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RESEARCH PAPER

Flames across the Line: A Strategic and Tactical Analysis of the May 2025 India-Pakistan Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This study critically analyzes the India-Pakistan military escalation of May 2025, with a specific focus on its strategic, tactical, and diplomatic dimensions. Triggered by a disputed cross-border incident near the Line of Control (LoC), the conflict rapidly escalated into intense ground and aerial engagements. A high-profile dogfight between the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and Indian Air Force (IAF) became a defining moment. Using a qualitative case study approach, this paper draws on open source defense reports, media briefings, and diplomatic communications to evaluate the conflict's trajectory and implications. The battle caused substantial military and civilian losses, infrastructure damage, and disruption of diplomatic and trade relations. Pakistan's air superiority, strategic restraint, and international messaging earned it measured global support, especially from China and Middle Eastern states. The article concludes with strategic policy suggestions to prevent future escalations and promote long-term stability in a nuclearized South Asia.

Keywords: Conflict Assessment, May 2025 Indo-Pak War, Military Engagements, Pakistan-India Border Clash, South Asia Military Conflict, UN Peace Efforts.

Introduction

South Asia's peace and stability are still essential for both regional development and the geopolitical balance of the world. The subcontinent still demands the world's diplomatic attention since it is home to two nuclear-armed neighbors with a long history of animosity. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is seen as a leading example of the economic cooperation at the sub-regional level that is a major manifestation of Asian regionalism. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, on the other hand, has been held captive by the India-Pakistan rivalry and has not succeeded as a forum for economic cooperation. A comparative historical analysis, based on archival data from primary and secondary sources, is a research method presented (Bettani & Ahmed, 2023). A study examines how developing technologies interact with South Asian security dynamics through the lens of deterrence theory. Emerging technologies can bring new and unpredictable elements to deterrence due to their intangible nature, inherent imbalances, and unpredictability (Babar & Abbasi, 2023). An article discusses India's ambitious strategy to improve its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities across all three domains of warfare space, land, sea, and air as well as the changing nature of India-U.S. data sharing cooperation and its consequences for Pakistan (Mahmood & Sultan, 2021).A thorough analysis of the Islamic State's history, its present and future prospects in South Asia, and the potential threat it poses to the West is provided (Sayed & Hamming, 2023). This study specifically examines the Islamic State's current status and future trajectory not only within its regional core territory of Afghanistan and Pakistan but also in its peripheral areas, which include India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. It achieves this by drawing on primary sources released by Islamic State Khorasan Province and related networks and individuals.An article attempts to analyze the significant geopolitical shifts in Pakistan-India relations from 2012 to 2022. This includes a thorough analysis of the intricate interaction of domestic politics, international influences, and national security concerns that shaped the

course of these relations over the past ten years, as well as their implications for regional stability (Ahmed & Baloch, 2024).It is crucial that two adversaries have at least equal access to military resources in order to keep the peace. An article explores whether nuclear deterrence is a successful peace tactic by presenting a case study of Pakistan-India nuclear deterrence. Its goal is to examine the theoretical underpinnings of nuclear deterrence and attempt to apply them to the South Asian peace between India and Pakistan. This qualitative study directly analyzed the nuclear policy of Pakistan and India against one another (Khan et al., 2022).

Since gaining independence in 1947, India and Pakistan have had several border skirmishes and military battles. Every fight, from the wars of 1948, 1965, and 1971 until the Kargel conflict in 1999, each confrontation has left lasting wounds and unsolved tensions. The history of these battles between Pakistan and India is summed up in a precise and comprehensive way, which also examines the actual nature of the conflicts between India and Pakistan and its long-term effects. To achieve the learning objectives and enhance reader comprehension, a research is divided into two sections: the pre-independence era and the post-independence era. One study highlights the nature of the British colonial disengagement policy, a rushed and poorly planned process which deepened the ideological divide between India's two major political parties, the Congress and the Muslim League, thereby contributing to the conflict-prone relationship between India and Pakistan (Mir, 2014). The three primary triggers of war disengagement, ideological differences, and the Kashmir dispute were set in motion by the interplay of domestic, regional, and systemic factors, ultimately leading to full-scale wars in 1947–1948, 1965, and 1971 (Ganguly, 2019). Another study examines both cartographic dynamics and tactical signaling, illustrating how territorial framing can intensify interstate tensions in South Asia (Nanda & Alam, 2022).

