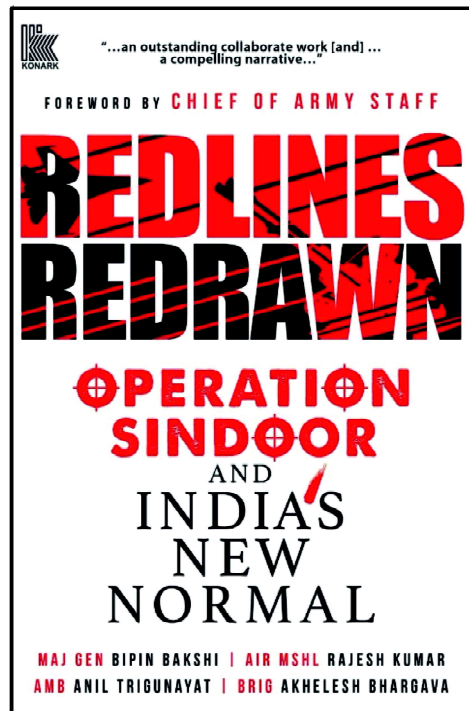


Review Article 2



Introduction

In War, Truth is often the First Casualty'—buried beneath competing narratives, selective disclosures, emotional rhetoric, and strategic deception. It is within such a contested informational environment that *Redlines Redrawn: Operation Sindoor and India's New Normal* appears to put the facts into open domain for the benefit of the serious observers of conflicts between India and Pakistan. Published several months after the short but intense India–Pakistan confrontation of May 2025, the volume seeks to move beyond propaganda and reconstruct what occurred, why it occurred, and what it signifies for India's evolving strategic posture.

For this reviewer, the subject is not abstract. Having served in counterinsurgency operations in the Pahalgam region—including during the early security arrangements for the Amarnath Yatra in 1990—and later engaging with cross-border terrorism issues at

Underworld Tyranny: The Traffickers' Reign Unveiled by Major Namrata Dhasmana (Retd), Sabre and Quill Publishers, Pages: 272, Price: ₹ 1,099, ISBN: 978-9348152213

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the National Security Council Secretariat while monitoring implementation of the Kargil Review Committee recommendations, the subject carries both professional and personal resonance.

Authored by Major General Bipin Bakshi, AVSM, VSM, PhD (Retd); Air Marshal Rajesh Kumar, PVSM, AVSM, VM, (Retd); Shri Anil Trigunayat, IFS (Retd); and Brigadier Akhelesh Bhargava (Retd), the book brings together practitioners of land warfare, airpower, diplomacy, and strategic analysis. This multi-domain authorship is one of the book's principal strengths. The narrative benefits from technical competence, policy awareness, and institutional memory. The flow of events is coherent and well referenced.

While the book understandably reflects an Indian institutional perspective, it remains methodologically transparent. The authors acknowledge that certain insights derive from professional interactions and open-source synthesis. The interpretations remain analytical and are supported by referenced tables, statistics, graphs, and illustrations.

Historical Context: State-Sponsored Proxy War

The opening chapter situates Operation Sindoor with the detailed historical perspective of Pakistan's strategy of proxy warfare since the mid-1980s. Having failed to secure its objectives through conventional wars, Pakistan's military establishment, the authors argue, institutionalised terrorism as an instrument of state policy—seeking to “Bleed India by a thousand cuts” through proxy war conducted via terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

Groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed are presented not as autonomous actors but as instruments functioning with varying degrees of state sponsorship. Operation Sindoor, therefore, is framed not as an isolated reaction but as part of a continuum of calibrated responses to accumulated provocations.

For professional readers, this contextual grounding is essential. It underscores that limited military operations are rarely spontaneous; they are products of prolonged strategic evolution and political signalling.

The Pahalgam Attack: Trigger and Trauma

The Apr 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam forms the emotional and operational trigger. The chapter reconstructs the sequence of events, intelligence leads, and forensic indicators linking the attackers to Pakistan-based networks. The chapter contains several deeply moving accounts of celebration turning into tragedy—individual grief unfolding into a national trauma. Beyond operational details, the authors emphasise the psychological design of such attacks: to erode public confidence, inflame communal fault lines, and coerce strategic overreaction. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement—"Those behind this heinous act will be brought to justice"—is presented not as mere rhetoric, but as the articulation of a political resolve, signalling the world that a threshold had been crossed.

