

Message from the Executive Board

This Background Guide has been made to give all invitees a basic idea behind the working and length of the agenda at hand. We shall be focusing upon the future security concerns for India, with respect to domestic issues and our relationship with the neighbouring nations especially.

Every invitee to the Stakeholders Meet is expected to attend the meeting, so as to ensure an in-depth discussion into various issues as notified to them. It is obvious that the invitees shall be judged not only upon their research but also necessary acumen and their ability to think on their feet – that they show at the meeting.

It is hoped that the leaders will be thoroughly researched on all prevalent issues, especially the current issues of security and national importance that are affecting our motherland. From insurgency to terrorism, we wish to discuss it all at length during the meeting. However the research must be based on reliable admissible sources of information and under no circumstances, this background guide shall be quoted as a source of information during the committee.

We hope to see a good level of debate at the session and a decent level of craft while discussing different aspects of this interesting agenda that attempts to review the domestic policy of governance along with our international outlook towards Pakistan and make any necessary changes to the same. The discussion shall also be based on the necessary updates that the leaders receive during the simulation.

Rishi Raj Singh
Co-Moderator
Stakeholders Meet



Introduction

The Indo-Pak conflict is one of the longest and most intractable political and armed conflicts in the postcolonial world. Intertwined in a complex mesh of historical political grievances, zero-sum geopolitics, and militant separatism, the state has found itself in a depraved situation for long now. Through the decades, since independence of India and partition - where the root of the conflict lies - Kashmir has been subjected to a milieu of clashing vested interests that have consistently disrupted a peaceful status quo for political ends.

In the midst of all the chaos, the Kashmiri people have suffered immensely since the conflict began. They have had to submit their agencies to a dizzying set of actors and two larger entities - India and Pakistan. In the process, the region became and continues to remain a key flashpoint of the bilateral dispute itself. However, the Valley in itself is plagued by a set of social and political exigencies that make any easy resolution inconceivable in the immediate term.

The conflict between these two countries, as we see it today, dates back to 1947 when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned. The clash of contesting Indian and emergent Pakistani religious nationalism rendered Kashmir into a bloody buffer zone. The post-colonial trajectory of both divided powers has hence shaped the nature of the conflict, which metamorphosed from nonviolent political resistance within a secular nationalist framework to a militant, fundamentalist, and exclusionist form of resistance. The manner in which Pakistan has used the insurgency as a tool has also undergone significant change, with Rawalpindi largely resorting to proxy disruption to assert itself in the Valley.



Changing Nature of the Militancy

While the militancy in Kashmir - reflection of both the organic nationalist movement and Pakistan's sabotage - has been largely religio-political so far. While it was never really 'secular' in its tone (unlike Sheikh Abdullah's initial nationalism), it stayed away from projecting any kind of fundamentalist Islamic position. The battle, the separatists claim, was for Kashmiri nationhood.

However, over the past one decade, especially after 2010 and 2014 when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in New Delhi, the insurgency has undergone significant alterations. A part of this transformation is the replacement of non-religious nationalism and religious expansionism under the framework of jihad. **From a nationalistic war, the militant assertion has now moved to a religious war in the name of God.** While these are only undertones so far, the endemic conditions and history of Kashmir make it a fertile ground for radical fundamentalism to flourish.

The most significant manifestation of this new religious narrative was the 2017 proclamation made by **Zakir Musa**, commander of the militant outfit Hizbul Mujahideen who replaced Burhan Wani after the latter was killed in an operation by Indian forces in July 2016. This new narrative carries strong flavours of **pan-Islamic extremist movements**. Particularly after the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) and the corresponding clamour for space by the pre-existing al-Qaeda, Kashmir has become a magnet for broader militant networks willing to hijack its separatist politics for their own vested ends.

While the revisionist form entails new trans-regional channels of fundings, commanding authorities, and patronages, its precise contours are yet unidentified. The Indian State has to act swiftly and decisively if it wants to preserve the status quo in Kashmir. This automatically warrants a detailed study of the situation and its subterranean modalities.

