

PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC MOMENT IN POST-PAHALGAM PARADIGM

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SUMMARY:

The recent standoff between India and Pakistan post Pahalgam incident has again generated a debate about the delicate balance of power and strategic stability in South Asia. The dimension of aerial warfare in this conflict has been momentous, as the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) demonstrated operational preparedness and tactical brilliance, challenging longstanding assumption of India's supposed dominance. It is the high time Pakistan should consolidate its upper hand while negotiating from position of strength and leverage President Donald Trump's mediation offer. A robust and principled framework for negotiations with India would support Pakistan's national interests and regional stability.



Notwithstanding India's numerical superiority in terms of air assets with over 2,200 aircrafts along with advanced platforms such as the Rafale and S-400 air defence system the recent developments have characterized the limitations and vulnerabilities of relying solely on hardware. The PAF's brilliance in the post-Pahalgam conflict hallmarked precision, effectiveness, and superiority. It has underscored the importance of doctrinal innovation, human capital,



and indigenous technological advancement. The counter strikes that neutralized India's air defense grid, Rafales and the much-trumpeted S-400, exhibited critical weaknesses in India's air defense and defied the myth of Indian aerial invincibility.



This escalation has proved that the outcome of aerial combat warfare is merely not determined by the sophisted platforms, but by the effective synchronization of technology, training and tactics. Pakistan's focus on adaptive indigeneity, electronic warfare, and accurate intelligence proved decisive in real time. The deployment of platforms such as the JF-17 Thunder, AEW&C, PL-15 coupled with precision-guided munitions, enabled the PAF to achieve domination with bare minimum collateral damage. This operational success authenticates the strategic vision of burgeoning indigenous defense capabilities and also emphasizes the need for continuous doctrinal evolution.

The tactical gains in this escalatory scenario need to be translated into an enduring strategic advantage. For this Pakistan needs to adopt a holistic framework focusing a broad canvas. It is imperative to consolidate and precipitate the technological edge in key domains. The advancement of indigenous warfare capabilities should be prioritized to ensure the ability and proficiency to disrupt adversary's air defense networks. The rapid deployment of UAVs for surveillance and precision strike missions can further exploit blind spots in India's air defense architecture.



Operational preparedness must remain a cornerstone of Pakistan's defense posture. The PAF should continue to engage comprehensively with strategic partners such as China, Turkey, and Gulf allies consequently opening avenues for diverse combat scenarios and technologies. The execution of advanced simulation centers and wargaming will ensure further tactical innovation. The

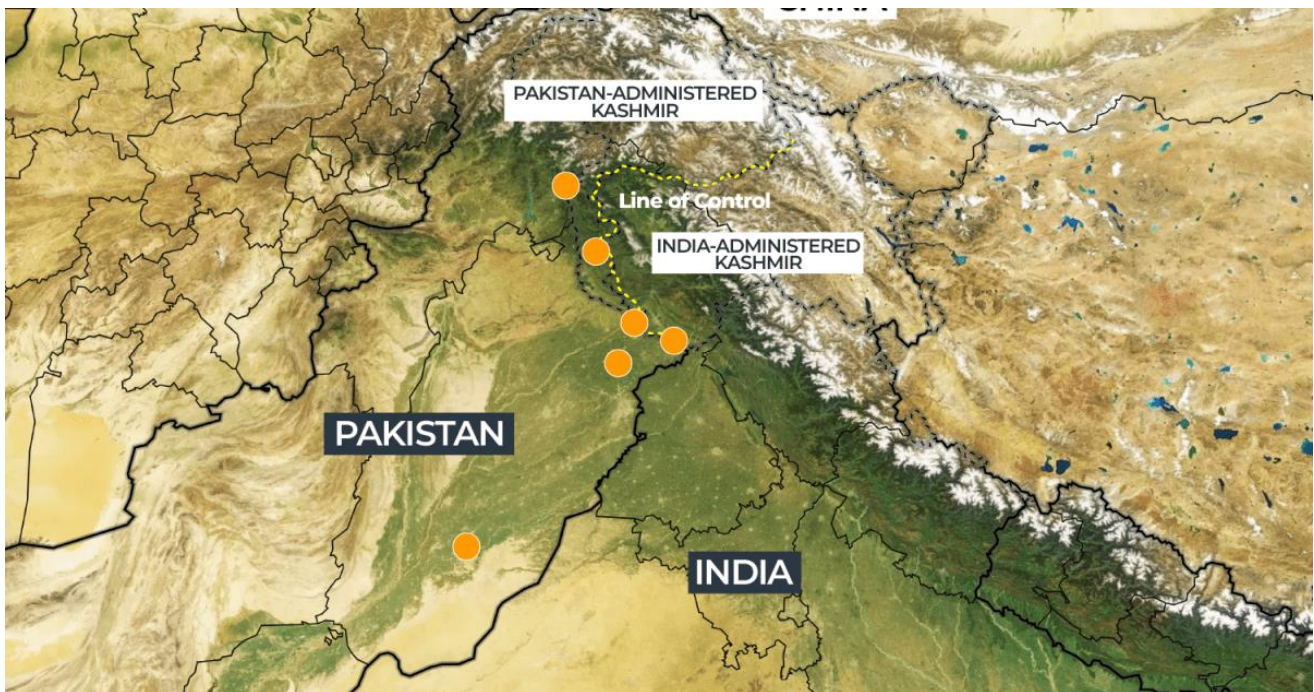
strategic communication should be a linchpin to shape international narrative, strengthening Pakistan's commitment to responsible defense architecture and its operational successes amidst provocation.



