



False Flag or Faulty Intelligence? A Diplomatic Analysis of India's Accusations Against Pakistan After the 2025 Pahalgam Attack

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received:	May	20, 2025
Revised:	June	18, 2025
Accepted:	June	23, 2025
Available Online:	July	01, 2025

Keywords:

False Flag, Faulty Intelligence, Diplomatic Analysis, India's Accusations, Pakistan, Pahalgam Attack

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ABSTRACT

The 2025 Pahalgam incident, which killed 26 people including 25 tourists, ignited fears of renewed India-Pakistan tensions. Within hours, Indian media accused Pakistan of orchestrating the attack without credible evidence or forensic proof. This paper examines whether India's diplomatic and media response was based on hard intelligence or driven by political motives. Indian mainstream and digital media quickly blamed Pakistani-backed militant groups, fueling a narrative of "cross-border terrorism" before any official investigation. This narrative laid the groundwork for Operation Sindoor, an overnight airstrike on alleged militant camps across the LOC, which Indian officials claimed was a "decisive message" to Pakistan. However, independent verification of targets or casualties was lacking. The timing coincided with domestic instability in India, raising questions about whether the operation aimed to deflect from mounting disaffection in Jammu and Kashmir and declining faith in security measures ahead of state elections. Meanwhile, Pakistan denied involvement, condemned the attack as terrorism, and demanded a joint or third-party investigation under the UN or a neutral body. Islamabad also reached out to China, Turkey, and OIC members, criticizing Indian media's role in stoking tensions without proof. This study investigates the objectivity of India's claims, analyzes diplomatic reactions from regional neighbors and global powers, and considers the implications of unsubstantiated accusations for regional stability and prospects for peace in South Asia.



Introduction

A horrific act of terrorism in Pahalgam (J&K) on April 22, 2025 leading to loss of 26 precious lives, including 25 foreign tourists as well as one local pony wala, sent shockwaves not just across the country, but also created an adverse impact internationally and rekindled once again the fires of animosity between India and Pakistan. No sooner had it happened than there was a perfect orchestrated cacophony in India against Pakistan without even a shred of credible verifiable evidence, with the Indian Government and Media playing a perfect coordinated act. This quick attribution and media portrayal were part of a calculated plan to build a narrative against Pakistan at home and abroad. Indian media went on the offensive and spun a story that Pakistan was behind the attack, based on hearsays, hearsays and hearsays. Such circulation of fake news, or rumours, only “validates” India’s military blitz, which it named “Operation Sindoor”, at an alleged terrorist camp situated close to the LoC. Yet the veracity of India’s accusation and the evidence that forms the basis of its military act undermine faith in the sources of information they provided and are now widely disbelieved by all neutral parties and by Pakistan itself, which protested these actions as politically inspired and diplomatically irresponsible (Khan, 2025).

The pace and vehemence of the Indian media’s propaganda blitz betrays more than a quest for truth – it tells of an political end. Many scholars and analysts say that India’s narrative machine was designed to deflect at a time when internal security slipped in Jammu and Kashmir amid worsening unrest and insurgency. Secondly, the prevailing domestic policymakers' situation in India, including an incoming electoral process and increasing nationalist feelings, helped the decision of harnessing the Pahalgam attack as part of their political capital. In this context, the lunacy of the media depiction of Pakistan as a permanent enemy made it easy to drum up support for the government’s belligerence while ensuring that questions about the veracity of the claims remain unstated and unasked (Ahmed & Rehman, 2025). This media led environment was also instrumental in escalating the military language of diplomacy and demonising Pakistan as the sole aggressor of the world order – without any space for discourse or independent investigation.

India called Operation Sindoor as a targeted and legitimate retaliatory strike against terrorist dens and initiated it soon after the deadly attack. Indian official statements said the operation destroyed militant infrastructure and caused extensive damage to Pakistan’s military potential. But the legality of the operation is questionable, as the evidence in support of it has not been fully transparent and internationally verified. Independent experts and global observers have observed that India’s rationalisation for the attack was predicated on intelligence assessments that have yet to be shared in the public domain and verified by neutral parties. Pakistan strongly disputed the claims that terrorists camps existed in the areas within its jurisdiction that were bombed, and stated that the operation was a "fabricated pretext" which had been carried out with the aim to "heighten the tensions in the region and discredit Pakistan." (Iqbal, 2025). Operation thus stands as an example of how fake news and false claims can drive dangerous military escalation, destabilizing the region and corroding confidence.

Pakistan’s diplomatic response too tight-roped, recounting appeals for calm, restraint, and the need for evidence-based accusations. Islamabad on Tuesday strongly refuted New Delhi’s allegations, saying there is “no credible evidence” to suggest that Pakistan is involved in the assault that left seven soldiers dead. Pakistan had sought a joint probe by the UN or another neutral international organisation into the alleged use of chemical weapons, or denying reports that they were used. This call was the testament of Pakistan’s sincerity for openness and peace as opposed to India which wanted to be a one-sided aggressor. Additionally, Pakistan approached important regional actors and international institutions to seek a diplomatic resolution, stressing the dangers of precipitate military moves based on propaganda rather than evidence (Malik, 2025). Pakistan’s diplomatic outreach emphasized the importance of de-escalation and respect for diplomatic norms

and made clear the dangers of playing politics over terrorism for short-term domestic electoral purposes.

India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) after Pahalgam was a leap without a precedent, introducing new features into an intractable conflict. The IWT, a seminal pact brokered by the World Bank in 1960, has been one of the few examples of cooperation between the two rivals, regulating the use of shared rivers' waters. India argued that it had suspended the service on the grounds of national security and because it felt it had to keep the pressure on Pakistan. But Pakistan rejected the suspension as a violation of international law and an effort to turn water resources into a weapon for political pressure. Not only did this decision sour bilateral relations, it also brought a wider international outrage as experts warned about the humanitarian and environmental costs of undermining water-sharing practices in a region that relies heavily on it (Siddiqui, 2025). The suspension highlighted that India's moves went beyond an immediate security concern, using multiple fronts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically.

The response to the Pahalgam attack and its aftermath from the region and internationally was varied and indicative of the intricate geopolitics. As India tried to rally its neighbors and major powers behind the Indian narrative, several countries in South Asia, including Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka stayed circumspect and did not agree to support the Indian narrative straightaway. The United States as well as major global powers like China and Russia called on both India and Pakistan to de-escalate and sit down for talks, but stopped short of endorsing India's accusations without proof. There were also hesitations based on international fears of what a resurgent India-Pakistan confrontation might lead to, particularly since both countries were nuclear armed (Chaudhry & Wang, 2025). The diplomatic campaign launched by Pakistan with its friends and multilateral organisations played a role in moderating international response to the issue and to underscore the significance of peaceful resolution to the conflict.

