

The Role of U.S. Mediation in Inter-State Conflict Resolution: A Study Focusing on the 2025 India–Pakistan Crisis

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Abstract

India and Pakistan are two nuclear-armed neighbors in the South Asian region whose bilateral crises are frequently subject to regional and international intervention. Historically, the mediation of U.S. President Richard Nixon and the strategies of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger during the 1971 war underscored Pakistan's reliance on U.S. foreign policy. Conversely, during the Cold War, India maintained a distant relationship with the U.S. as a strategic ally of the Soviet Union, with Indira Gandhi's leadership often characterized by a unique anti-American stance. This study examines the evolution of this dynamic, focusing on the U.S. intervention in the May 2025 India-Pakistan ceasefire. By 2025, the geopolitical landscape had fundamentally shifted within a unipolar-influenced but transitioning global order, both nations have been absorbed into a U.S. policy of complex engagement. Simultaneously, India's rising economic and strategic status has increased its influence within the Global South. However, the 2025 crisis sparked by India's "Operation Sindoor" counter-terrorism strikes and concluded via a U.S.-mediated ceasefire has raised critical questions regarding Indian strategic autonomy. This paper argues that the recent crisis demonstrated how the Narendra Modi-led government's handling of the conflict provided an opening for a superpower to influence Indian sovereignty. While India has traditionally rejected third-party mediation, international assessments suggest that the indirect intervention of the United States remains a decisive factor in preventing a full-scale nuclear escalation. Pakistan, meanwhile, continues to largely welcome American and international diplomatic roles. Drawing on Critical Realism and Neo-realism, this paper utilizes descriptive analysis and comparative methodologies to argue that U.S. actions in 2025 were primarily driven by national interest, regional stability, and nuclear deterrence rather than purely humanitarian objectives. The 2025 crisis serves as a pivotal event revealing both the limitations and opportunities of U.S. mediation, concluding that while a temporary peace was achieved, substantive, long-term resolution remains elusive under current U.S. leadership.

Keywords: Crisis Management, Foreign Policy, Nuclear Deterrence, Perception, Sovereignty

Introduction

In 21st-century international politics, the legal, economic, and political pressures exerted by third-party states in bilateral conflicts have become a central theme of political discourse. Conflicts, by their very nature, jeopardize the stability, peace, and security of their respective regions. Specifically, hostilities between nuclear-armed states necessitate urgent international attention and third-party intervention. In this con-

text, mediation by great powers has emerged as a vital instrument for conflict resolution.

Since the emergence of India and Pakistan as sovereign states in 1947, their relationship has remained in a state of perpetual crisis. Following the nuclearization of the subcontinent, nuclear deterrence became a cornerstone of both nations' security architectures and foreign policies. In the post-9/11 era, Indian foreign policy sought to reshape the international perception of the region by framing Pakistan as a "sponsor of terrorism,"



thereby aiming to diminish Islamabad's strategic significance in Washington's eyes.

However, the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War under Indira Gandhi and the subsequent 2025 conflict under Narendra Modi represent instances where American intervention was sidelined by regional objectives. While the United States has maintained global hegemony since World War II through its economic, military, and diplomatic prowess, its role in South Asia faces unique challenges. Although the 1995 Dayton Agreement, the 1999 Kargil War, and various Syrian peace initiatives highlight America's role as a global mediator, the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan provides a critical case study for examining the limits of U.S. influence and the evolving nature of South Asian diplomacy. Salma (2022)

The Indo-Pakistani relationship has been defined by systemic political, military, and security-related contradictions since the 1947 Partition. Key flashpoints, including the Kashmir dispute, territorial incursions, and allegations of cross-border terrorism, have historically intensified these frictions. The crisis of 2025 stands as a significant contemporary event that brought these nuclear-armed neighbors to the threshold of full-scale war.

The trigger for this crisis was a terrorist attack in April 2025 in Pahalgam, located in Indian-administered Kashmir. Following the deaths of 26 civilians, New Delhi accused Islamabad of providing clandestine support to the perpetrators. Despite Pakistan's denials, diplomatic ties deteriorated rapidly. In early May 2025, India executed precision air and missile strikes against targets in Pakistani-controlled territory, characterizing them as counter-terrorism operations. Pakistan responded by mobilizing its military and enhancing its combat readiness along the Line of Control.

