

Mapping India-Pakistan military power



RAJESWARI PILLAI RAJAGOPALAN
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JUNE 2025

Policy Brief

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Executive summary

The intense and competitive security dynamics between India and Pakistan, mostly related to the dispute over Kashmir, are longstanding. This ASPI brief maps the India–Pakistan military balance, defence spending and major equipment categories with a focus on providing readers with quantitative comparisons. India has consistently had greater conventional military strength, measured in terms of major equipment categories, in comparison to Pakistan.

This brief also includes the two countries’ nuclear weapons and strategic delivery systems. While China’s role is important and is briefly discussed, the brief focuses on datasets that help us understand the India–Pakistan balance.

Status of the India–Pakistan conflict

The focus of the India–Pakistan conflict is the disputed region of Kashmir, which both claim in its entirety, and which has been split between the two sides since an inconclusive war in 1948. Since the 1990s, Pakistan’s support for insurgent and terrorist groups fighting Indian forces in the disputed Kashmir region has presented a significant challenge to India. Complicating the situation is that both India and Pakistan have had some nuclear weapons capability since at least the late 1980s, although they openly declared their nuclear weapon status only after conducting a series of nuclear tests in 1998. While India sought nuclear weapons in response to China’s nuclear arsenal, not Pakistan’s, fear of nuclear escalation forced India to limit its response even to high-profile Pakistan-originated terror attacks, including on the Indian Parliament in 2001 and on Mumbai in 2008. However, with more and increasing attacks from Pakistan-based terrorist groups, the Indian strategy has evolved over the past decade to include open military retaliation,¹ as well as reported covert attacks on terrorist targets and individuals within Pakistan.

In September 2016, a terrorist attack on an Indian Army base in Uri, a small town in Indian Kashmir, killed 19 Indian soldiers. For the first time, the Indian Government conducted a retaliatory strike across the LoC (Line of Control, a *de facto* border separating Indian and Pakistani forces in Kashmir) using commando forces, reportedly targeting terrorist bases in Pakistan’s Kashmir.

In 2019, another major terrorist attack in Pulwama, another small town in Indian Kashmir, killed 40 Indian paramilitary troops. India responded with an air strike on a terrorist base in Balakot, in the first use of air power in combat in the region since the 1999 Kargil war.

In April 2025, a terrorist attack killed 26 Indian tourists in Pahalgam, in Indian Kashmir. It was the first time in years that civilians were specifically targeted. India responded with a strike on terrorist bases in Pakistan’s Punjab. Subsequent action included drone and missile strikes by Pakistan on India and further Indian retaliation.² That included attacks on major Pakistani air bases—the first time such attacks have taken place since the 1971 India–Pakistan war. One of the air bases that India attacked is just outside Islamabad, Pakistan’s capital city, while another is at Sargodha, which has long been rumoured to be a major Pakistani nuclear weapons facility.

China is of course a security factor for both India (as a strategic rival) and Pakistan (as a strategic partner). The competitive and highly charged security dynamic between India and Pakistan, and India and China, is not new. Moreover, China and Pakistan have long had diplomatic and military partnerships aimed at India. Nevertheless, recent developments have revealed the potential for deeper and more active levels of cooperation between the two that complicate India’s security planning. That includes Pakistan’s military capability reliance on China: the recent conflict has involved the Pakistan Air Force using Chinese-made jets to reportedly shoot down Indian planes. In addition, completely separately from the issue of Pakistan, and showing India’s assessment of China being the top state-based security threat, a considerable part of India’s ground forces is deployed on the China border, as is a good part of the Indian Air Force.³ Over the past decade, India has also stepped up expensive infrastructure building along the China border. In addition, major additions to the Indian

Army have included a new corps raised to deal with China. Finally, although India hasn't previously had to fight a two-front war, the close (and becoming closer) strategic ties between Pakistan and China mean that India has to consider that contingency seriously. A two-front war has been under active consideration by Indian security planners since at least 2010.

