



# The Pahalgam Attack: Context, Impact, and Implications

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# Contents

Summary	5
Introduction	6
1. Context	7
2. Implications for India	9
3. India's response	11
4. International implications	13
5. Implications for the UK	14
Conclusion	17



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The Pahalgam terror attack killed 28 tourists, including 2 foreign nationals, on 22 April 2025.



The attack was carried out by The Resistance Front, an offshoot of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba group.



The attack disrupted the relative peace in Jammu and Kashmir, and hit the tourism sector, a major source of livelihoods for the local population. It appears to be a direct attempt to undermine the prevailing normalcy and economic and political progress in Jammu and Kashmir.



While the region has seen declining terror incidents and killings since the abrogation of Article 370, the recent terror attack in Pahalgam is one of the deadliest attacks on civilians in Kashmir, raising questions about the internal security of the region.



India is posturing towards, and most likely will take stringent measures against Pakistan. India is likely to take strong military action by way of surgical airstrikes to destroy what it identifies as terrorist camps. This is likely to be coupled with a string of diplomatic responses including using the Indus Waters treaty to apply pressure on Pakistan.



The attack has potential international implications, especially in the UK. In February 2025 evidence has emerged that an engagement took place between Hamas, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Attempts by Islamist groups to call for a global jihad and draw parallels between Palestine and Kashmir risk tensions between British Hindus and Muslims.





## Introduction

Kashmir's popular tourist destination Pahalgam witnessed a terrorist attack on 22 April 2025. The incident represents one of the worst in terms of lives lost since the Pulwama attack in 2019. Official sources confirm 28 dead including 2 foreign nationals from Italy and Israel. These numbers are expected to rise in the coming days as many people are in a critical condition in hospital. The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has claimed responsibility for the attack. LeT (also spelt Lashkar e Tayyaba) has been proscribed in the UK since March 2001.

The Pahalgam attack seems to have shocked India and the world. The manner of this attack is unlike the usual modus operandi of terror groups in Kashmir, who had always avoided targeting tourists as it would harm the local economy and the sentiments of the local population.

On this occasion the terrorists targeted and killed tourists. Furthermore, evidence is emerging that the terrorists singled out Hindu men only, and reportedly checked the victims' IDs to confirm whether they were Hindus from their names before opening fire on them.

This briefing note will unpack the context, impact, scale and international implications of the attack. The insights are mostly based on an extensive network of primary sources in Delhi and on ground reports from Kashmir. Since the subject is sensitive, the identity of the sources has been withheld at this time. Discussion about the international implications of the attack draws from secondary sources about the activities of relevant Pakistan-based organisations that are proscribed in the UK, and academic and policy commentary. This follows an ICfS Briefing Paper published in June 2024 on the security situation in Kashmir following the abrogation of Art 370.



# 1. Context

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has seen violence for decades, during which it has been a flashpoint for conflict between India and Pakistan. In recent years, especially after Article 370 of the Constitution of India was repealed, J&K has seen a decline in terror incidents, killings (Fig 1.), violent protests and stone pelting which were previously the norm.

The people of J&K have seen economic growth and political progress too, evidenced by peaceful and democratic elections with high voter turnout. That itself is a significant indicator of the progress in J&K post Article 370.

