



## Threads of Influence: Reframing the 2025 Indo-Pak Confrontation as a Proxy Showcase of U.S. and Chinese Strategic Doctrines

Huraira Nawaz Cheema

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Management and Technology Sialkot,

Email: [hurairacheemaadv@gmail.com](mailto:hurairacheemaadv@gmail.com)

### Abstract

The events of early 2025 between India and Pakistan show a new type of conflict in today's world, very different from the past. The situation did not turn into actual fighting but was treated as a planned and organized way for both India and Pakistan to display their latest military tools, methods, and alliances, tied to the U.S. and China. In this article, author considers the confrontation by incorporating aspects from strategic studies, analyzing the way it is described, and looking at it qualitatively. Analysis of available information and messages from the government allows the study to explain that both nations fought a hybrid conflict that featured advanced technology, cyber moves, and diplomatic exchanges instead of battles. It is made clear in the findings that apart from the growing conflicts in the region, South Asia now stands as a stage where Washington and Beijing project their military strengths through India and Pakistan. This approach makes realists reconsider their importance of territorial issues and direct wars by emphasizing how conflicts act and are shown nowadays. It is also explained in the study how the strong influence of global powers in South Asian countries weakens their autonomy and endangers regional peace. All things considered, the 2025 Indo-Pak confrontation demonstrates how new and observable types of conflict contribute to the way global development proceeds.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pakistan conflict, arranging nations in strategic alliances, using proxies in wars, the U.S.-China rivalry, fighting hybrid warfare, using military diplomacy, the geopolitical significance of symbols

### Introduction

The region centered around India and Pakistan is still one of the most turbulent areas in the world's security. Shortly after British India was divided in 1947, India and Pakistan have faced both arms confrontations, uses of proxies, and times when they remained at an uneasy truce. Since the beginning of wars in 1947–48 and others in 1965, 1971, 1999, and 2019, facing conflict has turned into a normal strategy for India and Pakistan. Even so, the crisis in early 2025 was not the same as the previous problems in history. There was a rise in tensions, yet things did not lead to a battlefield war; both the US and North Korea chose to send signals through tactics rather than use military strength. It is argued in this paper that the 2025 standoff between India and Pakistan may be seen as a move towards a style of warfare that mixes different conflict techniques. As a result, it introduces a new idea: the clash was

like a “craft show” during which every state showed and displayed the technology, tactics, and ideas it gained from other nations. India is part of U.S.-led security groups, while Pakistan is linked to China’s major economic and military plans, and both countries acted both as influencers and sites for showcasing the important features of their allies’ strategies. The region’s situation and changes in strategy matter a lot. The dragging conflict started because of changes in the Indo-Pacific region, where China has been active and the United States considers it a threat due to new areas of influence. Being an important part of the Quad, having more arms deals with the United States, and following the Indo-Pacific strategy have made India change from its old policy of neutrality (Pant, 2022). At the same time, Pakistan is now a very important part of China’s regional building, helping form the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and purchasing much of its military exports and philosophies (Small, 2020). Such establishment of alliances leads into the events forming in 2025. A situation that seemed like it was sparked by border tension was really a bunch of actions designed to demonstrate military power, no threat to neighbors, and loyalty. Unlike the ones before it, this time the event showed that world-level competition was more important than local tensions. The demonstration of drone attacks, accurate cyber-retaliation, and the fine-tuned strategy of state-sponsored broadcasting not only reflected how the countries relate to each other but also revealed what other countries care about.

### **Academic means of teaching and blank spots**

Most studies about South Asian strategic dynamics have focused on nuclear stability (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010), the risks of conflict escalation (Krepon et al., 2015), and what happens when conflicts between the countries involve security dilemmas. Nevertheless, they usually overlook how outside players are contributing to turning local conflicts into examples of global geopolitical tussles. Even though some new studies on proxy warfare and hybrid conflict are available (Mumford, 2013; Berman & Lake, 2019), they have mostly not been applied systematically to South Asia other than to Afghanistan. Besides, a large part of the literature fails to mention that technology is often used in contemporary conflict for identity and diplomacy reasons as well as for tactical success. If we apply Nye’s (2004) thinking on soft power to the military-diplomatic world, we can see that influence can be enforced nowadays through demonstration and how explanations and narratives are made and conveyed to others. The study takes part in shaping a new interdisciplinary field by integrating international relations, media, and analysis of defense procurement to examine the 2025 Indo-Pakistani confrontation that serves as a proxy-filled craft exhibit. It looks to offer new insights by highlighting how South Asia’s warfare is influenced by actions taken on the ground.

