

Research Article

International Media Narratives on the Pahalgam Terrorist Attack and Emerging India-Pakistan Tensions: A Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines how international media outlets reported the Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 2025 in Jammu and Kashmir and how these narratives shaped emerging India–Pakistan tensions. The primary objective of the study is to analyze variations in language use, attribution of responsibility, and geopolitical framing across global media coverage, and to assess their implications for international perceptions of terrorism and regional security in South Asia. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative discourse analysis informed by Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. The analysis focuses on news reports, editorials, and explanatory articles published by six major international media organizations–BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera, The New York Times, CNN, and Xinhua. These outlets were selected based on their global reach, agenda-setting influence, and geopolitical diversity. The dataset comprises articles published between April and June 2025, capturing both immediate reporting on the attack and subsequent coverage of diplomatic and military developments, including India’s Operation Sindoor. The findings identify five dominant discursive patterns across international media narratives: (i) terrorism framed as a regional security threat, (ii) the recurring India–Pakistan blame game, (iii) Kashmir portrayed as a persistent conflict zone, (iv) the articulation of India’s nationalist security discourse, and (v) Pakistan’s diplomatic positioning and denial narrative. Western media outlets largely adopted neutral terminology such as “militants,” emphasizing diplomatic fallout and de-escalation, while other outlets foregrounded political, humanitarian, and strategic dimensions of the crisis. The study demonstrates that international media do not merely report events but actively shape geopolitical interpretations by legitimizing certain state actions and influencing global diplomatic responses. By situating media narratives within broader power relations and ideological frameworks, the paper contributes to scholarship on media framing, terrorism studies, and international relations, highlighting the role of global media as influential actors in the construction of South Asian security discourse.

Keywords

Terrorist Attack, Media Narratives, Conflict Zone, Nationalism, Geopolitical

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Received: 12 January 2026; **Accepted:** 21 January 2026; **Published:** 20 February 2026



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1. Introduction

Terrorist violence in conflict-prone regions often transcends local boundaries, becoming embedded within global political narratives shaped by international media. On April 22, 2025, a terrorist attack near Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir resulted in the deaths of multiple civilians and security personnel, triggering renewed tensions between India and Pakistan—two nuclear-armed neighbours with a long-standing dispute over Kashmir [1]. While Indian authorities attributed the attack to Pakistan-based militant organizations, international media responses varied considerably in tone, terminology, and attribution of responsibility.

Media representations of terrorism play a crucial role in shaping international perceptions, diplomatic responses, and policy legitimacy. In South Asia, where historical grievances and territorial disputes frequently escalate into violence, global media narratives often mediate how conflicts are understood by international audiences. Previous studies suggest that international reporting on terrorism is rarely neutral; instead, it reflects ideological positions, geopolitical interests, and institutional norms [2-4].

Despite extensive scholarship on media framing of terrorism, limited academic attention has been paid to how international media discursively constructed the Pahalgam attack and its aftermath, particularly in the context of India–Pakistan relations. This study addresses this gap by systematically examining how leading global media organizations framed the incident, selected terminology, and emphasized specific political narratives.

The central research problem guiding this study is: How do international media outlets frame acts of terrorism in South Asia, and what geopolitical meanings do these framings produce?

Accordingly, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How did international media frame the Pahalgam terrorist attack and subsequent India–Pakistan tensions?
- 2) What linguistic and ideological strategies were employed in labeling the attackers and attributing responsibility?
- 3) How do geopolitical orientations shape narrative differences across media outlets?

By employing qualitative discourse analysis grounded in Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study contributes to media studies and international relations scholarship by highlighting the role of global media as active agents in constructing geopolitical meaning rather than passive transmitters of information.

2. Research Objectives

- 1) To analyze how international media framed the Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 2025—particularly in terms of language, attribution, and political positioning.

- 2) To identify variations in discourse among major global news agencies (e.g., *Reuters*, *BBC*, *Al Jazeera*, *The New York Times*, *Xinhua*, *CNN*).

- 3) To examine the ideological, geopolitical, and cultural factors influencing these narratives.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis to examine how international media outlets construct narratives around the Pahalgam terrorist attack (April 22, 2025) and the ensuing India–Pakistan tensions, particularly following India’s Operation Sindoor (May 7, 2025). The research focuses on six major international media outlets—BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera, The New York Times, CNN, and Xinhua—to capture a range of geopolitical perspectives. The methodological approach is interpretive, aiming to uncover patterns of framing, bias, and ideological underpinnings embedded in media coverage.

3.1. Data Sources

Data were collected from the official websites of BBC (bbc.com), Reuters (reuters.com), Al Jazeera (aljazeera.com), The New York Times (nytimes.com), CNN (cnn.com), and Xinhua (xinhuanet.com). The internal search tools of these platforms were used to locate articles related to the Pahalgam attack (April 22, 2025) and Operation Sindoor (May 7, 2025). In addition, Google News archives were consulted to ensure comprehensive coverage and to retrieve relevant reports published during the selected period.

3.2. Sampling Strategy

Purposive Sampling: Articles were selected based on their direct relevance to the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor. Selection criteria included coverage focusing on the attack itself, India’s military and diplomatic response, Pakistan’s counter-narratives, and the humanitarian or civilian impacts of the crisis.

Time Frame: The sample includes articles published between April 22, 2025 (the date of the attack), and June 30, 2025, allowing for the analysis of both immediate reactions and evolving media narratives.

Search Strategy: Search terms such as “Pahalgam attack,” “Operation Sindoor,” “India–Pakistan tensions,” and “TRF terrorism” were used across media websites and Google News archives. Boolean operators (e.g., “Pahalgam AND attack”) were employed to refine and narrow search results.

