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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Saying is Doing: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Pakistan Armed Forces' Press Briefings Responding to Indian Attacks in May 2025**

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**ABSTRACT**

The present study intends to examine how the Pakistan Armed Forces made and authorized national discourses by press conferences in the aftermath of the Indian strikes in May 2025. Exchange of hot words and strategical map between India and Pakistan has always been in news. The present study is based on the recent exchange of press releases on both sides in May 2025 when India attacked Pakistan. The study is based on the concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and combines the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1995) with the socio-cognitive analysis of van Dijk (1998) to understand how structures of language, discursive practices and mind interconnect to create ideological meanings. The data is comprised of ten official press conferences issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) during May 1-15, 2025. Thematic analysis indicates that the discursive strategies that the study recognizes are as follows: legitimization of self-defense, development of national unity, moral positioning and presenting India as an aggressor. The findings show that the discourse of the Armed Forces is not only communicative but also ideological in nature the speech is turned into a type of political action. The linguistic options like modality, metaphor and evaluative adjectives contributed to the maintenance of power, whereas the intertextual distribution of media allowed to maintain the interpretive domination. The analysis concludes that these press briefings were used as the instruments of power and identity construction in which language was a tactical instrument to maintain the legitimacy, influence the thinking of the masses and support the moral and national sovereignty of Pakistan. The study may be used as a base to study and understand the hidden meanings and stance of officials at national and international levels in future. It can further be used to unearth the global narratives of the world leaders in broader perspectives.

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**KEYWORDS** Saying, Doing, CDA, Pakistan Armed Forces, Press Briefings, Indian Attacks, May 2025

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**Introduction**

Political and military language is not just a way of communicating but a way of power, persuasion and identity formation. With South Asia as a region where history, geopolitics and national discourses are closely interlinked, discourse has become one of the key vessels in creating perceptions of legitimacy, sovereignty and national unity. After the tension across the borders and the reported attacks in May 2025, the communication process in the press briefings by the Pakistan Armed Forces became essential communicative processes that did not just information people but fulfilled strategic roles of legitimization, persuasion and ideological consolidation. The examples of such briefings are the demonstration that saying is a kind of doing because speech acts produce social and political realities and do not describe them.

The Pakistani media has been seen to serve the purpose of an amplifier as well as a platform of the institutional voices especially when conflict prevails. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) as the official agency of communication of the Pakistan Armed Forces has always been a characteristic shaper of national narratives. Its discourses are symbolic and performative aspects of its statements during crises which form the discourses of peace, defense and the moral superiority in response to external aggression. Nevertheless, although, the coverage of the media, political speeches and social media rhetoric have been examined extensively between India and Pakistan, limited studies have investigated the official military press conferences as structured discursive events to reproduce ideology and authority using language.

The study covers this gap by critically examining the press conferences that were presented by the ISPR in May 2025 immediately after the Indian attacks. It aims to unravel the nature of linguistic and discursive mechanisms that were used to create a strong and authoritative national discourse and how discourses are indicative of underlying socio-political ideologies. The current study places itself in the framework of the more general Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) practice that incorporates the three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1995) and the socio-cognitive perspective by van Dijk (1998). The model developed by Fairclough can be used to systematically analyze the discourse on three levels: textual, discursive, and social practice, whereas the approach developed by van Dijk can be used to explain how such discourse interacts with cognition, ideology, and shared mental models.

The problem statement of the present study is based on the need to know how institutional language in the time of national crisis achieves ideological work, which is to justify the actions taken by the state and strengthen the collective identity. Geopolitical tension, like in the May 2025 attacks, is a topic where discourse serves as an instrument of power and a means to retain it. Accordingly, the examination of these press releases will provide information on how military institutions can influence the cognition of the population and how they can manipulate the interpretive frames.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Basing: Fairclough, van Dijk and Ideological Discourse**