## Yearly fatalities

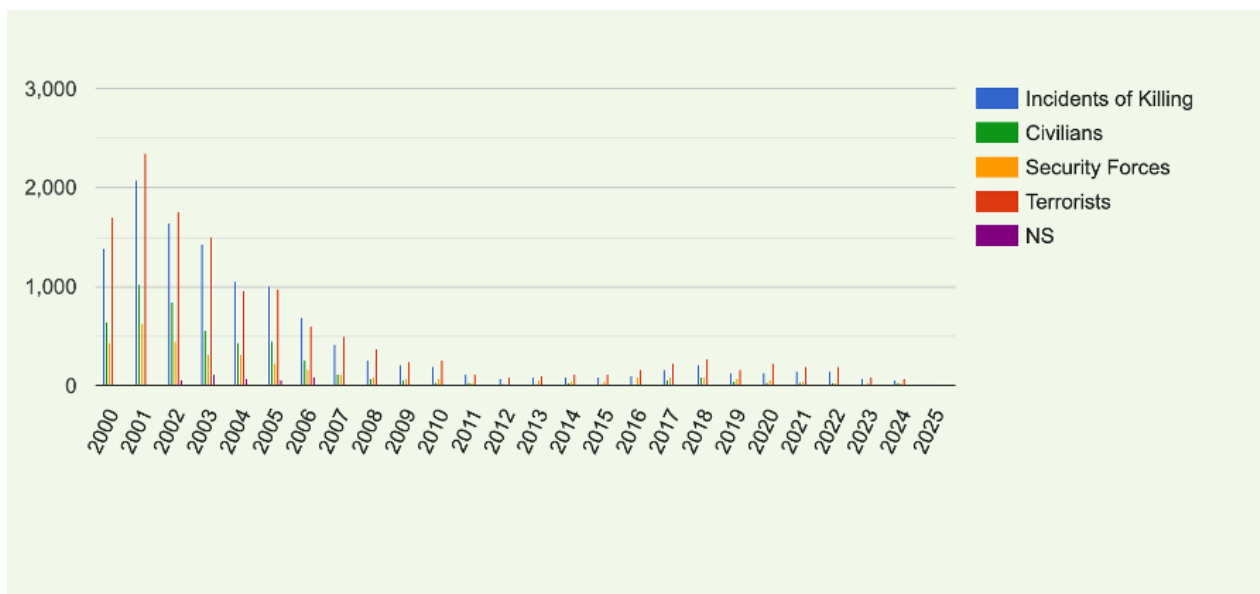


Figure 1: Chart with data on killings in J&K from 2000-2025. Source: SATP

## 1.1. Internationalisation of the Kashmir issue

It is important to understand the timing of the attack and why it happened now. This attack coincides with the US Vice President JD Vance's visit to India. There is some evidence to suggest that terrorist attacks occurring in Jammu and Kashmir are not always randomly timed. Certain attacks appear to be strategically planned to coincide with high-level official US visits to India.

In an effort to draw international attention to the Kashmir issue, terrorist groups have orchestrated deadly attacks around the time of US presidential or vice-presidential state visits. For example, as shown in Table 1, there appears to be a significant link between President Clinton's visit to New Delhi in March 2000 and the Chittisinghpura Massacre carried out by the Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist group.



<u>President or US Official</u>	<u>Date of Visit</u>	<u>Successive Terrorist Attack in J&amp;K</u>
<b>President Clinton</b>	03/2000	Attack on the remote village of Chittisinghpura in Anantnag district. A group of armed men dressed in army uniforms entered the majority Sikh village. 37 detained, 35 dead with 2 survivors.
<b>President Bush</b>	03/2006	Doda Massacre on 30 <sup>th</sup> April and 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2006, slightly later than the Bush visit. First attack killing 22 Hindu villagers in Kulhand area, second attack in Basantgarh area killing 35 Hindu shepherds.
<b>President Obama</b>	11/2010 01/2015	No related attacks.
<b>President Trump</b>	02/2020	No related attacks.
<b>Vice President Vance</b>	04/2025	Six terrorists disguised in army uniforms emerged from Baisaran meadow and targeted non-Muslim tourists, killing 26-30.

*Table 1: US Presidential or Vice-Presidential visits to India and subsequent terror attacks in J&K*

## 1.2. Links to Pakistan

A notable development preceding the attack was a video released by Pakistani Army Chief General Asim Munir, in which he made critical remarks about the Indian Army and referred to Kashmir as the "jugular vein of Pakistan." His statements, which included references to Hindus and broader criticisms of India, appear to reflect the Pakistani military's current posture amid declining domestic and international standing. Concurrently, Pakistan is experiencing internal instability, including violent protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and ongoing security challenges in Balochistan. The release of the video may be interpreted as an attempt by the military to reassert its relevance and maintain the prominence of the Kashmir issue in national discourse.

Further links to Pakistan are indicated by the claim of responsibility made by The Resistance Front, a group affiliated with Lashkar-e-Taiba and reportedly based in Pakistan. Official sources estimate that between four and eight well-trained individuals, armed with AK-47 and M4 rifles, participated in the attack. The group is believed to have infiltrated across the Pir Panjal range, which geographically separates Jammu and Kashmir. According to preliminary intelligence assessments, the majority of the assailants were foreign nationals, with two to three local operatives reportedly having received training in Pakistan.