Literature Review

When analyzing the disputes between Pakistan and India, it is imperative to acknowledge the strategic role of China, which maintains strong fraternal ties with Pakistan, particularly in military and commercial domains. The longstanding triangular relationship between China, India, and Pakistan has shaped South Asian geopolitics for nearly six decades, as highlighted in recent analysis (Smith, 2013). Given that both India and Pakistan are nuclear-armed states, the potential consequences of a nuclear exchange have attracted scholarly attention. One study outlines various scenarios based on the deployment of 15, 50, or 100 kiloton nuclear weapons, estimating that such a conflict could result in 50 to 125 million immediate fatalities, alongside profound local and global repercussions. Furthermore, it notes that Hindu opposition to the partition stemmed from their deep cultural and territorial attachment to British India, which they perceived as their motherland (Robock et al., 2019). In pursuit of peace and stability in South Asia, another study examines the underlying causes, long-term consequences, and possible trajectories of future India–Pakistan relations (Khan et al., 2019). Utilizing Kenneth Waltz's three images of war, a recent study investigates the causal dynamics behind India-Pakistan conflicts, identifying historical grievances and strategic motivations that remain relevant in the current geopolitical context (Gillani et al., 2023). Additionally, a study analyzing the role of missile defense technologies offers a framework for understanding their impact on nuclear deterrence stability, with particular reference to the missile exchanges of May 2025 (Kumar, 2022). The role of air forces has become increasingly significant in modern military strategy, particularly in regional conflicts where rapid escalation is possible. In the context of Indo-Pakistani confrontations, the growing emphasis on aerial superiority is especially evident. In recent years, major powers have increasingly relied on air power as a tool of foreign policy due to its precision capabilities and lower risk of personnel casualties. A study presents empirical data on the effectiveness and use of air power in interstate conflicts from 1914 to 2003, offering valuable insights into its strategic applications (Allen & Martinez Machain, 2019). The deployment of airpower transforms conflict termination into a

complex process, combining military coercion with political strategy to achieve favorable outcomes. Initial evaluations suggest that airpower can play a pivotal role in ending hostilities; however, understanding its full contribution requires a multi-dimensional analysis that accounts for its varied functions in different strategic settings (Fabyanic, 2019). An article analyzing the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war highlights the PAF effective defense of national airspace against the numerically superior IAF, attributing its success to exceptional training, morale, leadership, and combat spirit. This case underscores the critical role of highly skilled personnel and advanced technology in maintaining air force readiness and operational superiority (User, 2021). Furthermore, a study on India's defense partnerships reveals that the country has signed agreements with over 20 nations, enabling the integration of dual-use technologies in the development of advanced missile systems, aircraft, and weaponry. Notably, India has collaborated with Russia and Israel to develop and deploy various air-to-air missile systems, with both countries remaining its key defense partners and top suppliers of military hardware and technologies (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). The emergence of fourth generation warfare characterized by low-intensity conflicts and asymmetric threats poses new challenges for the effective deployment of offensive airpower. Nonetheless, advancements in surveillance technologies, precision-guided munitions, and the growing threat posed by non-state actors have compelled militaries to develop innovative strategies to counter these evolving threats (Subramaniam, 2024).

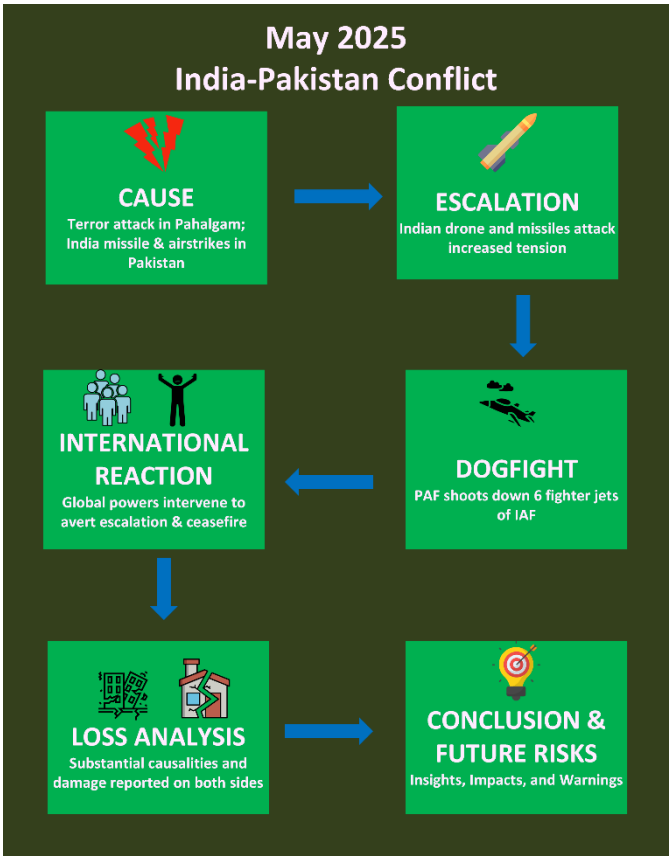

Figure 1: Graphical abstract of the proposed study

Theoretical Framework

Three interrelated theories including Strategic Deterrence Theory (SDT), Conflict Escalation Theory (CET), and Realism (R) form the foundation of this investigation. According to R, states operate within an anarchic international system, where the primary objective is to ensure national survival through the pursuit of power and security. In the South Asian environment, where bilateral ties between India and Pakistan are dominated by historical hostility and regional power imbalance, this viewpoint is especially pertinent.

