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New Normal in India's Security Doctrine: Evaluating the Strategic Significance of Operation Sindoor in Indian Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformation of India's security doctrine in response to persistent cross-border terrorism, with particular emphasis on the strategic significance of Operation SINDOOR (May 2025) in shaping contemporary Indian foreign policy. By tracing major terrorist attacks between 1993 and 2025—including the Mumbai bombings, the Parliament attack, the 26/11 attacks, Pulwama, and the Pahalgam massacre—the study demonstrates that India historically followed a policy of strategic restraint, largely conditioned by nuclear deterrence and escalation risks. Although this approach helped avoid large-scale war, it progressively weakened deterrence credibility and generated mounting domestic and strategic pressure for a more assertive posture. The paper situates Operation SINDOOR within India's post-2014 doctrinal shift toward deterrence-by-punishment, building on earlier precedents such as the Uri surgical strikes and the Balakot air operation. Through an analysis of the operation's objectives, execution, and signaling effects, it highlights how India employed calibrated military force, tri-service coordination, precision targeting, and escalation control to impose costs on terrorist infrastructure while remaining below the nuclear threshold. Operation SINDOOR is thus interpreted not merely as a tactical response, but as a strategic communicative act aimed at redefining red lines in India–Pakistan security relations. Beyond kinetic measures, the paper examines India's concurrent use of diplomatic, economic, and legal instruments, revealing a comprehensive deterrence framework. It concludes that Operation SINDOOR marks a decisive inflection point, signaling India's transition from reactive restraint to a proactive, deterrence-oriented security doctrine.

Keywords*:* Operation SINDOOR; India's Security Doctrine; Cross-Border Terrorism; Deterrence-by-Punishment; India–Pakistan Relations.

1. Introduction

India has confronted cross-border terrorism for more than three decades, particularly emanating from Pakistan-based militant networks operating in Jammu and Kashmir. Recurrent high-profile attacks have repeatedly exposed the vulnerabilities in India's security posture and raised fundamental questions regarding deterrence, escalation, and state responsibility. Major incidents—including the 1993 Bombay (Mumbai) bombings, the 2001 assault on the Indian Parliament, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing—have underscored the persistence and severity of the threat posed by Pakistan-supported militant organisations (A Compilation of Pakistani Terrorist Attacks in India: 1989–2025 - Part I, 2025).

Historically, India's response to such attacks was constrained by a policy of strategic restraint. Successive governments relied primarily on diplomatic pressure, international mobilisation, and limited military posturing, largely due to concerns over escalation under the shadow of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan (Jose, 2025). While this approach helped avoid full-scale war, it failed to impose substantial costs on perpetrators and gradually eroded deterrence credibility. As terrorist violence continued unabated, domestic dissatisfaction and strategic reassessment increasingly questioned the sustainability of restraint as an effective security doctrine.

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A significant shift became evident after 2014, when India began to move away from passive restraint toward calibrated military responses. This transition was reflected in the 2016 Uri surgical strikes and the 2019 Balakot air operation, which signalled India's willingness to employ limited force across borders in response to major terrorist provocations. The evolution of this approach culminated in Operation SINDOOR (May 2025). Following the operation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi explicitly described India's response framework as a "new normal," indicating a decisive doctrinal shift that treats large-scale terrorist attacks as acts of war warranting strong retaliation (Jose, 2025).

This paper analyses the evolution of India's security doctrine through the lens of Operation SINDOOR. It examines the operation's objectives, execution, and strategic implications, situating it within India's broader defence modernisation, deterrence strategy, and regional diplomacy. In doing so, the study assesses how Operation SINDOOR represents a pivotal moment in India's foreign and security policy, redefining deterrence thresholds and shaping India's future approach to cross-border terrorism.