Figure 1: Border areas of India–Pakistan

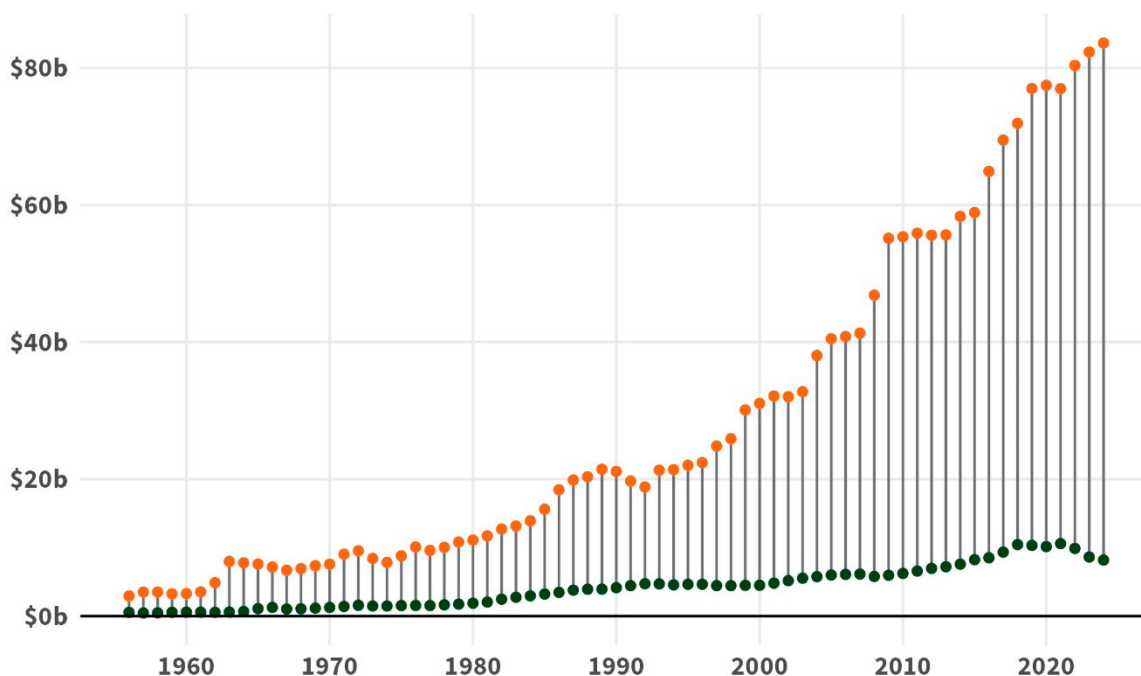


Source: Consulate General of India, Melbourne, [online](https://www.melbourneconsulateindia.org/).

India and Pakistan: comparing military power

The charts and tables below provide a visualisation of the India–Pakistan military balance, in budgets and various major equipment categories.

Figure 2: Defence expenditure, 1956 to 2024 (US\$, 2023 prices)



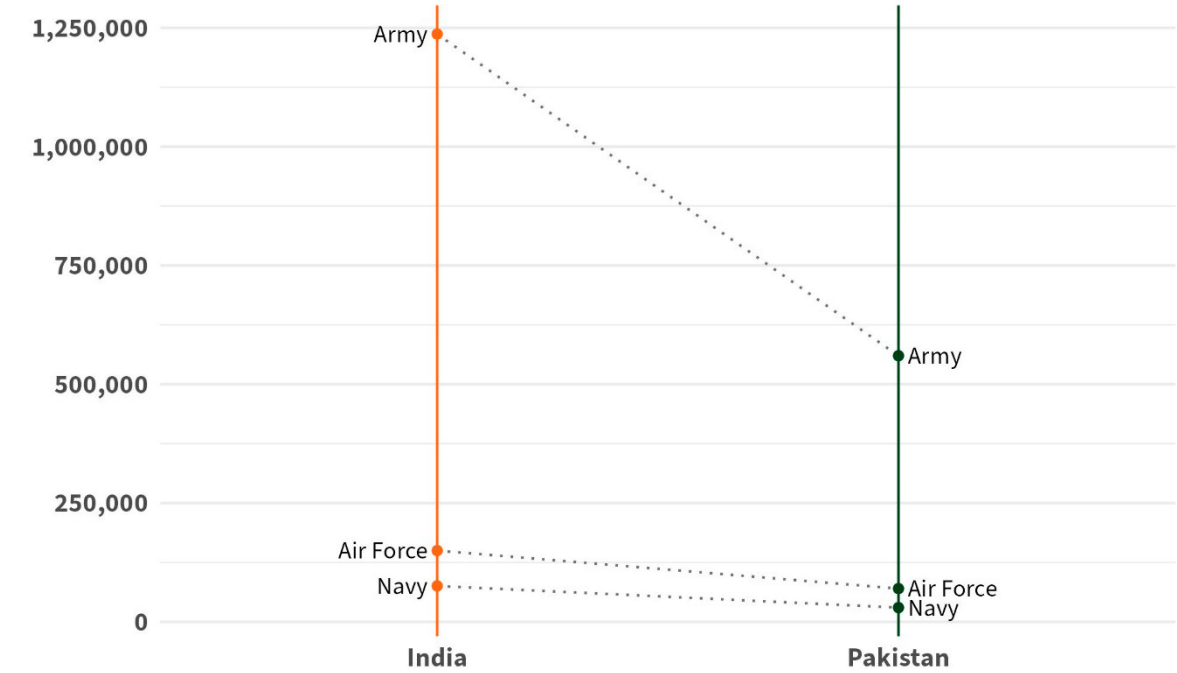
Source: SIPRI Defence Spending Database.

