



Securitization of The 2025 Pahalgam Attack: A Copenhagen School Analysis of India's Response to Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The Pahalgam attack of 22 April 2025 in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir became one of the deadliest civilian attacks in India since the 2008 Mumbai attacks. The attack occurred in Baisaran Valley near Pahalgam, where armed militants opened fire on tourists, killing 26 civilians and injuring more than 20. India quickly attributed responsibility to Pakistan-linked militant networks, particularly The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba. Following the incident, India adopted extraordinary political, diplomatic, and military measures including suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, visa restrictions, diplomatic expulsions, and military preparedness. This study applies the Copenhagen School's securitization theory to examine how India transformed the Pahalgam attack from a terrorism incident into an existential national security threat. The research focuses on secondary sources, academic literature and existing publications, aiming to fill the gap in existing literature regarding a full securitization analysis of India's response toward Pakistan.

Introduction

India-Pakistan relations have remained one of the most militarized and conflict-prone rivalries in international politics since 1947, with Kashmir functioning as the central source of strategic confrontation, interstate wars, proxy violence, and diplomatic hostility (Ganguly, 2002). Terrorist incidents in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir frequently trigger severe political and military responses from New Delhi, particularly when India attributes such attacks to Pakistan-based militant organizations. Such crises often move beyond conventional security concerns and become matters of national survival, sovereignty, and identity, creating conditions for securitization.

The Pahalgam attack of 22 April 2025 represents one of the most significant civilian-targeted militant attacks in recent years. Armed militants attacked tourists near Pahalgam in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in the deaths of 26 civilians and injuries to many. The attack was widely recognized as one of the deadliest attacks on civilians in Kashmir since the 2008 Mumbai attacks (Group I. C., 2025). India attributed responsibility to The Resistance Front (TRF), widely considered an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba, and linked the incident to cross-border terrorism (Singh & Acharya, 2025).

Following the attack, India adopted a series of extraordinary political, diplomatic, and strategic measures, including the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, visa restrictions, border closures, diplomatic expulsions, and increased military readiness.

These actions demonstrated that the issue had moved beyond routine counterterrorism policy and entered the domain of emergency security politics (Affairs M. o., 2025). According to the Copenhagen School, such a transformation reflects the process of securitization, where political leaders construct an issue as an existential threat requiring exceptional responses (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

The Copenhagen School of security studies, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, challenges traditional realist approaches by arguing that security is not merely based on objective threats but is socially and politically constructed. Wæver explains that security functions as a “speech act,” where state elites declare an issue to be a threat to national survival, and once the audience accepts this claim, extraordinary measures become legitimate. Security therefore depends not only on actual danger but also on political discourse, audience acceptance, and institutional support (Wæver, 1995).

In the case of the Pahalgam attack, Indian leadership particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior state officials framed the incident not simply as an act of terrorism but as a direct threat to India’s sovereignty, national unity, and internal stability. Official government statements linked the attack to cross-border terrorism and Pakistan-based militant networks. This securitizing discourse generated strong domestic political consensus and helped justify exceptional actions against Pakistan. The referent object shifted from individual victims to the survival of Indian state itself, while Pakistan was projected as the external source of existential danger (Bureau, 2025; Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998; Affairs M. o., 2025).

Literature Review

The paper “Narrative, Identity and Terrorism: A Constructivist Analysis of the Pahalgam 2025 Attack in the Escalating India–Pakistan”, written by Prayogo and Sari (2025), analyze the 2025 Pahalgam attack through a constructivist perspective and explain how both India and Pakistan used competing identity-based narratives after the attack. The study shows that India framed the attack as Pakistan-backed cross-border terrorism, which justified suspension of Indus Waters Treaty. Pakistan, on the other hand, rejected the accusations, called the attack a possible false-flag operation, and demanded a neutral international investigation. It concludes that the crisis intensified the long-standing “blame game” between India and Pakistan (Neola Hestu Prayogo, 2025).

The article “The 2025 Indo-Pakistan Crisis: From Pahalgam Attack to Ceasefire”, written by Haroon, Hanif, Butt, & Salman (2025), explains that the 2025 Pahalgam attack leading to India’s Operation Sindoor, diplomatic expulsions, and visa restrictions. The study argues that India framed the attack as Pakistan-backed terrorism particularly TRF and used strong nationalist rhetoric to justify military and political action, carrying out strikes on nine alleged militant sites inside Pakistan. The article shows how security narratives and political interests shaped India’s response after the attack (Haroon, Hanif, Butt, & Salman, 2025).