New militant dynamics

Since the killing of the popular Hizbul commander **Burhan Wani** on 9 July 2016, the leadership of the insurgency has been passed on to Musa, a leader who speaks in a pitch different from that of the previous ones. In September 2017, Musa released a 10-minute long video message stating: “we will hoist the flag of Islam on Hind (Indian subcontinent) and we will have the Hindu rulers chained and dragged.” Recalling various terror groups, including JKLF, Hizbul Mujahideen, he reiterated that they all fought only for Islam and Sharia (Islamic law). Few separatists in the Valley have spoken in such fundamentalist terms before.

But, the Musa camp was something entirely different from, and in contravention to, earlier Kashmiri separatists.

In July 2017, the Global Islamic Media Front claimed that Zakir Musa had been named the head of **Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind, a newly created cell of al-Qaeda**. On 16 September 2017, a video was floated on social media in which five masked men claiming to be Hizbul militants accused Musa of being behind the killing of militants in the Valley. In the video, the Hizbul terms Musa as a 'traitor'.

This video clearly brought to light a rift between Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militant outfits and Musa with the former blaming the latter for providing information to security forces about the movement of ultras. **This is a fissure that the Indian State can effectively utilise to degrade pan-Islamist networks.**



Ideological transformations

Hanafi/Barelvi Islam, the traditionally moderate school followed by the majority in Kashmir, is being replaced by the radical **Ahl-e-Hadith**, the local moniker for Saudi-imported Salafism or Wahhabism. The **Arab-funded Wahhabism** finds convergence with other already established conservative strains of Islamic movements, such as Deobandi and Jamat-e-Islami in Kashmir. **The mufti who made a plea for Musa is a Deobandi from a Jamati household.**

These mutations from moderate to radical have been happening insidiously and manifested themselves in the mob that lynched deputy **SP Ayub Pandith** on Shab-e-Qadr. Way before Wani was killed, the signs of Wahhabised radicalisation had already begun to emerge. Maulana Mushtaq Ahmad Veeri, for example, was already popular in south Kashmir by 2015 for sermons in which he praised the IS and Caliph Al Baghdadi.

Official sources said that there are over **7,500 mosques and seminaries in Kashmir**, of which over 6,000 are Hanafi and around 200 are syncretic Sufi shrines. Ahl-e-Hadith, Deoband and Jamat put together have just over 1,000 mosques and charity based seminaries, of which Ahl-e-Hadith has the largest number.

Sources said Ahl-e-Hadith mosques and seminaries have doubled in the last 27 years. FCRA annual reports show that top donors to India among the Salafist Islam practising states are the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Although it is not clear who the top donor and recipient in J&K is, the state has received between **10 and 100 crores as foreign funds each year** in the last decade.

Security officials believe that the influence of Wahhabi discourse through the internet, social media and messaging platforms is far more dangerous than the mosques and literature. Mobile data usage, officials claim, is higher in Kashmir than other parts of the country because of lack of other sources of entertainment. This remains a cause of concern for the Indian State.

New pull factors for radicalisation

The current thinking in the security establishment, based on preliminary evidence, is that more ultra- hardline elements have cropped up lately, swayed by jihadi ideology and seeking establishment of a Caliphate rather than just attaining *azaadi* (independence).

What has, however, kept these elements in check is that they are diffused rather than a cohesive unit. While these self-motivated, independent units with 2-3 members each have been planning attacks, the lack of resources and local support has limited their capability. The Pakistan-based outfits would also not like them to grow as they may loosen their hold over Kashmir.

Nevertheless, with growing incidents of self-radicalised, lone-wolf attackers across the world unleashing attacks right where they are, the possibility of the ultra-hardline Kashmiris trying the same in the Valley is seen as real.



To study about any conflict which is related to the Indo-Pak subject we need to study the wars fought between India and Pakistan which have shaped the relationship between the two countries in the near future. There have been many border skirmishes between India and Pakistan. The most important ones are listed below.

1948 conflict

The first Indo-Pakistani war started after armed tribesmen from Pakistan's north-west frontier province invaded Kashmir in October 1947. Besieged both by a revolt in his state and by the invasion, the Maharaja requested armed assistance from the government of India. In return he acceded to India, handing over powers of defence, communication and foreign affairs. Both India and Pakistan agreed that accession would be confirmed by a referendum once hostilities had ceased. Historians continue to debate the precise timing when the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir signed the instrument of accession and the Indian army moved into the state, arguing that the Maharaja acceded to India under duress. In May 1948, the regular Pakistani army was called upon to protect Pakistan's borders. Fighting continued throughout the year between Pakistani irregular troops and the Indian army.

