

FROM MEDIATION TO SOLIDARITY: MIDDLE EASTERN RESPONSES TO INDIA'S AGGRESSION AGAINST PAKISTAN

By
Arhama Siddiq
 Research Fellow

Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA), ISSI
 Email: arhama.siddiq@issi.org.pk

Edited by
Amina Khan

May 23, 2025

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



On April 22, 2025, an attack in Pahalgam, Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), resulted in the death of 26 tourists. Without holding any investigation and presenting any evidence India blamed Pakistan and first announced a slew of diplomatic and economic measures against Pakistan and later made military strikes in Pakistan and AJK under the so-called "Operation Sindoor" on May 7, 2025. Pakistan responded with its own military actions, including the downing of at least 5 Indian aircraft as well as missile strikes on Indian military sites. The escalation brought the two nuclear-armed neighbors to the brink of war, prompting urgent international diplomatic interventions. A U.S.-brokered ceasefire was announced on May 10, though violations by India were reported shortly thereafter.¹

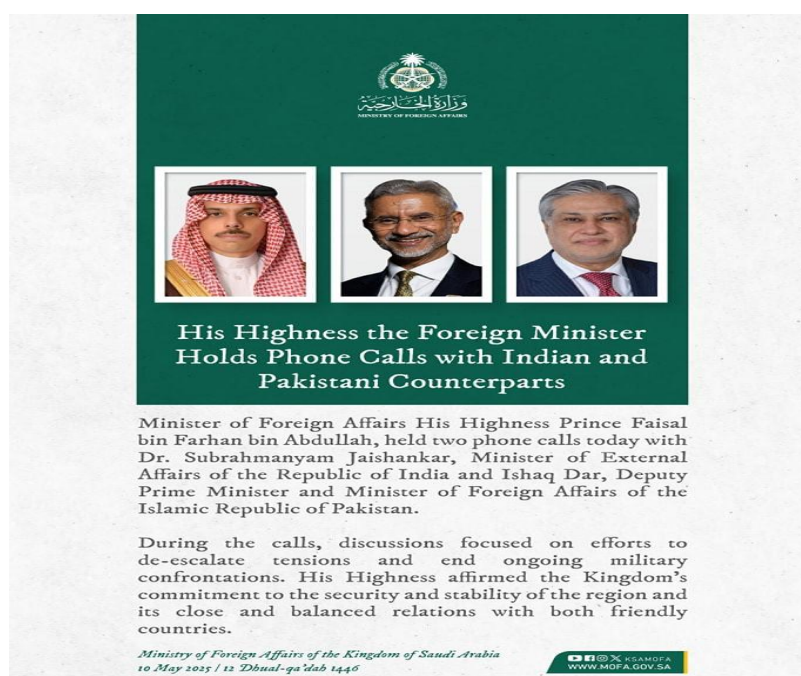
The Middle East, with its deep historical, economic, and strategic ties to both Pakistan and India, became engaged in a significant way. However, it is important to note that Pakistan's relationships with the Gulf states—particularly Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—are rooted in longstanding strategic, defence, and cultural linkages that go beyond transactional diplomacy. These ties, underpinned by shared religion, military cooperation, and decades of mutual support, continue to give Pakistan a unique standing in the region. The Middle East as a region hosts millions of South

¹ "India-Pakistan Operation Sindoor: Live Updates." *CNN*, May 10, 2025.
<https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/india-pakistan-operation-sindoor-05-10-25>.

Asian expatriates, and as key trade and energy partners with both Pakistan and India, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members and other Middle Eastern powers sensed that stakes were quite high. Many of these countries moved swiftly to defuse tensions, emphasizing the importance to Pakistan and India of opening diplomatic channels, de-escalation, and in some cases, aligning their support according to strategic calculations.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia quickly assumed a prominent role and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel Al-Jubeir visited New Delhi on (May 8) and Islamabad on (May 9) urging restraint and promoting dialogue.² Riyadh later also expressed strong support for the U.S.-brokered ceasefire and issued a statement underscoring the importance of peace and regional stability. Furthermore, on May 10, 2025, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan held separate telephone conversations with India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, and Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar.³ These discussions focused on efforts to de-escalate tensions and end ongoing military confrontation. Saudi Arabia's position was seen by many in the region as balanced, given its substantial investments in Pakistan and India and its broader role as a leading power in the Muslim world. Moreover, the Kingdom's historical solidarity with Pakistan - including in times of crises - continues to shape the tone and warmth of its engagement with Islamabad.



