

UPSC CSE | APSC CCE | STRATEGIC AFFAIRS

INDIA–PAKISTAN DIALOGUE

Strategic Prerequisites, Civil Society Limitations &
India's Evolving National Security Doctrine

GS Paper II | GS Paper III | Essay Paper | Ethics Paper

01 | KEY TERMS AND EXPLANATIONS

CORE STRATEGIC CONCEPTS

Understanding India–Pakistan dialogue requires familiarity with a specific vocabulary of strategic affairs, diplomatic law, and security studies. Each term below carries operational significance in policy debates and UPSC answer-writing alike.

TERM / CONCEPT	DETAILED EXPLANATION
Strategic Restraint	A doctrine by which a state deliberately limits the use of force in response to provocation, preferring calibrated, non-escalatory measures over full military retaliation. India operated under this framework for decades after events like the 2001 Parliament attack and the 2008 Mumbai siege, absorbing costs of terrorism without crossing the nuclear threshold.
Composite Dialogue Process	A structured framework launched in 2004 under which India and Pakistan agreed to hold parallel talks across eight thematic baskets – including terrorism, trade, cultural exchange, and the Sir Creek/Siachen disputes. The process was repeatedly suspended and resumed, revealing its fundamental weakness: that diplomatic momentum did not translate into Pakistani restraint from sponsoring cross-border terrorism.
State-Sponsored Terrorism	The deliberate use of non-state armed actors by a sovereign government as instruments of coercive foreign policy. Pakistan's use of groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed against India is the defining case study in South Asia. Unlike conventional warfare, this method preserves plausible deniability while imposing continuous strategic costs on the target.
Track-II Diplomacy	Informal dialogues between non-governmental actors – academics, retired officials, think-tanks, and civil society representatives – running parallel to official Track-I diplomatic channels. Track II is premised on the

TERM / CONCEPT	DETAILED EXPLANATION
	<p>assumption that such exchanges build epistemic communities and social trust that can eventually influence government policy. Its effectiveness in the India–Pakistan context has been repeatedly questioned.</p>
<p>Pakistan–China Axis (CPEC Logic)</p>	<p>The evolving military, economic, and intelligence partnership between Pakistan and China, institutionalised through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This axis transforms the India–Pakistan bilateral into a structural trilateral, because any Indian diplomatic engagement with Pakistan must now account for Beijing’s strategic interests, vetoes, and intelligence sharing with Islamabad.</p>
<p>Strategic Communication</p>	<p>The deliberate, coordinated use of diplomatic signals, official statements, and military posture to convey resolve, intent, or red lines to an adversary. Crucially, silence or absence of talks is itself a form of strategic communication — signalling that the adversary has not met minimum conditions for engagement.</p>
<p>New Normal Doctrine</p>	<p>India’s post-Operation Sindoor posture declaring that every act of terrorism constitutes an act of war, and that retaliatory military action against the sponsoring state is a legitimate and proportionate response. This represents a formal departure from strategic restraint and a shift toward what theorists call ‘compellence’ — using demonstrated force to change adversary behaviour.</p>
<p>Civil Society in Pakistan</p>	<p>Non-governmental actors — journalists, lawyers, academics, trade associations, human rights organisations — who theoretically operate outside state control. In Pakistan’s context, the army exercises near-total dominance over foreign policy, intelligence, and strategic affairs, severely limiting civil society’s ability to moderate state behaviour toward India.</p>
<p>Plausible Deniability</p>	<p>The deliberate construction of institutional distance between a state’s official apparatus and its non-state proxies, so that the state can credibly disavow involvement when proxies carry out attacks. Pakistan has refined this technique over four decades, using the ISI as an intermediary layer that insulates the civilian government from direct attribution.</p>
<p>Compellence vs. Deterrence</p>	<p>Deterrence is the use of threatened punishment to prevent an adversary from acting. Compellence goes further — it uses actual or threatened force to make an adversary stop an ongoing behaviour or reverse a past action. India’s new security doctrine shifts from deterrence (prevent future attacks) toward compellence (force Pakistan to dismantle terrorist infrastructure that already exists).</p>

02 | MAIN ARGUMENTS AND SUBSTANTIVE PARTS

THE CASE FOR SETTING STRATEGIC TERMS FIRST

A dominant strand of Indian strategic thinking argues that dialogue with Pakistan has value only when embedded in a coherent strategic framework — one that defines India's objectives, Pakistan's minimum behavioural obligations, and the consequences of non-compliance. Without this, talks become rituals that provide Pakistan diplomatic oxygen without exacting any behavioural change.

- ▶ **The Asymmetry of Costs Argument:** Pakistan has historically extracted disproportionate benefits from dialogue — international legitimacy, trade normalisation, reduced diplomatic isolation — without fulfilling reciprocal obligations on terrorism. Every resumption of talks without preconditions reinforces this cost asymmetry, incentivising Islamabad to maintain its dual-track policy of tactical dialogue plus strategic terrorism.
- ▶ **Silence as Strategic Communication:** The refusal to negotiate, when principled and consistent, signals to Pakistan that certain minimum standards of behaviour are non-negotiable. This is not intransigence but rational strategic communication — the adversary must understand that diplomatic access is a benefit contingent on behavioural compliance, not an unconditional entitlement.
- ▶ **Talks as Operational Adjustment, Not Strategic Abandonment:** A recurring pattern in India–Pakistan history shows that Pakistan recalibrates its terror infrastructure — shifting from large-scale strikes like Mumbai 26/11 to narco-terrorism, targeted killings, drone deliveries, and radicalisation networks — without fundamentally abandoning terrorism as state policy. Each tactical shift is often misread in India as a signal of moderation, triggering renewed engagement.
- ▶ **The Pakistan–China Strategic Fusion:** Pakistan is no longer a troublesome bilateral neighbour pursuing limited revisionist aims. It has become an integral component of China's regional strategic architecture — receiving military hardware, intelligence cooperation, technological assistance, and coordinated geopolitical positioning. Engagement with Pakistan divorced from this structural reality amounts to self-deception.
- ▶ **What Are the Conditions?** Four threshold questions must be answered: Has Pakistan formally ceased state-sponsorship of terrorism? Has it dismantled Jihadi infrastructure in Punjab and PoK? Has Rawalpindi abandoned proxy warfare as a foreign policy instrument? Has there been demonstrable accountability for Mumbai 26/11? The persistent absence of affirmative answers to these questions defines the strategic problem.

THE COUNTERARGUMENT: WHY ENGAGEMENT MUST NOT CLOSE

A parallel school of thought — rooted in realist accommodation and confidence-building theory — holds that perpetual non-engagement entrenches adversarial identities, forecloses diplomatic exits from crises, and cedes the narrative space to hardliners on both sides.

