was prompt to deny any involvement, condemn the attack and sought impartial international inquiry into the incident. But intense hype and war hysteria implicating Pakistan's involvement created by the Indian Media and the ruling BJP affiliates reached a level from where it was impossible for the Indian PM to back out from some sort of militarily actions. Indians, thereafter, conducted airstrikes at alleged terrorist hideouts inside Pakistan at the early hours of May 7, 2025, despite repeated call for restraint from the international community and Pakistan's stern warning for grave consequences. The Pahalgam attack eventually led to an intense aerial confrontation between the nuclear-armed neighbours with both sides exchanging air, drone and missile strikes across the border. Fortunately, intervention by the international community, de-escalation was successful within just four days.

Indian administered J&K has been a flashpoint for separatist attacks with a long-drawn-out struggle for self-determination, making the area unsafe for tourists for decades. Experts categorise the recent Indo-Pak escalation as unprecedented and a race between Western and Chinese military technologies that will certainly draw huge interest amongst the defence circles worldwide. The conflict bears significance beyond Indo-Pak frontiers. This article aims to analyse the post-Pahalgam escalation and its impacts in the subcontinent from Bangladesh perspective.

## **Indo-Pak Kashmir Flashpoint**

The Kashmir dispute has been an unresolved colonial legacy originated at the partition of the Subcontinent in 1947. The partition plan allowed the Muslim-majority region to join either country but the ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, chose to join India. The event drew both nations to the first ever Indo-Pak war in 1948. UN intervened in 1949 and deployed the UN Military Observers along the Line of Control (LOC) following a ceasefire agreement, which is still active. The ceasefire agreement brokered by the UN recommended holding a plebiscite to settle the question of whether the state would join India or Pakistan. However, the two countries could not agree to a deal to demilitarise the region before the referendum could take place. Thereafter, a second Indo-Pak war followed in 1965. India also fought a brief but bitter conflict at Kargil with Pakistani-backed militias in 1999.

**Kashmiri's Struggle for Self-determination.** An armed rebellion against Indian rule in J&K began in the late eighty's, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. India accuses Pakistan of backing militants in Kashmir, that Pakistan denies. With about 60% Muslim population, J&K is the only Muslim majority state in India and used to enjoy special status. But in 2019 Kashmiri discontent deepened, when the Hindu nationalist BJP govt abrogated the Article 370 and 35A that acknowledged the special status of the state in terms of autonomy and its ability to formulate laws

for the state's permanent residents. Since overturning of the region's special status, tourist visits soared, and Kashmiris started to fear demographic change in the state (Al Jazeera, 2019). Both local and international rights bodies have documented, sexualized violence used as a weapon to terrorize or humiliate Kashmiri Muslim communities. In a horrific incident in 1991, soldiers of an Indian Army unit along with troops of the paramilitary forces allegedly raped more than 30 women in the Kashmiri villages of Kunan and Poshpora during a search operation to trace militants (BBC Urdu, 2017). Victims of that incident are still fighting for justice. In April 2025, the J&K Revenue Dept. revealed that over 84,000 domicile certificates had been granted to non-Kashmiris within just two years (Qadri, 2025). Today, many in Indian-administered J&K oppose India's rule, while many wish to restore their semi-autonomous status existing before 2019. Human Rights Watch, in a news release in July 2024 says, 'the Indian security forces continue to carry out repressive policies including arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and other serious abuses (Human Rights Watch, 2024). The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) has provided security forces with immunity, leading to a lack of accountability for alleged extrajudicial killings and abuses. A July 2023, report by Amnesty International described J&K as a region with significant human rights violations, including curfews, arbitrary arrests, and extra-judicial killings (Amnesty International, 2023). Despite an active insurgency in Kashmir, the ruling Hindu nationalist government encouraged tourism to project normalcy following its controversial action to revoke the autonomy. Kashmiri separatist groups targeting Amarnath pilgrims at base camp and on the convoys have been a regular incidence for decades. The last major attack occurred in June 2024, when militants killed nine persons by opening fire at a bus carrying pilgrims. In 2019, a suicide bombing in J&K killed at least forty-six soldiers and prompted Indian airstrikes on targets in Pakistan. The Kashmir issue is definitely far bigger and complex than merely a cross-border terrorism or Indo-Pak rivalry. Indian attempt to brand it as cross-border terrorism is an attempt to mask the decades old Kashmiri struggle for self-determination.