## 2. Implications for India

### 2.1. Security

The Pahalgam attack has taken the security forces and Indian government by surprise. According to internal sources, intelligence related to a potential attack was circulating in advance; however, no specific information regarding the intended target was available. Pahalgam, regarded as a safe and popular destination for both domestic and international tourists, was not considered a likely site for such an incident.

The event has prompted scrutiny of the preparedness of security forces, particularly the local police, which operates under the jurisdiction of the elected state government rather than the central administration. The recent drawdown of security personnel in the region has often been cited as a sign of improving stability in Jammu and Kashmir, a region known for its extensive military presence. However, the attack highlights ongoing vulnerabilities and the potential for cross-border militant groups to exploit perceived lapses in security, thereby threatening the fragile gains made in recent years.

### 2.2. Economic

This attack could have severe implications for the tourism sector in Kashmir. Tourism is important for the region, not just for the economy but as an important vehicle for peace, prosperity and cultural preservation.

Significant increases to tourism numbers have been seen in recent years, not least thanks to a 70% drop in terror-related incidents, which has facilitated a more stable base for a developing tourism industry.

In this context there have been consolidated efforts by the Indian government to boost peace and drive investment in the region, linked to tourism. This includes a new section of the Kashmir train line, due to be inaugurated this month. Beginning of foreign investment from Dubai's Emaar Group in attempts to further stabilise the region and boost economic growth.

Jammu and Kashmir successfully hosted the third G20 Tourism Working Group meeting in Srinagar in May 2023, which was attended by over 60 international delegates. Key findings from the Economic Survey 2024-2025 show that tourism is an integral part of the J&K economy:

- Per Capita Income (PCI) of J&K increased by 148% between 2014-15 and 2024-25, indicating improved living standards and greater economic prosperity – inferred impacts of tourism.
- Tertiary sector (including hospitality and tourism) shows consistent growth – 59% average sectoral share of J&K economy.

In the last three financial years, J&K's economic growth has slightly exceeded the national average, with J&K's growth averaging 7.81%, marginally higher than the nation's average of 7.77%.



After violent stone-pelting incidents in 2018, hotel occupancy dropped 30% compared to the same period the year before, in 2017. In the aftermath of the Pulwama attack in February 2019, in which 40 CPRF personnel were killed and 35 injured, 80% of tourist bookings were cancelled, and international travel agencies began advising clients against visiting Kashmir. Airlines have also previously announced a cap on fares at Rs 9,500 for all flights to and from Srinagar, and offered fee waivers on ticket cancellations for flights to and from the airport.

The full impact of the attack on 22 April on the tourism industry in Kashmir will not be seen for some time. However, the short-term effects are already visible. The BBC has reported a large number of cancellation requests from clients, with one agency predicting losses of Rs. 40m (c. £350,000).

There is a growing fear among Kashmiris that their businesses and livelihoods will be destroyed.

While figures (Fig. 2) do show that tourism does recover in J&K after a terrorist attack, this is the first attack in the last decade which has explicitly targeted civilians. As a result, a harder impact on the tourism industry can be expected. Moreover, the attack also took place at a time when the Indian Government was actively urging countries like the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia to lift long-standing negative travel advisories that warn their citizens to "avoid all travel" to J&K.

Indians are traditionally very resilient to such attacks, and civilian organisations are likely to organise "religious" trips to Kashmir throughout 2025/26 in order to ensure that the economy of Kashmir does recover, and a confidence returns in the minds of the public to visit Kashmir.

Year	Tourist footfall
2021	11.3 million
2022	18.8 million
2023	21.2 million
2024	23.6 million

Figure 2: Statistics on the number of tourists visiting Jammu & Kashmir.  
Source: J&K Tourism Department, Economic Survey 2024-25



### 2.3. Political

The recent attack is expected to further delay the restoration of statehood for Jammu and Kashmir. Just a few days before the attack, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah had expressed that now is the time to restore statehood. The special status of Jammu and Kashmir was removed under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and the state was bifurcated into two Union Territories: Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. In December 2023, the Supreme Court upheld the Modi government's decision to abrogate Article 370 but directed that assembly elections be held by September 30, 2024, and that statehood be restored to Jammu and Kashmir "at the earliest." While elections were held as per the Court's directive, and a government formed, the restoration of statehood remains uncertain.