The CET explains how small-scale border disputes or political provocations may turn into major armed conflicts. This is essential to comprehend the recent Indo-Pak conflict episode. With nuclear weapons, both countries use conventional warfare, signaling, and diplomatic strategies to avoid full-scale conflict while still achieving their strategic goals. This is further explained by the SDT. When combining these ideas, they provide a logical framework for analyzing the diplomatic, political and military factors that were evident during the war in May 2025.

Material and Methods

Using publicly accessible data, defense analyst briefings, satellite data interpretations, and international media coverage, this article employs a qualitative case study methodology to analyze the Indo-Pak recent confrontation. Data is comprised of the official statements from Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) and the Indian Ministry of Defense along with independent think tanks. To find trends in state reactions, military engagement, and foreign diplomacy, thematic content analysis is employed.

Figures and tables are based on media-reported data and estimates from subject matter experts. Although exact figures are not provided, the analysis draws upon multiple credible sources to support qualitative assessments and thematic consistency. This methodology allows for a nuanced yet strategic-level understanding of the conflict's trajectory and implications.

The following sections apply these frameworks to key events during the May 2025 Indo-Pak conflict. Each segment is analyzed through the lens of realism, strategic behavior, and escalation dynamics to derive insights into state behavior under crisis conditions.

Operation Sindoor vs Operation Bunyan al-Marsous: The May 2025 Indo-Pak Conflict

Guided by the realist perspective that sovereign states prioritize national interest and military dominance, this section outlines the strategic objectives behind India and Pakistan's respective operations. During May 2025 confrontation between India and Pakistan, which was characterized by Operation Sindoor from Indian side and in retaliation, Operation Bunyan al-Marsous was successfully launched from Pakistan side. Following the devastating Pahalgam incident, which claimed the lives of 26 people, India began a string of belligerent military actions that penetrated deep into Pakistani territory. A brief but fierce phase of warfare resulted from Pakistan's determined precision in defending its sovereignty. Key military actions, casualties, and the final ceasefire are highlighted in this section's chronological study of the battle.

The Pahalgam Attack: Catalyst for Escalation

The terrible terrorist assault in Pahalgam, Indian occupied Kashmir, on April 22, 2025, which unfortunately resulted in the deaths of about 26 people, including both Muslims and Hindus, served as the immediate catalyst for the May 2025 escalation. In this incident, 17 people were also injured (Reuters, 2025).

India's Military Response: Operation Sindoor

India quickly accused Pakistan without conducting a thorough investigation, grabbing the opportunity to further proceed with its long-standing anti-Pakistan narrative and mindset. Aggressive military action was justified by this charge. India launched a series of six missile strikes on civilian areas in Pakistan, including Muridke, Bahawalpur, Kotli, Muzaffarabad, Bagh, and Sialkot, on May 6-7, 2025, in a unilateral and aggressive action and titled it as Operation Sindoor as illustrated in Figure 2. At least 31 people, including women and children, were killed in these attacks, while 71 more were injured (Reuters, 2025).

Additionally, a hospital, residential areas, and mosques were destroyed in the attacks. As has been repeatedly noted throughout the history of Indo-Pak relations, such measures are yet another instance of India starting hostilities.

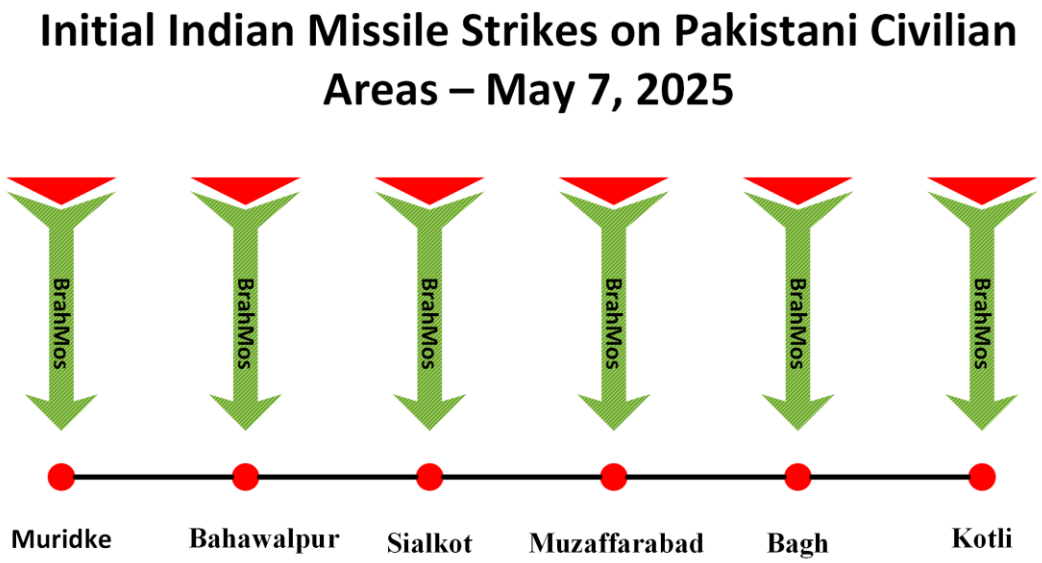

Figure 2: Initial Indian missile strikes on civilian population

Escalation of Hostilities

After India's provocative Operation Sindoor, Pakistan showed strategic caution despite having a powerful arsenal of ballistic missiles, precision-guided bombs, and a sophisticated air defense infrastructure. Pakistan opted for diplomacy and de-escalation over rapid retaliation, upholding its longstanding commitment to regional peace and stability.

