

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narrative, Identity and Terrorism: A Constructivist Analysis of the Pahalgam 2025 Attack in the Escalating India–Pakistan Conflict

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Abstract

The terrorist assault on Pahalgam in 2025 signified a new chapter in the enduring conflict between India and Pakistan. This study analyses how the governments of both nations produced official narratives in reaction to the occurrence and how these narratives embody and promote their distinct national identities. The research used a constructivist method to examine the production of identity and meaning through political speeches, government pronouncements, and media framing. The analysis relies on qualitative interpretation of secondary sources, such as diplomatic briefings, ministerial speeches, and reports from esteemed foreign media sites. Evidence suggests that India characterized the assault as an instance of cross-border terrorism, supporting its self-perception as a secular and democratic nation under threat and justifying retaliatory measures. Pakistan, in response, dismissed the claims and sought to recast the episode as a contrived crisis intended to divert attention from Indian persecution in Kashmir, portraying itself as a victim rather than an aggressor. This study

illustrates that identity formation and story creation are essential strategies in perpetuating the competition between India and Pakistan, distinguishing this research from earlier studies mainly concentrating on strategic, legal, or security aspects. It contends that absent a shift in one state's perception and representation of the other, future crises will likely follow analogous discursive patterns.

Keywords: India–Pakistan conflict, constructivism, political narrative, national identity, Pahalgam

I. Introduction

The territorial dispute over Kashmir persists as one of the most enduring and intricate conflicts in South Asia, involving two nuclear-capable nations: India and Pakistan. The conflict's origins may be traced to the 1947 Partition of British India, which bifurcated the subcontinent into two new nation-states: India, characterized by a Hindu majority, and Pakistan, distinguished by a Muslim majority. The princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, with a primarily Muslim population governed by a Hindu Maharaja, became a focal point of contention due to its disputed accession to India. Notwithstanding numerous conflicts and persistent diplomatic initiatives, the region has continued to be fragmented and militarized, with both nations maintaining conflicting territorial claims (Nicolson, S., 2022). The importance of Kashmir is rooted in its demographics, geography, and its symbolic role in shaping the national identities of both India and Pakistan. According to the constructivist perspective, the conflict cannot be comprehensively understood solely through material interests, such as territory or resources; it must also account for the



ideational frameworks that influence state behaviour, including historical narratives, collective memory, and perceptions of legitimacy. Kashmir is a vital component of Pakistan's postcolonial identity as the "homeland of Muslims" and of India's identity as a secular, territorially undivided republic (Paul, 2005).

On April 22, 2025, an armed group assaulted visitors in the Baisaran Valley of Pahalgam, located in Indian-administered Kashmir. The assault resulted in the deaths of twenty-six individuals, twenty-five Indian nationals and one Nepalese citizen, making it one of the most lethal incidents in the region in the last twenty-five years (BBC News, 2025). Despite The Resistance Front (TRF) asserting responsibility, Indian officials attributed the attack to Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a jihadist organization based in Pakistan (Shri, 2025). India alleged that Pakistan is implicitly endorsing the attack, characterizing it as an element of a broader campaign of cross-border terrorism. Conversely, Pakistan dismissed the accusations and asserted that India was employing terrorism as a rhetorical device to divert global focus from human rights abuses in Kashmir (Reuters, 2025).

On the other hand, the Pakistani government firmly denied the accusations made by India. Pakistan stated that it was not involved at all in the terrorist group's attack, including providing any support or assistance. Pakistan called India's accusations baseless and aimed at leading international opinion on the issue of human rights violations and the increasing internal tensions in Indian-controlled Kashmir (Reuters, 2025). The tensions between the two countries have increased with their various responses. Both countries are involved in retaliatory actions on

various fronts. Starting from responding to each other's accusations through the media, taking aggressive policies, to being directly involved in military contact on the border. This tension has also sparked international concern about a broader escalation of the conflict, leading to a nuclear war. The United States has called on India and Pakistan to exercise restraint, amid growing international concern over a potential escalation between the two nuclear-armed states, each of which reportedly has about 200 warheads (Newsweek, 2025). The incident of the terrorist group's attack in Pahalgam has further tested the relationship between India and Pakistan in the context of the dispute over the Kashmir region. The tensions that have been built are not only by armed violence, but also by the competition for national identity, the construction of a narrative of terrorism, and the struggle for legitimacy over disputed territory that has never been truly resolved peacefully since 1947.

This perspective aligns with constructivist theories that perceive terrorism and identity as socially produced entities. The designation of groups as "terrorists" or "freedom fighters" is significantly influenced by the actor's positionality and political narrative. India frames its narrative to depict Kashmir as an essential component of its sovereign territory, imperilled by external aggression and extreme extremism. Conversely, Pakistan positions itself as a protector of Kashmiri Muslims against what it characterizes as Indian occupation and persecution. These conflicting narratives are not solely rhetorical; they influence governmental decisions, popular sentiment, and foreign diplomatic affiliations.

