

# Operation Sindoor and the 2025 India Pakistan Conflict: Strategic Escalation and Regional Stability

Asma Begum<sup>1</sup>, Uroosa Ahmed<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan

<sup>1</sup>PhD scholar at Qurtuba university peshawar, Pakistan

## ABSTRACT

*The 2025 India-Pakistan crisis, operationally known as Operation Sindoor by India, is the most far-reaching military engagement between the two nuclear-armed nations in the last 50 years. In response to the April 22, 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack which killed 26 civilians in Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir, India, on the evening of May 6-7, 2025, fired precision missiles and air strikes into 9 militant infrastructure targets in Azad Kashmir, controlled by Pakistani forces, and the Punjab province of Pakistan. During the next 88 hours, the two countries were involved in a historic-level of exchanges that involved over-the-horizon aeronautical conflict, drone warfare, and standoff missile attacks, the largest aeronautical conflict on the subcontinent in modern history. The article also discusses the strategic aspects of the Operation Sindoor in terms of the changing policy of deterrence of India, the pre-escalatory factors that dictated the four-day war, the counter operations of Pakistan and geopolitical consequences on the stability of the region and the world as a whole. Based on the escalation theory, deterrence theory and the concept of compellence, the study concludes that Operation Sindoor represents a paradigm shift in the strategic posture of India, that of reactive restraint into calibrated assertiveness. The article also evaluates the ceasefire of May 10, 2025 and its frail sustainability, and examines suggestions to diplomatic architecture to curb future crises in one of the most unstable nuclear neighborhoods in the world.*

## KEYWORDS:

Operation Sindoor, India-Pakistan Conflict, South Asian Security, Nuclear Deterrence, Cross-border Terrorism, Strategic Escalation, Regional Stability

## JOURNAL INFO:

**HISTORY: Received:** February 26, 2026

**Accepted:** March 24, 2026

**Published:** March 31, 2026

\*Corresponding author: syedauroosaahmad@gmail.com

DOI: [10.21015/vtess.v14i1.2408](https://doi.org/10.21015/vtess.v14i1.2408)

## INTRODUCTION

On April 22, 2025, armed militants stormed tourists in the picturesque tourist resort of Pahalgam in the Indian-controlled Jammu and Kashmir, killing 26 civilians, which was immediately termed as the worst militant attack in the region since 2019. The involvement of Pakistan based militant organizations, namely the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) groups, which the United Nations, the United States and the European Union have long declared as terrorist groups was evidenced by the Indian intelligence agencies (Government of India, Press Information Bureau, 2025). The assault was commonly viewed as a calculated and carefully planned instigation, which had a two-fold aim of destabilizing the Kashmir Valley and instilling communal war to the multicultural society in India (Srivastava, 2025).

As a reaction, the Government of India led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a series of progressive diplomatic and economic steps after which military action was taken. These were the suspension of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, closure of the Attari-Wagah border crossing, the cancelation of their Pakistani national's visas and the bilateral trade. These punitive actions were an indication of a radically high standard of Indian strategic will, unlike the more moderate reaction to earlier terrorist acts like parliament assault and the 2008 Mumbai assaults (Tellis, 2025).

On May 6-7 2025, India unleashed Operation Sindoor, a military operation that involved controlled missile and air attacks on 9 targets that had been designated as terrorist infrastructure



in Azad Kashmir, which is controlled by Pakistan and the Punjab province in Pakistan. The very word *Sindoor*, which meant an indication of the red vermilion powder that Hindu women put on once they are married, also had a deep symbolic undertone since the Pahalgam attackers had allegedly killed the men, leaving behind widows. The action was described by the Indian military leaders as non-escalatory, measured, and focused and emphasized that there were no Pakistani military facilities, civilian infrastructure, and economic facilities that had been subject to the intentional attack (Government of India, Ministry of Defence, 2025).

Pakistan countermeasured by denying that it was a part of the Pahalgam attack, condemned the Indian attacks as unjustified aggression, and alleged civilian targets such as mosques had been hit. Islamabad initiated retaliatory measures, which included mortar shelling along the Line of Control (LoC), drone attacks on Indian territory, and finally, a formally coded retaliatory operation named *Bunyan-un-Marsoos* (Arabic: *Bunyan-un-Marsoos*), to attack Indian military installations (Inter-Services Public Relations, Pakistan, 2025).

