Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: The Editorial Board

Is there a mechanism for permanent de-escalation between India and Pakistan?

US President Donald Trump announced on Saturday that a ceasefire had been reached between India and Pakistan under US mediation. Although his peacemaking announcements demand caution because those regarding Ukraine or Gaza have not yet materialised, the world naturally hopes that the two Asian nuclear powers are on the right track to prevent an escalation.

Since the beginning of May 2025, tensions between India and Pakistan have been higher than at any time since the end of the twentieth century.

Within thirty-six hours, the two armies have carried out reciprocal air strikes on key bases and strategic installations. This escalation is the toughest test of stability in the nuclear-armed region since the Kargil conflict in 1999, and the willingness of both sides to attempt a direct military confrontation raises questions about the deeper causes, methods, and consequences of such actions.

The root of this dispute goes back to the partitions carried out by the British colonial administration in 1947. Kashmir then remained an unresolved issue of sovereignty and a dividing line that never eliminated the risk of cross-border tensions.

Since then, India and Pakistan have gone to war three times, and conflicts and diversions continue to occur to this day. The peaceful border demarcation mechanisms have not led to a lasting solution.

In earlier confrontations, armed tensions usually took the form of mutual shelling and localised diversions along the dividing lines. A paradigm shift occurred when both air forces switched to air strikes.

Escalation of previous incidents in Kashmir

India and Pakistan have almost simultaneously deployed a combination of drones and fighter jets to strike high-value military facilities and disrupt the enemy's defence capabilities.

Official statements provided partial details of the Indian operation. The Air Force deployed a combination of drones and fighter jets in the Muzaffarabad region.

Official statements speak of damage to ammunition depots and air defence installations several dozen kilometres from the demarcation line. The tactical target list also included subordinate command centres to disrupt the enemy's air defence.

> This escalation represents a significant increase in aggression that could lead to a major conflict

Pakistan's response followed the same day with an attack on an airbase near the Jammu region. Hangars and service facilities were destroyed, while civilian warehouses were badly damaged by shrapnel.

Preliminary reports speak of more than sixty dead and a hundred wounded. This statistic illustrates the strategic intent of both sides to inflict painful damage on the enemy.

Compared to the usual conventional incidents in the Kashmir Valley, this escalation represents a significant increase in aggression that could lead to a major conflict.

Political crises – the drivers of conflict

The reasons for the switch to air strikes should be sought in the political crises in both countries.

In New Delhi, the economic challenges are piling up. Prime Minister Modi is being criticised for slow growth and high unemployment. Nationalist rhetoric is a means of diverting public attention from internal problems and strengthening support for the ruling party.

The combination of external threats with internal challenges gives the appearance of determination. In Islamabad, the civilian government balances with the support of the military elite.

The generals there accuse the political leadership of indulgence towards the militants and foreign pressures.

A strong military response is considered proof of national resolve and the only way to consolidate power at home. In such an environment, tough rhetoric and a willingness to use force become real action.

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The technological elements of the conflict also play an important role. India has improved its domestic production of drones for reconnaissance and precision strikes, and Pakistan has acquired medium-range systems in co-operation with Turkey and China.

Drones make it possible to attack logistics facilities without jeopardising pilots, which increases flexibility in operations.

The attack on the ammunition depots is aimed at interrupting the enemy's supply chain. The damage to the reserves has a direct impact on the army's combat capability and gives a strategic advantage to the side that can maintain the intensity of operations for longer.

Global concern over the nuclear factor

The international community responded with a combination of concern and diplomatic initiatives. The United States offered to mediate the talks, while China called for calm and suggested the establishment of direct channels of communication between the commands of the two armies.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates sent special envoys to initiate informal consultations. The European Union is considering sending a mission modelled according to missions of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe to monitor the ceasefire and report violations of the agreement.

The nuclear factor remains at the core of any serious risk. Neither India nor Pakistan have changed the doctrine of no first use of nuclear weapons.

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Historical experience shows that failures of early warning systems and mechanical errors can lead to fatal escalation. The mobilisation of strategic medium-range missiles can be interpreted as preparation for a massive strike potentially initiating the nuclear dimension of the conflict.

Experts point to a high risk of unintended nuclear escalation. Kashmir is a complex region, characterised by mountain passes, dense forests, and inaccessible valleys.

Any thought of a civilian attack or misidentification of a target can trigger a chain reaction of retaliation. Under such conditions, the perimeter must be precisely defined and communication clear.

The analysis indicates that diplomatic initiatives could achieve a short-term pause in hostilities in the coming weeks. At the same time, however, there is a risk that any new violation of the ceasefire will lead to a rapid return of aggressive action.

Until a stable border control mechanism and reliable direct communication between the commands of the two armies are established, tension will remain a latent threat that can escalate even because of a local incident.

Necessary involvement of international factors

From a strategic perspective, the key points of vulnerability are logistic centres and civilian installations in the coastal regions of Kashmir that are exposed to drone attacks.

One of the most important recommendations is the immediate establishment of a bilateral security forum with the participation of neutral actors.

This forum should establish a common protocol for mutual information on planned military exercises and the deployment of units. In parallel, it is necessary to revitalise the work of the Indus Commission (the Indus Commission is a permanent body established in 1960 on the basis of the Indus Water Treaty with the mediation of the World Bank to manage the distribution of water of the Indus River Basin between India and Pakistan) and extend its mandate to include verification of the ceasefire.

It is imperative that the UN, with the support of key regional actors, formulate and support an operational protocol for constant communication and rapid response to crisis situations

The institutionalised presence of international observers on the ground would provide an additional layer of guarantees and reduce tensions between units in the border areas.

If these measures are consistently implemented, it is possible to avoid a deeper phase of conventional conflict and stabilise the situation in the long run.

Conversely, the delay in diplomatic steps and inconsistent implementation of the ceasefire regime will lead to further militarisation of the region and a risk of unintended nuclear escalation.

The international community must remain engaged until the situation changes from a mere ceasefire to a sustainable peace process.

Regardless of whether a ceasefire or a new phase of hostilities follows, the conflict has shown that old divisions can quickly turn into open conflict.

Without a permanent framework for intelligence sharing, joint monitoring of the ceasefire, and legally binding mechanisms to sanction violations of the agreement, any new incident can set in motion a chain of escalation with unforeseeable consequences for the entire region and the world.

It is therefore imperative that the United Nations, with the support of key regional actors, formulate and support an operational protocol for constant communication and rapid response to crisis situations.

Only the consistent application of such mechanisms can ensure that peace does not remain a temporary cessation of hostilities but becomes a solid foundation for long-term stability and security.