3.3. Data Analysis

Language and Terminology: The study compares the use of

key terms such as “militant,” “terrorist,” and “incident” across media outlets to identify ideological positioning and narrative preferences.

Narrative Focus: Coverage was examined to assess whether emphasis was placed on civilian victims, India’s security response, Pakistan’s counterclaims, or broader diplomatic consequences.

Bias and Framing: Each outlet’s framing was evaluated in relation to its geopolitical orientation, such as Western neutrality, Chinese diplomatic positioning, or regional perspectives.

Disinformation and Verification: Claims and contested narratives were cross-checked using fact-checking platforms (e.g., Alt News) and official statements issued by the governments of India and Pakistan, as well as by international bodies such as the United Nations.

Comparative Approach: A comparative framework was employed to contrast Western media outlets (BBC, Reuters, The New York Times, CNN) with Xinhua, highlighting differences in tone, attribution, and framing. Al Jazeera’s coverage was analyzed as a mediating perspective that often questions narratives from both sides.

Contextual Factors: The analysis also considers institutional contexts such as ownership structures (e.g., Xinhua as a state-run agency, BBC as a public-service broadcaster) and target audiences, which influence editorial choices and narrative construction.

4. Literature Review

Existing scholars on terrorism and media consistently emphasize the power of framing in shaping public understanding of violent events. Entman (1993) conceptualizes framing as the selection and salience of certain aspects of reality, through which media influence how audiences define problems, attribute causality, and evaluate moral responsibility. In the context of terrorism, framing choices determine whether violence is interpreted as criminality, political resistance, or national security threat [2].

A substantial body of literature highlights how Western media often adopt “conflict-neutral” or depoliticized language when reporting violence in the Global South. Thussu (2010) argues that international news coverage frequently reflects geopolitical hierarchies, where acts of violence in non-Western regions are contextualized through strategic or diplomatic lenses rather than ethical condemnation [4]. Similarly, Khalid and Abbas (2023) demonstrate that Western outlets tend to avoid direct attribution of responsibility in South Asian conflicts, privileging stability-oriented narratives over accountability [5].

Research specifically on India–Pakistan conflicts further reveals that terminology such as *militant*, *terrorist*, or *gunman* is ideologically loaded and closely aligned with foreign policy orientations. Thakur (2024) shows that Western media outlets

often reserve the term *terrorist* for attacks within Western geopolitical interest zones, while conflicts in Kashmir are framed through softer lexical choices [6]. Anwar, Bibi, and Mahboob (2025) argue that such discursive practices reproduce power asymmetries by normalizing certain forms of violence while delegitimizing others [7].

Studies examining earlier crises—such as the Uri (2016) and Pulwama (2019) attacks—have demonstrated that international media narratives frequently oscillate between humanitarian concern and geopolitical caution [8, 9]. These studies suggest that while victim suffering is acknowledged, structural questions of state sponsorship, cross-border militancy, and accountability are often diluted in global discourse.

However, despite this growing literature, systematic discourse-based analysis of the Pahalgam terrorist attack (2025) remains absent. Most existing studies focus either on domestic media or earlier episodes of violence. This study addresses this gap by examining how contemporary international media framed the Pahalgam attack and its aftermath, particularly in the context of India–Pakistan relations and escalating military tensions. By doing so, it contributes to both terrorism studies and international communication scholarship by offering a timely, comparative, and discourse-oriented analysis.

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which together provide a robust framework for examining how international media construct meaning around terrorism, conflict, and diplomacy.

Framing Theory, as articulated by Entman (1993), explains how media texts highlight certain aspects of an event while downplaying others, thereby shaping audience interpretation. Frames define what the problem is, who is responsible, and what responses are legitimate [2]. In conflict reporting, framing determines whether an act is portrayed as terrorism, insurgency, or political violence, and whether state responses are viewed as defensive, aggressive, or excessive. Previous studies have shown that framing plays a decisive role in legitimizing military actions and diplomatic positions during international crises [5, 9].

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly as developed by Fairclough (1995), complements framing theory by focusing on the relationship between language, power, and ideology. CDA views media texts not as neutral reflections of reality but as sites where social power relations are produced and reproduced. Through the analysis of lexical choices, narrative structures, metaphors, and silences, CDA enables scholars to uncover how dominant geopolitical interests are embedded within media discourse [4].

Applied to terrorism coverage, CDA reveals how labels such as *terrorist* or *militant* function as ideological signifiers rather than descriptive terms. As Said (1978) and later scholars argue, such language often reflects broader epistemic bi-

ases that shape how violence in postcolonial regions is understood by global audiences. In the India–Pakistan context, CDA helps expose how international media navigate competing state narratives while maintaining institutional claims of neutrality [10].

By integrating Framing Theory and CDA, this study adopts a multidimensional analytical lens. Framing Theory allows for

the identification of dominant narrative patterns, while CDA enables a deeper interrogation of the ideological assumptions underlying those frames. Together, these approaches facilitate a nuanced examination of how international media constructed the Pahalgam terrorist attack, justified or questioned state actions, and shaped global perceptions of security and diplomacy in South Asia.

