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Kashmir Dispute between India and Pakistan: Implication for the Regional Peace and Stability in South Asia

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Abstract: The Jammu and Kashmir dispute remains one of the longest-standing conflicts since the establishment of the United Nations. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have engaged in multiple wars and military standoffs over the contested territory, risking regional and global stability due to their nuclear capabilities. Despite numerous United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolutions advocating for a peaceful settlement through a plebiscite, India's persistent non-compliance has stymied any resolution efforts. This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the historical background, the complex geopolitical dimensions, and India's human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir. It also evaluates recent escalations, particularly the military standoff of 2025, and highlights the critical role of international mediation in averting a catastrophic conflict. The study argues that without a just resolution in line with UN mandates and Kashmiri aspirations for self-determination, South Asia will remain vulnerable to further instability. The study underscores the urgent need for structured dialogue, credible mediation, and strategic restraint by both nuclear-armed neighbors to secure lasting peace in the region.

Keywords: Jammu and Kashmir Conflict, India-Pakistan Relations, United Nations Resolutions, Self-Determination, Human Rights Violations, Nuclear Escalation

Kashmir Dispute: An Overview

The Jammu and Kashmir dispute is one of the oldest conflicts since the inception of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. Since 1947, India and Pakistan have fought four wars over this dispute, and recent military escalations between these nuclear-armed rivals have reached alarming levels, raising global concerns about the potential for nuclear conflict and widespread destruction in South Asia [1]. Although current hostilities have subsided following a brief air and missile engagement, the ongoing conflict over Jammu and Kashmir remains a core issue, perpetuating the protracted nature of the dispute [2]. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the United Nations Commission on India and Pakistan (UNCIP) have passed numerous resolutions aimed at resolving the conflict under UN auspices; however, no concrete steps have been initiated due to India's refusal to comply with these resolutions [3].

The resolutions passed by the UNSC and UNCIP revolve around three main points: the restoration of a peaceful environment in Jammu and Kashmir, the verifiable withdrawal of all outside forces, and the holding of an impartial, free, and fair plebiscite under UN supervision to determine the will of the people of Jammu and Kashmir regarding their choice to join either India or Pakistan [4]. Both India and Pakistan have accused each other of obstructing the holding of the envisaged plebiscite in Kashmir. However, a candid analysis of various developments since 1947 indicates that India, despite having taken the Kashmir dispute to the UN in 1948, has never shown genuine interest in resolving this conflict in accordance with UN resolutions, international law, and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people [5].

Following the illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir in October 1947, India has defied the efforts of the UN and the international community to achieve a peaceful resolution through bilateral negotiations or third-party mediation [1].

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India not only insists that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of its territory but has also employed brutal force to suppress the peaceful struggle of Kashmiris seeking their inalienable right to self-determination. Such actions represent a blatant disregard for and violation of UN resolutions that have declared Jammu and Kashmir a disputed territory [3].

Indian forces have killed thousands of innocent and unarmed Kashmiris, including women, children, and the elderly, through military operations in the region. These atrocities amount to ethnic cleansing and genocide [2]. Furthermore, Indian forces have used rape as a tool to suppress Kashmir's freedom struggle and have systematically destroyed the livelihoods of Kashmiris through organized plundering and looting, which clearly fall under crimes against humanity [5]. Currently, there are approximately one million Indian military personnel deployed in Jammu and Kashmir, making it one of the most militarized areas in the world [1]. India denies access to international media and human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and delegations from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), to visit Jammu and Kashmir and independently verify the atrocities committed by Indian armed forces [3]. Moreover, India does not allow military observers from the United Nations Military Observers Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) to visit Jammu and Kashmir, which constitutes a blatant violation of the mandate authorized by the UNSC [4].

State of Jammu and Kashmir: Brief History and Current Status

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is located in the north and northeast of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent. It is bounded by China in the north (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Tibet Autonomous Region), by Pakistan in the west, by Afghanistan to the northwest, and India to the east and southeast. The former State of Jammu and Kashmir had a total area of around 85,800 square miles (222,200 square kilometers), which has been portioned between Pakistan and India since 1947 when both countries gained independence from their erstwhile colonial master, Great Britain [7]. The northwestern and western portions joined Pakistan as a result of the freedom struggle against the suppressive ruler, the Maharaja of Kashmir. These areas, which are administered by Pakistan under a special constitutional arrangement, comprise Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), formerly known as Northern Areas [8]. In 1947, India, in connivance with Lord Mountbatten, who was the last British Viceroy of British India and had been accepted as the first Governor-General by India after independence, occupied a major part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, comprising the central, southern, and southeastern portions. These areas include Ladakh, the Valley of Kashmir, Jammu, and Poonch, which were added to India as the State of Jammu and Kashmir with a special autonomous status until a final settlement [9].

India claims that a remote region, Aksai Chin, which lies in the northeast of Ladakh, is part of the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir. China has repeatedly and unequivocally clarified that this area is an integral part of China (Xinjiang Autonomous Region) [10]. This claim is also recognized by the United Nations [11]. This region has an area of 37,555 square kilometers (16,481 square miles) and lies at the junction of China, Pakistan, and India. China and Pakistan formally decided and demarcated their border on March 2, 1963, with the signing of the 'Border Agreement' [12]. This agreement defined the border between China (XUAR) and the areas of Pakistan, including AJ&K and GB. Pakistan and China have no border dispute at all. In contrast, India has fought a war with China in 1962 over the sovereignty of the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh border regions. It is pertinent to highlight that China claims Arunachal Pradesh as its integral part (South Tibet), which is occupied by India [13]. In 2020, clashes erupted between Indian and Chinese troops primarily due to a longstanding dispute over the border known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC). India claims that the border has not been clearly demarcated; therefore, the tension persists. Pakistan has always supported China's position in an unambiguous and unequivocal manner [14].