Table 1: Military expenditure, India and Pakistan

Year	Indian defence expenditure (US\$ 2023 constant prices, millions)	Indian defence expenditure (% of GDP)	Indian defence expenditure (% of government expenditure)	Pakistani defence expenditure (US\$ 2023 constant prices, millions)	Pakistani defence expenditure (% of GDP)	Pakistani defence expenditure (% of government expenditure)
1960	3,284.0857	2.00%	N/A	587.9200	4.31%	N/A
1965	7,606.3946	3.87%	N/A	1,096.9109	5.90%	N/A
1970	7,573.4687	3.19%	N/A	1,270.8684	6.16%	N/A
1975	8,789.2534	3.53%	N/A	1,544.8649	6.32%	N/A
1980	11,087.7054	3.13%	N/A	1,886.1451	5.52%	N/A
1985	15,597.1533	3.57%	N/A	3,223.8233	6.92%	N/A
1990	21,108.1927	3.15%	12.40%	4,152.0584	6.52%	N/A
1995	22,010.0693	2.58%	10.50%	4,645.7218	5.82%	27.21%
2000	31,036.3567	2.95%	11.50%	4,500.6043	4.17%	22.42%
2005	40,464.0246	2.91%	10.42%	5,995.3244	3.90%	24.45%
2010	55,353.3569	2.89%	9.86%	6,234.9748	3.04%	16.83%
2015	58,879.3143	2.46%	8.83%	8,237.2792	3.16%	18.01%
2020	77,443.7373	2.80%	8.76%	10,148.2311	3.49%	17.18%
2024	83,623.1409	2.27%	7.63%	8,183.3506	2.67%	13.83%

Source: SIPRI Defence Spending Database.

Figure 3: Active-duty personnel, by service

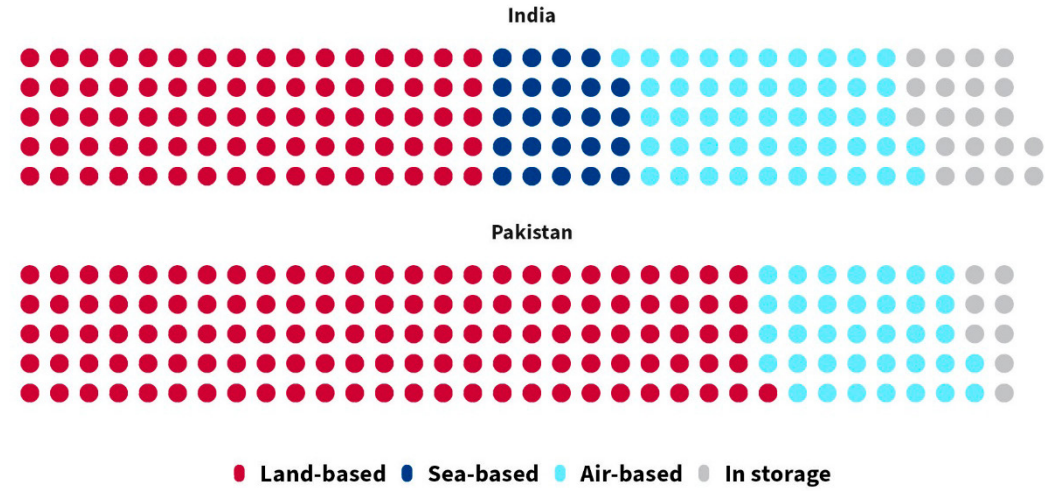


Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The military balance 2025*.

Table 2: Active-duty personnel, India and Pakistan

Service	India	Pakistan
Army	1,237,000	560,000
Navy	75,500	30,000
Air Force	149,900	70,000

Figure 4: Nuclear warheads, India and Pakistan



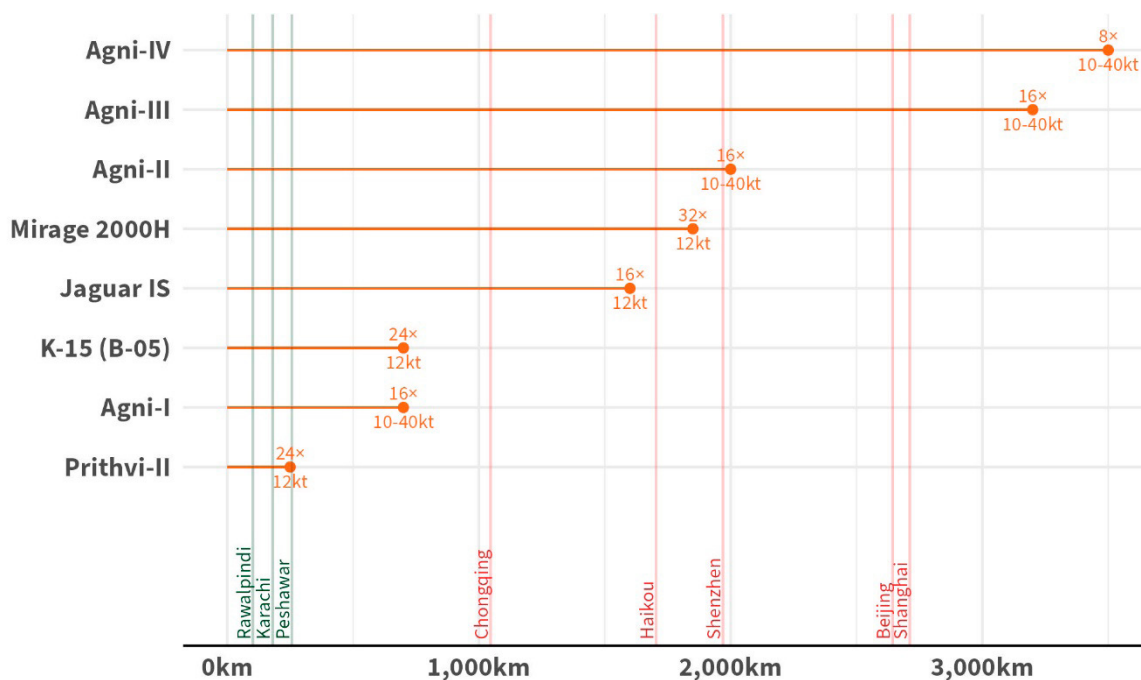
Source: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2024 and 2023.