1.1 Historical Overview of Major Terrorist Attacks

Since the early 1990s, India has suffered recurring terrorist attacks, many traced to Pakistan-based groups. In March 1993, 12 bombs simultaneously exploded across Bombay (now Mumbai), killing 257 people and wounding over 1,400. These coordinated blasts, orchestrated by Dawood Ibrahim's network (with ISI aid), targeted major landmarks (stock exchange, hotels, offices). Other deadly 1990s incidents include the February 1998 Coimbatore bombings (12 blasts, 58 dead) and the December 2000 attack on Delhi's Red Fort (killing 2 soldiers and 1 civilian). In December 2001, terrorists stormed the Indian Parliament in New Delhi. This assault – killing several security personnel (and five attackers) – marked one of the gravest threats to India's capital (killing at least 7 individuals) (Miglani, 2001). In response, India mobilized Operation Parakram along the Pakistan border but eventually refrained from full-scale war.

The new millennium saw further strikes. In November 2008, Lashkar-e-Taiba militants executed the **26/11 Mumbai attacks**, seizing multiple locations (Taj Hotel, Oberoi, Chhatrapati Shivaji Station, etc.) for three days and killing 166 people. In July 2011, Delhi was shaken by synchronized bombings (72 dead) claimed by Indian Mujahideen. In July 2013, bombs at Bodh Gaya temple killed 5 pilgrims. More recently, attacks on military bases underscored high-threat levels: the January 2016 Pathankot airbase attack (7 soldiers killed) and the September 2016 Uri base attack (19 soldiers dead) prompted Indian outrage. The worst single incident in recent years was the February 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing, when a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) operative killed 40 CRPF personnel.

These episodes, among many, illustrate the pattern of recurring violence. Terror groups (LeT, JeM, Hizbul Mujahideen, etc.) frequently operated from camps in Pakistan or Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, often with local support (funding, arms) and state acquiescence. Repeatedly, attacks occurred even as India attempted dialogue and normalcy with Pakistan, undermining peace efforts. Collectively, the toll of terrorism and the frustration over limited Indian responses set the stage for a re-evaluation of doctrine.

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Table 1

Major Terror Attacks in India and Their Officially Attributed Perpetrators (1993–2025)

Date / Period	Attack / Incident	Casualties	Claimed / Attributed To
12 March 1993	Serial bomb blasts in Mumbai (13 bombs across hotels, offices, markets)	**257 killed**	Attributed to Dawood Ibrahim's network (with Lashkar-e-Taiba / Pakistani support)
13 December 2001	Attack on Indian Parliament, Delhi	**~30 killed** (security personnel + others)	Linked to Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), alleged backing by Pakistani ISI
26–29 November 2008	Mumbai terrorist siege (hotels, station, public places)	**~166 killed** (some sources cite 149+)	Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)
January 2016	Pathankot Air Force Base attack (Punjab)	**7 security personnel**	Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)
September 2016	Uri attack, Jammu & Kashmir — Indian Army brigade HQ	**19 soldiers**	Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) (alleged)
February 2019	Pulwama attack, Jammu & Kashmir — suicide VBIED on CRPF convoy	**40 CRPF personnel**	Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)
22 April 2025	Attack on tourists at a meadow near Pahalgam (J&K)	**26 civilians killed** (including **1 Nepali citizen**)	The Resistance Front (TRF), believed by Indian authorities to be an LeT offshoot with Pakistani backing

(Based on findings from official investigations and government reports)

1.2 The Pahalgam Terror Attack and Public Sentiment

On 22 April 2025, a major terrorist attack occurred near Baisaran Valley in Pahalgam, in the Indian region of Jammu and Kashmir, when armed militants opened fire on a group of tourists. The attack resulted in the killing of 26 civilians and injuries to more than 20 others, marking one of the deadliest assaults on civilians in the region in recent years. The assailants targeted tourists, most of whom were Hindu, reportedly checking their names and asking them to recite Islamic verses before shooting them at point-blank range. A local Muslim pony ride operator who attempted to intervene was also killed. The incident involved weapons such as AK-47 rifles and M4 carbines and was widely characterised by authorities and the media as a mass shooting and a terror attack.