**India's Israeli Playbook in Kashmir.** Indian policies in J&K and with neighbours resemble copycat Israeli doctrine in the Middle East. Occupation of Kashmiri lands by moving settlers, demolition of houses of suspected militants, arbitrary detention and torture, undermining sovereignty of neighbours in the pretext of terrorism are vivid replication of Israeli policies adopted by India. Mr Arman Ahmed, an analyst at the International Council on Human Rights, writes in the daily New Age that India's Operation Sindoor in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir has been a deeper connection is in strategy: the employment of psychological warfare, media framing, identity politics, and a broad invocation of self-defence to justify pre-emptive attack (Ahmed, 2025). Authorities in J&K have demolished several houses of alleged militants and detained scores of Muslims for questioning as investigations continue into Pahalgam killings. Obviously, Israel was the only country that openly expressed support for India during its recent escalation with Pakistan. Mr. Nasir Qadri, a human Rights lawyer from the J&K, in an article published in the TRT News says, "Kashmiri dissidents were imprisoned under draconian laws, often without trial." Lawyers, journalists, political leaders, even grieving families, were surveilled, arrested, or silenced (Qadri, 2025). Israel's doctrine of deterrence that India tends to adopt against Pakistan insisted periodic, repeated strikes. Maliha Lodhi, Pakistan's former ambassador to UN, writes how borrowing from the Israeli playbook and applying it in a nuclearized environment would not work.

## **Sindoor vs. Bunyan Marsoos – The Outcome**

Indian strike at suspected terrorist hideout on May 7, was code named ‘Operation Sindoor’ signifying retaliation for the widowed women at Pahalgam. Chief of Pakistan military’s media wing claimed that none of the so called terrorist camps existed at the sites and these were mosques, civic centres and civilian residential areas. However, Indian airstrikes came at a cost as the Indian Air Force (IAF) reportedly lost six advanced jets including the IAF crown jewel, the French made Rafale jets were downed by the Pakistan Air Force (PAF). The four-day conflict showcased intense air battle in recent history involving around 110-120 modern fighter jets, what PAF called a multi-domain operation. Analysts both in India and outside accepts without hesitation that the PAF outshined IAF in a textbook demonstration of a Net-centric warfare. Months after the occurrence, Indians are yet to accept or declare the exact number of the jets lost in the conflict. In an analysis of visuals posted online, The Washington Post confirmed the presence of debris consistent with at least two French-made fighter jets, specifically a Rafale and a Mirage 2000, operated by the IAF (Imogen Piper, 2025). Sources in the Indian Military confirmed that on May 7<sup>th</sup>, the IAF operation against only two targets lasted about half an hour and resulted in at least six aircrafts losses (Thapar, 2025). The matter apparently exposed the IAF weaknesses, raising serious concerns.

The airspace over the Indo-Pak border has been one of the highly defended skies, which make it costly for any Air Forces to venture on a cross-border strikes by any means. PAF lately inducted Chinese J-10C jets and upgraded the locally produced JF-17 Block III jets with powerful radars capable of ‘Beyond Visual Range (BVR)’ engagements, significantly boosting its air power. Moreover, Pakistan over the years has built a robust Air Defence (AD) network with the induction of Western and Chinese Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems (AWACS), sophisticated Surface to Air Missile (SAM), and modern jets equipped with BVR missiles backed up by resilient electronic warfare capabilities. To overpower such a formidable AD, the IAF as an aggressor, essentially needed to conduct ‘suppression of Enemy AD’ in short SEAD operations against the adversary. Such operations entail persistent precision strikes to neutralise early warning radars, air bases, SAM sites including command and control nodes using a combination of Cruise Missiles, Drones and precision airstrikes for days. Indians surely lacked that capacity and resolve. Moreover, such level of sustained air strikes against Pakistani forces were definitely out of the planning table from Indian perspective considering Pakistan’s ability to retaliate equally. On the third day, Indian forces launched massive drone strike all along the Pakistani front using Israeli Harop Loitering Munition to take down Pakistani AD network but that failed to have any impact against Pakistani countermeasures.