However, Pakistan was forced to react as the LoC was subjected to persistent Indian artillery and mortar bombardment, which specifically targeted civilian areas. The Pakistan Army neutralized the source of hostility by firing calibrated mortar bombardment on advanced Indian installments in a calm but decisive military assault.

India's historic deployment of combat and surveillance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) across many sectors of the LoC and international boundary marked the beginning of South Asia's first drone warfare conflict, which intensified the situation. The Army Air Defence Command and PAF responded by engaging and successfully intercepting a number of hostile UAVs, signaling a dramatic change in the subcontinent's tactical theater.

The ISPR organized a high level military news briefing amid escalating tensions. Pakistan does not want war, but let there be no doubt that Pakistan has the will and the ability to defend our sovereignty with unwavering resolve and that any mishap will be met with a forceful and appropriate response, according to a senior Pakistani military spokesperson who reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to peace (Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), 2025).

On the other hand, Indian military officials and media sources started promoting hyper-nationalist discourse and making exaggerated claims of territorial expansion. According to propaganda outlets, Indian media claimed falsely that Indian soldiers had taken control of key resources, such as the Karachi Port, and even announced plans to "redraw the map of Pakistan". These falsehoods, which lacked operational credibility, were intended to agitate and distort public opinion.

The great founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, once said, "There is no power on earth that can undo Pakistan", which the country's leadership used as a reaction to these illusions (Jinnah, 1948). Every regiment and airfield heard these comments, which inspired the military and reaffirmed the solidarity and preparedness of the country. Pakistan's defensive stance was made stronger by the intimidation effort, which cemented the country's commitment to resist assault.

Indian Missile Aggression on Strategic Pakistani Airbases: Aerial Escalation and Targeted Destruction

Targeting several Pakistani airbases, the IAF carried out a series of targeted attacks in Operation Sindoor between May 8 and May 10, 2025. The goal of the attack was to weaken Pakistan's infrastructure and airpower. Notably, the strikes marked a major escalation in the fight and entailed the employment of drones and BrahMos cruise missiles (Economic Times, 2025; The Washington Post, 2025). The targeted airbases of PAF and impact details are presented below;

- **PAF Base Nur Khan Rawalpindi:** This vital installation, which is around 10 kilometers away from Islamabad, was the target of at least two drone and missile assaults. The attack damaged a hangar used for refueling airplanes and destroyed two roofs. Significant structural damage, including collapsed hangars and damaged radar systems, was confirmed by satellite photos (India Today, 2025).
- **PAF Base Murid (Chakwal):** A portion of the roof collapsed, causing structural damage to the airbase command and control structure. The hit was intended to interfere with the airbase ability to operate its sophisticated drones and fighter planes.
- **PAF Base Bholari (Sindh):** A 60 feet wide hole was created in an aircraft hangar at PAF Base Bholari, which is close to Karachi and situated in Sindh province. The wall of an adjacent structure seemed to have fallen, and debris were strewn all over the hangar.
- **PAF Base Shahbaz (Jacobabad):** This base, operating multiple variants of F-16 Fighting Falcons, was attacked, causing a 100 feet wide crater in an aircraft hangar and damage to its air traffic control tower.
- **PAF Base Mushaf (Sargodha):** Two runway segments were hit by precision weapons at PAF Base Mushaf located in Sargodha city of district Punjab, resulting in craters and rendering portions of the airfield unusable.
- **Rahim Yar Khan Airbase Punjab:** The base was deemed inoperable until May 18 due to a huge hole on the runway produced by the missile hit. A squadron leader and four other men were also killed in the attack.
- **Sukkur Airport:** Pakistan's aerial defense infrastructure was further hampered by the attacks, which caused a hangar to collapse and a radar facility to be destroyed.

Pakistan's air defense capabilities suffered severe damage as a result of the coordinated assaults (Times of India, 2025). At least six members of the PAF were killed throughout the targeted locations, according to Pakistani sources. Significant structural damage was also brought on by the bombings, including the destruction of radar systems, damaged runways, and collapsed hangars. Although the degree of airbase damage presented in section 2 and summarized in Table 1, it should be emphasized that the numbers are taken from open sources because Pakistani defense authorities have not formally reported them. Readers are advised to consider these figures as indicative rather than definitive. Table 1 summarizes these Indian airstrikes against Pakistan air bases.