- ▶ **Self-Respect and Security Are Not Mutually Exclusive:** Keeping channels open does not mean surrendering to Pakistan's terms. Trade, cultural exchange, and visa normalisation can proceed without conceding on terrorism, giving moderate constituencies in Pakistan something to defend.
- ▶ **The Democratic Peace Problem:** India–Pakistan history has demonstrated that civilian governments in Pakistan consistently lose out to the deep state on matters of India policy. Every time moderate Pakistani voices advocate engagement, the absence of any Indian reciprocal signal undermines their domestic credibility, strengthening hardliners.
- ▶ **Intelligence and Diplomatic Value of Engagement:** Formal engagement channels create intelligence-sharing opportunities, back-channel crisis hotlines, and institutional familiarity that reduce the risk of inadvertent escalation — particularly critical between two nuclear-armed states.
- ▶ **Civil Society Limitations:** Even well-meaning Pakistani civil society actors lack the institutional weight to shift army-dominated foreign policy. As a former intelligence official observed, politicians from Punjab province patronised militants to strengthen their political base, and it was never clear why the powerful Pakistani army could not stop this — strongly suggesting it was willful policy, not institutional failure.

UPSC INSIGHT: The India–Pakistan dialogue debate is not a binary between 'talks' and 'no talks.' The real question is: what strategic framework governs engagement? UPSC Mains questions frequently test whether candidates can articulate India's strategic interests, Pakistan's structural constraints, and the distinction between tactical flexibility and strategic principle.

03 | HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE ISSUE

TIMELINE OF INDIA–PAKISTAN RELATIONS: FROM PARTITION TO PRESENT

The India–Pakistan relationship has followed a consistent structural pattern: brief periods of diplomatic optimism punctuated by catastrophic setbacks, most of which originate from Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism or military adventurism. Understanding this timeline is essential for contextualising any contemporary debate about resuming dialogue.

PERIOD	KEY DEVELOPMENTS & SIGNIFICANCE
1947–1948	Partition and the First Kashmir War. Pakistan's irregular tribal militias backed by the army invaded the princely state of Jammu & Kashmir days after independence,

PERIOD	KEY DEVELOPMENTS & SIGNIFICANCE
	forcing Maharaja Hari Singh to accede to India. The conflict established the pattern of Pakistan using non-state proxies as instruments of coercive territorial revision.
1965	Operation Gibraltar and the Second Kashmir War. Pakistan infiltrated thousands of irregular fighters into Kashmir expecting a popular uprising that never materialised. India's military response expanded the conflict, resulting in a stalemate and the Tashkent Declaration. Pakistan's strategic miscalculation — that Kashmiri Muslims would rise against India — foreshadowed later intelligence failures.
1971	Bangladesh Liberation War and the Simla Agreement (1972). India's decisive military intervention in East Pakistan transformed the bilateral equation. The Simla Agreement committed both countries to resolve all disputes bilaterally and peacefully. However, Pakistan's subsequent nuclear weapons programme, begun covertly in the 1970s, fundamentally altered the strategic environment.
1987	Operation Brasstacks and Nuclear Signalling. India's massive military exercise along the border brought the two countries perilously close to conventional war. Simultaneously, Pakistan's A.Q. Khan reportedly informed an Indian journalist that Pakistan had nuclear capability — the first instance of nuclear signalling in South Asia.
1988–1997	Composite Dialogue Attempts. Prime Ministers Rajiv Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto launched bilateral diplomacy in 1988. The Lahore Declaration of 1999 between Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif created genuine optimism — but was immediately undermined by the Kargil intrusion, which the Pakistani army had been secretly planning while the civilian PM engaged with India.
1999	Kargil Conflict. Pakistani army regulars disguised as Mujahideen occupied strategic heights in Kargil, revealing the fundamental disconnect between Pakistan's civilian diplomatic posture and its military strategic goals. The conflict confirmed that engagement with civilian leadership carries no guarantee of military restraint.
2001–2002	Parliament Attack and Operation Parakrama. Following the December 2001 attack on India's Parliament by Jaish-e-Mohammed (linked to Pakistan's ISI), India mobilised nearly 500,000 troops along the border in the longest and largest military mobilisation in its history. The standoff lasted 10 months, demonstrating both India's resolve and the limitations of conventional military pressure below the nuclear threshold.

PERIOD	KEY DEVELOPMENTS & SIGNIFICANCE
2004–2008	Composite Dialogue Process. The Vajpayee–Musharraf backchannel produced the 'four-point formula' on Kashmir — widely regarded as the most substantive progress ever made. But the process was predicated on Pakistan's army's cooperation, which evaporated with Musharraf's political weakening. The Mumbai attacks of November 2008 permanently destroyed this framework.
2008 (26/11)	Mumbai Attacks — The Defining Rupture. Ten Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives trained, equipped, and dispatched by Pakistan's ISI killed 166 people across Mumbai. India's decision not to launch military strikes — despite possessing the capability — was a defining exercise of strategic restraint. It was also widely criticised domestically as failing to impose costs on Pakistan for the worst terrorist attack on Indian soil since independence.
2014–2016	Modi's Engagement and Its Collapse. Prime Minister Modi invited PM Nawaz Sharif to his inauguration, made a surprise Christmas 2015 visit to Lahore, and attempted to restart bilateral engagement. Within weeks, the Pathankot Air Force Base was attacked (January 2016) by Jaish-e-Mohammed, followed by the Uri attack (September 2016) — together forcing India to launch the 'surgical strikes' cross-LoC response.
2019	Pulwama–Balakot and the Air Strike Threshold. The Pulwama CRPF convoy bombing (40 killed) by a Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed operative triggered the first Indian air strike on Pakistani territory since 1971 — at Balakot. The strikes crossed a significant escalatory threshold and established a precedent for airpower use in sub-conventional conflict.
2025–2026	Pahalgam Massacre and Operation Sindoor. The killing of 26 Hindu tourists in Pahalgam by Pakistani-linked terrorists triggered India's most comprehensive military and diplomatic response since 1971. Operation Sindoor involved precision strikes on terrorist infrastructure across Pakistan and PoK. India formally declared that every act of terrorism constitutes an act of war, abandoning strategic restraint as a governing framework. The RSS leadership's subsequent call for reopening dialogue with Pakistan triggered the broader debate about when and under what conditions engagement is appropriate.

04 | LOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

STRATEGIC RATIONALITY AND PRECONDITIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT

The India–Pakistan dialogue debate is ultimately a philosophical debate about the nature of diplomacy, the rationality of state actors, and the conditions under which engagement is instrumentally useful versus symbolically harmful. Multiple philosophical traditions inform this debate.

