

FROM PAHALGAM TO POST-CONFLICT POWER PLAYS: U.S. SHUTTLE DIPLOMACY IN INDO-PAK RELATIONS FOLLOWING THE MAY 2025 CONFLICT

Amin Abdus Samad^{*1}, Rabia Iqbal², M. Sohail Hassan³

^{*1}Lecturer, Department of IR, University of Sargodha, Sargodha

²Lecturer, Department of IR, University of Sargodha, Sargodha

³Department of Pol. Science, University of Sargodha

¹amin.abdus@uos.edu.pk, ²rabia.iqbal@uos.edu.pk, ³sohailhassan535@gmail.com.pk

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Corresponding Author: *

Amin Abdus Samad

Abstract

One of the most contentious escalations in recent decades that was experienced in South Asia occurred in May 2025 during the Four-Day Conflict between India and Pakistan, which was instigated by a terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir. The paper is a critical analysis of the causes of the conflict, its quick progression into the military arena, how the shuttle diplomacy by the United States prevented a full-scale war, especially considering the threat of nuclear warfare. Comprehensively, the study examines domestic political consideration, military-technological innovations, nuclear signaling strategy, and weaponization of media in India and Pakistan through a multidisciplinary approach situation of the crisis. It examines internal political pressures in the two nations that determined the use of military forces in both operations India Operation Sindoor and Pakistan Operation Bunyan al-Marsus and the processes of an escalation and de-escalation. The efficacy and weaknesses of U.S. diplomatic intervention or its repercussions in the bigger picture of power shifts in the world powers and regional political alignments are observed. The paper will also examine the changing Indo-Pak strategic position after the war where economic coercion, digital propaganda and alignments of powers with the international powers like China and the U.S. is increasingly taking its place. The paper highlights the need to engage in lasting preventive diplomacy, cultural processes of resolving conflicts, and reducing the risk of nuclear war in the region through the analysis of the layered dimensions of the conflict and the mediation. In this Paper, It will enhance the research and study of crisis diplomacy in the 21st century as part of the management of conflicts in the multipolar and nuclearized world.

1 Introduction

The Four-Day War or Indo-Pakistani conflict of May 2025 is a graphic illustration of facts to evidence the absurdity of South Asian geopolitics. This is a short and high intensity military conflict that was sparked by a terrorist attack on Apr 22, 2025, on Indian tourist in a picturesque area

known as Pahalgam, Kashmir. Indian authorities promptly blamed this attack on corresponding militant groups based in Pakistan but this event once again triggered the conduct of historical skepticism between this two nuclear armed neighbours. The event did not only indicate an

acute failure in the regional stability but it also highlighted the open and unimproved problems of the Kashmir conflict.

In reaction to the Pahalgam Attack India responded with a strategic military action (Operation Sindoor) which sought to paralyze major targets in Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

This was an operation that has never been encountered with such wild scale and a precision that used sophisticated weapons including precision-guided artillery and loitering munitions. India was considered to be acting in a punitive way in military aggression as well as a deterrence on future cross-border terrorism.

Their retaliation was precise and calculated, and it was comprised of a combination of conventional retaliation and innovative drone warfare and it was summarized in what they titled as, their counter operation, Bunyan al-Marsus. The escalation of hostilities went well ahead to attract the concern in the global community not only considering the immediate toll of human lives but the imminent danger of nuclear escalation.

It is against this volatile background that the United States took center stages in crisis management by using shuttle diplomacy approach to crisis management. Understanding the devastating consequences of the full-scale Indian-Pakistan war, U.S. diplomats undertook the task of ending war and stopping the further development of the situation. Key to this method of diplomatic engagement is that it was relentless in opening possibilities with both New Delhi and Islamabad with a mix of face-to-face talks, back channeling and strategic pressure and was the means of achieving a ceasefire.

The American diplomacy did not go smooth. The intervention was also forced to traverse the tricky domestic politics in the two countries where nationalists and political factors tended to stand in the way of quick diplomatic solutions. Also, the threat of nuclear weapons on both ends also created some sense of urgency and complexity on negotiations on both sides.

This paper takes the reader through the complex aspects of the Four-Day War, observing the influence of U.S shuttle diplomacy in

transforming the war into a de-escalation. It goes into the domestic political involvements in India and Pakistan, the military and technological adjustments in the course of the war, and the nuclear implications that stood out in the seriousness of the matter. Moreover, it evaluates the influence of media in creation of the image of the conflict and perception of mass population, with the particular emphasis on the relationship between the information and the military warfare. After all, such an investigation gives us an idea, in general, of the persistence obstacles and possible directions toward peace between Indo-Pak relations, the necessity of long-term diplomatic relations and the need to find solutions to the core of the tensions in the region.

Background of the Conflict

The origins of the Forty-day war of 2025 are decades old as both India and Pakistan were entrenched in beefs and the conflicts of territory mainly the Kashmir territory. The conflict in Kashmir is not new and in fact, has been a hot spot since the division of the British India in 1947 culminating in the different wars and frequent skirmishes. It is a disputed territory, where the Indo-Pakistan tension has been fought over in one form or another over and over again, with each of the countries claiming this region in its entirety, yet only having a few fractions of it in its possession.