Table 1
Summary of Indian air strikes on Pakistan air bases (May 8–10, 2025)

Airbase	Location	Damage Inflicted	Casualities
Nur Khan	Rawalpindi	Reported hangers destroyed, radar system damaged	Not specified
Murid	Chakwal	Command and control building damaged	Not specified
Bhalori	Sindh	Aircraft hanger destroyed	Not specified

Shahbaz	Jacobabad	Hanger cratered, ATC tower damaged	Not specified
Mushaf	Sargodha	Runway sections cratered	Not specified
Rahim Yar Khan	Punjab	Runway cratered, base non- operational	5 killed
Sukkur	Sindh	Hanger collapsed, radar site destroyed	Not specified

Note: Figures are compiled from web data and media platforms; official military data remains undisclosed

Operation Bunyan al-Marsous : Pakistan's Decisive Counteroffensive

Operation Bunyan al-Marsous, an Arabic phrase meaning Solid Cemented Structure or a structure firmly joined together, was initiated by Pakistan in the early hours of May 10, 2025, as a forceful and well-thought-out reaction to India's previous assault during Operation Sindoor. Targeting more than 25 Indian military stations spread over many areas, including India occupied Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat (Pakistan Today, 2025; The Sun, 2025). This operation was carried out with accuracy and strategic vision thus restoring Pakistan's defensive posture and neutralizing India's offensive capabilities. Targeting vital Indian military sites, the operation began with synchronized drone attacks and missile strikes with Fateh-1 guided missiles. Air defense systems, military intelligence centers, air bases, and missile storage facilities were among the targets. A significant contribution was made by the PAF, which used JF-17 Thunder aircraft equipped with hypersonic missiles to pierce deep into Indian territory (Daily Times, 2025; The News International, 2025; The Tribune, 2025). Significant Targets and Impact achieved by Pakistan are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Major Indian military installations targeted and the reported impact

Targeted Location	Strategic Asset	Reported Impact
Beas	BrahMos Missile Storage Facility	Destroyed
Udhampur	Air defense system and airbase	Completely destroyed
Pathankot	Military airfield	Rendered non operational
Jalandhar	Airbase	Sustained heavy structural damage
Adampur	S-400 air defense system	Destroyed
Sirsa	Airfield	Destroyed
Uri	Brigade headquarter and supply depot	Destroyed, disrupting logistics
Rajouri	Military intelligence training center	Destroyed
Halwara	Air force station	Hit with significant damage
Bathinda	Airfield	Destroyed
Sirinagar	Airbase	Targeted; at least 20 Indian military causalities reported
Chandigarh	Weapons Depot	Neutralized
Gujrat and Rajasthan	Multiple airbases and installations	Targeted with damage assessment ongoing

Note: The above information is based on web data and media reports, as official confirmations from Indian authorities are limited.

Cyber Warfare Component

Besides conducting the kinetic operations in response to India's aggression, Pakistan also launched a comprehensive cyber-attack, targeting India's critical infrastructure. Some of these are listed below;

- **Attacks on the Power System:** It has been stated that almost 70% of India's power system was taken offline, resulting in extensive disruptions, especially in Maharashtra.
- **Website Defacements:** Several well-known websites were compromised and vandalized, including those of the Border Security Force, the Bharatiya Janata Party and other defense-related groups.

- **Data Breaches:** Important information from government databases, military communications, and the energy industry was either lost or corrupted.

Strategic and Diplomatic Outcomes

In addition to seriously harming India's military capabilities, Operation Bunyan al-Marsous changed the strategic equilibrium and forced India to reevaluate future escalations. The operation attracted worldwide attention, and a number of nations called for moderation and communication. Pakistan's calm but robust response demonstrated its dedication to regional stability and national defense.

The May 2025 Indo-Pak Aerial Engagement: The Largest Dogfight since World War II

Applying CET, the following analysis captures how tactical skirmishes intensified into large-scale aerial engagement, underscoring how airpower plays a pivotal role in deterrence strategies between rival states.

The IAF and the PAF engaged in a major aerial battle over the skies of South Asia on May 7, 2025. Military experts have called this battle, which featured cutting-edge fighter planes and sophisticated weapons, the biggest dogfight since World War II.

Forces Engaged and Tactical Overview

The French acquired Dassault Rafale multirole aircraft, which are renowned for their superior avionics and adaptability, were used by the IAF. The PAF responded by deploying its domestically built JF-17 Thunder planes and Chengdu J-10C Vigorous Dragon fighters, which were manufactured in China. Both sides engaged in high-speed maneuvers and missile exchanges as the conflict developed over the disputed areas of Jammu & Kashmir as shown in Figure 3.