The region of Kashmir has witnessed many changes in the last seven centuries. Except for 130 years of Sikh and Dogra rule, Kashmir was ruled by Muslim rulers: the Shah Mir Dynasty (1338 – 1586 CE), the Chak Dynasty (1555 – 1586 CE), the Mughal Dynasty (1586 – 1752 CE), and Afghan Rule (1752 – 1819 CE) [15]. Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by Sikhs from 1819 to 1846, who had captured the province of Punjab from the Mughals. The Mughals, then very weak, were facing a multi-pronged threat to their rule from the British in the east, Sikhs in the west, and Marathas in the south. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the ruler of Punjab, appointed his loyal soldier, Gulab Singh, as Governor of Jammu in 1822. He captured various adjacent areas in 1821-22, and later Kargil, Ladakh, and Baltistan from 1835 to 1840 [16].

The first Anglo-Sikh War took place in 1845-46. Gulab Singh conspired against his master, Raja Ranjit Singh, and sided with the British, which helped the British East India Company defeat the Sikhs. As a result of the 'Treaty of Lahore,' signed by the British and Sikhs on March 9, 1846, the Sikhs ceded part of their territory, including Kashmir, to the British [17]. The Sikh army was reduced in size, bringing Punjab under the virtual control of the British. In a separate 'Treaty of Amritsar,' also concluded in 1846, the British formalized the transfer of Kashmir to Raja Gulab

Singh in exchange for a payment of rupees 75 lakh (7.5 million) Nanak Shahi to the British in recognition of his support during the Anglo-Sikh War [18]. Therefore, the territory of Kashmir, along with its complete population, was sold out by the British to Gulab Singh. This marked the beginning of Dogra rule over Kashmir and the establishment of the State of Jammu and Kashmir in 1846, which lasted for the next 100 years (1846 – 1947). During this long period, the Muslim population of the State, which was in the majority, had to face perpetual suppression, economic deprivation, cultural apartheid, and untold atrocities committed by successive Dogra rulers, their officials, and the army [19].

Indian Occupation of Jammu and Kashmir and Kashmiri Freedom Struggle

Pakistan and India became independent states on 14 and 15 August 1947, respectively. According to the principles of the partition of British India, the Muslim majority areas formed Pakistan, while non-Muslim areas became India [20]. There were 565 princely states in the Indian subcontinent, which were given the choice to either join India or Pakistan, considering the ethnic (and religious) affinity factor, the wishes of the people within the states, and the geographic contiguity and proximity [21]. The State of Jammu and Kashmir was also among such princely states, ruled by a Hindu Dogra, but its population was predominantly Muslim [22].

British rulers of India delayed the announcement of many decisions regarding the future boundary between India and Pakistan, which caused enormous uncertainty and ambiguity. Two main provinces, Punjab in the west and Bengal in the east, were divided. This division entailed large-scale migration from India to Pakistan and vice versa, depending upon the actual boundary between India and Pakistan [23]. It is ironic to note that although the partition plan was announced on June 3, 1947, which was itself very late, the Boundary Commission Award was not announced until August 16, 1947. The people had already started migrating by then due to fears, anxiety, and mass ethnic and communal clashes. On top of it, no decision had been made about the future status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. All such delays were aimed at creating confusion and chaos [24].

Till August 14, 1947, Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, remained indecisive because he wanted to retain independence of his State instead of joining either India or Pakistan. 'India Independence Act 1947,' passed by the British Parliament on July 18, 1947, envisaged the transfer of power from the British Crown to the newly formed dominions. Lord Mountbatten became first Governor-General of India and Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan⁴.

As mentioned earlier, the 'Independence Act' only provided that the states could accede to either of the new dominions (India or Pakistan) and could not remain independent. Around 80% of the residents of the State of Jammu and Kashmir were Muslims. The Valley of Kashmir had a predominantly Muslim majority, about 97%. Moreover, it was naturally connected with (West) Pakistan due to geographic realities, social affinity, and economic linkages [25]. Muslims, who were in the majority and had remained under the brutal suppressive rule of Dogras for the last 100 years, demonstrated their desire to join Pakistan. The 'Legislative Council of the State' had expressed this desire in explicit terms. In 1931, there was a popular uprising against Dogra Raj in Kashmir, which was brutally suppressed [26].

The Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, offered a 'Stand Still Agreement' with both India and Pakistan on August 12, 1947. Pakistan accepted the offer, while India declined, asking for further discussions. Observing that their ruler had no intentions to join Pakistan and was dragging the issue due to his ulterior personal motives, the Kashmiris revolted against Maharaja Hari Singh. They were supported by tribesmen from the northwestern part of the newly independent state of Pakistan due to strong ethnic, social, and religious bonds [27].