The Government of India strongly condemned the attack. The Prime Minister's Office issued an official statement expressing deep grief and reaffirming India's resolve to combat terrorism. In his statement, the Prime Minister condemned the "heinous act," extended condolences to the families of the victims, and emphasised that "those behind this act will be brought to justice," while reiterating the government's commitment to strengthening counter-terrorism efforts (Prime Minister Strongly Condemns the Terror Attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, 2025). The Supreme Court of India also adopted a resolution condemning the carnage as a "cowardly act" that shook the conscience of the nation and observed silence in solidarity with the victims and their families (Supreme Court of India Condemns the Terrorist Attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir | Supreme Court of India | India, 2025).

Internationally, the attack sparked widespread condemnation. The Indian government's Press Information Bureau (PIB) reported that nations including the European Union, Saudi Arabia, the Maldives, and Palestine voiced their denunciation of the violence and expressed solidarity with India in its fight against terrorism. Several

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countries explicitly condemned the targeting of civilians and called for bringing the perpetrators to justice (Global Solidarity with India: A United Front against Cross-Border Terrorism, 2025).

The public mood across India in the aftermath was one of shock, grief, and heightened concern about national security. Outrage was expressed across political and social spectrums, with widespread demands for a firm response to terrorism. Relatives of victims publicly urged the government to take decisive action against those responsible and questioned ongoing engagements, such as bilateral sporting events with Pakistan. This reflected the intensity of anger and the demand for accountability that pervaded sections of Indian society following the massacre (Desk, 2025).

The attack also triggered a renewed debate on the effectiveness of India's security strategy in Kashmir and underscored concerns about the resilience of militant networks in the region. The public response reflected both profound mourning for the victims and significant anxiety about the trajectory of militancy and inter-state tensions in South Asia (Reuters Staff, 2025).

Overall, the Pahalgam terror attack represents a calculated strategy of mass-casualty civilian targeting designed to inflame communal fault lines and challenge India's claims of stabilisation in Jammu and Kashmir. The unified condemnation by India's executive, judiciary, and

international actors, coupled with intense domestic public outrage, illustrates how such attacks not only seek to generate fear but also shape strategic discourse by amplifying demands for deterrence-oriented responses. Consequently, the episode underscores the interaction between terrorism, public sentiment, and the evolving contours of India's security doctrine in a volatile regional environment.

2. India's Policy of Restraint and Its Limitations

For decades India largely practiced *strategic restraint* after terrorist strikes by Pakistan-affiliated groups. This meant avoiding full-scale retaliation or war, in deference to the nuclear balance. Analysts note two main constraints: Pakistan's use of deniable proxy warfare and the risk of nuclear escalation. Pakistan has consistently denied official involvement in terrorism, allowing militant actors "to pose perennial security challenges" for India. Since both countries have maintained declared nuclear arsenals (post-1998), India feared that any robust conventional retaliation could spiral into nuclear conflict. As Ashok Behuria of IDSA observes, the "open nuclear deterrence" since 1998 has "prevented any possible Indian pre-emptive or punitive action" (K. Behuria, 2024).

The result was that even after major attacks, India's reaction was often limited to diplomatic protests, sanctions (e.g. expelling envoys, halting talks), and border mobilizations. For example, the 2001 Parliament attack triggered Operation Parakram, a massive military mobilization, but ultimately no invasion. Parakram may have had some deterrent effect on Pakistan, but was "perceived as a cost-ineffective and an expensive counter-measure" with little tangible payoff. Similarly, after the 2008 Mumbai siege and other assaults, India lodged protest with the UN, pushed Pakistan diplomatically, and briefly tightened border security, but refrained from striking Pakistani territory.