Constructivism emphasizes the impact of identity politics and national mythology on



interstate conduct. The securitization of Kashmir is based on perceived existential threats to national identity: for India, any surrender over Kashmir is viewed as a compromise of its secular national fabric; for Pakistan, it signifies a repudiation of the Islamic cause upon which the nation was established. Consequently, the 2025 Pahalgam incident should not be perceived merely as an act of violence, but rather as a reaffirmation of conflicting identities, exacerbating the established narratives of suffering and resistance on both sides. The persistent character of the Kashmir conflict highlights the significance of ideational and identity-based frameworks in comprehending international issues. Utilizing a constructivist perspective reveals that the India–Pakistan rivalry concerning Kashmir is sustained not merely by strategic calculations or material interests, but by a profound contest over meaning, memory, and legitimacy that perpetually evolves through discourse, perception, and mutual antagonism.

This study seeks to analyse the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir, on April 22, 2025, by investigating both the timeline of the event and the political and diplomatic reactions of India and Pakistan. This dissertation examines the fundamental research problem: How do India and Pakistan interpret and react to the Pahalgam terrorist incident with national identity and international discourse? The study examines how each state constructs the story of the incident within its borders and on the global stage and how these narratives reveal underlying ideational frameworks tied to national identity, historical memory, and strategic self-perception.

This study aims to contend that the India-Pakistan war over Kashmir, including violent events like the Pahalgam attack, cannot be comprehensively elucidated solely through material or strategic interests. This paper argues that, via a constructivist perspective, the reactions of both nations are profoundly influenced by constructed identities, intersubjective meanings, and symbolic representations of threat and legitimacy. The paper will examine the conflicting narratives, allegations, and diplomatic strategies that arose following the attack to illustrate how state behaviours are influenced by physical security concerns and their aspiration to maintain specific national identities and international standings. This study employs a constructivist theoretical framework to elucidate the dynamics of escalation and misunderstanding between India and Pakistan, concentrating on identity, perception, and the social production of danger. Constructivism underscores the significance of national identity, concepts, and intersubjective meanings in influencing state conduct (Shafique, 2011). This paper will contend that examining the narratives constructed by India and Pakistan in reaction to the Pahalgam incident yields essential insights into the persistent conflictual framework of their bilateral relations and the wider geopolitical rivalry over Kashmir.

II. Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

Constructivism offers an alternative perspective to analyse the global political reality that realist and liberal perspectives currently dominate. In contrast to the realist and liberal perspectives that focus more on material and rational interests in driving state



behaviour, Constructivism focuses more on interactions, ideas, norms, and identities that develop in shaping international reality. (Wendt, 1999). In this context, identity denotes the shared comprehension within a state regarding “who we are” concerning others, which may be based on religion, historical experience, cultural narratives, or geopolitical self-perception (Wendt, 1999). India's identity as a democratic and secular state, characterized by a robust opposition to terrorism, stands in contrast to Pakistan's identity as a defender of Muslim communities, especially in Kashmir. These identities are dynamic, continuously produced and reproduced through political discourse, media narratives, and foreign policy actions. Perception involves the assessment of one state's intentions and legitimacy by another, informed by constructed identities. Narrative pertains to the storyline or framing states utilize domestically and internationally to justify their actions and bolster their self-image (Wendt, 1999). By examining these concepts, constructivism facilitates an analysis of the Pahalgam terror attack as not merely a security concern but also a discursive arena in which both India and Pakistan reinforced their national identities and rationalized their policies for both domestic and international audiences.

In India and Pakistan, the constructivist approach is very relevant to analyse this issue because the tension between the two countries has contained identity content since their inception. There are differences in national identity between the two countries, which have caused the two countries to continue to be at odds. Pakistan defines itself as a home for Muslims in South Asia. In contrast, India frames its national

identity as a secular country that is rich in multiethnicity, even though it is dominated by Hindu society (Nicolson, 2022). Pakistan narrates the formation of its country based on the Two-Nation Theory, namely, Muslims and Hindus in British India are two different nations in various aspects. They cannot be united peacefully (Shaikh, 2009). So Pakistan was formed as a home for Indian Muslims who were separated from India, which is predominantly Hindu. Based on the Two-Nation Theory, Pakistan calls Kashmir an inseparable part because the majority of Kashmiri society is Muslim. On the other hand, India views the integration of Kashmir as a legitimate part of the Indian Union since the signing of the Instrument of Accession (1947) (Khalid, 2011). For India, defending Kashmir is an effort to maintain their state identity as a secular power and maintain their legitimacy in the Kashmir region.

The construction of conflicting identities between the two countries has given rise to a perception of deep hostility. One party's actions will tend to arouse suspicion in the other party. A social structure marked by distrust will encourage countries in conflict to view their national interests in a zero-sum and conflictual manner (Wendt, 1994). This Constructivist approach will be used to analyse further how India and Pakistan frame the terrorist group's attack in Pahalgam in their official discourse. This study analyses the influence of identity and perception—key concepts in the constructivist framework—on the responses of India and Pakistan to the 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack. Alexander Wendt (1992) posits that the structure of international politics is socially constructed through shared ideas, rather than being solely dictated by material capabilities. The persistent mutual



distrust between India and Pakistan arises from historical conflicts, the construction of identities, and the repetition of narratives over time.

