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## **From War Memes to the Real Horror of War**



Image by Edgar Serrano.

As tensions rise once again between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, one of the most alarming aspects of this escalation is not just the provocative rhetoric from political actors, but the media's role in fanning the flames. Rather than urging caution, promoting dialogue, or presenting verified information, much of the news media has become a tool for inflaming passions, distorting facts, and silencing calls for peace. On the other hand, keyboard warriors on both sides seem more invested in escalating conflict than averting it through viral posts mocking each other's military capabilities. Many users, perhaps unaware of the true consequences of war, are excited for confrontation as though it were a sports rivalry. But the need is to understand that war is not a meme-worthy moment, it is a brutal, bloody, and irreversible tragedy.

I have been closely monitoring media coverage in both countries. In India, large sections of the mainstream media have adopted a warlike tone, dramatic music, screaming anchors, hashtags like #IndiaStrikesBack, and a flood of unverified content that is rapidly consumed

and shared by millions. Pakistan's media, though comparatively more restrained in tone, is not without belligerent nationalism with some analysts endorsing aggressive retaliatory actions as tit for tat. On social media platforms, retaliatory rhetoric, and memes mocking each other country take center stage in both countries. Instead of helping people understand the economic, humanitarian, and geopolitical risks of another conflict, the media packages war as entertainment—complete with graphics, slogans, and fake “scoops.”

Misinformation and rumors surrounding war, attacks, and destruction spread like wildfire across social media and mainstream news, often going viral within minutes. Graphic videos, exaggerated death tolls, and fabricated military victories dominate timelines and broadcasts, feeding fear and nationalist fervor. However, it is striking that no such urgency or virality surrounds news of peace initiatives. There are no viral rumors about a ceasefire agreement being reached, India restoring the Sindh Water Treaty, or bilateral talks resuming behind closed doors. This stark imbalance reveals a disturbing truth: in the public imagination—shaped by media and political narratives—conflict is more sensational, more shareable, and more politically profitable than peace. As a result, the hope for reconciliation is drowned out by the noise of war.

War cannot be deemed a matter of national pride; rather, it is a national shame considering its devastating consequences. Recent wars across the globe remind us of the grim fate awaiting humanity if peace is not sustained. Hundreds of thousands dead, millions displaced, entire cities in ruins, and a devastated socioeconomic environment for years to come is a legacy now painted by the Russia-Ukraine war, which has entered its third year. It has seen families pulled apart, economies destroyed, and the security of the region destabilized for probably generations to come. The psychological toll on soldiers, civilians, and especially children is incalculable, with trauma embedding itself deeply into the social fabric.

Likewise, the ongoing war in Gaza has uncovered the harsh reality of modern warfare. With Israel's merciless bombardment in response to Hamas's attacks, civilian populations including women and children have borne the brunt of the violence. International humanitarian laws have become useless as hospitals, schools, and residential areas are being targeted indicating that the suffering in Gaza is not just a political crisis but a humanitarian catastrophe. These are not distant tragedies; they are real-time warnings of what war truly looks like.

Despite this, in South Asia, many seem to glamorize the idea of an India-Pakistan war, oblivious to the incalculable costs such a conflict would entail. India and Pakistan are no strangers to conflict, having fought three major wars and engaged in several military

standoffs since their independence in 1947. Yet what sets the current scenario apart is not just the nuclear capability of both nations but also the hyper-nationalistic fervor fueled by social media and political posturing. A war between India and Pakistan could spiral into a full-scale confrontation with disastrous implications for both sides. Firstly, the human cost could be astounding with hospitals overwhelmed and basic services disrupted. Infrastructure, already fragile in parts of both countries, could be devastated—roads, power grids, water supplies, and communication lines could collapse under the strain of war. Secondly, both economies would suffer catastrophic setbacks. India, with its ambitions of becoming a global economic power, would face disrupted trade, tumbling investor confidence, and economic sanctions depending on the conduct of war. Pakistan, already grappling with economic instability, could see its fragile economy collapse. Unemployment, inflation, and poverty would surge, pushing millions into deeper distress. Perhaps most dangerously, the destabilization of both countries could create fertile ground for extremist groups and terrorist organizations to thrive. In the chaos of war, these groups could exploit weakened governance and societal unrest to expand their influence and carry out attacks—not just in South Asia but globally.

It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing the “other side” as the enemy, especially when nationalist narratives dominate headlines and viral posts fan the flames of hatred. But history, reason, and morality all urge us to choose diplomacy over destruction. The people of India and Pakistan share deep cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. Most citizens on both sides want peace, prosperity, and dignity—not war, hunger, and suffering. Leaders and media outlets must act responsibly to de-escalate tensions and prevent conflict. This includes verifying facts before dissemination, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric, and prioritizing diplomatic engagement. The international community, too, must play a constructive role in encouraging dialogue and holding accountable those who promote aggression.

As India and Pakistan are dangerously close to full-scale war, it’s imperative for both governments—and their citizens—to pause and reflect. War is not about heroism or revenge, it is about death, displacement, and destruction. The horrors of war are not confined to battlefields; they appear in every corner of society, leaving no one untouched. Memes mocking war might get a few laughs and shares, but they betray a deep ignorance of the real suffering that war brings. It’s time to stop treating war as entertainment and fueling the fire with misinformation and hate. It is high time to build trust, empathy, and diplomacy. Peace is not just an option—it is the only sane path forward. The world, already burdened by multiple crises, cannot afford another war, especially not one between two nuclear neighbors.

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