6. Discussion

6.1. BBC

Table 1. BBC Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Title	Key Points
April 22, 2025	At least five killed after gunmen open fire on tourists in Kashmir	26 tourists killed in Pahalgam Region's CM calls it the largest civilian attack in years India blames Pakistan; no claim of responsibility Global leaders condemn attack Targeted Hindu civilians specifically [11].
April 24, 2025	Pahalgam attack: How will India respond to the Kashmir killings	Deadliest civilian attack since 2019 India suspends Indus Waters Treaty, closes border Military response expected Use of "militants" criticized Targeting of Hindus noted [12].
April 24, 2025	India will pursue Kashmir attackers to 'the ends of the earth', says PM Modi	Modi vows retribution Diplomatic ties cut, treaty suspended 3 attackers named (2 Pakistani) Border skirmishes rise [13].
April 24, 2025	Pakistan suspends visas for Indian nationals after Kashmir attack	Pakistan reacts to India's border actions Denies involvement 1,500 detained in Kashmir Victims included Hindus, Sikhs, and tourists [14].
April 28, 2025	Pahalgam attack: India hunts suspects days after Kashmir killings	Homes of suspected militants demolished 10 structures blown up Detainees interrogated Kashmiri students face backlash Local leaders criticize state response [15].
April 30, 2025	Pakistan claims 'credible intelligence' India is planning an imminent military strike	Pakistan warns of Indian attack India detains over 1,500 suspects History of retaliation cited [16].
May 1, 2025	Pahalgam: US urges India and Pakistan to defuse tensions after Kashmir attack	India accuses Pakistan US urges calm Airspace closed Attackers targeted Hindus [17].
May 3, 2025	India and Pakistan face conflict again - how did they de-escalate in the past?	References 2008 & 2019 JeM named as likely group Past de-escalations involved diplomacy [18].
May 7, 2025	India strikes - how will Pakistan respond? Four key questions	Operation Sindoor launched Targets 3 militant groups Pakistan claims civilian deaths Risk of retaliation [19].
May 7, 2025	What we know about India's strikes on Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Kashmir	9 LeT/JeM camps hit 31 claimed dead by Pakistan 26 Pahalgam victims cited- Mutual denials [20].
May 7, 2025	India and Pakistan blame each other for escalating military tensions	India strikes militant targets Pakistan reports civilian deaths Drone/missile attacks traded [21].

The BBC's reporting on the Pahalgam terrorist attack constructs a layered and carefully balanced narrative that extends beyond a descriptive account of violence. Across eleven reports published between April 22 and May 7, 2025, the BBC consistently frames the incident as one of the deadliest civilian

attacks in Kashmir in recent years. A recurring emphasis in its coverage is the deliberate targeting of Hindu tourists and other civilians, which is interpreted as a sectarian provocation aimed at destabilizing an already fragile region. By fore-

grounding civilian vulnerability, the BBC underscores the human cost of the attack while situating it within broader patterns of militancy in Kashmir.

A central theme in the BBC's narrative is the contested attribution of responsibility. India's official position—linking the attackers to Pakistan-based militant groups—is reported in detail, including references to claims that two assailants were Pakistani nationals. At the same time, the BBC maintains institutional neutrality by highlighting the absence of a universally verified claim of responsibility and by giving equal prominence to Pakistan's categorical denials. This dual presentation produces a narrative tension that mirrors the diplomatic impasse characteristic of India–Pakistan crises, allowing competing state narratives to coexist without explicit editorial endorsement.

The BBC's coverage also emphasizes the rapid transformation of the attack into a geopolitical confrontation. Policy responses such as India's partial suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, border restrictions, and strong statements by Prime Minister Narendra Modi—most notably his pledge to pursue the perpetrators “to the ends of the earth”—are presented as critical escalation points. Pakistan's reciprocal measures, including visa suspensions, further reinforce the sense of a deteriorating bilateral environment. By drawing parallels with earlier episodes such as the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the 2019 Pulwama–Balakot crisis, the BBC suggests

a cyclical pattern in which major terrorist incidents repeatedly precipitate diplomatic breakdowns and military signalling.

Another notable dimension of the BBC's reporting is its attention to internal developments within Kashmir. Coverage of mass detentions, demolitions of suspected militants' homes, and the backlash faced by Kashmiri students expands the analytical frame beyond interstate security concerns. By integrating social and humanitarian consequences alongside geopolitical dynamics, the BBC presents the crisis as a multidimensional phenomenon affecting both local communities and regional stability.

Linguistically, the BBC's consistent use of the term “militants” rather than “terrorists” reflects broader Western editorial norms emphasizing neutrality and restraint. While this lexical choice has drawn criticism within sections of the Indian media, it aligns with the BBC's institutional effort to maintain distance from emotionally charged language. Nevertheless, repeated references to Pakistan-linked actors and sectarian targeting subtly reinforce associations of cross-border involvement.

Overall, the BBC constructs the Pahalgam attack as both a humanitarian tragedy and a strategic flashpoint. By weaving together themes of terrorism, diplomatic confrontation, domestic repercussions, and international concern over escalation, its reporting shapes global understanding of the incident in a nuanced, contextualized, and analytically rich manner.

6.2. Reuters

Table 2. Reuters Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Title	Key Points
Apr 22, 2025	<i>At least 20 feared killed in militant attack on tourists in Indian Kashmir</i>	Militants opened fire at tourists in Pahalgam meadow; death toll varied (20–26); group “Kashmir Resistance” claimed responsibility; targeted Hindu tourists; PM Modi and Trump condemned the attack; worst civilian attack in years [22].
Apr 25, 2025	<i>India hunts militants in Kashmir as tensions with Pakistan soar</i>	Indian Army Chief reviewed security; soldiers and police hunted suspects; one suspect's house demolished; stock market fell fearing escalation; India accused Pakistan; Pakistan denied involvement; Indus Waters Treaty suspended; airspace closed [23].
Apr 27, 2025	<i>US in touch with India and Pakistan; urges work toward 'responsible solution'</i>	US State Dept. condemned attack, supports India, stays neutral on Pakistan; calls for responsible resolution; involved both countries diplomatically [24].
Apr 28, 2025	<i>India, Pakistan exchange small arms fire</i>	Small-arms firing across Kashmir border; militants targeted Hindu men; border measures like treaty suspension and airspace closure underway; China urged restraint [25].
Apr 29/30, 2025	<i>Pakistan says intelligence suggests Indian military action</i>	Pakistan claimed India intent on military strike; border firing objections during military talks; Pakistan's PM asked US to pressure India; comparisons of militaries highlighted rising stakes [26].
Apr 30, 2025	<i>How do India and Pakistan's militaries compare</i>	Comparative review: India's army, artillery, tanks vastly outnumber Pakistan's; nuclear capabilities and conventional imbalance may influence strategic decisions [27].
May 3, 2025	<i>India bans imports from Pakistan amid tension</i>	India banned imports from or via Pakistan, blocked Pakistani ships; Pakistan closed trade, airspace, expelled diplomats; warned treaty interference may be “act of war” [28].

