DOI: 10.71317/jgst.2.11.2026.972
Journal of Global Social Transformation
Journal homepage: https://rjsaonline.org/index.php/JGST

India's Cold Start Doctrine and Its Effects on Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism and Strategic Policy

Sharjeel Hassan[1]
[1] MSc (Applied Psychology, Beaconhouse National University), LLB, MPhil (Peace and Conflict/Counter-Terrorism Studies), School Education Department, Government of the Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: sharjerl2004@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Submission:
September 30, 2026
Revised:
October 13, 2026
Accepted:
October 25, 2026
Available Online:
November 05, 2026

Keywords:
Cold Start Doctrine, Pakistan, counter-terrorism policy, nuclear deterrence, Full Spectrum Deterrence, South Asia strategic stability, stability–instability paradox, Operation Sindoor.

Corresponding author:
Sharjeel Hassan
Email:
sharjerl2004@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

India's Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) emerged from the mobilization failures of Operation Parakram (2001–2002) as an attempt to create a rapid, limited-war option against Pakistan capable of punishing suspected state sponsorship of terrorism without triggering nuclear retaliation. This paper examines the doctrine's origins, its evolution from an armor-centric "shallow-thrust" concept into a 2025–2026 posture built around Integrated Battle Groups, drones, and stand-off strike capability, and its cascading effects on Pakistan's strategic and counter-terrorism policy. Employing a qualitative document-analysis methodology grounded in deterrence theory and the stability–instability paradox, with sources coded by evidentiary tier and the central claim evaluated against a conservative process-tracing standard, the paper argues that Cold Start's principal effect on Pakistan has been structural rather than direct: it reshaped the architecture within which Pakistan conducts counter-terrorism, pushing Islamabad toward tactical nuclear weapons and a doctrine of "Full Spectrum Deterrence" — nuclear coverage extended across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels — reinforcing — alongside older, longer-standing drivers — a bifurcation between domestic counter-terrorism policy (e.g., the National Action Plan) and India-facing militancy governed by deterrence logic, and shaping conventional force allocation along the eastern border. The paper concludes by assessing how the 2025 India–Pakistan crisis (Operation Sindoor) and the doctrine's pivot into the aerial and drone domain are altering this dynamic, and offers directions for future research.

Introduction

Background

Since India and Pakistan's overt nuclearization in May 1998, the two states have operated within a strategic environment in which large-scale conventional war is widely regarded as prohibitively costly, yet sub-conventional conflict — cross-border militancy, terrorism, and proxy warfare — has continued largely unabated.[1] This pattern is commonly theorized as the "stability–instability paradox," in which strategic nuclear parity stabilizes the highest rungs of the escalation ladder while creating permissive conditions for conflict at lower levels. India's Cold Start Doctrine represents New Delhi's most sustained attempt to escape this paradox: to

[1] Jaganath Sankaran, "The Enduring Power of Bad Ideas: 'Cold Start' and Battlefield Nuclear Weapons in South Asia," *Arms Control Today*, November 2014, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-11/features/enduring-power-bad-ideas-cold-start-and-battlefield-nuclear-weapons-south-asia.

construct a conventional military option fast enough to punish Pakistan for terrorist attacks attributed to Pakistan-based groups before international diplomatic intervention or Pakistani counter-mobilization could occur, yet limited enough in scope to remain below Pakistan's nuclear threshold.

Research Problem and Question

Existing scholarship has extensively documented Cold Start's military-technical dimensions — force restructuring, Integrated Battle Groups, infrastructure investment — and, separately, Pakistan's nuclear response in the form of tactical weapons and Full Spectrum Deterrence.[2] Less attention has been paid to systematically tracing how this doctrinal contest has shaped Pakistan's *counter-terrorism* policy specifically, as distinct from its nuclear or conventional force posture narrowly defined. This paper addresses that gap by asking: **How has India's Cold Start Doctrine influenced the substance, priorities, and institutional architecture of Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy?** This paper argues that the relationship is structural rather than direct: Cold Start did not rewrite Pakistani counter-terrorism law or practice, but it altered the deterrence architecture within which that policy is made — pushing Islamabad toward tactical nuclear weapons and Full Spectrum Deterrence, and reinforcing a durable bifurcation between the institutions that govern domestic counter-terrorism and the deterrence logic that governs India-facing militancy.

Significance

The question matters for three reasons. First, Pakistan's counter-terrorism performance has direct consequences for regional and international security, including its standing before bodies such as the Financial Action Task Force. Second, the doctrinal contest between Cold Start and Full Spectrum Deterrence is frequently cited as one of the most dangerous nuclear dyads in the world, making its interaction with terrorism-related triggers a matter of first-order importance. Third, the 2025 Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor have reopened active debate about whether this dynamic is stabilizing or escalatory, giving the question renewed policy relevance.

Structure

Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework. Section 4 describes the methodology. Sections 5 through 8 present the analysis: the doctrine's origins and evolution, Pakistan's threat perception, its effects on Pakistani strategic and counter-terrorism policy, and the 2025 inflection point. Section 9 discusses limitations and contending interpretations, and Section 10 concludes with implications for policy and future research.

Literature Review

The origins and contested reality of Cold Start

The doctrine's genesis is generally traced to the 2001–2002 Operation Parakram crisis, in which India's strike corps required roughly three to four weeks to mobilize following the December 2001 Parliament attack, by which point strategic surprise and coercive leverage had been lost.[3] Reporting attributes the doctrine's initial articulation to around April 2004, associated with then-Army Chief General N. C. Vij and drawing on General Padmanabhan's account of efforts to place offensive formations on operational footing "from a cold start."[4] A substantial strand of the literature, however, has long questioned whether Cold Start was ever fully resourced. A widely cited 2008 U.S. diplomatic cable assessed that India had not implemented the doctrine even after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks and characterized it as "a mixture of myth and reality."[5]

[2] Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Their Impact on Stability," June 30, 2016, https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/06/pakistans-tactical-nuclear-weapons-and-their-impact-on-stability; Arms Control Association, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine," *Arms Control Today*, October 2023, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/pakistans-evolving-nuclear-doctrine.

[3] Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 158–190; Sumit Ganguly and S. Paul Kapur, *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

[4] Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?" 160–164.

[5] U.S. Embassy New Delhi, diplomatic cable, February 16, 2010, signed by Ambassador Timothy J. Roemer, released via WikiLeaks; reported in Deccan Herald, "India's Cold Start: Mixture, Myth," accessed September 2026, https://www.deccanherald.com/world/indias-cold-start-mixture-myth-2532635.