This *policy of restraint* was driven by pragmatism: India did not want to be seen as the aggressor nor risk spiraling conflict. As one commentator put it, successive Indian governments under restraint "take largely diplomatic actions (suspending dialogue, expelling diplomats, issuing condemnations)" after attacks, since "military action was considered too risky under the nuclear umbrella" (Jose, 2025). However, this approach drew growing domestic criticism; by 2014 many Indians felt it allowed attackers to act with impunity. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi campaigned on the promise to no longer "absorb terrorist attacks forever". In sum, while restraint avoided war, it also exposed limitations in deterring terrorism. Over time India's leadership and public opinion coalesced around the view that some form of punitive response was necessary to ensure security.

3. Emergence of the "New Normal" Security Doctrine

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Against this backdrop, a clear strategic shift has emerged in India's doctrine. After 2014 India began to emphasize **"decisive retaliation"** and proactive measures. Notably, after the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, India undertook unprecedented cross-border strikes (surgical strikes and the Balakot air raid). These actions demonstrated a departure from mere restraint. Prime Minister Modi publicly framed this as a *new paradigm*. In his May 2025 address following Operation Sindoor, Modi declared that SINDOOR "redefined the fight against terror …setting a new standard and a new normal in counter-terrorism measures". He outlined the pillars of India's new security doctrine: (1) **Decisive retaliation** – any terrorist attack will elicit a strong Indian response targeting terror infrastructure; (2) **No tolerance for nuclear blackmail** – India will not be deterred by threats of Pakistan's nuclear weapons; and (3) **No distinction between terrorists and their sponsors** – the state backing terrorism will be held accountable just like the militants (Times of India, 2025).

The government has further codified these ideas as red lines. In his August 2025 Independence Day speech, Modi summarized five "new normals": firm response to attacks, zero tolerance for nuclear threats, equating terrorists with sponsors, prioritizing terrorism in any dialogue, and no compromise on sovereignty (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025). For example, Modi famously stated "terror and talks cannot go together, terror and trade cannot go together, and blood and water cannot flow together," signalling that both diplomatic engagement and economic ties with Pakistan would be conditional on ending cross-border terrorism. In practical terms, this doctrine means India will actively target the locations from which terrorists operate, rather than waiting to be attacked. As the PIB noted, the "pattern of action over the last decade" – surgical strikes (2016), Balakot (2019), and now Sindoor (2025) – reflects this firmer policy (ibid).

Scholars describe this as moving from "exception" to "expectation." Walter Ladwig of RUSI comments that India now treats cross-border strikes *against terrorist targets* as the norm – if militants attack India, a response of equal or greater magnitude may follow (Ladwig, 2025). A Middle East Institute analysis likewise emphasizes that Modi's "new normal" rejects earlier restraint, declaring that India will retaliate against terrorist acts with full force and will "no longer be deterred by the threat of nuclear escalation" (Ali, 2025). In sum, India's security doctrine has recalibrated: terrorism emanating from Pakistan is met not just with protests, but with integrated military and non-military measures, underpinned by the aim of deterrence by punishment.

4. Operation Sindoor: Strategic Objectives and Execution

Operation SINDOOR can be analytically interpreted as a deliberate exercise in strategic messaging rather than a purely tactical military response. Embedded within India's post-2016 departure from a doctrine of strategic restraint, the operation was designed to convey a clear deterrent signal to Pakistan by demonstrating India's readiness to impose costs at the sub-conventional level while deliberately remaining below the nuclear threshold. Consistent with deterrence theory—particularly Thomas Schelling's conception of military action as a form of communication—the operation functioned as a signalling mechanism aimed at reshaping Pakistan's expectations regarding the costs of sponsoring cross-border terrorism.

Operation SINDOOR (May 6–10, 2025) was launched in immediate response to the terrorist ambush in Pahalgam on April 22, 2025, which resulted in the deaths of 26 civilians, primarily Hindu pilgrims. The strategic objective was explicitly punitive, with the stated aim of "eliminating terrorists" and dismantling the infrastructure enabling their operations (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025). According to official statements, India identified nine major terrorist camps across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir linked to groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Operating under strict rules of engagement designed to minimise civilian casualties, India executed precision strikes employing drones, missiles, and aircraft (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025).