The book “Security: A New Framework for Analysis”, written by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde (1998) introduced the Copenhagen School’s securitization theory. They argue that security is socially constructed and an issue becomes a security issue when leaders present it as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures. This book provides the main theoretical foundation for this research because India’s response to the Pahalgam attack can be studied through these exact elements (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

In the Book “Securitization and Desecuritization”, written by Ole Wæver (1995), author explains that security is not only a real threat but a speech act, where state leaders declare an issue as an existential danger to justify extraordinary measures. He argues that when political elites label something as “security,” they claim a special right to use exceptional actions beyond normal politics, that “undercut the political order” and challenge the state’s existence, making all other issues secondary. This framework is highly relevant to the Pahalgam attack, where India responded with extraordinary diplomatic and military actions against Pakistan (Wæver, 1995).

Although the existing academic scholarships provides detailed discussion of the 2025 crisis, but it does not apply the Copenhagen School of securitization theory to explain how India transformed the Pahalgam attack into an existential national security threat requiring extraordinary measures beyond normal politics.

Problem statement

The securitization of the 2025 Pahalgam attack from a terrorist act into an existential threat within India's policy discourse led to the invocation of extraordinary measures, such as diplomacy and military action. But the manner in which this transformation was constructed and accepted is under explored in the existing literature, especially when analysed through Copenhagen School's securitization theory. This study seeks to fill this gap.

Research question

- How did India's political and strategic response to the 2025 Pahalgam attack transform the incident from a terrorist attack into a broader national security issue against Pakistan?

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach with interpretive and descriptive analysis. Research uses the Copenhagen School's securitization approach to analyse India's response to the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam attack. The data collects from different sources like the speeches of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, parliamentary proceedings, policy documents, media coverage and journal articles. Research also accesses other secondary sources like books, research articles and reports. Discourse analysis has been used to identify securitising moves, while policy analysis has been used to analyse extraordinary measures against Pakistan

Pahalgam Attack as a Security Threat

On 22 April 2025, a significant militant attack occurred in Pahalgam, in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, resulting in the deaths of 26 civilians (most of them tourists), and 20 killed. According to reports Indian reports, the targets were targeted on the basis of their religious identity, instantly turning the attack from a terrorist attack into a highly charged political issue (BBC, 2025). The Indian government blamed The Resistance Front (TRF), which is believed to be an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba, and linked the attack to trans-border terrorism from Pakistan (Guardian, 2025).

The attack took place at a critical juncture. It happened at a time of intense domestic political activity in India, where national security and terrorism have been prominent election issues. Kashmir was already a sensitive issue following the August 2019 abrogation of Article 370 and any act of violence had broader political implications in the region beyond security (Combating Terrorism Center, 2025). The death of Hindu tourists further inflamed emotions as it was not just an act of terrorism, but also a challenge to national unity, religious harmony and Indian sovereignty.

The 2025 Pahalgam Attack and Immediate Political Framing

On 22 April 2025, militants attacked and killed 26 civilians and injured More than 20 in the Baisaran Valley in Pahalgam, one of the largest attacks in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir in recent years (BBC, 2025). The attack's site, a prominent tourist destination, also heightened its significance beyond the immediate loss of life as tourism is a visual symbol of normalcy in the conflict areas. However immediately after the attack, India framed it as a cross-border militancy, threat to nation's survival rather than a local conflict or security issue (Intelligence, 2025; Neola Hestu Prayogo, 2025).

This quick assessment is consistent with securitization processes of Copenhagen school where not only is violence reported, but it is also framed as a political dilemma in need of state intervention. Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde noted that security issues arise when political leaders re-frame an incident as a threat to the survival of their community, thus justifying extraordinary measures beyond regular policy making (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

As historically in Kashmir issue civilian deaths are presented as interstate rivalries rather than local militancy (Schofield, 2012). This shift in framing limits the explanatory possibilities of other grievances such as localised and non-state fragmentation of militant groups, and elevates the attack to a national security threat (Bhavthankar, 2025).