⁴ . Lord Mountbatten, who was last Governor General of British India, wanted to remain the Governor General both newly formed independent state, India and Pakistan after their independence. Indian National Congress, which represented Hindu majority accepted him as first Governor-General of India, whereas All India Muslim League, which represented majority Muslims did not agree. Therefore, Muhammad Ali Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan. Hence, Lord Mountbatten has a natural animosity and dislike towards Pakistan.

Maharaja Hari Singh fled to India and sought India's military assistance to crush the indigenous uprising against him, which had turned into a freedom struggle. India forced Hari Singh to sign an 'instrument of accession' on October 27, 1947, allowing India to occupy the State. Hari Singh's decision and Indian military occupation have been contested by Kashmiris and Pakistan to this day because he had never canceled the 'Stand Still Agreement' signed with Pakistan [28]. Immediately after having coerced the ruler of Kashmir to accede to India through an illegal document, the Indian Forces landed at the Srinagar airport. More forces joined through land routes. It is worth mentioning that while Hari Singh was conniving with Mountbatten, then Governor-General of India, and Mr. Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, the freedom fighters had already liberated a large part of Jammu and Kashmir and had reached very close to Srinagar, the capital of the State [29].

The freedom fighters, who were neither well-equipped nor well-organized or trained, had to halt their struggle. Some started withdrawing in the face of a much more powerful regular Indian Army. Pakistan wanted to intervene, but General Sir Frank Messervy, the Commander-in-Chief, who was a British officer, refused to obey the orders [30]. Until that time, the Pakistan Army, which was just in its formative stage, was mostly commanded by British officers. Interestingly, both the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army (General Sir Robert Lockhart) and the Pakistan Army (General Sir Frank Messervy) were British. Both were still under the command of Field Marshal Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck, who was the last Commander-in-Chief of the undivided British Indian Army. He held the position of 'Supreme Commander' of India and Pakistan from 15 August to 30 November 1947. He was responsible for the overall administrative control (but not operational control) of the armies in both India and Pakistan [31]. The Indian Army, having illegally entered Jammu and Kashmir, pushed the freedom fighters towards the east and started advancing towards Pakistan. Meanwhile, on November 1, 1947, the Gilgit Scouts liberated the Gilgit and Baltistan region from Dogra Raj and raised the flag of their freedom, declaring Gilgit and Baltistan an independent state that later joined Pakistan [32].

Under these compulsions, the Pakistan Army also entered Jammu and Kashmir in April 1948 and stopped the Indian Army. This was the beginning of the 1948 Indo-Pakistan War. As a result of the war, the State of Jammu and Kashmir was divided between India and Pakistan. India occupied a larger portion, comprising Ladakh, a major part of the Valley of Kashmir, Jammu, and the eastern part of Poonch. Gilgit-Baltistan and the western part of the Valley of Kashmir, plus part of Poonch, were brought under Pakistan's control. The freedom fighters established an independent government over the liberated area. This arrangement is called Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) [33].

The Jammu and Kashmir Dispute in the United Nations

Having seen that the indigenous revolt by the Muslim majority in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, supported by the Pakistan Army and volunteers from Pakistan, was likely to end up in complete freedom from Indian illegal occupation, the Indian Government approached the United Nations on January 1, 1948. India lodged a complaint under Article 35 (Chapter VI) of the UN Charter, charging Pakistan with "aiding and abetting" through the Pakistani tribal invasion in Jammu and Kashmir [34]. Pakistan denied these allegations and accused India of annexing Jammu and Kashmir through illegal means and a military invasion [35].

After hearing the representatives of India and Pakistan, the UNSC passed its first resolution (Resolution 38) on the Kashmir Conflict on January 17, 1948, calling on both countries to exercise restraint and ease tensions [36]. Three days later, on January 20, the Security Council passed another resolution (Resolution 39), creating the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) to investigate the dispute and mediate between the two countries. This decision was made in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter, Chapter VI (Art. 33-38), which deals with the 'Pacific Settlement of Disputes' [37].

Many proposals were prepared by the UNCIP, but both countries—India and Pakistan—did not agree to these proposals, giving different reasons. On December 11, 1948, the UNCIP laid out a new set of proposals. As per the proposals, "the question of accession to India or Pakistan was to be decided by a free and impartial plebiscite, which was contingent upon having a ceasefire." The two countries accepted the ceasefire plan and allowed the UN to observe the ceasefire from January 1, 1949 [38].

On January 5, 1949, the Security Council appointed a Plebiscite Commissioner. In early 1950, the United Nations appointed an Australian jurist, Sir Owen Dixon, as the United Nations representative to mediate between India and Pakistan and help them resolve the Kashmir Dispute. Dixon had strong legal knowledge and experience. He analyzed the problem and proposed a limited/regional plebiscite, in addition to undertaking phased demilitarization of the State by Pakistani and Indian military forces. The Government of Pakistan expressed readiness to accept the proposal, but

the Indian Prime Minister rejected what Dixon had proposed [39]. On September 15, 1950, Sir Owen Dixon reported to the Security Council that no agreement had been reached between India and Pakistan and requested formal termination of his position as the United Nations representative [40].