- ² "Saudi Arabia Leads Mediation Efforts to Ease India-Pakistan Military Escalation." *Saudi Gazette*, May 10, 2025. <https://www.saudigazette.com.sa/article/651674/SAUDI-ARABIA/Saudi-Arabia-leads-mediation-efforts-to-ease-India-Pakistan-military-escalation>.
- ³ "Saudi FM Dials Deputy PM Dar over India-Pakistan Escalation." *Samaa TV*, May 10, 2025. <https://samaa.tv/2087333259-saudi-fm-dials-deputy-pm-dar-over-india-pakistan-escalation>.

Iran

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi arrived in Islamabad on May 5, 2025, for a one-day visit aimed at de-escalating tensions between India and Pakistan.⁴ During the visit, he met with senior Pakistani officials to discuss regional stability and bilateral relations. Although his trip was originally scheduled for India to co-chair the 20th India–Iran Joint Commission Meeting, Foreign Minister Araghchi made a stop in Islamabad first - a gesture widely interpreted as a token of the enduring diplomatic depth between Pakistan and Iran. In India, though his visit was scheduled primarily for economic discussions, the escalating situation between India and Pakistan was also discussed, with Foreign Minister Araghchi advocating restraint and urging dialogue. Tehran's mediatory effort was noteworthy, with Foreign Minister Araghchi calling for restraint and a peaceful resolution to the crisis. His shuttle diplomacy was widely covered and seen as a testament to Iran's evolving strategic ambitions in South Asia.

Turkiye

Turkiye's response was markedly pro-Pakistan, reflecting long-standing solidarity and mutual support between the two countries. Amidst rising India-Pakistan tensions, on May 5, 2025, the Turkish Navy's anti-submarine warfare corvette, TCG BÜYÜKADA, docked at Karachi Port, and although the visit took place before the conflict erupted, it nonetheless symbolized solidarity.⁵ Following India's aggression against Pakistan, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan expressed Türkiye's strong support for Pakistan amid escalating tensions with India. In a phone call with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Erdoğan commended Pakistan's "calm and restrained policies" during the conflict and endorsed Islamabad's call for an international investigation into the April 22 attack.⁶ President Erdoğan also emphasized Türkiye's readiness to assist in de-escalating the situation through diplomatic efforts and reiterated the importance of dialogue between the nuclear-armed neighbors. He also conveyed condolences to the people and government of Pakistan for the civilian casualties resulting from the conflict. Additionally, reports maintained that Türkiye supplied Pakistan with military drones, including the Asisguard Songar, which were reportedly used in various operations along the India-Pakistan border.

UAE

The United Arab Emirates' Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, publicly urged both Pakistan and India to exercise restraint and avoid further

⁴ "Iran's FM Visits Islamabad to Ease Tensions Between India, Pakistan." *Iran Press*, May 5, 2025. <https://iranpress.com/iran-s-fm-visits-islamabad-to-ease-tensions-between-india--pakistan>.

⁵ "Turkish Naval Ship TCG BÜYÜKADA Visits Karachi." *The Nation*, May 5, 2025. <https://www.nation.com.pk/05-May-2025/turkish-naval-ship-tcg-b-y-kada-visits-karachi>.