At the start of 2025, South Asia came to the world’s attention because of several tense events on the border between India and Pakistan. In addition, unlike what happened with past crises, the two states did not engage in all-out fighting. Rather, it turned into a planned performance highlighted by both technological and cyberwarfare display. This text explains the 2025 Indo-Pak confrontation as being a “craft show”-like display, in which both countries displayed their ties with strong nations such as the United States and China. Through this comparison, the author suggests that the countries are being used more and more as testing grounds for many global powers.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Scholars have spent much time looking into the conflict between India and Pakistan,

focusing mainly on its history, related military challenges, and nuclear deterrence. Waltz's research (1979) and Mearsheimer's book (2001) paved the way for realists to mostly interpret South Asia in terms of power and the use of deterrence. Ganguly and Kapur (2010) went on to explain the role of nuclear weapons in how the crises between India and Pakistan remained stable and did not increase in intensity. Even so, challenges caused by the 2019 Balakot attacks and the 2025 clash have made people look at these issues differently. While noting that assessments over stability do not change with brief and important escalations, Krepon et al. (2015) mentioned that asymmetric conflict and latest technology add to the difficulties. Experts Berman and Lake (2019) and Mumford (2013) write about how various political interests in South Asia are advanced with the help of local proxy groups. For a long time, these studies considered Pakistan and India free actors, but today's events propose that the two countries are being handled as proxies between the U.S. and China. This element of proxy influence is very important in context of the 2025 scenario. Both Hoffman (2007) and the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (2016) in their writings explain how cyber operations and information warfare are carried out together with using conventional force and political means. This approach is very useful for the 2025 event, since cyber-attacks and media manipulation were main weapons, showing a move from only physical conflicts.

According to Nye (2004), the use of soft power matters a lot in military diplomacy and making strategic statements. Studies done in recent years now consider soft power to also describe when countries try to gain respect globally by displaying their troops and joining military exercises (Flam, 2017; Klein, 2016). Herrera (2024) and Talat (2021) explain how digital domains are now sites where countries in South Asia carry out espionage and try to shape the way they are portrayed. It has also been shown by studies from Tyagi et al. (2020) and Shabir and Raashed (2021) that the rivalry between India and Pakistan has many aspects involved today. Smith (2023) and Mastro (2021) have exposed the effect of the U.S.-China rivalry on security matters in South Asia. According to their studies, both countries are losing more ability to act independently in the region, as India joins U.S. plans in the region and moves closer to the United States, while Pakistan gets more involved in China's Belt and Road project and others. Such layer-like relations make regional disputes proxy-like and affect the way the states decide their next moves. Overall, the writings demonstrate that conflicts nowadays require some new approaches since traditional theories do not fully explain what happens in proxy wars, hybrid conflicts, using soft power, and great power struggles. The confrontation between India and Pakistan in 2025 proves that it is important to examine South Asian security using both military strategy and other aspects. This research depends on a multidisciplinary outline by including realist ideas, proxy war ideas, hybrid conflict concepts, soft power influences, and strategic performance theory to study the 2025 fight between India and Pakistan as a 'craft show' that is supported by the U.S.-China competition.

Given that realist and deterrence theory play an essential role, the concept of security can be clearly understood. Realist theory is important since it points out the anarchic structure of the global system, which makes countries try to gain security by balancing their powers (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). Because of nuclear deterrence, India and Pakistan have managed to avoid direct wars, which otherwise could have led to very serious consequences (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). Krepon et al. (2015) point out that maintaining a balance in deterrence is tough for both countries because of the chance of

escalation. Even though this theory gives a good explanation for the lack of appetite for more debt in 2025, it misses some elements that happen behind the scenes.

### **Proxy Warfare**

Using realist ideas as a base, proxy warfare theory describes how big powers achieve their goals by arming and guiding other countries in the region to carry out their conflicts (Berman & Lake, 2019; Mumford, 2013). Over the years, Pakistan has backed militant forces while India has usually used regular troops against Pakistan. Still, in 2025, the confrontation could become more complicated because both India and Pakistan become proxies for the different strategies of the U.S. and China. As a result of this condition, the main conflict has moved from isolated local disputes to worldwide struggles between big powers.