The actual block of time before the 2025 war started in April, 22, 2025 and it treats the terrorist bombing in Pahalgam, Kashmir. This involved the attack of a group of Indian tourists, leaving behind a heavy casualty and causing a furore of anger all over India. Soon the Indian government lodged accusations against the Pakistan-based militant groups and alleged that all that has happened before and the attack was as a result of cross-border terrorist activities that have led Indo-Pak relations in years. This was based on the fact that in the past, there had been a series of incidences when other groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed that are suspected to enjoy the, at least, tacit backing of certain quarters in Pakistan had carried out assaults against Indian territory.

The Pahalgam attack was responded by the Indian army with what they call Operation Sindoor; the latter was the strategic depth and precision that is about the response. This operation was a huge change in the military strategy of India where strategic restraint changed to offensive retaliation. It involved an intricate combination of machinery with a focus on the utilization of precision-based artillery, loitering weapons, and enhanced aeroplane power, as it attacked nine significant areas in Pakistan and Pakistan administered Kashmir. The action was aimed at not only destroying the terror infrastructures, it also intended to show a message of deterrence to the Pakistanis.

Pakistan is under heavy criticism by its domestic and foreign audience and reacted to it launching its "Operation Bunyan al-Marsus." The ability to utilize drone swarms and conventional artillery made it a particularly remarkable operation and an indication of adapting contemporary methods of waging war. The reaction was to serve to signal the strength and readiness of Pakistan to protect their sovereignty, and also to refute the Indian approach which insisted on military strength.

The crisis with a high level of hostilities raised the international community concerns because of the threat of nuclear escalation. The two countries are very well armed with nuclear weapons and the war signaled the unsettled balance of power in the world. Miscalculation or accidental escalation to nuclear war came to be of utmost priority with regard to diplomatic efforts which had to be urgently realigned.

The Four-Day War is therefore a combination of controversies that have been brewing as a result of the unresolved issue as well as the realization that South Asia lives under the nuclear nightmare. It highlights the precarious nature of peace in the region and how diplomatic efforts to examine the causes of conflict and especially the Kashmir dispute urgently require long-time efforts.

Domestic Calculus in India and Pakistan

Domestic calculus in India and Pakistan in the Four-Day War of May 2025 was the basic determinant of how India and Pakistan made decisions, talked, and escalated or de-escalated.

Political urgency and ingrained notions of security were the contributing factors that led each of the governments to risk, react, and restructure definitions, not only of literal borders but also figurative ones.

In India, the administration of a prime minister Narendra Modi was interested in the Pahalgam attack not just as a threat. That was given a groundswell of popular anger, and a call to action by the people, after the outrage in April 22 when 26 Indian tourists had been killed, when the shock of that incident gave rise and the demand to act quickly and decisively. Having viewed the management of earlier crises as being restrained (albeit at the expense of perceived deterrence), the government of Modi seized the attack as a justification of a doctrinal loosening of the screws. The Cross-border military action that India undertook, Operation Sindoor, was supported by a new strategic message; any future cross-border terroristic act would be considered as a war and will be answered with an instant and violent retaliation notwithstanding the nuclear context.

Modi addressed this so-called new normal in speeches, which appeared, along with non-state-controlled media sources, in state-owned media channels. India leadership presented its actions not only in military terms but as an example of moral action, sovereign claim, and India as a country ready to take in risk and exercise regional power. As elections approached and nationalism was on the rise, the media further supported the position of the government, because of the presentation of peaceful, yet firm rhetoric, precision of strikes, and narratives of the nationwide solidarity. The episode also enabled the Modi government to distract people of the country about economic problems existing in the country as well as the first regional backslide that occurred like the political crisis in the country, Bangladesh.

In the case of Pakistan, the calculus was also quite complex and very reactive. The civilian government was already exposed to pressure by an insistent military establishment and had to find a balance quickly between a strong reaction to respond to the Russian attack and the threat of a disastrous escalation. Pakistan initiated Operation

Bunyan-un-Marsoos and hit on Indian military infrastructure using conventional and drone weapons. Such A prompt revenge was meant to demonstrate national determination, strengthen domestic legitimacy and negate any impression of weakness after Indian counter-punches.

The central role in crisis management and preventing the escalation was, as usual, taken by the Pakistani military. Media and official channels focused on the casualties of civilians and infringement of sovereignty and billed it as a defensive measure and a justified war and even international sympathies had to be appealed. The memory of past crises and the relative perception of success of the past nuclear signaling meant that within the domestic arena, the Pakistani leaders were acting under the assumption that any form of restraint would put them at risk of being accused of having been cowed into submission. Simultaneously, there was a buzz in Pakistan which had borders on economic weaknesses and increasing international isolation and this became a consideration in its ultimate decision to go along with a ceasefire arranged by the U.S.

In both nations, the Four-Day War augmented the political purpose of external crises through which leaders were able to generate a higher level of domestic purchased pressure, demote opposition, re-depict national histories of resilience, injured provocation, and power. Although exceeding temporary stability of each of these regimes, this domestic-political rationality only left major structural problems and distrust of each other that cause the conflict essentially unresolved.

Military-Technological Adaptation

May 2025 Four-Day War brought a major shift in military-technological environment of South Asia as both India and Pakistan revealed their increased competencies and strategic modifications that highlighted transformations in nature of armed conflicts in the region.

