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India-Pakistan Tensions Reignited

*How Kashmir Once Again Became the
Flashpoint for South Asia's Nuclear
Neighbours*

By

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27 May 2025

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Barbara Listek

India-Pakistan Tensions Reignited:

How Kashmir Once Again Became the Flashpoint for South Asia's Nuclear Neighbours

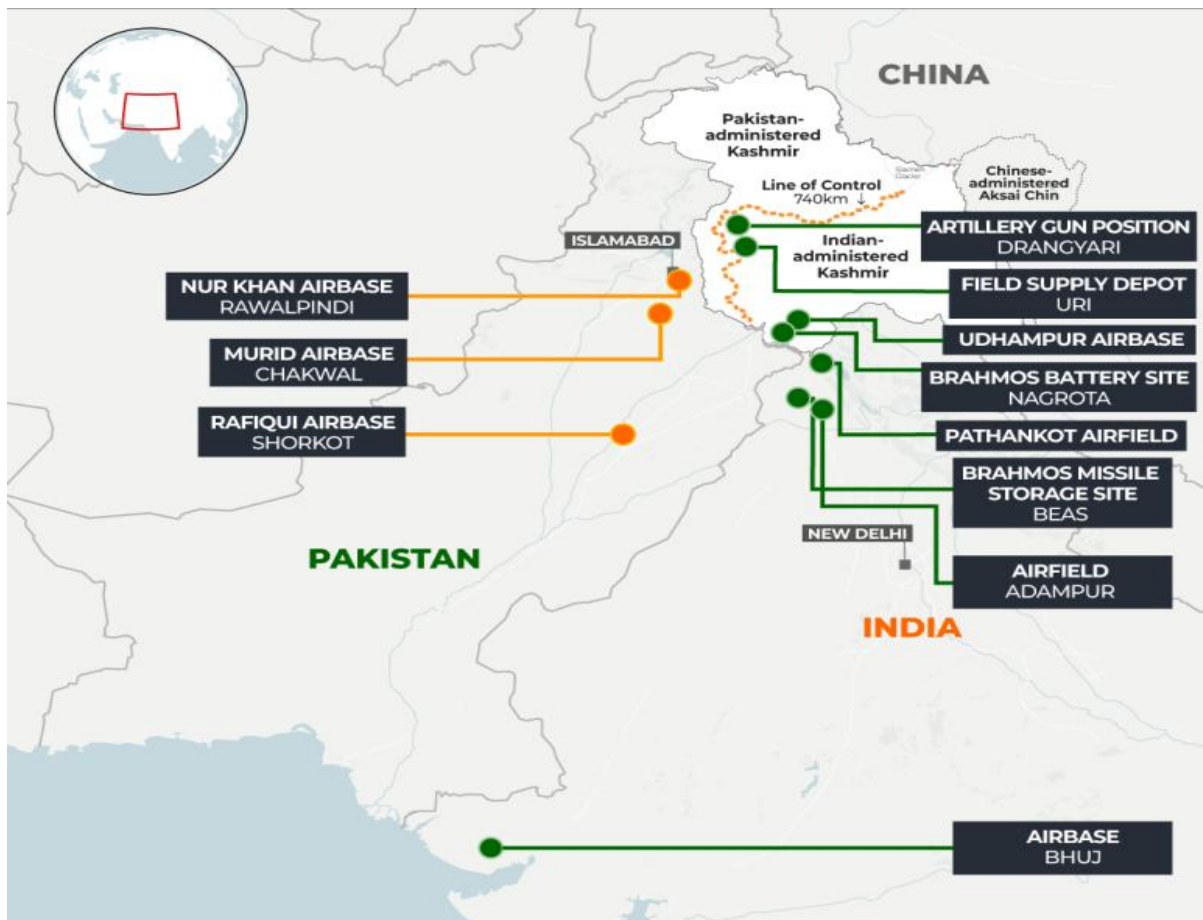
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Executive Summary

- ✦ Late April 2025 saw a dramatic escalation in tensions between India and Pakistan after a deadly terrorist attack on Indian tourists near the town of Pahalgam in Kashmir.
- ✦ Despite Pakistan denying its involvement, India responded with diplomatic and military measures, including the closure of border crossings, counterinsurgency operations in Kashmir, and exchange of fire with Pakistan.
- ✦ These events resurfaced the fears of an armed conflict between the nuclear states, as well as concerns about the human rights abuses in Kashmir, and the broader stability of South Asia.
- ✦ U.S.-mediated diplomacy led to a ceasefire on May 10, 2025, after intense international pressure. While both sides agreed to halt hostilities, there was no formal agreement, and the ceasefire remains fragile amid deep-rooted distrust.
- ✦ While open warfare is for now halted, the Kashmiri people continue to suffer as they remain caught between two powerful states. The root cause of the conflict lies in unresolved political grievances, particularly the lack of representation and autonomy for Kashmiri population.

Key Picture: India-Pakistan Military Escalations 2025 (as of May 10)



Source: [Al Jazeera](#) Note: Pakistan and India accused each other of launching missiles at key military bases early on May 10th morning. Both claimed they had shot down most missiles but acknowledged some damage to their military bases.

Tensions between India and Pakistan have reignited in recent weeks following a series of deadly clashes and retaliatory measures linked to the disputed region of Kashmir. At the heart of the renewed hostilities is the Kashmir dispute - a decades-long territorial conflict that continues to serve as both a flashpoint and a political tool.

1. Kashmir: A Region of Strategic and Symbolic Importance

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The current flashpoint of the tensions – Kashmir - is a region with a rich history and profound significance. Situated in the Himalayas at a critical geopolitical crossroads between India, Pakistan, and China, its breathtaking landscapes are marred by decades of conflict. Today, Kashmir is one of the most heavily militarised regions in the world, where the constant presence of armed forces has profound consequences for civilian life, human rights, and the broader prospects for lasting peace.