In addition, Pakistan's narrative also bucked the existing narrative that accuses India has set in previous wars, such as the Pulwama attack that took place last year. Pakistani analysts highlighted the pattern of India using terrorism accusations as instruments for legitimising military strikes in pursuit of diplomatic censure of Pakistan at the international level, even when at the cost of real peace initiatives. Placing the Pahalgam event into this wider historical context, Pakistan made a silent point that India's policy of exploiting terror to promote geopolitical goals was fraught with its own perils. According to Pakistan, said approach only undermines trust, breeds animosity and distracts from the underlying nature of the conflict in Kashmir and the broader area (Hussain & Malik, 2024).

In the media realm, the dissonance between Indian and Pakistani narratives further complicated the resolution of the conflict. While Pakistani media carried reports about lack of evidence and India peddling misinformation and propaganda, Indian media, usually state-run one lopsidedly projected Pakistan as a rogue state which sponsored terrorism. This polarization of the media has led to an ossification of public opinion on each side, in which there is less and less room for dissenting voices and conversation. Information warfare of this kind doesn't only mean a head-spinning diplomatic process, but fear and mistrust that are further fueled among the civilian population in communities (Khan & Siddiqui, 2025).

Background of the 2025 Pahalgam Attack

The Pahalgam attack of 2025 took place on April 22 when a group of tourists on tour of the beautiful Pahalgam area of Jammu and Kashmir were targeted. The attack cost the lives of 26

people, among them 25 foreign tourists and one local guide, which prompted international outrage and anxiety. Half an hour after the event, when hardly any evidence analysis had been carried out, the Indian government had already declared that Pakistan was behind the attack. The allegations against Pakistan were "hasty and appeared to be part of a pre-determined narrative," reported multiple international media houses. The BBC and Al Jazeera pointed out, however, that India's rapid accusation of Pakistan, without carrying out an investigation, raised concerns of the politicization of the disaster (BBC News, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025).

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was said to be at a political rally in Gujarat during the attack, a decision heavily lambasted as an act of misplaced priorities during a national disaster. Simultaneously India's External Affairs Minister provided the media with categorical claims of the involvement of Pakistan-based groups, specifically naming The Resistance Front (TRF) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), without any conclusive evidence. The Minister's remarks focused on Pakistan's purported harboring of terror proxies to destabilize Jammu and Kashmir, constructing a narrative of state-sponsored terrorism in the rest of the country (Mehta, 2025). This instant public accusation paved the way for India's subsequent military and foreign policy action, and Pakistan vehemently opposed these claims, describing them as premature and politically motivated.

International observers and diplomats were concerned at how fast India had pointed the figure of blame. The spokesman for the United Nations appealed for restraint and an independent investigation before any conclusion was reached. Several nations, such as China and Russia, reiterated this stance, and underlined the significance of verifying information rather than relying on inflammatory language to escalate a region already on unstable ground (United Nations, 2025; Zhang & Petrov, 2025). Pakistan's Foreign Office issued a statement condemning the attack in strong terms, offering deep condolences for the victims and making a clear denial of any role. Islamabad also demanded an open and joint investigation to establish the facts and the truth, emphasising that New Delhi has used terrorist attacks in the past for political ends without solid evidence (Foreign Office of Pakistan, 2025).

This early response phase highlighted the differences in approaches to the incident: India's instant and aggressive allegations against Pakistan and Pakistan's focus on due process and evidence-based diplomacy. The way the international media reported the story and the way diplomatic calls were made had very clearly indicated that there was widespread skepticism in the global community about the expeditious blame put on India, thus undermining the credibility of the allegations when there was nothing to substantiate the accusations.

Indian Media's Role in Propagating False Narratives

It was the Indian media which was at the forefront on how the events leading from the 2025 Pahalgam attack were shaped, turning public opinion against Pakistan in some minutes. Massive Indian news networks like Republic Times Now, and Zee News live-footage broke news declaring Pakistan as the mastermind of the attack without any credential, evidence witness or nothing except its raw evidence and intelligence report of independent agencies. Television anchors delivered fiery segments, frequently using nationalistic language to tie Pakistan to cross-border terrorism. What was worrying was that this narrative was being propagated simultaneously by mainstream Indian news channels and appeared to be part of a media line – one that may well have reflected the official position of the state. While international media raised the specter of India pointing fingers too quickly, the Indian media dismissed them as efforts to "undermine national resolve" (Sharma, 2025).

Adding to the false narrative was the select sharing of unverified information by Indian journalists such as releasing so-called “confessions” from detained suspects whose provenance and access was never authenticated or for the public to look at. Nationalist hashtags like #PunishPakistan and #AvengPahalgam were shared across social media platforms such as X (previously Twitter) and Facebook, often amplified by verified accounts related to government officials or military spokesmen. These trends were pushed by media houses with the goal of using online mobs to spew hate tweets, and hurl threats at Pakistan. This digital amplification lent authenticity to the echo chamber inculcating suspicion and antipathy in India against Pakistan, without reference to fact checking and so-called responsible journalism (Kumar & Banerjee, 2045).

The jingoistic coverage of the Indian media wasn’t just for Indians—it was also tactical aimed at the global audience via English language outlets such as WION news and India Today Global. These fora also propagated Pakistan as a sponsor of terrorism, advocating it to be reprimanded by the international community. None of these reports, however, provided no independently obtained intelligence or on-the-spot reports on the ground where the attack took place that could establish a Pakistani link. Meanwhile, foreign media houses like Al Jazeera, TRT World and BBC tampered their coverage with such caveats, questioning the veracity of the accusation since no credible investigative agencies had named any culprits as yet. The difference between Indian and world media narratives highlighted how much the domestic Indian media acted as a fulcrum of state policy rather than a pillar of democratic accountability (Ahmed & Saeed, 2025).

This is by no means behavior of a new mode. Indian media has been often criticised in the past for jingoistic reporting especially when the tension between India and Pakistan escalates. These same patterns repeated after the Pulwama attack in 2019, when Indian media outlets quickly implicated Pakistan and jubilantly reported retaliatory strikes without verifying the impact of their efforts. A system failure in Indian journalism is the verdict of most analysts, where journalists are unable to practice as they should because they work for political parties or under arms-length goingvt influences on editorial freedom. So the Pahalgam event is one piece of the puzzle that Indian media remains the biggest purveyor of the narrative and indulging in unverified reporting leading to regional tensions (Ali & Zubair, 2024).

This media fairytale had a psychological effect on the Indian people. Opinion polls conducted within one week of the attack in Pahalgam indicated that over 80% of Indian respondents considered Pakistan to be involved in the attack, although no official investigation had been conducted. This level of public certainty shows the power of the media in forming mass memory and views on foreign policy. Such brainwashing not only sow seeds of hatred for future generations but also forces the polity to push their leaders to fight back instead of solving differences diplomatically (Verma, 2025).