Table 3: Nuclear forces, India and Pakistan

Type	India	Pakistan
Land-based	80	126
Sea-based	24	None fielded; SLCM in testing
Air-based	48	36
In storage	20	8
Total	172	170

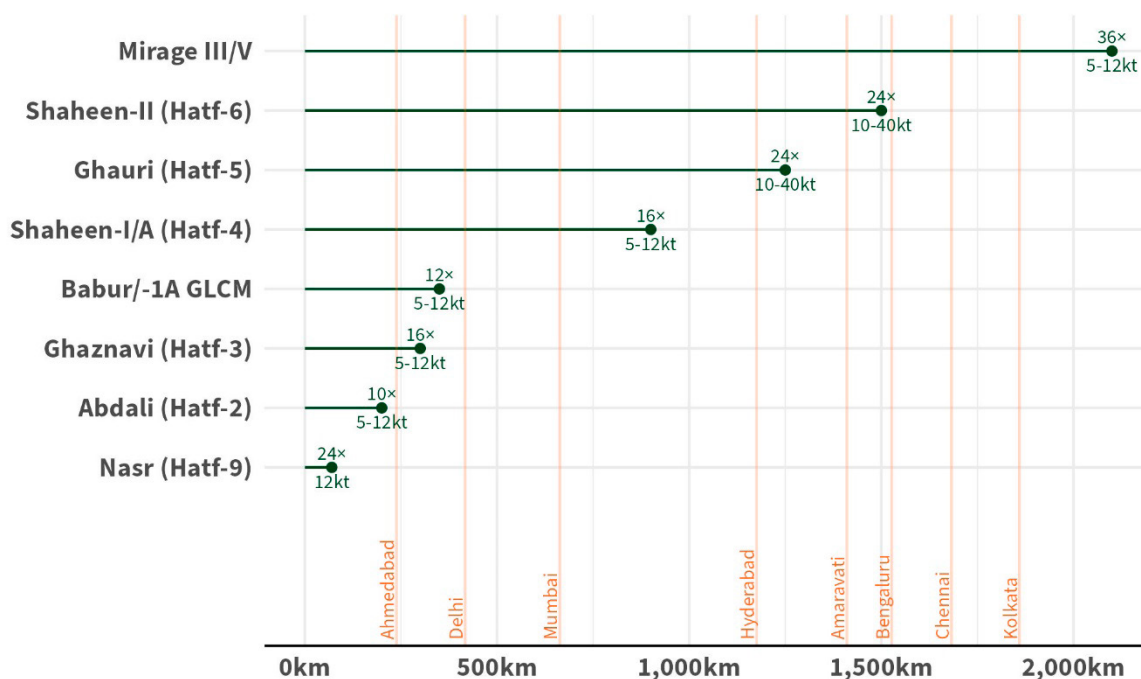
SLCM = submarine-launched cruise missile.

Figure 5: Indian nuclear delivery systems



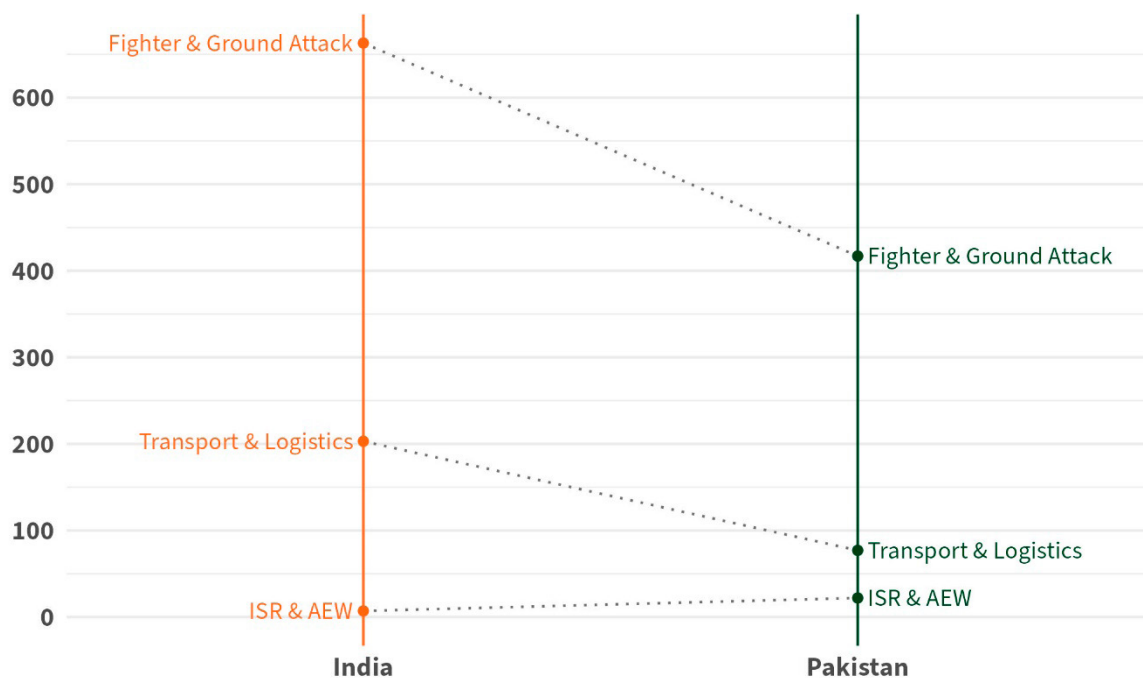
Source: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2024.