The four days that ensued thereafter was incredible in its magnitude, refinement, and moderation. More than 125 of the combat airplanes on both forces took part in beyond-visual-range (BVR) aerial combat, the biggest air combat involving a fourth-generation jet fighter in current history. Pakistan scrambled Chinese-provided PL-15 long-range air to air missiles on JF-17 Block III planes whereas India used a mix of BrahMos cruise missiles, Akashteer air defense systems and S-400 surface to air missile batteries. The war was the first recorded drone war between two nuclear powers, and this started a new and profoundly disturbing trend in the field of strategies (Tripathi, 2025).

Importantly, the war was a case that was fought in the dark of nuclear deterrence. India and Pakistan are both nuclear armed and the prospect of nuclear escalation was a source of energy to international diplomacy in imposing a ceasefire. Although the United States initially expressed reservations - with Vice President JD Vance terming the conflict as none of our business - it eventually took part in the brokering of the ceasefire of May 10, 2025, with President Donald Trump announcing the agreement on social media (U.S. Department of State, 2025). There was diplomatic involvement of the United Nations, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Russia as well in efforts to de-escalate tensions.

At 5:00 pm Indian Standard Time on May 10, 2025, a ceasefire was agreed upon after the Directors-General of Military Operations (DGMOs) of both countries talked directly. Nevertheless, the ceasefire was precarious in the immediate aftermath of its signing with both countries accusing each other of breaking the ceasefire by drone attacks and firing cannon fire (Reuters, 2025).

Various independent analytical institutions have evaluated operation *Sindoor* to be a watershed event in South Asian Strategic history. According to the Carnegie Endowment to International Peace, it was perhaps the biggest and boldest Indian military strikes on Pakistani targets since the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 (Tellis, 2025). According to *AirForces Monthly*, Operation *Sindoor* was a strategic win of the Indian Armed Forces (*AirForces Monthly*, 2025). According to a report issued by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, the two nations hit targets far into the territories of each other than at any point in the past 50 years (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2025).

This paper is a scholarly reflection of the operation *Sindoor* and the wider India Pakistan war of 2025, placing the events in the theoretical contexts of the key theories of strategic studies and international relations. The study explores the causal antecedents, strategic justifications, operational aspects, and escalatory processes and the regional implications of the conflict and

specifically whether the current strategic equilibrium in South Asia is stable or in a fundamentally more dangerous stage.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To start with, the article attempts to evaluate the strategic rationale behind the choice made by India to go a step further with Operation Sindoor, the way the India policy on deterrence changed into one based on calculated aggression, and the antecedent conditions that allowed the Indian military to take the nuclear age to war.

Second, the paper will focus on the escalatory dynamics that defined the four-day India-Pakistan conflict of May 2025 and how both countries were able to deal with the risk of nuclear escalation and yet achieve military objectives and the role of third-party actors in the de-escalation of the crisis.

Third, the study tries to evaluate how the Operation Sindoor impacts regional stability in South Asia such as how it influences the India-Pakistan strategic balance, the India-China-Pakistan triangular relationship, the sustainability of the May 10 ceasefire, and the future of a new diplomatic understanding between New Delhi and Islamabad.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main question that this study seeks to answer, is the fact that Operation Sindoor is a sustainable recalibration of the Indian strategic doctrine of deterrence, which makes South Asian stability more durable, or it is a precarious precedent that has essentially reduced the threshold to future military conflict between two nuclear armed powers. This question has far-reaching consequences, since it undermines the basic assumptions of the nuclear deterrence theory that has dictated South Asian security calculations since 1998.

Before Operation Sindoor, the conventional wisdom among the strategic community maintained that Indian response to the Pakistani sponsored terrorism was limited by the nuclear threshold, any serious Indian operation against Pakistan presented an intolerable danger of nuclear retaliation. This "stability-instability paradox" of South Asian deterrence theory argued that strategic-level nuclear deterrence paradoxically allowed Pakistani military and intelligence agencies to sponsor sub-conventional acts of terrorism against India with relative impunity, as they knew that India would not escalate in a way that would allow it to use decisive military action (Krepon and Faizi, 2018).