- ▶ **Kautilyan Realism and the Saptanga Theory:** Kautilya's Arthashastra provides the foundational Indian strategic text on diplomacy. His 'six measures of foreign policy' (shadgunya) include sandhi (treaty), vigraha (war), yana (march), asana (neutrality), dvaidhibhava (dual policy), and samshraya (seeking shelter). Crucially, Kautilya treats negotiation as an instrument subordinate to national interest — not a virtue in itself. Talks are tools, not values. This directly mirrors the argument that negotiations without strategic purpose become 'talks for talks' sake'.
- ▶ **Kantian Perpetual Peace and Its Limits:** Kant's liberal internationalism holds that democratic states, by sharing domestic institutional constraints against war, will eventually find peaceful accommodation. The problem in the India–Pakistan case is that Pakistan is not a functioning democracy in any substantive sense — the army controls foreign policy, nuclear weapons, and the intelligence apparatus independently of electoral outcomes. Kantian theory therefore has limited explanatory power here.
- ▶ **Clausewitz: War as an Extension of Politics:** Von Clausewitz's dictum — that war is the continuation of politics by other means — can be inverted for the Indian context: Pakistan's peace-time terrorism is the continuation of war by other means. The Pakistani deep state has successfully used the formal architecture of diplomacy to insulate itself from the political costs of proxy warfare, making engagement a structural advantage for Islamabad rather than Islamabad.
- ▶ **Rawlsian Justice and the Moral Obligation of Engagement:** John Rawls' theory of justice would suggest that India has a moral obligation to keep open the possibility of peace, even with a hostile state, because the people of Pakistan — particularly the poor and minorities — are not identical with the Pakistani army's strategic interests. This creates a philosophical tension between state-level strategic logic and people-level humanitarian ethics.
- ▶ **Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach:** Sen would argue that sustained hostility structurally limits the capabilities of people on both sides — reducing trade, educational exchange, and economic opportunity. The capability deprivation caused by non-engagement is itself a form of injustice, particularly for border communities in Punjab, Sindh, and Kashmir.
- ▶ **Epistemological Problem — Who Speaks for Pakistan?:** The deepest philosophical puzzle in the India–Pakistan dialogue debate concerns knowledge. When India negotiates with Pakistan's civilian government, it is unclear whether it is negotiating with the decision-making centre. The army's control over strategic affairs means that civilian diplomats may not have the authority to make — or keep — commitments. This is not merely a political problem but an epistemic one: India lacks reliable knowledge of who actually controls Pakistan's India policy.

PHILOSOPHICAL SYNTHESIS: The debate ultimately distills into a tension between consequentialist ethics (engagement may produce better outcomes for more people) and deontological strategic logic (engagement without conditions violates the principle that state

behaviour must carry costs and consequences). UPSC Essay and Ethics papers frequently require exactly this kind of philosophical synthesis.

05 | NEW FEATURES AND UNIQUE IDEAS

PARADIGM SHIFTS IN INDIA'S STRATEGIC POSTURE

The contemporary India–Pakistan strategic context has generated genuinely novel ideas and institutional innovations that have not previously featured in Indian foreign policy discourse. These deserve careful analytical attention.

- ▶ **The 'Act of War' Doctrine and Formal Abandonment of Strategic Restraint:** For the first time in India's post-independence history, a democratic government has publicly and formally declared that terrorism constitutes an act of war, and that the sponsoring state will face direct military consequences. This is a qualitative shift — not merely rhetorical — because it permanently alters the risk calculus for Pakistan's ISI when planning future operations. The doctrine creates a credible deterrent in a way that previous responses did not.
- ▶ **'New Normal' as Doctrine:** The framing of India's retaliatory posture as a 'new normal' is significant because it signals institutionalisation rather than exceptionalism. It means that any future Pakistani-sponsored terrorism will trigger a military response as a matter of established policy, not as an ad hoc political decision. This removes the uncertainty that previously allowed Pakistan to calculate that India would absorb costs without retaliation.
- ▶ **Disaggregating 'Pakistan':** One genuinely innovative analytical approach in recent discourse is the disaggregation of the Pakistani state into its constituent actors — civilian government, military establishment, ISI, judiciary, civil society, business community, minority communities — each with distinct interests and different relationships with India. Policy that targets these actors differently can be more precise and effective than uniform engagement or non-engagement.
- ▶ **Civilisational Engagement as Distinct from State-to-State Diplomacy:** The argument that India can engage Pakistan's civil society, cultural communities, and religious minorities while maintaining a punitive posture toward the Pakistani army represents a sophisticated two-track approach. However, critics note that Pakistani civil society's institutional weakness makes this distinction largely theoretical rather than operationally effective.
- ▶ **Pakistan's Intelligence-Bureaucratic Complex:** The recognition that Pakistan is an 'intelligence-fundamentalist bureaucracy-dominated nation' — where foreign policy is driven by ISI imperatives rather than civilian deliberation — is an analytically precise and relatively underappreciated insight. It implies that civil society contacts, Track-II dialogues, and people-to-people exchanges are structurally incapable of producing policy change as long as the intelligence establishment retains veto power over India policy.

- ▶ **Historical Precedent of General Hamid Gul's Confession:** The documented claim that General Hamid Gul acknowledged to his Indian counterpart in the late 1980s that Pakistan supported terrorism against India 'because it was afraid of its size' provides a rare candid admission of the security anxiety driving Pakistani strategic behaviour. This structural insecurity — not ideology alone — is what sustains terrorism as Pakistan's preferred asymmetric instrument against India.

FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT: The 'act of war' doctrine is strategically credible but carries escalation risks between nuclear-armed states. Its long-term effectiveness depends on India's capacity to sustain precision military capability, intelligence penetration of Pakistani networks, and diplomatic management of third-party stakeholders, particularly the United States and Gulf states.

06 | SUSTAINABILITY OF THE IDEA

LONG-TERM VIABILITY ACROSS MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS

The sustainability of any India–Pakistan engagement or non-engagement policy must be assessed across environmental, constitutional, ethical, societal, and geopolitical dimensions. Short-term tactical advantages must be weighed against long-term structural costs.

- ▶ **Constitutional Sustainability:** India's constitutional commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes (Article 51 — Directive Principles on international peace) creates a normative obligation to maintain diplomatic channels. However, Article 51 does not obligate India to accept peace on Pakistan's terms, nor does it preclude military response to acts of war. The constitution's silence on pre-conditions for engagement leaves significant room for strategic doctrine.
- ▶ **Societal Sustainability in India:** Indian public opinion has undergone a structural shift — particularly after 26/11 and the Pahalgam massacre — away from accommodation-based engagement and toward demands for demonstrated punitive capacity. Any government that resumes unconditional dialogue with Pakistan will face significant domestic political costs. This public sentiment is itself a constraint on Indian foreign policy flexibility.
- ▶ **Societal Sustainability in Pakistan:** Pakistan's civil society, while aware of the economic and human costs of India–Pakistan hostility, has historically been unable to sustain pressure on the military establishment to change course. The CIVICUS Monitor data indicating low civil society credibility in Pakistan reflects structural constraints — the army's dominance of media, judiciary, and economic institutions — that individual civil society actors cannot overcome regardless of their personal commitments to peace.
- ▶ **Economic Sustainability:** South Asia is the least economically integrated region in the world, and India–Pakistan non-engagement is a primary cause. Bilateral trade remains a fraction of its potential. The economic cost of sustained hostility — including military expenditure, foregone trade,

foregone regional connectivity through Pakistan to Central Asia — is enormous for both countries. Ironically, Pakistan's economic fragility may eventually create more pressure for accommodation than any diplomatic initiative.

