

Pakistan-Based Terrorism and India's Response: A Strategic Analysis of Avoiding Direct War

Submitted by

*PANKAJ DAS¹ And MANIK DAS²

India E-mail Id – dasp55652@gmail.com


¹Independent Scholar of Political Science subject. Address – Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. Email ID- dasp55652@gmail.com.

²Independent Scholar of Political Science subject. Address – Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. Email ID – manikdascob22@gmail.com.



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Abstract

Since the birth of Pakistan, India-Pakistan relations have been fraught with hostility, suspicion, and conflict. The issue of war, border disputes, the Kashmir issue, and most worryingly, terrorism, has repeatedly come to the fore between the two countries. Pakistan-based terrorist groups have carried out attacks in India many times. Notable among these attacks are the Parliament attack, Mumbai attack, Uri attack, Pulwama attack and Pahalgam attack. This paper seeks to examine the nature of these attacks, how India has responded to them, and explores the reasons why India refrains from launching a full-scale war in retaliation.

Key words – Terror Attack, Terrorism, India, Pakistan.

Introduction

India and Pakistan's relations have always been tense in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia. From the partition of the country in 1947 to the present day, the issue of war, border disputes, the Kashmir issue, and most worryingly, terrorism, has repeatedly come to the fore between the two countries. Pakistan-based terrorist groups have carried out attacks in India many times. In particular, incidents such as the Parliament attack in 2001, the Mumbai attack in 2008, the Uri attack in 2016, the Pulwama attack in 2019, and the Pahalgam attack in 2025 have posed significant threats to India's national security. With the 2001 Parliament attack, terrorists struck at the heart of India's democracy. On November 26, 2008, one of the worst and most well-planned terrorist attacks in Indian history took place in Mumbai. In this three-day attack, Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists indiscriminately fired and bombed multiple places in Mumbai, including the Taj Hotel, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, Leopold Cafe, and Nariman House. Terrorist groups directly attacked Indian security forces through the Uri attack in 2016 and the Pulwama attack in 2019. Most recently in 2025, another terrorist attack took place in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Terrorists opened fire indiscriminately on tourists. Asked people their religion, and killed them. Which was a clear attempt to incite communal violence (Public Information Bureau Delhi 2025). Pakistan is jealous of India's stability. Therefore, Pakistan wants to endanger India's security and unity by carrying out various subversive activities. Pakistan's main tone is to oppose India. A major reason for the deterioration of bilateral relations between India and Pakistan is the four full-scale wars fought between the two (1948, 1965, 1971 and 1991). Pakistan was defeated in all four wars. The loss of East Pakistan during the Bangladesh War in 1971, it was considered by Pakistan as a

loss of its limb. After Bangladesh gained independence, a sense of vengeance began to grow within Pakistan's military and intelligence leadership toward India. From that time on, Pakistan adopted a policy of weakening India indirectly rather than through direct confrontation. One of the key tools in this strategy become the use of 'proxy war' i.e. applying pressure through terrorism.

Literature review

Biswas, A. (2017) in research paper entitle "Surgical Strikes and Deterrence-Stability in South Asia" stated that after Uri terror attack by Pakistan based terrorist groups on September 18, 2016, Surgical strikes were conducted behalf of India on September 28. The commandos crossed the Line of Control (LOC) and entered from 500 meters to up to two kilometres into the Pakistan occupied Kashmir to conduct strikes in the sectors of Bhimber, Hotspring, Kel, and Lipa. These surgical strikes were well below the levels of even a low-scale conventional attack India arguably conducted these surgical strikes with three objectives: eliminate future terrorist infiltration bids from the Pakistani side of the LoC; punish Pakistan for its sub-conventional war; and deter Pakistan's sub-conventional war (Biswas 2017).

Thakur, S. A. et. al. (2025) in research paper entitle "Pahalgam to Indus Water Disputes: Nuclear Deterrence and Modern Warfare" analyzes how the deadly attack at Pahalgam on April 22, 2025, led India to carry out several actions, including the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan. In response to Pahalgam terror attack Operation Sindoor was initiated by India. Pakistan responded to India's missile and drone attacks on May 10, 2025, with its military response called Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos. It showed that states might use traditional, non-forceful and unconventional ways all under the threat of nuclear weapons (Thakur et. al. 2025).

Nature of terrorism and India's response

Pakistan-based terrorist groups have carried out many terrorist attacks in India to date. Terrorist groups use various tactics of terrorism to carry out attacks on Indian soil, including: explosive attacks, suicide bombers, sniper attacks and infiltration, religious incitement, and brainwashing of the youth. Jaish-e-Mohammed carried out a suicide bombing attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly building in Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, in October 2001, killing more than 30 people (DIN 2013). On 13 December, 2001 a five-member suicide squad comprising Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists attacked the Indian Parliament. The attack led to the deaths of five terrorists, six Delhi Police personnel, two Parliament Security Service personnel and a gardener, in total 14 and to increased tensions between India and Pakistan, resulting in the 2001–02 India–Pakistan standoff (Times of India 2025). Then another incident followed in November 2008, the Mumbai attacks, also known as the 26/11 attacks, were carried out by terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Taiba. At least 166 people, including 20 security force personnel and 26 foreigners, were killed and more than 300 injured in attacks Pandey 2024). In response, Indian Armed Forces launched 'Operation Black Tornado' to bring down the terrorists (India Today 2021). On 18 September 2016, four terrorists linked with Jaish-e-Mohammed attacked an Indian army base in Uri, Jammu and Kashmir, killing 19 Indian soldiers and injuring 30 others. After a six-hour gunfight, four terrorists were killed. On 29 September, India launched a covert surgical strike, in which Indian Army commandos crossed the LOC and destroyed seven terrorist launch pads located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (Basu 2025). On February 14, 2019, another terror attack was carried out in Pulwama in Jammu and Kashmir by a suicide bomber resulting in the death of 40 CRPF personnel. The suicide bomber, identified as Jaish-e-Mohammad's Adil Ahmed Dar, rammed his vehicle into a bus with the CRPF convoy (The Hindu 2019). In response to the attack, on February 26 the Indian Air Force (IAF) conducted an airstrike on a Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) terrorist camp in Balakot, situated in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Basu 2025). Most recently on April 22, 2025, another terrorist attack took place in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. In which 26 civilians were killed mostly Hindu tourists. In response, India launched Operation Sindoor to destroy the terror bases behind the attack. As well as India suspended Indus Water Treaty. Besides this, India also plans to push for Pakistan's re-inclusion in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list, alleging continued support for terror groups.