India's Immediate Attribution of Blame to Pakistan

In the aftermath of the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam attack, the Indian government swiftly framed the attack in terms of the existing narrative of cross-border terrorism and attributed it to Pakistani militant groups. Both the Ministry of External Affairs and security agencies did not see this attack as a localised act of militancy but as a more general phenomenon of externally funded terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir (Neola Hestu Prayogo, 2025). This swift attribution was part of a broader strategic framing seen after the 2001 Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks and 2019 Pulwama attacks where Pakistan was identified as the prime source of external destabilisation in Kashmir (Bhavthankar, 2025).

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's briefing on 23 April 2025, made this official when he announced that:

'The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 would be kept on hold with immediate effect "until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures support for cross-border terrorism" (Affairs M. o., 2025).

Ministry of External affairs S.Jaishankar termed "the Pahalgam terror attack as economic warfare aimed at crippling Kashmir's tourism and inciting communal violence" (Times Of India, 2025).

According to Copenhagen school, the terminology is significant as it turned security accusation into a state of affairs that is part of an international treaty. This shifted the problem from blaming to an institutional punishment, reflecting that attribution had already accepted at the policy level prior to an impartial fact-finding forum had taken the case at international level.

Attribution is a first step of securitization process. Wæver sees the construction of a referent threat as key point to the speech act of security. The Indian state shifted the issue from criminology to the survival of the nation and state by identifying Pakistan as a referent threat. The referent object was not just the victims of the attack, but national unity and domestic stability, and the legitimacy of the state in Kashmir is also a referent object (Wæver, 1995).

Pakistan's denial of the charges and its demand for an international investigation provided an alternative diplomatic discourse (Ministry of Water Resources, GoPK, 2025). But the prompt of Indian attribution and institutional backing for it curtailed political space for verification. This is a common feature of securitization that takes place before evidence, especially in long-standing rivalries where audiences have pre-conceived biases (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

Securitising Discourse of Indian Political Leadership

Political leadership was critical in the securitization of the Pahalgam attack from a terrorist act to a vital national security threat. On April 22, 2025, 26 persons were killed when four to five heavily armed terrorists opened fire on tourists in the Baisaran Valley, near Pahalgam, after allegedly identifying their religion. Since then, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has been investigating case; but on April 21, 2026, it filed a lengthy charge sheet that is thousands of pages long. According to the investigation, Sajid Jatt, Saifullah Sajid and Habibullah Tabassum, has been hiding in Pakistan. In order to evade detection and capture, he constantly changes his identity, location, and general appearance (INDIA TODAY, 2026).

The reaction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his statement on 22 April 2025 was that,

"I strongly condemn the terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir. Condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. I pray that the injured recover at the earliest. Those behind this heinous act will be brought to justice...they will not be spared! Their evil agenda will never succeed. Our resolve to fight terrorism is unshakable and it will get even stronger" (Press Information Bureau, 2025). This was not a policing response but a sovereign action of retaliation, putting the attack in a national security rather than a law enforcement context.

In his first public address in Bihar, on 24 April 2025, Modi said that

"The entire country is saddened by the brutality with which terrorists killed innocent countrymen in Pahalgam... India will hunt down every terrorist and their backers... Attackers and conspirators will be punished beyond their imagination" (BBC News, 2025). By adding "backers", the threat field was expanded from terrorists to state sponsors, which confirms Pakistan's role in the attack. This language is key to securitization as it expands the threat and justifies action beyond the crime scene.

The clearest articulation occurred in Modi's broadcast to the nation on 12 May 2025 following Operation Sindoor when he said that India would not distinguish between terrorists and state sponsors of terrorism, and declared that "terror and talks cannot go together...terror and trade cannot go together...water and blood cannot flow together" (PMINDIA, 2025). It erased the difference between terrorism and inter-state conflict, and thus allowed for extraordinary measures in military, diplomatic and economic realms.

This was echoed by both Home Minister Amit Shah and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who reiterated that the attack was not just an assault on civilian life, but also India's economy (tourism) and "affects our social fabric". The attack was presented as one that was meant to sow communal tensions and disrupt social order. In securitization parole, the referent object shifted from territorial security to societal security, with identity, order and stability (including the tourism economy) being targeted (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

The rise of anger in India has assisted the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to bolster its stance on "maximum security", especially in the elections of northern states. In its quest for nationalistic goals, the Narendra Modi government responded with bellicose rhetoric and heightened police and military operations in Kashmir (Affairs A. I., 2025).