The sophisticated military operations of India in the conflict were a good demonstration of high-tech weaponry and technology. Operation Sindoor brought out the fact that India was moving towards being precise and fast in terms of military doctrine. Indian Armed Forces also used

a variety of state-of-art systems such as Precision guided artillery, such as Excalibur shells, Israeli loiters munitions, such as the SkyStriker, and Rafale manufactured by France with the SCALP missile. The capabilities enabled a penetration into Pakistan unusually deep in the territory and attacking the most important structures with the minimum collateral damage and the maximum precision.

The drone was extensively and effectively used as a source of surveillance and intelligence giving real time battlefield mobilisational information; this increased the accuracy of the operations by the Indian military. This use of drones into traditional military tactics was a step in the right direction of India becoming advanced in modern day warfare. The effectiveness of Indian military action was also enhanced by the interception of enemy communication systems and radar using the conventional method of electronic warfare system, which applied the philosophy of total control of the battlefield.

Pakistan is a case in point as it was at a technological disadvantage but was able to counter act and come up with creative forms of adaptation. The reaction of the Pakistani military known as the operation bunyan al-Marsus entailed use of conventional artillery, use of drone swarms and fire on Indian military installations. Not only the use of drones in the spying but the offensive use of this weapon was remembered as a significant change of the tactics used by Pakistan.

Electronic countermeasures were also used in order to reduce the effects of the precision strikes of India by trying to jam the communication sites and effects in the targeting systems by Pakistan. This adaptation under of the fact that Pakistan acknowledged the necessity to respond to the advanced technological threats both symmetrically and asymmetrically. In addition, the war incited Pakistan to quicken its pace in the procurement and exploitation of precision-guided munitions and superior electronic war fighting measures so as to minimise the technological qualification by India.

Thereby, the Four-Day War marked the ever-growing role of technological advantages and adaptations in the regional conflict, with both

countries believing that advanced military technologies are the life of a modern battle. The war served as an incentive to make additional investments in the military research and development which India and Pakistan were determined to enlarge their military arsenals and to build local capabilities and depend less on imports.

The episode further confirmed that military-technological progress in South Asia had further globalization implications, with the future trend of the arms race and the probability of destabilizing alterations in the equilibrium of power in the region becoming one of the issues of concern. With both countries still developing and advancing new technologies, the threat of escalation and miscalculation constantly lingers and in response to them, strong diplomatic systems are needed in taming and reducing such emerging risks.

Nuclear Signalling

In the Four-Day War of the month of May 2025, nuclear signaling became a factor that critically influenced both the Indian and Pakistani strategic calculus when it came to strategic balance, and this aspect remains under examination as the balance of deterrence is tenuous between both states. The shadow of nuclear escalation was huge; affecting military decision-making as well as International relations.

Ambiguity and controlled escalation was the main strategy of India in its nuclear signaling in the conflict. After the initial strikes of the Operation Sindoor, India increased the readiness level of its strategic forces, an action that was meant to prove that it was willing to retaliate any possible Pakistani aggression without specifically threatening to employ nuclear weapons. This pose was supposed to achieve robust deterrence by expressing intentions to make good on a threat without going further and taking actions that would cause more escalation.

Strategic communication by India focused on its conventional military capabilities and accuracy, which made them sound sure about reaching strategic goals without involving nuclear possibilities. This signaling was meant to

discourage Pakistan against going beyond conventional lines of the conflict and the highly developed military forces of India were to be used in its own right as being a deterrent.

Pakistan with a graver strategic vulnerability resorted to more vehement nuclear signaling. Public meetings of the Pakistani military commanders of the nuclear arsenals were held, and large-scale missile movements, complete with official spokespersonship on the nuclear deterrence support of Pakistan, were held. All these were meant to remind India and the outside world about the Pakistani willingness to utilize its nuclear AMMOs in case of need and the notion that supports its defense is the "full-spectrum deterrence".

The main goals which were on the agenda of signaling by Pakistan were as follows: to prevent any further Indian military invasions, to garner domestic support on the reasoning that Pakistan showed national determination and to internationalize the issue and thus force international action to be to the point that nuclear risks are at stake. Pakistan used the shadows of nuclear escalation as a means to till its nuclear instrument as a strategic equalizer against the conventional strength of India.

Both sides directed nuclear signals which the U.S. and other world powers carefully observed because they did not want misinterpretation or exaggerated miscalculation to result in an escalation. American diplomacy efforts involved such overt steps as communication of red lines concerning nuclear usage, as well as promises aimed at de-escalating the situation and avoiding the catastrophic development.

The situation during the Four-Day War contributed to the weakness of deterrence stability in South Asia due to the influence of nuclear signaling. The warfare revealed that nuclear weapons are both a restraining and an escalatory force; the means of containment and strategic surprise. Effective communication, confidence-building measures and the existence of a mechanism to deal with crisis therefore is of paramount importance as India and Pakistan continues to develop and refine their nuclear

doctrines and arsenals as so that any crisis in future will not go out of hand.

Media Wars and Information Influence

The Four-Day War was the war not only on the ground and in the skies but also in the wide area of traditional and digital media where information became the tool and the weapon at the same time. It was a fierce competition of stories with a high density of propaganda, fake information and intentional disinformation in the air.