A notable feature of the operation was the coordinated employment of all three services, underscoring both capability and resolve. The Indian Air Force reportedly targeted airfields and radar installations at locations such as Nur Khan and Sargodha, while the Army and Navy secured the Line of Control and the western seaboard

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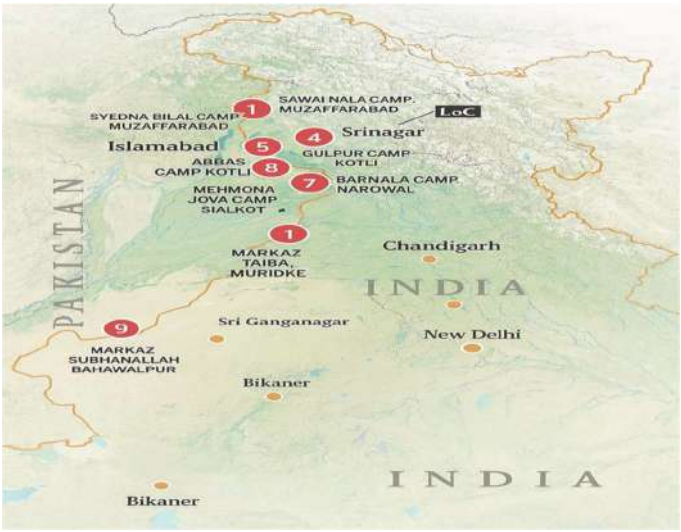
respectively to prevent escalation and infiltration. The emphasis on intelligence-led targeting further reinforced the signalling dimension of the operation. As articulated by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, Operation SINDOOR was "focused, measured and non-escalatory," with initial strikes deliberately confined to terrorist infrastructure (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025). Collectively, these features transformed Operation SINDOOR into a calibrated strategic message—one intended not only to punish but to redefine deterrence thresholds in India–Pakistan security dynamics.

Fig. 1 Geospatial Overview of the 9 Terror Camps in Pakistan and PoK Hit in Operation Sindoor



The **execution** was swift but carefully calibrated. On day one (May 7), Indian forces struck designated targets under strict limitations: they **did not** engage Pakistani fighter jets or pre-emptively suppress air defenses, even after Pakistani jets appeared in the sky (Ladwig, 2025). This discipline – accepting the risk of some losses – reflected political intent to signal resolve without opening a full war. India's multi-layered air defenses (legacy Russian/Soviet SAMs like Akash and Pechora, plus US Phalanx and Israeli Barak systems) protected its territory; these weapons successfully shot down incoming Pakistani drones and missiles (Kumar et al., 2025). By May 8–9, Pakistani forces conducted retaliatory strikes ("Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos"), launching drones, missiles and Chinese-supplied J-10 fighters into Indian airspace (Ladwig, 2025). India's defenses shot most of these down, with limited damage reported.

Over the five-day engagement, India achieved its stated military goals with minimal collateral damage. More than 100 militants (including leaders linked to past attacks) were killed, and the targeted camps were extensively damaged. Importantly, no major Indian military facilities were struck. The stand-down came when Pakistan requested a ceasefire on May 10. Throughout, India maintained a narrative of restraint: public briefings repeatedly asserted that only terrorist sites were targeted and that Pakistan's territory was struck only "because it harboured terrorists" (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025).

Analysts highlight the operation's **military implications**. Carnegie India notes that SINDOOR was "perhaps the most significant and daring military strikes by India on Pakistani targets since 1971," showcasing new capabilities (Peri, 2025). The use of long-range precision weapons (for example, BrahMos missiles launched from Su-30MKI fighters) and integrated ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) networks was key to success(ibid). Crucially, India's forces demonstrated a high level of jointness (coordinated by the new Chief of Defence Staff) and exploited recently adopted technologies (drones, AI-aided sensors). On the other side, Pakistan's employment of Chinese technology (J-10s, PL-15 missiles, CH-4 drones) underscored a new Sino-Pak

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operational synergy (Pant & Rawat, 2025). Indeed, observers note that for the first time since 1971, a pronounced military asymmetry in India's favour has been established (Peri, 2025).

