



By Strategic Studies Centre

# OPERATION SINDOOR

*Strategic Actions and  
Future Implications*

GEOSTRATA

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Future Implications*

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# Prelude to Operation Sindoor: Context, Crisis & Strategic Imperatives

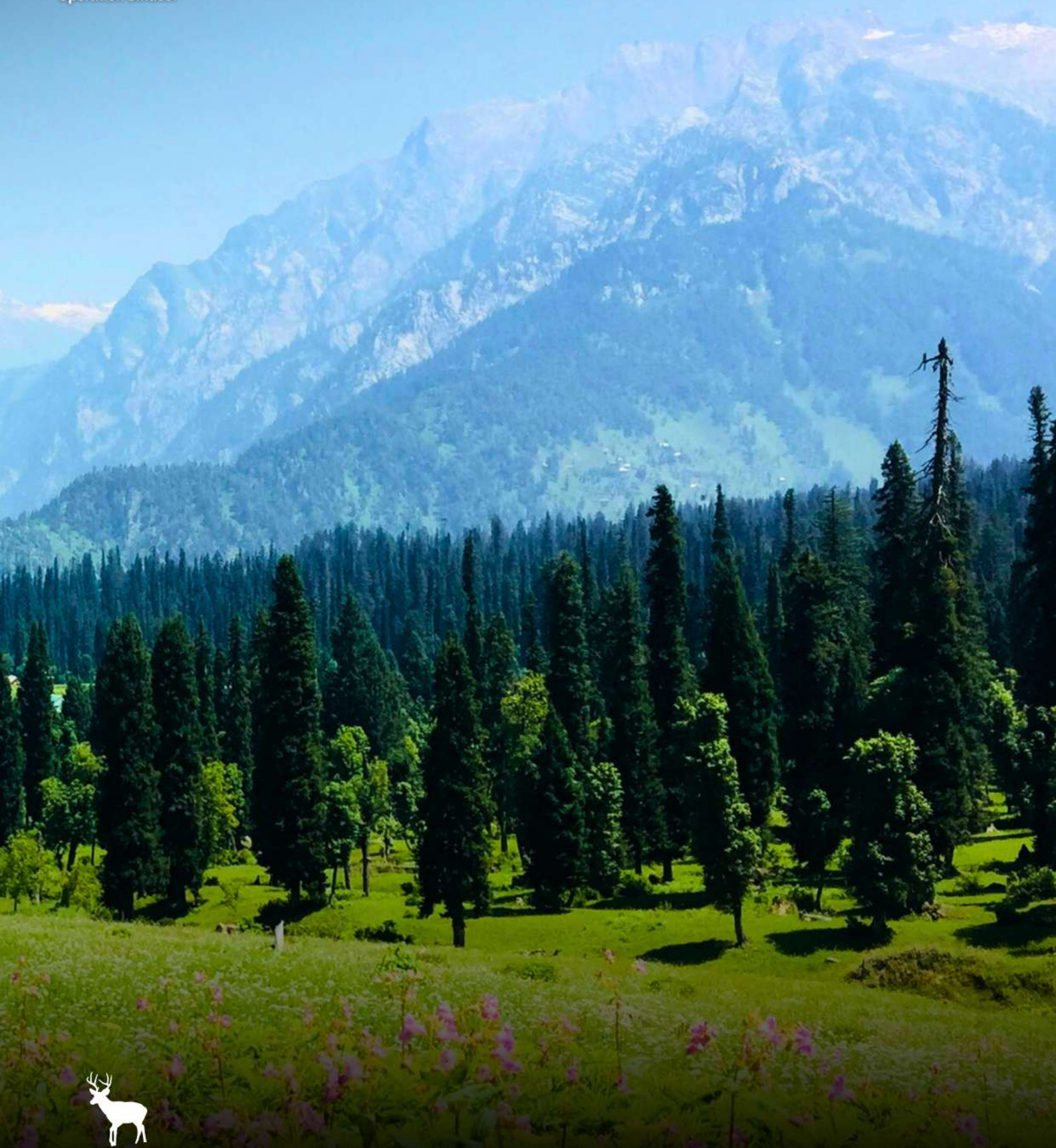
## BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The normalcy which was actively being brought into perspective post the abrogation of Article 370, couldn't have been attacked from a better location.