Reasons why India is engaging in proxy wars instead of directly fighting against terrorist attacks carried out by Pakistan

Why is India not taking more active, aggressive, or tougher action against Pakistan? The answer to this question brings to light a number of complex political, diplomatic, military, and economic realities that influence India's policy. First, both Pakistan and India possess nuclear weapons. If a direct war breaks out, it can easily turn into a nuclear conflict, which can be devastating for the entire subcontinent. As a result, India keeps this dire possibility in mind while taking any step. A wrong decision can push the entire region towards nuclear war. Therefore, India maintains a very restrained and strategic approach in its response. After the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001, India was fully prepared for war, while Pakistan was also ready for war. However, due to the possible use of nuclear weapons and pressure from the international community, especially America, the war did not start.

Second, India's foreign policy emphasizes maintaining balance in international diplomacy. India wants to project itself on the world stage as a responsible democratic state. To maintain this image, India strives to ensure that the steps it takes are not contrary to international law or aggressive. War can expose India to international criticism. As a result, India tries to corner Pakistan diplomatically instead of war, such as presenting evidence against Pakistan in international forums, putting Pakistan under pressure in institutions like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and portraying it to the world as a 'state sponsor of terrorism'.

Another important issue is India's national development strategy. India is currently on the path of rapid economic growth and is working to become a global power. India is investing heavily in various sectors including information technology, defence, space research, infrastructure, and the health sector. In this situation, a full-scale war or military escalation could create major obstacles to India's development plans. The economic cost of war, the impact on investment — all these are things India wants to avoid. Therefore, India has adopted a long-term strategy to counter terrorism, which works not through conflict but through pressure, reputation, and strategic relationships.

Pakistan's internal situation also plays an important role in determining India's strategy. Pakistan is currently embroiled in a political and economic crisis. Internal political discord, military dominance, inflation, foreign debt — all these reasons are putting Pakistan under pressure within itself. In India's view, it would be more effective to put pressure on Pakistan diplomatically and economically and isolate it internationally rather than pressuring it militarily. Such a strategy would further undermine Pakistan's own internal weaknesses. India revoked Pakistan's "Most Favoured Nation" (MFN) trade privileges in 2019 (Times of India 2019) and increased import duties on goods from Pakistan. The move was a way to exert economic pressure. India is also strengthening ties with international partners — such as the United States, the European Union, Russia, Japan, and Israel. These countries are also aware of Pakistan's role in terrorism and have often supported India's position.

A key geopolitical reality today is the close relationship between Pakistan and China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and the Gwadar Port — these projects have made Pakistan a strategic ally of China. China is investing a huge amount of money in Pakistan through these projects. If India launches a direct war against Pakistan, China may see it not only as an attack on its ally, but also as a threat to its own strategic investments and presence. As a result, China may respond directly — through political, economic, and even border tensions. This will further complicate India-China relations. India will then be under pressure on two fronts simultaneously — Pakistan on one side, and China on the other. Such a situation will greatly weaken India's defence and strategic position and will have long-term implications for India's military budget, diplomatic policy, and internal security strategy. India therefore consciously wants to avoid a "two-front war".

In the context of India's geopolitics, a direct military conflict could create a multi-dimensional pressure, the first of which would be on the regional balance of power in South Asia. India has historically been considered the leading power in the subcontinent, with political and economic influence in neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. If India were to engage in a direct and protracted conflict with Pakistan, these smaller countries

could be sceptical of India's leadership. They may feel that India is now unstable or overly militarized. China could quickly move in to fill that void. As a result, India's long-standing influence and leadership balance in South Asia could be at risk.

Conclusion

India is “not taking an active role” — this statement is partly true, but not entirely realistic. India has adopted a strategic, balanced and far-sighted path — where military, diplomatic and economic measures are used to complement each other. Not war, but preventive and internationally legitimate action is India's current strategy. The path that India is walking is a “patient but firm strategy.” Which is not immediate retaliation, but a step-by-step strategy of cornering Pakistan internationally, increasing its own defence capabilities, prioritizing development and stability, and highlighting terrorism as a global threat. But India is not completely passive in its response to terrorism. India has carried out several retaliatory military operations inside Pakistan or in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Balakot airstrikes, Operation Sindoor, Operation Parakram – these steps show that India is not only relying on diplomacy, but also using limited military force when necessary. However, these steps were very specific and controlled, not intended to start a war, but as a tactic to send a political message.

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