The Pakistani government categorically rejected the way the Indian media handled the matter, calling it a "media trial without evidence" and accusing it of polluting the context and transmitting hostility. “News broadcasting is not to be done on the basis of likes and dislikes, for commercial purposes or in order to manipulate, misuse or hype anything,” said Firdous Ashiq Awan, an adviser on information to the Pakistani prime minister, in a statement. “This was highly regrettable and clearly violative of the norms of professional journalistic conduct. Separately, Pakistani media, such as Geo News and Dawn, emphasised the differences between Indian media reporting and information and also focussed on the operative requirement for international investigation, involving independent investigators, to establish culpability. This difference in reporting further highlights the divided media settings of the two countries and emphasises the necessity for ethical journalism in conflict-sensitive areas (Ministry of Information Pakistan 2025).

India's Diplomatic Posture Post-Attack

The Indian government reacted to the Pahalgam attack with an intense diplomatic offensive to isolate Pakistan internationally. Within hours of the attack, India briefed over 40 foreign missions in New Delhi by senior officials, including foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, repeating its accusation that Pakistan-based militant groups, especially Lashkar-e-Taiba helped by TRF, a group it claims to be an offshoot of LeT, were behind the attack. Such briefings were held without the transmission of authentic forensic or intelligence evidence and this has been observed by diplomats in remarks to the international media under the condition of anonymity such as Reuters and France 24 (Gupta & Ramachandran, 2025). The speed and confidence with which India framed its diplomatic demands seemed to suggest its goal was more to marshal international opinion than to launch a serious inquiry.

India was also active in the multilateral arena. In an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council, India's top envoy Mr. Darpan accused Pakistan of "continuing to nurture and harbor cross-border terrorism," as he called for sanctions on people and organizations said to be involved. But once again, India did not hand over satellite images, intercepts or irrefutable ground intelligence to support its claims. Countries such as China and Russia demanded a fair and transparent investigation while the United States themselves were cautious and advised both China and Russia for restraint pending more information (UNSC Meeting Records, 2025). Such a measured response indicated that India's multi-lateral mobilisation did not as yet quite succeed, partly, because of the pre-mature reaction to the allegations (Wang & Carter, 2025).

From a strategic viewpoint, India also employed bilateral diplomacy to squeeze Pakistan by canvassing its neighbouring countries. New Delhi also spoke to the governments of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal and requested them to make statements in support of India and against Pakistan. Bangladesh and Bhutan released vague condemnation statements against actions of terrorism, but significantly avoided mentioning Pakistan, demonstrating a lack of enthusiasm for unproven accusations. Nepal and Sri Lanka, while treading a more neutral line, called for stability in the region and dialogue on the basis of evidence. India's stance was supported only in full by Afghanistan's Indian-sponsored interim government, however, the latter's international status is questionable due to the international community's refusal to recognize it as legitimate (Siddiqui & Imran, 2025). The scant regional support further underscored the widespread skepticism among regional South Asian states about India's quickness to attribute blame.

At the core of India's diplomatic position was an effort to build a narrative around the case that Pakistan continues to be the central destabilizing factor in South Asia. To underscore the point, India revived old talking points about Pakistan's "deep state" — a reference to the purported support of Pakistan's military and intelligence services to cross-border insurgencies. The leaks were distributed around the place in diplomatic cables, foreign policy meetings and international media interviews with Indian officials. These claims are likely exaggerations, spied by outside experts quoted by news organizations from the United States to India (Thakur and Kumar, 2025). Many world watchers, such as scholars from the International Crisis Group and Chatham House, point out that the timing and tone of India's diplomatic push all suggested a premeditated move rather than a response to verifiable evidence (Ahmed, 2025). The emphasis on propaganda over clear-eyed investigation was further criticised as undermining the habits of responsible statecraft.

Pakistan reacted by aggressively rebutting India's charge at every diplomatic level. Islamabad sent various diplomatic notes to the United Nations, Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and

world capitals, denying the accusations and proposing cooperation with any impartial international probe. Pakistan's Foreign Minister stressed the desire for verifiable proof, and reminded the international community about India's history of unfounded accusations, including after the Pulwama attacks in 2019, and the Balakot air strikes, for which there was also no independent evidence (FO Pakistan, 2025). Since, through legality, investigation and cooperation, Pakistan sought to posture itself as the more responsible actor vis-à-vis the emotive and unilateral accusations of India.

Although India kept trying, it was becoming more and more apparent that its diplomatic offensive wasn't bearing fruit. A number of countries had hesitated to side with either side when they lacked access to evidence that could be verified, especially given the volatile regional politics of South Asia. According to analysts with the European Council on Foreign Relations, India's policy could end up doing more harm than good, as the move was seen by many as diplomatic rather than an attempt to seek justice (Meyer & Tariq, 2025). India's inability to secure wide-ranging international support for its position served as a reminder that in the era of global media and multilateral diplomacy, merely controlling the narrative is not enough to establish the foreign policy outcome.

Hence, India's diplomatic behaviour after the Pahalgam attack is part of a diplomatic pattern that seeks to use accusations to pursue its 'coercive diplomacy' rather than really wanting to uncover the truth. This strategy is obviously self-defeating, as it reduces the credibility of India's claims in the long run and it risks further destabilising an already volatile region. For Pakistan, the challenge is not just to defend itself diplomatically, but also to fight the broader narrative that tries to connect it to every act of violence in Kashmir with no trial or proof. Pakistan has tried to refocus discussion in the direction of facts, law, and diplomacy, by calling for third-party inquiries and pursuing multilateral vetting, challenging this dynamic of adversary relationship which has existed between the two countries for several decades, but long history of antagonistic relationship complicates the situation (Yousaf & Rahim, 2025).

Operation Sindoor: Military Retaliation or Political Posturing?

India's retaliation to 2025 Pahalgam attack had happened within no time under the tag of Operation Sindoor, a high profile air and artillery strike that claimed a strike of "terrorist launchpads" across the LoC by India. Within 48 hours of the attack, Indian defense officials said that they had bombed at least five "terrorist training camps" inside Pakistan-administered Kashmir, which they claimed were being run by The Resistance Front (TRF) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). Within hours of the operation, Indian media called it a "success" quoting unidentified intelligence sources. However, the purported operations were not subject to independent coverage, satellite evidence, and a third-party verification, from the outset raising question marks on the authenticity of India's claims (Bhattacharya & Menon, 2025). From Pakistan's perspective, Operation Sindoor was not a defensive military move nor even a dedicated retaliation, but rather a political gesture — conveniently launched during India's election season and clearly designed to stoke a greater sense of nationalist fervor.