Pakistan's nuclear and doctrinal response

A second strand of literature documents Pakistan's response in the nuclear domain. Sankaran and the Carnegie Endowment trace Pakistan's April 2011 test of the Nasr (Hatf-IX) short-range tactical missile directly to concerns about Cold Start, and describe the formal adoption of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) in September 2013 as an effort to close the sub-strategic "gap" the doctrine was designed to exploit.[6] The Arms Control Association and ORF both situate FSD within Pakistan's broader shift from "credible minimum deterrence" toward a posture covering strategic, operational, and tactical levels simultaneously.[7] Comparative Strategy's two-decade retrospective provides the most recent scholarly synthesis of the doctrine's operational development, including India's investment in Integrated Battle Groups, rail and road infrastructure, and surveillance systems.[8]

Counter-terrorism policy literature

Literature on Pakistan's domestic counter-terrorism framework — principally the National Action Plan adopted after the December 2014 Army Public School attack in Peshawar — has generally been produced separately from the Cold Start/FSD literature, with comparatively little cross-referencing between the two bodies of work. This paper treats that separation itself as an analytically significant finding rather than a gap to be regretted.

The 2025–2026 literature

A final, emerging strand covers the April 2025 Pahalgam attack, the May 2025 Operation Sindoor crisis, and India's subsequent pivot toward drone- and electronic-warfare-based operational concepts, demonstrated in the October 2025 Babina/Mhow exercise.[9] This literature is produced close to real time by policy commentators on both sides of the border and should be read with the customary caution applied to contemporaneous, non-peer-reviewed analysis of an unresolved crisis.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on two complementary theoretical traditions. The first is classical deterrence theory, particularly the distinction between *deterrence by punishment* and *deterrence by denial*, which is used to interpret the shift in Pakistani doctrine from a punishment-based "credible minimum deterrence" posture toward a denial-oriented Full Spectrum Deterrence intended to foreclose specific operational options available to an adversary.[10] The second is the stability–instability paradox, as commonly applied in South Asian strategic studies,[11] which frames Cold Start and FSD as a single interactive system: each side's efforts to secure escalation dominance at one rung of the ladder shift risk-taking behavior to adjacent rungs, rather than eliminating risk altogether. Together, these frameworks support the paper's central claim that Cold Start's effect on Pakistani counter-terrorism policy is best understood as an indirect, structural consequence of a deterrence competition rather than a direct policy transmission.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative document-analysis methodology, drawing on open-source secondary literature: peer-reviewed journal articles, think-tank and policy-institute publications, contemporaneous journalism, and official statements by Pakistani and Indian defense officials. Sources were selected to represent both Indian and Pakistani strategic-studies perspectives, alongside Western (largely American) arms-control literature, in order to triangulate claims that are often contested along national lines.

[6] Sankaran, "Enduring Power of Bad Ideas"; Carnegie Endowment, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons."
[7] Arms Control Association, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine"; Observer Research Foundation, "Pakistan's Latest Nuclear Antics in the Form of Full Spectrum Deterrence," November 3, 2024, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/pakistans-latest-nuclear-antics-in-the-form-of-full-spectrum-deterrence.
[8] Usman Haidera, "Two Decades of India's Cold Start Doctrine," *Comparative Strategy* 45, no. 3 (2025), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01495933.2025.2580956.
[9] Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR), "The Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine: From Terrestrial to Aerial Domain," October 27, 2025, https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/the-evolution-of-indias-cold-start-doctrine-from-terrestrial-to-aerial-domain/; Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS) Islamabad, "The Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine: From Terrestrial to Aerial Domain," October 28, 2025, https://ciss.org.pk/indias-drones-and-counter-drones-drill-a-transition-from-terrestrial-space-to-airspace-domain/.
[10] Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 3–17; Arms Control Association, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine."
[11] Glenn H. Snyder, "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror," in *The Balance of Power*, ed. Paul Seabury (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), 184–201; S. Paul Kapur, "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe," *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005).

Given the doctrine's classified and partially deniable character on the Indian side, and the deliberate ambiguity Pakistan maintains around its nuclear thresholds, the analysis relies on inference from declaratory statements, force-posture changes, and documented crisis behavior rather than on primary classified sources, which are not publicly available. This is consistent with standard practice in the open-source strategic-studies literature on South Asian nuclear dynamics.[12] The author also attempted to supplement this base with interviews of serving and retired Pakistan Army officers; this limitation is discussed in Section 9. For the empirical comparison added in Sections 7.7–7.9, the study also uses a structured event comparison of four crisis episodes (2001–02, 2008, 2019 and 2025), SIPRI's January 2025 nuclear-force estimates and 2024 military-expenditure data, and PIPS annual terrorism indicators for 2023–24. These indicators are used for descriptive triangulation, not statistical causal identification; differences in source definitions and the limited availability of official data are treated as constraints.

Evidence coding. To support conservative causal inference, sources cited in this paper are treated as falling into four evidentiary tiers. Tier 1 comprises primary documents and verbatim official statements: legislation, court and tribunal findings, diplomatic cables, and on-the-record remarks by named officials. Tier 2 comprises peer-reviewed academic scholarship. Tier 3 comprises think-tank and policy-institute analysis, including reports from bodies such as the Pak Institute for Peace Studies, the Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research, and the Arms Control Association. Tier 4 comprises contemporaneous journalism, used chiefly to establish dates, sequencing, and officially reported facts rather than interpretive claims. Interpretive and causal claims in this paper draw primarily on Tier 1 and Tier 2 sources; Tier 3 and Tier 4 sources are used mainly for descriptive, dateable facts — budget figures, casualty counts, legislative timelines — and, wherever a claim is load-bearing for the argument, are cross-referenced against at least one independently sourced account.

Process-tracing standard. The paper's central causal claim — that Cold Start restructured the architecture within which Pakistani counter-terrorism policy operates — is evaluated against the evidentiary-test typology developed by Van Evera and formalized by Bennett, Checkel, and Collier: straw-in-the-wind, hoop, smoking-gun, and doubly decisive tests, distinguished by whether a given piece of evidence is necessary, sufficient, both, or neither for the hypothesis under examination.[13] Given the absence of interview access and the reliance on open-source material discussed below, the evidence marshalled here is judged capable of clearing hoop tests — necessary-condition evidence that, if absent, would eliminate the bifurcation hypothesis, such as the documented coincidence of Full Spectrum Deterrence's 2013 adoption with a Nasr test explicitly linked to Cold Start by named officials — and multiple straw-in-the-wind tests that are individually inconclusive but collectively consistent with the hypothesis. It does not claim to clear smoking-gun or doubly decisive thresholds, which would require, for example, internal Pakistani deliberative records showing officials explicitly trading off India-facing deterrence investment against domestic counter-terrorism investment in real time.[14]

Rival explanations and falsifiability. Following George and Bennett, the paper specifies rival explanations the evidence does not rule out: that the bifurcation reflects the far older institutional division between the army's India-facing conventional and nuclear planning and the police-and-paramilitary domestic-security apparatus, predating Cold Start by decades (Section 9); that domestic political incentives around the unresolved Kashmir dispute independently sustain tolerance for India-facing militancy irrespective of nuclear doctrine; and that resource competition between the two tracks may be better explained by Pakistan's chronic fiscal constraints than by any doctrine-specific mechanism.[15] Where the paper's language in Sections 8 and 10 hedges the causal claim as operating "alongside older, longer-standing drivers," this reflects the hoop-test rather than smoking-gun standing of the evidence, not stylistic caution alone. Table 1, in Section 7.6, operationalizes the bifurcation claim as a dated, twin-track empirical record against which this standard can be applied and, in principle, falsified.