As the escalation threatened to spiral out of control, the United States, the United Nations, and various regional powers urged strategic restraint. Washington, in particular, utilized its diplomatic channels with both capitals to facilitate de-escalation. Due to this concerted international pressure and prevailing domestic pressures, a temporary ceasefire was established in mid-May 2025.

Responsibility for the Pahalgam attack was initially claimed by an offshoot of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba. This event was particularly significant as direct attacks on tourists had become increasingly rare. It marked the deadliest incident involving tourists since the 2000 Pahalgam massacre. For an Indian administration focused on projecting global economic dominance, this security breach was viewed as a direct challenge to national stability. In response, India launched Operation Sindoor, targeting military installations within Pakistan. However, as the kinetic exchange surpassed initial strategic expectations, the necessity for a ceasefire and third-party mediation specifically by the United States became apparent. Ultimately, while the initiation of the conflict was driven by India's national interest, its conclusion was shaped by the realities of international diplomacy.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review is necessary to identify gaps in existing scholarship regarding interstate conflicts and the role of third-party mediation in resolving them. This study aims to analyze the strategic position of third-party mediation, particularly in conflicts involving nuclear-armed states. Within this framework, the India-Pakistan conflict must be examined through historical, political, security, and theoretical lenses. As South Asian regional politics largely revolves around India's pursuit of superpower status in the Indian Ocean, any prolonged military escalation threatens to undermine its regional supremacy. Consequently, existing academic discourse on these dynamics serves as the foundational literature for this study

Keethaponcalan (2017) in his work *Conflict Resolution: An Introduction to Third Party Intervention*, argues that true resolution must be a process of understanding root causes to create lasting peace. He advocates for non-military and non-coercive approaches, such as mediation, negotiation, and trust-building. Keethaponcalan defines conflict as a manifestation of deep-seated structural issues including political power distribution, resource inequality, identity politics, and historical injustices which serve as the

foundations for long-term enmity. Furthermore, Keethaponcalan asserts that mediators must not only maintain neutrality but also possess the capacity to address the power imbalance between the conflicting parties. He critically observes that mediation by powerful nations in international politics carries a dual potential: while it can facilitate peace, it also presents the risk of those third parties advancing their own political and strategic interests. This body of literature is vital for evaluating the role of third parties in the enduring rivalry between India and Pakistan.

Yusuf (2018) in his *Brokering Bargaining* model, explains that since nuclear weapons prevent total military victory, the role of third-party mediators undergoes a fundamental shift. He theoretically illustrates the politics behind third-party intervention, noting that in nuclear environments, third parties act less as traditional mediators and more as crisis managers. Within this framework, he explains that India and Pakistan repeatedly utilize third parties to manage or limit external interference without appearing weak in their respective domestic political spheres. This theory is also vital for understanding the "brinkmanship" regarding nuclear use during the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict.

Cohen (2010) defines India-Pakistan relations as a "permanent crisis," stating that the Kashmir issue frequently manifests as a regional imbalance and a core conflict between the two nations. He identifies mutual distrust as the primary driver of this friction. Similarly, Ganguly (2016) explains in his research that the India-Pakistan conflict has evolved beyond a bilateral political issue to become a matter affecting regional and global political stability.

Regarding third-party mediation, Bercovitch and Houston (2000) argue that while mediation efforts by powerful nations can be effective in controlling conflict, they are often driven by the strategic interests of those nations. This perspective is crucial for understanding U.S. mediation. This study identifies that when examining the U.S. role in India-Pakistan conflict resolution, evidence suggests the U.S. engages in mediation to preserve its national interests and superpower status. Furthermore, Zartman (2005) through his "Ripeness Theory," explains that mediation becomes effective only after a conflict reaches a

specific level of intensity or a "mutually hurting stalemate."

On the subject of U.S. mediation in the India-Pakistan context, Kux (2001) and Tellis (2017) note that the U.S. has often functioned as a crisis management tool rather than a direct mediator. Literature points to events such as the Kargil Crisis (1999) and the post-Pulwama tensions (2019) as instances where the U.S. acted to prevent escalation. Beyond this, existing discourse highlights that war and peace in the global political arena often occur under U.S. influence.

While existing literature extensively explores border disputes over Kashmir and the consequences of nuclear rivalry, there is a clear scholarly deficiency in examining how India's quest for Indian Ocean hegemony affects its receptivity to third-party mediation. Most studies treat maritime politics, strategic significance, and peace processes as isolated dimensions.