The two governments swung into action mobilizing their communications machinery in order to influence perceptions both at home and abroad. India government-run TV and government-controlled spokespeople framed Operation Sindoor as a set of surgical attacks which involved assault on militant infrastructure only related to Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba groups. This story was supported by similar images taken by satellites selectively, showing footage of successful bombings, and stories of how the Indian military was restrained. Massive Pakistani claims of civilian casualties were either dismissed or toned down in Indian reports which portrayed the military action as so accurate that it was justified.

Pakistan responded with their strong messages. Authorities and the Pakistani media focused on civilian casualties, with claims of mosques, schools, and neighborhoods getting destroyed in Pakistan; they circulated pictures of injured civilians as well as of burnt-down households in Poonch and Azad Kashmir. Through press briefings, the loss of non-combatants, the effect on structures and facilities including the Markaz-e-Taiba complex, and Jamia Masjid Subhan Allah, and the Pakistani response as being involved in the necessary defense were highlighted[1]. Hashtags and posts that evoked the use of solidarity with the victims of Indian actions and condemn their activities on the international scale inundated the social media.

The fog of war and misinformation also played more effective roles in falsifying the truth. Both parties pointed accusing fingers at each other in terms of falsifying evidence and exaggerating the number of the casualties; it became close to

impossible to verify the claims that were made by independent countries because foreign journalists were denied access, while their claims conflicted with each other. It was viral videos or photo shopped pictures that spread like wildfire, some of those official, and some anonymously engineered agents trying to whip up a storm either in order to create tension or cause a certain foreign sentiment. These escalatory media cycles were a mighty challenge that the United States and other international mediators had to face. The American officials continued to be very cautious as in the battlefield; they were also restricted in the information space by making public statements and briefings to foreign media outlets carefully worded. The aim was to preclude any side getting captured by its rhetoric, and unable to find diplomatic ways out, or to have to adopt maximalist positions in response to popular mood. Media war followed the physical one in the measure and unpredictability, as both nations used information as a weapon to the purpose of attaining strategic goals, shaping international and national popular opinion, and establishing domestic legitimacy. The information battle has become so large and fast that the significant influence of social and digital media became clear on fighting in the contemporary environment where the narratives can become an almost equally important tool of the war as missiles and drones.

Ind-Pak Politics: Future Perspective with the Lenses of War

The Pakistani and Indian politics and policymaking in general, and in particular, after May 2025 Four-Day War is going to be both complicated and momentous. As we have just witnessed the recent events, the path of both countries has now been defined by how they have reacted to the escalations of military forces, economic restrictions, change in geo-politics, and the Kashmir issue that has always been present. Referring to the most recent trend in analytical forecasting and trends, the complex of domestic politics, economic stability, recalibration of foreign policy, and persistence of threat of conflict will characterize the new stage in Indo-Pak relations.

The near future in the case of India can be described as peaceful with low intensity though with high sensitivity especially in Jammu and Kashmir. As the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeks a third term in 2024, it started 2025 with a divided mandate, a politically self-confident, yet not an all-powerful government. It is the policy after years of high octane politics, that is gradually becoming cold on the development of the economy, hard on counter-insurgency and propounding the image of India as an emerging world player. Regardless of the continued militant provocations and, to some extent, LoC violation, the formal ceasefire is likely to last, with occasional shows and speech. A serious terrorist event might, however, trigger another kinetic fight, since the desire to exercise strategic restraint has cooled on both sides.

Geopolitics is becoming the major factor in the political arithmetic of India; the opposing invective is getting less and less. Even the domestic politics, which is always troubled, is being accorded second fiddle by the strategic propositions of India in the international arena. As the GDP growth rate has slowed to 5.4% in late 2024 and remains strong by international standards—the Modi government is doubling its efforts to attract foreign investment, bolster exports and family-oriented industries and manufacture high-technology goods. Not just has the economic blockade of Pakistan left Islamabad alone but its impact had sent a clear message to the international markets which was the trigger of investor enthusiasm in India and the upward movement of the Sensex to greater levels. With international carriers retracing their routes around Pakistan airspace at the demand of New Delhi, India is showing its ability to influence economic and flight policy according to its strategic interests. The Indian space of diplomatic activity is picking up. The first Quad Summit is on Indian soil in New Delhi, both U.S. and Russian presidents attend it, and a significant strategic deal and free trade agreement with the United Kingdom is about to be closed. India is ready to realign its relations with Canada after the stepping down of Justin Trudeau as the prime minister of Canada, and the newly elected prime minister is looking to

establish fresh ties with the country. Such actions are an indication that it aims to exert regional power much further than South Asia attempting to balance ties with the West on one hand and Russia on the other engaged in economic and security-focused operations with the Gulf, Southeast and Africa.

The safety policy will be solid, or even aggressive. India would increase its military strength along the LoC, strike capability, air defence, and cyber and special forces, and prioritise investment in intelligence and surveillance to forestall cross border evils. An increasing readiness of the government to use economic weapons (sanctions, trade embargo, etc.) indicates that the regional policy has become multi-dimensional and is most likely to spread to such directions as digital, financial, and energy.