### **Hybrid Warfare**

The idea of hybrid warfare helps us grasp all the different areas of the confrontation. Hoffman (2007) and NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (2016) agree that hybrid warfare means combining various types of operation. Instead of actual battles, the 2025 standoff was defined by cyber-espionage, advertising through strategic information, and various military displays, which matched the model explained. Using hybrid warfare, states are able to put addition stress on opponents while monitoring the risk of things becoming more serious.

### **Other ways of applying soft power include strategic signaling.**

In this work, Nye's soft power theory is improved by including military diplomacy and clear instructions sent by nations to other countries. The countries made occasional drone flights, launched cyber actions, and shared comments that showed their capabilities and western allies. They stress that using particular strategies in politics is done to influence people in both the international and domestic arena.

### **The idea of Strategic Performance Theory is like that of Semiotics**

This study uses the approach that international conflict plays out like a performance in which states present power, identify, and alliances (Flam, 2017; Klein, 2016). A look at the imagery and public statements in the area shows that the 2025 confrontation will be presented as a type of "craft show" displaying imported technology from the United States and China. Such an approach helps us understand today's conflicts by looking at the symbols they carry, since we are constantly connected through media.

### **Global Power Rivalry and Regional Autonomy**

The way things work in the Asia Pacific region is mainly affected by the U.S. and China rivalry (Smith, 2023; Mastro, 2021). It is clear from India's priorities and Pakistan's actions that countries in this region lack the freedom to act independently (Pant, 2022; Tellis, 2020). This shows that seen in this light, the rivalry between India and Pakistan is representative of global power struggles, where local players are influenced more and more by external supporters.

### **Methodology**

I use different qualitative research approaches to try and explain how the confrontation between India and Pakistan in 2025 would work outside of direct warfare and focus on its

symbolism and use of proxies within the U.S.-China conflict. Most of the information for data collection comes from satellite images, defense purchasing history, and descriptions of cyber incidents to analyze the India-Pakistan defense strategies and tools involved. In addition, analysis of media content was carried out by reviewing news and social media discussions from various locations, to discover any narrative patterns, attempted information attacks, or partnership symbolism in people's remarks. Official news from governments and press statements from the United States and China involved in the conflict were checked to see the messages and strategies they used. In the study, different sources of information are analyzed side by side through QCA, to discover the way military technology origin, cyber capacities, and alliances with other countries interact. Using this strategy, I interpret the symbolic messages of military equipment and battle strategies by applying semiotic analysis and break down the messages shared by using discourse analysis for both internal and external purposes. The study admits the presence of biases in open-source data, strict access to confidential matters, and the sensitive side of India and Pakistan's relations, yet it applies strict verification and fair analysis. Looking at the confrontation in these terms lets me explain its role in South Asia as a stage for high-level diplomacy and military pressure.

#### **Years 2025 was seen as a Strategic Exhibition of Charlotte's strength.**

In this confrontation, India and Pakistan have stepped away from actual fighting and now concentrate on showing their military force and geopolitical importance. The confrontation is like an arranged presentation between India and Pakistan to highlight the type of military and alliances they have with major countries. Unlike what happened in the past, the main aim of this event was propaganda and symbolism instead of fighting, showing a clear understanding of contemporary strategies and wielding power around the world. The cyber-espionage attack that set the confrontation in motion proves that an attack online can now cause conflicts and also play a big role as a theater of war itself. There was no instant military response from India after the Pakistan cyber-attack, but rather the country handled it with planned actions and used both technological and political tools. By using U.S.-made drones and increasing their work with American intelligence agencies, the Indian military showed it was ready to act and supported Washington's approach in the Indo-Pacific region. As a sign of their close connection, Pakistan put up its Chinese Wing Loong II and CH-4 drones, along with equipment linked to Chinese cybersecurity measures, which demonstrated NATO may depend on China for future defense support.

