

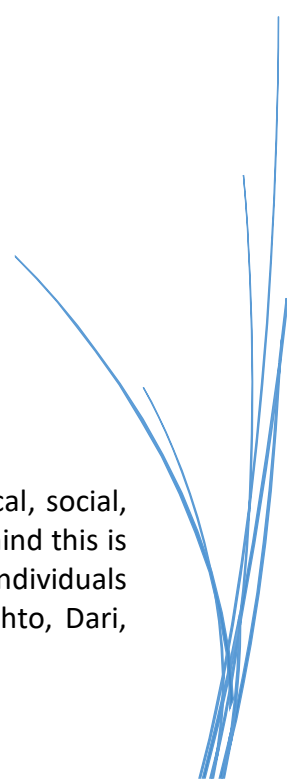
WEEKLY ANALYSIS

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TENSIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN AND THEIR IMPACT ON AFGHANISTAN



Weekly Analysis is one of the CSRS publications analyzing significant weekly political, social, economic, and security events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them design better policies. Weekly Analysis is published in Pashto, Dari, English and Arabic languages.



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TENSIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN AND THEIR IMPACT ON AFGHANISTAN

Introduction

Since the formation of India and Pakistan, the two countries have engaged in several wars. The first war occurred in 1948 over the Kashmir region and ended with a ceasefire and the establishment of the Line of Control (LOC). The second war broke out in 1965, again over Kashmir, and lasted for 17 days. It ended through mediation by the Soviet Union and the United States. Another major conflict occurred in 1971, known as the Bangladesh Liberation War. This war concluded with the signing of the Simla Agreement and resulted in India capturing 90,000 Pakistani soldiers.

The next significant confrontation was the Kargil War in 1999, which started after Pakistani troops infiltrated the Kargil region. Apart from these wars, several other clashes and attacks have further fueled tensions between the two nations. These include the Siachen conflict, the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks, the Indian military strike in Uri in 2016, and the Pulwama attack in 2019, which targeted Indian security forces and resulted in many casualties. In response to the Pulwama incident, India carried out an airstrike on Balakot in Pakistan.¹

All of these incidents have significantly deepened the rivalry and mistrust between India and Pakistan. The most recent event occurred on April 22, 2025, in Pahalgam, a town in Indian-administered Kashmir, where armed individuals attacked a group of tourists, killing around 26 people. India blamed Pakistan for the attack, though Pakistan denied any involvement. While Kashmiri resistance groups claimed responsibility, India maintains that Pakistan provides financial and logistical support to these groups.²

This is not the first-time tourists in Pahalgam have been targeted. On January 4, 1995, six foreign tourists were kidnapped from the same area—two Americans, two Britons, one German, and one Norwegian. A group called "Al-Faran" claimed responsibility and demanded the release of Maulana Masood Azhar, leader of the militant group Harkat-ul-Ansar. Four days later, one of the American hostages escaped. Weeks later, the beheaded body of the Norwegian tourist was found, with the name "Al-Faran" inscribed on his chest. To this day, the fate of the remaining four hostages remains unknown, though reports suggest they were all killed.³



THE PAHALGAM INCIDENT AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIA-PAKISTAN BILATERAL RELATIONS

As mentioned in the introduction, India and Pakistan have historically been nuclear-armed rivals in South Asia. Occasionally, tensions flare up between the two countries, often escalating their already-strained relationship. In recent years, however, India's economic progress and Pakistan's relative economic stagnation have shifted the balance of power in India's favor. Currently, India is the fifth-largest economy in the world, and its economic output is ten times that of Pakistan. Regarding military capability, India is the second-largest arms importer globally (after Ukraine), while Pakistan ranks fifth.⁴

After the border clash between India and China in the Himalayan region in 2020, India shifted much of its strategic focus away from Pakistan and towards managing tensions with China. This included efforts to either ease disagreements or apply political and economic pressure on China. As a result, India-Pakistan relations remained relatively quiet for a while. However, the recent events in Pahalgam have once again brought these relations to a critical point, even raising concerns about the possibility of direct military conflict.

On April 25, Indian officials reported that troops from both sides had exchanged gunfire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir, marking a dangerous escalation. In response, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi faced mounting pressure from the public, with many demanding strong actions against Pakistan. Modi responded by taking the following measures:

- Recalled Indian diplomats from Pakistan.
- Expelled many Pakistani diplomats from their embassy in India.
- Announced the deportation of all Pakistani nationals living in India, cancelled their existing visas, and suspended the issuance of new visas under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- Began arresting and deporting Pakistani nationals in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where 1,800 people were targeted, 150 have already been deported, and 50 women along with their children were detained.
- Closed the Attari and Wagah border crossings between the two countries.
- Suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, which governs the sharing of river water between India and Pakistan.