The situation is even more complex after the war in the case of Pakistan. India has imposed an economic blockade on Pakistan, and this has dislodged the already weak economy further and driven the stock market up in the air and accumulated public debts and inflationary barriers. The IMF has been raising alarm that Pakistan is facing diminishing stock of reserves and exceedingly frail dependence on support and bail-out. Islamabad is not only isolated in military terms but also in diplomacy and especially in terms of fiscal and monetary policies, making it weakly able to react to internal and external shocks.

On a political front, the current leadership of Pakistan is cornered by the effect of the meltdown in the economy, demonstrating in favor of the masses, and a more assertive (and belligerent) Indian competitor. Pakistan military still remains a powerful force and controls not only the security policies but also most of the diplomacy. In the short-term, the Islamabad policy is to reach out further to China, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) as well as to Western capitals without any hope that it can pressure New Delhi or to alleviate any sanctions. The government also tries to find the new military and financial resources in Beijing and via Gulf partners to modernize its air forces as well as develop precision-strike capabilities and support its so-

called unconventional deterrence considering both the nuclear and the assets of non-state actors. At a domestic level, high inflation rates, energy crisis, and loss of social expenditure have increased the pitch of political instability. On the one hand, the status quo of the civilian-military compact is still in force, but on the other hand, the probability that popular agitation or factions of higher elites can influence the policy shift is increasing. The ruling class in Pakistan will have to choose between pressing onward with external balancing and confrontation, or a pivot (however unwilling) toward economic reform and conflict management in order to avoid systemic crisis. Both courses of action will be driven by domestic politics in which demands of accountability and reform of governance are on the rise and the necessities of a security state.

Another imperative development in the two countries is the rise of economic and information warfare as principal statecraft instruments. To India, economic clout now serves as a creep to put the pressure on the enemies in terms of security policy. In the case of Pakistan, diplomatic activism, information warfare, and invocation of international law and human rights in the fight against isolation should continue to play a critical role. The two nations are spending heavily on narrative power, public diplomacy, and digital influence, as they understand that war is not only fought at the borders, but on the newsroom, social media, or world platforms.

Further into the future, the strategic rebalancing triggered by the 2025 crisis will probably trigger an arms race. India will further enhance its conventional and unconventional military presence, update technology in areas pertaining to cyber and space, and become increasingly interoperable with the strategic allies. Pakistan, in its turn, will also deepen its dependence on an asymmetric approach (such as the utilization of proxy militants, as well as the tactical nuclear force) and its sprint towards modernizing conventional forces (by means of Chinese and Gulf sponsors)[1]. The danger is that such mutually escalating rivalry traps both participants into a destabilizing pattern, in which each innovation or provocation will be met with a counter in a pattern that escalates the

costs of peace and heightens the likelihood of a war that will be larger and more destructive.

The relations with China and the United States will be the most important in both of the countries. The strategic relationship between India and the U.S. is set to intensify, particularly in technological terms, in defense chains, and Indo-Pacific security. The reliance of Pakistan on China as an economic and military power will become further critical, which may increase the involvement of Islamabad in the orbit of Beijing and cause a greater level of the great-power rivalry in the area. Such alignments although being advantageous have a risk of driving out regional agency and turning the subcontinent into a battleground of proxy wars, the outcomes of which are always unpredictable.

The long-term threat is that not both the nations are willing to take agonizing political steps to sustainable resolutions to the conflict particularly the Kashmiri issue. There is a high danger of accidental or intentional escalation, especially in the case of external powers being preoccupied or militants, possibly, with connections to the Afghan or the rogue Taliban forces, triggering another crisis[1]. It is most probable that the condition of observing of the pause in the conflict instead of the solution of conflict is going to remain, and both India and Pakistan are getting ready facing the new crisis, whereas both of them state that they are ready to the peace.

Simultaneously, the contradictions that take place within the boundaries of every country are huge. In case of India, economic aspirations have to be balanced against domestic strife (be it communal, regional or industrial unrest), and this will have to be sensitively handled by politics.

In the case of Pakistan, regaining financial stability and credibility will require a set of changes that are likely to conflict with vested interests and national security. Both countries therefore have the twin problem of not only dealing with the opposing relationship which could blow up at any time but also dealing with the internal demands within the countries without which they themselves run the risk of undermining state capacity through internal need.

Indian and Pakistani politics and policy is on the verge of unstable stability and turbulence. India is exuding confidence, economic impetus and aggressiveness in its diplomacy which is a complete contrast with Pakistan which has been living in an isolated island of economic woe. They are however trapped in a precarious balance; one in which the cost of war is great but the potential stake of risking everything in a moment of internal crisis is enticing to political leaders. Until the two parties, with the help of continued international assistance, can get out of crisis mitigation to real conflict resolution and the alteration of structures, South Asia will always be the region of intermittent tumult, tense nerve ends, and lost promise.

U.S. Shuttle Diplomacy

As shown during the May 2025 Four-Day War, the role of the central U.S. in ensuring the long-standing hostilities between India and Pakistan were stopped proved decisive as U.S. shuttle diplomacy entered the scene to contribute immensely to the management of the crisis between the two nuclear weapons states and partial operators of the no-first-use policy. When the war dramatically intensified further particularly following an Indian missile attack that targeted the Noor Khan Air Base, which was a very dangerous distance near Pakistan, nuclear command center, Washington and the rest of the international community were seriously alarmed. The possibility of a nuclear exchange which has become very real after Pakistan publicly summoned its nuclear weapons commanders and increased warning in both capitals brought the United States into action.