Date	Title	Key Points
May 5, 2025	<i>Pakistan tests missile, India orders drills amid Kashmir stand-off</i>	Pakistan fired missiles twice in 3 days; India ordered civil defense drills with air alerts; Moody's warned Pakistan's reforms at risk; both sides militarily mobilizing [29].
May 6, 2025	<i>How world leaders react to Indian strikes</i>	Global reactions: US, UN, China, UK, Russia, UAE, Japan urged restraint; Israel backed India's right to self-defence [30].
May 7, 2025	<i>Pakistan vows retaliation after Indian strike over tourist</i>	India launched missile strikes in Pakistan/Kashmir; Pakistan shot down jets, pledged retaliation; saw heavy shelling and missile exchanges—the worst since 2003 [31].

Reuters' reporting on the Pahalgam attack constructs the event as a rapidly intensifying security crisis, illustrating how a single militant strike against civilians swiftly escalated into a broader geopolitical confrontation between India and Pakistan. In its initial dispatches, Reuters characterizes the incident as one of the deadliest civilian attacks in Kashmir in recent years, emphasizing that Hindu tourists were deliberately targeted and noting a fluctuating death toll ranging from 20 to 26. Unlike some international outlets that foregrounded uncertainty, Reuters places early and sustained emphasis on the militant group identifying itself as the "Kashmir Resistance," which claimed responsibility soon after the attack. This narrative choice directs attention toward organized insurgent involvement rather than leaving the event open to ambiguity.

As coverage progresses, Reuters increasingly foregrounds the cascading security and diplomatic consequences triggered by the attack. Reports detail Indian counterterrorism operations, including police–military coordination, demolitions of suspected militants' homes, and heightened security measures, while simultaneously presenting India's accusations of Pakistan-backed involvement alongside Islamabad's categorical denials. Policy responses such as the partial suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, airspace restrictions, and economic repercussions—including declines in Indian stock markets—are presented as concrete indicators of escalating bilateral tensions. Through this framing, Reuters underscores the fragility of India–Pakistan relations and demonstrates how a localized act of violence can rapidly produce political, economic, and strategic repercussions.

A distinctive feature of Reuters' narrative is its sustained attention to international diplomatic responses. The agency

highlights the United States' engagement with both India and Pakistan, emphasizing calls for restraint and "responsible solutions" without assigning direct blame—reflecting Washington's crisis-management posture. China's appeals for de-escalation, along with statements from the United Nations and other global actors, are integrated into the coverage, situating the crisis within a wider international security context and reinforcing the perception of South Asia as a region where escalation carries global consequences.

As tensions intensify, Reuters documents border skirmishes, Pakistan's warnings of a potential Indian strike, and heightened mistrust communicated through military channels. Its comparative assessment of Indian and Pakistani military capabilities—contrasting India's conventional strength with the nuclear dimension of deterrence—adds strategic depth to the reporting. During the peak of the crisis in early May, Reuters describes Pakistan's missile tests, India's civil defence drills, trade bans, and diplomatic expulsions as elements of a rapidly escalating cycle of retaliation.

The final phase of Reuters' coverage focuses on India's Operation Sindoor, involving cross-border strikes on militant camps, alongside Pakistan's claims of downed Indian aircraft. These developments are framed as the most serious confrontation since the 2003 ceasefire, marked by heavy shelling and growing fears of uncontrolled escalation. Throughout its reporting, Reuters maintains a restrained and measured tone while portraying the crisis as a revealing episode that exposes the volatility of India–Pakistan relations, the fragility of deterrence, and the ease with which localized violence can propel the international community toward the brink of wider conflict.

6.3. Al Jazeera

Table 3. Al Jazeera Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Title & Format	Key Points
Apr 24, 2025	<i>Kashmir updates: Pakistan claims Pahalgam attack 'false flag operation'</i>	Pakistan's Defence Minister calls the attack (26 killed) a "false flag" by India to justify aggression; India names gunmen, vows to hunt them; attack targeted Hindu men; bilateral tensions spike [32].