- ▶ **Environmental and Resource Sustainability:** The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) — one of the world's most successful water-sharing agreements — has survived three wars, multiple military crises, and decades of political hostility. India's increasing scrutiny of this treaty in the post-Pulwama and post-Pahalgam environment raises questions about whether even this foundational instrument can survive the 'act of war' doctrine's logic.
- ▶ **Long-term Ethical Sustainability:** A posture of permanent non-engagement raises ethical questions about the civilian populations on both sides who bear the costs of hostility. The people of Pakistan — particularly minorities, women, and the poor — are not identical with the Pakistani army's strategic choices. There is an ethical case for maintaining people-to-people channels even when state-to-state dialogue is suspended.

07 | CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE ISSUE

CHALLENGES CATEGORISED BY TYPE

The India–Pakistan engagement debate faces challenges that are simultaneously strategic, diplomatic, domestic, institutional, and epistemological. Each category requires distinct analytical treatment.

STRATEGIC AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

- ▶ **Nuclear Threshold Management:** The most dangerous challenge in any India–Pakistan military escalation is managing escalation below the nuclear threshold. Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence' doctrine — including tactical nuclear weapons — is explicitly designed to deter Indian conventional military superiority. The 'act of war' doctrine must therefore account for Pakistan's asymmetric nuclear response options.
- ▶ **Pakistan's Tactical Recalibration:** Pakistan has consistently adapted its terrorist methods in response to Indian pressure — shifting from spectacular mass attacks to harder-to-detect patterns like narco-terrorism, radicalisation networks, lone-wolf attacks, and drone-based weapons delivery. Any Indian policy framework must anticipate this adaptation rather than assuming that one military response permanently deters future operations.
- ▶ **The China Factor:** Any Indian pressure on Pakistan must now be assessed against China's willingness to compensate for Pakistan's losses — economically, diplomatically, and militarily. China has used Pakistan as a strategic spoiler of India's regional influence, and the CPEC investment gives China a direct stake in Pakistan's strategic orientation. Indian policy cannot treat Pakistan as an isolated bilateral issue.

DIPLOMATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

- ▶ **Third-Party Interests:** The United States, Gulf states (particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE), and multilateral institutions have historically resisted Indian efforts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically. Pakistan's nuclear weapons, its role in Afghanistan, and its position as an Islamic state with significant OIC influence give it diplomatic capital that insulates it from full international isolation.
- ▶ **FATF and Institutional Leverage Limitations:** Pakistan's repeated entry into the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey and blacklists demonstrated the possibility of multilateral financial pressure on Pakistani terror financing. However, FATF's effectiveness has been limited by geopolitical considerations — China has used its influence to protect Pakistan from the most severe consequences. This illustrates the general problem that multilateral instruments are subject to great power politics.
- ▶ **Track-II Dialogue's Structural Weakness:** As documented in intelligence officials' accounts, Pakistani civil society actors who advocate better India relations at Track-II dialogues are ultimately unable to translate their positions into policy changes because the army retains full control over Pakistan's India policy. This means Track-II dialogues may create false confidence in India about the momentum for change.

DOMESTIC AND POLITICAL CHALLENGES

- ▶ **Electoral Incentives:** In both India and Pakistan, domestic political incentives push toward hawkish rather than accommodative positions on bilateral relations. In India, public opinion has hardened significantly after major terrorist attacks. In Pakistan, civilian politicians who advocate engagement with India risk being labelled as traitors by the military establishment and religious parties.
- ▶ **Bureaucratic and Institutional Inertia:** The Ministry of External Affairs, the armed forces, and the intelligence agencies in both countries have developed institutional cultures and standard operating procedures oriented toward hostility management rather than diplomatic transformation. Changing these institutional orientations requires sustained political leadership that has rarely been available.
- ▶ **Information Ecosystem and Narrative Warfare:** Both countries' media ecosystems have been increasingly shaped by nationalist narratives that make any conciliatory gesture politically costly. Pakistan's information environment — dominated by the military and Islamist parties — is particularly hostile to voices advocating accommodation with India. India's social media landscape similarly amplifies hawkish voices over strategic nuance.

08 | MULTIDIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

A comprehensive understanding of the India–Pakistan dialogue debate requires examining it through multiple analytical lenses. Each dimension reveals aspects that are invisible from any single perspective.

SOCIAL DIMENSION

- ▶ People-to-people ties between India and Pakistan — despite state hostility — remain surprisingly robust at the level of cultural memory, family connections (particularly among Punjabi and Sindhi communities), literary traditions, and shared cuisine and film. This social capital is a genuine asset that hardline state policies continuously erode.
- ▶ The experience of Partition trauma shapes both societies' collective memory of the Other. For India, Pakistan represents the cost of religious nationalism; for Pakistan, India represents both the source of existential insecurity and an aspirational model of democratic development that creates uncomfortable internal comparisons.
- ▶ Minority communities — Hindus, Christians, and Ahmadis in Pakistan; Muslims in India — are disproportionately affected by India–Pakistan hostility. They bear the costs of nationalist mobilisation on both sides without having proportional voice in strategic decisions.
- ▶ South Asian diaspora communities — particularly Punjabis in UK and Canada — often maintain cross-border connections that challenge state-enforced separation, creating informal pressure for normalisation that is systematically ignored by both governments.

POLITICAL DIMENSION

- ▶ Pakistan's civil-military divide is the central political fact of India–Pakistan relations. Civilian governments in Pakistan have consistently sought better relations with India — Nawaz Sharif's repeated overtures, Imran Khan's early signals — only to be constrained or overruled by the army. This means India faces the structural problem of negotiating with actors who lack the authority to implement commitments.
- ▶ India's domestic politics have increasingly militarised the discourse on Pakistan, making any government that appears 'soft' on terrorism politically vulnerable. The BJP's electoral strategy has partially been built on projecting strength against Pakistan, creating an incentive structure that makes diplomatic flexibility politically costly.
- ▶ Pakistan's democratic deficit — where elections occur but sovereignty rests with GHQ Rawalpindi — creates an accountability gap. Pakistani citizens cannot use electoral mechanisms to punish the army for the economic costs of Pakistan's India policy, removing a key pressure valve that might otherwise push toward accommodation.
- ▶ Regional political dynamics in India — particularly in Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat (which border Pakistan) — are affected by cross-border terrorism, drug trafficking, and proxy infiltration in ways that make these states strong advocates for a punitive rather than accommodative approach.