After the Pahalgam attack, Indian political discourse, encompassing official government statements and media coverage, characterized the incident as yet another example of “cross-border terrorism,” thereby reinforcing India’s enduring view of Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism. This perception is not merely reactive; it is integrated into a broader national identity narrative wherein India presents itself as a secular, democratic victim of Islamist extremism. Prime Ministerial statements underscored the necessity to “defend national sovereignty against foreign-backed militants,” while Indian diplomatic efforts sought to persuade international partners to intensify pressure on Pakistan (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025).

In contrast, Pakistan refuted any involvement and redirected the discourse to India's purported human rights abuses in Kashmir. This response illustrates Pakistan's identity as a defender of Muslim communities, especially in the contested Kashmir region. Pakistani officials described India's actions in Kashmir as indicative of a systematic pattern of repression and occupation, a narrative consistently employed to validate Pakistan's international posture and domestic political standing. These rhetorical strategies indicate that Pakistan's response was not solely defensive; instead, it actively sought to securitize India's presence in Kashmir to garner support from the Islamic world and mitigate external pressure. The constructivist approach suggests that these actions are not solely strategic or interest-driven; instead, they are influenced by the ideational frameworks

through which both countries interpret and respond to violent events such as the Pahalgam attack. These frameworks are developed, replicated, and conveyed through political speeches, diplomatic discourse, and media narratives targeting domestic and international audiences. An analysis of identity-driven narratives reveals that responses to the Pahalgam incident are influenced by immediate political considerations, enduring national myths, and intersubjective meanings that shape the India–Pakistan relationship.

III. Methodology and Data

This study utilizes a qualitative research methodology, specifically employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the principal technique to investigate how India and Pakistan formulate and convey their official narratives concerning the Pahalgam terrorist incident. This interpretive method concentrates on how language via speeches, official announcements, and media framing generates meaning, mirrors power dynamics, and influences national identity, rather than examining causal linkages or gauging public opinion.

In order to identify the ideational components in the language utilized by state actors, particularly examining the deployment of terms such as “cross-border terrorism,” “retaliation,” and “oppression” to legitimize particular political stances or moral assertions. This method works particularly well for explaining how stories are constructed to define ‘self’ and ‘other’, often along identity-based lines. This research examines how India and Pakistan portray themselves as victims or defenders, the attribution of responsibility, and



the impact of these narratives on internal perception and international reputation.

Secondary documentation methods acquired this study's data, entailing the collecting and systematic analysis of documents chosen for their relevance, credibility, and representativeness on the narratives of the India–Pakistan conflict. This collection comprises official statements from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including press releases from April to May 2025), transcripts of political speeches by leaders such as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, news articles from prominent international media outlets (e.g., Reuters, Al Jazeera, and BBC), along with peer-reviewed journal articles and academic commentaries pertinent to South Asian regional security and discourse analysis.

The selected sources employed purposive sampling to guarantee representation of government narratives and media interpretations, while preserving a balance among Indian, Pakistani, and worldwide viewpoints. Incorporating academic literature enhances triangulation and anchors the analysis within recognized theoretical frameworks. The data were examined utilizing a discourse analysis methodology, concentrating on constructing identity, legitimacy, and moral posture via political language. Focus was directed towards repeating terminology, metaphors, emotive framing, and the deliberate employment of narratives in the discourses of both India and Pakistan. This method enabled the study to transcend superficial description and to analyse how language operates as a mechanism of political influence and identity

formation in the context of the Pahalgam incident.

IV. Discussion

a. India's Official Narrative

India described the terrorist attack in Pahalgam as a manifestation of cross-border terrorism allegedly originating from Pakistan. In the hours following the attack, Indian government elites, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ministry of External Affairs Secretary Vikram Misri, issued firm statements accusing Pakistan-based groups of being behind the violence. Modi's declaration that India would "pursue the perpetrators to the ends of the earth" illustrates the use of emotionally charged and retributive language aimed at mobilizing national sentiment and reinforcing India's right to self-defence (Reuters, 2025). Similarly, Misri's assertion that the attackers were linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba and trained in Pakistan functions as a rhetorical strategy to externalize the threat and simplify the enemy image (Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). However, no valid evidence supported this narrative (Shaikh, 2025).

Through this consistent narrative, India not only seeks to delegitimize Pakistan on the international stage but also constructs itself as a victim of terrorism, a nation under constant threat, yet morally justified in taking retaliatory measures. This aligns with a broader discursive strategy seen in past incidents such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks, where India also framed Pakistan as the sponsor of cross-border terrorism. What emerges is a deliberate effort to maintain continuity in a state-sponsored discourse that positions Pakistan as a "terror-exporting" state and India as the rightful actor



of moral resistance. From a discourse analysis perspective, these public statements serve more than just an informative function. However, they actively shape public perception, construct national identity in opposition to a threatening 'Other', and legitimize policy choices in the name of national security. The narrative becomes a performative act, not only responding to a security incident but also producing a political reality in which India reaffirms its victimhood and moral superiority.