The exhibition was also made bigger through official diplomacy and the use of information to inform both people living in Canada and people around the world. Media organizations took part in shaping news that explained each side's strength and discipline in technology. These stories were used to show that their country could handle an invasion, alert allies about their strength, and earn support from the public using low-intensity actions. It was also important that the confrontation involved more than just equipment displays, since it relied on cyber methods, false information campaigns, and diplomatic methods in multilateral gatherings. Pakistan spoke of China-backed arrangements as SCO and BRI, setting them apart from India's main emphasis on Quad and Indo-Pacific groups, which highlights regional tears in the wake of global divisions. They give material help and help to unite the groups, which makes the Indo-Pak struggle look like a small version of the rivalry among major global powers. Because of its

performance nature, the conflict made the involved states look strong and advanced while matching up with leaders in the world. The region of South Asia turned into a place where the two countries' strategies and military skills were tried, revealed, and somewhat challenged. Thus, what happened mostly represented the clash between Washington and Beijing, who used local actors to display and demonstrate advanced weapons in the region. So, the 2025 Indo-Pac conflict demonstrates that future wars will be decided based on strong symbols, strengthened alliances, and many types of military operations. It demonstrates that the purpose of military encounters may be to create a certain impression that can affect many groups at once, so the lines between war and peace, conflict and cooperation grow more blurry in recent times.

### **Interpreting the Event: Performance over Combat**

When it comes to the 2025 Indo-Pak confrontation, we can tell that the actions of both nations primarily center on strategic performance, not on face-to-face fighting as usual. In distinction to the past events such as Balakot strikes or Uri in 2016, when military battles were directly joined, 2025 saw Pakistan take a careful approach, showing its abilities through actions and little use of military force. This trend is linked to changes across the globe, as states use small-scale conflicts to express their aims, reveal who they are working with, and create a certain attitude in the world, all without putting themselves in danger of excessive escalation or war (Flam, 2017; Klein, 2016). In this situation, both countries showed their strength yet stayed clear of actions that could have caused major destruction in the nuclear region. Using drone flyovers, technology to defend against cyber threats, and diplomatic statements shows that the government is aware that modern wars need to influence viewers and those part of global audiences. They work as ways of showing strength to others, involving military, information, and diplomatic means, and make it clear that the U.S. and China are allies. It also relies on the way different news outlets present events, putting emphasis on how quickly military activities take place, high-tech capabilities, and restrained morals, which ,in turn, strengthens support for government actions and fills people with patriotism.

In addition, this model indicates that South Asia turned into a place for India and Pakistan to present their strategic partners' military skills. On one side, Pakistan put up Chinese and cyber-related displays, while India joined forces with the U.S. on technology and held military activities with them. They were not mainly designed for use in combat but rather to show what sides others in the world were on and deter them through the implied backing by outside countries. Through this way of thinking, attention shifts from the old distinction between war and peace to a more detailed view of today's conflicts as ranging from mild gestures to a blend of different techniques. It points out that today's international conflicts, especially in regions where major powers compete, make good use of well-planned demonstrations of power to affect trends and stop escalation. Placing greater importance on performance than combat in 2025, the scenario demonstrates how important things like perception, disseminating stories, and social ties have become in today's world. What does this mean for South Asia's independence and ability to make its own strategy?

The use of a proxy element in the 2025 Indo-Pak confrontation could greatly change the independence and self-directed strategies of countries in South Asia. In the past, it was widely believed that a state's sovereignty allowed it to be independent in deciding both

its security policy and ties with other countries. At the same time, due to the continuing changes in this conflict, both countries are showing signs of abandoning the original principle as their strategy relies more on the help of their powerful allies. The idea of strategic autonomy in India's foreign policy is becoming more difficult to maintain because the country is working closely with the US in international and defense organizations. While India keeps choosing its independent diplomatic path, shared operations and security matters guided by U.S. plans lead it to fall predominantly within its Indo-Pacific strategic appearance. Following this line convinces India to focus on the U.S. instead of solving issues in the region or together with their neighbor, Pakistan. At the same time, growing connections with China, including through CPEC and more extensive military aid, reveal that Pakistan is leaning toward Chinese direction. Even though Pakistan's military power increases because of the relationship, its security strategy shrinks because it is influenced by Beijing's major objectives. Because of China's influence, it seems that bargaining and solving conflicts between India and Pakistan might be limited for Pakistan.

