



Escalating Tensions Over Kashmir

[India and Pakistan](#), which both lay claim to the Kashmir region, are nuclear powers with developed arsenals.

India has approximately [150 nuclear warheads](#), and has land-based, sea-based and air-launch nuclear capabilities. The state had declared a [No First Use](#) policy, which means they have vowed to never use nuclear weapons first in a conflict. However, as of August 2019, India said they are reconsidering this policy.

Pakistan has approximately [160 warheads](#). This number exceeds the projection made by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency in 1999 that Pakistan would have 60-80 warheads by 2020. If the current growth trend continues, Pakistan's arsenal could grow to 220 to 250 warheads by 2025. Pakistan keeps its nuclear warheads stored separately from its missiles and will only be assembled if it will be used. Unlike India, Pakistan has not declared a No First Use policy, and instead has opted to emphasize smaller battlefield or "tactical" nuclear weapons as a [counter](#) to India's larger and superior conventional forces.

Recent Sources of Conflict

The conflict between India and Pakistan dates back to 1947 when the first Kashmir war was fought. Kashmir has been heavily disputed territory with major conflicts breaking out in [1965 and 1999](#). Terrorism has been a constant factor in violence between the two nations, and terror plots carried out on Indian soil are often [blamed on Pakistan](#).

In February 2019, Pakistani-based terrorist group Jaish-e-Mohammed carried out a suicide car bomb attack in Indian-controlled Kashmir which resulted in the deaths of over [40 members](#) of India's paramilitary forces. Twelve days later, India retaliated with air strikes across the Line of Control. The Pakistani air force claimed to have exercised their own air strikes against Indian military targets. Pakistan shot down an Indian aircraft and captured a pilot, significantly increasing tensions between the two nuclear states. However, two days later, the Indian pilot was released.

In August 2019, India revoked [Article 370](#) in its constitution which gave special rights to Kashmir, including the right to its own constitution and autonomy to make laws. This led to a major crackdown in Kashmir and has worsened relations with Pakistan, which has now downgraded its diplomatic relations with India.

On February 25, 2021, India and Pakistan [announced](#) a ceasefire across their shared border for the first time in almost 20 years. While some villagers along the Line of Control are [skeptical](#), this is a big step for the two nations constantly in conflict.

Growing Concerns

Following the 2019 tensions, India indicated it may back away from its No First Use policy. Indian Defense Minister Rajnath Singh [implied](#) that a day may come when India decides it needs to use nuclear weapons first to safeguard its security. No comments on this topic have been made following the 2021 ceasefire. Pakistan does not currently have a No First Use policy, opening the potential to use nuclear weapons in a conventional conflict. Pakistan has a smaller conventional military that would likely be overwhelmed by Indian forces. The potential of national collapse and territory loss [may be enough](#) for Pakistan to even the playing field by using a nuclear weapon.

There is also a [growing stockpile](#) of fissile materials in each state, presenting the opportunity for terrorist organizations to acquire a nuclear weapon or enough fissile material to construct one. Additionally, reports have shown that even a small nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan [could kill](#) 20 million people in a week. If a nuclear winter is triggered, nearly [2 billion](#) people in the developing world would be at risk from death by starvation.