In April 1948, by its resolution 47, the UNSC decided to enlarge the membership of UNCIP. It also recommended various measures, including the use of observers to stop the fighting. At the recommendation of UNCIP, the Secretary-General appointed a Military Adviser to support the Commission on military aspects and provided for a group of military observers to assist him. The first team of military observers, which eventually formed the nucleus of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), arrived in the mission area in January 1949 [41]. UNMOGIP's mandate was to supervise, in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the ceasefire between India and Pakistan and to assist the Military Adviser to UNCIP. These arrangements remained in effect until the conclusion of the Karachi Agreement on July 27, 1949, which established a ceasefire line to be supervised by UN military observers [42].

On March 30, 1951, following the termination of UNCIP, the UNSC, by its resolution 91, decided that UNMOGIP should continue to supervise the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir. UNMOGIP's functions were to observe and report, investigate complaints of ceasefire violations, and submit its findings to each party and to the Secretary-General [43]. To this day, Pakistan provides all required assistance to UN military observers to undertake their mandated tasks, whereas India has refused to accept the validity of their mandate [44].

Since 1948, the United Nations has considered the Kashmir Dispute on numerous occasions and has passed numerous resolutions for resolving the dispute, but it has not been able to get them implemented. According to independent and neutral Kashmiri observers, the UN resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir lie buried in the archives of the United Nations Headquarters in New York [45].

Indian Atrocities against Kashmiris

India, since occupation of State of Jammu and Kashmir, in 1947, has committed brutal atrocities through its Armed Forces, Paramilitary Forces and Police, in order to suppress the freedom struggle of Kashmiri Muslims. Over the years, all civil liberties of the inhabitants of Kashmir Valley have been snatched, political activities banned and economic progress denied. A large number of young innocent Kashmiris, besides suffering brutal torture in imprisonment and interrogation centres, have lost their lives. Indian Government is involved in a systematic and an organized genocide of Kashmiri Muslims, in order to convert their majority into a minority. Women are raped, houses are raided, children and elderly people are killed. This is, indeed, an ethnic cleansing. Human rights organizations all over the world have raised the issue of Indian atrocities at various international forums but Indian Government continues to perpetrate its crimes against humanity through worst form of state terrorism. Global human rights organizations have also demanded that the right of self-determination of the 16 million people of the State of Jammu and Kashmir must be respected. The UNSC must ensure that an impartial plebiscite is held under its auspices to implement the UN resolutions on Kashmir.

Revocation of Special Autonomous Status of State of Jammu and Kashmir

In August 2019, India abolished the autonomous status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and declared it as part of union territories. It revoked Article 370 and Article 35A of the Indian constitution. Article 370 had accorded special autonomous status to the Jammu and Kashmir. All the provisions of the Indian Constitution, which were applicable to the Indian states, did not apply to the territory. A renewed wave of protests erupted throughout Jammu and Kashmir on this reckless decision made by India. Tens of thousands of additional Indian troops were deployed in Kashmir to suppress the protests of Kashmiris who had displayed their anger and anguish against such illegal and immoral decision by the Indian Government to strip their special status. The Indian government stunned the Kashmiris and international community, including the UN, by revoking the Article 370 and 35A which had been the basis of Kashmir's complex relationship with India since 1947. The decision, later on, was challenged in the Indian Supreme Court, which upheld the government's decision in a verdict that shocked all Kashmiris and experts of international law. The ripping of special status of Kashmir, separating Ladakh from the State and declaring both areas as two separate entities under union territories have very serious repercussion. It has further alienated the Kashmiris forcing them to adopt violent means to attain their right of self-determination, which has been acknowledged and granted by the UN but denied by India for last 78 years.

Jammu and Kashmir Freedom Struggle

Kashmiris had started their freedom struggle, through uprising against oppressive rule of Dogras in 1931, much before India and Pakistan became independent countries. However, they felt more aggrieved and treated unjustly when Hari Singh, the former ruler of the Jammu and Kashmir, acceded to India in a dubious manner without their consent. Such contrived action had led to military occupation of their State by Indian military forces. Hence, the beginning of 'Freedom Struggle of Kashmir' since 1947. India promised to allow the Kashmiris to decide their future by using the right of self-determination, as was decided by the UN. However, with every passing day, India has strengthened its brutal grip over the Jammu and Kashmir through perpetual abuse of military forces and continued occupation.

India has used multiple political and administrative instruments, including creating proxy / puppet politicians and phoney elections, to absorb and integrate the Jammu and Kashmir into Indian union but it has failed miserably in all such efforts. The UN has also refused to accept any such action, including stage managed State elections, as a legal and legitimate substitute or an alternate to the Plebiscite that needs to be conducted under the UN arrangements.

Meanwhile Kashmiris have continued their freedom struggle with great determination, resolve, and resilience. The Kashmir freedom struggle has witnessed many phases, ranging from political struggle to armed insurgency / militancy. Mostly, such struggle has remained peaceful, except during the decade of 1990s when freedom fighters had increased their activities against Indian occupying forces. Resultantly, India had to suffer considerable losses as well. Legitimate support for Kashmir cause is a cardinal principle of Pakistan's declared foreign policy. Therefore, Pakistan has always extended all possible diplomatic and moral support for the just and legitimate freedom struggle Kashmiri brethren. India continues to blame Pakistan for supporting militancy in Kashmir but Pakistan has always denied all such baseless allegation aimed at distracting international community's attention from brutalities and atrocities committed by India in Jammu and Kashmir.