Pahalgam, a tourist hub in the Anantnag district of South Kashmir, is the most significant among the two routes of the Amarnath Yatra. It can be considered as a symbol for a peaceful and economically lively valley. This makes it a prime target for terrorist groups as their intent is to disrupt normalcy and economic activities and revive militancy optics in Kashmir. The normalcy which was actively being brought into perspective post the abrogation of Article 370, couldn't have been attacked from a better location.

Baisaran Meadow was chosen as the spot of the attack for its favourable geography too. The 'mini-Switzerland' is situated 5.5-6 KMs southeast of the Pahalgam town. To reach Baisaran, one needs to go through a serpentine trek route passing through streams, dense forests, and muddy stretches. Largely this route is unmotorable and only means to travel is by ponies, horses, or by walking. One needs an hour to trek to Baisaran from Pahalgam. Deep gorges on all sides, makes this trek route the only accessible route. Even emergency responders would need 30-40 minutes to reach the spot. Lack of security presence in the area is also a strategic marker for the terror operatives to select this spot.

Pahalgam was mostly considered as a secure and safe zone before the attacks in April 2025. Intelligence inputs as said did not indicate any immediate threats, and the particular region did not witness any terror activity for a considerable amount of time. Kashmir's broader security environment however saw a peculiar change in strategies taken up by the terror outfits like The Resistance Front (TRF), wherein rather than targeting high-profile security targets or military infrastructures, soft civilians were made the target. This shift showed a desperation and an attempt to regain relevance in the picture because of the decreasing trends of the terror activities, or stone pelting since the abrogation of article 370.



**Baisaran Meadow was chosen as the spot of the attack for its favourable geography too. The ‘mini-Switzerland’ is situated 5.5-6 KMs southeast of the Pahalgam town.**





The assailants reached Baisaran on foot through dense pine forests of the southern side, and utilised the absence of any surveillance. They carried assault rifles, upon reaching they segregated victims on the basis of religion. Then they asked the non-Muslims to recite Islamic verses, failing to do so, Hindu men were executed at close range and their wives and children were left alive to narrate this ordeal to the world. This targeted, symbolic violence was done to create psychological rifts among the people on the basis of religion, mirrors previous radical Islamist patterns and exploited gaps in area-specific security deployment.