The war ended on 1 January 1949 when a ceasefire was arranged by the United Nations, which recommended that both India and Pakistan should adhere to their commitment to hold a referendum in the state. A ceasefire line was established where the two sides stopped fighting and a UN peacekeeping force established. The referendum, however, has never been held.

In 1954 Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India was ratified by the state's constituent assembly. In 1957, it approved its own constitution, modelled along the Indian constitution. Since that time India has regarded that part of the state which it controls as an integral part of the Indian union.

To the west of the ceasefire line, Pakistan controls roughly one third of the state. A small region, which the Pakistanis call Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir, and the Indians call Pakistani-occupied Kashmir, is semi-autonomous. The larger area, which includes the former kingdoms of Hunza and Nagar, called the northern areas, is directly administered by Pakistan.

India- Pakistan (1965) war

The 1965 war between India and Pakistan was the second conflict between the two countries over the status of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The clash did not resolve this dispute, but it did engage the United States and the Soviet Union in ways that would have important implications for subsequent superpower involvement in the region.

The dispute over this region originated in the process of decolonisation in South Asia. When the British colony of India gained its independence in 1947, it was partitioned into two separate entities: the secular nation of India and the predominantly Muslim nation of Pakistan. Pakistan was composed of two noncontiguous regions, East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by Indian territory. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which had a predominantly Muslim population but a Hindu leader, shared borders with both India and West Pakistan. The argument over which nation would incorporate the state led to the first India-Pakistan War in 1947–48 and ended with UN mediation. Jammu and Kashmir, also known as “Indian Kashmir” or just “Kashmir,” joined the Republic of India, but the Pakistani Government continued to believe that the majority Muslim state rightfully belonged to Pakistan.

Conflict resumed again in early 1965, when Pakistani and Indian forces clashed over disputed territory along the border between the two nations. Hostilities intensified that August when the Pakistani army attempted to take Kashmir by force. The attempt to seize the state was unsuccessful, and the second India-Pakistan War reached a stalemate. This time, the international politics of the Cold War affected the nature of the conflict.

The ceasefire alone did not resolve the status of Kashmir, and both sides accepted the Soviet Union as a third-party mediator. Negotiations in Tashkent concluded in January 1966, with both sides giving up territorial claims, withdrawing their armies from the disputed territory. Nevertheless, although the Tashkent agreement achieved its short-term aims, conflict in South Asia would reignite a few years later

India-Pakistan(1971) war

The third war between India and Pakistan took place between November 22 (when the Indian's began providing active artillery support to the separatists) and Dec 17, 1971. The origins of the third Indo-Pakistani conflict (1971) were different from the previous conflicts. The Pakistani failure to accommodate demands for autonomy in East Pakistan in 1970 led to secessionist demands in 1971. In March 1971, Pakistan's armed forces launched a fierce campaign to suppress the resistance movement that had emerged but encountered unexpected mass defections among East Pakistani soldiers and police. The Pakistani forces regrouped and reasserted their authority over most of East Pakistan by May.

As a result of these military actions, thousands of East Pakistanis died at the hands of the Pakistani army. Resistance fighters and nearly 10 million refugees fled to sanctuary in West Bengal, the adjacent Indian state. By midsummer, the Indian leadership, in the absence of a political solution to the East Pakistan crisis, had fashioned a strategy designed to assist the establishment of the independent nation of Bangladesh. As part of this strategy, in August 1971, India signed a twenty-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. One of the treaty's clauses implied that each nation was expected to come to the assistance of the other in the event of a threat to national security such as that occurring in the 1965 war with Pakistan. Simultaneously, India organised, trained, and provided sanctuary to the Mukti Bahini (meaning Liberation Force in Bengali), the East Pakistani armed resistance fighters.