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough has introduced a three-dimensional framework namely text, discursive practice and social practice as a fundamental tool in the unraveling of how language influences ideology, power relations and social identities (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2013). The socio-cognitive approach formulated by Teun A. van Dijk fits into this by addressing the interaction between discourse and shared mental models, ideologies and social cognition to reproduce or challenge power (van Dijk, 1998; van Dijk, 2006). Various studies that have analyzed political, military or media discourse have used a combination or contrast of both theorists such as (De-)Legitimizing War by Yasmin (2023) where both Indian and Pakistani civil/military discourses post- Pulwama attack employ legitimization strategies (emotion, rationality, expert voice). That research activity shows the way the war discourse can be structured to be attractive both emotionally and cognitively (Yasmin, 2023). A different study, Ideological Conflict in Editorials on Terrorism (Badshah, Kausar and Aziz Ullah Khan, 2023) analyzes the application of such strategies as positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, passivation, personalization based on van Dijk ideas of ideological square. These demonstrate how ideology is instilled in media language and affects cognitive frames of the readers.

## Rhetorical Discourse of Military in South Asia

Within the context of the India-Pakistan conflicts, a body of literature is currently growing in the study of the use of language in crises at the military institutions. The study by Sabir and Naeem (2025) examines political and military rhetoric of India and Pakistan when the two countries were in bilateral tension and discuss how the official statements are used to build up the national narrative and justify the actions of the state. Likewise, Fairclough CDA has been used in *Framing War through Words: A Critical Discourse Analysis of DG ISPR Press Statements in the Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos* (Badshah et al., 2023), which discusses how ISPR legitimizes the Indian aggression and how it builds the national identity using metaphors, nationalist rhetoric, and ideological framing. The study writing on the topic of social media as the discourse place of DG ISPR, the study by the authors Ashraf, Khan, Qazalbash and Rahamad (2021) discusses the use of narrative in the work of the particular organization through the analysis of selected tweets published by the ISPR. Such analyses refer to the fact that in South Asia, military speech is more prone to the accentuation of the sovereignty, violence of the other, nationality, pathos and morality.

## Discursive Strategies: Self vs Other, Emotion and Legitimization

The use of discursive strategies of positive self-presentation, negative other-presentation, passivation, modal forms, metaphor and evidentiality is a common theme in literature. Indicatively, the research on Pulwama conducted by Yasmin (2023) concluded that both the Indian and Pakistani civil and military discourses justified their positions using emotional rhetoric and expert voices, hypothetical futures, altruism and rationality (Yasmin, 2023). Also reported in the *Ideological Conflict in Editorials on Terrorism* (Badshah et al., 2023) are such strategies as passivation or personalization in order to position us vs them. In the media context, the study by Qadeer, Tahir, Ilyas Chishti and Ali (2021) examines the discursive practices of Pakistani Press in the form of Headlines to shape up political realities through lexical choice and framing. The other study that is relevant and applicable to the investigation is *Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani and Indian News on Pulwama Attack* (Wasim, Ahmed and Habib, 2023) that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative research methods to study ideological framing in news headlines.

Although, there is a vast amount of literature concerning the war, media, editorial, social media in the context of India-Pakistan conflict (e.g. Sabir and Naeem, 2025; Yasmin, 2023; Badshah et al., 2023), the series about press briefings within a short, sharply framed crisis, such as May 2025, are less represented. The study by (Rawan & Rahman, 2020) about Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos comes very close but nonetheless, the majority of literature is devoted to editorials, social networks of the political speeches in general. Additionally, although, it has been alluded that there is a three-dimensional model created by Fairclough and the socio-cognitive/ ideological square approach created by van Dijk, there are relatively few studies that blend them in a well organized thematic or textual-cognitive style in the context of military press briefings. In addition, the majority of studies have centered their attention on the events of the past (Pulwama 2019, Article 370 revocation, Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos) and not on real-time or even more modern conflict discourse such as May 2025. However, such emerging studies as *Wartime Media Dynamics in Emerging Democracies: Case Study of Pakistani Media in May 2025 Indo-Pak Conflict* (Ashfaq et al., 2022) start to study media coverage in general, no longer isolate and deeply analyze military press conferences specifically with CDA + socio-cognitive themes.

## **Material and Methods**

The proposed research design for the current study is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research design to investigate the ways in which the Pakistan Armed Forces formed and justified their discourse to react to the Indian attacks of May 2025. The study particularly relies on the three-dimensional discourse model by Fairclough (1995) and the socio-cognitive perspective by van Dijk (1998), which offers a combination of the linguistic structures, discursive practices, and cognitive processes to form an ideological meaning and power relations.