Figure 6: Pakistani nuclear delivery systems



Source: *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2023.

Figure 7: Fixed-wing air power, India and Pakistan



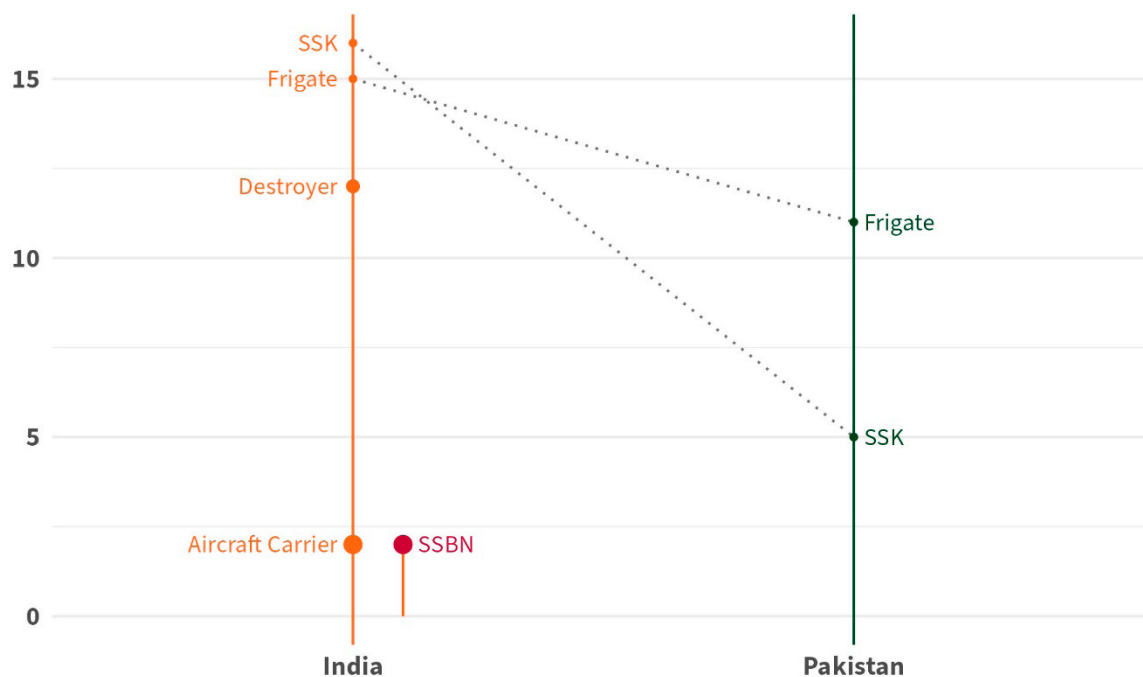
Source: IISS, *The military balance 2025*.

Table 4: Fixed-wing air power, India and Pakistan

Category (all fixed-wing)	India	Pakistan
Fighter / ground attack	663	417
Transport and logistics	203	77
ISR & AEW	7	22

ISR = intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; AEW = airborne early warning.