On May 10, 2025, Pakistan initiated its own retaliatory strike, code named ‘Operation Bunyanun Marsoos,’ meaning concrete structure in Arabic, as it vowed to respond at a time of its own choosing. Pakistan’s military media claimed that it targeted and destroyed several Indian air bases in J&K and India’s Punjab province. It also claimed destroying a BrahMos missile storage facility in the Indian city of Beas (Global Times, 2025). Meanwhile, Indians launched missiles at three air bases in Pakistan at the early hours of the same day. Pakistani and international media outlets claimed that Pakistani forces carried out massive cyberattack on Indian official websites, railway network and India’s power grid as part of the operation (The News, 2025). From Pakistan’s perspective, it had no options than to retaliate as doing otherwise would give India permission to strike Pakistan, whenever Delhi feels aggrieved.

Indian defence and security analysts Mr Pravin Sawhney observe that the PAF displayed much superior operational and technological prowess and Pakistani forces definitely finished ahead of the Indians (Sawhney, 2025). Experts both in India and outside note that Operation Sindoor lacked strategic insights and failed to achieve its objectives both in the political and military terms. A New York Times report says, 'Strategically, the battlefield tossup was a clear setback for India' (Travelli, 2025). The setback has seriously dented India's aspiration as a regional superpower or an aspiring diplomatic and economic power. India actually finds itself equated with Pakistan and must have realized that an outright military victory against an adversary possessing nuclear arsenals is nearly impossible. The Indo-Pak standoff highlighted a China-Pakistan alliance winning against a combined Western, Russians and Indian endeavours. Indian analysts have started to question the handling of the situation, particularly the disproportionate response against suspected terrorist camps. Columnists also conclude that India actually raised Pakistan's geopolitical profile post Sindoor as it finds itself equated with Pakistan. Some Indian analysts however claims that the operation has imposed cost on Pakistan military. Indian analysts have observed that Operation Sindoor emboldened Pakistan rather than deterred it. Most importantly, the conflict allowed to internationalise the Kashmir issue (Subramanian, 2025). President Trump's offer to assist in resolving the Kashmir issue aligns with Pakistan's objective of bringing international attention to Kashmir and encouraging India to engage in dialogue.

### **Fallout from the Indo-Pak Conflict**

The Indo-Pak escalation happened at a crucial geopolitical setting, creating uncertainties for smaller states in the Subcontinent across diplomatic, economic, and strategic fronts. Like the previous similar attacks, Pakistan insists that Pahalgam attack is a 'false flag operation' for domestic consumption, staged for electoral gain in upcoming state elections. Indian hand behind the separatist movement in Baluchistan is evident from Ajit Doval's 2014 statement, "You do one Mumbai, you may lose Baluchistan" (Travelli, 2025). As an immediate fallout, separatist activities in J&K and elsewhere will certainly be on the rise. Potential implications are discussed subsequently.

- Despite internal political upheavals, Pakistan effectively countered its much larger adversary, challenging the perspective and adding to Indian frustration. Indian defence and security analyst, Mr Parvin Sawhney suggests that 'Operation Sindoor' was actually paused, and true ceasefire is yet to be achieved (Sawhney, 2025). Therefore, speculations for wider hostilities in the near future are real. Given Pakistan military's ever growing reliance on Chinese military technologies, China would never want Pakistan, its 'Ironclad friend' disappoint against Western technologies used by India. Vice President of the Beijing-based Centre and Globalization, Victor Gao in an interview at TRT's Strait Talk says, "China is a staunch friend of Pakistan. No country in the world should second guess China's commitment to defend the legitimate interest of Pakistan in terms of its sovereignty and territorial integrity" (Gao, 2025). With that backdrop, in the event of a full-scale war, greater Chinese involvement is inevitable. In such scenario, the Subcontinent may see Indo-China faceoff in India's Northeast, which may add to wider regional insecurity. There are concerns for Bangladesh getting absorbed militarily against threats to its territorial integrity.