The research data will be official press conferences issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) between the dates of May 1-15, 2025, after military escalation across the borders was reported. The reason behind the selection of these briefings was because they are authoritative and institutionalized reactions that capture both the discourse of the nation and the discourse of the military. These texts were accessed in the official ISPR site and confirmed by cross-checking with the key Pakistani media sources like Dawn, Geo News and The Nation to ascertain authenticity and representativeness. Overall, ten official press conferences were chosen to analyze them in relation to their topicality, similarity of the tone and the overall coverage of the event.

Analysis has been done in line with Fairclough (1995) three-dimensional model. The first dimension, textual analysis has explored the linguistic qualities such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, transitivity and rhetoric to determine how language selections form such meanings of power, legitimacy and moral authority. Discursive practice was the second dimension that examined how such texts were created, disseminated and read- how intertextual, how circulated as well as repeated in a variety of communicative intermedia. The third dimension, social practice, was used to place these discourses within the framework of wider socio-political and ideological realms of national security and regional affairs in Pakistan.

In a bid to add depth to interpretation, the socio-cognitive approach of van Dijk (1998) was used to supplement the model of Fairclough in that shared mental models, beliefs and ideological schemata helped to both produce and receive discourse. The approach assumes the role of cognition mediating discourse and society in the process of how institutional discourses are internalized as shared truths. Therefore, the model developed by Fairclough facilitated the analysis of the text and social stratum in layers. Whereas, the theory created by van Dijk provided a psychological explanation of how such meanings are perpetuated in the mass consciousness. The present research has also employed thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in detecting the recurrence patterns in the corpus. Salient patterns of linguistic and ideological codes, after several readings of the data were coded and sorted into five broad themes, namely, legitimization of self-defense, othering of India, construction of national unity, focus on peace and restraint and institutional establishment of authority. Such themes were discussed within the context of the three aspects of the model by Fairclough, so, the textual aspects, communicative practices and social-political meanings were discussed in a unified manner.

The research has kept reflexivity in the analysis process to guarantee the credibility and rigor as the study has considered positionality as an observer of geopolitical discourse in the region. To reduce interpretative bias, triangulation of sources, transparency of coding and repeating the reading of the texts were used. The combination of Fairclough and van Dijk methodology made the study shift away

descriptive linguistics to a critical elaboration of discourse performing ideology. Overall, the selected methodology design offers a rich perspective on how the Armed Forces of Pakistan used discourse as language and action i.e. words were not only used to explain reality, but also to create, uphold and justify it.

## Results and Discussion

### Theme 1: Sanctioning Self-Defense and Sovereignty

The first significant theme is focused on a linguistic building of the defensive actions of Pakistan as appropriate and just in terms of the press briefings. High-modality verbs are overloaded with the use of high-modality elements like will, must and shall, which strengthen authority and confidence. The phrases such as: *Pakistan reserves the right to protect its independence and a calculated and mature response are indicative of a rational self-defense and not aggression*. This lexical frame introduces the Armed Forces as legitimate actors who are acting according to the international standards, whereas, the grammatical constructions are aimed at making order and discipline, creating the image of the institutional power and moral authority. The dissemination of these briefings via the official ISPR channels gave uniformity and authority in platforms. These phrases were reproduced by news media, both local and international, whereby, the same framing of morality was ingrained in the narrative of the people. In this production distribution, the discourse of the military moved to the center of adequate interpretation, blocking other opinions. Here, the discursive aspect of Fairclough is obvious by institutional communication, which recreates its power by regulating the access to interpretation of the event. Van Dijk's (1998) model explains the occurrence at the social and cognitive level where the repetition of such constructs as Sovereignty and Defense creates a common mental image and pattern where the actions of Pakistan have become an imperative to be upheld as a moral imperative. The viewers absorb the message that the reaction of the state is justified and right. This gives the military greater credibility in society and the national cognition is in line with the institutional ideology- defense is now equated with nationalism.

