

ON THE BRINK



Matthew Borie *explains how events in late April led to serious escalation in the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict*

On 22 April, a shooting attack by suspected Pakistani-linked militants killed 26 civilians in the Indian-administered Kashmir region. This was the largest number of civilian deaths in a terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir since the May 2006 Doda massacre, and the largest number of casualties in any attack in Indian-administered Kashmir since 14 February 2019. India responded initially with a set of diplomatic measures as announced by the Ministry of External Affairs on 23 April and Pakistan reciprocated on 24 April. The Indian prime minister reportedly stated on 29 April that he has: “complete faith and confidence in the professional abilities of the armed forces” and: “it is our national resolve to deal a crushing blow to terrorism”. Pakistani defence officials have reportedly denied any involvement in the 22 April attack and blamed it on Indian “homegrown terrorists”.

On 10 May, Pakistan and India reportedly reached an immediate and full ceasefire agreement – to include along the Line of Control (LoC) separating Pakistani-administered Kashmir and Indian-administered Jammu &

Kashmir as well as the entire shared border – reportedly brokered by the US following armed clashes from 6-10 May. From 13-22 May, there have been no ceasefire violations reported between India and Pakistan, and the agreement continues to hold. India stated on 18 May that the ceasefire agreement with Pakistan has no expiry date.

Both India and Pakistan have said they will abide by the ceasefire, but have vowed to respond to any violations should they occur. Pakistan has stated that the ongoing Indian suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty puts the ceasefire at risk, but has not indicated what a response to the ongoing abeyance will be. The US, Canada, UK, Australia and France issued travel security advisories to their citizens in India in the wake of the above activity and the 22 April terrorist attack.

INDIA-PAKISTAN CONFLICT: KEY EVENTS FROM 6-12 MAY

On 12 May, the Indian Army stated that a “small number of suspected drones have been observed near Samba” near LoC in Indian-administered Jammu & Kashmir and that: “they are being engaged” by air defences. In addition, on 12 May, the district commissioner of Jalandhar in India’s Punjab state said that: “one surveillance drone was

brought down by the armed forces”. No casualties or material damage have been reported.

No ceasefire violations were reported on 11 May; however, violations did take place on 10 May. Indian air defences reportedly shot down at least 12 Pakistani military drones in breach of the ceasefire over Jammu & Kashmir region near the LoC as well as further South along the shared border over Rajasthan and Gujarat states on 10 May. Pakistan reportedly shot down multiple Indian military drones in breach of the ceasefire over Peshawar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on 10 May. Armed clashes with small arms and mortar/artillery fire were also reported sporadically along the LoC in wake of the ceasefire on 10 May.

The security situation along the entirety of the India-Pakistan border remains fluid and subject to rapid change. Prior to the ceasefire on 10 May, the Indian military reportedly launched drones at Pakistani Air Force (PAF) Base Sargodha (OPMH/MSF) in Punjab province, PAF Base Sialkot (OPST/SKT) in Punjab province, PAF Base Sukkur (OPSK/SKZ) in Sindh province, PAF Base Shahbaz (OPJA/JAG) in Sindh province and PAF Base Bholari in Sindh province as well as PAF Base Peshawar (OPPS/PEW) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Pakistani air defences were activated in response.

Overnight on 9-10 May, Pakistan reportedly launched ballistic missiles at Indian air bases in Jammu and Kashmir near the LoC as well as further South in Punjab, Haryana and Gujarat provinces, to include Beas near Amritsar, Adampur (VIAX/AIP), Suratgarh (VI43), Sirsa (VISX), Srinagar (VISR/SXR), Jammu (VIJU/IXJ), Udhampur (VIUM) as well as Pathankot (VIPK/IXP) and Indian air defences were activated in response. In addition, on 10 May, Pakistan reportedly launched drones at areas of Jammu and Kashmir along the LoC as well as further South in Amritsar, Rajasthan and Gujarat provinces and Indian air defences were activated in response.