There were round the clock negotiations conducted by American diplomats with the help of intelligence and military advisors between New Delhi and Islamabad. The U.S. remained a respected mediator, who did not choose sides but, instead, promoted de-escalation to avoid the occurrence of nuclear doomsday. This was one of the most important roles since despite the fact that India and Pakistan were spurred by intra economies of their own, India with its traditional military advantage and Pakistan with its nuclear

first use strategy had a tendency to worsen into a bigger war unless interceded.

The U.S. diplomatic initiative used a number of simulacra, according to various reports; Direct calls by the U.S. President and Secretary of State to their counterparts in both capitals, which stressed the world community and the consequences of not taking further actions to expose. Involvement of neutral mediators like the UK and Gulf states to aid the U.S. in mediation in order to offer diplomatic paths whereby, India and Pakistan did not have to lose face by withdrawing. Transparent red lines on the use of nuclear weapons and promises and rewards on showing restraint. Both types of signaling, public and with a felicitously timed dramatic announcement of a ceasefire by the U.S. President himself, which brought a chorus of international legitimacy and pressure to the negotiations.

The peace accord was negotiated when local inhabitants in the borders are just evacuating in apprehension that the future will not be good, which had indicated how close the area was to a catastrophe. The American mediation was perceived to be fast and efficient, yet not devoid of obstacles Washington struggled to strike a balance between hard intervention and sensitivity to sovereignty and regional dynamics issues and keeping in mind the diplomacy that it would not sound to be heavy-handed or self-interested.

Eventually, the Four-Day War demonstrated that U.S. was not a global policeman, but a referee who could be respected and obeyed by both parties when the stakes were high enough to get to the existential level. The multifold of real time diplomatic activities, international coalitions, and alerts to foresee any global implications was successful however this also revealed the weak security set-up in the South Asian region and how imperative American presence in the region has to be protracted and delicate.

Challenges and Criticisms of U.S. Diplomacy

The diplomacy experienced during the Four-Day War between India and Pakistan in May 2025 was intense, pressure-packed, involving a lot of improvisation and rising to the occasion to make a life or death decision within the most terrific time

constraints. The main problem was the geopolitical complexity of South Asia and the historical baggage of grievances, wars and mutual distrust that both India and Pakistan harbour much of it centring on the unresolved status of the state of Kashmir as well as on who started terrorism across the border and who was potent enough to put a stop to it. Once the Pahalgam attack put the region in a crisis situation, U.S. officials were forced to act even when they had failed to predict the high rate at which things turned out to escalate. This initial slackness was criticized by analysts as it should have been anticipated thru the intelligence and diplomatic mechanism of the U.S. since the region had decades of volatility and there were already existing terror networks present.

Almost bang on, the tightrope that the U.S. diplomacy had been walking was there to see. Washington has developed a very tough strategic relationship with India in the recent decades due to their common anxieties about China, escalated military collaboration and increased economic connectivity. Meanwhile, Pakistan continues to be an imperfect but necessary ally to the U.S. in its first anti-terrorist plan and a main participant in the security of neighboring Afghanistan. This two-fold role caused a problem of perception: a move in the direction of one country would mean the loss of the other one. Washington seemed to encourage Indian adventurism by urging caution after India participated in Operation Sindoor though Washington denied the allegations, in Islamabad, there were people who argued that Washington has handcuffs Indian in its cause of punishing those who sponsor terrorism. This view of prejudice or partial involvement has plagued American diplomacy as regards South Asia like the American diplomacy in general and rendered non-credible as the impersonal broker in times of crisis. American too had the herculean task to convey clear, constant and efficient messages within the changing diplomatic and military environment. The United States leadership, in the person of President and Secretary of State, communicated with Indian and Pakistani leadership non-stop, but needed to be very sensitive in offering any words. Any statement that might be considered too soft

may encourage even more escalation; a statement that might be considered too forceful may eliminate flexibility and compromise and even get a backlash within the domestic context of either of the countries. These risks were amplified by the fast moving media environment whereby, both traditional and social media on the two sides magnified each word at times in distortion of both intent and context and contributed to the nationalist narratives that left leaders with less and less options.

With the exacerbation of the crisis, the efficiency of the usual tools of international diplomacy was put to the test in such vast measure as never before. A combination of official declarations on the one hand and underground communications and third-party facilitators on the other allowed the U.S. officials to maintain dialogue, although they also had to face the threats of the modern era: controlling real-time digital fake-news challenges, combating conspiracy theories, and trying to control the viral falsehoods that inflamed mass indignation. The task did not only involve the open activity of the diplomatic game, but also that of the more covert terrain of perceptions, in which one false move could send a dangerous situation into boiling point.

Such challenges were made even harder by the feeling of strategic despondency in the U.S. diplomatic community. The American foreign policy had already been stretched thin due to years of crises in Eastern Europe to the Middle East. Critics contended that this gave rise to a reactive stance in the South Asian crisis that was more geared towards the mitigation of short term effects rather than that of the long term planning. Although the U.S. later facilitated an end to hostilities in the form of a ceasefire, concerns were expressed by many observers that the underlying causes of the Indo-Pakistani rivalry Kashmir, militancy, arms racing had not been resolved, a fact that led to the possible occurrence of future instability and violence.