On the **policy and strategic** level, Operation SINDOOR made a statement. The Modi government used the operation to *legally* change the rules of engagement: it declared that a failure by Pakistan to act against militant sanctuaries is itself justification for strikes (Ladwig, 2025). In practice, India simultaneously applied other forms of pressure – suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, closing the Attari border, imposing trade embargoes and visa bans – to amplify deterrence. As the MEI analysis notes, SINDOOR was a "broad-based response integrating both kinetic and non-kinetic measures" that amounted to a comprehensive shock to Pakistan's support system for terrorism (Ali, 2025).

Internationally, India sought to manage escalation. Officially, New Delhi emphasized disciplined engagement under the nuclear threshold. At no point did India issue nuclear threats. India's strategy was *calibrated*: shape the narrative, hit the targets, and step back before a spiral. Walter Ladwig (2025) argues that India's "restraint on the first day" and strict mission focus likely prevented a broader war, and that the conflict demonstrated how limited conventional strikes can be "contained under the shadow of nuclear weapons" if escalation thresholds are observed. This contained nature was underscored by the absence of public nuclear brinkmanship (even U.S. commentary about a "bad nuclear war" was deemed exaggerated in hindsight).

5. Defence Modernization and Budget Trends

Operation SINDOOR's success reflects a decade of heavy investment in India's military. Since 2013–14, India has dramatically increased defence spending. The defence budget (including pensions) rose from about ₹2.53 lakh crore in 2013–14 to an estimated ₹6.81 lakh crore in 2025–26(*PIB*, 2025) – nearly tripling in nominal terms. Concurrently, India has boosted domestic production and exports of military equipment. Indigenous defence output reached a record ₹1.27 lakh crore in 2023–24 (a 174% surge over 2014–15), and defence exports hit ₹23,622 crore in 2024–25 (over 30 times the level of a decade earlier). These figures reflect India's *Atmanirbharta* (self-reliance) push, with reforms like the Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020, liberalized FDI, and positive indigenization lists driving a stronger domestic industry(ibid).

On the **modernization** front, the armed forces have acquired new capabilities that proved critical in SINDOOR. The Air Force's fleet of Su-30MKIs, now armed with the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, enabled deep strikes with precision (Peri, 2025). The IAF's integrated air defence (Prithvi Air Defence and Advanced Air Defence) and Army's Surface-to-Air Missiles (Akash, OSA-AK, Pechora) ensured protective cover. Upgrades to early-warning radars, drones, and cybersecurity infrastructure have improved situational awareness. Simultaneously, the creation of the **Chief of Defence Staff** (2019) and plans for tri-service theatre commands have enhanced joint planning. Indeed, the SINDOOR press release highlights that India now has a unified command structure for cyber and space operations and is moving to integrate forces by theatre (Kumar, Kataria, Patiyal, et al., 2025). In short, India's qualitative military edge – built through decades of procurement and reforms – provided the capacity for the calibrated strikes.

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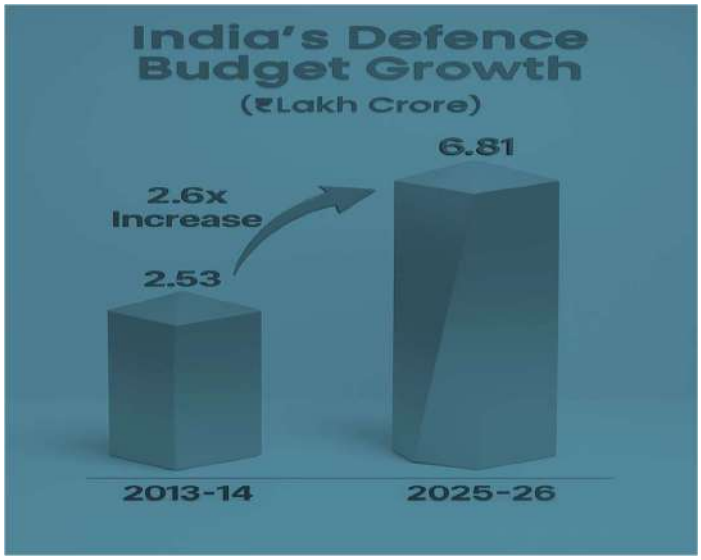
Fig. 2