Unable to deter India's activities in the eastern sector, on December 3, 1971, Pakistan launched an air attack in the western sector on a number of Indian airfields, including Ambala in Haryana, Amritsar in Punjab, and Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir. The attacks did not succeed in inflicting substantial damage. The Indian air force retaliated the next day and quickly achieved air superiority. On the ground, the strategy in the eastern sector marked a significant departure from previous Indian battle plans and tactics, which had emphasised set-piece battles and slow advances. The strategy adopted was a swift, three-pronged assault of nine infantry divisions with attached armoured units and close air support that rapidly converged on Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan. Lieutenant General Sagat Singh, who commanded the eighth, twenty-third, and fifty-seventh divisions, led the Indian thrust into East Pakistan. As these forces attacked Pakistani formations, the Indian air force rapidly destroyed the small air contingent in East Pakistan and put the Dhaka airfield out of commission. In the meantime, the Indian navy effectively

blockaded East Pakistan. Dhaka fell to combined Indian and Mukti Bahini forces on December 16, bringing a quick end to the war.

Within hours of outbreak of hostilities, the Indian Missile Boat Group was ordered to execute operation Trident, the code name for the first attack on Karachi. The task group consisting of three OSA class missile boats, escorted by two Kamorta class anti-submarine patrol vessels, regrouped off Okha and charged towards Karachi. At 2150 hrs on December 4, the task group was 70 nautical miles south-west of Karachi. Soon thereafter, the task group detected patrolling Pakistani naval ships on their sensors. The deadly missiles were heading towards their targets which were soon hit. PNS Khyber, a destroyer and PNS Muhafiz, a minesweeper were sunk. Another Pakistani destroyer Shajehan was badly damaged. The fuel storage tanks at Karachi harbour were set ablaze, causing heavy loss. Operation Trident was a thundering success with no damage to any of the ships of the Indian Naval Task Group, which returned safely. Operation Trident had introduced to the war, the first ever ship launched missiles in the region.

Though the Indian conduct of the land war on the western front was somewhat timid, the role of the Indian air force was both extensive and daring. During the fourteen-day war, the air force's Western Command conducted some 4,000 sorties. There was little retaliation by Pakistan's air force, partly because of the paucity of non-Bengali technical personnel. Additionally, this lack of retaliation reflected the deliberate decision of the Pakistan Air Force headquarters to conserve its forces because of heavy losses incurred in the early days of the war.

On 16 december 1971 the surrender was signed between Lt.Gen J.S. Aurora of the Eastern Command and commander in chief of Mukti Bahini Forces and Lt Gen A.K. Niaza of the Pakistani army.



Siachen- (Operation Meghdoot)

The glacier is located in the disputed Kashmir region and is claimed by India and Pakistan. In spite of the severe climate, the word `Siachen` ironically means `the place of wild roses`, a reference some people attribute to the abundance of Himalayan wildflowers found in the valleys below the glacier, but specifically refers to the thorny wild plants which grow on the rocky outcrops. The glacier is also the highest battleground on Earth, where India and Pakistan have fought intermittently since 1984. Both countries maintain permanent military personnel on the glacier at a height of over 7,000 metres. The site is a prime example of mountain warfare. The glacier`s melting waters are the main source of the Nubra River, which falls into the Shyok River. The Shyok in turn joins the Indus River, crucial to both India and Pakistan. The roots of the conflict over Siachen lie in the non-demarcation of the cease-fire line on the map beyond a map coordinate known as NJ9842. The 1949 Karachi agreement and the 1972 Simla Agreement presumed that it was not feasible for human habitation to survive north of NJ9842. Prior to 1984 neither India nor Pakistan had any permanent presence in the area.

In the 1970s and early 1980s Pakistan permitted several mountaineering expeditions to climb high peaks on this glacier. This was to reinforce their claim on the area as these expeditions arrived on the glacier with a permit obtained from the Government of Pakistan. Once having become aware of this in about 1978, Colonel N. Kumar of the Indian Army mounted an Army expedition to Teram Kangri peaks as a counter-exercise. The first public mention of a possible conflict situation was an article by Joydeep Sircar in The Telegraph newspaper of Calcutta in 1982, reprinted as "Oropolitics" in the Alpine Journal, London, in 1984. India launched Operation Meghdoot (named after the divine cloud messenger in a Sanskrit play) on 13 April 1984 when the Kumaon Regiment of the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force went into the Glacier. Pakistan, which had also gotten wind of it quickly responded with troop deployments and what followed was literally a race to the top. Within a few days, the Indians were in control over most of the glacier as Pakistan was beaten by just a week. The two passes due to Indian military pre-emption – Sia La and Bilfond La were secured by India while the Gyong La pass remained under Pakistan control. Since then both sides have launched several attempts to displace each-others forces, but with little success.