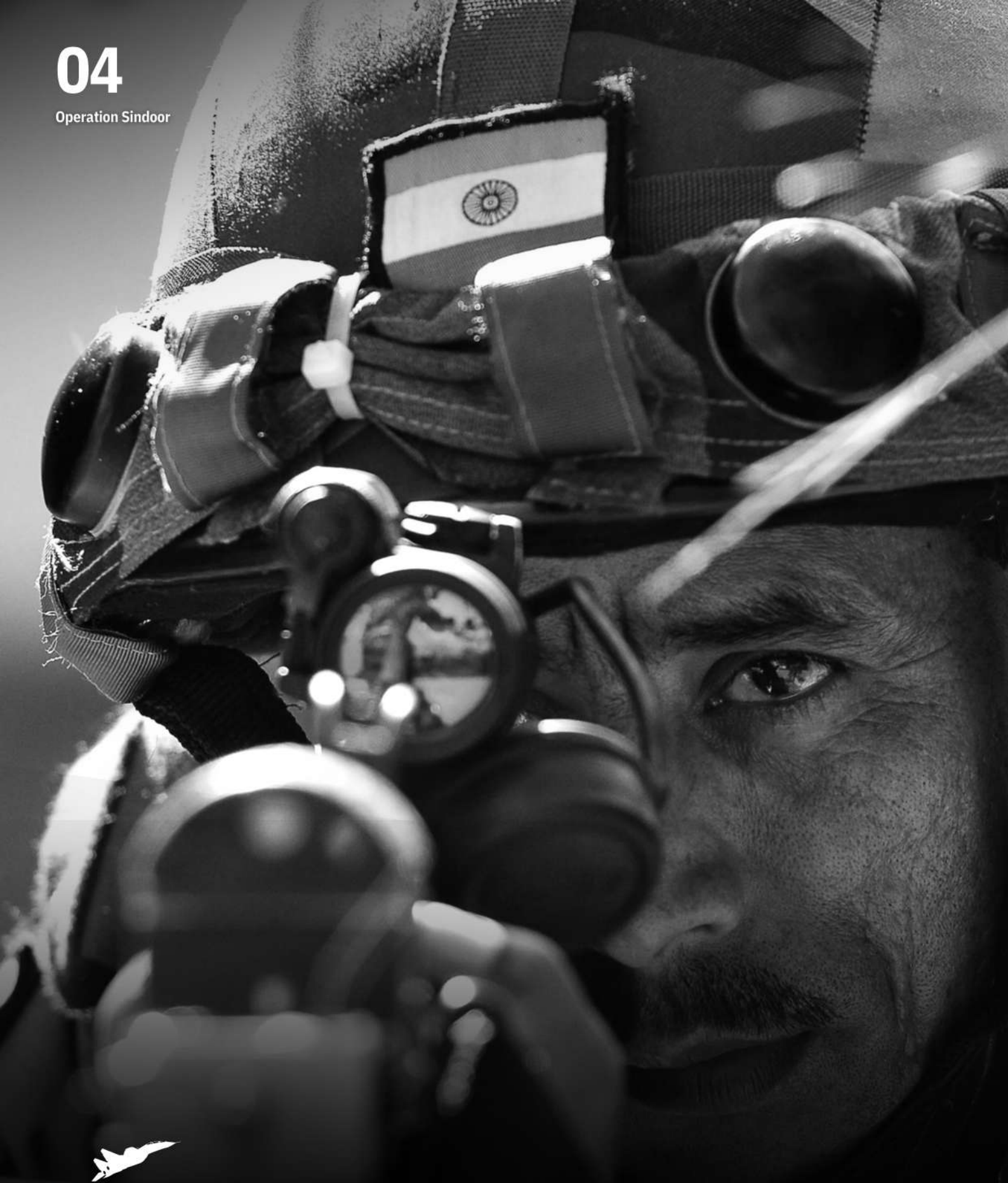
### **OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES OF SINDOOR**

Operation Sindoor has a well thought out operational blueprint with clear objectives to attain. These can be presented in three distinct time frames - immediate, medium, and long-term goals, all of which are guided by a strategic political-military intent.

The primary aim was to deliver a swift, decisive and precise retaliation against the terrorist outfits and infrastructures responsible for the Pahalgam terror attack. Indian forces on the night of 6th May 2025, targeted and took out Nine terrorist facilities deep within Pakistani territory.

Beyond immediate retaliation, the operation sought to degrade the operational capabilities of terrorist organisations by systematically dismantling their infrastructure. Disruption of terrorist networks, reducing overall Infiltration, and Strengthening Border Security are some of the other medium-term goals for this operation. The intent was to send a clear message that India's proportion of strikes will be decided by India only.

In the long-term, Operation Sindoor aims to strategically establish a new paradigm of deterrence in the region. This paradigm puts up a strong message of decisive deterrence and doesn't stop at non-state actors only, in that endeavour.



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This was demonstrated by conducting precise military operations and attacking the military infrastructure of Pakistan too. This careful targeting showed both India's capability and its commitment to responsible warfare. Operation Sindoor in the long run tries to reshape both the geopolitical and strategic landscape of South Asia, not merely a military campaign, it was a multidimensional assertion of India's sovereignty, resolve, and global standing.

The operation showed India's strategic shift towards a proactive defence posture, focusing on a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism. Political intent behind Operation Sindoor was to break off from its previous stance of strategic ambiguity on cross-border terrorism in hope of a peaceful settlement which was utopian. India now talks straight with political clarity of zero-tolerance.