⁶ "Erdogan Calls Pakistan's Inquiry Demand 'Valuable.'" *Geo.tv*, May 9, 2025. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/603706-erdogan-calls-pakistans-inquiry-demand-valuable>.

military escalation. He emphasized that diplomacy and dialogue remain the most effective mechanisms for resolving conflict and achieving sustainable peace in the region.⁷ Abu Dhabi also reportedly engaged in quiet shuttle diplomacy aimed at de-escalating tensions. While the specifics of these engagements remain undisclosed, credible reports suggest that the UAE maintained open lines of communication with both New Delhi and Islamabad throughout the crisis.⁸ On May 14, 2025, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif held a phone call with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, expressing gratitude for the UAE's diplomatic efforts in defusing the South Asian crisis. He reaffirmed that the UAE had always stood by Pakistan through thick and thin.⁹ This conversation is a reflection of the special bond between Pakistan and the UAE, built on decades of military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation—highlighting that despite regional mediation efforts, Pakistan continues to command uniquely close ties with key Gulf actors.

Qatar

The statements issued by Qatar urged both sides to engage in constructive negotiations and highlighted the potential repercussions of war for regional economic stability. On May 8, 2025, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call from Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani, the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. The two leaders discussed the prevailing regional situation, with the Qatari side expressing deep concern over the rising tensions and offering to play a role in facilitating de-escalation, reaffirming Qatar's commitment to supporting diplomatic efforts for peace and stability.¹⁰

Israel

As expected, Israel expressed unequivocal support for India. The Israeli ambassador to New Delhi, Reuven Azar, stated that Israel "supports India's right for self-defence" and "condemned terrorism." Israeli-made drones and missile systems, notably the IAI Harop loitering munitions, IAI Heron, IAI Searcher Mk II, Barak 8 (LR-SAM), and SkyStriker reportedly played a role in India's initial strikes, revealing deep military collaboration between the two countries. These drones are designed for precision strikes and have been part of India's arsenal since their acquisition in previous years. This move drew strong criticism from Islamabad and added a layer of complexity to Israel's relations with the wider Muslim world.

⁷ "UAE Foreign Minister Holds Calls with Indian and Pakistani Counterparts Regarding Regional Tensions," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates, May 7, 2025, <https://www.mofa.gov.ae/en/MediaHub/News/2025/5/7/7-5-2025-UAE-india>.

⁸ "How the Middle East Responded to India and Pakistan's Crisis," The New Arab, May 14, 2025, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-middle-east-responded-india-and-pakistans-crisis>.

⁹ "Telephonic Conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the UAE," Prime Minister's Office, Pakistan, May 14, 2025, https://www.pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=6129.

¹⁰ "Qatar Offers Role to De-escalate Pakistan-India Tension," *moib.gov.pk*, May 8, 2025, <https://moib.gov.pk/News/65423>.

Conclusion

In his nationally televised address on May 11, 2025, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif acknowledged the diplomatic efforts of several Middle Eastern and global powers in support of de-escalation and regional peace and stability. Among the Middle East countries, he specifically thanked Turkiye, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE for their timely interventions and moral support. The Prime Minister stated: "My brother Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, my brother Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, my dear brother Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad, and my nice brother President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—all offered us strength and confidence in a difficult hour. I am grateful from the bottom of my heart."¹¹

The 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan underscored not only the volatility of the South Asian security environment but also the growing importance of Middle Eastern diplomacy in global conflict resolution. For Pakistan, these engagements reaffirm the value of strategic ties with key Muslim-majority nations and the necessity of maintaining balanced, multifaceted foreign policy alignments. The crisis also highlighted how countries like Turkiye are willing to project power in support of allies, while states like Saudi Arabia and Iran strive to balance pragmatic diplomacy with ideological solidarity. It also reaffirmed the privileged nature of Pakistan's ties with GCC countries, where expressions of solidarity were not merely diplomatic, but reflective of a deeper strategic partnership forged through shared history, mutual trust, and consistent alignment on key international issues. As the dust settles, the role of Gulf / Middle Eastern countries in managing this crisis will be remembered as a turning point in regional diplomacy, where traditional allies and emerging players converged to contain escalation in South Asia which could have spiralled out of control.

¹¹ "PM Shehbaz Confident IWT, Kashmir Issues with India Will Be Resolved." *The Express Tribune*, May 10, 2025. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2545105/pm-shehbaz-hhails-ceasefire-thanks-nation-allies-and-global-mediators>.