Nuclear tests in the Pokhran range (1998)

Despite the U.S. government's self-declared "surprise" at India's multiple tests in May 1998, India's march towards an openly declared nuclear capability underscored by new tests was clear for a number of years. During the last several years the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, or BJP) has emerged as the dominant power in domestic politics. One of its key platform issues has been its desire to make India an openly declared nuclear power. The BJP created a short-lived government for 13 days in May 1996, and it is now known that Vajpayee actually authorised nuclear tests at that time, and the devices got as far as being placed in the test shafts, before he called them off when it became evident that his government was unlikely to survive long enough to deal with the aftermath.

Two years later however, on 10 March 1998, the BJP achieved a strong electoral victory and finally succeeded in putting together a governing coalition of 13 (later 20) parties. The BJP wasted no time in making clear its intention to deploy nuclear weapons. On 18 March 1998, the day before he was sworn in as Prime Minister, PM-designate Vajpayee declared "There is no compromise on national security. We will exercise all options including nuclear options to protect security and sovereignty". An official planning report further stated directly that the new BJP government intended to "re-evaluate the nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons".

Considering the numerous test preparations that had been detected over the past three years, and Vajpayee's 1996 actual test authorisation which was undoubtedly known to U.S. intelligence by that time, and after such announcements there would seem to be little excuse for being "surprised" by subsequent events. The underlying reason seems to have been a very ill advised cut-back in the analysis of imagery of the Pokhran site, combined with greater stealth on the part of the Indians. Given the considerable activity at the site over the previous three years, and the intelligence that the CIA undoubtedly had by then that Vajpayee had actually ordered tests during his previous short-lived government, it was not a difficult assessment to realise that Pokhran should be watched more carefully after Vajpayee took office, rather than less. It appears that the one NIMA (National Imagery and Mapping Agency) assigned to the site actually did detect suspicious activity on the morning of May 11, 6 hours before the tests (and about the time they were originally scheduled for detonation) and was waiting for further review of his findings when the tests were announced.

Kargil Conflict 1999

For the past several years, the Indian Army had been occupied in counterinsurgency operations. This had involved deployment well away from the LoC, mainly to block likely infiltration routes along valleys and approaches to the towns and villages where these routes converged. Foot patrols and air reconnaissance sorties along the LoC were the exception rather than the rule. The intrusions were thus not detected till early May.

On May 03, 1999, local shepherds reported seeing strangers digging in on the heights. Over the next few days, three Army patrols were sent out. All were repulsed with casualties. Lack of intelligence on the extent of the infiltration and other details made planning difficult. The Army now launched, Operation Vijay, to evict the intruders. However, carefully directed enemy artillery fire resulted in the destruction of the Army's main artillery dump on May 09. Over the next few days, Army casualties mounted. The number of intruders, initially assessed by the Army Headquarters as being between 80 to 100 by May 18, continued to be revised upwards, finally being estimated as between 1600 and 2500. 42 Initially, however, local commanders were quick to downgrade the scale of the intrusion; it is safe to say that the Army was in denial. This delayed any request for air support that could have been made. But the exemplary strength shown by the Indian Army was commendable. Kargil incident even today is sharp and engraved in the memory of the 5 Northern Light Infantry soldiers of the Pakistani Army.



2019

Post Pulwama Attack Situation

On 14 February 2019, a convoy of 78 vehicles transporting more than 2,500 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel from Jammu to Srinagar was travelling on National Highway 44. The convoy had left Jammu around 03:30 IST and was carrying a large number of personnel due to the highway having been shut down for two days prior. The convoy was scheduled to reach its destination before sunset.

At Lethpora near Awantipora, around 15:15 IST, a bus carrying security personnel was rammed by a car carrying explosives. It caused a blast which killed 40 CRPF personnel of the 76th Battalion and injured many others. The injured were moved to the army base hospital in Srinagar.

Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed claimed responsibility for the attack. They also released a video of the assailant Adil Ahmad Dar, a 22-year old from Kakapora who had joined the group a year earlier. Dar's family had last seen him in March 2018, when he left his house on a bicycle one day and never returned. Pakistan denied any involvement, though Jaish-e-Mohammed's leader, Masood Azhar, is known to operate in the country. It is the deadliest terror attack on India's state security personnel in Kashmir since 1989.