Operation Sindoor seems to have upset and perhaps invalidated this assumption. The fact that India was prepared to attack the entire length and width of Pakistan, including targets in its core Punjab province, with an explicit reference to its no-first-use nuclear policy and its conventional dominance in escalation, indicates a re-conceptualization of the space of conventional military action below the nuclear threshold. Whether this is some kind of real and truly steady new deterrence equilibrium, or a perilous escalation of the competition that will invite more often and more serious military conflicts, is the heart of the problematic that this study examines.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The academic importance of the study is multifold. To begin with, the 2025 India-Pakistan war is a special empirical case in the nuclear deterrence study as it is the most comprehensive non-nuclear military confrontation between two nuclear-armed nations since the nuclear era on

the subcontinent. The conflict offers a unique real-world experiment of the deterrence theory in the South Asian setting, and has direct effects in terms of the generalizability of the deterrence models to other nuclear dyads, such as the U.S.-China and North Korea-South Korea relationships.

Second, Operation Sindoor has created new frontiers to the research of warfare among nuclear-powered states, especially to drone warfare, aerial combat of BVRs and precision strike warfare as a tool of limited war. The nature of the conflict, its limited duration, focus on civilian, and nuclear infrastructure targets, and the avoidance of a prolonged war reflects a new pattern of limited warfare of the nuclear era that needs academic study.

Third, the geopolitical aspects of the conflict, such as the Chinese indirect contribution to it via weapons shipments to Pakistan, the late intervention of the United States, and regional powers, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, in the negotiation process, also shed light on the shifting multipolar nature of South Asian strategic relationships and the declining relevance of bilateral India-Pakistan models to regional security relationships.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### India-Pakistan Relations in History

The existing literature in the field of India-Pakistan relations is large in scope, and its relationship can be described since independence by a struggle over territory, ideological antagonism and a sporadic military conflict. Foundational accounts of the partition of British India in 1947 by Brass (1994) and Talbot (1998) set the stage of the unresolved status of Jammu and Kashmir that gave rise to a structural conflict between the two successor states. The relationship has been characterized by four wars in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999 (the Kargil fighting) and 1971 war led to the dismemberment of Pakistan and the formation of Bangladesh.

Ganguly (2002) documents the origin of the Kashmiri insurgency in the late 1980s and the active involvement of Pakistan in supporting the insurgency stating that the asymmetric strategy of bleed India and denying involvement was a conscious policy of Pakistan.

The India-Pakistan relationship changed dramatically in the post 2001 period as international counter-terrorism norms after September 11 put new constraints on the overt sponsorship of militant groups by Pakistan. Chari, Cheema, and Cohen (2007) assess a sequence of near-war crises during this era such as the 2001-02 Twin Peaks crisis that followed the attack on the Indian Parliament and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and how these two states were able to handle escalation in the shadow of nuclear weapons. Their examination gives invaluable background to the operational calculations which dictated Operation Sindoor.

### South Asian Security: Deterrence and Escalation

Theoretical discourse on nuclear deterrence in South Asia has been active in considering what Krepon and Faizi (2018) call the stability-instability paradox, which was initially defined by Glenn Snyder in the context of the Cold War. This paradox is that nuclear deterrence at the strategic level provides perverse incentives to sub-strategic aggression because each party realizes that the use of nuclear weapons limits the response alternatives of the other party. Narang (2014) posits in the South Asian scenario that an unusual form of deterrence that Pakistan has adopted, through its adoption of what he describes as an asymmetric escalation nuclear posture, that the threat of first use of tactical nuclear weapons on conventional Indian troops has provided a unique deterrence environment resulting in a significantly lowered nuclear threshold.

Another significant empirical precedent to the 2025 conflict was the 2019 Balakot airstrikes when India attacked a JeM training camp on Pakistani soil in response to the Pulwama suicide bombing. Basrur (2019) interpreted Balakot as an expression of Indian readiness to cross the LoC and attack targets on Pakistani soil, but explained that the scale of the Balakot strike, into Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, was much less than the strikes in Punjab, which made up the heart of Operation Sindoor. Ladwig (2008) has created the concept of the Cold Start Doctrine - India strategy of fast conventional military mobilization aimed at establishing facts on the ground before Pakistan could invoke nuclear threats - as a paradigm of Indian conventional war-fighting doctrine. The fact that Operation Sindoor was not based on the mobilization of ground forces but on precision strikes with standoffs indicates that India is no longer in the Cold Start paradigm but has shifted to what can be called a Precision Strike Doctrine that can accomplish compellence goals using airpower and missiles without the logistical and time expenditures of mobilizing an armored force.