The Indian government's approach can be explained by the complex geopolitics of the Kashmir conflict, involving territorial disputes, religious and ideological differences, and strategic concerns. Jammu and Kashmir is a border state sharing boundaries with nuclear-armed neighbours China and Pakistan, and it has long been a flashpoint for conflict.

Given the continuing instability and the region's strategic importance, the government prioritises national security over political considerations by maintaining direct control over security issues. Jammu and Kashmir has a unique administrative and political structure, with both the union and state governments overseeing different areas of competence. As a Union Territory, the Union government has broader powers over tackling security threats. This would change with the restoration of statehood, with the elected J&K government regaining control over the security apparatus, similar to other Indian states.

Before the abrogation of Article 370, the state's track record of incidents, protests, and overall violence made the Union government less confident in its capability to handle threats from terror groups. And so, the recent Pahalgam attack and ongoing unrest will further delay the restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, as a significant decline in terrorism is a critical prerequisite for the government to consider restoring the statehood.





### 3. India's response

The Government of India has formally condemned the Pahalgam attack and stated that an appropriate and decisive response will follow. India is considering a range of military and diplomatic measures in response to the terror incident. The Cabinet Committee on Security has reviewed the overall security situation and has taken the following steps:

- The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 will be suspended until Pakistan ends support for cross-border terrorism.
- The Integrated Check Post Attari will be closed immediately, allowing only those with valid endorsements to return by May 1, 2025.
- Pakistani nationals will be barred from traveling to India under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme. Existing visas are cancelled, and Pakistanis must leave India within 48 hours.
- Pakistan's military, naval, and air advisors at its High Commission in New Delhi are declared persona non grata and must depart within a week. India will withdraw its own advisors from Islamabad.
- The strength of both High Commissions will be reduced from 55 to 30 by May 1, 2025.

The recent suspension of India's participation in the Indus Waters Treaty represents a significant diplomatic measure by the Ministry of External Affairs in response to cross-border terrorism.

While the 1960 treaty has withstood the strain of three wars—1965, 1971, and the Kargil conflict—as well as numerous terror incidents, India's decision signals a shift in approach. Although India has not halted the flow of water from the western rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab—which are allocated to Pakistan under the treaty, it has taken steps to fully utilize its share of water from the eastern rivers.

As the upper riparian state, India holds leverage in managing water flows, and any sustained changes could potentially affect Pakistan's access to irrigation and drinking water. The suspension primarily affects the exchange of data and cooperation under the treaty framework but does not yet entail the stoppage of water from the western rivers.

Another step taken by the union government is the immediate shutdown of the Integrated Check Post at the Attari-Wagah border - a crucial link for trade and people-to-people engagement between the two nations. Several high-level confidential sources have confirmed air strikes in the coming days. India has previously responded to the Uri attack by Jaish-e-Mohammad through surgical strikes, and the Pulwama attack 2019 through the Balakot strikes.

The general understanding within security circles is that this time, the military measures will target not just the terror groups behind this attack, but also the perceived "mastermind" behind it. The Indian government is under immense public pressure to address the root cause of the terror problem emanating from Pakistan.






## 4. International implications

The possible international implications of the attack are not limited to India and Pakistan. The LeT has recently engaged with other terror groups, including Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) (proscribed in the UK since March 2001) and Hamas (proscription extended in November 2021). On 5 February 2025, in Rawalakot, in Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, the Hindustan Times reports that a conference titled 'Kashmir Solidarity and Hamas Operation AL-Aqsa Flood' was held. This report has been corroborated by Firstpost, the Times of India, and India Today. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, the attendees included Talha Saif, the brother of JeM's Masood Azhar, Asghar Khan Kashmiri and Masood Ilyas, "top LeT leaders" and Dr Khalid Qaddoumi of Hamas. South Asia Terrorism Portal claims that this is the first visit of a Hamas leader to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. This points to clear engagement between terror groups situated in different parts of the world.

This engagement should be of interest because it reinforces views of a common cause between them. The various accounts of the conference have identified a narrative that draws an equivalence between the current Israel-Palestine conflict in Gaza, and the tensions between India and Pakistan over Kashmir.

This mirrors academic commentary that has framed both issues as anti-colonial struggles for sovereignty: in both cases, there is a settler colonial power (Israel and India) that has occupied or annexed land (Gaza and Kashmir) and in so doing, denied self-determination to those living in that territory.