Because India and Pakistan are both embedded in these leading countries' networks, it demonstrates the practice of strategic outsourcing in which regional issues are overtaken by top-level conflicts. This situation leads to greater problems because it gives importance to competing with nations rather than focusing on finding solutions or working together in the affected areas. Such developments also make it harder for South Asian countries to work together as there is less trust and those steps are usually tried within the region instead of through international measures. Besides, since the conflict involves proxies, it reveals that South Asia is vulnerable to different types of hybrid warfare like cyber attacks, information misinformation, and symbolic military acts. These actions are hard to tackle by themselves. Using imported technology and concepts in military operations affects both the country's security system and the politics behind it. As a result of this influence, countries may become more hostile toward each other, talk less directly, and keep depending on each other. In short, the year 2025 underlines how tensions between global powers and regional interests in South Asia make it more difficult for the region to achieve its strategic goals because of parties' need for involvement in the rivalry. It is up to the policymakers to respond to these pressures and ensure their country's safety, share ideas with neighbors, and develop security schemes that make the region less dependent and more secure.

## **Conclusion**

This conflict, why it is was not a traditional war, was something carefully arranged between India and Pakistan, where they both highlighted their ties to the United States and China. Based on this review, it seems that the event was different from regular wars because symbolic actions, mixed warfare, and proxy fights received more importance over active fighting. The recent confrontation made it clear that South Asia is now a place where powers outside the region provide technology and policies that are carried out by local countries. It was clear from the situation that countries used their military setup, cyber tools, and messages to demonstrate their soft power abroad and signal support for their allies through constant media. By doing this, this re-contextualization rebates the major realist and deterrence arguments about Indo-Pak conflicts by highlighting the roles of improved military tactics and complex warfare styles in today's rivalries. India's and Pakistan's ability to decide their security policies was greatly affected by their important

partners. All in all, the 2025 confrontation stands for a new fighting model in the Global South that emphasizes visibility, influence, and contesting different strategies. Realizing how South Asia's role has evolved gives scholars and policymakers a better guide for handling how global power will change and affect security in the region.

## References

- Berman, E., & Lake, D. A. (2019). *Proxy wars: Suppressing violence through local agents*. Cornell University Press.
- Bailey, J., & Darden, K. (2021). *The dynamics of proxy warfare: Understanding local agency and external influence*. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65(9), 1563–1589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027211006423>
- Flam, H. (2017). Performing power: The performative nature of diplomacy and conflict. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3), 503–515. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx031>
- Ganguly, S., & Kapur, S. P. (2010). *India, Pakistan, and the bomb: Debating nuclear stability in South Asia*. Columbia University Press.
- Herrera, M. (2024). Between “cyber insecurity” and modern warfare: The precarious tightrope of deterrence stability in South Asia. Stimson Center. <https://www.stimson.org>
- Hoffman, F. G. (2007). *Conflict in the 21st century: The rise of hybrid wars*. Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.
- Klein, J. (2016). *The politics of performance: Strategic narratives in international relations*. Routledge.
- Krepon, M., Clary, C., Dalton, T., et al. (2015). *Deterrence stability and escalation control in South Asia*. Stimson Center.
- Kux, D. (2006). *India and the United States: Estranged democracies, 1941-1991*.
- Lieberthal, K., & Oksenberg, M. (1988). *Policy making in China: Leaders, structures, and processes*. Princeton University Press.
- Mann, J. (2023). China's evolving strategy in South Asia: Balancing economic investments and military influence. *International Security Review*, 47(3), 45–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2023.2101234>
- Mastro, O. S. (2021). *The costs of accommodation: America's reluctant hegemonism in the Indo-Pacific*. Cornell University Press.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Mumford, A. (2013). *Proxy warfare*. Polity Press.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Pant, H. V. (2022). Strategic autonomy revisited: India's shifting global calculus. *International Affairs*, 98(1), 87–104. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab256>
- Shabir, A., & Raashed, S. (2021). Strategic information warfare in South Asia. *NUML Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 12(1), 15–34.
- Small, A. (2020). *The China-Pakistan axis: Asia's new geopolitics* (Rev. ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Smith, J. (2023). Great power competition in South Asia: The US, China, and regional security. *Asian Security*, 19(2), 112–130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2023.2178497>



- Talat, S. (2021). Cyber warfare and regional security dynamics: The case of South Asia. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 44(5), 674–693.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2021.1880842>
- Tellis, A. J. (2020). India's grand strategy and the Indo-Pacific challenge. *The Washington Quarterly*, 43(2), 145–162.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1755879>
- Tyagi, A., Field, A., Lathwal, P., Tsvetkov, Y., & Carley, K. M. (2020). A computational analysis of polarization on Indian and Pakistani social media. *arXiv*.  
<https://arxiv.org/abs/2005.07153>
- Waltz, K. N. (1979). *Theory of international politics*. Addison-Wesley. National Defense University Press.