Origins and Evolution of the Cold Start Doctrine

Operation Parakram and the mobilization problem

India's ten-month mobilization following the December 2001 Parliament attack — the longest and costliest such deployment in the subcontinent's history — exposed critical vulnerabilities in India's ability to translate conventional superiority into timely coercive

[12] Sankaran, "Enduring Power of Bad Ideas"; Carnegie Endowment, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons."
[13] Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 31–32; Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds., *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 823–830.
[14] Bennett and Checkel, *Process Tracing*; Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," 824–827.
[15] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), chap. 10.

leverage. By the time Indian strike formations were mobilized, Pakistan had counter-mobilized and international diplomatic pressure, particularly from Washington, had defused the crisis without extracting Pakistani concessions on cross-border militancy.[16]

The 2004 doctrine and institutionalization

Cold Start proposed restructuring India's large, unwieldy strike corps into smaller Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) — self-contained combined-arms formations capable of launching shallow, multi-pronged incursions of roughly 50–100 kilometers into Pakistani territory within 48–96 hours of a decision to act.[17] Even as senior Indian officials periodically denied the doctrine's existence, incremental force restructuring proceeded over the following two decades: improved border infrastructure, enhanced night-fighting capability, "shoot-and-scoot" artillery, and modernized surveillance and communications systems.[18]

The 2025–2026 shift: validation and the aerial pivot

The doctrine's status changed materially following the April 2025 Pahalgam attack and India's May 2025 response, Operation Sindoor. Indian officials, including the Chief of Defence Staff, have since characterized the operation as having "created space" for conventional action under the nuclear threshold.[19] In October 2025, India conducted its first dedicated Cold Start drone and counter-drone exercise at Babina and Mhow, integrating the Army, Navy, and Air Force around AI-enabled drones, electronic warfare, and stand-off strike systems.[20] Section 8 develops the strategic logic behind this shift and its implications for Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy.

Pakistan's Threat Perception

Pakistani strategists have generally interpreted Cold Start not as a general-purpose warfighting concept but as an instrument specifically aimed at Pakistan's tolerance of anti-India militant proxies. The perceived logic is that, absent a credible Indian punitive option, Pakistan's nuclear ambiguity alone had sufficed to deter large-scale retaliation for attacks attributed to Pakistan-based groups; Cold Start threatened to close that gap by offering India a punitive option fast and limited enough that Pakistan's strategic-level nuclear forces would not credibly be employed in response. Critically, this perception shaped Pakistani planning assumptions well before independent analysts agreed the doctrine had reached genuine operational capability — a dynamic consistent with security-dilemma theory, in which perceived rather than actual capability drives counter-doctrine formation.

Effects on Pakistan's Strategic and Counter-Terrorism Policy

Nuclear doctrine: from credible minimum deterrence to Full Spectrum Deterrence

The clearest, most direct effect of Cold Start on Pakistani policy is nuclear, and it structures everything downstream in this analysis. Pakistan's traditional "credible minimum deterrence" posture assumed that a modest strategic arsenal sufficed to deter an all-out Indian attack; Cold Start's premise — that India could act at a sub-strategic level without inviting strategic retaliation — was read in Islamabad as reopening exactly the kind of space that made limited war thinkable again. Pakistan's response was the April 2011 test of the Nasr tactical missile and the formal 2013 adoption of Full Spectrum Deterrence, extending doctrine across strategic, operational, and tactical levels so that, in the stated formulation of Pakistan's nuclear planners, India would have "no place to hide" for a limited incursion.[21] Pakistani officials have consistently framed FSD as a strategy to *deter* limited war rather than to fight one,[22] but its practical effect — lowering the threshold at which nuclear weapons could plausibly be used — is regarded by much of the outside arms-control literature as destabilizing rather than reassuring.

Insulating rather than dismantling proxy strategy

A second, more contested effect concerns Pakistan's approach to India-oriented militant groups. Analysts sympathetic to this reading argue that escalation dominance secured via FSD functions as insurance that reduces the perceived cost of continued

[16] Ladwig, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?," 158–160.
[17] Carnegie Endowment, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons."
[18] Haidera, "Two Decades of India's Cold Start Doctrine."
[19] Anil Chauhan, remarks at the launch of the ORF Foreign Policy Survey 2024, quoted in *The Week*, "Why Is Operation Sindoor Unique? CDS Gen Anil Chauhan Explains," July 9, 2025, https://www.theweek.in/news/defence/2025/07/09/why-operation-sindoor-is-unique-cds-gen-anil-chauhan-explains.amp.html.
[20] CSCR, "Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine"; CISS, "Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine."
[21] Arms Control Association, "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine."
[22] Carnegie Endowment, "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons."

tolerance of anti-India militancy, by removing the plausibility of serious Indian conventional punishment as a consequence. This paper treats this as a structural incentive documented in the literature rather than as evidence of deliberate intent; nonetheless, successfully deterring Cold Start removed one of the few external pressures that might otherwise have pushed Pakistan toward more thorough action against India-focused militant organizations.

Domestic counter-terrorism policy under an external deterrence shadow

Pakistan's principal domestic counter-terrorism framework, the National Action Plan, adopted in December 2014 following the Peshawar Army Public School attack, was directed overwhelmingly at internal threats — the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, sectarian militancy, and terrorist financing — rather than at India-oriented groups.[23] The National Counter Terrorism Authority, established to monitor the Plan's twenty points, has tracked implementation — prosecutions, proscriptions, and financing controls — aimed overwhelmingly at domestically focused militant networks, with comparatively little parallel machinery directed at organizations whose principal target is India. This bifurcation is a downstream institutional consequence of the broader environment Cold Start helped entrench: Pakistan's security establishment has tended to treat domestic terrorism as an internal-security and policing problem while treating India-facing militancy as a matter of strategic deterrence and the unresolved Kashmir dispute, governed by nuclear signaling rather than by counter-terrorism law enforcement or prosecution. Cold Start reinforced this separation by casting the India-facing dimension primarily as a question of conventional and nuclear force posture, which in turn has made it easier for the Pakistani state to resist sustained international pressure — including from the Financial Action Task Force, whose 2018–2022 grey-listing of Pakistan targeted terrorist-financing controls rather than the underlying question of which organizations were financed — to act uniformly against all designated terrorist organizations irrespective of their principal target.[24]