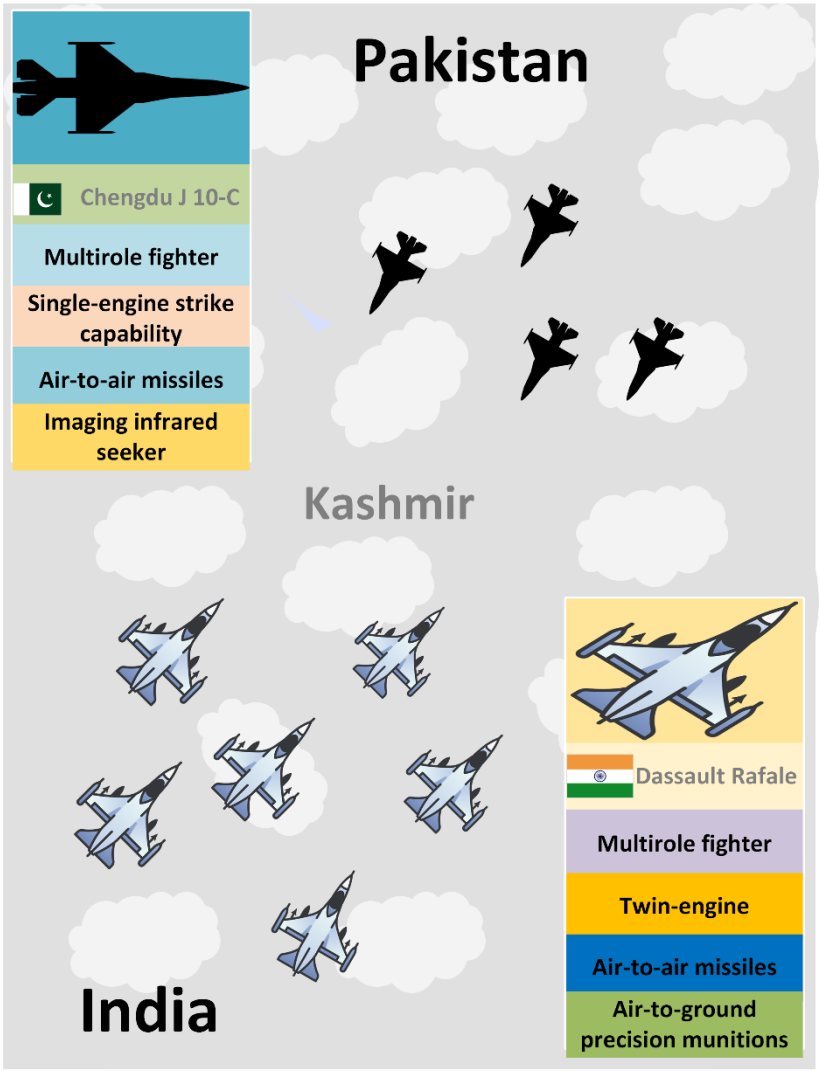

Figure 3: Visual representation of the May 2025 aerial dogfight between PAF and IAF

Critical differences in pilot preparedness and tactical execution were exposed during the May 2025 aerial combat, despite India's numerical advantage in fighter aircraft and its position as a regional economic powerhouse. The IAF fielded 72 jets including 33 Rafale while the PAF deployed 40 aircraft during the roughly 45-minute duel, according to defense analysts. This result emphasizes how important situational awareness, morale, and battle training are. Because of their exceptional skill and strategic discipline, PAF pilots were able to take advantage of the IAF's formation and piloting flaws, especially with regard to the highly developed Rafale fighters. It is noteworthy that France had previously asserted that no Rafale had ever been shot down in battle. But the events of May 2025 disproved that assertion, showing that without properly educated troops, sophisticated platforms by themselves cannot ensure air dominance.

Outcome of the Engagement

The PAF reportedly used a mix of air-to-air missiles and smart maneuvers and interestingly, the IAF lost six aircraft, including three Rafale fighters, while the PAF suffered no losses (Defence Security Asia, 2025; The Economist, 2025; Reuters, 2025). In a press briefing, Air Vice Marshal Aurangzeb Ahmed, Deputy Chief of Air Staff (Operations) and Director General Public Relations of the PAF, utilized satellite imagery to brief international media outlets. He further asserted that during the aerial engagement, the PAF achieved a decisive 6–0 victory over the IAF. A key factor in gaining air supremacy was the J-10C's

combination with PL-15 long-range missiles and sophisticated radar systems, even though the IAF lost six fighter jets, PAF mostly achieved their strategic goals.

Comparative Analysis of Aircraft

A comparative overview (Defence Security Asia, 2025; Langenscheidt Taschenwörterbuch Englisch-Französisch, n.d.; South China Morning Post, 2025) of the key specifications of the Rafale and J-10C fighters are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Comparative analysis of Dassault Rafale and Chengdu J-10C

Specification	Dassault Rafale	Chengdu J-10C
Origin	France	China
Engine	Twin Snecma M88-2	Single WS-10B turbofan
Maximum Speed	Mach 1.8	Mach 2.0
Service Ceiling	50,000ft. (15,240m)	59,000 ft. (18,000 m)
Combat Radius	1850 km	1,100-1,500 km
Avionics	RBE2 AESA radar, SPECTRAEW suite	AESA radar, advanced EW systems
Armament	MICA, Meteor missiles, SCALP EG cruise missile	PL-10, PL-15 missiles, precision guided munitions
Unit Cost	Approximately $ 130 million	Approximately $ 50 million

Economic and Strategic Implications

The maker of the aircraft, Dassault Aviation, was immediately affected by the loss of Rafale planes. Investor concerns about the jet's capabilities in combat scenarios were reflected in the significant drop in Dassault's stock price when news of the crashed aircraft broke. On the other hand, China's position in the global defense market was improved by the successful deployment of the J-10C, which raised interest in its military aviation technology.