Date	Title & Format	Key Points
Apr 25, 2025	<i>India, Pakistan trade gunfire as tensions rise over deadly Kashmir attack</i>	Small-arms fire exchanged along LoC; UN calls for restraint; TRF, linked to Pakistan, claims responsibility; India imposes border closures, treaty suspensions; Pakistan denies involvement [33].
Apr 26, 2025	<i>Kashmir attack updates: Pakistan open to Pahalgam 'neutral' investigation</i>	Pakistan offers cooperation with neutral investigators, denying involvement; 26 tourists killed, mostly Hindu men; India's visa suspensions, border closures escalate tensions [34].
Apr 27, 2025	<i>Kashmir attack updates: Indian forces blow up homes after Pahalgam attack</i>	Indian forces demolish homes of suspected separatists; attack killed 26; India accuses Pakistan, which denies involvement; demolitions spark concerns about collective punishment [35].
Apr 28, 2025	<i>'Burst balloon': How Pahalgam attack shattered Modi's Kashmir narrative</i>	Attack undermines Modi's claims of normalcy in Kashmir; exposes security flaws; TRF, linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba, reportedly responsible; 26 tourists killed, mostly Hindu men [36].
May 1, 2025	<i>Fears of attack in Pakistan-administered Kashmir amid acute India tensions</i>	Pakistan closes 1,000+ religious schools in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, fearing Indian strikes; Modi grants military "complete operational freedom"; US urges de-escalation; airspace bans imposed [37].
May 2, 2025	<i>Pahalgam attack: A simple guide to the Kashmir conflict</i>	Explains Kashmir conflict since 1947; attack (26 killed) prompts visa cancellations, treaty suspensions; India accuses Pakistan, which threatens Simla Agreement exit; LoC gunfire escalates [38].
May 2, 2025	<i>'Everyone lives in fear': Voices of Kashmir after deadly Pahalgam attack</i>	Kashmiris face economic loss (tourism collapse), fear from India's crackdown (detentions, demolitions); Kashmiris harassed elsewhere in India; attack targeted Hindu men [39].
May 7, 2025	<i>India-Pakistan Updates: India hits Pakistan, Pakistan-administered Kashmir</i>	Operation Sindoor targets "terrorist infrastructure"; Pakistan reports 26 killed, 46 injured; India claims 8 killed in strikes; Pahalgam attack (26 killed) prompts India's response; Pakistan denies involvement [40].
May 7, 2025	<i>Why did India strike Pakistan? All we know about Operation Sindoor</i>	Operation Sindoor targets nine LeT/JeM sites; Pakistan reports 31 civilian deaths, including in mosques; Pahalgam attack targeted Hindu men; India blames TRF; Pakistan claims Indian jets downed [41].
May 7, 2025	<i>Information war: Are India and Pakistan telling the truth about attacks?</i>	India claims Sindoor hit terrorist sites; Pakistan reports 31 civilian deaths, including children; India accuses Pakistan for Pahalgam; Pakistan claims jets downed; social media amplifies disinformation [42].
May 7, 2025	<i>'High risks': Indian attacks in Pakistan raise fears of wider conflict</i>	Operation Sindoor targets "terrorist infrastructure"; Pakistan reports 8 civilian deaths; India's retaliation follows Pahalgam attack; analysts warn of nuclear risks, domestic pressure on Modi [43].

Al Jazeera's coverage of the Pahalgam terrorist attack places the incident within a deeply politicized India–Pakistan context. Its reporting follows two competing narratives: Pakistan's "false flag" claims that India staged the attack to justify aggression, and India's accusations that Pakistan-backed groups like The Resistance Front (TRF) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) were responsible. This dual framing underscores the information warfare that often follows major Kashmir crises.

Al Jazeera highlights the sectarian nature of the violence most of the 26 victims being Hindu tourists while analyzing the political and diplomatic fallout, such as India's visa suspensions, border closures, and treaty freezes. The outlet links these actions to a broader pattern of militarization and increased state control over Kashmir.

A recurring theme in its reporting is the humanitarian impact: widespread home demolitions, detentions, and economic disruption that exacerbate fear among civilians. Parallely, Al Jazeera tracks Pakistan's diplomatic responses, including offers for neutral investigations, school closures in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and warnings about the Simla Accord's breach.

During Operation Sindoor, the network portrays India and Pakistan as mirror adversaries, each alleging civilian deaths and downed aircraft. By citing U.S. and U.N. calls for restraint, Al Jazeera situates the crisis within a regional and nuclear context, framing Pahalgam as both a humanitarian tragedy and a geopolitical flashpoint where Kashmiris remain caught between militarism and diplomacy.

6.4. The New York Times

Table 4. NYT Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Headline	Key Points
Apr 22, 2025	At Least 24 Tourists Gunned Down by Militants in Kashmir	Eyewitness accounts; 24–26 tourists (mostly Hindu) killed in Baisaran Valley; uses “militants,” drawing criticism; Modi calls it terrorism [44].
Apr 23, 2025	A Perfect Day in a Gentle Meadow Is Shattered by Bloody Carnage	Detailed victim/family stories; emotive narrative; uses “militant” label, focusing on human suffering [45].
Apr 23, 2025	What to Know About the Tensions Over Kashmir	Explainer: TRF’s role, linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba; conflict history; uses “terrorist” when citing India, “militant” elsewhere; 26 killed, 17 injured [46].
Apr 23, 2025	India Takes Aim at Pakistan After Slaughter of Civilians in Kashmir	India suspends Indus Waters Treaty, downgrades diplomacy; uses “militant”; mentions religious targeting without graphic detail [47].
Apr 24, 2025	Crisis Deepens for India and Pakistan Over Kashmir Attack	India imposes visa suspension, treaty suspension; accuses Pakistan of supporting terrorism; Pakistan calls measures “unilateral,” denies involvement [48].
Apr 25, 2025	Indian and Pakistani Soldiers Briefly Exchange Fire Along Kashmir Border	First LoC skirmishes; border firing reported; diplomatic tit-for-tat (visa bans, military adviser expulsions) begins [49].
Apr 25, 2025	Pakistan Official Calls for International Inquiry Into Kashmir Terror Attack	Pakistan’s Defence Minister Asif denies involvement, seeks international probe; India suspects Pakistani nationals, escalates measures [50].
Apr 27, 2025	India Seems to Be Building Its Case for Striking Pakistan	Modi briefs global leaders, signals military action; cites Pakistan’s past terrorism support, limited evidence; LoC skirmishes continue [51].
Apr 30, 2025	India Accuses Pakistan of Supporting Terrorism. Here’s What We Know.	Attack (26 killed, 17 injured) targeted Hindus; India cites technical intelligence (e.g., facial recognition); Pakistan denies; US, UN urge de-escalation [52].
Apr 30, 2025	India’s Muslims Fear a Growing Backlash After Kashmir Attack	Focuses on domestic fallout: Muslim detentions, fears of communal backlash post-attack; highlights social tensions in India [53].
May 1, 2025	U.S. and U.N. Urge De-escalation Between India and Pakistan	Covers global calls for restraint; notes India’s visa bans, treaty suspension; escalating tensions persist despite diplomacy [54].
May 5, 2025	Pakistan’s Most Powerful Man Steps Out of the Shadows to Confront India	Highlights Gen. Asim Munir’s role in Pakistan’s military response; portrays military decision-making dynamics [55].
May 7, 2025	India Strikes Pakistan but Is Said to Have Lost Jets	Operation Sindoor targets nine LeT/JeM sites; Pakistan reports 20+ killed, claims downed jets; two Indian aircraft crash; Modi claims victory [56].
May 7, 2025	The Symbolism Behind India’s ‘Operation Sindoor’	Examines naming and framing of Operation Sindoor; links to cultural, political messaging; targets terrorist infrastructure [57].
May 7, 2025	Thursday Briefing: What’s Next for India and Pakistan?	Analyzes risks, potential diplomatic paths; links to past escalations (e.g., 2019 Pulwama); assesses future conflict scenarios [58].