6. Proactive Diplomacy and Deterrence-Based Response

Operation SINDOOR illustrates India's broader shift from passive to proactive measures in foreign policy and security. Beyond direct military action, India employed diplomatic and economic tools to maximize pressure on Pakistan. Within days of the attack, India **held Pakistan accountable** in international forums, exposing its terror networks. Domestically, Modi's government invoked the doctrine "terror cannot be separated from sponsors," and moved to diplomatically isolate Pakistan. Key measures included suspending the Indus Waters Treaty (projecting "blood and water cannot flow together", closing land trade routes and exports (including halting onion shipments, a staple Pakistani import), and revoking visas or expelling Pakistani diplomats. Pakistan's cultural footprint was also rolled back – all Pakistani artists were banned and media exchanges cut off. These actions inflicted immediate economic pain and symbolic losses on Pakistan, reinforcing India's message of "zero tolerance" for state-sponsored terror (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025).

India's diplomatic outreach mirrored this stance. The government tasked seven multi-party delegations to visit over 30 countries across the globe. New Delhi sought international backing to delegitimize Pakistan's proxy war: it highlighted evidence of ISI involvement and warned that any attacks from Pakistani soil would be met with force. For example, India curtailed all bilateral initiatives with Pakistan, demanding any resumption of talks be on India's terms (focusing only on terrorism and Kashmir). According to the PIB, India "diplomatically and economically isolated Pakistan" through policy measures, gaining global support for its position (Kumar, Kataria, & Rane, 2025). At the United Nations and with key partners (US, Russia, Middle East), India has consistently placed cross-border terrorism at the top of its agenda postures. This proactive diplomacy signals to adversaries and allies alike that India is building a coalition of legitimacy behind its deterrent strategy.

This deterrence-based response is not without risk. Scholars caution that "deterrence by punishment carries inherent risks" (Ladwig, 2025). RUSI notes that aggressive retaliation could invite further provocation by fringe actors seeking to draw India into unwinnable confrontations. Maintaining domestic and international support for punitive strikes also requires careful narrative management (as India experienced with misinformation campaigns during Sindoor. To sustain this posture, experts suggest India improve crisis communications (beyond just military channels) and intelligence linking to pre-empt escalations. Nonetheless, the Modi government has so

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far balanced its "resolve" with caution: cross-border operations are well-planned and limited to terror targets, with clear stop signals to avoid full-scale war(ibid).

7. India–Pakistan–China Strategic Dynamics and the Two-Front Challenge

Operation SINDOOR must be understood in the larger regional context of India's relationships with both Pakistan and China. Pakistan's strategy – long characterized as a "two-front" threat – involves sustaining asymmetric warfare via jihadist proxies (West) and modernizing its conventional tie-up with China (East). China and Pakistan have deepened military cooperation, testing India's defences from both flanks. During the SINDOOR crisis, Pakistan's use of Chinese weapons (J-10 jets, PL-15 air-to-air missiles, Chinese origin surveillance drones) and China's deployment of the Da Yang Yihao survey ship in the Indian Ocean underscored this alignment (Pant & Rawat, 2025). As national-interest analysts Pant and Rawat (2025) note, the **China–Pakistan nexus** is now operationally convergent: Pakistan emulates Chinese tactics, and together they pose a real two-front challenge to India. Historically, India has prepared for such a scenario: its Army doctrine explicitly calls for readiness to hit Pakistan quickly (Cold Start) then redeploy towards China in the Himalayas (Ahmad, 2010). Building two strong offensive fronts remains difficult and resource-intensive, as IDSA analysts warned a decade ago(ibid).