### Theme 2: Othering India as the Aggressor

The second theme that comes about is that of showing India as the aggressor. Often, the briefings use the terms, unprovoked aggression, fabricated claims, reckless escalation and baseless provocations. Negative evaluative adjectives and oppositional constructions, such as, where Pakistan pursues peace, India pursues confrontation create a very clear moral dichotomy between a rational, peace-seeking self and an impulsive, hostile other. Such a linguistic opposition reinforces the moral stance of Pakistan and renders the activities of India illegitimate by polarizing the semantics. Reproduction of this framing through the media shows the coordinated action between the military and the discourse of the journalism. Televised analysis, posts on social media, and newspaper articles repeated statements, which is why the information is transmitted equally. This interdiscursivity, a situation where the military and political register is overlapped with a journalistic one, reinforces the strength of the official narrative. The idea of discursive practice described by Fairclough (1995) can be observed in the circulation of discourse in a variety of channels to ensure the interpretive hegemony. Socio-cognitive approach of Van Dijk explains this trend as polarization of ideologies among ingroup and outgroup. The press conferences form images in the minds, which portray Pakistan as the symbol of peace and order and India as the symbol of aggression and instability. This political polarization enhances the level of internal unity and national unity is viewed as a

reaction to the opposing force of external aggression. Such discourses have changed the public opinion into faith and trust on their forces along with the eradication of mistrust and insecurity in public.

### **Theme 3: The Building of the National Cohesiveness and Ethical Preeminence**

The press briefings revolve around the theme of unity and moral power. The repetition of the inclusive pronouns like the we, our country and our will unite citizens and troops into one solid organism. Lines such as *We stand together as one nation and Our collective strength ensures peace focus on togetherness and unity*. Metaphors of solidarity, such as *a wall of defense, one voice, an unbreakable chain*, make the military actions turn into the symbols of national virtue. Lexical and syntactic cohesion represent the discourse as a location of unity in the form of both emotional and moral capitals. These were not merely informative texts but also performative texts. Their broadcast together with the imagery of the national flags and military insignia not only produced them but also made briefings the act of the symbolic representation. The recurring mass discourse of military defense as a national action erased demarcations between civil and military worlds. Here, the second dimension as defined by Fairclough is real: discursive practices create social meaning by the ritual performance of unity, which is strengthening the military as the reflection of the nation. On the social practice level, the socio-cognitive framework by van Dijk explains how such a repetition of language of inclusion promotes a collective mental image of identity. The citizens are inculcated with the perception that they have to be loyal to the Armed Forces, which is synonymous with the nation. Therefore, this discourse is ideological and it controls the masses to be emotionally oriented towards collective unity and discouraging any existing dissent. The national unity is not just a social value but a mental habit which is created by the repetition of institutions.

### **Theme 4: Peace, Restraint and Rationality as Strategic Narratives**

The fourth theme is that the Armed Forces have been maintaining a consistent image of themselves as being peace seeking but alert. The words peace, restraint, dialogue and stability are lexical elements that are used consistently during the briefings which portrays Pakistan as a rational and the peace-seeking actor. *We do not want war but we will protect every inch of our land* is a balanced type of sentence structure that combines assertiveness with diplomacy so that it creates a textual balance between strength and restraint. Pakistan has successfully created its moral authority in the whole at national and international level. Press briefs are the confirmation of the world moral laws and also in accordance with the UN charter of protecting your land and respect. The narrative set by Pakistan is ethical and legitimized. The discourse was also spread by foreign correspondents and digital media into its interpretive space across national borders. Socio-cognitive perspective, this theme correlates moral thinking that identifies restraint to be the same as wisdom. According to Van Dijk (1998), this ideologically freighted discourse creates some positive self-representations that persist across contexts. This continual repetition of the act of framing restraint as strength instils an ideology that moral composure is a national trait in Pakistan. Therefore, it is the people who learn to view peace as something other than passivity but as a sign of higher morality and tactical perception.