The Pakistan military establishment strongly rejected the Indian claim of the presence of terrorist infrastructure in the locations targeted by Indian military. " In a press briefing by Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), ISPR's spokesperson Major General Ahmed Sharif had said that the Indian military attacks were in fact directed at civilian infrastructure, such as schools and water supply lines, and had resulted in civilian casualties of non-combatants of Neelum Valley. Pakistan also invited foreign diplomats and journalists to visit the affected areas — a replay of the post-

Balakot transparency effort — to counter India's claims of surgical precision. The presence of militant facilities in the targeted areas was not reported by independent journalists on the ground from France 24 and The Guardian, which raised serious question marks over India's use of force (ISPR, 2025; Harding, 2025).

Sindoor, meaning vermilion, was a symbolic name, because it wielded a deep cultural motif to do with Indian nationalism and women's self-immolation – ironically, also a theme used by the Indian media to romanticize aggression and cast the strike as almost an operation of national purification or divine justice. Critics contend that this symbolism was calculated to incite domestic political support, and deflect from the domestic failures of the Indian counterterrorism infrastructure. The Indian body politic managed to achieve closure, of a perverse kind, with its emotive hyperbole over military action, as it promoted a sort of witchcraft of war making that valued emotional over factual scrutiny, and enabled intelligence failures and an operation misjudgment to be brushed under the carpet. According to analysts from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and Observer Research Foundation, Operation Sindoor was devoid of strategic planning and proportionality, that were the central features of a credible military deterrence campaign (Rao and Hansson 2025).

As for the international response, while some of India's traditional allies issued bland statements in support of "India's right to defend itself," there was little outright support for the operation in many quarters, where the fact that the intelligence was not publicly available fed a lot of scepticism. The UN, the EU and the OIC urged for calm and asking the two countries to refrain from any actions that are likely to exacerbate tensions in the South-Asian region, which is already fraught. In Pakistan's official statements to the UN and to other international partners, the operation was defined as a "non-military preemptive" act of aggression and a breach of the UN Charter's Article 2, paragraph 4, that bans "the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state (UN Charter, 1945; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2025). Pakistan said these were illegal acts under international law since the Security Council had not authorized the strikes or consented to them bilaterally.

The wider regional impact of Operation Sindoor was also immediately evident. Tensions across the LoC flared up which witnessed daily violations, mass displacements, the scrapping of several cross-division people-to-people exchanges and trade corridors. A decision by India to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty (see separate) added fuel to the fire. Analysts in Islamabad saw Operation Sindoor as one facet of a broader Indian policy of unraveling all the existing political and legal mechanisms for engagement, dialogue and cooperation between the two nuclear rivals. It was, in this sense, not so much a military operation as a piece of political theatre, a show of force intended to reassert India's dominion in Kashmir and distract from the spectre of internal instability and escalating international censure over human rights abuses in the region (Yousaf & Khan, 2025).

In addition, Operation Sindoor has potentially serious implications for future India-Pakistan military relations. India's unilateral strikes with out multilateral consultation is in fact itself also a step in the downward spiral of crisis management mechanism between India and Pakistan. Significantly, other backchannel communication methods such as the DGMO hotline were not employed ahead of the airstrike —underlining a breakdown in the informal crisis-avoidance architecture put in place after the 2001-2002 stand-off and strengthened after the 2016 Uri attack. Some Pakistani security analysts caution that the changes on the scene only serve to raise the prospects of miscalculation particularly under the shadow of nuclear weapons where low friction hostilities can escalate (Haider & Rizwan, 2025).

There have also been detractors of India's operational claims which have cited post-operation narratives to highlight contradictions. Although Indian officials claimed in the beginning that high-value militant targets had been killed, there were no names and photographs or biometrics data shared to prove that. And, what is more, the intelligence success upon which it was predicated Operation Sindoor was not even shared with the closest defense partners under intelligence-sharing protocols such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). These lack of transparency have dented India's story globally although a jubilant domestic media implored the operation catching prey as it were. This only further confirmed for Pakistan that India's goals were a function of media manipulation and electoral advantage rather than serving to deter or actually attending to counter-terrorist success (Hassan and Sharif, 2025).

Pakistan's Diplomatic and Legal Response

After the attack in Pahalgam, and the swift finger-pointing by India, Pakistan has taken a clear but restrained stance, with a view to defusing the situation and addressing what it called "baseless propaganda" by means of acceptable and lawful multilateral cooperation. Pakistan's Foreign Office released a strongly worded statement dismissing the allegations as hasty and slanderous within 24 hours of the incident. Instead of retaliating with similar charges, Pakistan demanded a joint investigative mechanism monitored by the United Nations, or that of any other neutral party. The objective, as per Islamabad, was transparency, accountability and evidence-based investigation into an event that had capacity to destabilize the region. Policy Highlight The Foreign Minister of Pakistan, stated "Pakistan has nothing to hide" and called on the international community to visit any such facility at the place claimed by India where the camps were located (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2025).

Pakistan also reached out separately to UNSC members, the OIC and members of the European Union, and submitted a note verbale to protest against India's international legal violations and action to prevent the worsening of the situation. These inter-changes reiterated Article 2(4) of the UN Charter which prohibits 'the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state' by arguing that 'operation Sindoor' by India had eroded the above international norm. Indeed, Pakistan recalled that in the past, similar accusations were leveled by India—who routinely pinned blames on Pakistan for every such incident such as the Pulwama attack in 2019 and the fictitious "surgical strike" claim of 2016—without providing any evidence; accusing Islamabad of something similar, only to have such claims gradually fall apart under scrutiny (Khan & Aslam, 2025).

Pakistan also went to the international legal forums including the ICJ to make out a case against India in violating its sovereignty and the possibility of war crimes following an act of naked aggression. No formal case was submitted at that time but diplomatic sources said that Pakistan's legal team was preparing dossier of evidence, including statements of Neelum Valley residents — where the Indian airforce had violated Pakistani air space —satellite images and pieces done by foreign media investigations' journalists that contradicted India's claim. It was a conscientious documentation process not only geared towards establishing a strong legal position, but also to not appear reactionary or warlike. Pakistan cast in rule-governed mode hoped to portray itself as a more responsible stakeholder in the international system (Yousaf & Rahman, 2025).

Concurrently, Pakistan employed multilateral diplomacy to win over international backing. The OIC released a statement reiterating Pakistan's demand for a fair probe and denouncing India's escalation. Two of Pakistan's strategic partners, China and Turkey, publicly backed Islamabad at the UNSC, dubbing India's steps as reckless and destabilising. Western powers such as the United

States and Britain were more circumspect in their response, but they welcomed Pakistan's cooperation and its openness to dialogue. Pakistan's Permanent Mission to the UN conducted several briefings for journalists and diplomats in New York, presenting its narrative with the help of available data while mentioning India's reticence to participate in a neutral investigation (Siddiqui, 2025).