LEGAL DIMENSION

- ▶ International humanitarian law and the United Nations Charter framework prohibit states from harbouring or supporting groups that conduct terrorist attacks on other states. UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) mandates that member states criminalise terror financing, freeze terrorist

assets, and deny safe haven to terrorists — obligations Pakistan has systematically evaded through legal formalism.

- ▶ The Simla Agreement (1972) commits both countries to resolving disputes bilaterally, without third-party mediation. India consistently invokes this agreement to resist Pakistani attempts to internationalise the Kashmir dispute. However, Pakistan has simultaneously violated the agreement's spirit by sponsoring cross-border terrorism while formally adhering to its letter.
- ▶ India's own constitutional framework — particularly the right to life under Article 21 — creates a legal obligation on the Indian state to protect its citizens from terrorist attacks, including those sponsored by foreign states. The 'act of war' doctrine can be framed as a fulfilling of this constitutional duty.
- ▶ The International Court of Justice (ICJ) case of Kulbhushan Jadhav — an Indian national sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court for alleged espionage — illustrates how legal processes are weaponised in the India–Pakistan relationship. Pakistan's refusal to give India consular access violated the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, demonstrating the selective application of international law.

ETHICAL DIMENSION

- ▶ The ethics of strategic restraint versus military response involves a fundamental tension between the duty to protect one's own citizens (cosmopolitan within the nation) and the duty to avoid harming civilians in a foreign country (cosmopolitan across borders). India's post-Pahalgam military response necessarily involves risk to Pakistani civilians, raising proportionality questions under just war theory.
- ▶ The moral responsibility for terrorism lies primarily with the Pakistani military establishment and the ISI, not with Pakistani civilians, civil society, or moderate political actors. Ethical analysis requires distinguishing between these actors and designing responses that impose costs on decision-makers while minimising harm to non-combatants.
- ▶ There is a deontological argument that democratic states have a special obligation to maintain diplomatic channels, even with hostile states, because the alternative — permanent militarisation of the relationship — normalises war as an instrument of state policy in ways that corrode democratic norms domestically.
- ▶ The ethics of 'talking to terrorists' or to states that sponsor them is a genuine moral dilemma. Peace is not possible without negotiation, but negotiation without accountability legitimises atrocities. The resolution is to insist that accountability is a precondition for — not an alternative to — sustained dialogue.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

- ▶ India's management of the India–Pakistan relationship is increasingly shaped by the Indo-Pacific strategic environment. The United States, Australia, Japan, and European partners have strategic

interests in regional stability that sometimes conflict with India's preference for a punitive approach to Pakistan. Managing these tensions while maintaining the Quad coalition requires sophisticated diplomatic balancing.

- ▶ China's role as Pakistan's 'all-weather friend' transforms every India–Pakistan crisis into a test of the India-China strategic competition. Beijing's regular diplomatic cover for Pakistan at the UN Security Council — blocking designations of Pakistani terrorist leaders — is a structural obstacle to multilateral pressure on Islamabad.
- ▶ The Islamic world's relationship with both India and Pakistan has evolved significantly. Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have deepened economic ties with India and have significantly reduced the unconditional diplomatic support they previously extended to Pakistan on Kashmir. This shift creates new leverage opportunities for Indian diplomacy.
- ▶ India's permanent membership aspiration at the United Nations Security Council requires demonstrating responsible great power behaviour, including measured responses to provocation. Excessive militarisation of the India–Pakistan relationship risks undermining India's global image as a responsible democracy committed to international law.

ECONOMIC DIMENSION

- ▶ Pakistan's economic crisis — with its debt-to-GDP ratio exceeding 75%, chronic balance of payments deficits, and dependence on IMF bailouts — creates a theoretical window for economic diplomacy. A country under existential fiscal pressure has strong incentives to normalise trade relations with its largest neighbour. However, the army's stranglehold on strategic policy means economic logic rarely translates into foreign policy flexibility.
- ▶ The foregone trade between India and Pakistan is estimated at USD 37 billion annually against actual bilateral trade of under USD 3 billion (including third-country routing through UAE and Singapore). This represents an enormous opportunity cost that falls disproportionately on Pakistan's economy, which is significantly smaller than India's.
- ▶ Pakistan's strategic location — between Central Asia, China, the Gulf, and South Asia — gives it potential value as a connectivity corridor. The CPEC has allowed China to partially exploit this geography, but India remains cut off from overland trade with Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Iran because of Pakistan's denial of transit rights. This creates a structural incentive for India to seek normalisation without sacrificing security interests.
- ▶ Cross-border drug trafficking from Pakistan — particularly heroin and synthetic drugs — imposes enormous social and economic costs on Indian border states, particularly Punjab. This is a dimension of Pakistan's asymmetric pressure on India that is frequently underestimated in formal strategic analysis but has devastating community-level consequences.

09 | LINKAGES WITH NCERTS

NCERT textbooks form the factual and conceptual foundation for UPSC preparation. The India–Pakistan dialogue debate draws from multiple NCERT books across classes 10–12.

NCERT SOURCE	RELEVANCE TO INDIA–PAKISTAN DIALOGUE
Class 10 — Democratic Politics II (Chapter: Outcomes of Democracy)	This chapter discusses how democracies handle external threats and maintain sovereignty. India–Pakistan relations illustrate the tension between democratic accountability (public demand for security) and diplomatic rationality (long-term peace-building). The chapter's discussion of security and governance directly connects to counter-terrorism policy.
Class 11 — Political Theory (Chapter: Peace)	Directly relevant — discusses conditions for sustainable peace, the role of non-state actors in conflict resolution, and the limits of state-centric peace-making. The question of whether civil society can substitute for state-level diplomatic engagement maps precisely onto the Pakistan-dialogue debate.
Class 12 — Contemporary World Politics (Chapter: South Asia & International Order)	This chapter explicitly covers India–Pakistan relations, the SAARC framework, the Simla Agreement, the Composite Dialogue Process, Kargil, and the challenge of nuclear deterrence in South Asia. It provides the factual timeline essential for any Mains answer on the subject.
Class 12 — Contemporary World Politics (Chapter: Security in the Contemporary World)	Covers traditional and non-traditional security threats, including terrorism, state-sponsored violence, and the changing nature of warfare. The distinction between state-sponsored terrorism (traditional) and non-state terrorism (non-traditional) is essential for understanding Pakistan's strategic model.
Class 12 — India's Foreign Policy (Chapter: India and its Neighbours)	Provides essential context on India's neighbourhood policy — the 'Neighbourhood First' doctrine, its application to Pakistan, and the specific challenges of Pakistan's structural hostility. Discusses SAARC's paralysis because of India–Pakistan tensions.
Class 9 — Democratic Politics I (Chapter: Electoral Politics and Democracy)	Relevant for understanding how electoral incentives in both India and Pakistan push toward hardline positions on bilateral relations, making sustained diplomatic engagement politically costly for moderate leaders.