Institutional Capacity: NACTA, the Anti-Terrorism Act, and the Empirical Record

The bifurcation argued above is not merely a matter of declared priorities; it is visible in the institutional record of the bodies Pakistan actually built to fight domestic terrorism. The National Counter Terrorism Authority, first established administratively in 2008 and placed on a statutory footing by the NACTA Act, 2013, was designed as the coordinating hub of this domestic effort — collecting intelligence, formulating strategy, and monitoring the National Action Plan's twenty points.[25] In practice, the authority has been chronically under-resourced relative to its mandate: its own 2018 annual report recorded 631 of 841 sanctioned positions vacant, and its Board of Governors — the mechanism meant to bring the military, intelligence services, and federal and provincial ministries into a single forum — held no meeting at all between NACTA's creation and 2018.[26] Its budget grew substantially over the same period, from roughly 95 million rupees in 2013–14 to over 1.6 billion rupees by 2017–18, yet remained a fraction of the resources allocated to the military and intelligence services with which it was meant to coordinate as an equal.[27] NACTA's more concrete successes — developing Pakistan's first National Terrorism Financing Risk Assessment and supporting the country's FATF submissions — came precisely in the financing-control domain the FATF process demanded, rather than in the broader intelligence-fusion role its statute envisaged.[28]

Pakistan's domestic legal response has followed a similar pattern of improvisation rather than sustained reform. The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 remains the principal statute for prosecuting terrorism domestically, but its perceived inadequacy after the December 2014 Army Public School attack led Parliament to create a parallel, explicitly temporary track: military courts empowered to try civilians on terrorism charges under the 21st Constitutional Amendment, enacted within weeks of the attack and carrying a two-year sunset clause intended to give the ordinary criminal justice system time to reform.[29] That reform did not occur within the

[23] National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Government of Pakistan, "National Action Plan, 2014," accessed September 2026, https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/.

[24] Pakistan was placed on the FATF's list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring in June 2018 and removed in October 2022 after completing its 2018 and 2021 action plans on terrorist-financing controls; Associated Press of Pakistan, "Pakistan Exits FATF's Grey List: FO," October 21, 2022, https://www.app.com.pk/national/pakistan-exits-fatfs-grey-list-fo.

[25] National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Government of Pakistan, "National Action Plan, 2014" [statutory background], accessed September 2026, https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/.

[26] Hassan Naqvi, "Can Faisal Naseer Fix Pakistan's Broken Counter-Terrorism Architecture?," *The Friday Times*, September 6, 2026, https://www.thefridaytimes.com/06-Sep-2026/can-faisal-naseer-fix-pakistan-s-broken-counter-terrorism-architecture.

[27] Naqvi, "Can Faisal Naseer Fix Pakistan's Broken Counter-Terrorism Architecture?"; Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), "National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA): A Critical Review," accessed September 2026, https://crss.pk/national-counter-terrorism-authority-nacta-a-critical-review/.

[28] Naqvi, "Can Faisal Naseer Fix Pakistan's Broken Counter-Terrorism Architecture?"

[29] Dawn, "Curtain Comes Down on Military Courts," January 7, 2017, https://www.dawn.com/news/1306928; International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), "Pakistan: As Military Courts Lapse, Government Must Prioritize Reform of the Criminal Justice

allotted window; instead, Parliament extended the military courts' jurisdiction for a further two years via the 23rd Amendment in 2017, after which the expanded jurisdiction was allowed to lapse in 2019 without the promised strengthening of anti-terrorism courts materializing.[30] International legal observers treated the lapse as confirmation that the underlying capacity problem had gone unaddressed rather than resolved, and proposals to reintroduce comparable emergency powers — including a 2024 push to restore preventive-detention provisions within the Anti-Terrorism Act itself — indicate that the pattern of crisis-driven, temporary legal fixes has persisted.[31]

The empirical trajectory of domestic terrorism offers a further, largely India-independent test of this institutional record. Terrorist violence declined markedly following the National Action Plan's adoption and the military's ex-FATA operations, reaching a low point around 2019–2020.[32] That decline reversed after the Afghan Taliban's August 2021 return to power in Kabul and the collapse of Islamabad's negotiations with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan in November 2022: Pakistan recorded a seventeen percent rise in terrorist incidents in 2023 and a further seventy percent rise in 2024, with the Pakistan Security Report series describing a security landscape that risks regressing toward pre-2014 levels if the trend continues.[33] This resurgence is driven overwhelmingly by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Islamic State–Khorasan Province, and Baloch separatist groups operating from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Afghan sanctuary — organizations with no meaningful India-facing dimension. That the institutions built after 2014 (NACTA, the Anti-Terrorism Act, the provincial Counter Terrorism Departments, and the now-lapsed military courts) have been tested primarily against this Afghanistan-linked threat, and found only partially adequate to it even on its own terms, supports the paper's central claim that the domestic counter-terrorism apparatus and the India-facing deterrence apparatus have developed along largely separate tracks, evaluated against separate threats, with limited institutional traffic between them.

Force posture and resource allocation

Beyond doctrine, Cold Start has shaped Pakistan's conventional force posture in ways that indirectly affect counter-terrorism capacity. Pakistan has invested in short-range and cruise-missile systems (Nasr, Abdali, Babur) and quick-reaction artillery such as Chinese-supplied SH-15 howitzers along the Line of Control, with border-facing realignments explicitly justified by Pakistani officials as responses to Cold Start and related "Pro-Active Operations" concepts.[34] Resources devoted to this conventional and nuclear hedging compete, at the margin, with resources that might otherwise support internal counter-terrorism policing, Afghan-border management, or de-radicalization programming.

A Twin-Track Timeline

Table 1 summarizes the empirical record underlying the bifurcation argument as a dated, twin-track timeline, drawing on the sources cited throughout Section 7. With the partial exceptions of 2008 and 2013 — where an India-facing development and a domestic-institutional development happen to fall in the same year without being causally connected in the sources consulted — the two tracks are triggered by largely distinct events: the left-hand track by Indian doctrinal shifts and India-Pakistan crises, the right-hand track by domestic attacks, legislative sunset clauses, and FATF review cycles.

Table 1. Parallel timelines of India-facing deterrence policy and Pakistan's domestic counter-terrorism institutions, 2001–2026. Sources: as cited in Sections 5–8 and accompanying footnotes.

Year	India-facing deterrence track (Cold Start / FSD / crises)	Domestic counter-terrorism track (NAP / NACTA / ATA / incidents)

System," 2019, https://www.icj.org/pakistan-as-military-courts-lapse-government-must-prioritize-reform-of-the-criminal-justice-system/.

[30] International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), "Pakistan: As Military Courts Lapse."

[31] International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), "Pakistan: As Military Courts Lapse"; "Every Law Needs a Sunset," *The News International*, July 18, 2025, https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1329090-every-law-needs-a-sunset.

[32] Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, accessed September 2026, https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/pakistan-security-report-2023.

[33] Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2024*, January 2025, https://www.pakpips.com/article/8246; Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), *Pakistan Security Report 2023*, accessed September 2026, https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/pakistan-security-report-2023.

[34] ORCASIA, "Pakistan's Quest for 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' Continues," accessed September 2026, https://www.orcasia.org/article/228/pakistans-quest-for-full-spectrum-deterrence-continues; Observer Research Foundation, "Pakistan's Latest Nuclear Antics."