After the terrorist attack in Pahalgam in April 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a speech strongly condemning the perpetrators and those who supported the attack. In his first public speech after the attack (April 24, 2025), Modi stated emphatically "I say to the whole world: India will identify, track and punish every terrorist and their backer" (Ellis-Petersen, 2025). The above statement shows Modi promising to pursue every terrorist and their backers to the end. Although Modi did not mention Pakistan directly in this sentence, the term "their backer" implicitly refers to Pakistan which India accuses of masterminding or sponsoring the terror attacks. Through this speech, Modi built a narrative that Pakistan was behind the terrorist attacks and therefore would be given a befitting response. He described Pakistan as a state that supports terrorism. A strong statement was also issued by the Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Vikram Misri, who accused the terrorist group of originating from Pakistan and receiving training from the Lashkar-e-Taiba group (India Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Vikram Misri also viewed that the terrorist group's attack was aimed at creating conflict in Kashmir by attacking the tourism sector and triggering

communal conflict in India. Indian government elites believe that this terrorist attack was intended to instil fear among non-Muslims living in the Kashmir region.

Various official narratives issued by India remain consistent in building the perception among its people and the international community that the Resistance Front (TRF) group that claimed responsibility for the terrorist attack in Pahalgam is merely a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba based in Pakistan. This narrative built by India is an effort to strengthen the perception that Pakistan has a role in the attack incident. In various forums, India always emphasizes that Pakistan is a haven for cross-border terrorist groups that often carry out cross-border terror in India, especially in the Kashmir region. Several terrorist attacks that occurred in India, such as the Mumbai attacks in 2008, India accused Pakistan of sponsoring the attacks and providing protection to the perpetrators of cross-border terrorist attacks (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). India then framed the terrorist attack in Pahalgam to emphasize further the long-standing narrative that Pakistan is a country that supports various cross-border terrorist groups and India as a victim who has the right to take action to defend itself and retaliate against what India has received.

Real actions also followed the various narratives issued by India in response to the terrorist attacks. After the terrorist group attack incident in Pahalgam, India took a series of firm actions against Pakistan. The firm actions taken by India include:

- 1) One of the key diplomatic actions was the expulsion of several Pakistani defence attachés, declared *persona*



non grata. The MEA described them as “individuals whose continued presence would not be conducive to bilateral peace” (Times of India, 2025). The phrase “not conducive to peace” reflects the narrative construction of Pakistan not merely as a hostile neighbour but as a state actively undermining regional order, thereby justifying the downgrading of diplomatic ties. Simultaneously, India reduced its diplomatic personnel in Islamabad, a gesture that symbolically communicated its distrust and distancing.

- 2) India restricted interaction and access for Pakistani citizens by revoking visas for Pakistani citizens and closing the border between India and Pakistan. This step is a form of India's effort to limit the entry of Pakistani citizens into India who could potentially threaten India's domestic security. This was framed not just as a security precaution, but as an act of protecting the nation from “cross-border infiltration of radical elements” (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025), reinforcing the constructed identity of India as a victim of terrorism rooted in external sources, specifically from Pakistan.
- 3) Another significant move was India's unilateral suspension of its commitments under the Indus Waters Treaty, an agreement in force since 1960. Indian officials claimed that “Pakistan has shown no willingness to engage in good-faith dialogue,” and that the treaty must be “revised in light of 21st-century geopolitical realities”

(Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). The rhetorical use of “geopolitical realities” implies that India's perception of Pakistan as a bad-faith actor extends beyond terrorism into environmental and economic cooperation, thus constructing a broader narrative of delegitimizing Pakistan's credibility as a treaty partner.

- 4) India also mobilized international support to condemn Pakistan for its involvement in the terrorist group attack in Pahalgam. The Indian foreign ministry is actively trying to lead international opinion and international organization forums, such as the UN, to acknowledge that there is strong involvement from Pakistan in the terrorist group's attacks. India also made this effort by encouraging the UN Security Council to issue a press statement on April 25, 2025, which contained condemnation of the terrorist group's attacks in Pahalgam and emphasized the need to punish the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of the terrorist action. India then claimed this press statement as a form of international support for India to take firm action against the sponsor of this terrorist action, namely, Pakistan.

Numerous official narratives disseminated by India are replete with attempts to rationalize its punitive measures against Pakistan. India contends that Pakistan's inability to implement definitive actions against the perpetrators of the Pahalgam incident exemplifies “*a reflection of continued denial and inaction*” (Indian Ministry of



External Affairs, 2025). In an official press briefing, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs declared: *"Notwithstanding the provision of substantial evidence, there has been no credible action taken by Pakistan against the terrorist infrastructure within its territory."* We have grounds to suspect that other attacks were being orchestrated, making it essential for India to engage in self-defence (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Consequently, India conducted what it termed *"measured, precise, and proportionate airstrikes aimed at terrorist infrastructure along the Line of Control, with stringent directives to evade civilian regions"* (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). India's rhetorical framing legitimizes its preventive military actions and portrays it as a sensible, responsible state addressing an urgent threat, rather than an aggressor.