### **State Responses to Cross-Border Terrorism**

Literature on the state reactions to cross-border terrorism offers significant background to comprehend the rationality behind Operation Sindoor. Pape (2005) and Cronin (2009) study the circumstances in which states opt to use military force or diplomacy to respond to terrorism attacks, find the perceived attribution certainty, domestic political pressures, and available military capabilities as the main factors that determine the choice of the state. The Pahalgam attack in the Indian case took place in a setting of built up grievances and a domestic political climate that was very sensitive to the Pakistani-related terrorism.

Byman (2005) explores the idea of state-sponsored terrorism and the continuum of state involvement in terrorist violence, between active guidance and passive acceptance. His model especially applies to the situation where India describes the relations that Pakistan has with the LeT and JeM - relations which are actually described by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan as being nurtured over decades. The issue of whether the targeting of terrorist infrastructure in Operation Sindoor, as opposed to Pakistani military or governmental property, is the subject of a legally and strategically meaningful difference has been discussed at length in the post-conflict analytical literature.

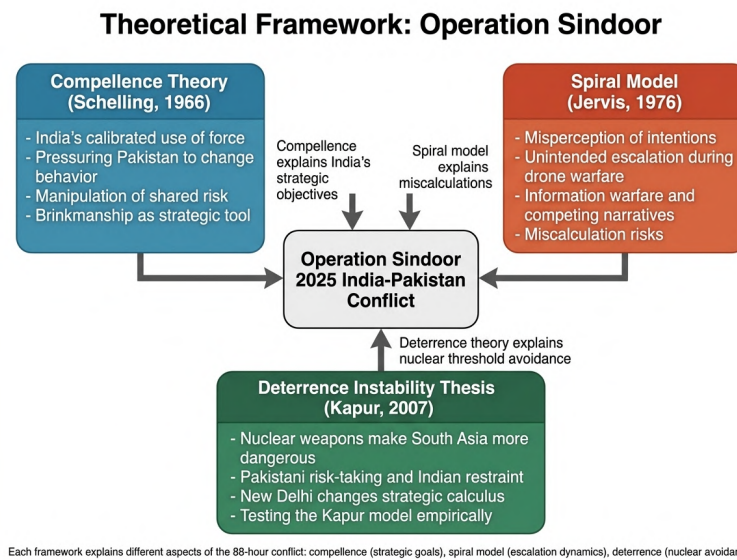
In an article in the Carnegie Endowment, Tellis (2025) contends that India has implemented an Israeli approach to mowing the grass, namely, that it cannot eradicate the terrorist threat once and for all but recursively degrades the capacity to launch militant actions to impose costs and purchase strategic time. This strategy has a tactical benefit, but also has the strategic disadvantage that weaker organizations can be rebuilt with time, and that military interventions are necessary to rebuild them. The sustainability of this strategy in the long-term is, therefore, still an object of academic discussion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Figure 1 synthesizes the three complementary theoretical frameworks applied to this case study: Schelling's compellence theory, Jervis's spiral model, and Kapur's deterrence instability thesis.

Each framework, as shown in Figure 1, explains different aspects of the conflict: compellence explains India's strategic objectives, the spiral model explains miscalculations during drone warfare, and deterrence theory explains the avoidance of nuclear escalation.

The paper uses three theoretical frameworks that complement each other based on the literature on international relations and strategic studies. The first one is the theory of compellence



**Figure 1:** Application of theoretical frameworks to Operation Sindoor

and coercive diplomacy developed by Schelling (1966), who differentiates between deterrence (the prevention of an opponent to act), and compellence (the act of making an opponent change his or her behavior). The case of operation Sindoor can be broken down into compellent action that is aimed at pressuring Pakistan into permanently limiting its involvement in sponsoring anti-India militant groups. Such an analytical vocabulary as the manipulation of shared danger, brinkmanship, as a tool to control an opponent, is also offered by Schelling to understand how both parties managed to maneuver the nuclear threat during the crisis.

The second model is the spiral model of conflict escalation by Jervis (1976), which analyzes the misperception of the intention and capability of the other state by the states to inadvertently escalate a conflict. The spiral model is especially applicable in the context of the drone warfare stage of the conflict, where the speed at which tactical situations developed and the rivalry in the narrative of the national countries provided the circumstances of misperception and miscalculation. The competing claims of civilian deaths, aircraft destruction and infrastructure targeting in the conflict are just examples of the information environment that the spiral model characterizes as being especially favorable to the dynamics of escalation.

