

India Draws the Sindoor Line but There Needs to be a Principled Commitment for Ending Terrorism

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Introduction

At 1700 hours on 10 May, a ceasefire leading to the stoppage of firing and military hostilities between India and Pakistan was announced. The Pakistan Director General Military Operations Major General (Maj Gen) Kashif Abdullah had initiated a call on the morning of 10 May with his counterpart Lieutenant General (Lt Gen) Rajiv Ghai, followed by another call at 1535 hours. After the calls, there were discussions that led to an understanding between the two nations. As per official sources, the decision to stop military actions was taken bilaterally.

In previous statements, it had been made clear that India's actions were not escalatory in nature, however, it would respond if Pakistan retaliated. With this position, which had been articulated, India agreed to the ceasefire. While the aim was to avenge the killings in Pahalgam, the purpose was to send the right message to Pakistan about zero tolerance to terrorism and that an act of terror will be constituted and treated as an act of war. New Delhi also shifted to targeting the backers of terrorists from merely terrorists.¹

Hitting the minds of the military was evident in the selection of targets right from the first day. Firing at Rawalpindi showcased that India had the ability to target the General Headquarters. Unlike the actions taken post Uri and Balakot, where targets were only engaged in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK) and Khyber, the sheer scope, range, and intensity has changed the matrix. India's political will to take punitive measures, along with the armed forces' ability to deliver, was visible. The signalling was clear and no longer shrouded.

Achievements

The Indian Armed Forces successfully executed its assigned tasks in Operation Sindoor with precision and professionalism. The operation was conducted in a deliberate and discreet manner, aligned with national objectives.

As per Lt Gen Ghai, “Operation Sindoor was conceptualised with a clear military aim to punish the perpetrators and planners of terror and to destroy their terror infrastructure”. There was very diligent and microscopic scarring of terror landscapes across the border and the identification of terror camps and training sites.²

The primary objective was to deliver a decisive blow to Pakistan’s terror infrastructure following the Pahalgam attack. On 07 May, India achieved this by targeting nine terror launchpads and camps deep inside Pakistan and PoJK. The precision strikes, executed with advanced weaponry, not only neutralised immediate threats but also disrupted Pakistan’s ability to stage future attacks.

India’s retaliatory strikes targeted eight Pakistani military sites, including command and control centres at air bases such as Rafiqui, Murid, Chaklala, Rahim Yar Khan, Sukkur, Sargodha, Jacobabad, and several others. The destruction of air bases represents a significant blow to Pakistan’s military capabilities, particularly its Air Force, which plays a critical role in its defence strategy.³ These strikes, executed with air-launched precision weapons, underscore India’s technological superiority and its willingness to target not just terrorist infrastructure but also state assets complicit in supporting terrorism.

Pakistan has suffered heavy losses after its provocative action against India, while its offensive and defensive capabilities have been ‘Dismantled’. By eliminating terror camps, crippling air bases, and securing global backing, the rules of engagement have been redefined. Further, India has struck deep into Pakistan for the first time after 1971, as the former never crossed the Line of Control (LoC) in 1999.

India’s shield of sensors, missiles, and jammers protected the Indian airspace from Jammu and Kashmir to Gujarat, as Pakistan fired a swarm of drones and missiles during Operation Sindoor. Incoming threats were identified, tracked, and neutralised by India’s integrated counter-unmanned aerial systems grid and air defence systems.⁴

The holding in abeyance of the Indus Waters Treaty on 24 Apr, a non-kinetic measure in response to the Pahalgam attack, has many consequences for Pakistan and has emerged as a powerful tool of strategic coercion.⁵

Lessons Learnt

Several analysts will draw out lessons ranging from the strategic, operational, and tactical levels from this round of retaliatory conflicts. The professionalism displayed by India's Armed Forces remains outstanding and they have delivered well.

There is a need to focus on the escalatory steps and thresholds, as well as the effectiveness of technology and the evolution in the character of war. There will be many countries who will study the efficacy and performance of Chinese-origin equipment fielded by Pakistan.

At the military level, there would be immense lessons. Some of these would lie in the domain of intelligence, networking, sensor-to-shooter data transfer, and reactions in allocating appropriate weapon systems for destruction. Interoperability between the surveillance assets of the three services and sustenance of forces and civil military interfaces is commendable.