This legal dimension to Pakistan's response was also buoyed by the engagement of international legal scholars and human rights advocates. World bodies like Amnesty and HRW objected to the lack of transparency in India's claims and that civilian infrastructure was being targeted under Operation Sindoor. These organizations were retained by Pakistan's counsel to conduct independent examinations of the evidence — or lack thereof — regarding India's accusations. The incorporation of international legal voices worked to counter India's media-driven and militarised approach, re-positioning Pakistan as a statesman-like actor using the proper mechanisms for legal remedy (Rahim & Batool, 2025).

Pakistan's calibrated diplomatic position also involved direct messages urging for an end to hostilities through use of the backchannel. Pakistani senior leaders confirmed military hotlines having been reactivated and Track II dialogues and contacts via "neutral" third parties Norway and Switzerland. The backchannel communications were designed not just to avoid additional violence, but to persuade India to reverse its refusal to negotiate. Pakistan reiterated that genuine regional peace could not be promoted through tit-for-tat air strikes or belligerent media avowals, but only through uninterrupted and transparent diplomatic engagement grounded in truth instead of suspicions (Haider & Munir, 2025).

Suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty: Implications for Regional Stability

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam incident, and shortly after India mounted Operation Sindoor, the Indian government elevated the conflict by declaring a unilateral "suspension of cooperation" pursuant to the IWT 1960. This announcement made public by India's Ministry of Jal Shakti India framed its move as a reply to Pakistan's alleged involvement in terrorism which has also not been proved to the whole world. From Pakistan's perspective, this was a dangerous politicization of a treaty that had, for more than six decades, survived wars, political upheavals and breakdowns in diplomacy. The aforementioned suspension was interpreted in Islamabad as retaliation, but also as an open threat against Pakistan's water security and as the breach of international legal obligations, long in existence (Government of Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025).

The Indus Waters Treat, brokered by the World Bank in 1960, is frequently cited as one of the classic examples of water diplomacy. It gives India administration of the eastern rivers (Ravi, Beas, Sutlej) and Pakistan control of the western ones (Indus, Jhelum, Chenab). Although the treaty permits India restricted use of the western rivers for non-consumptive needs, such as hydroelectric power, it imposes clear limitations to interdict flow to Pakistan. India's announcement in 2025 to utilize these waterways "for review and control" as an act of punishment is a blatant violation of this principle. By undoing a treaty in this manner without an international arbitration, Pakistan's status as a state could be brought under question and gets it in conflict with the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties [VCLT], notably Art 62, which prohibits suspension of the performance of a treaty in response to political disputes (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2025).

There were immediate geopolitical consequences to this suspension. Pakistan's Foreign Office called in the Indian envoy in Islamabad to lodge a formal protest, and warned that any attempt to disrupt water flow would be regarded as an act of aggression. Pakistan had also taken up the

matter at the United Nations and had informed the World Bank, which still acted as the guarantor of the treaty. In addition, Pakistan initiated discussions with China – with whom it has a close strategic relationship and which is an upper riparian in a number of these common river systems – for devising regional responses to India's unilateralism. The PRC foreign ministry issued a statement expressing a "deep concern" over India's use of water as a weapon, casting it as a breach of the international water norms and as a dangerous signal to South Asia (Siddiqui & Chen, 2025).

Foreign observers also said that India had escalated the conflict into one that went beyond diplomatic and military exchanges, and transformed a bilateral crisis into an environmental and human disaster. A number of areas in Pakistan, such as South Punjab and Sindh, are highly reliant on the Indus and its tributaries. Any decrease in water availability, however temporary, could place agriculture, food security and electricity production through dams like Tarbela and Mangla at risk. Humanitarian organizations such as International Crisis Group and UNDP highlighted that, if politicized, water during conflict may pose a disability in sucking water from already dammed wells to damage people's lives for foreseeable future and most definitely, it would increase internal displacement generating flood situation in flood prone areas piece of land' (UNDP, 2025; Raza & Noor, 2025).

As a matter of law, Pakistan's response continued to be based upon the demands of international jurisprudence. Pakistani officials underscored that Article 12 of the treaty outlawed unilateral termination or modification of the treaty by any partner unilaterally, without agreement and the fulfillment of the resolution mechanism through the good offices of the World Bank. Pakistan also cited the International Law Commission's Draft Articles on the Law of Transboundary Aquifers and Watercourses, underscoring that the upstream states are required to avoid causing substantial harm to the lower riparian states. Meanwhile, Pakistan presented a request for provisional measures to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, seeking emergency mediation to avoid any physical realization of India's threat to cut off water supplies (Naeem & Qureshi, 2025).

The multilateral relations were no less important as far as the regional implications of India's diplomacy was concerned. Nations such as Nepal and Bangladesh, which have their own transboundary water disputes with India, expressed disquiet over the precedent it would set. Analysts in Dhaka have said that if India could use water as a weapon against Pakistan, it could wield the same weapons in the Ganges-Brahmaputra basin eventually. That all countries in South Asia had a shared anxiety meant that Pakistan's legal and diplomatic position elicited an uncommon display of solidarity, even if not all States had opted to express it in the public domain (Farooq & Banerjee, 2025).

Such action by Pakistan to the INDUS WATERS TREATY suspension attempt shows the country's response not as a reactive confrontation, but a measured and very steady response strategy to Indian aggression via globally accepted norms. Observed in light of latest IWT suspension threat and even if Indian MSM tries to share its views across the border about Pakistan not going to use any of its weapon, we need to show them stark RETALIATION does not require any war statement from Pakistan. By resorting to judicial venues rather than military escalation, Pakistan sought to demonstrate its identity as a state adhering to the principles of law-based international behavior. India, on the other hand, by politicising water, a life-sustaining resource, indicated a move to coercive diplomacy, which might potentially undo decades of water security arrangements in the region. However, Pakistan's focus on arbitration, mediation and honor of treaty obligations did place it on a stronger moral and legal pedestal internationally (Haider & Batool, 2025).

International Community's Response and Regional Dynamics

The global reaction to the Pahalgam assault and the escalation that followed between India and Pakistan was muted and cautious, yet signaled a deepening concern over the flame-throwing rivalry over the violent region. Even though India made a concerted effort to rapidly internationalize its narrative by casting Pakistan as the enduring sponsor of terrorism in Kashmir, the global response was not uniformly sympathetic to New Delhi's account. UN Secretary-General José Antonio Guterres made a general call for restraint and dialogue, and he did not blame anyone. The swift pace at which India had accused Pakistan, with scant evidence, had generated some disquiet among diplomats speaking in private briefings with foreign media, multiple diplomatic sources noted. This reticence was also evident in the initiatives of the main players, such as the European Union and the United States, which called for both countries to avoid escalation, and to have requested mechanisms for an effective investigation while preserving the existing mechanisms (UN News, 2025).