### **Theme 5: Institutional Power and Ideology**

The last theme is the establishment of the press briefings to make the military the main truth. The terms verified intelligence, authentic reports, objective evidence, and

credible information were used in placing the Armed Forces as the caretakers of factual knowledge. The authoritative and declarative statements ensured that there was no ambiguity and that the institution has been placed in the epistemically over and above contestation. This type of linguistic accuracy makes the discourse a weapon of power. The spread of such messages on the controlled media platforms further enhanced institutional dominance. The centralization of information at ISPR restricted the diversity of interpretations and created a consistent image of the world. The discursive aspect of Fairclough can be seen in this monopolization of discourse production, in which repetition on multiple planes reproduces the levels of power. This correspondence between linguistic and media power maintains what Fairclough terms ideological naturalization the process through which institutional viewpoints have been naturalized into common sense. In the present study, the Armed Forces have shaped the perception of the nation about them as being the trustworthy and reliable source. It also indicates the ideological control of the Armed forces which they have exhibited in May 2025 by framing the perception of the nation. Therefore, the discourse is not merely informative, it controls thought as well instilling power within group consciousness.

## Conclusion

In the present study, it is indicated that the Armed Forces of Pakistan have fabricated the discourse tactfully to express their solidarity, authority and moral uplift. It has also been an indicator of their capability of doing what they have said about protecting their lands against uninvited Indian attacks. Based on a three-dimensional model provided by Fairclough (1995), the textual analysis has revealed a lot of modality, metaphors, and evaluative adjectives to represent Pakistan as a rational, peaceful and defensive country. Such expressions like *the measured response* and *the protecting sovereignty* were the metaphors of controlled power and following of the codes of moral. Such linguistic decisions presented the Pakistani military position as being right and legal, which was in contrast to the description of India as being provocative and aggressive. The institutional voice was increased at the discursive level through intertextuality and controlled dissemination through official ISPR channels. The briefings were replicated in the mainstream and digital media which guaranteed consistency and interpretive dominance. Such circulation is indicative of what Fairclough (1989) explains as the reproduction of institutional power by way of media discourse. The unity had also been achieved by the use of the collective pronouns like those of *we* and *our*, which added more strength to the collective identity that the military was a symbol of unity of the nation. By following the socio-cognitive framework by van Dijk (1998) repeated mentions of defense, peace and national integrity generated mental images when the Armed Forces were associated with patriotism and legitimacy. This rhetoric signs influenced popular thinking, which gave rise to a common ideological framework of equating military authority to moral righteousness. Therefore, the briefings, were not informative but constituted political action- narrative turned into an instrument of cognitive national alignment. In general, the findings indicate that language was used as a tool of ideological creation. It is possible to apply discursive control, cognitive influence, and strategic self-representation, and the Pakistan Armed Forces managed to use discourse as a defense and diplomacy which is why the idea of saying being doing also applies in critical discourse.

This study concludes that the language, ideology and national identity show the intersection is powerful through the Pakistan Armed Forces examples of press conferences in the aftermath of Indian attacks in May 2025. By combining the three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1995) and socio-cognitive approach by van Dijk

(1998), the study shows the role of discourse as a communicative act and also a performative statement of the sovereignty and legitimacy. The strategic application of linguistic and rhetorical elements in the Armed Forces entailed an effective national discourse grounded on self-defense, peace and moral superiority.

The textual decisions indicated deliberate framing and the depiction of Pakistan as peace seeking and responsible; India was linguistically placed as the aggressor. It was a contrast thereby bringing ideological polarization that enhanced internal unity. The institutionalized regulation of the message production and distribution created a discursive space of unity that reduced dissent and restored a national cohesion. At the mental level, such recurrent discursive patterns had effects on shared mental constructs, where the citizens were pushed to internalize the military worldviews as the objective reality. These findings highlight the point that discourse does not present an objective image of reality; conversely, it is the process that allows maintaining power and ideology. The example of the Armed Forces communication can be taken as an example of how language can serve as a strategic governing body: it builds a moral legitimacy and directs the opinion of the population. This kind of discourse is in line with the argument by Wodak (2009) that political communication is dynamic both as a symbolic and practical action.

### **Recommendations**

The present study confirms that Armed Forces of Pakistan employed discourse as a political performance instrument and combined authority, morality and unity into a single national narrative. Speaking turned into a nation-building act--the defense rhetoric was turned into ideological power and communication was redefined as a type of strategic activity. In future, further studies can be done by using extended data at global level to understand the hidden and apparent stance of the World officials used in cold war chronicles and in press conferences.



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