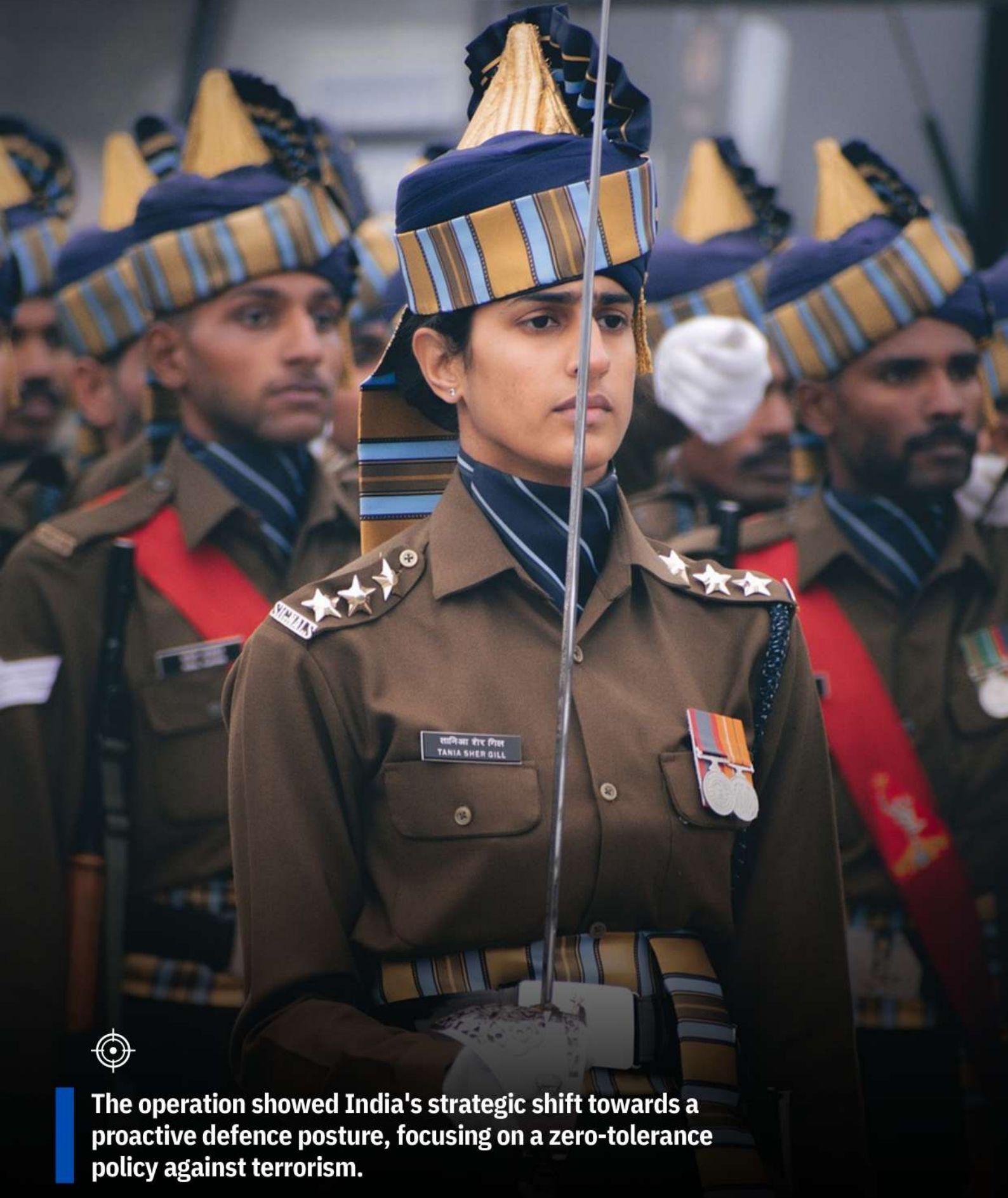
Militarily, the intent of the operation was to evolve and implement a doctrine of strict, punitive deterrence, without reaching the nuclear threshold or beginning a full blown war. A lesson for other nuclear dyads like North and South Korea. At the operational level, the Indian Armed Forces showed the ability to conduct integrated, cross-domain campaigns with excellent coordination. Another aspect was to promote, showcase, and establish the capabilities of the Indian indigenous weapons, military technology, and defence systems.