Apart from this, a very important lesson has come out regarding strategic communication. The Indian media, both mainstream and the social media, have been at the forefront as far as it comes to giving support and pushing the narrative. However, there has also been a large spread of misinformation on social media, with artificial intelligence-generating content created panic aimed at eroding trust in government reports. India must control the narrative.

The actions taken at the political, diplomatic, socio-economic, and military domains saw a whole government and whole-of-nation approach to national security, which is imperative to ensure a secure and strong India. This must be India's focus area.

On 12 May 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in his first address to the nation post-Pahalgam attack, clearly sent a stern message to Pakistan. He said, "Operation Sindoor has carved out a new benchmark in our (India's) fight against terrorism and has set up a new parameter and the new normal".⁶

Conclusion

Pakistan has been carrying out violent acts against India at the sub-conventional level, drawing strength from the premise that India would not react in the conventional space since Pakistan is a nuclear weapon state with a doctrine of irrationality. India had demonstrated its ability to use conventional weapons with a nuclear overhang in Kargil in 1999, and again in Balakot, but now the fundamentals are clear, the window between a sub-conventional terror strike and conventional military strikes has been closed. There will be no distinction. India's response has changed.

Though escalation remained at the lower rungs of the ladder, there is no doubt that Operation Sindoor has raised the costs for Pakistan in using terror as an instrument of state policy. What was witnessed were only the preliminary operations, prior to the launch of a ground offensive, which would have dealt a decisive blow.

The initial phase of battle was dominated by standoff missile strikes—precision-guided, long range, and with high impact. There has been a use of drones—both armed and surveillance—low cost and high cost, at varying operational depths. These actions enabled degradation of capabilities from a distance, minimising troop casualty while targeting terrorist structures, radars, and airbases, thus, shaping the battlefield before direct engagement. India also witnessed the use of own air defence. The only direct engagements were at the LoC where Pakistan targeted civilian population centres. It is no wonder that General Manoj Naravane, the former Indian Army Chief, had tweeted on 07 May, '*Abhi Picture Baki Hai* (The picture is still incomplete)'.⁷

Strong leadership has been demonstrated through foresight, restraint, clarity, and the ability and willingness to deliver. There is a need to build future capabilities as far as hard power is concerned, catering for sustained operations. Deterrence lies in capabilities, abilities, and a willingness and demonstration of intent.

While the ceasefire will be followed by talks, what needs to be ensured is that India must get guarantees in no uncertain terms that Pakistan will desist from supporting terrorism in all its manifestations and take action to hand over those involved in terrorist activities to India.

A ceasefire is welcome, provided there is a principled commitment to ending terrorism, resulting in a less uncertain future.

Endnotes

¹ 'India-Pakistan Ceasefire Updates: Operation Sindoor Objectives Achieved; Losses Are Part of Combat but Pilots Are Back Home, Says IAF', *The Hindu*, 11 May 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/operation-sindoor-pahalgam-attack-india-pakistan-ceasefire-live-updates-may-11-2025/article69563302.ece>

² 'India Inflicted Heavy Losses to Pakistan Military, Terrorists during Operation Sindoor: DGMO', *Newsonair.gov.in*, 12 May 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/operation-sindoor-over-100-terrorists-killed-high-value-targets-eliminated-across-pakistan-pojk/>

³ Explained Desk, 'Operation Sindoor: All about Pakistan Air Force Assets That India Hit', *The Indian Express*, 13 May 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/operation-sindoor-pakistan-air-force-assets-india-hit-9999538/>

⁴ Divyam Sharma, 'Guardians of the Sky - India's Integrated Air Defence That Outfoxed Pakistan', *NDTV*, 12 May 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/guardians-of-the-sky-indias-integrated-air-defence-that-outfoxed-pak-operation-sindoor-indian-air-force-akash-missile-8395760>

⁵ Apurva Vishwanath, 'Indus Waters Treaty, Simla Agreement 'in Abeyance': What This Means', *The Indian Express*, 26 Apr 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-law/indus-waters-treaty-simla-agreement-in-abeyance-what-this-means-9966366/>

⁶ Amrita Nayak Dutta, 'India, Pakistan DGMOs Agree to Reduce Troops on Borders', *The Indian Express*, 12 May 2025, accessed 13 May 2025 <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-pakistan-dgmos-agree-to-reduce-troops-on-borders-9999355/>

⁷ Manoj Naravane, X, 07 May 2025 <https://x.com/ManojNaravane/status/1919975041921384635>

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