The perpetrator was identified as Adil Ahmad Dar (alias Adil Ahmad Gaadi Takranewala or Waqas Commando), a 22-year old from Kakapora. According to Dar's parents, Dar became radicalized after he was beaten by Indian police. Between September 2016 and March 2018, Adil Dar was reportedly arrested six times by Indian authorities. However, each time he was released without any charges.

The crisis between India and Pakistan that began on February 14 with the Pulwama attack continues and has reached a new inflection point after the Indian Air Force struck targets on Pakistani soil in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province, well across the Line of Control. We crossed an important threshold with Indian military retaliation.

The retaliatory action had been promised by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, so the fact of its occurrence wasn't necessarily a surprise. What did take many observers aback was the audacious choice of a target: a Jaish-e-Mohammed camp in undisputed Pakistani territory.

On 26 February 2019, the Indian Air Force conducted airstrikes at Balakot in Pakistan. The strikes were subsequently claimed to be "non-military" and "preemptive" in nature; targeting a Jaish-e-Mohammed facility within Pakistan. The Indian government stated that the airstrike was in retaliation to the Pulwama attack and that "a very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis" were eliminated who were preparing for launching another suicide attack targeting Indian assets.

Indian media claimed to have confirmed from official sources that twelve Mirage 2000 jets were involved in the operation and that they struck multiple militant camps in Balakot, Chakothe and Muzaffarabad operated by Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen, killing about 350 militants. The exact figures varied across media-houses. Pakistani officials acknowledged the intrusion of Indian aircraft into the country's airspace but rejected the claims about the results. They asserted that the Indian jets were intercepted and that the payloads were dropped in unpopulated areas and resulted in no casualties or infrastructural damage. Pervaz Khattak, the Pakistani Defence Minister, stated that the Pakistani Air Force did not retaliate at that time because "they could not gauge the extent of the damage".

Business Today India stated that the area around Balakot had been cordoned off by the Pakistan Army and evidences such as the dead bodies were being cleared from the area. Praveen Swami writing for *Firstpost* claimed that Indian intelligence estimated a figure of about 20 casualties and that there were five confirmed kills per burial records. He also noted a JeM rally in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on 28 February, wherein Masood Azhar's brother, Abdul Rauf Rasheed Alvi mentioned India's attack of their headquarters and vowed revenge. In another piece he stated that RAW analysts estimated 90 casualties including three Pakistani Army trainers, based on intercepted communications. Swami also noted a lack of witness testimony to independently assess the validity of above claims. This airstrike was the first time since the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 that aerial attacks had been carried out across the Line of Control.

Villagers from the area claimed that four bombs struck a nearby forest and a field resulting in damage to a building and injuring a local man around 3:00 AM. A team from Al Jazeera visited the site two days after the strikes and noted "splintered pine trees and rocks" which were strewn across the four blast craters. Local hospital officials and residents asserted that they did not come across any casualty or wounded people. The reporters located the facility, a school run by Jaish-e-Mohammed, at around a kilometre to the east of one of the bomb craters, atop a steep ridge, but were unable to access

it. Reporters from Reuters were denied access to the madrassa by the military but they noted the structure and its vicinity to be intact from the rear.

Some diplomats and analysts have raised doubts about the efficacy of the strike, claiming that the terrorist groups along the border would have vacated the area, after the Indian Prime Minister vowed to retaliate against the Pulwama attack. The local people varied as to the purpose of the facility. Whilst some claimed its being an active Jaish training camp, others asserted it to have been a mere school for the local kids and that such militant camps had used to exist far earlier. Satellite-data analysis by Nathan Ruser, from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute noted the absence of any apparent evidence to verify Indian claims. Michael Sheldon, a digital forensics analyst at the Atlantic Council, did an independent investigation on the issue, in which he asserted that no damage was caused to any infrastructure around the target site. He concluded that "something appears to have gone wrong in the targeting process", which was mysterious in light of the autonomous nature of the missiles supposedly used.

In contrast, Indian officials said that synthetic aperture radar showed that four buildings had been destroyed; however, they did not release those images. Vice-Marshal RGK Kapoor of the Indian Air Force said on 28 February 2019 that though it was "premature" to provide details about the casualties, they had "fairly credible evidence" of the damage inflicted on the camp by the air strikes.