Even recent studies regarding the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis focus largely on descriptive accounts of nuclear use and third-party mediation. There is a lack of deep critical analysis regarding the nature, motives, and limitations of U.S. mediation. Specifically, research has not sufficiently addressed how U.S. intervention under the guise of mediation challenges the sovereignty and supremacy of the involved nations. Therefore, based on the literature, a clear research gap exists for a critical analysis of the U.S. role in the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring the political and strategic dimensions of American mediation in the contemporary era.

Methodology

Research is a scholarly pursuit dedicated to uncovering the truth. Accordingly, to analyze the position of U.S. mediation in interstate conflict resolution focusing on the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis this study utilizes Qualitative Research Methodology, integrating Comparative Analysis, Critical Realism, and Descriptive Analysis.

The research utilizes a hybrid approach, integrating primary and secondary data to ensure the reliability and validity of findings despite the sensitive nature of the geopolitical events

Official State Documents: Formal statements from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) to capture official state positions.

Diplomatic Communications: Digital records and public diplomatic transcripts, including high-level social media announcements (e.g., President Trump's Truth social posts), which served as primary catalysts for international discourse.

Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journals and books by established scholars like S.I. Keethaponcalan and Moeed Yusuf to provide the theoretical grounding in Conflict Resolution and Nuclear Deterrence.

Credible Media Reporting: Real-time reports from reputable international and regional news outlets (e.g., The Hindu, Reuters) to reconstruct the timeline of "Operation Sindoor" and the Pahalgam attack.

Using Comparative Analysis, this study contrasts the 2025 crisis with the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War to identify shifts in U.S. intervention strategies moving from Cold War "Containment" to 21st-century "Crisis Management". Furthermore, a Critical Realist approach is applied to look beyond the surface level of diplomatic rhetoric. This allows for a deeper evaluation of whether U.S. actions were driven by genuine humanitarian mediation or by a "Power Politics" agenda aimed at maintaining regional hegemony and protecting global trade interests. This methodology ensures transparency by acknowledging potential biases in political statements and weighing them against strategic military outcomes on the ground.

Discussion and Findings

The India-Pakistan crisis of 2025, while structurally echoing the geopolitical tensions of the 1971 war, serves as a transformative case study in modern South Asian power dynamics. Although both historical and contemporary conflicts originated from deep-seated territorial and security anxieties, the 2025 crisis was defined by a shift from traditional conventional warfare to a complex interplay of high-tech kinetic exchanges and digital diplomacy. While the high probability of a protracted, all-out war loomed, the unprecedented rate of casualties driven by mod-

ern weaponry necessitated an urgent cessation of hostilities. This study finds that while India possessed the requisite military and economic capital to sustain a conflict, the nature of the eventual ceasefire revealed a significant erosion of India's long-standing doctrine of bilateralism.

A primary finding of this research is the critical discrepancy between the image of mediation and the institutional reality of international law. President Trump's public intervention via Truth Social represents a paradigm shift toward "personalistic diplomacy." Unlike the institutionalized mediation of the past, this was a performative act that bypassed formal diplomatic channels, creating what Critical Realists would define as a "mediation facade." This study argues that this intervention was not a functional legal necessity but a strategic move to bolster American domestic prestige. Consequently, a strategic divergence emerged: Pakistan embraced this third-party involvement as a balancing mechanism against a superior power, while the Indian administration engaged in strategic diversion. By saturating the domestic media with narratives of military heroism and "Operation Sindoor's" success, New Delhi effectively masked the perceived erosion of its national sovereignty and regional autonomy.

Furthermore, the 2025 crisis exposed a fundamental internal contradiction within the Modi administration's "Vishwaguru" (Global Teacher) narrative. India's pursuit of moral and cultural leadership on the global stage relies on the projection of self-reliance and regional stability. However, the reliance on a U.S.-mediated ceasefire to prevent a potential nuclear escalation created a significant "credibility gap." The necessity of external crisis management directly contradicts the "Vishwaguru" objective of providing solutions to global problems, rendering India's pursuit of great-power status vulnerable to both international skepticism and intense domestic scrutiny within the Lok Sabha.