Overall, through the official narrative issued by India, it seeks to create the perception that the terrorist group attack carried out in Pahalgam was a terror attack supported by Pakistan. India positions itself as the victim who has the right to take retaliatory or preventive measures for the recurrence of terrorist attacks in Indian territory. India describes the terrorist group attack in Pahalgam as a serious threat to the sovereignty and security of their country and needs to take firm action against Pakistan. This narrative, built by India, also received strong support from the Indian people who were angry about the terrorist group attack in Pahalgam. Indirectly, the terrorist group attack in Pahalgam aroused the nationalist sentiment of the Indian people by supporting various firm steps taken by the Indian government against Pakistan. In a constructivist framework, India's response was influenced by the collective

identity that they were the victims of a terrorist group attack supported by Pakistan. This identity then encouraged India to issue various firm policies up to the option of military conflict against Pakistan.

b. Pakistan's Official Narrative

On the Pakistani side, the official narrative that was built tended to be more defensive and counter-accusatory. Pakistan denied all accusations from India that it supported the terrorist group responsible for the Pahalgam attack. In shaping domestic and international perceptions, Pakistan framed the incident as another example of a recurring pattern in which it is routinely blamed for every violent event that occurs in Kashmir. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, in his official statement on April 26, 2025, described the Indian reaction as part of a *"perpetual blame game"* and emphasized that *"this endless cycle of accusation must be broken in the interest of regional peace"* (The Hindu, 2025). He also stated that Pakistan is *"willing to support a neutral, transparent, and internationally monitored investigation into the incident"* (Time of India, 2025). This official Pakistani narrative seeks to portray Pakistan as cooperative and open to scrutiny, while simultaneously suggesting that India is using the attack as a pretext for pursuing hidden political objectives and justifying aggressive policies against Pakistan.

Several high-ranking Pakistani officials have suspicions that the terrorist attack in Pahalgam was not carried out by a terrorist group based in Pakistan and was a covert effort by India. This narrative was later reinforced by an official statement delivered by Pakistani



Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif, in an interview with international news media that Pakistan suspects the terrorist attack in Pahalgam as a form of "false flag operation" or engineered by India to corner Pakistan (Al Jazeera, 2025). This controversial statement issued by Khawaja Asif reflects Pakistan's efforts to refute all narratives issued by India with counter-conspiracy theories. In addition, various domestic Pakistani Urdu-language media also reported that the terrorist attack in Pahalgam was very advantageous for India in terms of time and targets to pressure Pakistan. This gave rise to various conspiracy speculations within Pakistani society about the real motives of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

While India denied various accusations, Pakistan tried to take the high ground by offering investigative cooperation on this case. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said in the wake of the April 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack, "Pakistan is open to participating in any neutral, transparent and credible investigation" (McRae, 2025). He voiced Pakistan's willingness to cooperate with an impartial international probe into the incident. This effort is a form of Pakistan to reveal the truth and uphold justice. However, implementing this proposal again depends on India's willingness to conduct a neutral investigation with Pakistan. For Pakistan, this openness to a neutral investigation has two functions: First, to show confidence that Pakistan was not involved at all in the terrorist group attack in Pahalgam; Second, a diplomatic effort to show that if India is not willing and rejects this proposal, then there is something India is hiding. In addition to maintaining a defensive position, Pakistan also made counter-accusations against India. This counter-accusation was conveyed by Pakistan's

Interior Minister, Naqvi, that there was Indian involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan. This statement refers to the long-standing allegations that India allegedly provided support to anti-Pakistan militant groups in the unrest in Balochistan (Dawn, 2025). From the various statements issued by the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister of Pakistan, it is clear that Pakistan is trying to show that the real perpetrator of terror is India and that Pakistan is the victim of India's actions.

In addition, Pakistan also showed readiness in facing various threats and aggressive policies from India. Responding to India's cancellation of the Indus Water Treaty, Shehbaz firmly stated that the Indus Water is a vital interest for Pakistan, and the flow of the Indus Water will be maintained by all means. This statement warned India that if there were any actions or efforts to cut off the flow of the Indus Water, it would be responded to with full force (Dawn, 2025). The various narratives that Pakistan has issued also provide clarity to the old narrative based on Pakistan's foreign policy to provide support for Kashmir to determine its destiny according to its aspirations, without pressure from external powers such as India. This effort is a form of returning the focus of the international world to what happened in Pahalgam, which was a result of a political dispute and not just a terrorist attack. What Pakistan is doing is a form of "narrative reframing", namely wanting to change the narrative that is developing in the international world that Pakistan supports the terrorist group's attacks in Pahalgam, but instead wants to show that what happened in Pahalgam was the result of injustice given by India to Kashmir which triggered various attacks by terrorist groups.