These actions have significantly worsened the diplomatic relationship between the two countries and pushed the region into a state of heightened uncertainty. While tensions between India and Pakistan are not new, the scale and scope of the current response mark a turning point that may have long-term consequences for regional peace and stability.

SUSPENSION OF THE INDUS WATERS TREATY

One of the most significant steps taken by India against Pakistan following the recent conflict was the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT). Signed in 1960 with the mediation and guarantee of the World Bank, the treaty was intended to manage the distribution of river waters between the two countries. Under the agreement, India received control over the three eastern rivers — Beas, Ravi, and Sutlej — while Pakistan was allocated about 80 percent of the waters from the three western rivers — Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab. ⁵

This raises an important question: Can India legally block the flow of these rivers into Pakistan?

From a legal perspective, India cannot unilaterally cancel or suspend a treaty that is recognized under international law and guaranteed by a third party like the World Bank. From a technical standpoint, the answer is also twofold. During high-water seasons, India lacks the infrastructure to store such large volumes of water. Attempting to block the flow could cause massive flooding within India itself. However, India does have the capacity to use water strategically as a means of political pressure against Pakistan.

There are three main ways India could do this:

1. **Withholding water during dry seasons:** India could store some of the river water during periods of low rainfall and reduce the flow into Pakistan. This would significantly affect Pakistan's agriculture and economy.
2. **Failing to share flood data:** According to the treaty, India is required to share flood-related information with Pakistan, particularly in the months of May and June when flooding is common. If India withholds this data, floods could enter Pakistani territory without warning, leading to devastating consequences.
3. **Releasing excess sediment and silt:** India could release sediment accumulated in its dams and reservoirs into rivers flowing toward Pakistan, which would damage agricultural lands downstream.



Tensions over the use of Indus waters are not new. Pakistan has long protested India's construction of hydropower projects and infrastructure on these rivers, arguing that they slow or reduce the natural flow of water into Pakistani territory — a move Islamabad considers a direct violation of the treaty.⁶

In response to India's recent decisions, the Pakistani government, under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, convened a meeting of its National Security Council, where the following actions were decided:

- Suspension of bilateral agreements, including the Shimla Agreement.
- Closure of the Wagah border crossing and a complete halt to movement until April 30;
- Cancellation of all visas issued to Indian citizens (except Sikh pilgrims) and expulsion of Indian nationals within 48 hours;
- Expulsion of India's military attachés by the end of April and reduction of Indian diplomatic staff in Pakistan to 30 people;
- Closure of Pakistani airspace to Indian flights and a ban on all economic exchanges, including indirect trade through third countries.⁷

In summary, the Pahalgam incident has severely damaged the already fragile relationship between India and Pakistan, further escalating political and economic tensions between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

WILL INDIA ATTACK PAKISTAN?

The likelihood of war between India and Pakistan can be examined through two primary lenses: first, the possibility of a full-scale conventional war; and second, the potential for limited military operations such as targeted airstrikes or ground incursions along the border.

When it comes to the first scenario—an all-out war—international relations theory generally holds that two nuclear-armed states are highly unlikely to engage in such a conflict. The logic is straightforward: when both sides possess nuclear weapons and can retaliate, the cost of war becomes too high. A historical example is the U.S. use of nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II—events that occurred when Japan did not have nuclear capabilities and still does not.



This theory, known as **nuclear deterrence**, is based on the idea that states, like rational individuals, make calculated decisions in moments of crisis. The mutual ability to launch a devastating nuclear response discourages either side from initiating a nuclear or large-scale war, as both would face catastrophic consequences.

As a result, there is a broad consensus among Indian and Pakistani political and military analysts that the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides significantly reduces the likelihood of a full-scale war. According to the 2020 annual report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Pakistan possesses approximately 160 nuclear warheads, while India holds about 150. Both countries are also equipped with medium- and long-range missile systems capable of reaching deep into each other's territories. Moreover, these missiles are designed to carry nuclear payloads, further strengthening the deterrent effect.⁸

For instance, Pakistan has missiles such as the *Shaheen* and *Hatf-6*, which can target major parts of Indian Territory. India, on the other hand, has its *Agni* missile series, which primarily covers short-to-medium ranges and is capable of reaching key areas within Pakistan.⁹ Given this balance of power and the high stakes involved, it is safe to conclude that a full-scale war between India and Pakistan is highly unlikely, if not impossible.¹⁰

However, the possibility of limited military action cannot be entirely ruled out. In response to allegations, such as the presence of the perpetrators of the Pulwama attack inside Pakistan, India may opt for targeted airstrikes or small-scale ground operations in specific areas. These actions would be aimed at eliminating perceived threats without triggering a larger conflict.

IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICT ON AFGHANISTAN

In response to the Pahalgam incident, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan issued a statement condemning the attack. According to the official release from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan condemns the attack on tourists in the Pahalgam area of Jammu and Kashmir and expresses its condolences to the families of the victims. The Islamic Emirate considers such incidents a threat to peace and stability in the region."¹¹

This statement is appropriate for two main reasons. First, while maintaining neutrality, since Pakistan has denied any involvement, the tone of the message subtly leans in



support of India. It shows that the Emirate is aware of the importance of balancing its diplomatic relations and should be able to use its ties with both India and Pakistan strategically. Second, not long ago, India condemned Pakistan's attack on Barmal district in Paktika Province. In a statement from India's Ministry of External Affairs, it was said:

"We strongly condemn any attacks on innocent civilians in Afghanistan. This is part of Pakistan's ongoing policy of blaming its neighbors for its internal failures."

Given this context, it was fitting for the Islamic Emirate to also condemn the killing of innocent civilians in India.

Tensions or a potential war between India and Pakistan can have serious negative consequences for Afghanistan, particularly in terms of trade. The Wagah border crossing is the key trade route between Afghanistan and India. Statistics show that Afghanistan exports nearly \$500 million worth of goods to India every year, with 80% of that trade passing through Wagah. However, due to recent tensions, the crossing has been closed. The longer this closure lasts, the more it will hurt Afghanistan's economy.

Khanjan Alkozai, a board member of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said:

"We have suffered greatly, especially in the dried fruit sector. Currently, the borders are closed and we are facing many problems. This is the season for dried fruits, and in two months, the season for fresh fruits will begin. We hope the issue is resolved by then. Unfortunately, our trade with India has completely stopped through this route."¹² Similarly, Khalid Rahmani, spokesperson for the Kabul Dried Fruits Exporters Association, noted:

"Most of Afghanistan's dried fruit exports to India go through the Wagah-Attari route. Alternative options like air corridors and the Chabahar port do exist, but due to limited infrastructure in Chabahar, they are not practical for exporters." Given these realities, two recommendations can be made to the Islamic Emirate:

1. The Islamic Emirate should play an active role in easing tensions and preventing direct conflict between India and Pakistan. Efforts should also be made to reopen the Wagah trade route as soon as possible.

2. Since the India-Pakistan conflict is long-standing and future crises are always possible, the Islamic Emirate should also focus on developing alternative trade routes for its exports to India, reducing reliance on the Wagah crossing.

CONCLUSION

The recent incident in Pahalgam has heightened tensions between India and Pakistan. As a result, India has suspended the Indus Waters Treaty, while Pakistan has delayed the Shimla Agreement. Both countries have also ordered the expulsion of each other's citizens and reduced the number of diplomatic staff in their embassies. This event has had a deeply negative effect on India-Pakistan relations and even raised fears of direct conflict. However, within the framework of deterrence theory, the likelihood of a full-scale war between the two remains low. In the meantime, the Wagah border has been closed—a critical trade route through which Afghanistan exports nearly \$400 million worth of goods to India each year. This development has had a direct economic impact on Afghanistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Neutral Foreign Policy:**
In light of the current crisis between India and Pakistan, it is in Afghanistan's best interest for the Islamic Emirate to maintain a neutral foreign policy. There are two types of neutrality in international relations. The first is permanent or legal neutrality, where a country declares itself neutral in all current and future conflicts. A good example of this is Switzerland, which adopted this policy after the Napoleonic Wars in 1815. The second is temporary neutrality, which is adopted only when war breaks out between other countries. This type of neutrality is not pre-declared for all future wars; rather, it is applied selectively when a conflict begins. Examples include Spain's neutrality during World War II and Iran's neutrality during the Gulf War of 1990–1991.¹³ Therefore, we recommend that the Islamic Emirate adopt a policy of temporary neutrality and declare its impartiality in the current India-Pakistan conflict. For smaller countries like Afghanistan, getting involved in power struggles between major nations is rarely beneficial.
2. **Condemning Civilian Casualties:**
The Islamic Emirate can condemn the killing of innocent civilians during the India-Pakistan conflict without compromising its neutral stance. According to the Geneva Conventions, the targeting of civilians in war is a violation of international

law. Similarly, under Islamic law, the killing of innocent people is strictly forbidden. As such, by publicly condemning such actions, the Islamic Emirate would be upholding both international legal standards and Islamic principles. Doing so would also signal that Afghanistan, as a member of the South Asian region, is neither indifferent nor disconnected from regional humanitarian concerns.

3. **Balancing Relations with India and Pakistan:**

During the time of the former republic, Afghanistan often became a battleground for India-Pakistan rivalry, which brought significant harm to the country. Going forward, if the Islamic Emirate adopts a foreign policy that balances relations between India and Pakistan and prevents Afghanistan from once again becoming a site of competition between them, it will be a positive step for Afghanistan's stability and development.

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