The third framework is proposed by Kapur (2007) revisionist analysis of South Asian deterrence instability that states that the nuclear weapons have rendered South Asia more dangerous, not less dangerous, by facilitating Pakistani risk-taking and Indian restraint. Operation Sindoor is an empirical test of the thesis of Kapur: by revealing that India is willing to take serious conventional military action in spite of the nuclear posture of Pakistan, New Delhi has changed the strategic calculus which Kapur model presupposes. It is an open empirical question whether this creates a stability or an instability in the medium term and this article answers this question.

## METHODOLOGY

The article is a qualitative case study, which is a standard approach to strategic studies research of deep analysis of particular conflicts and crises as lenses through which to view the wider theoretical issues (Yin, 2018). The case study approach fits the Operation Sindoor well due

to the fact that the events under study are not old enough, there is not a lot of declassified primary source documentation available, and the conflict is multidimensional, including military, diplomatic, economic, and informational aspects that could not be measured in only quantitative terms.

The primary source materials that will be analysed are official governmental statements and press releases of Government of India, Press Information Bureau of Pakistan, the U.S. Department of State, and the United Nations. These are the official government version of events, which should be critically evaluated together with other journalistic and analytical versions of the events that have transpired, due to the nature of information warfare, which was an inherent part of the conflict. The academic journals, publications of think-tanks, and large international news sources such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Observer Research Foundation, the Stimson Center, the War on the Rocks strategic journal, and CNN International are considered secondary sources.

The methodology used in the analysis is process tracing whereby the causal factors that led to a Pahalgam attack and the decision of India to launch an operation named Sindoor are addressed by tracing the decision-making process using the intermediary processes of diplomatic signaling, economic coercion and military mobilization. Comparative analysis is the complement to process tracing in that Operation Sindoor is placed in the historical context of the India-Pakistan crisis since 1999 and comparisons with the Israeli periodic operation against Hezbollah and Hamas are made as a possible analogy of this potential strategic model.

An important methodological flaw should be mentioned: since the events that were examined took place in the period between April and May 2025, and the entire set of declassified intelligence analyses, military post-action analyses, and diplomatic cables is not made available to researchers with open access, the present analysis will be based upon open-source data that can be incomplete or potentially under controlled governmental publications. Contradictory reports of the counts of casualties, aircrafts lost and exact targets hit during the operation have not been confirmed by the independent observers. The analytical findings of this paper should be seen then as tentative, and subject to change as more information is released via declassification, journalistic reporting and parliamentary review.

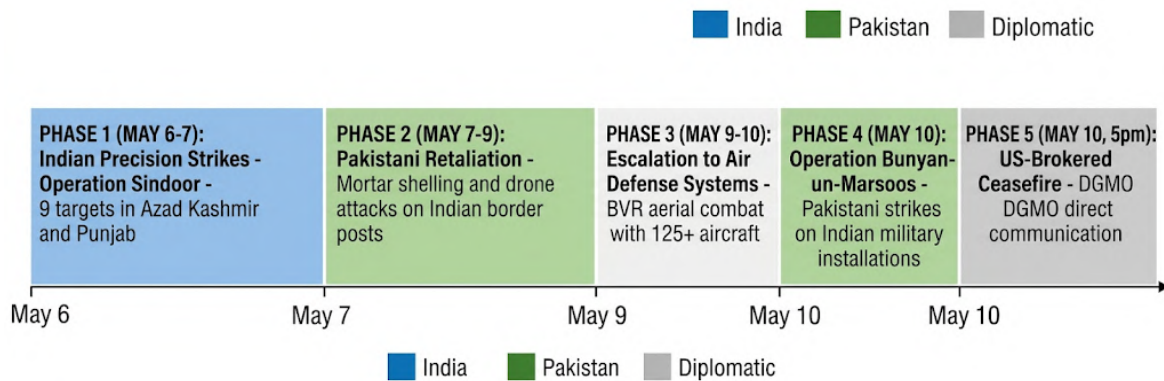
## Data Collection and Synthesis

The 88-hour conflict progressed through five distinct phases from May 6 to May 10, 2025. Figure 2 presents the complete timeline of Operation Sindoor and the subsequent military exchanges between India and Pakistan, including the initial precision strikes, Pakistani retaliation, aerial combat, and the US-brokered ceasefire. The 88-hour conflict progressed through five distinct phases: Indian precision strikes (May 6-7), Pakistani retaliation (May 7-9), escalation to air defense systems (May 9-10), the formal Pakistani counter-operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos (May 10), and the US-brokered ceasefire (May 10). Adapted from (Tripathi, 2025) and (Stimson Center, 2025).

## DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

### Strategy of Operation Sindoor

Operation Sindoor marks a turning point in the history of Indian strategic development, where the principle of a Precision Strike Doctrine has become more mature and replaces the theoretical framework of Cold Start as the main tool of coercive military diplomacy of India. The operation



**Figure 2:** Timeline of Operation Sindoor and the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict (May 6-10, 2025).

took place with some operational precision and strategic clarity that was the result of decades of doctrine development, investment into capabilities and intelligence preparation. The initial strike phase of 23 minutes on the night of May 6-7 on nine targets in two Pakistani provinces showed how India managed to produce simultaneous precision effects with respect to a wide geographic area without necessitating the massive mobilization of ground forces as in the context of the previous doctrinal ideas (Government of India, Ministry of Defence, 2025).

The Chief of Defense Staff of India, General Anil Chauhan, expressed three strategic principles according to which the management of the escalation of Operation Sindoor was carried out: the willingness of India to follow its no-first-use nuclear policy, which created a firebreak beyond the conventional operation ceiling; the first strike of Pakistan on Indian military targets on May 7, which put the moral and strategic burden of further escalation on Islamabad; and the select targeting of militant infrastructure only. These ideals were a complex effort to manage the escalation ladder - attaining compelling goals but at the same time contain the danger of uncontrollable escalation.

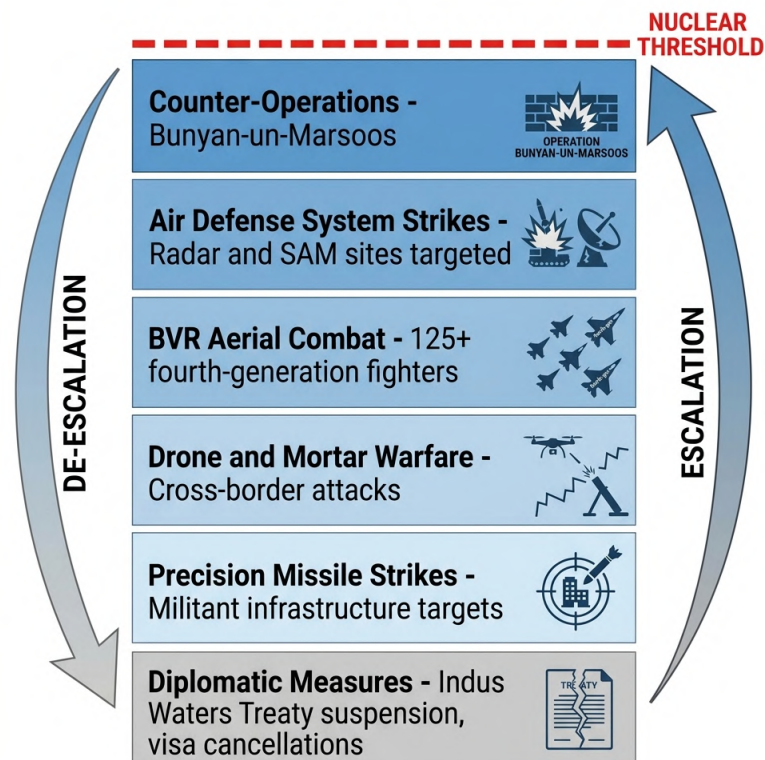
The operation was also a big break with past trends in the strategic narrative management in India. India was the first to be able to decouple its military operation in relation to the Kashmir political issue and make it a purely counter-terror operation within the confines of international law. This framing garnered unparalleled global solidarity, as the leading world powers such as United States, France, and Israel began to support India in its counter-terrorism aims instead of automatically asking it to restrain itself as was the norm in previous crises (Government of India, Press Information Bureau, 2025). The reputational and diplomatic payoffs of this story success are huge strategic benefits accrued by India in Operation Sindoor.

### The Nuclear Shadow and Escalatory Dynamics

The escalatory dynamics of the conflict are conceptualized in Figure 3. As shown in Figure 3, both sides moved up the escalation ladder while deliberately avoiding the nuclear threshold at each stage.

This framework, as depicted in Figure 3, helps explain how India and Pakistan managed to achieve military objectives while preventing uncontrolled escalation to the nuclear level.