The New York Times examined the Pahalgam terrorist attack through a blend of human-centered storytelling and geopolitical analysis. Early reports combined eyewitness accounts and personal stories to highlight civilian suffering while maintaining a neutral tone, using the term militants except when quoting Indian officials. The coverage situated the attack within Kashmir’s long-standing conflict, referencing the Resistance Front (TRF) and the enduring India–Pakistan hostility.

The newspaper documented India’s diplomatic actions—suspending treaties, imposing visa bans, and downgrading

ties—alongside Pakistan’s denials and its appeal for an international investigation. Later pieces analyzed the militarization of the crisis, detailing cross-border clashes, political maneuvering, and preparations for Operation Sindoor.

Domestically, The New York Times noted communal tensions and detentions among Indian Muslim communities following the attack. Reports on Operation Sindoor described India’s strikes on Pakistan-administered territory, Pakistan’s claims of downed jets, and the rising civilian toll on both sides.

The paper also explored the symbolism of “Sindoor”, linking it to India’s cultural and political identity in security narratives. Comparing the episode to the Pulwama–Balakot crisis

(2019), it underscored the recurring cycle of escalation between two nuclear powers. Ultimately, The New York Times portrayed Pahalgam as both a human tragedy and a strategic

flashpoint, advocating measured diplomacy to avert broader conflict.

6.5. CNN

Table 5. CNN Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Headline & Format	Key Points
April 23, 2025	<i>A tourist massacre in Kashmir is escalating tensions between India and Pakistan</i>	Gunmen killed at least 26 tourists near Pahalgam, mostly Indian. India blamed "cross-border terrorism" on Pakistan; Islamabad denied. India downgraded diplomatic ties, closed border, suspended Indus Waters Treaty. Fears of military retaliation revived after 2019 precedents [59].
April 29, 2025	<i>Pakistan claims it has 'credible intelligence' India will strike within 36 hours</i>	Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar claimed "credible intelligence" of Indian military action within 24–36 hours, without evidence. US, China urged restraint; Rubio called for Pakistan to investigate. India under domestic pressure to act; hotlines opened briefly [60].
May 1, 2025	<i>India-Pakistan tensions: Vance, Rubio urge restraint as Kashmir attack sparks alarm</i>	US officials Rubio and Vance urged de-escalation; Rubio pressed Pakistan to cooperate in investigations. India's Jaishankar vowed to bring perpetrators to justice. US framed as stabilizing force, not mediator, amid India's diplomatic offensive [61].
May 5, 2025	<i>Grief and fear permeate the picturesque Kashmir valleys that separate India and Pakistan</i>	Pakistani villagers mourned casualties near LoC from initial Pahalgam fallout. Both nations conducted drills, evacuated civilians. Conflict recalled past crises like Kargil, with fear of further escalation [62].
May 6–7, 2025	<i>Pakistan and India are blaming each other as their Kashmir conflict spirals</i>	India's Operation Sindoor launched missile strikes on Pakistan-administered areas, targeting LeT, JeM. Pakistan reported 31 deaths, claimed civilian hits; India reported 12 deaths from Pakistani shelling. IPL match suspended; international media reported airstrikes, bunkers opening [63].
May 7, 2025	<i>India launches attacks on Pakistan after Kashmir massacre</i>	India's Operation Sindoor targeted "terrorist infrastructure" (LeT, JeM) in Pakistan and PoK. Pakistan claimed 31 killed, alleged civilian hits; India reported 12 deaths from Pakistani shelling. Pakistan's Sharif claimed jet shootdowns; Qatar urged de-escalation [64].

CNN's coverage of the Pahalgam terrorist attack portrays it as a key trigger for escalating India–Pakistan tensions. The network reported that 26 foreign tourists were killed, and India swiftly attributed the assault to cross-border terrorism, prompting strong retaliatory actions—downgrading diplomatic ties, closing borders, and suspending the Indus Waters Treaty—drawing parallels to the 2019 Pulwama–Balakot crisis.