On 9 May, the Indian military reportedly targeted PAF Base Nur Khan (OPRN/RWP) in Rawalpindi, PAF Base Rafiqui (OPRQ) in Shorkot and PAF Base Murid in Chakwal with cruise missiles and air-defences were

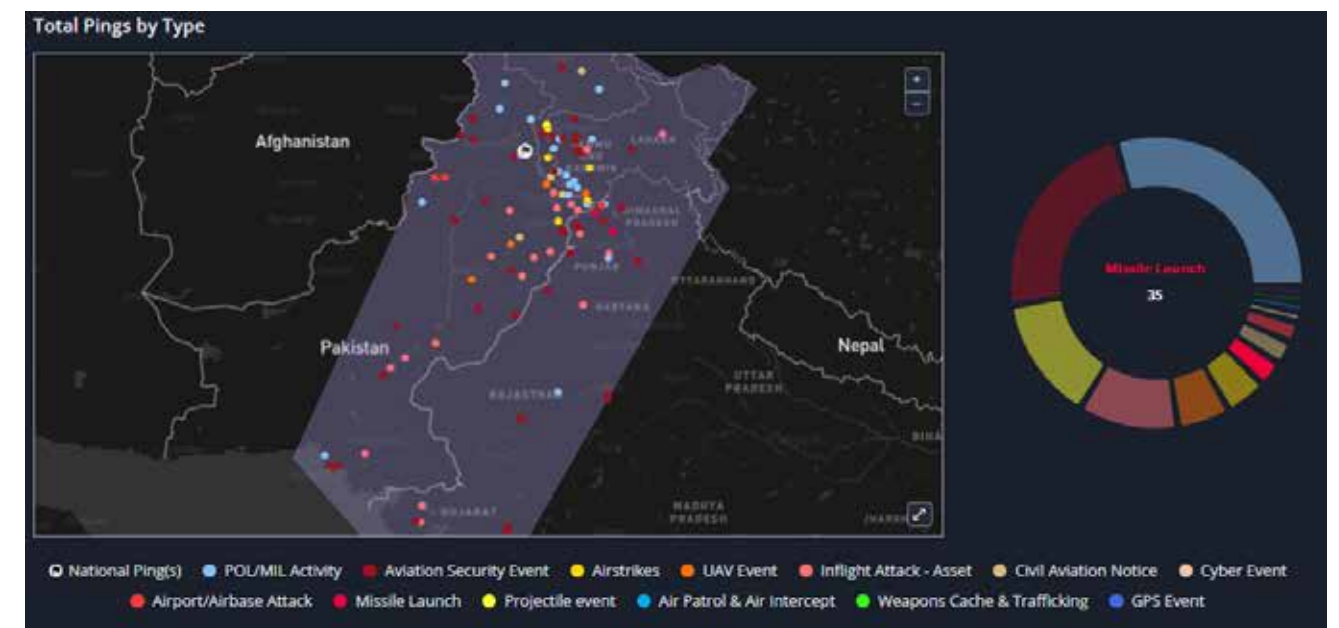
activated in response. In addition, on 9 May, Pakistani air defences were reportedly activated in response to Indian drones over Lahore. On 9 May, India announced Pakistani military drone sightings at 26 locations along the entire Western border from Jammu and Kashmir along the LoC down to Gujarat province, with air defences activated in response. On 9 May, Pakistani air defence reportedly were activated in response to Indian military drones over several areas of Pakistani-administered Kashmir along the LoC as well as over several areas in Punjab province.

A FULL RESUMPTION OF ARMED CLASHES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES REMAINS UNLIKELY

Previously, on 8 May, the US State Department issued a security alert to its nationals in Pakistan stating the following: “Due to reports of drone explosions, downed drones and possible airspace incursions in and near Lahore, the US Consulate General in Lahore has directed all consulate personnel to shelter-in-place” and the: “Consulate has also received initial reports that authorities may be evacuating some areas adjacent to Lahore’s main airport [(OPLA/LHE)]”. Overnight on 8-9 May, India stated that Pakistan attempted to conduct around 50 missile and drone attacks on military targets along the entire Western border and that it had employed air defence systems in response to the incoming strikes. This activity reportedly occurred in areas stretching from Jammu and Kashmir near the LoC to Southern Rajasthan province.