India – Pakistan Armed Conflict / Wars over Kashmir Dispute

Kashmir Dispute is main cause of tension and acrimony between India and Pakistan. Though, there are few more issues that need to be resolved, yet Kashmir remains the core issue. Had India and Pakistan managed to resolve Kashmir dispute under UNSC resolutions, the fate of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent would have been entirely different. Both the countries, in addition of their large population (human resource) have enormous wealth of natural resources. Had these resources been used for human resource development, building regional connectivity infrastructure, industrialization, and promoting commerce and trade, through the principle of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence, it could have opened unmatched avenues of progress, prosperity, and development in South Asia.

India wishes to establish its hegemony over South Asia using its military to coerce other neighbouring states. Hence, the complete region, especially the small and weak states, stand hostage to India's unbridled ambitions. Moreover, the South Asia's geostrategic location as a connecting hub for various regions: Central Asia; West Asia; Middle East; Africa; and East Asia, makes it an attractive prey for global and regional competition and dominance by major global powers. Under the prevailing geopolitical realities, a simmering dispute, that has remained unresolved for last 78 years, prompts an unending armed conflict. Thus the possibility of war remains alive.

India and Pakistan has fought four wars, essentially due to Kashmir Dispute, in 1948, 1965, 1971, and 1999. In addition, the armed forces of both countries have remained at the brink of war at many occasions, particularly in 1998, 2002-2003, 2010, 2019, and 2022.

It must be noted that both countries possess nuclear weapons, beside maintaining large standing armies, conventional forces and large arsenal of medium to long range missiles. A realist analysis of all previous wars fought by India and Pakistan clearly show that neither country can destroy the other. Nor anyone can gain ascendancy to establish its hegemony over other. Pakistan has relatively smaller standing armed forces but it has established strategic parity with India through its nuclear capability and strategic forces.

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is divided by a 'Line of Control (LoC)' formerly known as 'Cease-fire Line.' The 'LoC' was agreed upon by India and Pakistan in 1972 through a bilateral treaty - 'Simla Agreement.' It is worth mentioning that neither India nor Pakistan recognize the LoC as an international boundary. The LoC remains calm when relations between India and Pakistan are normal. Violations of cease-fire take place through firing of small arms, heavy weapons, and occasionally by artillery during times of hostility. At times, these violations lead to a near war situation.

Indian Military Escalations against Pakistan (1998, 2001-2002, 2010, 2019)

In May 1998, India conducted five nuclear tests. In response, Pakistan also conducted six nuclear tests. Hitherto, both countries were believed to possess nuclear capability but it was shrouded in ambiguity. Becoming overtly nuclear has exposed India's ambition of gaining prestige as a regional military power / hegemon. For Pakistan, to give a befitting response in kind was a strategic compulsion. Pakistan had to demonstrate that it was not bluffing about its nuclear capability as was doubted and propagated by many Indian scholars, strategists and media experts.

With both arch-rivals, India and Pakistan, becoming overtly nuclear, the credibility of nuclear deterrence had been established. However, India has always tried to look for creating a strategic space for conventional or sub-conventional war under nuclear overhang. In 1999, Pakistan and India indulged in a limited war in Kargil Sector, across the LoC, that lies in Kashmir / Gilgit - Baltistan and Ladakh area. Pakistan captured some high altitude heights, in side Indian occupied Kashmir, during this conflict. However, this conflict remained restricted to a limited geographic area and both countries did not escalate the conflict either to the entire LoC in Kashmir or across the international border between India and Pakistan. The Kargil Conflict ended after the US intervention by President Bill Clinton.

After the terrorist act of 9/11 in New York, the U.S. launched Global War on Terror (GWOT) by invading Afghanistan without the approval from the UNSC. The U.S. invasion was supported and joined by NATO forces and many other countries under so called international coalition. Though, India did not join these forces, as it was not a member of NATO, yet it supported NATO-led operations in Afghanistan. It also developed a close relationships with the U.S. and other NATO allies. The U.S. GWOT had many objectives as the situation unfolded in the following years. The U.S., later on, invaded other Muslim countries like Iraq, Libya and Syria in the Middle East. Recently, it has launched attacks against Iran as well. Under these obtaining military-strategic environment, India has felt emboldened to take more atrocious measures against Kashmiri freedom fighters. It also decided to coerce Pakistan under the casus belli that Pakistan was sponsoring and supporting the Kashmir's freedom fighters.

Therefore, for undertaking any military operation against Pakistan, there had be some actual or stage-managed act of terror which could be used as an excuse to coerce or attack Pakistan. In December 2001, an armed attack on the Indian parliament in New Delhi killed 14 people. India blamed Pakistan-backed armed groups for the attack. India mobilized its armed forces to India-Pakistan border and all along the LoC in Kashmir. The face-to-face standoff between Indian and Pakistani militaries, which have nuclear weapons as well, caused serious concerns at global level. However the standoff, eventually, ended in October 2002, after international mediation. There was another military escalation between India and Pakistan in 2010, though it did not lead to a full-scale mobilization of forces as had happened in 2022. However, there were many incidents of firing across the LoC in Kashmir.