This rhetoric needed to be accepted by the audience. The All-Party meeting in New Delhi on 24 April and the political consensus, with opposition backing for tough retaliatory measures, demonstrated the acceptance of the speech acts at home country (Destradi, 2026). With political acceptance of extraordinary action, securitisation became a matter of policy, that is a key principle of Copenhagen school. As there was not institutional resistance so this served as a basis for diplomatic pause and treaty suspension, and military action.

Evolution of Media and Public Opinion in Endorsing the Threat

Media played an important role in amplifying the securitised discourse of the attack, especially by constant linkage of the attack with cross-border terrorism. The amplifying role enhances what Wæver calls "acceptance" by the audience, a precondition for securitization. Media give attention to the foreign responsibility, limited the discursive possibilities for alternative framing (Wæver, 1995; Barman, 2025).

Indian opposition Party leader Mallikarjun Kharge said to the Home Minister Amit Shah:

"This is no time for partisan politics," Kharge said after the Congress meeting. "This is a moment for collective resolve to ensure justice for those who lost lives. At this moment we are all one with the government in fighting the terrorists," (BBC News, 2025).

Domestic mobilisation of the operation contributed to a securitised discourse. Official statements blamed Pakistan that strikes killed civilians, which is the threat to state survival, and armed response from India is mandatory now (Tahira, 2025). Lack of political opposition within India in the aftermath of the strikes suggests high audience acceptance, an essential precondition for extraordinary measures to result from securitization (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

The Indian media coverage was highly biased towards the themes of national security, patriotism, and the accusations against Pakistan. The incident was frequently framed in terms of nationalistic sentiment through phrases like: "a cowardly act of terror", "another assault on the sovereignty of India", etc. There was a strong emphasis on personal stories of the victims, with many of the stories being accompanied by emotional interviews with their family members. This human-interest story integrated into a larger, state-resilience, and military-heroism narrative. The term "Pakistan-backed terrorists" was repeatedly used within the discourse of media, often without proper attribution or evidence, making news coverage a type of spectacle. Even though the strategy was quite successful in terms of attracting attention of the audience, it tended to blur the boundary between objective reporting and propaganda. Hashtags, such as #PahalgamAttack, #KashmirTerror, #IndiaBleedsPahalgamAttack, trended several days on social media, particularly on Twitter (X), and Instagram (Bagaitkar & Vidyapeeth, 2025).

Regarding the narrative construction, the Indian media depicted the victims as martyrs, the assailants as enemies of the nation and the state and military as the defenders of national honor. This framing was mainly binary, simple and emotional. Conversely, the international media houses reported the incident in the broader historical context of the Kashmir conflict, which often presented a number of actors as being interdependent in a complex conflict environment, such as the Indian state, militant groups, and external actors such as Pakistan (Bagaitkar & Vidyapeeth, 2025).

This was reinforced by the public response, with nationalist feelings heightened in the wake of the attacks (Ramachandran, 2025). In securitization theory, securitization occurs when extraordinary measures take place based on public resonance. The interaction of politics and media created an environment that socially and politically accepted the escalation policy towards Pakistan (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998; Jaffrelot). Furthermore, images and videos of tearful family members on the social media heightened sorrow, and anger nationwide (BBC News, 2025).

The dynamic between government and media is a characteristic of contemporary securitization, that align with Copenhagen school, in which communication technologies act as force multipliers amplifying perceptions of the threat, and play key role in normalizing the extraordinary measures without any delay (McDonald, 2008).

Securitization and Political/Strategic Consequences

Crisis in Diplomacy and Freeze on Statecraft

In the immediate aftermath of the Pahalgam attack, bilateral diplomatic engagement between India and Pakistan shrunk dramatically, indicative of a typical securitization response in which "normal" diplomacy is replaced with crisis diplomacy. India reduced the level of its diplomacy and started expelling some of its diplomatic staff, as witnessed in previous crises, such as the

2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis (Bhavthankar, 2025). The Ministry of External Affairs noted the curtailing of bilateral interactions and communications, implying a streamlining of bilateral diplomacy (Affairs M. o., 2025).

Hours after the attack on April 23, 2025 Foreign Secretary on the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) outlined a series of punitive measures against its neighbour including further thinning of diplomatic relations (which had been reduced in 2016, and again in 2019), the closure of the sole border between two nations, and the closure of airspace to all Pakistani aircraft. India immediately closed the integrated Check Post (ICP) Attari, withdrew SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES) for Pakistanis and said that "Any Pakistani national currently in India under SVES has 48 hours to leave India". The Foreign Secretary also said that "The Defence/Military, Naval and Air Advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi are declared Persona Non Grata., and they have a week to leave India. The Indian authorities also suspended the Indus Waters Treaty "until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism" (Affairs M. o., 2025).