Figure 8: Sea power, India and Pakistan



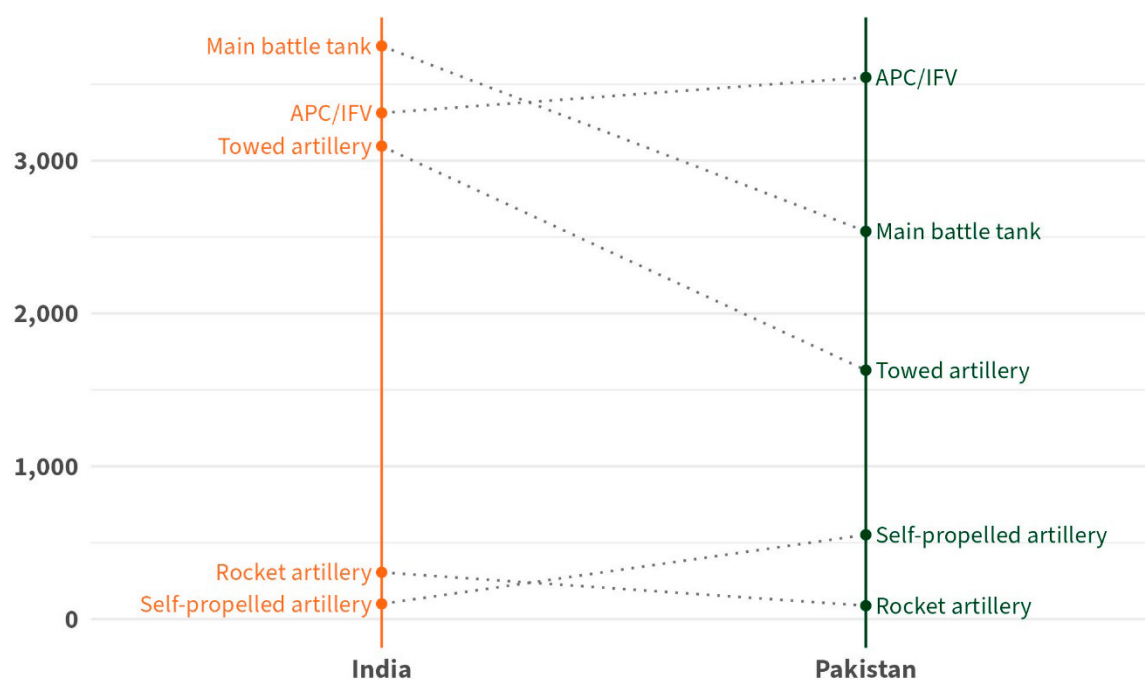
Source: IISS, *The military balance 2025*.

Table 5: Sea power, India and Pakistan

Vessel type	India	Pakistan
SSK	16	5
Frigate	15	11
Destroyer	12	N/A
Aircraft carrier	2	N/A
SSBN	2	N/A

SSK = conventionally powered hunter-killer submarine; SSBN = nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine.

Figure 9: Land power, India and Pakistan



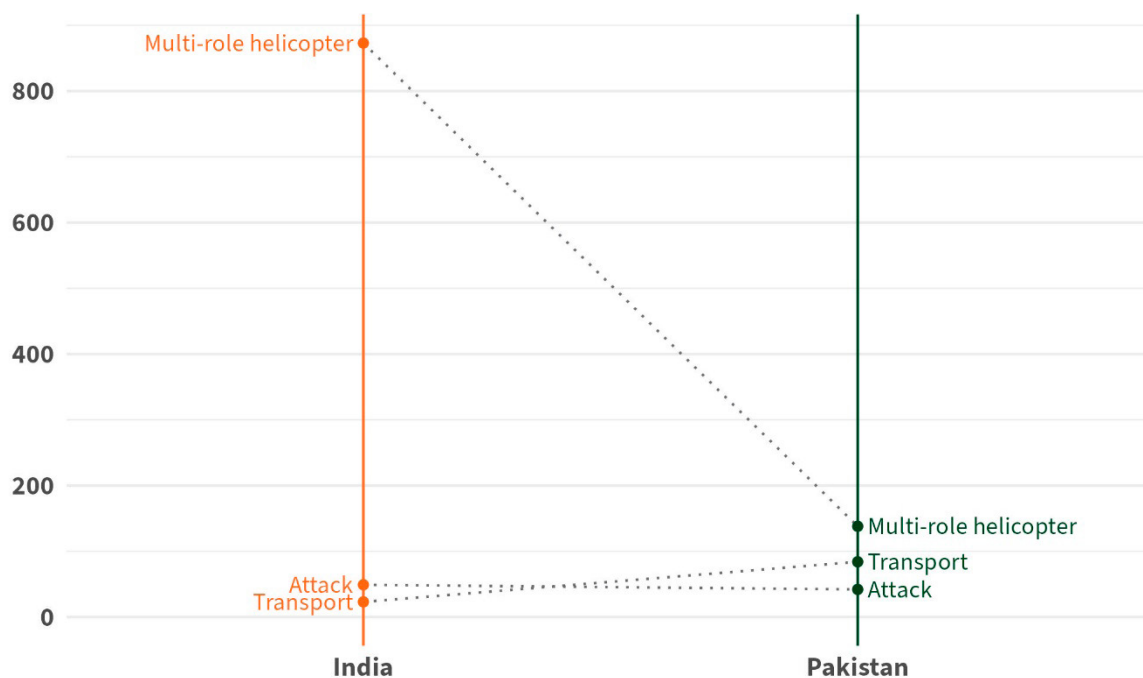
Source: IISS, *The military balance 2025*.

Table 6: Land power, India and Pakistan

Equipment	India	Pakistan
Main battle tank	3,750	2,537
APC/IFV	3,312	3,545
Towed artillery	3,095	1,629
Rocket artillery	306	88
Self-propelled artillery	100	552

APC = armoured personnel carrier; IFV = infantry fighting vehicle.