CNN emphasized Pakistan's repeated denials and warnings of an imminent Indian strike, noting the absence of supporting evidence and the emergence of a cycle of mutual distrust. The channel gave prominence to U.S. and international appeals for

restraint, highlighting Washington's dual approach of urging calm while pressing Islamabad to cooperate with investigations.

Through first-person accounts from the Line of Control, CNN illustrated the fears of Pakistani villagers facing evacuations amid military preparations. Coverage of Operation Sindoor presented contradictory narratives: India's claim of precision strikes on LeT and JeM camps versus Pakistan's allegations of civilian casualties and downed Indian jets. Overall, CNN framed the Pahalgam crisis as a regional flashpoint, where terrorism, nationalism, and diplomacy intertwined to heighten the risk of wider military confrontation.

6.6. Xinhua

Table 6. Xinhua Coverage of the Pahalgam Attack (April–May 2025).

Date	Headline & Format	Key Points	Conclusions
April 23, 2025	<i>China condemns terrorist attack in India's Jammu and Kashmir</i>	China condemned the April 22 Pahalgam attack that killed 26 civilians. Expressed condolences. Urged India and Pakistan to exercise restraint and resolve disputes through dialogue.	China condemns terrorism and urges both nations to de-escalate, maintaining a neutral diplomatic stance [65].
May 3, 2025	<i>China calls for restraint from India, Pakistan amid escalating tensions</i>	Rising tensions after India's diplomatic and security moves post-Pahalgam. China reiterates call for dialogue. Cites Pakistan's strike warning as a concern.	China promotes peaceful conflict resolution to ensure regional stability [66].
May 7, 2025	<i>China expresses concern over India's military strikes on Pakistan</i>	Reports on India's Operation Sindoor. China expresses "regret" over India's military response. Warns of civilian harm and urges restraint.	While reaffirming its opposition to terrorism, China criticizes military escalation and urges dialogue [67].

The presentation of Xinhua is always neutral and stability-focused diplomacy that criticizes the attack at Pahalgam but does not blame Pakistan. The Chinese version of coverage showers loves to the victims and at the same time urge both India and Pakistan to restrain but also state that dialogue is the only way to avert destabilization of the region. With the situation escalating with India taking diplomatic steps, the buildup of arms, and later dropping of Operation Sindoor, Xinhua puts the threat of spillover war in South Asia into emphasis. The coverage is subtle in its criticism of the military strikes of India by expressing but regretting the possibility of civilian loss of life but at the same time highlights how China stands completely on its ground to deal with terrorism. In total, Xinhua represents China as an actor of reservations, a promoter of peace and is determined to do away with the crisis without taking a one-sided side.

7. Analysis and Findings

7.1. Narrative 1 - "Terrorism as a Regional Security Threat"

Finding: A group of international media outlets frame the Pahalgam attack as part of a broader pattern of transnational Islamist militancy in South Asia. This framing situates the incident within established militant networks and emphasizes counterterrorism cooperation, military preparedness, and regional security responses.

Outlets and Evidence: Reuters and the BBC emphasize claims of cross-border involvement, including references to Pakistan-origin attackers and militant organizations such as JeM, LeT, and TRF. These outlets extensively report India's retaliatory actions, including Operation Sindoor, alongside

diplomatic consequences such as treaty suspensions and airspace restrictions [6]. CNN and The New York Times contextualize the attack within earlier crises such as Pulwama and Balakot, highlighting patterns of escalation and military readiness. Al Jazeera acknowledges alleged links to TRF or LeT but simultaneously problematizes attribution by stressing uncertainty and competing claims.

Implications: This security-centric framing normalizes military and intelligence-based responses at the international level and primes global audiences to interpret India's subsequent actions as counterterrorism measures rather than bilateral aggression.

7.2. Narrative 2 - "India–Pakistan Blame Game"

Finding: Most international outlets foreground competing national narratives, juxtaposing India's attribution of responsibility against Pakistan's categorical denials. Diplomatic exchanges and rhetorical escalation often dominate coverage.

Outlets and Evidence: The BBC and Reuters maintain a balanced presentation of accusations and denials while documenting diplomatic ruptures. Al Jazeera and Xinhua devote greater attention to Pakistan's counterclaims, including assertions of false-flag operations and calls for neutrality. CNN and The New York Times highlight India's assertive rhetoric alongside Pakistan's warnings based on "credible intelligence."

Implications: This binary blame frame reinforces perceptions of entrenched mistrust and transforms media coverage into a conduit for diplomatic signalling, potentially amplifying escalation risks.

7.3. Narrative 3 - "Kashmir as a Conflict Zone"

Finding: Several outlets situate the attack within Kashmir's

broader political, social, and human-rights context, shifting attention away from purely counterterrorism narratives toward structural grievances and civilian consequences.

Outlets and Evidence: Al Jazeera and The New York Times foreground local voices, economic disruption (especially tourism losses), detentions, demolitions, and civilian fear. The BBC and Reuters also report domestic repercussions alongside international developments.

Implications: This framing complicates security-focused explanations by introducing normative concerns related to governance and human rights, influencing how international audiences assess legitimacy and responsibility.

7.4. Narrative 4 - “India’s Security and Nationalist Narrative”

Finding: Coverage frequently conveys India’s security posture and nationalist rhetoric, portraying state actions as legitimate defensive responses to terrorism.

Outlets and Evidence: The BBC and The New York Times prominently quote Prime Minister Modi’s rhetoric and analyze the symbolic framing of Operation Sindoor, highlighting the strategic role of language and imagery in conflict communication [9]. Reuters and CNN document swift policy measures, including visa bans, import restrictions, and treaty suspensions, while the BBC and NYT emphasize domestic political pressures shaping India’s response.