2001–02	Operation Parakram mobilization exposes the rationale later invoked for Cold Start	—
2008	Mumbai attacks; Cold Start doctrine debated internally (per 2010 cable)	National Counter Terrorism Authority established administratively
2011	Nasr (Hatf-IX) short-range missile first tested (April)	—
2013	Full Spectrum Deterrence formally adopted (September)	NACTA Act gives the authority statutory footing; budget ≈ PKR 95 million (2013–14)
2014	—	Army Public School attack (December); National Action Plan adopted
2015	—	21st Amendment establishes military courts (two-year sunset clause)
2017–18	—	23rd Amendment extends military courts two years; NACTA budget grows to ≈ PKR 1.6 billion; Board of Governors meets for the first time; 631 of 841 posts found vacant
2018	—	FATF places Pakistan on its increased-monitoring ("grey") list (June)
2019	—	Military courts' expanded jurisdiction lapses, not renewed
2021	—	Afghan Taliban retakes Kabul (August); TTP resurgence begins
2022	—	TTP negotiations collapse (November); FATF removes Pakistan from grey list (October)
2023	—	306 recorded terrorist attacks, +17% year-on-year (PIPS)
2024	—	521 recorded terrorist attacks, +70% year-on-year (PIPS)
2025	Operation Sindoor crisis (May); first sustained India–Pakistan drone exchange	Quadcopter strike kills four children in Mir Ali, North Waziristan (May)
2026	—	NIFTAC intelligence-fusion centre launched; Faisal Naseer appointed NACTA National Coordinator (September)

Comparative crisis evidence: changing response timelines and operational domains

A comparison of four major India–Pakistan crises helps distinguish the original Cold Start problem from the broader evolution of cross-border coercion. The comparison is descriptive rather than a claim that every Indian response was an implementation of Cold Start. The 2008 episode illustrates non-use of a major conventional ground offensive and contemporaneous doubts about operational readiness, while the 2019 and 2025 crises show an increasingly prominent role for air power, precision stand-off weapons and unmanned systems. The sequence therefore supports a narrower proposition: the strategic problem that Cold Start sought to address—how to generate a timely punitive option under nuclear constraints—has persisted, even as the means have diversified.

Crisis / episode	Documented response and observable facts	Comparative implication
Operation Parakram (2001–02)	India mobilised major strike formations after the December 2001 Parliament attack. The mobilisation took weeks; Ladwig's study describes the resulting search for faster, more limited options.	The clearest antecedent to Cold Start: delay reduced the utility of conventional coercion and created an incentive for faster force packages.
Mumbai attacks (2008)	India did not launch a major conventional ground offensive against Pakistan. A contemporaneous US diplomatic assessment later described Cold Start as a mixture of "myth and reality" and questioned its implementation.	Shows the gap between doctrinal concept and operational readiness; the existence of a doctrine should not be treated as proof of operational execution.
Pulwama–Balakot (2019)	Following the 14 February Pulwama attack, India conducted an air strike at Balakot on 26 February; Pakistan responded with an air operation, an Indian aircraft was downed and its pilot was returned on 1 March.	Aerial punitive action and reciprocal air operations became central, demonstrating that crisis escalation could occur without a ground-based IBG incursion.
Pahalgam–Operation Sindoor (7–10 May 2025)	The Stimson Center's early assessment records a four-day conflict, Indian cruise-missile use, Pakistani short-range ballistic-missile use, and drone operations by both sides. It also stresses that some claims and damage assessments remained contested.	The crisis indicates a multi-domain environment. It is evidence of expanded strike and counter-strike options, not by itself proof that the original Cold Start doctrine was formally activated.

Sources: Ladwig (2007/08); U.S. Congressional Research Service (2019); Stimson Center (Clary, 2025). The table distinguishes documented events from interpretation; contested claims are not presented as independently verified facts.

Quantitative indicators: nuclear balance, military expenditure and domestic terrorism

Available quantitative indicators provide context for the structural argument, although none alone establishes causation. SIPRI estimated that, as of January 2025, India possessed 180 nuclear warheads and Pakistan 170. These are external estimates, not official declarations, and should not be read as a measure of operational readiness or survivability. The near numerical parity coexists with substantial asymmetry in conventional economic resources. SIPRI reported Indian military expenditure of US$86.1 billion in 2024, a 1.6 per cent real-terms increase over 2023. This figure illustrates India's larger spending capacity, but a direct spending ratio is not calculated here because the comparable Pakistan figure and methodological basis were not verified from the same source extract. The comparison is therefore deliberately limited to the documented Indian figure and the SIPRI nuclear estimates.

Indicator	India	Pakistan	Analytical use / caveat
Estimated nuclear warheads, January 2025	180	170	SIPRI estimates; not official inventories and not a measure of deployable forces.
Military expenditure, 2024	US$86.1 billion	Not inserted	SIPRI identifies India as the fifth-largest military spender; no unsupported bilateral ratio is inferred.
Doctrinal emphasis in the literature	Rapid, limited conventional options; evolving air/stand-off and integrated formations	Full Spectrum Deterrence, including tactical-level signalling	A comparison of declared/analysed posture, not a claim of doctrinal equivalence or exact operational capability.

Sources: SIPRI Yearbook 2025, Summary (world nuclear forces, January 2025); SIPRI, Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024 (April 2025).

The domestic counter-terrorism record provides a separate empirical test of the paper's claim that Pakistan's internal-security track has its own drivers and outcomes. The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) recorded 306 terrorist attacks in 2023 and 521 in 2024, a 70 per cent increase. It reported 852 deaths in 2024, 23 per cent higher than in 2023, and 1,092 people injured. PIPS further attributed 335 attacks to religiously inspired militant groups and 175 to nationalist insurgent groups in 2024; 11 attacks were sectarian-related. More than 95 per cent of the attacks were concentrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. These figures indicate a severe domestic security challenge concentrated largely in the western provinces, which cannot plausibly be reduced to the India-facing Cold Start dynamic.

PIPS indicator	2023	2024	Change / interpretation
Terrorist attacks	306	521	70% increase
Deaths in terrorist attacks	Not stated here	852	23% increase over 2023, as reported by PIPS
Anti-militant operations by security forces	Not stated here	158	PIPS reports a 22% increase over 2023
Militants killed in operational strikes	373	621	More than 66% increase

Source: Pak Institute for Peace Studies, Pakistan Security Report 2024 (January 2025). PIPS figures are the institute's event-based coding and should not be conflated with other datasets that use different definitions, thresholds or inclusion rules. The 2024 increase demonstrates the scale of domestic CT pressure; it does not, by itself, demonstrate that India's doctrine caused any particular Pakistani policy choice.