This indicates that the link drawn is more than a matter of perception by Indian intelligence agencies, but instead a wider current of thinking. As will be discussed below, the same link has been drawn by several controversial UK-based Muslim organisations when discussing the Kashmir issue.

The engagement between these proscribed groups requires further monitoring going forwards by UK authorities. Should this continue, the risk of terror activities in one country – either Israel, India, or a third country – may be compounded by activity elsewhere in the world. Further engagement between Hamas, LeT and JeM must also be monitored on account of its possible implications for India's position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. India has historically supported a "negotiated two State solution and the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine", as confirmed by the MEA in December 2024. Notably, Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir, who referred to Kashmir as the 'jugular vein' of Pakistan, also expressed support for the Palestinian cause in the same speech. If the two conflicts are linked in the manner highlighted here, there is scope for India's position to change on account of its worsening relations with Pakistan.

## 5. Implications for the UK

The shared narrative evidenced by engagement between these proscribed groups, in conjunction with the UK's recent history of Hindu-Muslim community cohesion issues, raises the issue of a spillover of any ensuing India-Pakistan tensions to the UK.

### Prevent Review

William Shawcross' 2023 review of the Prevent strategy highlights concerns about how "rhetoric from Pakistan is impacting UK Muslim communities when it comes to inflaming anti-India sentiment", particularly relating to Kashmir.

Shawcross adds that there is evidence of UK extremist groups calling for the "use of violence in Kashmir", and that "flashpoints related to Kashmir leads to a significant surge in interest from UK Islamists". He suggests that this grievance may be exploited by Islamists in the years to come.

### Diaspora Engagement

As the debate in the House of Commons in February 2019 following the Pulwama terror attack indicates, there is likely to be significant interest from diaspora communities within the UK, in India's response following the Pahalgam attack. This includes both the Indian diaspora in general, but also specific Kashmiri populations in cities such as Birmingham. The recent letter signed by 20 British MPs calling for the construction of an airport in Mirpur (Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir) stems from the significant Mirpuri population in the UK.

### Anti-Colonial Framing

The shared narrative discussed above can also be identified in discourse amongst British Muslim organisations on Kashmir. A 2019 press release from the Muslim Council of Britain's Legal Affairs Committee explicitly references "Indian occupied Kashmir", whilst the 5 Pillars media house hosts an article claiming that the revocation of Art 370 and Art 35A of the Constitution of India, is a Reconquista, echoing the reclamation of the Iberian Peninsula by Christian kings from Muslim rulers several centuries ago. 5 Pillars has also used the language of occupation to describe both Israel's activities in Palestine, and the position of Jammu & Kashmir in India today, explicitly drawing parallels between the two.





This reinforces the narrative put forward on Kashmir Solidarity Day by LeT, JeM and Hamas that the Kashmir and Palestine conflicts are parallel and inseparable. A further article hosted by 5 Pillars from May 2021, written by the chairman of Hizb-ut-Tahrir Britain, calls for a united ummah to liberate Kashmir and Palestine. On the 5 Pillars podcast, George Galloway has invoked the idea of *haq* as a universal moral demand that applies as equally in Kashmir as in Gaza. Should this narrative solidify, it has the potential to mobilise British Muslims on both causes.

### **Potential for violence and misinformation**

Although an anti-colonial framing is not itself a cause for official concern, it might become so should it be accompanied by threats of violence or force. For example, language such as “we are in a state of war”, and claims that the freedom of Kashmiri youth from the “shackles of [their] oppressors” must be taken by force, as stated by Muslim influencer Shakeel Afsar at a youth conference of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front in 2024, should be viewed with greater caution. With retaliation by India expected, an increase in such calls for the use of force against ‘Indian oppression’ can be anticipated.

Alongside this, misinformation regarding the source of the attack can spread and influence diaspora communities in the UK. The key claim is that India bears ultimate responsibility for the attack. The UK Media Cell of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front, an organisation that is proscribed in India but not in the UK, has stated “JKLF has always vehemently condemned the brutal loss of innocent lives, and we assert that the occupiers of our beloved motherland Jammu and Kashmir bear full and undeniable responsibility for every innocent life lost.” This ignores the reality of the links between Pakistan and the TRF, which has claimed responsibility for the attack.