In 2019, India and Pakistan, two nuclear armed neighbours, witnessed another very serious military standoff. In February 2019, forty Indian Central Reserve Police Force personnel were killed in a terror attack at Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir. In the aftermath of this attack, India and Pakistan exchanged cross-border airstrikes and gunfire battles took place. On 26 February 2019, India carried out a cross-border airstrike near Balakot in side Pakistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Indian Air Force aircrafts crossed the international border / LoC and bombed an uninhabited wooded hilltop. India, boasted that she had carried out a punitive strike directed against a terrorist training camp, claiming that a large number of terrorists had been killed.

On 27 February 2019, Pakistan carried out a retaliatory air strike inside Indian occupied Kashmir and destroyed many military targets. While Indian fighter jets again tried to cross the LoC for another strike, Pakistan shot down two Indian fighter jets, including one MiG 21 Bison. Pakistan military captured an Indian Pilot, Wing Commander Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, who was later on returned to India on 1 March as a good will gesture to facilitate de-escalation. The same day, an Indian Mi-17 helicopter was brought down by friendly fire in which all Indian Air Force officer and airmen on board were killed.

India has been trying to acquire Raffaele aircrafts from France, which is one of the most modern high-tech and highly expensive fighter aircraft in the world. Indian Air Force Commander commented that if India had Raffaele aircrafts, Pakistani pilots could not have shot down these aircrafts. Anyhow, the military standoff was diffused through international intervention. In 2023, Mike Pompeo, who was United States Secretary of State during the 2019 Crisis, claimed that U.S. diplomacy had prevented the dispute from sparking a nuclear war. Pakistan denied all Indian allegations about its involvement in Pulwama incident. Pakistan also offered an independent inquiry of the incident to be conducted by international experts but India did not agree to that proposal. Many impartial analysts concluded that

Pulwama incident was, most probably, a false flag operation that was carried out by or was arranged by India to blame and attack Pakistan. India has not shared any evidence or inquiry findings of this incident with Pakistan.

Indian Military Escalation in May 2025 (Pahalgam Incident) and Pakistan's Robust Response

Indian adventure of crossing the LoC / international border, using Pulwama attack as a *casus belli*, was very carefully studied and analysed by Pakistan military strategists, planners and senior leadership. It was concluded that India would stage manage a similar incident in future as well. Having done that, India would strike Pakistan to fulfil her aggressive dream and illusion of damaging and destroying Pakistan. Therefore, necessary plans and preparations were put in place to counter any such misadventure without wasting time. It was also decided that Pakistan's resolve must demonstrate its desire for peace. Thus, the response must be effective to establish the credibility of deterring India to undertake any miscalculated adventure.

The U.S. Vice President, J.D. Vance visited India from 21 to 24 April 2025. On 22 April, purportedly four/five terrorists attacked a tourist resort at Pahalgam in Indian occupied Kashmir in which 26 civilians were killed. Pahalgam is located well away from the LoC. It is a popular tourist destination and a hill station located in the Anantnag district at an altitude of 2,200 meters (7,200 ft). The tourists killed were mostly Hindu, though some Christians and Muslims also died in this incident. It was reported that an unknown organization, The Resistance Front (TRF) had carried out the attack.

Immediately after the incident, within an hour, India accused Pakistan for orchestrating the attack. Indian electronic and social media launched a well-coordinated assault on Pakistan and started beating the drums of war in hysteric rhetoric. Indian PM Narendra Modi said that India will pursue the attackers to 'the ends of the earth' and punish every terrorist and their backers. He was followed by all and sundry in India, including foreign minister, national security advisor, retired generals, air marshals, admirals, and media anchors and commentators. Everyone was enthusiastic to throw as much of venom as they could against Pakistan. They all demanded that Indian Government must teach a lesson to Pakistan.

India announced strong retaliatory measures against Pakistan that included: suspension of Indus Water Treaty⁵ and holding it in abeyance; reduction of diplomatic officials at Pakistan Embassy at Delhi; immediate withdrawal of Defence Advisor and his staff by declaring them *persona non-grata*; and cancellation of all visas issued to Pakistani nationals, demanding that they must leave India and travel back to Pakistan within one week. Indian PM Modi boasted to stop every drop of water going downstream to Pakistan. Pakistan also retaliated with some reciprocal actions. However, it clarified, in absolutely unequivocal terms, that any hindrance caused by India in Pakistan's water, as agreed in Indus Water Treaty, will be considered as an act of war.

Pakistan, categorically and unequivocally, rejected all Indian allegations and accusations. It clarified that Pakistan had nothing to do with any terrorist act in India. Many senior officials, including ministers, expressed their apprehension that most probably, it was a false flag operation either conducted by India or allowed to take place, in order to blame and accuse Pakistan while the U.S. Vice President was visiting India. This apprehension was based on a strong evidence of India having committed similar heinous crimes earlier as well. Pakistan, immediately, offered its full cooperation for an impartial and independent inquiry to be conducted under international experts, preferably under the UN auspices, to establish the truth. India refused this offer and preferred to act as an accuser, prosecutor, judge and jury itself. This attitude was a clear indication of Indian intentions for a misadventure. Pakistan, naturally had taken all necessary safe guards.