What the comparisons establish—and what they do not

Taken together, the comparisons support three bounded findings. First, the 2001–02 mobilisation problem and later crises show a persistent search for timely punitive options, but the 2008, 2019 and 2025 episodes caution against treating Cold Start as a single, consistently implemented operational template. Second, SIPRI's estimates show that both states remain nuclear-armed, with broadly comparable estimated warhead totals; SIPRI's Indian spending figure provides context but, without a matched Pakistan figure in this comparison, does not establish a bilateral spending ratio. Third, PIPS data demonstrate that Pakistan's domestic terrorist-violence trajectory has varied independently and remains geographically concentrated in areas far from the principal India-facing theatre. These findings are consistent with the paper's structural argument, but they do not prove that Cold Start caused Pakistan's domestic counter-terrorism bifurcation. That causal claim remains an inference supported by chronology, declaratory doctrine and institutional separation, and would require internal decision records or elite interviews for stronger confirmation.

The 2025 Inflection Point

Building on the doctrinal shift traced in Section 5.3, the May 2025 Operation Sindoor crisis is treated in the most recent literature as a watershed. Indian officials argue the crisis demonstrated Pakistan's unwillingness to cross the nuclear threshold even under sustained conventional pressure, which some Indian strategists interpret as confirming that space exists for punitive conventional action — the original premise of Cold Start — even within a nuclearized environment.[35] Pakistani commentary, by contrast, continues to credit Full Spectrum Deterrence with preventing further escalation. Both interpretations now function as reference points for the next crisis, and India's subsequent pivot toward drone- and electronic-warfare-based operational concepts[36] — the aerial and drone-centric variant introduced in Section 5.3 — reflects a judgment that Pakistan's tactical nuclear posture has blunted the original, armor-heavy conception of Cold Start, and that comparable punitive effect is achievable at lower escalation risk through stand-off means. For Pakistan, this shift poses a new problem: a drone-centric "Cold Start" is harder to deter through a strategy calibrated to blunt armored incursions, and may push Pakistani doctrine toward further investment in air defense, counter-drone systems, and electronic warfare rather than additional battlefield nuclear systems — with as-yet-unclear implications for the prioritization of domestic counter-terrorism reform.

[35] Chauhan, remarks at the ORF Foreign Policy Survey 2024 launch, quoted in *The Week*, "Why Is Operation Sindoor Unique?"
[36] CSCR, "Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine."

The Aerial and Cyber-Adjacent Pivot: Implications for Counter-Terrorism and Crisis Stability

The drone-centric turn evident in the May 2025 crisis has implications for Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy that extend beyond the force-posture questions addressed above, and the literature on unmanned systems offers tools for assessing them; Gartzke and Walsh's early work specifically modeled the escalation and instability effects of remotely piloted vehicles in the Pakistani context, anticipating many of the dynamics visible in 2025.[37] During the four-day confrontation, India employed Israeli-origin Harop loitering munitions against targets in Pakistan, while Pakistan responded with Turkish-origin YIHA-III and Songar drones alongside the domestically produced Shahpar-II across dozens of locations along the border, with each side also using decoy and electronic-countermeasure tactics against the other's systems.[38] Analysts at the Stimson Center and the Irregular Warfare Initiative describe this exchange as qualitatively different from prior India-Pakistan crises: drones lowered the threshold for the initial use of force, complicated attribution, and compressed the time available for escalation-control decisions relative to manned-aircraft or missile exchanges.[39]

The near-simultaneous use of the nominally dual-capable BrahMos cruise missile within the same crisis illustrates a related risk identified in the cross-domain deterrence literature: instruments that are individually conventional can, in a compressed, multi-domain crisis, be misread as crossing a nuclear threshold — a risk Cold Start's original proponents did not have to weigh at the doctrine's inception.[40] Gartzke and Lindsay's cross-domain deterrence framework, and Schneider's account of deterrence in and through cyberspace within that volume, both argue that adding low-signature, fast-tempo instruments — drones and cyber operations alike — to a dyad's toolkit does not simply supplement existing deterrence relationships but can destabilize them, by shortening decision windows and multiplying the channels through which a crisis can escalate inadvertently.[41] Although no confirmed cyber operation accompanied the May 2025 crisis in the way drones did, both states are understood to maintain offensive cyber capabilities, and the cross-domain literature's core concern — that complexity across domains undermines rather than reinforces classical bilateral deterrence — applies with particular force to a dyad whose entire nuclear posture, including the Cold Start-driven adoption of tactical weapons this paper traces, was designed around a simpler, primarily land-based threat model.

These dynamics bear on domestic counter-terrorism practice as well as on India-Pakistan crisis stability, because the same UAV technologies are simultaneously used by Pakistani security forces against domestic militants. A quadcopter strike on a militant target in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, on May 19, 2025 — within the same week as the India crisis — killed four children of one family and injured five others; Pakistan's military publicly denied responsibility and attributed the strike to militants acting "on the behest of their Indian masters," while residents staged a week-long sit-in demanding accountability.[42] Whoever was responsible, the episode illustrates that domestic drone use against militancy is, so far as is publicly documented, governed by the same general counter-terrorism authorities as ground operations, with no drone-specific oversight framework comparable to the debates over signature strikes that have accompanied comparable technology elsewhere.

For the paper's central argument, the 2025 drone exchange is best read as extending rather than displacing the institutional bifurcation documented in Section 7: it is a new capability layered onto an old division of labor, rather than evidence that the domestic and India-facing tracks are converging. Whether this holds is itself a hoop-test-level empirical question for future research (Section 10). If Pakistan's post-2025 doctrinal adjustments to drones remain confined to hardware and force posture, as they were after the 2011 Nasr test, the bifurcation identified here will simply persist in a new technological form; if instead the shared platform

[37] Erik Gartzke and James Igoe Walsh, "Drones and Their Drawbacks: The Effects of RPVs on Escalation and Instability in Pakistan" (working paper, University of California, San Diego), https://deterrence.ucsd.edu/domains/index.html.
[38] "India-Pakistan Drone Conflict Signals a New Era in Aerial Warfare," DroneXL, May 29, 2025, https://dronexl.co/2025/05/29/india-pakistan-drone-conflict-aerial-warfare/; Sudha Ramachandran, "Drone Warfare Is Redefining India-Pakistan Rivalry," *The Diplomat*, June 5, 2025, https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/drone-warfare-is-redefining-india-pakistan-rivalry/.
[39] Stimson Center, "Drone Warfare in South Asia," December 18, 2025, https://www.stimson.org/2025/drone-warfare-in-south-asia/; "The Strategic Use of Drones in Pakistan–India Irregular Warfare," Irregular Warfare Initiative, July 11, 2026, https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/india-pakistan-drone-warfare/.
[40] Shaza Arif, "Escalation and Restraint: Revisiting the May 2025 Conflict," British American Security Information Council (BASIC), June 3, 2026, https://basicint.org/escalation-and-restraint/.
[41] Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay, eds., *Cross-Domain Deterrence: Strategy in an Era of Complexity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), including Jacquelyn Schneider, "Deterrence in and through Cyberspace," in the same volume.
[42] "Pakistani Military Blames 'Indian-Sponsored' Militants for Children's Death in Northwest This Week," *Arab News*, May 21, 2025, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2601602/amp; Dawn, "Mir Ali Protesters Threaten to March on Capital Today," https://www.dawn.com/news/1913361/mir-ali-protesters-threaten-to-march-on-capital-today.

base drives institutional convergence between NACTA-coordinated domestic counter-terrorism practice and military-run cross-border operations, that would count as evidence against this paper's structural, rather than institutional, account of the mechanism.