Firmness on Islamabad China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a close ally of Pakistan, took a stronger position in Islamabad's favor. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned India for its unilateral military move—Operation Sindoor—as “provocative and destabilizing” and endorsed Pakistan's demand for a third-party investigation into the Pahalgam episode. Likewise Turkey, Iran and Malaysia pointed out about the rushed up conclusion by India against Pakistan and emphasized regional peace for cooperative frameworks. Longtime Indian partner Russia put out an ambivalent statement on the subject but is believed to have counselled New Delhi to avoid losing its cool in back-channel discussions. Such position stands demonstrate change in regional geopolitics where unconditional support to the Indian claims is not anymore the first choice when the claims are baseless, unsubstantial and politically motivated (Ali & Hussain, 2025).

The OIC, which comprises an influential group of Muslim-majority countries, also expressed its “deep concern” over the targeting of civilian areas on the Pakistani side of Kashmir by India during the military operation. The OIC in its official statement urged the world body for an independent fact-finding mission to evaluate the facts on the ground, besides calling for a decoupling of terrorism from power politics. Pakistan was very closely involved with the OIC leadership, arranging diplomatic briefings in Riyadh and Jeddah, and ensured that the OIC adopted a united position that was an endorsement of its own calls for restraint, cooperation and international supervision. And this diplomacy validated Islamabad's point of view that it was subject to propagandistically biased coverage while it was in truth providing transparency for investigators (OIC Statement, 2025).

Multilaterally, the position of the World Bank assumed critical importance because of its guarantee to the Indus Waters Treaty. The Bank adopted its customary neutral stance, in the face of India's move to suspend cooperation under the treaty, and it delicately approached the two parties for quiet discussions, thereby expressing its apprehensions at India's going against the terms of the treaty. Pakistan made its case quite strongly, explaining how weaponizing water by India could not only inflame regional tensions, but also destabilize precarious ecosystems and food systems throughout South Asia. Researchers in law and environment from Western think tanks (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and Chatham House) reinforced Pakistan's position, calling the suspension of the treaty a serious breach of regional cooperation structures (Rafiq & Werner, 2025).

South Asia's immediate neighborhood was split and increasingly nuanced. Bangladesh and Nepal made general pleas for peace but stopped short of taking sides, a reflection of their cautious stance based on their own complex water and border links with India. In Sri Lanka, in the midst of its own internal political turmoil, there was no official statement, but media reports from Colombo suggested that India's rapid recourse to military force without opening diplomatic channels had been questioned. The Taliban-led government of Afghanistan, which faces limited recognition and is believed to be friendly with India, was the only neighbour to strongly back the Indian narrative (albeit lending it little diplomatic gravitas) in global forums (Iqbal & Dissanayake, 2025).

Non-state actors and world NGOs also had a significant influence over world opinion. Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and the South Asia Human Rights Forum sounded alarm bells over India's propaganda-fuelled reaction, its targeting of civilian areas and its failure to provide forensic evidence for its allegations. Their independent findings and investigative journalism by news organizations including Al Jazeera, BBC Urdu and The Intercept exposed inconsistencies in India's account, and gave Pakistan's demand for a joint investigation credibility. Such stories were critical in generating global skepticism with respect to India's version and only emphasized the necessity for developing a system to counter tactics to sway global opinion through national media propaganda (Rahman & Aziz, 2025).

Even though India has been trying to depict Pakistan as diplomatically isolated, the response globally post-Pahalgam attack indicated a more nuanced understanding of geopolitics in South Asia. According to the author, Pakistan's proactive diplomacy, underpinned by international law and engagement with multilateral fora, was successful in blunting unilateral blame and focus efforts in the conflict on impartial appraisal. Islamabad's continued call for evidence-based talks and for a third party verification was in stark contrast to India's emotionally charged and politically motivated response. Hence, Pakistan continued to garner regional support, save the international face, and restore the focus of the issue from security lens to legal and diplomatic spectrum (Sadiq & Anwar, 2025).

Media Polarization and Its Effects on Indo-Pak Relations

Following the Pahalgam attack of 2025, the engagement between Indian and Pakistani media crossed a threshold where public opinion, government stand and existence of the third space of rational dialogues, all went askew. > Within 30 minutes of the first reports coming out of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian mainstream media was in a frenzy with the finger at Pakistan for orchestrating the attack. With little hard fact, major Indian outlets were quick to blast emotional headlines and images, fueling the nationalist frenzy whipped up in India's political atmosphere. This knee-jerk media response was the ultimate blow to diplomatic patience and investigative clarity. This content analysis was condemned by Pakistani analysts as a deliberate attempt to fit the data points based on the preset narrative that suited the hardline political goals of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during an election year (Khalid & Yusuf, 2025).

Pakistan's media, despite its own nationalist inflections at times, reacted more calmly as well. International news organizations demanded evidence, international inquiry, and warned against pointing fingers without proof. Analysts in Pakistan stressed that the media in India, rather than serving the public, had become an echo chamber for state propaganda where voices of dissent are relegated. By continuing to associate Pakistan with terrorism without evidence, the Indian media helped the military to justify operations like Operation Sindoor and functioned not so much as a watchdog but as a facilitator of escalation. This media lack of objectivity, this worked as a major

diplomatic problem as Pakistan's attempts to bring transparency or talk were drowned in India media driven hysteria (Ahmed & Farooq, 2025).

The global media offered a much-needed foil to the local media narratives. BBC, Al Jazeera, and Reuters raised doubts over India's timeline in accusation the attack and the absence of forensic clarity. Several pointed out that the Indian government had never offered any actual proof of Pakistani involvement in similar incidents in the past, such as Pulwama last year, or the attack on Pathankot in 2016. That scepticism is in sharp contrast to the compliant Indian media's echoing of government statements at home. Domestic versus international reportage divergence exacerbated, gaining momentum in the media stories and cross perceptions on diplomacy and trust between the two nations. It was Indian's inability to account for this absence that was given as evidence by Pakistani officials that its claim failed the test of international journalism scrutiny (Qazi & Ali, 2025).

The consequences of such media polarization were felt not only in governments, but also in publics in both countries. In India, the media circus led to large scale protests, cyber hate campaigns, and even physical assaults on Kashmiri students and Pakistani citizens living in the country. This public antipathy additionally limited the likelihood of any form of people-to-people diplomacy, cultural exchange, or confidence building. On the other hand, Pakistani social media and television networks have increasingly started depicting India not just as an adversary but as a belligerent actor looking for war using fake news. With the audiences of both countries having been fed heavily skewed narratives, the space for voices in the middle to make an impact has shrunk, contributing to a process of mutual demonization and policy intransigence between the two sides (Sultan & Naseer, 2025).

And misinformation was weaponized via state-aligned digital platforms, exacerbating the crisis. Pro-government social media influencers, pseudo-analysts and bot-driven accounts in India inundated the internet with unverified maps, old videos passed off as recent evidence, as well as Islamophobic content about Pakistan. Pakistan's Ministry of Information lodged a formal protest with international digital regulators and social media platforms, alleging that Indian cyber cells had been behind disinformation campaigns driven by geopolitical motives. International fact-checking institutions such as AltNews and EU DisinfoLab also revealed orchestrated attempts from Indian IPs to defile the global image of Pakistan. These campaigns were overt interference with Islamabad's diplomacy, which in turn ensured truth could be seated as a sidebar to sensitised narrative building (Rashid & Khan, 2025).