The Diplomatic Front and Ceasefire Agreement

As R predicts, states eventually seek to restore balance and avoid mutual destruction; hence, diplomatic channels reopened under international pressure and nuclear risk, halting further escalation. On May 10, 2025, India and Pakistan agreed to a truce that would take effect at 17:00 IST (11:30 GMT) after fierce military clashes in early May 2025. In an attempt to defuse the crisis and stop more deaths, diplomatic efforts including U.S. mediation facilitated this deal (Al Jazeera, 2025; BBC News, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2025). Following a slew of incidents that escalated tensions, such as India's Operation Sindoor and Pakistan's counterattack Operation Bunyan al-Marsous, the truce was announced. According to reports, Indian soldiers displayed white flags at specific locations along the LoC as a sign of their intention to end the war (Dunya News, 2025). Public sentiment in India indicated a desire for peace and stability, and the civilian populace voiced serious concerns about the escalation. The ceasefire accord was viewed as an essential step to start diplomatic talks and stop more deaths. Despite the agreement, both nations accused each other of violating the ceasefire shortly after its implementation, highlighting the fragility of the truce. Nevertheless, the ceasefire has largely held, with both sides engaging in discussions to address underlying issues and prevent future conflicts.

Strategic Analysis

This section applies SDT to evaluate military posturing, technological escalation, nuclear signaling, and the psychological-economic dimensions of the conflict, offering insights into broader regional stability. Despite its short length, the Indo-Pak confrontation in May 2025 is strategically significant for both regional stability and global security dynamics. Pakistan's military professionalism, readiness, and dedication to responsible

deterrence were all on display throughout the crisis, which also highlighted India's belligerent stance and political irresponsibility.

Strategic Intent and Posturing

Operation Sindoor was launched by India in a blatant act of preemptive aggression, motivated more by internal political goals than by the need to fight a war. Despite the lack of any solid proof, India attempted to paint Pakistan in a narrative of cross-border terrorism by carrying out unjustified missile and drone attacks after the Pahalgam incident. However, Pakistan demonstrated strategic caution and its determination to put peace above provocation by purposefully delaying punitive operations like Operation Bunyan al-Marsous.

Technological and Tactical Outcomes

Utilizing cutting-edge aerial vehicles such as the J-10C and Rafale demonstrated how crucial technology is to contemporary combat. Because of inadequate pilot training and tactical cohesiveness, the IAF was unable to take advantage of the Rafale's better specs, which included Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar and Meteor BVR missiles. On the other hand, the PAF was able to control the airspace by integrating J-10Cs with Link-17 to enable real-time coordinated dogfighting tactics.

Deterrence and Nuclear Signaling

The war demonstrated how brittle deterrence is in South Asia. Despite the fact that both countries have nuclear weapons, India's disrespect for escalation thresholds almost caused a full-scale conflict in the region. Any territorial incursion will be faced with full-spectrum retribution, as Pakistan's leadership, including the military and ISPR, has repeatedly cautioned. As a result, Pakistan's response was not just defensive but also sent a well-balanced message of deterrence in all areas.

Psychological and Economic Warfare

India sought to establish psychological control through its aggressive narratives, which included false claims of redrawing Pakistan's territory and conquering Karachi. But these efforts backfired. Pakistan's united military, diplomatic corps, and media successfully thwarted Indian information warfare operations, which responded with accurate information and patriotic rhetoric.

Additionally, after the war, India's defense budget suffered greatly. Dassault Aviation's stock value fell more than 11% in European markets after the downing of Rafale fighters, demonstrating how military results increasingly affect perceptions of the world economy.

Lessons Learned and Strategic Takeaways

- **India's Miscalculation:** The battle served as a reminder that operational losses and diplomatic isolation can result from strategic boldness without disciplined military implementation.
- **PAF's Tactical Brilliance:** Using the fewest resources possible for the greatest amount of deterrence, PAF proved to be the most professionally effective force during the fight.
- **Media Warfare:** Just as important as Pakistan's physical defense was its capacity to fend against misinformation and preserve internal cohesion.
- **Future Preparedness:** To preserve supremacy in upcoming conflicts, focus should now be on bolstering cyber defense, AI-based surveillance, and multi-domain operations.