Implications: This narrative presents India’s actions as domestically legitimized and sovereignty-driven, making robust military or diplomatic measures appear reasonable to international audiences.

7.5. Narrative 5 - “Pakistan’s Denial and Diplomatic Positioning”

Finding: Pakistan’s denials, calls for neutral investigations, and diplomatic countermeasures receive sustained coverage, sometimes framed sympathetically in outlets emphasizing regional nuance.

Outlets and Evidence: Al Jazeera and Xinhua highlight Pakistan’s denials, offers of neutral probes, and appeals for dialogue. Reuters and CNN report Pakistan’s warnings, missile tests, and outreach to third parties such as the United States. The BBC and The New York Times include Pakistan’s diplomatic steps but typically balance them with India’s claims.

Implications: This framing enables Pakistan to position itself as a victim of unproven allegations and to appeal to international legal and diplomatic norms, complicating unilateral endorsement of India’s narrative.

7.6. Linguistic and Semiotic Patterns (Terms, Tone, Headlines)

Finding: Terminology, tone, and symbolic references vary systematically across outlets and carry significant interpretive

weight.

Key Patterns: Western outlets (BBC, Reuters, CNN, NYT) predominantly use the term *militants*, reserving *terrorists* mainly for direct quotations from Indian officials. Al Jazeera employs both terms while emphasizing political context, whereas Xinhua avoids explicit attribution. Reuters and Al Jazeera report claim of responsibility more directly, while other outlets stress uncertainty. Headlines and narrative tone range from emotive, victim-centered framing to restrained, escalation-focused reporting.

Semiotic Elements: The symbolic naming of military actions, particularly “Operation Sindoor,” functions as political messaging, as highlighted in The New York Times. Visual and narrative emphasis differs across outlets, with some prioritizing human suffering and others focusing on state actions and procedural developments.

Implications: Linguistic and semiotic choices shape moral evaluations, responsibility attribution, and emotional resonance, influencing public sympathy, the perceived legitimacy of state responses, and pressure on international actors.

8. Conclusion

The international media coverage of the Pahalgam terrorist attack demonstrates how global narratives shape the political meaning of violence in South Asia. Across major international outlets, five dominant discursive patterns emerged. First, many media organizations framed the incident as part of a broader regional terrorism network, reinforcing perceptions of South Asia as a volatile security environment. Second, an “India–Pakistan blame game” narrative dominated wire services and breaking-news formats, often reducing complex security dynamics to reciprocal accusations. Third, human-rights-oriented reporting situated the attack within Kashmir’s wider political and social context, extending the discourse beyond terrorism to include issues of governance, civilian impact, and state response. Fourth, several outlets amplified India’s nationalist and security-oriented framing, implicitly legitimizing retaliatory measures and reflecting domestic political expectations. Finally, Pakistan’s denial and diplomatic messaging received substantial coverage, presenting a counter-narrative that reframed the crisis as political contestation rather than cross-border militancy.

These findings carry important implications for India’s foreign policy and strategic communication. The study demonstrates that international perceptions are shaped not only by official state statements but also by how diverse media ecosystems interpret and frame events [5]. Consequently, India’s foreign-policy apparatus must anticipate competing global narratives and respond through coherent, evidence-based communication strategies. Proactive media diplomacy—through timely briefings, transparent information-sharing, multilingual engagement, and sustained interaction with global news organizations—can help counter misinformation,

reduce narrative asymmetries, and enhance international credibility during crises.

The analysis further highlights that crisis reporting functions as a site of soft-power competition between India and Pakistan. India's ability to frame terrorist attacks within a broader counter-terrorism discourse depends on sustained diplomatic outreach, strategic use of verified data, and alignment between domestic political rhetoric and international expectations. As global media increasingly foreground human rights and local experiences, integrating humanitarian considerations into strategic communication becomes essential to prevent negative narrative spillovers.

Future research may extend this study in several directions. First, examining social media platforms such as X/Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp would provide insights into the circulation of unofficial narratives and disinformation. Second, comparative analyses between Western and Asian or Middle Eastern media could further illuminate regional biases and geopolitical alignments. Finally, longitudinal comparisons with earlier crises such as Uri (2016) and Pulwama (2019) would deepen understanding of continuity and change in international media discourse on terrorism and South Asian security.

Overall, the Pahalgam attack underscores that international media narratives do not merely report conflicts; they actively shape the diplomatic and strategic environments in which those conflicts unfold. Recognizing this reality is essential for adapting India's strategic communication and foreign-policy responses in an increasingly mediated global order.

9. Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focuses exclusively on English-language international media, thereby excluding regional, vernacular, and local-language outlets that may present alternative or contrasting narratives. Second, the study is confined to a limited time frame (April–June 2025), which may not capture longer-term shifts or evolving patterns in international media coverage.

Third, the research relies solely on qualitative textual analysis and does not incorporate audience reception or perception data. As a result, the study cannot assess how global or local audiences interpreted or internalized the media narratives examined. Fourth, while the study analyzes discursive framing, it does not undertake a detailed institutional analysis of editorial policies or ownership structures that may systematically influence media narratives.

Finally, the study does not compare coverage across different media formats such as television broadcasts or social media platforms, where discourse often evolves more rapidly, emotionally, and interactively than in print or online news reporting [68]. Future research may address these limitations by adopting a multimodal, longitudinal, and audience-centered approach to media discourse

analysis.

Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa
CNN	Cable News Network
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
JeM	Jaish-e-Mohammed
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
LoC	Line of Control
NYT	The New York Times
PoK	Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir)
TRF	The Resistance Front
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Sagar Joshi: Formal Analysis, Visualisation, Validation, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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