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Operation Sindoor was not merely a tactical act of retaliation. It was a well calibrated, firm, and strategic statement made to both state and non-state actors. Attacks on Pakistan's critical military infrastructures, gave out a strong message that the options of India's response are not limited anymore. Pakistan's military-intelligence nexus that uses proxy warfare, would now invite tangible military costs.

For non-state actors like The Lashkar-e-Taiba or the JeM, Operation Sindoor has formulated a new risk mechanism wherein, India strikes preemptively and publicly. These actors now enjoy no impunity and shelter under the security cover given by another country.





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After the horrific Pahalgam Terror Attack, the public morale was significantly affected. This operation boosted the public morale, reinforced their confidence in the capabilities of the armed forces. It's a psychological closure after the traumatic experience of the Pahalgam killings. This decisive action against terrorism, will instill courage among the people to continue with their travelling endeavours. Pahalgam is an important route for the Amarnath Yatra, with that being opened on 3rd July 2025, pilgrims will now feel a lot safer.

On the strategic front, Operation Sindoor marked an evolution in India's internal security doctrine too. Domestic terror responses will now have external military repercussions. The Pahalgam attack also showed the lapse in internal security mechanisms applied to tourist spots. The doctrine has been enhanced and made more watertight post these events.





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# The Conduct of Operation Sindoor- Forces, Fieldwork and Frictions

## AREA OF OPERATIONS (AOO)

The Indian Military utilised precision-guided munitions such as the Scalp cruise missile and HAMMER guided air-to-ground bomb to ensure zero collateral damage.

On the first day of Operation Sindoor, the Indian Army and Air Force targeted nine terrorist camps belonging to the Pakistan-based terrorist organisations: Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Hizbul Mujahideen in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Five targets were in PoJK, while the other four were in Pakistan. The attacks were carried out from Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan. The Indian Military utilised precision-guided munitions such as the Scalp cruise missile and HAMMER guided air-to-ground bombs to ensure zero collateral damage.

The Indian Government had announced a nationwide mock drill on 7th May, to assess and prepare the Indian populace for a potential conflict. The alignment of the commencement of Operation Sindoor with the nationwide mock drill was done to ensure minimal civilian casualties in case of retaliation by Pakistan.

Pakistan retaliated to the strikes on the terrorist camps by launching drones and missile strikes against multiple military installations across Northern and Western India, and further aimed to instil fear through indiscriminate artillery shelling across the Line of Control in the Poonch and Rajouri sectors.

## FORCE COMPOSITION AND DEPLOYMENT

During Operation Sindoor, both sides heavily deployed loitering munitions such as the IAI Harops and the TB-2 Bayraktar, primarily for SEAD operations (Suppression of Enemy Air Defence) to pave the way for fighter-bombers to deliver heavier payloads to high-value targets.





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 PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC POINTS DURING OPERATION SINDOOR





Op Sindoor stands as a testament to the Indian Military's capability for inter-service operability, the Army and the Air Force coordinated their strikes on Day-1, and continued to collaborate closely on the subsequent days. On the night of 7th May, 36 warships of the Indian Navy moved towards Karachi port in a move to disable the Pakistani Navy and deter the Pakistani Establishment from escalating the conflict threatening Pakistan's economic carotid.

During the planning stages and during the operation, satellites emerged as the most important link, they proved to be an invaluable asset in communications and reconnaissance, and most importantly aided in narrative shaping by confirming the achievement of objectives.

India heavily utilised the indigenously built Counter-UAS Grid and Akash in combination with battle-proven air defence systems such as the Pechora and OSA-AK to counter loitering munitions and missiles.