Discussion: Contending Interpretations and Limitations

Several caveats qualify the argument advanced above.

Doubts about operational reality. A substantial body of scholarship has long questioned whether Cold Start was ever fully resourced or operationally credible prior to 2025, given persistent Indian shortfalls in mechanized readiness, ammunition stocks, and inter-service integration through much of the 2010s.[43] If the doctrine's practical capability lagged well behind its declaratory existence for most of its history, Pakistan's costliest responses — particularly tactical nuclear weapons — may for years have been calibrated against a threat that was more perceptual than material, though in a security-dilemma framework, perception is itself sufficient to drive counter-doctrine.

Causal overdetermination. Pakistan's reluctance to act comprehensively against India-oriented militant groups predates Cold Start by decades and has multiple contributing causes, including domestic political economy, the military's institutional interests, and the unresolved status of Kashmir. Attributing this reluctance primarily to Cold Start risks overstating a single factor among several plausible causes, and this paper's claim should be read as identifying a contributing structural incentive rather than a sole or sufficient cause.

Stabilizing versus destabilizing framings of FSD. Pakistani officials describe Full Spectrum Deterrence as having restored strategic equilibrium and rendered war "almost unthinkable";[44] a substantial share of Western and Indian analysts instead describe the same posture as escalatory, given the command-and-control risks associated with forward-deployed tactical weapons. This tension is explored directly in recent scholarship on the deterrent logic of limited nuclear options in the Pakistani case,[45] and remains an unresolved empirical and normative debate that this paper does not attempt to adjudicate.

Absence of primary military testimony. As noted in Section 4, the author attempted to secure semi-structured interviews with serving and retired Pakistan Army officers to speak to internal deliberations behind Full Spectrum Deterrence and the National Action Plan's scope. No officer approached consented to be interviewed, whether on the record or on a not-for-attribution basis, which is unsurprising given the classified and politically sensitive nature of the subject matter. This paper's findings are consequently built entirely on open-source declaratory statements, secondary scholarship, and journalism rather than on primary testimony from within the Pakistani security establishment, and should be read with the evidentiary caution that gap implies. Future researchers with existing institutional access or security clearances may be able to close this gap.

Preliminary evidence base for 2025–2026. Much of the analysis of Operation Sindoor's strategic implications is being produced close to real time by partisan policy commentators on both sides of the border; firmer, peer-reviewed scholarly assessment will likely take years to emerge, as it did following the 2001–2002 crisis.

Conclusion and Implications

India's Cold Start Doctrine has not directly rewritten Pakistan's counter-terrorism policy in the narrow sense of legislation, prosecutions, or domestic policing frameworks. Its effect has instead been structural: by threatening a fast, limited conventional punishment for terrorism attributed to Pakistan-based groups, it pushed Pakistan toward tactical nuclear weapons and Full Spectrum Deterrence, which reduced the perceived cost of tolerating anti-India militancy and reinforced — alongside the older domestic-political and Kashmir-related causes discussed in Section 9 — a bifurcated Pakistani approach in which domestic counter-terrorism frameworks such as the National Action Plan address internal militancy while India-facing groups remain governed by deterrence and territorial-dispute logic rather than counter-terrorism policy proper. The April–October 2025 Pahalgam–Sindoor–Babina sequence indicates this dynamic is entering a new phase, as India experiments with drone- and stand-off-based alternatives to the original armor-centric doctrine.

More broadly, this case suggests that in nuclear dyads governed by the stability–instability paradox, a rival's search for escalation-dominant conventional options can reshape a state's domestic institutions indirectly, through the deterrence posture it provokes,

[43] Deccan Herald, "India's Cold Start"; Sankaran, "Enduring Power of Bad Ideas."
[44] Foreign Policy News, "Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence," May 31, 2015, https://foreignpolicynews.org/2015/05/31/pakistans-full-spectrum-deterrence/.
[45] Masahiro Kurita, "The Deterrent Logic of Limited Nuclear Options: A Case Study of Pakistan," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, published online August 10, 2025, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2025.2543864.

even where it leaves formal counter-terrorism law and practice untouched. The bifurcation documented here — between institutions built to fight domestic militancy and a deterrence architecture built to manage an external rival — may be a more general feature of proxy-war dyads under a nuclear overhang, wherever an external doctrinal threat offers a state a cheaper way to manage that threat than reforming its treatment of the proxies at its center. Testing that proposition against other dyads is a natural extension of the process-tracing agenda outlined below.

Policy implications. For regional stability, these findings suggest that international pressure aimed at reforming Pakistani counter-terrorism policy toward India-oriented groups is unlikely to succeed in isolation from the broader deterrence relationship; sustainable change may require parallel confidence-building measures addressing the underlying Cold Start–FSD dynamic. For India, the findings suggest that the search for lower-escalation-risk punitive options is likely to continue driving doctrinal innovation, with corresponding pressure on Pakistan to adapt its deterrent posture in turn.

Future research. Future work should track whether Pakistan's doctrinal response to India's drone-centric pivot follows the pattern established after Nasr — a hardware-and-doctrine response calibrated narrowly to the specific capability — or produces broader change in Pakistan's counter-terrorism institutions. Systematic, comparative process-tracing of specific crisis episodes (2001–02, 2008, 2016, 2019, 2025) would also help disentangle the relative weight of Cold Start–related deterrence dynamics from the other, longer-standing drivers of Pakistani counter-terrorism policy identified in Section 9.

Bibliography

1. "Every Law Needs a Sunset." *The News International*, July 18, 2025. https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1329090-every-law-needs-a-sunset
2. Arab News. "Pakistani Military Blames 'Indian-Sponsored' Militants for Children's Death in Northwest This Week." May 21, 2025. https://www.arabnews.com/node/2601602/amp
3. Arif, Shaza. "Escalation and Restraint: Revisiting the May 2025 Conflict." British American Security Information Council (BASIC), June 3, 2026. https://basicint.org/escalation-and-restraint/
4. Arms Control Association. "Pakistan's Evolving Nuclear Doctrine." *Arms Control Today*, October 2023. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/pakistans-evolving-nuclear-doctrine
5. Bennett, Andrew, and Jeffrey T. Checkel, eds. *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
6. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "Pakistan's Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Their Impact on Stability." June 30, 2016. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/06/pakistans-tactical-nuclear-weapons-and-their-impact-on-stability
7. Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS) Islamabad. "The Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine: From Terrestrial to Aerial Domain." October 28, 2025. https://ciss.org.pk/indias-drones-and-counter-drones-drill-a-transition-from-terrestrial-space-to-airspace-domain/
8. Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS). "National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA): A Critical Review." Accessed September 2026. https://crss.pk/national-counter-terrorism-authority-nacta-a-critical-review/
9. Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR). "The Evolution of India's Cold Start Doctrine: From Terrestrial to Aerial Domain." October 27, 2025. https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/the-evolution-of-indias-cold-start-doctrine-from-terrestrial-to-aerial-domain/
10. Chauhan, Anil. Remarks at the launch of the Observer Research Foundation's Foreign Policy Survey 2024, New Delhi, July 2025. Quoted in *The Week*, "Why Is Operation Sindoor Unique? CDS Gen Anil Chauhan Explains," July 9, 2025. https://www.theweek.in/news/defence/2025/07/09/why-operation-sindoor-is-unique-cds-gen-anil-chauhan-explains.amp.html
11. Clary, Christopher. "Four Days in May: The India-Pakistan Crisis of 2025." Stimson Center, May 28, 2025. https://www.stimson.org/2025/four-days-in-may-the-india-pakistan-crisis-of-2025/
12. Collier, David. "Understanding Process Tracing." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 823–830.