India on 13 May sent back a member of the Pakistan High Commission for his alleged involvement in espionage. In a tit-for-tat move Pakistan also expelled a member of Indian High Commission. On 14 May, both India BSF soldier and Pakistan Ranger returned to their home countries. New Delhi also banned Pakistani social media, YouTube, podcasts, and music (Desai, Abbas, & Raimedhi, 2025).

The halt in engagement fits into the securitization processes of Copenhagen school, where issues are taken out of the realm of normal politics and placed into extraordinary security context. Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) call this process moving an issue away from "normal politics", enabling state actions that are outside of ordinary diplomatic procedures. The Kashmir crisis structure exhibits these scenarios, in repeated escalation cycles which impact institutional continuity of the two states (Ganguly, 2001).

Pakistan, while responding to the incident, continued to assert a different diplomatic approach, denying unilateral attribution and the need for third-party verification, to keep the door open for diplomacy. This resulted in a dichotomy in the diplomatic milieu where one side focused on containment through isolation and the other on internationalisation of the problem (Ministry of Water Resources, GoPK, 2025).

Economic and Treaty-Based Measures (Indus Waters Treaty Suspension, etc.)

On April 23, 2025 Foreign Secretary said on the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) that one of the most escalatory measures taken after the incident included India's partial hold and review of treaty-based water-sharing arrangements under the Indus Waters Treaty mechanism.

"The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be held in abeyance with immediate effect, until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism" (Affairs M. o., 2025; Group W. B., 2023).

Federal Home Minister Amit Shah said: "India will never restore the Indus Waters Treaty with neighbouring Pakistan, and the water flowing there will be diverted for internal use" (ALJAZEERA, 2025). Amit Shah tainted Pakistan over and over, and justified suspension of the treaty for security reasons.

Indus Waters Treaty (IWT), brokered by the World Bank in 1960, allocates six river systems to Pakistan and India and is considered to be one of the most successful international treaties (World Bank, 1960). Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) is a lifeblood for more than 240 million Pakistanis (Affairs M. o., 2025). Any disturbance in its operation not only signifies a bilateral crisis but also disrupt whole water governance regime in South Asia.

The threat of treaty suspension is indicative of securitization via economic means, where non-military strategies turned into security resources. Such move is in line with Buzan where security is not limited to military dimensions but extended to economic and environmental domains once an existential threat is constructed. Water is used as a bargaining tool rather than a resource for co-operation, increasing tensions in precarious hydro-politics (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998; Zawahri, 2009).

On May 3 Pakistan Test-fired a Abdali missile. In response India Shut down all postal and trade relations and prohibited Pakistani ships from entering Indian ports. Furthermore, banned vessels from entering Pakistan waters, and seized Pakistani ranger (Desai, Abbas, & Raimedhi, 2025). This created instability and uncertainty, because violation of the water treaty shown weakness of institutions.

Military Deterrence and strategic Escalation (Operation Sindoor and Beyond)

Escalation in response to the Pahalgam attack took a systematic form as an extension of securitized discourse. On 7 May 2025, the Indian Armed Forces launched Operation Sindoor, which included precision missile strikes on nine alleged militant camps within the Pakistan, which Indian sources identified as "terrorist infrastructure" across the border, present it a counterterrorism measures beyond interstate conflict (Haroon, Hanif, Butt, & Salman, 2025). The language of operation in official communication avoided formal declaration of war, signalling escalation under control to avoid full blown war.

Domestic discourses heightened the securitization. The government framed the strikes in response to civilian deaths at Pahalgam, and present that military actions were necessary due to counter existential security threat. The lack of political contestation in India following the strikes suggests that there was a high level of audience acceptance, a precondition for securitization to lead to sustained extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

Narendra Modi's statement after operation Sindoor "terror and talks cannot go together" cemented the escalation (PMINDIA, 2025). This articulation brought securitization from attribution to doctrine, where military response becomes institutionalised within foreign policy, a key feature of Copenhagen school. The connection between terrorism, state sponsors and sovereignty formed a continuous threat, linking terrorism to the sovereignty of states, justifying the preparedness for further escalation.