Both the strength and the weakness of the deterrence structure in South Asia was manifested in the four-day conflict. The war was fought through a variety of different stages: the first Indian precision attacks of May 6-7; the retaliation by the Pakistani mortars and drones against Indian borders on May 7-9; the extension of Indian targets to Pakistani air defense systems and



**Figure 3:** Escalation ladder of the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict showing six levels of military engagement and the nuclear threshold

radar bases; the official operation of the DGMO Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos against Indian military bases on May 10; and the official ceasefire. Both sides intentionally tried to keep some ceiling of the escalation under control in each stage, not reaching specific heights, especially the strikes against nuclear installations, national highly important civilian infrastructure and big cities, which would have resulted in the extreme increase of the risk of nuclear escalation.

Especially, the role of technology in the development of escalatory dynamics should be paid attention to. The war was the first time when the Pakistan Air Force could use long-range Chinese PL-15 air-to-air missiles fired by JF-17 Block III fighters, which marked the direct military presence of China in the crisis due to weapons transfer (Stimson Center, 2025). The usage of the Turkish-supported ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) technologies was yet another way of the Pakistani forces internationalizing the technological aspects of the conflict. The strategic value of Russia-India defense relations was seen through the deployment of its S-400 surface-to-air missile systems, which India bought in Russia despite heavy pressure on its part by the United States, in the Indian military equation. The new China-Pakistan-Turkey counter-coalition to Indian military capabilities is a major long-term strategic issue that is far more than the immediate crisis.

The drone warfare aspect of the conflict presented some specific complicated dynamics of escalation. The use of hundreds of unmanned aerial vehicles by Pakistan to investigate and attack the Indian military and civilian infrastructure raised unparalleled difficulties in integrating air defense in India. The experience of India in dealing with these threats resulted in the prime minister Modi declaring on August 2025, the Sudarshan Chakra program, an indigenous

integrated air defense system, inspired by the Israeli Iron Dome, which will be deployed by 2035 (War on the Rocks, 2026). The war therefore hastened the investment that both nations made in drone abilities and counter-drone technologies, implying that subsequent conflicts will be fought in a more complex and possibly escalatory technological setting.

### Regional and Global Geopolitical Implications

The complex web of international involvement is visualized in Figure 4. Figure 4 shows how China, the United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran each played distinct roles in the crisis.



Figure 4: Major geopolitical actors and their alignments during the May 2025 India-Pakistan crisis

As illustrated in Figure 4, the conflict revealed a multipolar South Asian security architecture where no single power dominated the diplomatic or military landscape.

The geopolitical aspects of operation Sindoor have deep rooted implications beyond the bilateralism of India-Pakistan. This war has radically changed the strategic calculating of China that now needs to consider the possibility of an even more militarily aggressive India that would be ready to use deep strikes on Pakistan - one of the key Chinese strategic allies. The proxy role of China with the transfers of arms to Pakistan and intelligence support (including Turkish-Pakistani ISR cooperation, allegedly intensified since the war) is indicative of the interest of Beijing in avoiding a decisive conventional Indian conventional domination of Pakistan (Observer Research Foundation, 2025). India has rightly realized that it needs to prepare in case of a two-front war between China and Pakistan, which would be a strategic imperative, given the fact that the revelation of the Operation Sindoor has shown both India strengths and weaknesses in conventional warfare.

The reaction by the United States to the conflict brought out some serious uncertainties in

the South Asian policy of Washington. The original Trump administration apathy, when Vice President Vance said it was none of their business, was later replaced by proactive diplomacy when the severity of the conflict caused the concern of the possibility of nuclear spillage. The final role of the U.S. in mediating the ceasefire, as well as the statement of the Secretary of State, Rubio, that the U.S. supports the Indian counter-terrorist goals, indicates a U.S. policy with a broad Indian strategic focus and an aim to avoid nuclear escalation (Congressional Research Service, 2025). This position symbolizes a major convergence of U.S and Indian strategic interests that have strengthened the alliance between the two countries making the U.S. relations with Pakistan difficult.