Figure 10: Rotary-wing air power, India and Pakistan

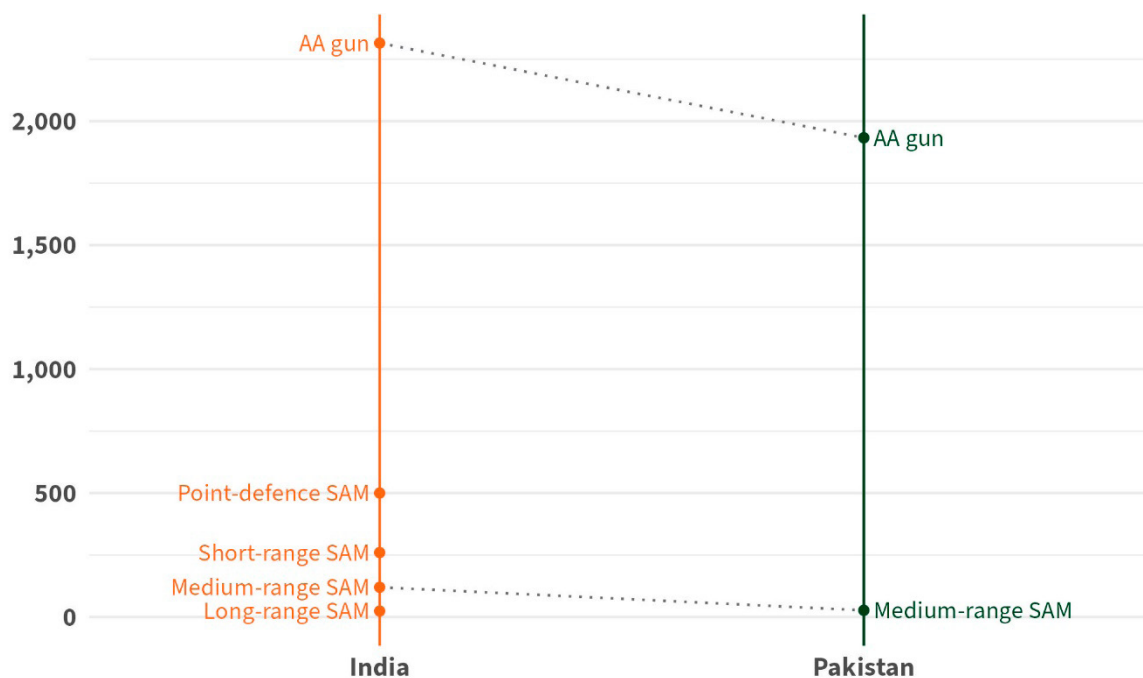


Source: IISS, *The military balance 2025*.

Table 7: Rotary-wing air power, India and Pakistan

Aircraft	India	Pakistan
Multi-role helicopter	873	138
Attack helicopter	49	42
Transport helicopter	23	84

Figure 11: Land power air defences, India and Pakistan



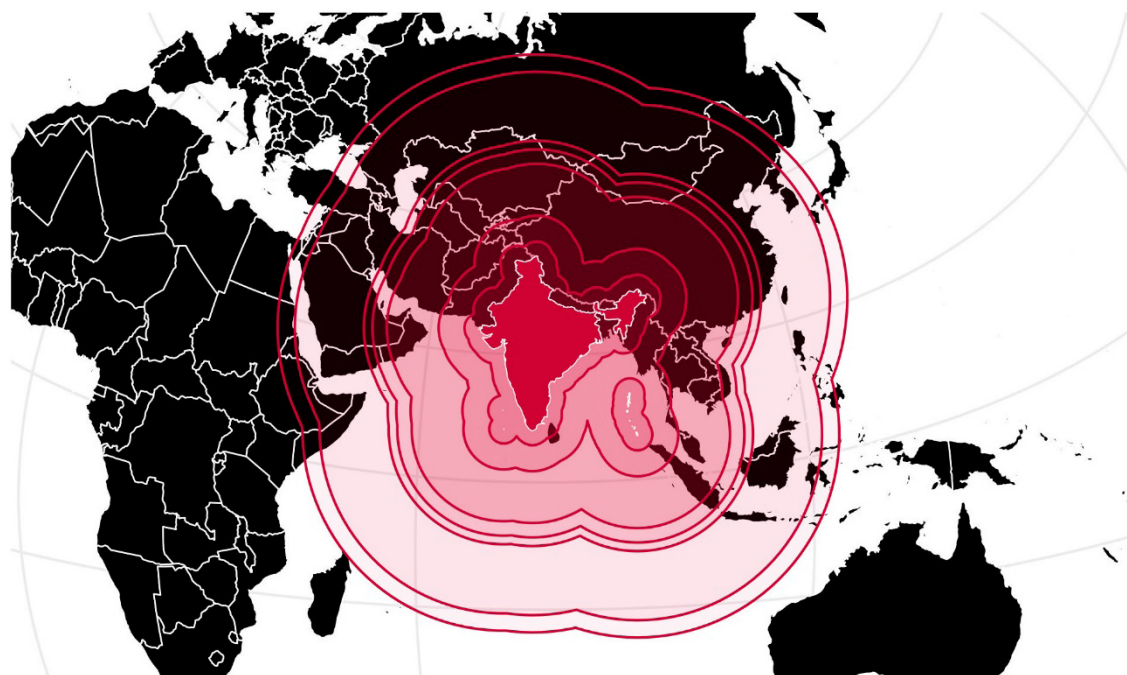
Source: IISS, *The military balance 2025*.