One of the criticisms was quite embarrassing because it revolved around U.S. propensity to deal and concentrate more on crisis management as opposed to conflict resolution. Although shuttle diplomacy succeeded in preventing the

catastrophic development of the situation, this step did little encouraging the promotion of solutions to hard, unresolved challenges. The Kashmir conflict that stuck several wars and thousands of skirmishes is as stubborn as it has always been, and the U.S. has not brought either party to the next round of discussions on the destiny of the region. Such shortsighted thinking elicited criticism that American diplomacy was only, as it were, kicking the can down the road, with the purchase of short-term security at the expense of eliminating the forces that motivated conflict.

Bureaucratic inertia and resource limitations of the U.S. State department were also factors that inhibited agility on the diplomatic front. This gave way to lapses of time and confusion as agencies attempted to coordinate services with each other, without examining the situation and prioritizing particular events. As there were so many different organizations which could provide input into this (the military, the intelligence community, and all levels of diplomatic staff, to name a few), it was sometimes hard to come up with one, cohesive strategy. Additionally, a few critics within the foreign policy fraternity also noted that the United States depended a lot on modes of engagement that were out-dated i.e. the threat of withholding military aid or using the instrument of diplomatic isolation and this might not be very useful in a regional scenario where both India and Pakistan have diversified their international ties much more.

Excessive dependence on military deterrence as an instrument to stabilize South Asia was put under further test. It can be said that American involvement in India military modernization, although not directly the cause of the conflict, has created an arms dynamic where acceptance of military technology and one upmanship is rewarded. There is a direct association between the India step up in their conventional advantage and its resultant chain reaction in Pakistan, which is beyond a nuclear chase but rather an operational capability. By criticizing blind overemphasis on arms transfer, but having nothing to say about diplomatic or confidence-building options, the critics assert that the prospects of military options

as regional stability destabilizing mechanisms are brought closer and become more attractive in the advent of any crisis.

In addition, a certain number of voices both in South Asia and elsewhere have argued that the mediation position taken by the U.S. does not always reflect local political realities about both countries generally. In India, nationalist tides and a political necessity of looking firm on security matters may limit the diplomatic maneuverability of the government. The military establishment in Pakistan is a strong force with a lot of influence which has, in most of the cases, silenced the attempts at dialogue or compromise by the civil bodies in the government. The U.S. crisis diplomacy has also been accused of being too top-down, concerned only with immediate leaders and official institutions, not so aware of all the players in political and social arena that can influence the opinion of the masses and affect the decision-making practices.

The information environment, along with technology created a new challenge that a crisis manager in the U.S had to contend with. When traditional and social media began filling up with claims, counter-claims, and emotional images by both Indian and Pakistani authorities and non-state actors, the U.S. was thrown into the middle of two competing narratives that grew by the day in scope and intensity. The mere velocity with which untruths might become contagious on the internet meant that American utterances would need to be assembled with exorbitant caution and are delivered at the right metered time. Nevertheless, the U.S. was not always able to dictate the perception and spin its interventions based on local groups intolerant to any ambiguity that can pass local benefits. This contest over the management of the narrative and perception is becoming an important attribute of present crisis diplomacy and the Four-Day War indicated just how hard it is when an outside power is trying to influence the information environment remotely. The work by the U.S. in terms of synchronization of other major stakeholders including the UK, European Union, Gulf States, and China entailed both advantages and challenges. Although these alliances made it possible to present a common de-

escalation message, pooled diplomatic leverage, there was also a necessity to juggle various interests and policy preferences to reach that goal. There were those partners who were inclined toward stronger intervention and others who were in favor of more respect of regional powers and none of them wanted to be sucked deeply to local South Asian crisis with far reaching nuclear consequences.

Though such same caveats inhibited the U.S., innovative diplomacy was also witnessed in the Four-Day War, though to a limited extent. The top-level shuttle diplomacy, characterized by quick visits and both open and closed negotiations, helped Washington stay in the pressure mode on both governments and provide them both with the diplomatic exit strategy, or the off-ramp, to get a domestic victory and retreat without damaging its own face. Signaling by Americans (such as satellite reconnaissance of nuclear forces deployments and explaining a red line in terms of the use of strategic weapons) was another way of seriousness and discouraging further brinkmanship.

The durability of the ceasefire achieved through U.S. efforts remains in question. Analysts and officials alike warn that the root causes of Indo-Pakistani conflict are deeply structural, and that any diplomatic intervention that does not address these will be inevitably provisional. There is a growing consensus that future stability requires a refocus on proactive diplomacy, confidence-building between militaries, robust hotlines and communication channels, and perhaps even structured, sustained dialogue on the Kashmir issue and on nuclear risk reduction. The Four-Day War could mark either a warning or an opportunity for such renewed engagement, but only if the lessons of crisis management both its successes and its limitations are fully reckoned with.