The clash between the two nations brought an end to the ceasefire since the February 2021 peace deal. Both sides accused each other; India accused Pakistan of military aggression, while Pakistan said the fire was in response to Indian violations (Neola Hestu Prayogo, 2025).

Pakistan's Response and Call for Neutral International Investigation

India accused Pakistan of tacitly supporting the terrorist attack, as it claims it is part of a larger cross-border terrorism. In response, Pakistan rejected the allegations and claimed that India is using terrorism as a rhetorical tool to distract the international attention from the Kashmir issue (Reuters, 2025).

The government of Pakistan has accused India of slandering and distracting. Islamabad has denied its involvement, and rallied the public against the threat of an Indian attack, claiming that India has in fact launched a "false flag" attack instead (Aljazeera, 2025).

Ministry of foreign affairs pointed out India's unlawful use of force and breaches of international law, including the UN Charter and International Humanitarian Law, in particular, attacks on civilian targets and killings of innocent civilians, including women and children. Pakistan has denied India's false accusations about 22 April terror attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, that are without any evidence and cautioned India against its water weaponisation through its unilateral control over IWT contrary to international law and treaty obligations (Affairs M. o., 2025).

On April 26th Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif: Threatened "full-force" reaction if India diverts water, will be regarded "as an act of war". Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif condemns the Pahalgam attack, and described India's reaction as "unilateral, unjust, politically motivated, extremely irresponsible and devoid of legal merit". Despite Indian assertions, Pakistan has in its possession irrefutable evidence of India's involvement in terrorism in Pakistan, such as the confession of an Indian Navy officer, Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav (Council, 2025).

Pakistan alleged that India was carrying out attacks in its territory for the fourth consecutive nights, including ballistic missile strikes on at least three air bases. In retaliation, Pakistan declared a large-scale military operation named Operation Bunyan Marsoos (an Arabic phrase meaning: a structure made of lead) on at least six Indian military bases (Aljazeera, 2025). Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump alleged on Tuesday that seven planes were shot down by Pakistan during the brief-lived military conflict between Pakistan and India in May. Trump said, "Seven brand new, beautiful planes were shot down" (Ajansi, 2025). Operation Bunyan Marsoos involved airstrikes, missile launchings and deployment of armed drones, which targeted Indian military bases and infrastructure (Tahira, 2025).

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in his statement on April 26, 2025, termed the Indian response as a part of the "permanent blame game" and said that "this never-ending blame game must be ended in the interest of regional peace" (The Hindi, 2025). He also stated that Pakistan is "willing to support a neutral, transparent, and internationally monitored investigation into the incident" (Time of India, 2025). This official response from Pakistan shows Pakistan's willingness to

cooperate, while hinting that India is using the attack as a cover-up to pursue its "real" intentions and to legitimise its hostile policies towards Pakistan.

It is an example of counter-securitization, in which the "victim" seeks to avoid being constrained by an imposed threat identity.

International Reaction and Critical Evaluation of Securitization

The international reaction to the Pahalgam crisis, mirror South Asian conflict management pattern, where international actors always focus on de-escalation over blame game. UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said, at the daily news briefing in New York on Friday.

"We again urge both the Government of India and the Government of Pakistan to exercise maximum restraint to ensure the situation does not deteriorate further," (United Nations, 2025).

The United Nations called for restraint and dialogue, while refusing to take sides, a position it has taken in previous India-Pakistan battles. The ambassadors reiterated that, "Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security". UN pointed out that such acts are "criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation, wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed.". This non-interventionism is consistent with the UN's approach to not issue any legal or political judgements in bilateral cases of terrorist attribution, as indicated in its peace and security mandates (United Nations, 2025). This stance restrains international endorsement of securitizing claims, and blocks the international legitimisation of unilateral threat framings.

Statements of external actors and great powers highlight their concern for stability. US diplomatic statements prioritised counter-terrorism coordination and de-escalation, to prevent inter-state conflicts. United States President Trump states that;

"The dispute over Kashmir is 1,500 years old and leaders of both India and Pakistan will figure out one way or the other how to deescalate tensions in the volatile region, offer to mediate." (Desai, Abbas, & Raimedhi, 2025; US. Department of State, 2025).