In recent years, Sino-Indian relations have also been fraught (e.g. border clashes in Ladakh, infrastructure buildup in Tibet). Thus, India cannot ignore China's role. Operation Sindoor and Pakistan's counter-attack happened under the shadow of China: India reported electronic warfare interference and viewed Pakistan's strikes as aided by China's Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities. In diplomatic terms, the India-China conflict and the India-Pakistan conflict have become interlinked. The Modi government's *new normal* treats any attack stemming from that broader front as India's affair: it has signalled that Pakistan's "failure to control or deny space to terrorist groups" makes military action legitimate, implicitly warning China as well not to shelter terror infrastructure.

At the same time, India is leveraging partnerships to offset the two-front threat. It has deepened ties with the US, Russia, and regional blocs (e.g. Quad, SCO) to gain diplomatic cover and arms. U.S. governments have voiced concern over Pakistani terrorism, even if unwilling to confront Pakistan openly. India's increased defence exports to over 100 nations, including the United States, France, and Armenia, along with its participation in joint military exercises, enhance both interoperability and deterrence (*Defence Atmanirbharta: Record Production and Exports*, 2025).Domestically, India is accelerating military modernization (e.g. acquiring new missiles, long-range radar, and networked communications) and reorganizing its command (theatre commands are being formed) to better handle simultaneous threats.

India's contemporary security doctrine recognizes national security as a multi-dimensional construct shaped by military, diplomatic, and geopolitical factors. Militarily, Operation Sindoor signifies a transition from reactive restraint to a more proactive, capability-driven deterrence posture on the western front against Pakistan. Diplomatically, India is deepening strategic partnerships with major global powers to isolate adversaries and reinforce its operational red lines. Nevertheless, this approach faces persistent challenges arising from the complex flux of global geopolitics and Pakistan's sensitive geographical and strategic position.

8. Conclusion

Operation SINDOOR has marked a watershed in India's foreign and security policy. By swiftly striking terrorist camps across the border while exercising operational restraint, India set a powerful precedent – declaring that future terror attacks will be met with full-spectrum retaliation. Our analysis shows that Sindoor's success was built on years of defence modernization, improved military integration, and readiness to use cross-border force. It

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represents India's broader "new normal": refusing to be passive under nuclear umbrellas and holding even state sponsors of terror to account.

Key findings include: (1) **Shift in Doctrine:** India's doctrine now equates large-scale terror with direct aggression, justifying calibrated military response. (2) **Integrated Response:** The operation combined precision strikes with economic and diplomatic warfare (Indus Treaty abeyance, trade bans, visa denials), reflecting a comprehensive deterrence approach. (3) **Deterrence and Risk:** While such deterrence-by-punishment can dissuade adversaries, it also requires careful escalation management (via communication channels and intelligence) to avoid unintended wars. (4) **Regional Implications:** China's support for Pakistan underscores a continued two-front challenge; India's renewed assertiveness compels Beijing to consider risks of sheltering militant networks.

Implications for the future: India will likely continue its proactive posture, calibrating retaliation as part of its national security toolkit. The "new normal" raises the deterrence threshold against Pakistan, but also obliges India to maintain credible capabilities and alliances. At home, the government has committed to never again seeing terrorism as an uncontested threat, which in turn drives further military reform and defence spending. Regionally, the balance has subtly shifted: India can no longer be coerced easily, but must also guard against escalation by others. The long-term effectiveness of this doctrine will depend on sustaining military readiness and international cooperation to pressure terror actors. Regardless, Operation SINDOOR has definitively signalled that India's security doctrine now prioritizes **decisive retaliation and deterrence** as essential to its foreign policy in the "new normal."

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