## **Equivalence between Hindutva and Zionism**

The anti-colonial framing turns this matter from an India-Pakistan issue into a possible flashpoint between British Hindu and Muslim communities, because of a narrative background that equates the Hindu-centred politics of the current Bharatiya Janata Party government in India with Zionism. Amrit Wilson associates this with ideological parallels between the two, centred on the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and the rewriting of history, as well as growing political and military cooperation between India and Israel. Commentary by Vikram Visana identifies a shared model of nationalism between the two movements. This presents the complex situation in Kashmir as a simple binary between Hindus and Muslims, where the latter is oppressing the former. When viewed in light of comments on the 5 Pillars platform that the issues in Kashmir and Gaza are of concern to all Muslims worldwide, there is a clear narrative stream by which British Muslims may be mobilised against British Hindus based on events happening in the subcontinent.

## **Background of community cohesion issues**

Recent community cohesion issues between Hindus and Muslims in the UK highlight the scale and potential consequences of any inflammation in community tensions following a response by India. In September 2022, the city of Leicester saw civil unrest between British Hindus and Muslims including property damage, assaults, stabbings and attacks on places of worship. Marches and public demonstrations were carried out by both Hindu and Muslim groups. A report on the incident by the Henry Jackson Society treats this as a “micro-community cohesion issue” between Muslim and Hindu youth.

It references the activities of figures such as Mohammad Hijab, who encouraged Muslims in Leicester to defend themselves physically against ‘Hindu fascism’, but who also faced “strong opposition from local Muslims.” In a 2020 podcast, Hijab described India’s actions in Kashmir as an “illegal settlement – like Israel has done with Palestine”, and argues that the revocation of Art 35A, which allowed the state of Jammu & Kashmir to accord special rights to its citizens that other Indian citizens were excluded from, was part of a deliberate demographic strategy by the Indian government in the region, stating: “Considering the area is majority Muslim, the best bet for India is to change the demographic.”

This allegation mirrors the language of the TRF, which in taking responsibility for the Pahalgam attack claimed that the issuing of residence permits to those from outside Jammu & Kashmir creates a “pathway for demographic change in Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.” The Henry Jackson report also highlights that claims that the unrest was driven by Hindu extremism lacked a firm evidential basis. The civil unrest in Leicester highlights how inaccurate information about a perceived Hindu extremist threat contributed to community cohesion issues between British Hindus and British Muslims.

Given this background, there is a strong possibility that any conflict between India and Pakistan that arises through Indian retaliation following the Pahalgam attack could spill over into community tensions between British Hindus and British Muslims. In the coming days, it is vital that the Home Office monitors the situation for calls to violence or the glorification of terror incidents.





## Conclusion

The recent attack in Pahalgam, one of the most serious incidents targeting civilians in recent years, has renewed concerns about the security environment in Jammu and Kashmir, and its broader economic and political ramifications. Preliminary assessments suggest the involvement of foreign terrorists affiliated with Pakistan-based groups. The timing of the incident, alongside provocative remarks by Pakistan's Army Chief referring to Kashmir, underscores the need to address the persistent threat of cross-border terrorism.

This incident should be framed clearly as an act of cross-border terrorism rather than attributed to internal demographic dynamics, as suggested by terror groups such as The Resistance Front (TRF). Such narratives risk diverting attention from the external actors responsible for undermining regional stability.

The attack has caused considerable unease among local communities in Kashmir, many of whom support a return to peace and economic recovery. It also raises critical questions about the actions of groups that claim to act on behalf of Kashmiri interests while engaging in violence that disrupts local livelihoods and social cohesion.

There is a growing imperative for the international community to address the destabilising impact of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. The increasing convergence between groups such as Hamas, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) represents a transnational threat that warrants close monitoring.

Attempts to draw parallels between Kashmir and other global conflicts, such as Palestine, risk oversimplifying distinct geopolitical issues and contributing to wider communal tensions.

It is essential that the global response to such acts of terrorism be unambiguous. Diplomatic clarity and measured action are required to reinforce international norms against state-tolerated terrorism. In this context, the United Kingdom has an opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to counter-terrorism by expressing its unequivocal support for India and reinforcing bilateral ties.

Given the potential for international events to influence intercommunal relations within the UK, it is also important for British authorities to remain attentive to domestic social cohesion. Ensuring that tensions abroad do not affect harmony between British Hindu and Muslim communities is critical in maintaining the UK's values of pluralism and mutual respect.

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