In summary, the various official narratives issued by Pakistan are as follows:

- 1) Firm rejection of various accusations made by India and offering a neutral investigation to India. This step is an attempt by Pakistan to test whether India can prove its accusations objectively.
- 2) Pakistan counter-accused India that the terrorist attack in Pahalgam was a kind of "false flag" to reverse Pakistan's position as if it were the victim of accusations from India.
- 3) Pakistan emphasized sovereignty rhetoric and military warfare over India's various threats to sovereignty. Pakistan will fully counter India's threats, such as the cancellation of the Indus Water Treaty or military attacks.
- 4) Pakistan is trying to overcome the narrative of the issue in Kashmir. Pakistan is trying to change the perception of the cause of the terrorist action as a result of the political dispute in Kashmir, which has not been resolved until now. This effort was made to encourage the international community to see the terrorist group's attack in Pahalgam holistically and to attract international sympathy from India.

From a constructivist perspective, Pakistan's response is shaped not merely by material interests but by its socially constructed national identity as a counter-power to India. This identity has been historically developed through prolonged rivalry since the 1947 partition, positioning Pakistan as both a geopolitical competitor and

the ideological guardian of Muslim communities, particularly in Kashmir. As such, Pakistan's rejection of India's narrative and its assertion of an alternative account are strategic acts and expressions of its need to reaffirm its role as an equal and opposing force to India in the regional order. The interaction pattern between Pakistan and India tends to be at odds. If India accuses Pakistan, then Pakistan tends to deny and accuse India back. On the other hand, the perception has long been formed that if there is a problem in Kashmir, then India will blame Pakistan. The Kashmir issue is the root cause of tension between Pakistan and India that has never been resolved until now. Various narratives of blaming each other carried out by Pakistan and India have given birth to a kind of "perpetual blame game". In facing various accusations made by India, of course, Pakistan will continue to reject them. If Pakistan accepts the accusation, it means that Pakistan confirms its country as a "terrorist country" that India wants to pin. Accepting India's accusations will have an impact on the bad image received by the international community, so Pakistan will always reject accusations from India and try to counter accuse as an effort to maintain the dignity of its country.

c. Dynamics of Conflict Escalation After Terrorist Attack in Pahalgam

The official narrative battle between India and Pakistan triggered a broader escalation of the conflict and worsened the security situation in both countries. This wider escalation of the conflict occurred several days after the terrorist attack, India and Pakistan began to engage in limited armed contact, both on land and in the air. On April 25-26, there was



armed contact between the Indian army and the Pakistani army along the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir (Reuters, 2025). The Pakistani army initially carried out this armed contact by providing small arms fire that was not directed and seemed provocative at several Pakistani military posts along the Pakistani border. This provocative action carried out by the Pakistani army was then responded to with similar fire by the Indian army. The armed contact between the two countries marked the end of the ceasefire since the February 2021 peace agreement. Each party blamed the other; India called the Pakistani fire part of military aggression, while Pakistan stated that the fire was a response to violations committed by India (Arun & Bashaarat, 2025).

This limited armed contact also contributed to political and diplomatic tensions between the two countries. After the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, India and Pakistan both implemented various confrontational political and diplomatic policies. On one occasion, Pakistan declared it would withdraw from the 1972 Simla Agreement. This agreement is important because it is the basis for resolving the Kashmir issue peacefully and bilaterally without involving other parties (Farzana, 2025). In addition, Pakistan also stated that it had closed its airspace to Indian flights, so this policy made flight costs from India even more expensive (Reuters, 2025). On the other hand, India also implemented various confrontational policies, such as not re-recognizing the Indus water treaty and closing the border with Pakistan. In addition, India also revoked all visas of Pakistani citizens in India. With the various confrontational policies that the two countries have implemented, relations between the two countries fell to their lowest point in years just a few days after the terrorists

in Pahalgam. Relations between the two countries are heating up not only at the state level but also at the societal level. National media in both countries are issuing various provocative news reports that have provoked anger in the people of both countries (The Hindu, 2025).

The escalation of this conflict then developed into a more massive military escalation when India launched coordinated airstrikes on several targets in Pakistan. This airstrike operation was codenamed "Operation Sindoor" to attack 9 locations claimed to be facilities and infrastructure owned by the terrorist group responsible for the attack in Pahalgam. India claimed that this airstrike was measured only targeting targets owned by terrorist groups identified as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. India stated that this Sindoor operation was India's right to defend itself as well as a pre-emptive step to prevent further attacks by terrorist groups (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2025). Pakistan condemned the airstrike carried out by India and called it open military aggression. The Pakistani Foreign Ministry called it a "blatant act of war," and Pakistan had the right to retaliate against this airstrike as a self-defence response (Reuters, 2025). The consequences of this Sindoor operation opened up a major military confrontation between the two countries. The Pakistani military launched a series of counterattacks into Indian territory by launching drone attacks and missile fire. The various military confrontations that occurred also resulted in civilian casualties on both sides. Both countries claimed that the military attacks that occurred in their countries resulted in civilian casualties.