- Recent escalation helped Indian and Pakistani military planners to rediscover each other's weaknesses to be exploited in the next conflict. Pakistan is considering 20% increase in its defence budget and initiated procurement spree of the state of the art military hardwares (Al Jazeera, 2025). China is reportedly expediting the delivery of the fifth generation J-35A stealth jets, advanced AWACS and highly sophisticated HQ-19, Ballistic Missile defence systems to Pakistan. India, stunned by the failures of its French Rafael jets and S-400 SAM systems, is consulting with the French and the Russians to get additional jets and related critical fixes. Indian use of military might to interdict alleged militant sites with vague pretext induces security vulnerabilities to its smaller neighbours. As Mr Bilawal Bhutto, the former Pakistani foreign minister, at a press conference at the UN says, "India has turned into a source of insecurity to its neighbours" (Momand, 2025). South Asian countries facing complex socio-economic issues, must now prioritize defence and security in the face of renewed Indian stance.
  
- A new front of 'Water War' is initiated by India by suspending the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) signed in 1960. Pakistan has warned India that any disruption to its share of water would be considered as 'an act of war.' Former Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto even went on to say, "blood will flow if India stops river water" (The Hindu Online, 2025). There is speculation that China, with infrastructures upstream to block waters of the Indus and Brahmaputra, may become involved in water disputes in the Subcontinent (Michel, 2025). Bangladesh has been the worst victim of Indian water aggression since independence. India getting tangled with water wars in its western front, could complicate negotiations on contentious issues like the Teesta River. Furthermore, Chinese interest in the Teesta river water management project may further complicate existing water disputes.
  
- Pahalgam issue definitely cast a shadow and prospects for revival of SAARC diminishes further. India's relations with its neighbours have deteriorated due to growing anti-India sentiment in South Asia. Given India's support for the deposed regime, Bangladeshi political entities are concerned about India's role in Bangladesh's internal affairs. The BJP-led government in Delhi has intensified these issues, impacting prospects for any future reconciliation. For the same reason, the only regional forum SAARC could not be functional since its inception. India's apprehensions regarding any perceived rapprochement between Bangladesh and Pakistan could add to renewed diplomatic tension.
  
- India's increased security around the Siliguri Corridor, comes amid Bangladesh's deepening ties with China and diplomatic normalcy with Pakistan. Experts feel that India's recent hostile posture along Bangladesh border is rooted to the frustration stemming from its fiasco in Kashmir and reasserting regional dominance. Indo-Bangla border already earned the infamous title of being the deadliest border in the world, could experience more violence. Frequency of border incidents between the Indian border forces and Bangladeshi villagers are on the rise. Some of the incidents may lead to skirmishes between the border guards and spiral out of control. Moreover, with extreme disregard to international laws and norms, Indians are likely to intensify the 'Push in' of undocumented Muslim migrants including Rohingyas into Bangladesh. An Indo-Pak faceoff could intensify militancy or

terrorism in South Asia, with possible spillover effects in Bangladesh. Like in the past, troubled Chittagong Hill Tracts region may turn volatile with moral and logistical support from across the border. Analysts have observed India's nervousness as Bangladesh adopts a more neutral and sovereign stance in its diplomatic relations. Additionally, in the field of trade and commerce in the Subcontinent, Bangladesh would continue to suffer due to the retaliatory measures and supply chain disruptions due to airspace closure, which is unlikely to be eased soon.

## Conclusion

Any major escalation in the Subcontinent would impact nearly two billion people in a densely populated region. A post-Pahalgam arms race in South Asia would also have serious implications for socio-economic conditions in an area already facing extreme poverty and hunger. Undoubtedly, peace in the Subcontinent will remain elusive as long as the Kashmir issue remains unresolved. As such, dialogue between the parties is essential. The regional forum SAARC could help address terrorism as necessary clauses exists in its charter. It is crucial that sound judgment prevails and India recognizing that the use of military power does not lead to sustainable outcome. An extended or worsening conflict between India and Pakistan could negatively affect Bangladesh's security and economic prospects. In response to the military build-up around the Siliguri Corridor, Bangladesh should focus on diplomatic engagement, enhance its defence capabilities and explore strategic partnerships. Additionally, Bangladesh may consider strengthening ties with other regional powers to counterbalance India's influence. Overall, diplomacy should be prioritized to promote stability in South Asia.

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