The war has brought about new diplomatic formations at the regional level. The active mediation of Saudi Arabia, the fact that Iran offers to act as an intermediary, and that Russia is secretly involved with both sides show the multipolar nature of South Asian security governance in 2025. The United Nations appeals to restraint, though symbolically significant, had little practical impact on the course of the conflict - a symptom of the overall decrease in the power of multilateral security institutions in a period of great power politics. The ceasefire, which was finally negotiated through bilateral DGMO-level channels and also through U.S. diplomatic pressure, is an expression of the primacy of bilateral negotiation and mediation by major powers to resolve acute South Asian crises compared to the role of multilateral institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Operation Sindoor is a watershed operation in the South Asian strategic history. The move by India to launch precision strikes deep within Pakistani territory as a response to the Pahalgam terrorists attack was the first move to the abandonment of the post-nuclear strategic restraint that governed Indian military responses to Pakistani-sponsored terrorism since 1998. The exercise revealed that India has not only the military but also the political will to undertake major conventional military action against Pakistan, and to cope with the risk of nuclear escalation, a display that radically changes the deterrence calculus of the subcontinent. The war exposed the vast potential that India has built up in precision strike, air defense integration, and multi-domain warfare, and also highlighted that there were major gaps in the intelligence collection, counter-drone capabilities, and information warfare. The two countries have learned a lot during the 88-hour battle, which will continue to influence their military build-up programmes and doctrine development in the coming years. The introduction of the drone warfare concept, Chinese armaments, and Turkish ISR technology as a new variable of India-Pakistan strategic equation presents new complexities in the relationship that require long-term analytical consideration.

The main academic finding of this article is that Operation Sindoor has not solved, and even exacerbated, the underlying structural antagonisms of South Asian security. New Delhi has generated compelling pressure on Pakistan to stop supporting militant groups, by showing that India would be able to launch deep strikes in response to terrorist provocations. Nevertheless, it has also perhaps reduced the barrier to future military conflicts making crises in a nuclear setting more frequent and severe. The durability of the new deterrence balance created by Operation Sindoor is highly questionable and will heavily hinge on the ability of diplomatic instruments to be created to handle the India-Pakistan rivalry on a level lower than that of military engagement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the discussion in this paper, the following policy suggestions are put forward to be considered by the concerned actors:

### For India and Pakistan

The formal and institutionalized crisis communication frameworks such as a special hotline between the National Security Advisors, formalized procedures of communication between the DGMO level when the crisis escalated, and agreed-upon procedures of notifying the other countries about military exercises on the LoC would greatly lower the risk of miscalculation in the event of future crisis. The current DGMO hotline, although it worked, was not sufficient during the May 2025 sudden escalation. There is an immediate need to have a stronger and more formalized crisis management architecture.

### For the International Community

Long-term diplomatic engagement, and not short-term crisis management is the key to ensuring that there will be no future India-Pakistan military conflicts. The United Nations Security Council, the United States, China and the regional powers ought to come up with a permanent multilateral diplomatic channel of round the clock observation of tensions between India and Pakistan instead of rushing to learn how to manage the crisis only after the two countries have started military hostilities. The diplomatic track that would have ensued the ceasefire in June 2025 should be institutionalized and not left to expire.

### For Pakistan

An essential strategic reevaluation of the usefulness of militant groups as a tool of state policy is badly needed. History of Operation Sindoor shows that the tolerance of India towards cross-border terrorism is officially over, and that any future attacks by Pakistan-based groups will provoke military actions with ever more serious outcomes. The national security interest of Pakistan has become a huge liability in the strategic analysis of cost-benefit of supporting organizations like LeT and JeM.

### For India

Operation Sindoor showed the impressive level of military performance, but the article agrees with Tellis (2025) that military operations should be figured as a supportive component of an overall counter-terrorism and strategic engagement system. The military planning should not be more dominant than the deployment of investment in intelligence infrastructure, ability to conduct covert operations, diplomatic isolation of Pakistan based militant groups and economic leverage instruments. Handling domestic expectations especially the clamor of the populace to take escalatory military action which dominated the post-Operation Sindoor domestic political climate, is a major governance challenge and it needs proactive leadership.

### For Academics and Strategic Thinkers

Operation Sindoor offers the perfect empirical example of how the theoretical constructs that have been used to understand South Asian security need to be reformulated and refined. The deterrence theory, escalation theory, and the analysis of limited war in the nuclear age have implications of the conflict that require a long-term and intensive scholarly focus in the coming years.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Asma Begum:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing - Original draft preparation, Supervision, Project administration. **Uroosa Ahmed:** Methodology, Investigation, Validation, Writing - Reviewing and Editing, Resources, Visualization.

## FUNDING STATEMENT

No specific funding was received for this study.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare no competing interests.

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