Two weeks after the attack, on May 7, 2025, India launched a series of air strikes on various sites inside Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, under the code name of 'Operation Sindoor'. India claimed that it had hit nine targets inside Pakistan, declaring these as terrorists training facilities. Pakistan's military said at least 31 civilians were killed

⁵ . Indus Water Treaty is a bilateral accord between India and Pakistan, which was concluded in 1960 under the auspices of the world Bank. The 'Treaty' deals with distribution of water of the five rivers of Indus basin between India and Pakistan. It also provides guarantees of provision of required quantity of water to Pakistan as a lower riparian. It forbids India to stop or cause any hindrance in supply of water of three rivers that are allocated to Pakistan. All these rivers emanate from or pass through Indian Occupied Kashmir.

and 57 were injured due to the strikes. Pakistan announced that it reserved the right to respond at its own choosing. Pakistan displayed considerable restraints and increased its diplomatic efforts to control Indian war hysteria.

Meanwhile Pakistan National Security Committee (NSC) deliberated its likely response, should India initiate an armed conflict. Pakistan's resolve to react responsibly and effectively to any such misadventure was communicated very clearly. As tensions rose and persisted visibly, Pakistan expressed that Pakistan will use all means at its disposal to defend its territorial integrity and to protect its sovereignty. This messaging was aimed at reminding India that Pakistan will neither accept nor tolerate any nonsense similar to Indian misadventure in 2019, which had been countered in an extremely professional manner. Pakistan also apprised the UNSC, the UN Secretary General, permanent representatives at the UN, and many diplomats at Islamabad. Explaining the dangers of further escalation by India, Pakistan's resolve to counter the same with full force was clearly expressed. International community, realizing the dangers of escalation, asked India and Pakistan to resort to mutual dialogue and negotiations to diffuse the tensions but India had no intension to that.

On night 8-9 May, India launched multiple drone attacks at numerous targets in Pakistan. Most of these drones, made in Israel, were destroyed by Pakistan. However, few drones landed at different places and caused some damage. India had decided to climb the 'Escalation Ladder' risking the regional peace and stability. Reportedly, Pakistan Air Force deployed 42 jets to counter over 70 Indian fighter jets. On 9-10 May, Pakistan decided to respond. Number of military targets, including Indian air defence system (SU 400) sites, and missile storage sites were destroyed.

India moved up in the 'Escalation Ladder' once again and targeted three Pakistan air bases, using air to surface missiles. Pakistan launched a very strong and resolute response. Six Indian Air Force jets, including three Rafale, one MiG 29, and one SU 30. Indian fighter jets were shot down by Pakistani pilots, who were flying F-16, JF-17 Thunder and Chinese J-10 C fighter jet that were equipped with a high-tech PL-15 air to air missiles. In addition, many other high value military targets, including Indian air bases were destroyed. It must be kept in mind that JF-17 Thunder is a joint production of China and Pakistan, which is also capable of striking the targets at long ranges using its 'beyond visual range -BVR' capability. The retaliation by Pakistan was so strong, robust, precise, accurate, and devastating that it created awe and shock in India. Resultantly Indian Air force was virtually grounded.

Cease-fire between India and Pakistan arranged through the U.S. Mediation

A very dangerous escalation between India and Pakistan suddenly came to an end on May 10, 2025, through the mediation efforts of the United States. The U.S. President Trump, in a post on Truth Social, said: "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a Full and Immediate Ceasefire. Congratulations to both countries on using Common Sense and Great Intelligence" [46]. The U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, also confirmed that the U.S. intervention and diplomacy to convince and persuade both India and Pakistan to agree to an immediate ceasefire had succeeded [47]. Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister stated: "India and Pakistan have agreed to a ceasefire with immediate effect. Pakistan has always strived for peace and security in the region, without compromising its sovereignty and territorial integrity" [48].

Mr. Nick Robertson, a senior analyst at CNN, who was present in Pakistan to cover the conflict, reported: "When India attacked three Pakistani airbases, Pakistan responded with a relentless, massive barrage of missiles and rockets into Indian military facilities, airbases, and weapons storage sites. That really put India on the back foot — they didn't know what had happened" [49]. He added that Pakistan unleashed its full military capability, prompting New Delhi to seek immediate mediation through U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, as well as Saudi Arabian and Turkish officials [50].

Since May 10, 2025, a fragile ceasefire prevails, notwithstanding some minor violations along the Line of Control (LoC) at the tactical level during the initial stage. Both sides have not lowered their guards, retaining readiness for war. The detailed terms of the ceasefire have not been made public; however, it appears that the ceasefire could lead to a better understanding and the potential for more durable peace in the region [51]. Though some defense and security analysts opine that there are still dangers of further escalation if India chooses to engage in any misadventure aimed at gaining domestic political dividends [52].

Analysis

India wishes to establish its hegemony in the region (South Asia and Indian Ocean). India considers that Pakistan is a great hurdle and stumbling block for her wild ambitions of becoming a regional hegemon. India and Pakistan are locked into perpetual animosity since their independence on issues pertaining to division of India, which has not been accepted by India so far. India and Pakistan have many contentious issues, however, Kashmir Dispute is the core problem between both countries. India has defied the UN mediation on Kashmir dispute and does not acknowledge the role of any third party to resolve this long outstanding dispute. India and Pakistan have gone to war four times. Moreover, no war, no peace situation prevails perpetually between India and Pakistan, which fuels constant mistrust. India has resorted to miscalculating Pakistan's resolve to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty, which has resulted in repeated misadventures. It must be understood clearly that without just and fair resolution of Kashmir Dispute, South Asia is not likely to see a long lasting peace, political stability and economic progress.