Operation Sindoor: Multi-Domain Calibration

The core of the book lies in its account of Operation Sindoor as a multi-domain campaign encompassing land, air, maritime posture adjustments, cyber operations, space-based surveillance, and information operations.

The operation's naming—Sindoor—is symbolically interpreted as signifying national resolve and sacrifice. More substantively, the authors argue that the campaign demonstrated:

- Limited, clearly defined objectives focused on degrading terrorist infrastructure rather than targeting Pakistani military formations.
- Short-duration, high-intensity action calibrated to avoid uncontrolled escalation.
- Integrated multi-domain synchronisation, reflecting doctrinal maturity.
- Readiness to respond further without seeking territorial revisionism.

The detailed description of the destruction of terrorist camps on 07 May 2025 and the subsequent air defence engagements over Indian airspace provides rare insight into layered air defence integration. Indigenous systems, combined with the Indian Air Force command-and-control architecture reportedly intercepted drones

and aerial threats with high effectiveness, signalling increasing technological integration and operational maturity.

Airpower, Space Assets, and the Nuclear Shadow

The chapter examining airpower and space-based assets is analytically robust. Satellite reconnaissance, early warning systems, secure communications, and networked targeting are shown as central to real-time decision making. Importantly, the authors explore how hostilities approached sensitive thresholds before being stabilised through signalling and backchannel communication.

The operation is presented as an evidence that limited conventional action remains feasible under a nuclear overhang, provided the objectives are narrow and the signalling unambiguous. The narrative also notes external commentary, including claims by United States President Donald Trump regarding de-escalation efforts, situating the episode within broader international diplomatic currents.

Diplomacy and Indus Waters Treaty

Diplomatic outreach, information warfare, and global perception management receive substantial attention. The authors document expressions of support for India's right to self-defence from several Western states as well as Israel and Russia, while analysing Pakistan's counter-narratives.

Particularly consequential was India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance. This move is interpreted as signalling that strategic costs could extend into economic and environmental domains. In the words of Prime Minister Modi, "Both Blood and Water cannot flow together". One might interpret this strategic signalling differently: if Pakistan historically described Kashmir as its "Jugular Vein", India's leverage over the Indus waters potentially represents a comparable strategic pressure point.

Indigenous Capability and Doctrinal Evolution

A recurring theme is the performance of indigenous systems under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-reliant India) initiative. Counter-drone technologies, electronic warfare assets, and air defence systems are credited with effective performance. However, the authors do not shy away from noting structural concerns: declining fighter squadron strength, incomplete networking of platforms, and procurement delays.

The book frames Operation Sindoor as an evidence of doctrinal evolution beyond the debated 'Cold Start' construct. Rather than large-scale mobilisation, the emphasis is on swift punitive action, multi-domain integration, and escalation control. Whether this 'New Normal' emerged accidentally or evolves into institutionalised doctrine remains to be seen.

Strategic Environment: The China Factor

Chinese military support to Pakistan is treated as a significant strategic variable. With nearly 80 per cent of Pakistan's military hardware of Chinese origin, Operation Sindoor provided Beijing an opportunity to observe the performance of its systems in live combat conditions. The possibility of collusive two-front contingencies, therefore, emerges as a structural concern rather than rhetorical exaggeration.

Critical Observations

Professional readers—particularly experienced military practitioners—may question the prudence of sharing granular operational and technological details. While transparency contributes to credibility and deterrence signalling, it also invites scrutiny about operational security and potential commercial motivations in global defence markets.

Redlines Redrawn is a timely and substantial contribution to literature on crisis management, deterrence, and limited war under nuclear conditions. It functions simultaneously as a chronicle of Operation Sindoor and as an argument that India has entered a more assertive, calibrated phase in managing Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

Operation Sindoor is presented not as the end of terrorism but as a demonstration of capability and resolve. Whether this 'New Normal' becomes enduring doctrine or remains situational adaptation will depend on future crises and political will. Nonetheless, the authors succeed in anchoring that debate in experience, strategic reasoning, and operational evidence rather than rhetorical flourish.

Overall, *Redlines Redrawn: Operation Sindoor and India's New Normal* is an important contribution to contemporary strategic literature. The book offers a structured account of limited conflict

conducted under the shadow of nuclear deterrence. It will also help academics and policymakers seeking to understand the trajectory of India's military transformation amid the 'New Normal' in a 'Multipolar World'.

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