Of course, India made clear that the attack was "non-military" — in the sense that the target was not the Pakistan Army — and "pre-emptive," based on specific intelligence inputs that suggested an attack was being planned. In the immediate 24 hour period following the attack, most countries have been largely supportive of India's position, even as they have called for restraint. The U.S. statement, released on the evening of February 26, was particularly supportive. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo emphasized Washington's "close security partnership and shared goal of maintaining peace and security in the region" with India, making no comment on the merits of the attack itself.

On Pakistan, Pompeo took on a more prescriptive tone. In the State Department readout, he noted that he had conveyed to Pakistan's foreign minister that Islamabad needed to take "meaningful action against terrorist groups operating on its soil" and underscored "the priority of de-escalating current tensions by avoiding military action."

The latter point is where most attention falls now. Following India's statement on the strikes on Tuesday, Pakistan's military convened a press conference. The director-general of Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations, Maj. Gen. Asif Ghafoor, confirmed that Pakistan would retaliate against India at a time and place of its choosing, effectively cornering Islamabad into retaliatory action.

On 27 February, Pakistani military officials announced that Pakistan had carried out an airstrike against multiple targets in Jammu and Kashmir. A military spokesman claimed that the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) was able to lock onto Indian military installations, but opted to drop weapons into open areas instead, "to avoid human loss and collateral damage." Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the airstrikes only aimed to "send a message" and appealed for negotiations to avoid a full-blown war. The spokesman further claimed that the Pakistan Air Force had shot down two Indian aircraft after they encroached on Pakistan's airspace, one of which fell in Pakistan administered Kashmir while the other fell in Indian administered Kashmir. It was also claimed that Pakistan Army had captured two Indian pilots but a subsequent statement revised the count to one—Abhinandan Varthaman, a Wing Commander.

India rejected this version of events and asserted to have "successfully foiled" Pakistan's attempt to "target military installations". The Indian military claimed that three Pakistan Air Force jets had crossed the Line of Control (LoC) from Nowshera, Jammu and Kashmir and had dropped bombs over Nadian, Laam Jhangar, Kerri in Rajouri District and Hamirpur area of Bhimber Galli in Poonch, before being pushed back by six Indian airforce jets. There were no damage or casualties. Raveesh Kumar from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs also stated that a Pakistani aircraft of the sortie was shot down by the Indian Air Force in the process. India initially contradicted Pakistan's claim of capturing a pilot but subsequently the Indian Ministry of External Affairs confirmed that an Indian pilot was missing in action after a MiG-21 Bison fighter plane was lost while engaging with Pakistani jets.

ANI also reported that an F-16 was shot down in the process. On 28 February, a picture of aircraft wreckage in Pakistan administered Kashmir was claimed by IAF sources as the wreckage of the PAF F-16 shot down by the IAF MiG-21. This was rebutted by Bellingcat, an open source investigative journalism network, which confirmed it as the wreckage of a MiG-21. The Indian Air Force later presented wreckage of an AIM-120, an air-to-air missile, as evidence that Pakistani F-16 were used. The F-16 is the only aircraft in the

Pakistan military that uses AIM-120s. India claims that the use of F-16 by Pakistan against India, violates the US arms sales agreement, which restricts the usage of the jets by Pakistan. India also asked US to look into the claimed usage for violations.

The claims of using F-16 in the attack were rejected by Pakistan's military, who claimed to have used Chinese-designed JF-17s only, whilst asserting that no Pakistan Air Force jet was damaged in the process. The U.S. Embassy in Islamabad has since been looking into a potential violation of end-user-agreement that governed the sale of F16s.

The retaliatory air strikes coupled with the capture of the Indian pilot led to a heightened state of military alert. Tanks were deployed to the border in the Pakistani side whilst several Kashmiri residents reportedly fled their homes and painted their homes with red-cross signs to avert air-strikes.

Pakistan released the captured pilot on 1 March, describing the move as a gesture of peace. The Indian Air Force though asserted the pilot's release as an obligation under the Geneva Conventions. The Indian media also criticized Pakistan's release of his photographs and interrogation videos to be against the protocols of the convention. A video published by the state just prior to his release that showed him praising Pakistani Army and condemning Indian media was criticized for being heavily edited.