Both sides were also involved in direct air combat. Various international media outlets



widely reported on the dogfight between the Indian and Pakistani air forces on May 7, 2025. Operation Sindoor successfully attacked various targets in Pakistan, but there was also a fierce air battle. There was a claim from Pakistan that this air battle managed to shoot down five Indian Air Force planes. Although the number of planes downed has not been confirmed because there is no independent confirmation for such a large number of planes, it is estimated that this is a form of propaganda from Pakistan (Al Jazeera, 2025). Meanwhile, India claims that all its pilots returned safely, and one plane had disappeared. The magnitude of the escalation of open military conflict that occurred around May 7-9, 2025, is considered the most significant escalation of military conflict between India and Pakistan since the 1999 Kargil War. Direct conflict between the two nuclear-powered countries quickly prompted the world to consider the possibility of a major war. With troops from both countries on full alert, the South Asian region was on the verge of a large-scale military confrontation for several days. Pressure from the international community is significant in resolving the heated situation between India and Pakistan and reducing the tension of the conflict between the two countries.

d. Diplomatic Impact and International Response

The international community stepped in to prevent an escalation of the conflict between India and Pakistan. The United States took the lead through greater diplomatic efforts. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio held telephone conversations with Indian Foreign Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in early May, urging

both sides to exercise restraint and de-escalate tensions to promote regional stability. The United States said both sides should seek a “responsible solution” and avoid further escalation. Secretary Rubio also urged other allies to convey similar messages to Delhi and Islamabad. Senior US officials expressed condolences and condemned the April 22 terror incident in their discussions with India, reaffirming US support for India’s efforts to combat terrorism (NDTV, 2025). US President Donald Trump formally condemned the Pahalgam attack as a “horrific” incident and pledged to stand with India. However, it is important to acknowledge that while the United States has strongly condemned terrorism in Kashmir, Washington has been careful to refrain from publicly rebuking Pakistan. Reuters reported that the Trump administration condemned the attack and expressed support for India, though it has refrained from criticizing Pakistan publicly. This illustrates the diplomatic balance that the US continues to see Pakistan as a partner, despite its diminished standing after the US exit from Afghanistan in 2021, and must maintain to avoid total marginalization (Reuters, 2025).

Other major powers have also been involved in diplomatic efforts. China, Pakistan’s long-standing ally, has urged “restraint” on both sides and has approved any measures to ease tensions. Beijing, which has strategic interests in the region, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan, is naturally wary of a full-scale conflict (Anadolu Agency, 2025). China has expressed disinterest in encouraging discussions, but its diplomatic engagement has given Pakistan leverage to assert its position. The UK and the European Union have made their positions clear: the EU issued a statement



"strongly condemning the horrific terrorist attack in Pahalgam" and urging India and Pakistan to refrain from such actions in the future. On May 10, 2025, G7 Foreign Ministers issued a joint communique expressing deep concern about the escalating tensions between India and Pakistan. They condemned the April 22 terror attacks and strongly urged both countries to exercise maximum restraint, as further military escalation poses significant threats to regional peace and security (Business Today, 2025). On May 9, neighbouring Singapore issued a statement advocating for a diplomatic resolution and warning against actions that could worsen the situation.

Multilateral forums were used to prevent the situation from escalating. The UN Security Council held a closed-door discussion on the "India-Pakistan Question" on May 5, 2025. The first informal UNSC meeting on the India-Pakistan issue in years was a sign of the seriousness of global concern (UN Security Council, 2025). The forum was expected to hear briefings from both sides and perhaps a third entity, such as the UN or a presiding state. The outcome was kept secret; however, it put moral pressure on both countries to refrain from overstepping the line. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which has often been outspoken on the Kashmir issue, condemned the Pahalgam incident and criticized "India's actions that have exacerbated the suffering of the Kashmiri people," in line with the OIC's pro-Pakistan position (Anadolu Agency, 2025). Islamabad used this to underscore its stance that the Muslim world supports Pakistan's narrative on Kashmir. The United States and its allies eventually reached an immediate ceasefire between India and Pakistan shortly after May

7. On or about May 10, 2025, the two countries tacitly agreed to a ceasefire. Reuters reported that Islamabad and New Delhi reached an immediate ceasefire through emergency diplomatic channels, ending a military standoff brewing. Britain and the US reportedly facilitated efforts to ensure both sides continued the ceasefire along the Line of Control and refrained from further provocative activities (Reuters, 2025).