10 | LINKAGES WITH UPSC CSE SYLLABUS

The India–Pakistan dialogue debate has extraordinary syllabus coverage, cutting across all four GS papers, the Essay paper, and multiple optional subjects. This makes it one of the highest-yield topics for integrated UPSC preparation.

GS PAPER / PAPER TYPE	SPECIFIC CONNECTIONS
GS Paper I – Modern History	Partition and its consequences; transfer of power and princely state accession; First and Second Kashmir Wars; the Simla Agreement in the context of post-1971 South Asian order. India–Pakistan relations since independence as a case study in the long shadows of colonial partition.
GS Paper I – Indian Society	Communalism, religious minorities, and the securitisation of identity in post-Partition South Asia; diaspora communities and their role in India–Pakistan cultural memory; the social cost of sustained bilateral hostility on border communities and trading populations.
GS Paper II – India's Foreign Policy	India's neighbourhood policy; bilateral relations with Pakistan; SAARC and regional cooperation paralysis; the role of multilateral institutions (FATF, UN, SCO) in managing India–Pakistan tensions; India's nuclear doctrine and its relationship to Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence'.
GS Paper II – International Relations	Nuclear deterrence in South Asia; the role of third parties (US, China, Gulf states) in India–Pakistan relations; India's permanent UNSC membership aspirations and responsible great power behaviour; comparison with other protracted conflicts (Korean Peninsula, Israel–Palestine) as structural analogies.
GS Paper III – Internal Security	Cross-border terrorism; proxy warfare and its legal-strategic dimensions; narco-terrorism; radicalisation networks; drone-based infiltration; the intelligence ecosystem for counter-terrorism; Operation Sindoor as a case study in precision military response to state-sponsored terrorism.
GS Paper IV – Ethics	Just war theory and proportionality in military response; the ethics of negotiating with states that sponsor terrorism; moral responsibility of civilian populations versus military establishments; deontological versus consequentialist frameworks for evaluating engagement policy.
Essay Paper	Direct essay themes: 'Dialogue without conditions is surrender; silence without strategy is abdication.' 'Civil society as a peacemaker:

GS PAPER / PAPER TYPE	SPECIFIC CONNECTIONS
	hope or illusion in South Asia.' 'India's strategic doctrine: from restraint to resolve.' 'Nuclear deterrence and the limits of coercive diplomacy.'
Optional: Political Science & IR	Theories of deterrence and compellence; security dilemma in nuclear South Asia; hegemonic stability theory and regional order; democratic peace theory and its limits in Pakistan's case; foreign policy analysis and the role of domestic politics.
Optional: History	Partition historiography; Indo-Pakistan Wars; the evolution of the Line of Control and its legal status; the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty as a model of functional cooperation under political hostility.

11 | BEST LINKAGES WITH SYLLABUS, PHILOSOPHY & EPISTEMOLOGY

The deepest intellectual connections in this debate lie at the intersection of strategic theory, moral philosophy, and epistemology. These linkages elevate a competent UPSC answer into an exceptional one.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UPSC INTEGRATION

- ▶ **Kautilya's Arthashastra and India's Strategic Tradition:** The Arthashastra's concept of 'sama, dana, bheda, danda' (conciliation, gifts, division, punishment) provides a classical Indian framework for graduated diplomatic responses. India's current posture — exhausting conciliation and now applying danda — maps precisely onto Kautilyan logic. UPSC Mains answers on India's foreign policy that integrate Kautilyan thought demonstrate sophistication that generic answers lack.
- ▶ **Carl von Clausewitz and the Grammar of War:** Clausewitz's insight that war has its own grammar but not its own logic — meaning that military operations follow tactical rules, but are governed by political objectives — is essential for evaluating India's military responses to Pakistani terrorism. The question 'what political objective does this military action serve?' must always be answered before evaluating the action's strategic merit.
- ▶ **John Rawls and the 'Veil of Ignorance':** Rawls' thought experiment — designing social institutions without knowing one's position in them — applied to India–Pakistan relations would likely support sustained engagement, because the citizens on both sides who suffer most from hostility are rarely those who design security policy. This creates a powerful ethical argument for maintaining humanitarian channels even during military standoffs.
- ▶ **Kenneth Waltz and Structural Realism:** Waltz's theory holds that state behaviour is primarily determined by the structure of the international system — particularly the distribution of power —

rather than by domestic politics or leadership choices. Applied to India–Pakistan, this would suggest that Pakistan's hostility is driven by its structural insecurity vis-à-vis India, and that no amount of engagement will change this until the power differential narrows or Pakistan develops confidence in its own survival.

- ▶ **Hannah Arendt and the Banality of Institutional Evil:** Arendt's analysis of how ordinary institutional structures can produce extraordinary harm — without requiring individual malice — is applicable to Pakistan's ISI. The ISI's support for terrorism is not driven by individual extremism but by institutional mandates, career incentives, and organisational culture. This has important policy implications: targeting the institution's incentives rather than individual operators is likely to be more effective.
- ▶ **Michel Foucault and Power/Knowledge:** Foucault's analysis of how knowledge is produced and weaponised by power structures illuminates the India–Pakistan dialogue debate in an important way. The 'knowledge' that civil society dialogue can produce peace is itself a product of liberal institutional assumptions that may not hold in Pakistan's authoritarian military context. Questioning this epistemological assumption — rather than simply accepting it — is a mark of analytical maturity.

12 | WAY FORWARD

A principled, strategic, and evidence-based way forward on India–Pakistan relations must balance the imperatives of national security, economic opportunity, ethical responsibility, and long-term regional stability. The following recommendations are grounded in the strategic, historical, and philosophical analysis above.

IMMEDIATE AND SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Define Non-Negotiable Preconditions Publicly and Explicitly:** India should formally articulate — through official government channels, not just think-tanks — the minimum conditions for resuming substantive diplomatic engagement. These conditions should include: verifiable dismantling of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed infrastructure, handover of individuals accused of Mumbai 26/11, cessation of cross-border infiltration, and formal Pakistani acknowledgment that terrorism is not a legitimate foreign policy instrument.
- ▶ **Maintain Strict Separation of Humanitarian and Strategic Channels:** India should keep open Indus Waters Treaty mechanisms, consular services, and cross-border family contact channels, while keeping formal diplomatic normalisation strictly contingent on behavioural change. This prevents the 'all-or-nothing' framing that extremists on both sides prefer, while denying Pakistan the diplomatic dividend of engagement without accountability.
- ▶ **Strengthen Multilateral Pressure Architecture:** India should work intensively with the FATF, UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee, and bilateral partners to maintain sustained financial and diplomatic pressure on Pakistan's terror financing ecosystem. The 2022 FATF grey-

listing demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach; India should invest in preventing Pakistan from achieving 'white-listing' without genuine compliance.

MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ **Build Regional Economic Architecture That Incentivises Pakistani Compliance:** India should actively develop alternative connectivity routes to Central Asia (via Iran through the Chabahar Port, and via the International North-South Transport Corridor) that demonstrate to Pakistani strategic planners that their denial of transit rights has a finite window before India routes around them permanently. This creates an economic incentive structure for future accommodation.
- ▶ **Invest in Democratic Resilience Assistance for Pakistani Civil Society:** While not betting on Pakistani civil society as a peace driver, India should support international funding for Pakistani independent media, bar associations, and academic institutions that maintain some independence from army control. This is a long-game investment in the conditions that might eventually change Pakistan's strategic culture.
- ▶ **Develop a Credible Nuclear Signalling Framework:** India's 'no first use' nuclear doctrine creates asymmetric vulnerability to Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence' (tactical nuclear weapons). India needs a credible, articulated doctrine that closes the tactical nuclear gap without abandoning strategic stability. This requires investment in missile defence, hardened command-and-control architecture, and diplomatic communication of red lines.
- ▶ **Northeast India and APSC Perspective — Assam's Border Security Nexus:** For APSC-specific analysis, it is crucial to note that Assam shares no direct border with Pakistan, but is deeply affected by Pakistan-sponsored radicalisation networks operating through Bangladesh and Myanmar, drug trafficking routes linked to Pakistan-Afghan narco-networks, and the broader security environment of the Northeast. Assam's peace consolidation efforts — particularly with regard to ULFA and other insurgencies — are directly linked to Pakistan's ability to provide external sanctuary and support to armed groups in the region.

POLICY PRINCIPLE: The optimal India–Pakistan posture is neither permanent military hostility nor unconditional engagement, but calibrated conditionality — maintaining the diplomatic architecture of a potential relationship while making clear that its activation depends entirely on verifiable Pakistani behavioural change. As Kautilya observed, policy without purpose is merely theatre.

13 | PREVIOUS YEARS' UPSC AND APSC QUESTIONS

The following PYQs have been carefully selected for their direct and thematic relevance to the India–Pakistan dialogue debate. Organising these by paper and year helps identify recurring examination patterns.

UPSC CSE MAINS — GS PAPER II (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)

YEAR / PAPER	QUESTION
2023 GS II	India's neighbourhood policy has been criticised for being reactive rather than proactive. Critically examine with reference to India's relations with Pakistan and China.
2022 GS II	Analyse the significance of the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan in the context of recent bilateral tensions. Is the treaty under threat?
2021 GS II	China's emergence as a major power has fundamentally altered the India–Pakistan–China strategic triangle. Evaluate.
2020 GS II	Cross-border terrorism in India: examine the state-sponsored nature of the challenge and India's policy responses over the last decade.
2019 GS II	Discuss the various components of India's soft power. How can they be effectively deployed in India's relations with Pakistan?
2018 GS II	What are the impediments India faces in its bilateral relations with Pakistan? Discuss the prospects for improving these relations.
2017 GS II	The SAARC remained a dormant organisation despite being the regional grouping of South Asia. Critically examine the reasons for this, with specific reference to India–Pakistan tensions.
2015 GS II	The 'Composite Dialogue Process' between India and Pakistan has repeatedly been suspended and resumed. Critically evaluate the process and suggest a more durable framework.
2013 GS II	Do you think that India's strategic interests are better served by engaging Pakistan diplomatically or by maintaining a posture of minimal engagement? Justify your answer.

UPSC CSE MAINS — GS PAPER III (INTERNAL SECURITY)

YEAR / PAPER	QUESTION
2023 GS III	Examine the nature and dimensions of cross-border terrorism in India. What institutional reforms are required to strengthen India's counter-terrorism architecture?

YEAR / PAPER	QUESTION
2022 GS III	How has Pakistan used non-state actors as instruments of foreign policy against India? Discuss the strategic implications for India's security doctrine.
2021 GS III	Narco-terrorism emanating from Pakistan is increasingly recognised as a serious national security challenge. Analyse the threat and India's response.
2020 GS III	The surgical strike of 2016 and the Balakot air strike of 2019 represent a shift in India's response to state-sponsored terrorism. Critically evaluate this shift.
2019 GS III	Discuss the role of the intelligence ecosystem in India's counter-terrorism response, with specific reference to cross-border threats.
2017 GS III	Explain how external state actors support insurgency in India. Examine the policy options available to counter this phenomenon.

UPSC CSE MAINS — GS PAPER IV (ETHICS)

YEAR / PAPER	QUESTION
2022 GS IV	A state faces a moral dilemma: military retaliation against a terrorist attack will harm civilians in the adversary country. How should the state balance national security with humanitarian ethics? Use relevant philosophical frameworks.
2020 GS IV	Critically examine the ethical dimensions of negotiating with states that sponsor terrorism. Is there a principled basis for such engagement?
2019 GS IV	Discuss the concept of just war. Is India's military response to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism ethically justified under just war principles?

UPSC CSE PRELIMS — RELEVANT THEMES

YEAR	QUESTION THEME
2023 Prelims	Consider the following statements about the Simla Agreement (1972): [1] It committed both India and Pakistan to resolve all disputes bilaterally. [2] It was signed by Indira Gandhi

YEAR	QUESTION THEME
	and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. [3] It formally ended the state of war between the two countries. Which of the above statements are correct?
2022 Prelims	The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global standard-setter for: (a) anti-money laundering (b) counter-terrorism financing (c) both (a) and (b) (d) nuclear non-proliferation.
2021 Prelims	Which of the following characterise India's nuclear doctrine? [1] No first use. [2] Credible minimum deterrence. [3] Massive retaliation in response to first strike. Select the correct answer.
2019 Prelims	The Composite Dialogue Process between India and Pakistan included which of the following baskets: [1] Terrorism and drug trafficking. [2] Jammu and Kashmir. [3] Sir Creek. [4] People-to-people contacts. Select the correct code.
2017 Prelims	The 'Indus Waters Treaty' was brokered by which international organisation? (a) United Nations (b) World Bank (c) Asian Development Bank (d) Commonwealth Secretariat

APSC CCE MAINS — RELEVANT QUESTIONS

APSC EXAM / PAPER	QUESTION
APSC Mains (General Studies)	How does Pakistan's state-sponsored terrorism affect the security environment of Northeast India? Discuss with special reference to Assam.
APSC Mains (General Studies)	Examine the role of external powers in insurgencies of Northeast India. How has India's counter-insurgency strategy evolved?
APSC Mains (General Studies)	Discuss the challenges India faces in implementing the 'Act East Policy' given the security situation in the Northeast, including cross-border threats linked to Pakistan-Afghanistan networks.
APSC Mains (Essay)	India's security challenges in the Northeast: internal vulnerabilities and external exploitation. [Essay]

14 | MODEL ANSWERS FOR SELECTED QUESTIONS

The following model answers are structured as per the UPSC Mains format — with an introduction, structured body, and conclusion within approximately 250 words. Note the integration of data, philosophical frameworks, and balanced analysis.