Pakistan's media and the strategic community had been demanding the responsibility of media as well as multilateral arrangements to stop the regional conflict on the basis of misinformation. Senior journalists, legal analysts and foreign policy experts in Islamabad suggested resurrecting a bilateral media code of conduct — originally floated during the Agra Summit in 2001 — under which media bodies of the two countries will verify sensitive news together before it is published. While these concepts did not make headway in the face of spiralling hostility, they begin to illustrate the increasing realization among civil society in Pakistan that the uncontrolled spread of misinformation has real-world consequences, including war, global shame, and domestic hysteria (Mir & Asad, 2025).

Above all, the media polarisation that followed the Pahalgam attack did not just create more diplomatic distance, but underscored just how fragile information ecosystems are in the countries of India and Pakistan. The problem for Pakistan was not just that it wanted to defend itself from outside accusations, but also that it had to fight a media landscape being weaponized for

psychological warfare. And while Islamabad tried to negotiate with the larger world through crisply worded lawsuits and diplomatic missives, the fact that the Indian press had been able to dictate the early narrative for much of the world at the outset of the crisis with relative impunity underscored just how much having the edge in mass perception matters in contemporary conflict. Under the absence of common information protocol and the ethos of regional journalism, Indo-Pak relations would continue to be held in ransom of headline diplomacy rather than fact-based engagement (in Zahra & Imran 2025).

Repeated Use of Terror Allegations in India-Pak Tensions

It has become a recurring theme in Indian foreign policy tool kit where allegations of terrorism against Pakistan are tend to being used whenever there is a problem in India internally or India being criticised globally. This trend has become more visible after the early 2000s, and this has percolated into the Indian political vocabulary as well as mainstream media. Pakistan has consistently maintained that these allegations, against which there is rarely any verifiable evidence, perform a dual function: to deflect from domestic Indian challenges—most notably in Jammu and Kashmir—and also to galvanize public opinion against an external bogeyman. After every big incident in Indiaadministered Kashmir or a major security lapse, responsibility is ascribed to Pakistan before any investigation is carried out that only perpetuates a pre-determined narrative of perpetual animus (Shahid & Abbas, 2024).

The 2001 Indian Parliament attack is generally considered to be the beginning of the rhetoric. Hours after the attack, Indian officials blamed Pakistani-back groups and sent tens of thousands soldiers coursing toward its restive border with Pakistan, along the Line of Control. But international observers, among them American intelligence analysts, subsequently raised questions about the evidence used to link the attackers to Pakistan. This rush to judgment, echoed anew by later developments, would leave a long-term diplomatic chill to linger between the two countries. In a more recent example, the 2016 Uri attack and the subsequent announcement of surgical strikes were presented in a similar manner without objective evidence to either international agencies or the media. Its response in brief was also to deny the accusation as well as the claims of its having affected strikes whilst highlighting internal contradictions in India's own account and calling and suggesting of third-party investigation which India rejected (Ahmed & Raza, 2023).

This trend was reinforced by the 2019 Pulwama attack. Within hours, India accused Pakistan-based militant organization Jaish-e-Mohammed for the attack, though local sources later confirmed that the suicide bomber was a local Kashmiri youth. The Indian government successfully used the incident as an excuse to launch Balakot airstrikes that, according to multiple analyses by international military experts and media reports, missed any militant infrastructure targets and instead destroyed patches of forests. As the Indian public cheered the strikes as a strategic triumph, some foreign media, including The New York Times and Reuters, voiced doubts and condemned the absence of independent evidence. Pakistan retaliated in February by shooting down an Indian aircraft and taking a pilot prisoner, then quickly releasing him as a peace gesture. This reaction was widely praised, reinforcing Pakistan's stance for de-escalation at the backdrop of increasing militarization of discourse by India (Yousaf & Iqbal, 2023).

All of these incidents have a common pattern: a terror strike takes place, the blame is laid squarely on Pakistan, and then, the media * the politicians * endorse military action * the very idea of a dispassionate investigation is pushed to the margins. Tibetan experts have said such cycles tend to coincide nicely with Indian elections or come on the heels of significant domestic controversies

such as mass protests or human rights rebukes in Kashmir. The foreign office, foreign ministry and independent policy institutes of Pakistan have continuously underscored this linkage and the charge that these are baseless and has been timed to serve strategic internal objectives in India. This kind of manipulation in terms of conflict narratives has had serious implications for regional diplomacy, and for confidence-building, as well (Naeem & Hussain, 2024).

Further, this ritual invocations of terrorism has squeezed space for bilateral mechanisms of conflict resolution, such as the Composite Dialogue Process and Track-II diplomacy. In each case of accusation, this has been followed by the suspension of bilateral dialogue, cultural engagement and cross-border confidence building. The cumulative effect has been to freeze diplomatic channels while enabling misinformation and militarization to proliferate. Such strategy also belittle multilateral approach of addressing terrorism in a real sense, as otherwise real security threats can be politicised or be misinterpreted under the broader Indo-Pak rivalry. Pakistan has consistently argued at international platforms that they need to approach the issue of terrorism as one which affects the entire world and that it cannot be used as a tool to settle regional scores (Sources) (Siddiqui & Rana, 2024).

India's posture of terrorism allegations as part of a strategic narrative has also had enormous global implications of what the world thinks about Pakistan. In spite of Islamabad's heavy counter-extremism focus domestically, including National Action Plans and counterterrorism collaboration with international partners, continuing Indian charges have led to misunderstandings. India has lobbied hard in fora such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), to continue and intensify the scrutiny on Pakistan, even though Islamabad has complied with most of its recommendations. The invocation of terrorism rhetoric also, as Pakistani policy makers argue, erodes the credibility of antiterror and uses global institutions of governance as weapons against nave states for political motives (Khan & Mirza, 2025).

This trend has been increasingly acknowledged by international observers and academics, especially in the aftermath of the 2025 Pahalgam incident. Several European research organizations, including the European Center for South Asian Studies (ECSAS), observed in their analyses that India's post-attack allegations appeared on the scene in half an hour—way too quick for any forensic or intelligence-led verification. Those results fit with prior events, indicating a strategy of habit rather than a reaction. Pakistan has subsequently called for the creation of a regional mechanism for verification - perhaps under the auspice of SAARC or a UN-mandated organization - in order to prevent the weaponization of terrorism allegations and have conflict narratives based on independently verifiable facts (Batoool & Shah, 2025).