During the war, Iran and other regional actors sent their foreign minister to Islamabad as part of their mediation efforts. The visit by the Iranian foreign minister was interpreted as an effort to promote a peaceful resolution and offer diplomatic assistance (Reuters, 2025). The presidents of both countries have apparently been approached by the governments of Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in an attempt to alleviate the situation, stating that they are interested in preserving regional stability and cultivating cordial ties with both sides. (Time, 2025). The Pahalgam 2025 dispute resulted in a significant deterioration in India-Pakistan relations, reviving the diplomatic deadlock. Formal communication channels between the two governments were effectively cut off during the crisis; even after its resolution, restoring the already inadequate status quo ante took considerable time. No bilateral dialogue has occurred, peace negotiations have stalled since 2015, and this incident has only worsened matters (Razdan, 2018). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized this stance, stating: "Terror and talk can't happen together. Terror and trade can't happen together" (Economic Times, 2025). Pakistan has said that India is avoiding talks on Kashmir by citing terrorism as a pretext. As Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar stated, "Pakistan wanted a



comprehensive dialogue on a range of issues including water, whereas India wanted to focus only on terrorism” (Shahzad, 2025). This stance has strengthened the diplomatic deadlock.

Many agreements and cooperation procedures have been compromised as a result. However, India’s reversible suspension of the Indus Water Treaty has set a dangerous precedent in bilateral relations between the two countries (New Desk, 2025). Experts warn that politicizing the water issue could worsen tensions, even recent claims of World Bank intervention to enforce the agreement. Similarly, Pakistan’s choice to suspend the Simla Agreement marks a significant diplomatic loss. The Simla Agreement was the basis for the post-1971 peace agreement, and its failure to do so could signal that Pakistan is once again internationalizing the Kashmir dispute (Ramachandran, 2025). This move concerns the West as it involves other important countries, such as China, in the conflict.

On the contrary, there have been modest positive outcomes regarding global recognition of the need to address fundamental challenges. Both India and Pakistan face reputational challenges: Pakistan’s credentials on terrorism are under scrutiny, while India’s Kashmir policy, particularly since the withdrawal of autonomy in 2019, has faced criticism for exacerbating tensions. Analysts note that both countries have limited leverage: India has not managed to completely “marginalize” Pakistan in the international arena, while Pakistan has struggled to convince the global community of its innocence due to its long-standing reputational issues. The crisis has created a unique dynamic in which each side seeks to influence the global narrative in its favour.

However, it is constrained by historical precedents that reduce the efficacy of that narrative.

Domestic diplomatic repercussions also emerged. Modi’s government in India experienced a significant surge in political support for its tough approach to terrorism. The construction of a “tough on Pakistan” narrative strengthened domestic nationalism and temporarily unified cross-party support, with Indian opposition leader Mallikarjun Kharge asserting that, despite the government’s failure to prevent the attacks, the opposition would remain united in supporting the government against external threats. The transitional government in Pakistan, approaching general elections, used the crisis to advocate national unity against the Indian threat, despite criticism from certain factions for its inadequate diplomatic management of the situation.

V. Conclusion

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam in 2025 not only escalated long-standing tensions between India and Pakistan but also revealed how national identity plays a central role in shaping state narratives during a crisis. From a constructivist perspective, identity is not a fixed attribute but a socially constructed and continuously reproduced concept through discourse and interaction with “the other.” In this context, India and Pakistan interpreted and responded to the attack through narratives deeply rooted in their national identities and historical self-other constructions.

India characterized the Pahalgam attack as an instance of cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. This narrative



solidifies its identity as a secular, democratic, and law-abiding state under threat from external invasion. The account legitimizes India's retaliatory measures, including military strikes and the diplomatic isolation of Pakistan, as acts of self-defence. Moreover, by highlighting the brutality of the assault and portraying itself as a victim, India aims to foster domestic cohesion and elicit international empathy, thereby reinforcing its identity as a responsible participant in the global fight against terrorism.

Conversely, Pakistan's narrative is influenced by its role as a protector of the Kashmiri Muslim community and a victim of Indian dominance. Pakistan unequivocally rejected any complicity in the attack and demanded an impartial international probe, seeking to assert its legitimacy and moral superiority. Concurrently, it characterized India's response as repressive and grounded in anti-Muslim prejudice, which corresponds with its overarching narrative of opposing Indian occupation in Kashmir. This dual strategy—denial of culpability and moral counteraccusation—demonstrates Pakistan's endeavour to establish an identity that is simultaneously defensive and ideologically valid.

The process of narrative production is not solely reactive but also purposeful. Both states employ selective interpretation, framing, and transmission of narratives that reinforce their national identities while concurrently delegitimizing the opposing entity. These narratives are disseminated via official declarations, diplomatic channels, and international forums, and they are crucial for how states pursue recognition, solidarity, and influence.

The Pahalgam attack illustrates a persistent discursive cycle in India–Pakistan relations: a crisis occurrence incites narrative intensification, driven by deep-seated perceptions and adversarial identities. International pressure may momentarily diminish tensions, although the fundamental narratives persist unaltered. As long as identity-based narratives are formed in antagonism to one another, subsequent crises will probably follow a comparable path. Constructivism offers a significant perspective for comprehending both the material reactions to terrorism and the ideational mechanisms that perpetuate lasting competition. Sustainable peace necessitates a reconfiguration of identity narratives through trust-building, intersocietal engagement, and a mutual readiness to reconceptualize the "other" beyond animosity.

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