A detailed assessment of the economic losses incurred by India and Pakistan during the conflict in May 2025 is shown in Table 4. Direct military losses, damage to civilian infrastructure, interruptions to commerce, and market-related economic effects are all included in the statistics (Bloomberg News, 2025; Indian Ministry of Defence, 2025; Jane's Defence Weekly, 2025; Ministry of Finance, Government of Pakistan, 2025; Reuters, 2025).

Table 4
Comparative economic damage of May 2025 conflict – Pakistan vs India

Category	Pakistan	India
Direct Military Infrastructure Damage	PKR 28 billion (Airbases, border posts, UAVs)	INR 45 billion (Aircraft, radar systems, fuel depots)
Civilian Infrastructure Damage	PKR 15 billion (Houses, schools, hospitals, roads)	INR 12 billion (Border towns, communication towers)
Aircraft Losses (Value)	PKR 5 billion (2 JF-17s reported down by foreign media)*	INR 30 billion (6 aircraft incl. 3 Rafales)
Trade Disruption Loss	PKR 20 billion (Exports halted, import routes closed)	INR 50 billion (Exports hit, port activities disrupted)
Stock Market Impact	-3.2% KSE-100 Index during conflict week	-5.8% BSE Sensex (Heavy fall post Rafale loss reports)
Tourism & Service Sector Loss	PKR 4 billion (Cancelled bookings, hotels closed)	INR 9 billion (Flights grounded, tourist sites shut)
Energy Infrastructure Damage	Minimal	INR 6 billion (Transmission lines & grid damaged)
Defense Production Halt	Moderate (local plants affected)	Severe (HAL and DRDO labs shut temporarily)
Foreign Investment Fallout	$300 million delayed/withdrawn	$1.5 billion pulled out (especially French & EU firms)
Total Estimated Damage	PKR 72 billion	INR 153 billion

Notes:

- Figures are approximated based on reports from defense analysts, financial data during conflict week, and media coverage.
- Currency conversion not shown here due to fluctuating rates.
- *Losses reported by Pakistan were not officially confirmed by ISPR, and India's aircraft loss figures were denied by MoD but claimed by national and international media platforms.

Conclusions

The theoretical lens used in this study helps reveal the cyclical nature of Indo-Pak conflict behavior and the fragile balance sustained by strategic deterrence.

India and Pakistan's recent battle was one of the bloodiest and most illuminating military conflicts in South Asian history since the Kargil War. The battle intensified into a full-spectrum combat with drones, missile attacks, and the biggest aerial dogfight since World War II after being sparked by Indian aggressiveness on the Pahalgam incident. India had a numerical and economic edge, but Pakistan's professional training, tactical discipline, and strong morale were what ultimately won the war.

Operation Bunyan al-Marsous, Pakistan's defense effort, successfully resisted Indian offensives, showcasing the country's strong deterrent capabilities and unbreakable national unity. Due to strategic defeats on the battlefield and pressure from other countries, India grudgingly agreed to a ceasefire that ended the conflict. The idea that contemporary combat is won by leadership, strategy and national will rather than just troops or weapons was emphasized during this conflict.

Following are the key points of conclusion;

- India violated international rules and LoC protocols by starting the conflict.

- Pakistan only retaliated in response to repeated Indian provocations, demonstrating strategic prudence.
- The PAF dominated the air battleground, taking down six Indian fighter jets while suffering no casualties.
- The use of information warfare was crucial, and Pakistan was able to refute Indian propaganda.
- India's military strategy was made public, particularly when it came to managing cutting-edge aircraft like the Rafale.
- Following Rafale's losses, the world's markets responded, most notably with a decline in Dassault's shares.
- Under international pressure, a ceasefire was reached, but only after Pakistan's supremacy was evident.

Recommendations

Based on CET and R, this section outlines future flashpoints and strategic pathways to reduce hostility in South Asia. Critical insights into the changing character of Indo-Pak conflicts have been provided by the May 2025 battle, which has completely reshaped South Asia's strategic environment. Future conflicts are likely to occur as long as both nuclear-armed countries retain their belligerent posture and no meaningful diplomatic channels are established and maintained. Drone warfare, information supremacy and the introduction of sophisticated weapons are important markers of how regional wars are evolving. Without ideology, training and morale, the fight has demonstrated that technology alone cannot ensure success. There is a genuine and immediate risk of fresh escalation as long as the Kashmir issue remains unresolved and India's internal political ambitions continue to shape its offensive foreign policy.

- To lessen misunderstandings and distrust, established lines of communication should be revived and assisted by impartial international mediators.
- Confidence-building measures should be prioritized, and reinforcing hotlines along with cooperative monitoring of the LoC is essential.
- Campaigns for public awareness should be launched to dispel myths and increase intercultural understanding, especially among young people.
- To preserve strategic independence and lessen dependency on other sources, Pakistan must keep improving its own defense capabilities.

Future peace depends on diplomacy, discipline, and respect for one another in addition to deterrence. The world needs to understand that another major conflict might degenerate out of control in an area as unstable as South Asia. The only way ahead is to take proactive steps, including diplomatic, military, and political ones.

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