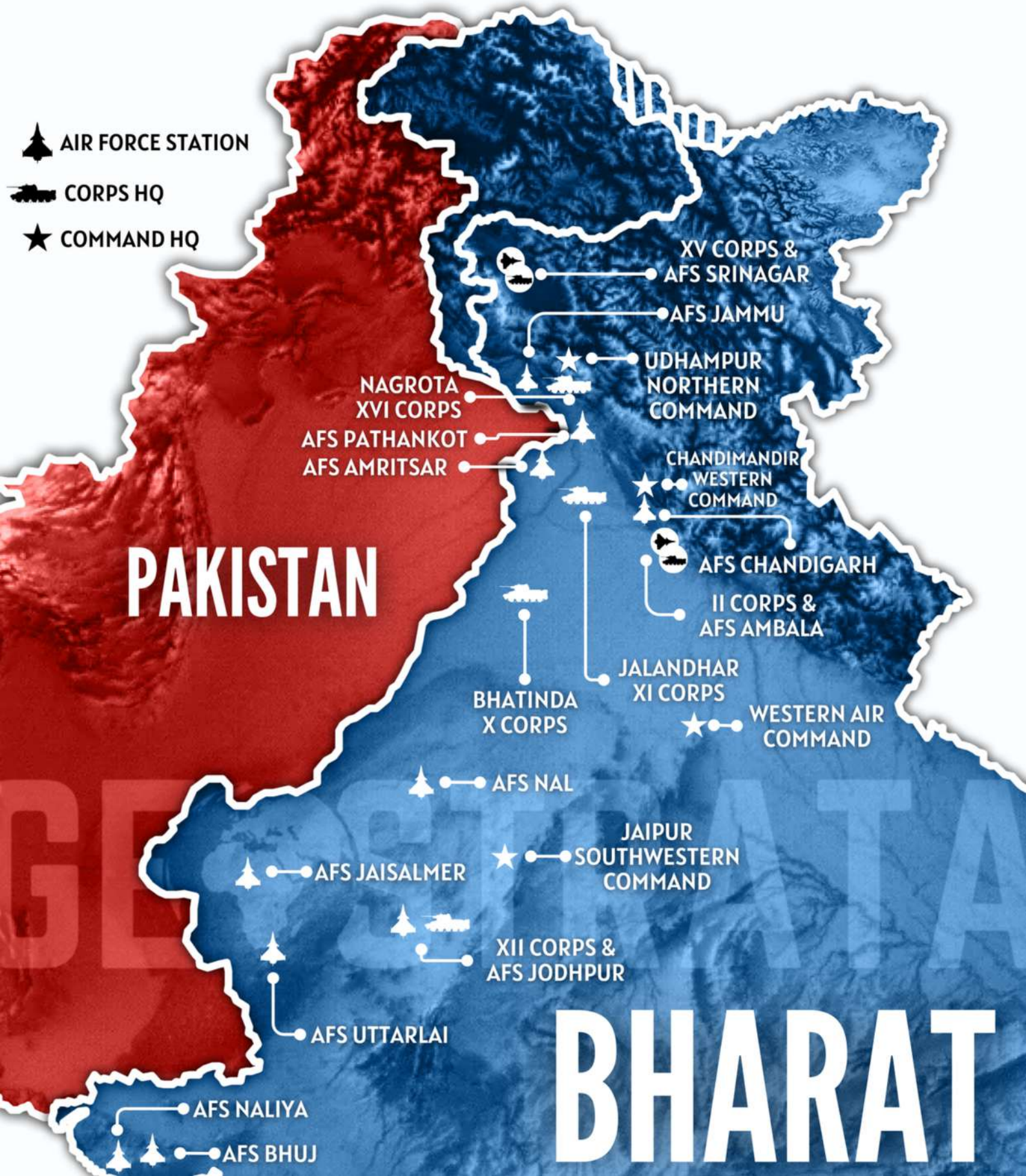
### **OPERATIONS TIMELINE:**

- Night of 6th-7th May: India initiated Operation Sindoor. The mission targeted nine terror camps of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen.
- 8th May: Pakistan attempted to retaliate with 300-400 drones across multiple locations.
- 9th May: Pakistan launched drone attacks on civilians at 36 locations across the Western states. IMF Approved a \$2.3 billion financial assistance package.
- 10th May: India retaliates by striking 11 Pakistani air bases, both states agree to a ceasefire after DGMO level talks, which Pakistan later violated.
- 11th May: India struck bases across Pakistan including an alleged nuclear warhead storage facility at Chaklala. A joint press briefing by the DGMO, DGAO, DGNO closed Operation Sindoor and the DGs stated that all strategic objectives had been achieved during the operation.