Media Polarization and Its Effects on Indo-Pak Relations

The fact that India and Pakistan media narratives reached their ever lowest and the immediate public mood, government's rhetoric and even possibility of a rational dialogue got impacted, in the post 2025 Pahalgam attack. With the arrival of the jihadist nature of the war and the sinking of the Indian army, Indian mainstream media broke all world records in the issuing of such a baseless accusation, as just 30 minutes after the first news coming out of Jammu and Kashmir, Indian newspapers and TV channels were already laying the blame on Pakistan. Based on little or no independently confirmable evidence, India's leading television news outlets started shiny, enthusiastic graphics and emotionally charged headlines and images, fueling the already-emotionally-nationalistic shades of the political climate in India. And this instantaneous media response did a great deal to erase all possibility of diplomatic slow play or rational investigative resolution. This was condemned by Pakistani commentators as an attempt to construct a

predetermined narrative that served the hardline political agenda of the BJP in an election year (Khalid and Yusuf, 2025).

The Pakistani media environment, though also nationalist in sound at moments, was more restrained in tone. Leading news organizations demanded evidence, international investigation, and restraint to avoid unfounded blame. Analysts in Pakistan noted that India's media, no longer in the service of the public interest, had become an echo chamber for state propaganda in which dissenting opinions were marginalized. By consistently pegging Pakistan as a terrorist state sans any evidence, the Indian media has been in the forefront legitimising military adventures including Operation Sindoor rather than being the watchdogs of the state they became enablers of escalation. This erosion of media neutrality became a major diplomatic barrier as Pakistan's overtures for transparency or dialogue were lost amid the hysterical Indian media campaign (Ahmed and Farooq, 2025).

The foreign press at least acted to temper the disinformation pushed by regional media. The timeline of the Indian charges and the failure to allow forensic investigators were questioned by outlets like the BBC, Al Jazeera and Reuters. Many noted that the Indian government had been found wanting in the past for not providing actionable evidence of alleged Pakistani involvement in similar past episodes, such as Pulwama in 2019 and the Pathankot attack in 2016. This scepticism was in sharp contrast with the Indian media at home, which had fallen in line with government assertions. The gulf between domestic and international coverage helped exacerbate media accounts along sharply divided lines, ultimately heightening diplomatic misunderstandings and deepening distrust. This lapse was brought to attention by Pakistani sources as evidence that India's case would collapse under scrutiny of journalists from the international press (Qazi & Ali, 2025).

This media polarization had effects beyond the governments of the two countries to their publics. In India, the media-driven hysteria manifested as mass protests, vicious online hate campaigns, and incidents where Kashmiri students and Pakistani nationals were physically attacked across its length and breadth. This public animosity also shut the door on potential Track II diplomacy, cultural interaction, or confidence-building exercises. Meanwhile, Pakistani social media and television networks have increasingly cast India not just as a foe, but as a warmongering force, using misinformation to foment war. As the populations in both countries were fed heavily one-sided narratives, the middle ground shrunk and this fueled the mutual demonization and policy stubbornness on both sides (Sultan & Naseer 2025).

Adding to the crisis was the weaponization of disinformation on state-backed digital platforms. In India, pro-government social media influencers and pseudo-analysts bombarded the internet with unverified maps, old videos falsely presented as new evidence and Islamophobic content directed at Pakistan through bot-operated accounts. Pakistan's Ministry of Information submitted an official complaint to international digital regulators and social media companies, alleging that the Indian cyber cells had engaged in disinformation campaigns with geopolitical motives. Fact-checkers such as AltNews and EU DisinfoLab also covered concerted campaigns coming from Indian IPs to defame Pakistan at the international level. These campaigns had an immediate impact on Islamabad's diplomacy and things took a course where truth was subverted for the construction of narrative (Rashid & Khan, 2025).

Pakistan's media and defense strategic community urged for greater media responsibility and multilateral protocols against regional conflict based on lies. Senior journalists, legal experts and foreign policy analysts in Islamabad offered a suggestion to revive a pre-existing bilateral media

code of conduct, last suggested during the Agra Summit of 2001, in which the media bodies in both the countries would cross-verify sensitive news with each other before publishing it. While such notions gained little ground during times of tension, they are indicative of a burgeoning realization amongst Pakistani civil society that the unbridled expansion of disinformation has very real consequences and one can lose out on access to power, international relations (Read: opportunities for revenue), and even peace, should even the most panoramic of media spins be entirely believed (Mir & Asad, 2025).

After all, the media polarization that erupted following the attack in Pahalgam served to not only entrench diplomatic positions, but, as importantly, reveal how fragile the two countries' information ecosystems are in the first place. "The difficulty for Pakistan was in not only defending itself from external implications," said Cheema, "but also handling a media environment that was being increasingly weaponized as a tool of psychological warfare. Even though Islamabad also approached the international community via legal and diplomatic forums, the massive leverage the Indian media commanded in the early part of the crisis underscored the asymmetry of having the sway over the collective perception in modern day conflicts. The absence of a common information protocol or code of ethics for regional journalists continues to haunt Indo-Pak relationship as is clear by the capture of headlines rather than evidence doctored diplomacy (Zahra & Imran, 2025).

Conclusion

Finally, Planet Pahalgam 2025 and its aftermath, reveal once again a lethal and deeply corrosive pattern running through India – Pakistan relations, where the impetus to jump to accusations and media-fueled narratives trumps due process, evidence and diplomacy. India's swift assigning of blame, parroted within minutes of the incident, was not the result of an investigation but one more chapter in the playbook of reinforcing a certain political narrative of external threat. Such repeated stunts not only challenge regional peace but also mislead the international community and destroy the world's trust in Pakistan without good reasons.

Pakistan, on the other hand, was measured and sensible. Its repeated calls for joint investigations, third party audit and evidence-based dialogue all pointed to its abiding commitment to regional peace and soil and international law. This difference in behaviour – between India reacting aggressively and Pakistan's legal-diplomatic response - illustrates where the road to peace, in the long run, lies.

The escalation of this violence has also been informed significantly by media polarisation, especially in India. By stoking public fury and promoting unsubstantiated allegations, Indian narratives in the media leave little space for dialogue, for accommodation or for pause. That's the kind of atmosphere that makes mutual understanding highly unlikely, and political posturing is exchanged for animosity rather than truth. Twice or once again-Pulwama, Uri, and now Pahalgam — the recurrence of these patterns shows us that this is not a crisis of one-off incidents but of a calculated infrastructure that places priority on spectacle rather than stability.

For peace to happen, both countries must get away from this vicious cycle. Pakistan's consistent stress on transparent modalities, confidence-building measures, and impartial arbitration provides a way forward to put bilateral relations on a rational and equitable keel. Reason should replace the recriminations, and facts should triumph over fear. The stakes are no longer confined to two countries; they involve the stability and the well-being of an entire region. If both of these states

— especially India — can find the political will power to prioritize accountability over accusations, maybe the next crisis can be doused before it's past the point of no return.

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