The attack in Pahalgam provoked a fresh round of armed conflict in the disputed region and has since seen the United States (US) and China urging both India and Pakistan to cool down the situation and refrain from further escalation to keep the peace in the region. In the backdrop of tensions, responding to media questions during a routine press conference, China urged the two sides to de-escalate and welcomed a Sino-Russian investigation, a move by Pakistan to help de-escalate tensions. Although China supported Pakistan's demand for an impartial investigation into the Pahalgam attack, the spokesperson's response did not specifically align with either side, but rather called for cooperation and harmony in a way that is typical of China's foreign policy (Policy, 2025). This is part of balance-of-power in world affairs, where South Asia is viewed as a nuclear "hot spot", in need of escalation management.

Various countries such as the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Gulf nations demanded restraint and offered to mediate between the two parties. The international reaction was however seen as having been timed out, with the reaction coming at the time when both India and Pakistan were on the verge of a full-scale war (Tahira, 2025).

Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde argue that securitization is optimally effective only when the audience accepts extraordinary measures, that directly align with Copenhagen school. In this instance, international audiences did not wholly accept the securitization of Pakistan as an unquestioned threat, limiting the international acceptance of India's escalatory policies (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998).

Conclusion

The terror attack of 22 April 2025 in which 26 civilians were killed in the Baisaran Valley close to Pahalgam became a major security issue between India and Pakistan because it was quickly securitised from a terrorism issue to one of national security. The instant blame on Pakistan by the Indian side was followed by extreme measures such as the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty on 23 April 2025, visa bans, diplomatic expulsions, border crackdowns and Operation Sindoor on 7 May 2025, what it claimed to be terrorist infrastructure within Pakistan. These measures reflected the core logic of securitization as identified by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), where a issue is removed from the realm of politics and moved into the emergency domain. The statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which directly equated terrorism with state sponsorship, particularly the phrase, "terror and talks cannot go together" and "water and blood cannot flow together," established a perception of Pakistan as

a direct threat to Indian sovereignty, integrity and unity. The domestic political consensus, including opposition backing and intense media campaigns, finalised audience acceptance, necessary for securitization process.

But the securitization at the international level was only partially achieved. The United States, Russia, Gulf states and the United Nations condemned terrorism and called for regional security, but none entirely accepted India's unilateral finger-pointing at Pakistan, or legitimated unconstrained. Pakistan's denials of the charges and its calls for an international investigation blocked full international legitimation of the India's threat. The result was a divided legitimacy, where India secured diplomatic support for extraordinary measures, but not full acceptance. The case highlights that securitization is not just about violence but also political framing, institutional legitimations and audience acceptance, both in the domestic and international arena. For South Asia, crisis securitization creates a strategic distrust, which undermines diplomatic institutions and institutionalises temporary security threats as permanent conflict. Until de-securitization occurs, the India-Pakistan relationship remains mired in a cycle in which violence poses a permanent confrontation.

Recommendations

1. India and Pakistan should establish a permanent bilateral crisis between the foreign ministries and the military leadership to avoid immediate escalation in the aftermath of terrorist attacks and minimise the risk of miscalculation.
2. Independent international investigation mechanisms, such as those set up under the United Nations or some other mutually agreed-upon multilateral institution should be triggered before state-to-state attribution of terrorism, especially in a high-stakes nuclear environment.
3. The Indus Waters Treaty should not be subjected to political retaliation because more than 240 million people indirectly or directly rely on the Indus basin system and misuse of the treaty leads to instability.
4. Media regulatory bodies should set standards for crisis journalism to avoid sensationalism, and the rapid creation of a war consensus during interstate crises.
5. India and Pakistan's backchannel diplomacy should continue even when their official diplomacy is on hold because secret diplomacy has prevented escalation in South Asian crises in the past.
6. Regional forums like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation should be reactivated for institutionalised conflict prevention, confidence-building and cross-border institutional engagement.
7. Major powers, such as the US, China and the Gulf states, should pursue systematic diplomacy for de-escalation rather than selective strategic containment, which indirectly enhances coercive gestures.
8. Pakistan should challenge unilateral securitization by using transparent legal investigation and multilateral verification regimes in its communication strategy.
9. India should focus on political engagement, civil administration, and local confidence-building in Jammu and Kashmir to ensure domestic issues are not externalised as interstate security threats.
10. Regional peace requires de-securitization of Kashmir by moving away from military management to sustained political dialogue, legal engagement and human security cooperation on both sides of the Line of Control.

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