Table 8: Land power air defences, India and Pakistan

Equipment	India	Pakistan
Anti-aircraft gun	2,315	1,933
Point defence SAM	500	N/A
Short-range SAM	260	N/A
Medium-range SAM	120	27
Long-range SAM	24	N/A

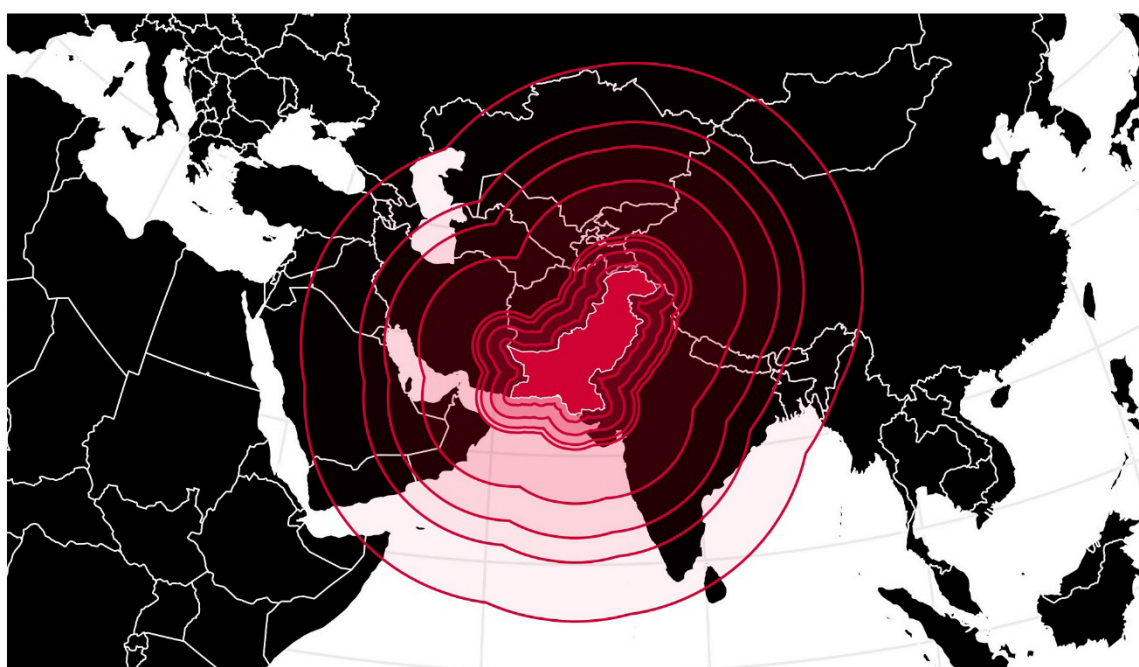
SAM = surface to air missile.

Figure 12: Range of Indian nuclear delivery systems



Source: Data sourced from *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

Figure 13: Range of Pakistani nuclear delivery systems



Source: Data sourced from *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*.

Background: brief historical context

The competitive and adversarial nature of the India–Pakistan relationship has deep political and historical roots that began with the independence of the two countries from the British Raj in 1947. The partition resulted in the establishment of a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan.

Following partition, the status of a number of princely states came into dispute. Most of the disputes were quickly resolved, but the status of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was more complicated because it had a Hindu maharaja (king), while most of its population was Muslim.⁴ Moreover, it was contiguous to both India and Pakistan, which meant both claimed it. Also, Maharaja Hari Singh, the ruler, wanted to stay independent of both India and Pakistan, further complicating the issue. Two months after the partition, in October 1947, Pakistan launched an attack on Kashmir, and the Maharaja finally decided to accede to India. Indian forces were rushed to the state and pushed back Pakistani forces, but half the state remained in Pakistan's hands; the rest remained in India's.

Since then, the two countries have fought three more wars – in 1965, 1971 and 1999. Both the 1965 war and the 1999 war were over Kashmir. The two countries have also engaged in several limited military face-offs, including the Operation Brasstacks crisis in 1986–87 and the Operation Parakram crisis in 2001–02.

Relevant government press releases / statements in 2025

Government of India

1. Transcript of special briefing on Operation Sindoor, 7 May 2025, [online](#).
2. Transcript of special briefing on Operation Sindoor, 8 May 2025, [online](#).
3. Transcript of special briefing on Operation Sindoor, 9 May 2025, [online](#).
4. Transcript of special briefing by Ministry of Defence on Operation Sindoor, 10 May 2025, [online](#).
5. Transcript of special briefing on Operation Sindoor, 10 May 2025, [online](#).
6. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the nation (English rendering), 12 May 2025, [online](#).
7. Ministry of External Affairs, [online](#).
8. Ministry of Defence, [online](#).
9. Press Information Bureau, [online](#).

Government of Pakistan

1. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, [online](#).

Notes

1. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'India and Pakistan must manage escalation after Pahalgam attack', *The Strategist*, 7 May 2025, [online](#).
2. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, 'India–Pakistan crisis: military operations intensify before ceasefire', *The Strategist*, 11 May 2025, [online](#).
3. Nathan Ruser, 'Satellite images show positions surrounding deadly China–India clash', *The Strategist*, 18 June 2020, [online](#).
4. 'India/Jammu and Kashmir (1947–present)', University of Central Arkansas, 2025, [online](#).