The origins of the current territorial dispute go back to 1947, when British India split into the two independent states: India and Pakistan. At the time, the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, with its Muslim-majority population and Hindu ruler, was given the choice of joining either of the states. Kashmir eventually acceded to India, a decision that led to the first war between India and Pakistan. The region was subsequently divided into India-administered Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan, with both nations staking claims to the entire region. A third of Kashmir also fell under Chinese control following the 1962 border war between India and China.

Tensions escalated after 1989, when an armed insurgency erupted in Indian-administered Kashmir, driven by both separatist groups seeking independence and Pakistan-backed militants. The Indian government has responded with a heavy military presence, leading to human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture, and enforced disappearances.¹ The situation worsened in 2019 when India revoked Article 370, stripping the region of its limited autonomy. This move triggered a communications blackout, widespread curfews, and renewed international concern over human rights abuses.²

Kashmir's importance lies not only in its strategic location but also in its potent symbolism. For India, control over Jammu and Kashmir is tied to its secular national identity and territorial integrity. Conceding any part of the region is seen by many - especially within the growing tide of Hindu nationalism - as a threat to national unity and strength. For Pakistan, Kashmir represents the unfinished legacy of partition and the denial of self-determination to a Muslim-majority population. Politically, the issue also serves as a rallying point for public sentiment, a tool to deflect from domestic challenges, and a strategic lever against India on the international stage.

Caught in the middle are the people of Kashmir, long subjected to violence, repression, and political marginalisation by both states. Despite bearing the brunt of the conflict, their voices are largely side-lined. Meanwhile, international actors often refrain from direct involvement, wary of upsetting a key economic partner like India or destabilising a region where nuclear-armed rivals remain on edge.

2. The Pahalgam Attack and Its Aftermath

On 22 April 2025, violence along the India - Pakistan frontier escalated after a gunman in Indian-administered Kashmir killed 26 tourists - 25 Indian nationals and one Nepali - at a resort near the town of Pahalgam.³ The attack was one of the deadliest civilian-targeted incidents in recent years. India immediately accused Pakistan-linked militants and announced punitive measures, suspending the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, downgrading diplomatic ties, cancelling visas and sealing border crossings.⁴ Pakistan denied any role and offered to participate in "any neutral, transparent and credible investigation" into the attack.⁵ This gesture was however rejected by India as a "ploy," citing the failures of previous such investigations.⁶

By 24 - 25 April, both states had closed borders, halted flights and trade, and exchanged fire along the Line of Control (LoC). India initiated a crackdown in Kashmir, demolishing homes of suspected militants and detaining dozens during cordon-and-search operations.⁷ Internet and phone services remained slow or shut in some areas, and curfews were imposed in districts near the border.⁸

On 7 May, India launched "Operation Sindoor," conducting pre-dawn missile strikes on nine sites in Pakistan-administered territory, targeting what it termed "terrorist infrastructure."⁹ Reuters reported intense shelling across the LoC, resulting in 13 Indian and at least six Pakistani civilian deaths.¹⁰ Pakistan later reported a total of 31 civilian deaths and 46 wounded from the strikes and nearby shelling, and vowed retaliation.¹¹ Both countries then subjected their airspace to drone and missile encounters. India said it shot down many Pakistani drones and engaged enemy air defences; Pakistan similarly claimed to have downed Indian warplanes (a claim New Delhi denied). By 8 May both sides had suspended schools and closed markets in border regions.

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3. What Comes Next: Diplomacy, Distrust, and the Future of Kashmir

The escalation in tensions between the two nuclear neighbours drew strong international attention. The United Nations Secretary-General urged both sides to "step back from the brink" and exercise "maximum restraint," the UN mission in Kashmir likewise urged dialogue.¹² Major powers, including China, Russia and the UK, joined in calling for de-escalation.¹³

On 10 May, US-mediated diplomacy reportedly produced a ceasefire. As announced in a press statement by the Secretary of State Marco Rubio, both sides "agreed to an immediate ceasefire" after intensive talks led by the United States.¹⁴ While no formal agreement was made public, the strikes and shelling appeared to stop, suggesting that great-power pressure brought a temporary halt to the conflict.¹⁵

Both states have a strong incentive to avoid war, as a direct conflict would be catastrophic for both sides. A direct conflict would be catastrophic, and neither side would benefit. Both are nuclear powers, and war risks uncontrollable escalation, severe economic fallout, and international condemnation. Pakistan's fragile economy and India's global ambitions make prolonged conflict especially costly. Military action would also fail to deliver a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute, instead risking insurgency and prolonged instability.

Yet while open warfare is currently on hold, underlying tensions remain strong. Indian actions - including crackdowns in Kashmir, cross-border strikes that killed Pakistani civilians, and the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty - have angered both Pakistan and many Kashmiris. Meanwhile, Indian media have emphasized the terrorist threat, while Pakistani outlets focus on civilian suffering, reflecting a bitter information war.¹⁶ Narrative control has thus become one of the conflict's key battlegrounds, shaping public opinion and hardening nationalist sentiment on both sides.

Looking ahead, durable peace will require more than a pause in violence. Without addressing Kashmiris' political grievances, such as representation, legal protections, and autonomy, and without rebuilding trust between New Delhi and Islamabad, the risk of renewed confrontation remains high. And why the tensions likely won't escalate into a full-fledged war, the plight of the Kashmiri people remains devastating, as they are torn between two powerful states vying for control. It is therefore essential that the international community does not look away and continues to push for a tangible political solution for Kashmir.

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