Some critics point to the broader lessons for U.S. global strategy: in a world of multipolar competition and rapidly evolving technologies, crisis diplomacy will need to adapt. This means investing more in early warning and predictive analysis to head off crises before they reach the point of no return, building regional and multilateral frameworks that do not exclusively

rely on American leadership, and embracing new diplomatic tools to combat digital misinformation and foster dialogue in contested spaces. The challenge for the U.S. is not just to prevent the next Indo-Pakistani war but to help build the foundations for a peace that can survive the shocks and transformations of the twenty-first century. The Four-Day War is a case study in both the enduring necessity and the real limitations of American crisis diplomacy an intervention that was necessary, effective in the short term, yet insufficient for the deeper and more lasting work of conflict resolution in South Asia.

Conclusion

The May 2025 Four-Day War between India and Pakistan, and the ensuing U.S.-brokered ceasefire, mark a pivotal moment in South Asian security and global diplomacy. The conflict underscored how volatile the region remains, how deeply entrenched the rival narratives of New Delhi and Islamabad are, and how the international system led by the U.S. but joined by new mediators like Iran and Saudi Arabia is grappling with the reality of multipolar crisis management. Now a destructive slew of propaganda by both sides aimed at winning world hearts and minds has broken out and reports show this coming usually at the cost of the dire need to carry out radical reforms and economic recovery at home. India and Pakistan are both putting diplomatic bandwidth in trying to influence the minds and not tackling the root levels of the dark rock in their bitter rivalry.

The U.S. intervening factor, though useful, since it prevented further escalation and a disaster, is surrounded by both the celebration and accusations. On the one hand, there were rapid shuttle diplomacy of American diplomats who were coordinating multilateral messages and using both the stick of private and public pressure to bring each side back to the brink. The U.S.-driven ceasefire, however, is best viewed as a pressure valve rather than a permanent fix: violations along the Line of Control continue, and the underlying political climate in both capitals remains uncompromising. India's official silence on U.S. mediation reflects domestic constraints and a reluctance to appear externally pressured, while

Pakistan has more openly acknowledged and even welcomed external involvement[5]. This divergence highlights the different domestic calculations and international strategies of the two countries a reality the U.S. must navigate with care in future crises.

For India, the war is likely to solidify a “no more business as usual” approach to Pakistan. The appetite in New Delhi for diplomatic normalization, water cooperation, or compartmentalizing terrorism from broader relations has sharply diminished. India’s policy will now be far less tolerant of distinctions between “rogue” elements and the state, viewing all acts of cross-border violence as requiring a forceful, possibly preemptive, response even at the risk of brushing up against nuclear red lines. This hardening stance is reinforced by domestic political imperatives and the need to project strength both at home and in a more competitive global arena. The broader regional impact is a chilling effect on potential constituencies for peace, dialogue, or compromise within Indian politics.

Pakistan’s postwar policy and politics are shaped by economic duress, diplomatic isolation, and an urgent need to rally international support. The government’s acknowledgment of U.S. mediation and its continued efforts to frame itself as the aggrieved party seeking to cast India as the aggressor reflect both vulnerability and shrewd diplomatic maneuvering. Pakistan is intensifying ties with the OIC, China, and other partners to counterbalance Indian pressure, but faces a hard road ahead in breaking out of economic and geopolitical isolation. Domestic debates in Pakistan are increasingly defined by questions of legitimacy, accountability, and the costs of perpetual confrontation, but lasting change will depend on the ability of leadership civilian or military to rethink the balance between security maximalism and socio-economic recovery.

On the international stage, the 2025 crisis confirms a drift from U.S. exclusivity in regional mediation. The emergence of other actors especially Saudi Arabia and Iran as potential brokers reflects an evolving strategic landscape. This development brings opportunities for

burden-sharing and multiparty engagement but also risks confusion, mixed signals, and even competing visions for regional order. The U.S. must remain engaged, but adapt to a more multilateral context, leveraging its still formidable influence while avoiding the appearance of partisanship or “tilt”. The question remains whether future U.S. policy will maintain its recent restraint and even-handedness, or revert to a more India-focused tilt for strategic reasons. The answer will profoundly shape future crisis outcomes.

Strategically, the events of May 2025 signal the need for a renewed international investment in conflict prevention not just crisis management. This requires support for confidence-building measures, reliable and independent channels of communication (including military to military hotlines), and multilateral frameworks that can address the security architecture of South Asia. A focus on nuclear risk reduction, economic interdependence, and informed media engagement should be prioritized, since much of the escalation risk now occurs in the information and perceptual domain as well as on the battlefield.

Domestically, both India and Pakistan must reckon with the opportunity costs of perpetual crisis. As their governments pour resources into diplomatic offensives and military readiness, critical economic and governance reforms are deferred. The international community including the U.S., but also multilateral institutions should use all available tools, from targeted aid to conditional engagement, to incentivize a shift away from zero-sum competition and toward constructive development. This is particularly urgent for Pakistan, given its economic fragility.

The Four-Days War and its aftermath are both warning and opportunity. They reveal the dangerous persistence of old hostilities but also the ability albeit fragile of diplomacy and international pressure to prevent catastrophe. The recommendations that emerge are clear: persistent and even-handed international engagement, investment in preventive and confidence-building measures, and a focus on turning narrative contests into platforms for peace rather than perpetuating cycles of antagonism. The jury is still

out on whether the region and its key external partners will seize the opportunity for restraint and reform, or find themselves repeating the perilous rush to the brink witnessed in May 2025.

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