The recent escalation of April and May 2025, and previous incidents of similar nature demonstrate a great danger of any further escalation. Any future misadventure by India may cross the nuclear thresh hold of Pakistan, which has already been lowered to an extremely dangerous level. The myth of invincibility of India, and its Forces, especially its Air Force stands completely shattered. It has rather evaporated due to Pakistan's resolve and strategic capability. Pakistan has very skilfully integrated domestically developed defence systems with modern Chinese high-technology, including aircrafts and other weapon system. Such fusion of technology and higher training standards give a clear edge to Pakistan in balance of force in qualitative terms. It also offers her an ability to compensate its numerical imbalance.

On the strategic, regional and global level, the Conflict between India and Pakistan must be viewed with a different prism. It is not a simple bilateral dispute any more. In fact, it is a practical manifestation of global power rivalry and great power competition between the United State and India in one block and China and Pakistan in the other. This competition becomes more relevant in the context and backdrop of China's BRI and CPEC, which has been openly and vehemently opposed by the US and India.

The Future Trajectory of the Conflict

Keeping India's history and attitude towards its neighbours, it can said with confidence that the current conflict is not yet over. After the recent cease-fire, the war hysteria created by India has not subsided. Though, primarily for domestic political consumptions, Indian senior political leadership, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is still beating the drums and blowing the bugles of war with Pakistan. Indian military leadership, including a former Army Chief, has openly said that 'Operation Sindoor' has not ended, it is rather paused. The credible information reveals that India's Army Chief has been continuously visiting military formations that are deployed near Pakistan border. India has also launched very aggressive diplomatic manoeuvre by sending number of delegations to many countries.

India, having suffered unexpected losses, asked the U.S. to help her to gain a strategic pause. It is perfectly a text book case study of following the teachings of Chanakya, an ancient and revered military philosopher of India. Having reorganized and reequipped, India may indulge in another military conflict to take revenge of its defeat and insult. For doing so, India will not hesitate to orchestrate another 'false fag' operation at a much larger scale to seek a cogent casus belli, which should help her to galvanise Indian public support domestically and convince the international community to take stringent punitive action against Pakistan. India will seek more high-tech military equipment from the U.S., Europe, Israel, and possibly Russia as well to offset the strategic parity achieved by Pakistan. It must be kept in mind that real target of the India and the U.S., combined, is China, not Pakistan.

Conclusion

The consequence of India's renewed military misadventure would be highly dangerous, very unpredictable and extremely disastrous for both the countries and for the South Asia and beyond. Pakistan must remain vigilant and be prepared and must not be surprised by India. The U.S. President Trump has indicated his desire for mediating between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir Dispute. India is not likely to accept any such proposal that goes against retaining her illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. Anyhow, no resolution of Kashmir Dispute that is outside the UN resolutions or the framework laid down by the UNSC / UNCIP would be accepted by Pakistan.

Any mediation to resolve Kashmir Dispute must take into considerations the Kashmiris' right of self-determination. They have suffered and sacrificed a lot in their efforts to seek freedom from illegal occupation of India. Pakistan should focus on 'Composite Negotiations' concerning four main issues: no compromise on Indus Water Treaty; Structured Dialogue on resolution of Kashmir Dispute under the UN resolutions; institutionalization of joint inquiry mechanism in case of any terrorist act taking place in India or Pakistan, including Jammu and Kashmir, especially when the other country is blamed for its involvement; and restoration of special status of State of Jammu and Kashmir that has been withdrawn through revocation of Article 370 and Article 35 A. Pakistan should also seek SCO members' help in resolving the Kashmir Dispute in the light of UNSC resolutions. China and Russia, alongside the U.S. can help both countries to adopt more realistic and pragmatic approach towards 'Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management.' The Organization of Islamic Cooperation has not been able to play any significant role in helping the Kashmiri Muslims to exercise their inherent right of self-determination. However, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye can use their diplomatic influence to persuade India and Pakistan to resume their bilateral negotiation by providing a neutral venue for such dialogues.

On the national security and defence side, Pakistan should continue to strengthen more robust cooperation and collaboration with China, which is the only trustworthy, all weather friend, and Iron-clad 'Strategic Partner.' Pakistan needs to enhance its collaborative joint production of modern high-tech defence equipment, including air crafts, missiles, rockets, radars, air defence systems, ships, submarines, electronic warfare equipment, and satellites etc. More attention should also be accorded to developing network centric and cyber-warfare capability. Strength deterrents aggression, brings peace and stability, and eventually leads to mutually benefitting cooperative relations.

As regards another misadventure by India, it is clear that Pakistan will not hesitate to use all the means at her disposal to defend its territorial integrity and to protect its sovereignty at all cost. India must realize and understand that both countries possess sufficient nuclear weapons. Of course, Pakistan will exercise maximum restraint, as was done during current situation, however, nothing is more important than national dignity, pride and honour.

It must be kept in mind that no sustainable peace can prevail in South Asia without fair and just resolution of Kashmir Dispute. Any agreement between India and Pakistan on Jammu and Kashmir must fulfil genuine and legitimate aspirations of the Kashmiri people. If there is no peace in South Asia, it will affect all adjacent regions to include, China, Central Asia, Middle East, and West Asia as well. Hence, the significance and urgency to resolve Kashmir Dispute as desired and advised by the UNSC and UNCIP.

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