President Trump's offer to mediate between India and Pakistan presents a rare and valuable opportunity to settle longstanding disputes. Historically, India always resisted third-party mediation, citing bilateralism to sustain the status quo. However, the recent context marked by India's heightened vulnerabilities and increased international concern post escalation offers space to Pakistan for a substantive, principled and result oriented dialogue. Pakistan's approach to these negotiations should be from a position of strength with an explicit commitment to regional peace and justice.

A proactive negotiation framework must include several key components. An immediate and durable ceasefire must be established, with international guarantors ensuring compliance. The

reactivation of direct communication channels between military commands is pivotal to thwart any miscalculation and unprovoked escalation. Both sides should establish protocols that prevents preemptive air strikes, particularly near the Line of Control, mitigating the risk of inadvertent conflict. Most importantly, the complete restoration and implementation of the Indus Waters Treaty must be a key demand of Pakistan. The suspension of this treaty by India has gravely risked Pakistan's agriculture, food security, and economic stability. The Indus basin supplies about 80 percent of Pakistan's irrigated agriculture and is imperative for millions of livelihoods. Restoration of the treaty is essential for regional stability, as water security is emerging to be an existential threat and is inseparable from peace and development.



Pakistan must insist that the core issue of Jammu and Kashmir remains at the forefront to any mediation process. The internationalization of the Kashmir dispute, in consonance with



United Nations Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people should remain a non-negotiable demand. Nuclear risk reduction measures, including the confidence-building measures should be employed. The access for international humanitarian agencies to conflict zones must be facilitated to address the rehabilitation of affected populations. India's tendency of knee-jerk reaction to any terrorist incident has been a notable reason for the previous and present crises between the two countries. India must commit that any terrorist incident if it occurs would be investigated and Pakistan should be ready to cooperate in any mechanism that ensures transparent and neutral investigations of Pahalgam and future incidents.

Pakistan's demands in any negotiation must be explicit, clear and resolute. India must acknowledge the changed regional scenario and the vulnerabilities exposed in its air defense posture. Attempts to subside the Kashmir dispute must be firmly rejected. Pakistan

should advocate for reciprocal transparency in force deployments and air defense postures along the border, as well as independent investigations into alleged human rights abuses in Indian-administered Kashmir. The international community should be urged to impose sanctions or censure in the event of future violations of ceasefire or airspace agreements.

It is important to recognize that while Pakistan's recent success has shifted the strategic calculus but significant risks still remain there. Economic impediment limits Pakistan's ability to sustain protracted high intensity volatile operations, necessitating optimal prioritization of defense spending and sustained investment in indigenous capabilities.

The post-Pahalgam conflict has instilled a hope that alacrity, innovation, and self-reliance can enable Pakistan to overpower formidable challenges. By consolidating its upper hand in the



aftermath of the recent crisis, Pakistan can deter aggression, safeguard sovereignty, and project itself more confidently on the diplomatic stage. The pursuit of a principled negotiation framework centered on deescalation, restoration of the Indus Waters Treaty, and the resolution of the Kashmir dispute will not only protect Pakistan's national interests but would pave a pathway for regional peace and stability in South Asia.

It is imperative to emphasize that the nation's resilience, ingenuity, and unwavering commitment to justice have been the bedrock of its defense posture. The recent conflict has provided an opportunity to translate tactical victories into strategic gains, both in the military and diplomatic arenas. By combining operational excellence with diplomatic agility and principled negotiation, Pakistan can shape a more secure, just, and prosperous future for itself and the broader South Asian region.

INTRODUCTION

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