13. Congressional Research Service. "India, Pakistan, and the Pulwama Crisis." IN11057, February 26, 2019. https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/IN11057.html

14. Dawn. "Curtain Comes Down on Military Courts." January 7, 2017. https://www.dawn.com/news/1306928

15. Deccan Herald. "India's Cold Start: Mixture, Myth." Accessed September 2026. https://www.deccanherald.com/world/indias-cold-start-mixture-myth-2532635

16. DroneXL. "India-Pakistan Drone Conflict Signals a New Era in Aerial Warfare." May 29, 2025. https://dronexl.co/2025/05/29/india-pakistan-drone-conflict-aerial-warfare/

17. Financial Action Task Force. Outcomes of the Plenary Meeting, Paris, 20–21 October 2022. Reported in Associated Press of Pakistan, "Pakistan Exits FATF's Grey List: FO," October 21, 2022. https://www.app.com.pk/national/pakistan-exits-fatfs-grey-list-fo

18. Foreign Policy News. "Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence." May 31, 2015. https://foreignpolicynews.org/2015/05/31/pakistans-full-spectrum-deterrence/

19. Ganguly, Sumit, and S. Paul Kapur. *India, Pakistan, and the Bomb: Debating Nuclear Stability in South Asia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

20. Gartzke, Erik, and James Igoe Walsh. "Drones and Their Drawbacks: The Effects of RPVs on Escalation and Instability in Pakistan." Working paper, University of California, San Diego. https://deterrence.ucsd.edu/domains/index.html

21. Gartzke, Erik, and Jon R. Lindsay, eds. *Cross-Domain Deterrence: Strategy in an Era of Complexity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

22. George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

23. Haidera, Usman. "Two Decades of India's Cold Start Doctrine." *Comparative Strategy* 45, no. 3 (2025). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01495933.2025.2580956

24. International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). "Pakistan: As Military Courts Lapse, Government Must Prioritize Reform of the Criminal Justice System." 2019. https://www.icj.org/pakistan-as-military-courts-lapse-government-must-prioritize-reform-of-the-criminal-justice-system/

25. Irregular Warfare Initiative. "The Strategic Use of Drones in Pakistan–India Irregular Warfare." July 11, 2026. https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/india-pakistan-drone-warfare/

26. Kapur, S. Paul. "India and Pakistan's Unstable Peace: Why Nuclear South Asia Is Not Like Cold War Europe." *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2005).

27. Khan, Feroz Hassan. *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012.

28. Kurita, Masahiro. "The Deterrent Logic of Limited Nuclear Options: A Case Study of Pakistan." *Journal of Strategic Studies*, published online August 10, 2025. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2025.2543864

29. Ladwig, Walter C., III. "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine." *International Security* 32, no. 3 (Winter 2007/08): 158–190.

30. Liang, Xiao, Nan Tian, Diego Lopes da Silva, Lorenzo Scarazzato, Zubaida A. Karim, and Jade Guiberteau Ricard. "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2024." SIPRI Fact Sheet, April 2025. https://www.sipri.org/publications/2025/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-military-expenditure-2024

31. Naqvi, Hassan. "Can Faisal Naseer Fix Pakistan's Broken Counter-Terrorism Architecture?" *The Friday Times*, September 6, 2026. https://www.thefridaytimes.com/06-Sep-2026/can-faisal-naseer-fix-pakistan-s-broken-counter-terrorism-architecture

32. National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), Government of Pakistan. "National Action Plan, 2014." Accessed September 2026. https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/

33. Observer Research Foundation (ORF). "Pakistan's Latest Nuclear Antics in the Form of Full Spectrum Deterrence." November 3, 2024. https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/pakistans-latest-nuclear-antics-in-the-form-of-full-spectrum-deterrence

34. ORCASIA. "Pakistan's Quest for 'Full Spectrum Deterrence' Continues." Accessed September 2026. https://www.orcasia.org/article/228/pakistans-quest-for-full-spectrum-deterrence-continues

35. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). *Pakistan Security Report 2023*. Accessed September 2026. https://www.pakpips.com/article/book/pakistan-security-report-2023

36. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). *Pakistan Security Report 2024*. January 2025. https://www.pakpips.com/article/8246

37. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). Pakistan Security Report 2024: An Abridged Version. January 2025. https://www.pakpips.com/article/8246

38. Ramachandran, Sudha. "Drone Warfare Is Redefining India-Pakistan Rivalry." *The Diplomat*, June 5, 2025. https://thediplomat.com/2025/06/drone-warfare-is-redefining-india-pakistan-rivalry/

39. Sankaran, Jaganath. "The Enduring Power of Bad Ideas: 'Cold Start' and Battlefield Nuclear Weapons in South Asia." *Arms Control Today*, November 2014. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2014-11/features/enduring-power-bad-ideas-cold-start-and-battlefield-nuclear-weapons-south-asia

40. Schneider, Jacquelyn. "Deterrence in and through Cyberspace." In *Cross-Domain Deterrence: Strategy in an Era of Complexity*, edited by Erik Gartzke and Jon R. Lindsay. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

41. Snyder, Glenn H. "The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror." In *The Balance of Power*, edited by Paul Seabury, 184–201. San Francisco: Chandler, 1965.

42. Snyder, Glenn H. *Deterrence and Defense: Toward a Theory of National Security*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961.

43. Stimson Center. "Drone Warfare in South Asia." December 18, 2025. https://www.stimson.org/2025/drone-warfare-in-south-asia/

44. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). SIPRI Yearbook 2025: Summary. August 2025. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/yb25_summary_en_v2.pdf

45. U.S. Embassy New Delhi. Diplomatic cable, February 16, 2010, signed by Ambassador Timothy J. Roemer. Released via WikiLeaks. Reported in Deccan Herald, "India's Cold Start: Mixture, Myth."

46. Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997.



2026 by the authors; Journal of Global Social Transformation (JGST). This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).