From a Neo-realist perspective, the study finds that U.S. intervention was fundamentally driven by rational self-interest rather than humanitarian altruism. Specifically, the preservation of global trade stability amidst the ongoing U.S.-China trade war was paramount. As American manufacturing and technology investments shifted from China to India, the U.S. could not

afford a destabilized South Asia. The study identifies this as “Economic Deterrence”; the implicit threat of disrupting these vital economic lifelines forced India into a pragmatic ceasefire. This highlights a modern geopolitical reality: in an interdependent world, economic leverage functions as a potent instrument for great powers to influence the internal security decisions of sovereign states, regardless of their regional dominance.

The evolution of the 2025 conflict into a drone-centered war further complicates the security landscape. This technological shift toward unmanned systems lowered the psychological threshold for initial attacks but simultaneously increased the risk of unintended nuclear escalation a phenomenon described as “technological brinkmanship.” This necessitated a global consensus for an immediate ceasefire, validating the argument proposed by Yusuf (2018) that in a nuclear-armed environment, third parties act less as traditional peace mediators and more as essential “crisis managers.”

Therefore, the maneuvers from the beginning of the India-Pakistan war to the ceasefire were structured around India’s national interests. Pakistan’s political, economic, and military weaknesses led it to seek third-party support rather than reaching a mediated settlement through direct dialogue with India. However, the assertive nature of the United States and the specific politics of Trump rendered the challenge to India’s supremacy an undeniable argument. Despite subsequent attempts by high-ranking Indian officials and the U.S. President to rectify this perception, the criticism remained unavoidable. Ultimately, this must be viewed as a manifestation of weakness in India’s foreign policy. The involvement of the United States in the India-Pakistan ceasefire brings to mind the philosophy of the former U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Whether viewed through the lens of Kissinger’s specific diplomatic doctrine or the foundational principles of American foreign policy, his assessment of nations that align with or oppose the United States remains significant. Kissinger famously remarked, “To be an enemy of the United States can be dangerous, but to be a friend is fatal.” This suggests that while being an adversary of America is hazardous, being its ally can prove to be a far more deadly predicament.

Conclusion

This study concludes that U.S. involvement in the 2025 India-Pakistan crisis functions more as asymmetric crisis management than formal mediation. By examining the discrepancy between public diplomatic rhetoric and the absence of legal treaties, the research demonstrates how the United States utilizes “Digital Brinkmanship” and economic leverage to protect its regional interests.

A primary contribution of this research is the identification of a new challenge to India’s Strategic Autonomy. While India traditionally upholds a bilateral framework for conflict resolution, the 2025 event reveals that increasing global economic interdependence makes unilateral military action (like Operation Sindoor) difficult to sustain without external diplomatic clearance.

The study fills a critical scholarly gap by highlighting two significant paradoxes in contemporary international relations:

1. Perception as Power: The Construction of Mediation

The research establishes that in the modern era of digital diplomacy, mediation can be successfully constructed through political imagery and strategic communication, even in the absence of formal legal recognition by the conflicting parties. In the 2025 crisis, while neither India nor Pakistan officially designated the United States as a formal mediator, the U.S. utilized social media platforms and international press briefings to project an image of “indispensable intervention”. This suggests that a superpower’s influence is no longer measured solely by signed treaties, but by its ability to shape the global narrative of a conflict’s resolution. This “mediation by perception” allows external powers to assert hegemony over bilateral disputes without undergoing institutionalized diplomatic processes.

2. Sovereignty vs. Stability: The Vishwaguru Constraint

Secondly, the study explores the inherent tension between India’s pursuit of “Vishwaguru” (Global Teacher) status and the

practical constraints of Strategic Autonomy. While India seeks to project its moral and cultural leadership as a “pathway to peace,” the global necessity for nuclear stability often forces a compromise. When regional military objectives (such as Operation Sindoor) risk escalating into a nuclear exchange, the international community’s demand for stability outweighs the state’s claim to absolute sovereignty. Consequently, India faces a “sovereignty-for-security” trade-off, where it must accept a degree of external influence to preserve its international economic standing and prevent regional collapse. This finding reveals that the “Vishwaguru” ambition is constantly negotiated within the cold realities of Realpolitik and global interdependence.

The paper concludes that while a temporary ceasefire was achieved through U.S. intervention, the root causes of the India-Pakistan rivalry remain unaddressed. Future diplomatic stability in South Asia will depend on whether regional powers can reclaim their bilateral mechanisms or if they will remain perpetually subject to the strategic dictates of external superpowers.

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