ANI and the Indian media have claimed that the Indian air force has shot down a number of Pakistani drones. The claims include that on 27 February, a Pakistani drone was shot and brought down near the border at Kutch in Gujarat. On 4 March, an Indian Su-30MKI fighter jet shot down a Pakistani UAV with an air to air missile in Bikaner sector of Rajasthan. On 10 March, Indian army's air defence wing shot and brought down another Pakistani UAV in the Ganganagar sector in Rajasthan. On the same day another drone was fired upon and forced to return back to Pakistani airspace.

This marks a sharp difference from Pakistan's reaction to the September 2016 "surgical strikes" claimed by India after the Uri terror attacks that same month by Pakistan-based militants. Pakistan was able to de-escalate the crisis by claiming no such strikes had occurred.

By confirming that the Indian Air Force had penetrated as far as Balakot in KPK in the first place, Pakistan's military cornered itself this time. Similarly, commentators in Pakistan have raised pressure on the military by asking questions of the performance of Pakistani air defense crews in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, wondering how the Indian Air Force's

fighters would have been able to cross the Line of Control to conduct a strike. To repel these notions, Ghafoor said Pakistan was not caught off-guard or surprised by the Indian attack.

At a higher level, the challenge for Pakistan's military now is to re-establish what it sees as the failure of its nuclear deterrence. Pakistan has maintained an aggressive nuclear strategy and posture to make conventional military action by India against its territory unthinkable in theory. This held largely between the conclusion of the 1999 Kargil War almost 20 years ago and Tuesday.

The Indian strikes this week marked not only the first intentional crossing by the IAF since the 1971 war between the two countries, but the first-ever use of conventional airpower by one nuclear-armed state against the territory of another nuclear-armed state. Even with its low-yield battlefield nuclear weapons, Pakistan had failed to convince the Indian leadership that such action would be unthinkable — it clearly was not.

Nuclear weapons are slowly making their way into the ongoing crisis. The most direct indication came with comments by Ghafoor on Tuesday. The Pakistani military spokesperson confirmed that the country's National Command Authority (NCA) would meet on Wednesday. With little subtlety, Ghafoor added: "I hope you understand what is National Command Authority; what does it constitute."

The implication was nuclear weapons. The NCA was formalized as the supreme civilian decision-making body to authorize the use of nuclear weapons after the country's breakout in 2000, attaining further legal sanction in 2007. Ghafoor's remark was not a threat, per se, that outlined the conditions under which nuclear weapons would be brought into play, but they were a reminder — to the Pakistani public and Indian government alike — that Pakistan is a nuclear-armed power.

With Pakistan now under pressure to take its decision on how it will retaliate for the Indian strikes on its territory, the prospect of a nuclear crisis grows. While it initially appeared that escalation may have been avoidable like in the aftermath of the 2016 "surgical strikes," Pakistan has set that option aside.

This crisis remains serious and the probability of a nuclear exchange shouldn't be understated. But until we see Pakistan's retaliation, it should not be overstated either;

we're not sitting at the cusp of a nuclear conflict in South Asia. In fact, neither New Delhi nor Islamabad have serious incentives to seek the start of an uncontrollable escalation spiral.

On the Pakistani side, there are more mundane considerations that should be taken into account. Pakistan's military has just proven itself unable to protect the country's borders, opening it up to the same kinds of criticism that it faced internally after the United States' May 2011 raid on al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's compound at Abbottabad. Now, with the country in a serious fiscal crisis, its proportion of national spending might decrease.

In order to retain its share of the national budget — and its influence over the country's democratically elected leaders — the military will need to show that it continues to be a vital national institution. The IAF's strike at Balakot, in this regard, would be an opening.

Pakistan's retaliation will be about sating domestic audience costs and saving face after the perceived embarrassment resulting from the Balakot strike. The question is whether Islamabad can do that in way that won't inevitably reset India's position and put Modi back in a position where has to strike back.

That's how a war might begin. And even if both sides find a way to stand down in a matter of days or weeks, there's the unfortunate reality that India's retaliation for the Pulwama attack will likely fail to deter groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed or those in the Pakistani military-intelligence apparatus that continue to see utility in those groups as a tool of sub-conventional warfare. One crisis would end, but another would be a virtual inevitability.