India previously stated that overnight on 7-8 May, Pakistan attempted to conduct missile and drone attacks on military targets stretching from along the LoC to Gujarat province and that it had employed air defence systems in response to the incoming strikes. Also on 8 May, India claimed it has conducted strikes targeting Pakistani military air defence systems at a number of locations in Pakistan, to include Lahore. On

Police in Kashmir clash with protesters in December 2018



8 May, Pakistani air and/or air defences reportedly shot down around 25 Indian military drones over an area stretching from Jammu and Kashmir near the LoC to Sindh and Punjab provinces.

Previously, on overnight on 6-7 May, the Indian military confirmed conducting strikes on the following nine locations in Pakistan from near the LoC to areas well further south in Punjab province. Pakistan has claimed that its air and air-defences shot down five Indian military combat aircraft, including four over areas near the LoC as well as India's Punjab province well further south on 6-7 May. Pakistani air and defences also reportedly shot down two Indian military drones in areas along the LoC while Indian media reports claimed that one Pakistani combat aircraft was been shot down over Jammu and Kashmir on 6-7 May.

WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME?

The security situation along the entirety of the India-Pakistan border remains fluid and subject to rapid change. The ceasefire holding thus far with no violations reported on 13-22 May is viewed by Osprey as an indicator of de-escalation. Osprey assesses that amid the ceasefire, allegations of further limited-scale violations are possible in the near term.

Osprey assesses that a full resumption of armed clashes – including unguided rocket/artillery fire, guided missile launches and airstrikes – along the LoC between Indian and Pakistani military forces are unlikely in the near term amid the ceasefire.

Osprey assesses that additional strikes by India and Pakistan in areas near the shared border in the countries' respective areas of the Punjab region, as well as in India's Rajasthan and Gujarat states and Pakistan's Sindh provinces, via guided missile launches and airstrikes are unlikely in the near amid the ceasefire.

Both India and Pakistan have military airbases with combat aircraft and air-defence units with conventional surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems operationally stationed in areas near the LoC and along the shared border. The conventional SAM systems and combat aircraft are capable of engaging targets at all altitudes. While unlikely, Osprey assesses that additional shoot-downs of military-grade air assets by both Indian and Pakistan air and air defences

INDICATIONS & WARNINGS

INDICATORS OF ESCALATION

- Ceasefire violations alleged by India and/or Pakistan
- Terror attacks by Pakistani-linked militant groups in Jammu and Kashmir region
- Terror attacks by Pakistani-linked militant groups in main urban centres of India
- Declaration of an end to the ceasefire by India and/or Pakistan
- Indian and/or Pakistani military forces announcing an increased alert posture
- Increased military aircraft and/or naval movements within India and/or Pakistan
- Increased GPS interference (jamming and/or spoofing) within India and/or Pakistan
- Airspace and/or airport closures in India and/or Pakistan

INDICATORS OF DE-ESCALATION

- Declaration of commitment to the ceasefire by India and/or Pakistan
- Direct and/or indirect diplomatic talks between India and Pakistan
- Airspace and/or airports reopening in India and/or Pakistan
- Decreased military aircraft and/or naval movements within India and/or Pakistan
- Decreased GPS interference (jamming and/or spoofing) within India and/or Pakistan
- Indian and/or Pakistani military forces announcing an decreed or normal alert posture
- India re-committing to the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan
- India re-opening the Wagah-Attari Border area with Pakistan
- Statements by Pakistani-linked militant groups that they will halt attacks in Jammu and Kashmir region
- Statements by Pakistani-linked militant groups that they will refrain from attacks in main urban centres of India.

– including via conventional SAM systems capable at all altitudes – in areas along the entire shared border are unlikely in the near term amid the ceasefire.

WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST DANGEROUS OUTCOME?

While unlikely, Osprey assesses that a conflict between India and Pakistan could extend beyond the LoC and encompass the entire border area through the medium term, should the current ceasefire fail to hold and should armed clashes between the countries return to 6-10 May levels.

Though unlikely, should the above occur, main urban centres in India's Punjab and Rajasthan provinces would be exposed to conventional military activity and Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore in Pakistan would be inside the conflict zone for an extended period of time in the medium term ●

Matthew Borie
is Osprey's Chief
Intelligence Officer.

Osprey assesses that additional strikes by India and Pakistan in areas near the shared border are unlikely in the near future