MODEL ANSWER 1: INDIA–PAKISTAN BILATERAL RELATIONS — IMPEDIMENTS AND PROSPECTS

Q: What are the impediments India faces in its bilateral relations with Pakistan? Discuss the prospects for improving these relations. (250 words, GS Paper II)

Introduction:

India–Pakistan relations represent one of the most intractable bilateral conflicts in the contemporary world — two nuclear-armed democracies (one substantially so) locked in a structural hostility sustained by territorial disputes, religious nationalism, and deliberate state sponsorship of terrorism. Understanding this relationship requires distinguishing between its proximate causes and its structural drivers.

Key Impediments:

- ▶ State-Sponsored Terrorism: Pakistan's ISI has systematically used non-state actors — Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Hizbul Mujahideen — as instruments of coercive foreign policy against India. The 26/11 Mumbai attacks (2008) and the Pahalgam massacre (2025) exemplify this structural challenge. No sustainable bilateral relationship is possible when one party uses terrorism as a diplomatic instrument.
- ▶ Army's Dominance of Pakistan's India Policy: Pakistan's civilian governments lack authority over foreign and defence policy. Even when civilian leaders seek engagement (Nawaz Sharif's Lahore visit, 1999), the Pakistani army has systematically undermined these efforts — as demonstrated by the concurrent Kargil intrusion.
- ▶ Pakistan–China Axis: CPEC has transformed Pakistan into an integral component of China's regional anti-India strategy, making bilateral normalisation structurally more difficult.
- ▶ Nuclear Asymmetry and Escalation Risk: Pakistan's 'full spectrum deterrence' — including tactical nuclear weapons — complicates India's military response options.

Prospects:

- ▶ Pakistan's escalating economic crisis may eventually create sufficient domestic pressure on the army to moderate its India policy, particularly if Gulf financial support diminishes.
- ▶ India's 'New Normal' doctrine — combining military credibility with conditional diplomacy — creates a more durable framework than the previous oscillation between unconditional engagement and passive strategic restraint.

Conclusion:

As Kautilya observed, negotiations are tools subordinate to policy. India's optimal posture is calibrated conditionality — maintaining the architecture of a possible relationship while making its activation contingent on verifiable behavioural change in Islamabad. Peace is not impossible, but it requires Pakistan's army to choose its own people over its proxy armies.

MODEL ANSWER 2: CROSS-BORDER TERRORISM AND INDIA'S SECURITY DOCTRINE

Q: Cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan represents India's most persistent national security challenge. Critically examine India's policy responses since 2001. (250 words, GS Paper III)

Introduction:

India has faced continuous Pakistan-sponsored terrorism for four decades, ranging from the insurgency in Jammu & Kashmir in the 1990s to targeted attacks on civilians and security installations in the 2000s–2020s. India's policy responses have evolved from strategic restraint toward active compellence — a significant doctrinal shift.

Evolution of India's Response Framework:

- ▶ 2001–2008 — Strategic Restraint: Despite the Parliament attack (2001) and the 10-month Operation Parakrama military standoff, India chose not to launch offensive operations, relying instead on diplomatic pressure. The 26/11 Mumbai attacks revealed the limits of this approach — restraint without deterrence simply lowered the cost of terrorism for Pakistan.
- ▶ 2016 — Surgical Strikes: India's first publicly acknowledged cross-LoC special forces operation after the Uri attack (18 CRPF killed) signalled a willingness to breach the LoC threshold. The strikes demonstrated capability while limiting escalation risk.
- ▶ 2019 — Balakot Air Strike: India crossed a qualitatively different threshold — striking Pakistani territory (not LoC) with air power for the first time since 1971. The Balakot strike targeted Jaish-e-Mohammed infrastructure and established airpower as a legitimate instrument below the nuclear threshold.
- ▶ 2025–2026 — Operation Sindoor and the 'New Normal': India's most comprehensive military and diplomatic response — precision strikes on terrorist infrastructure across Pakistan and PoK, formal declaration that terrorism constitutes an act of war, and abandonment of strategic restraint as a governing framework.

Critical Evaluation:

- ▶ The escalatory ladder has been climbed — but Pakistan has recalibrated rather than fundamentally changed its behaviour, suggesting deterrence has been incomplete. The 'New Normal' doctrine's long-term effectiveness depends on whether India can sustain military credibility while managing nuclear escalation risk.

Conclusion:

India's counter-terrorism doctrine has evolved from absorbing costs to imposing them — a rational strategic progression. However, military compellence must be complemented by diplomatic isolation, economic pressure, and information warfare to produce durable behavioural change in Islamabad.

WHY THIS TOPIC IS UPSC-CRITICAL

India–Pakistan dialogue is a perennial Mains theme because it sits at the intersection of every major GS Paper — foreign policy (GS II), internal security (GS III), ethical dilemmas (GS IV), and historical analysis (GS I). It tests whether candidates can distinguish between policy and posturing, understand structural drivers of state behaviour, apply philosophical frameworks to real crises, and propose balanced — not merely hawkish or naive — way-forward recommendations. The integration of Kautilyan realism, Clausewitzian logic, Rawlsian ethics, and Sen's capabilities approach in a single answer on this topic will distinguish a serious aspirant from a rote-learning candidate. APSC candidates must additionally demonstrate how Assam's specific security vulnerabilities — drug trafficking, radicalisation networks, external support for Northeast insurgencies — connect to the broader India–Pakistan strategic environment.

NOTE-MAKING TIPS: (1) Maintain a separate column for 'India's position' vs 'Pakistan's structural constraints.' (2) Build a timeline of all major India–Pakistan crises with India's response type. (3) Note the shift in India's doctrine: restraint → surgical strikes → airpower → compellence doctrine. (4) Memorise the eight baskets of Composite Dialogue. (5) Keep a philosophical toolkit — one Kautilya quote, one Clausewitz insight, one Rawlsian or Amartya Sen angle — for any engagement in Essay or Ethics.