Five targets were in PoJK and the other four were in Pakistan. The operations were carried out from Kashmir, Punjab, and Rajasthan.





The four-day operation showcased Indian Military's superior strategy and capabilities. India was able to disable multiple air bases of the Pakistan Air Force, with minimal damage to its own strategic locations and civilian infrastructure. India's effortless suppression of Pakistani air defence and subsequent attacks at Pakistan's most critical assets highlighted shortcomings in their capabilities, discouraging the Pakistani Establishment from disrupting the peace on the Subcontinent. The bombing of the alleged nuclear storage base at Chaklala is speculated to be the reason that forced Pakistan to honour the ceasefire.

### **INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS**

The Indian intelligence community comprises of R&AW, Intelligence Bureau, Military Intelligence, the Defence Intelligence Agency, and the NTRO. R&AW is responsible for conducting HUMINT, and is most likely the organisation that confirmed the locations of the terrorist camps in Pakistan using cultivated assets. Military Intelligence and the Defence Intelligence Agency were responsible for collecting information on the capabilities of the Pakistani Military and the locations of their Assets. NTRO was responsible for gathering and analysing SIGINT, which proved to be highly valuable during Operation Sindoor in monitoring Pakistani movements.

### **CIVILIAN-MILITARY INTERFACE AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED**

The declaration of nationwide mock drills in addition to imposing blackouts and curfews safeguarded the civilian population from any and all threats.

The Indian Establishment conducted wide-scale information warfare ensuring that Pakistani propaganda and misinformation is unable to permeate into the Indian populace. The showcase of evidence for each and every strike further aided India in solidifying its position and controlling the narrative.

Operation Sindoor cemented that the new nature of warfare is here- drone centric operations. India operates the Swedish L/70 and the Soviet Schilika to counter drones, the recent conflict has showcased the importance of capable CIWS weapons systems in defending from mass aerial threats, and has opened the case for the procurement of more of such systems to ensure that India is capable of engaging in a two-front war.





**The Indian intelligence community comprises R&AW, Intelligence Bureau, Military Intelligence, Defence Intelligence Agency, and NTRO.**



# Post-Op Assessment – Outcome, Reflections & Way Ahead

The kinetic engagements during and after Operation Sindoor highlight the complexities of asymmetric warfare and Pakistan's proclivity for state-sponsored terrorism, coupled with retaliatory kinetic actions.

This assessment dissects the strategic ramifications of Operation Sindoor, underscoring India's commitment to counter-terrorism through the calibrated application of military power, leveraging advanced equipment, well-defined strategic objectives, the exceptional performance of its indigenous air defence network, and the crucial role of advanced air-to-air weaponry like the Astra BVR missile.

## 1. Outcome Assessment

### Casualties (own and adversary) Recoveries, arrests, and disruption of militant networks Casualties and Strategic Impact Analysis:

The kinetic engagements during and after Operation Sindoor highlight the complexities of asymmetric warfare and Pakistan's proclivity for state-sponsored terrorism, coupled with retaliatory kinetic actions.

**Indian Losses and Implications:** The unfortunate collateral damage resulting in the loss of 15 civilians in Poonch due to Pakistan's counter-bombardment underscores the adversary's willingness to employ indiscriminate force, a tactic aimed at psychological attrition. The loss of over four soldiers at forward observation posts (OPs) along the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB), while a tactical setback, highlights the inherent dangers of frontline defence against a state sponsor of terrorism.

**Adversary Losses and Force Degradation:** The successful neutralisation of over 50 Pakistani military personnel across the Pakistani Army (PA) and Pakistan Air Force (PAF) represents a significant degradation of their immediate combat readiness.





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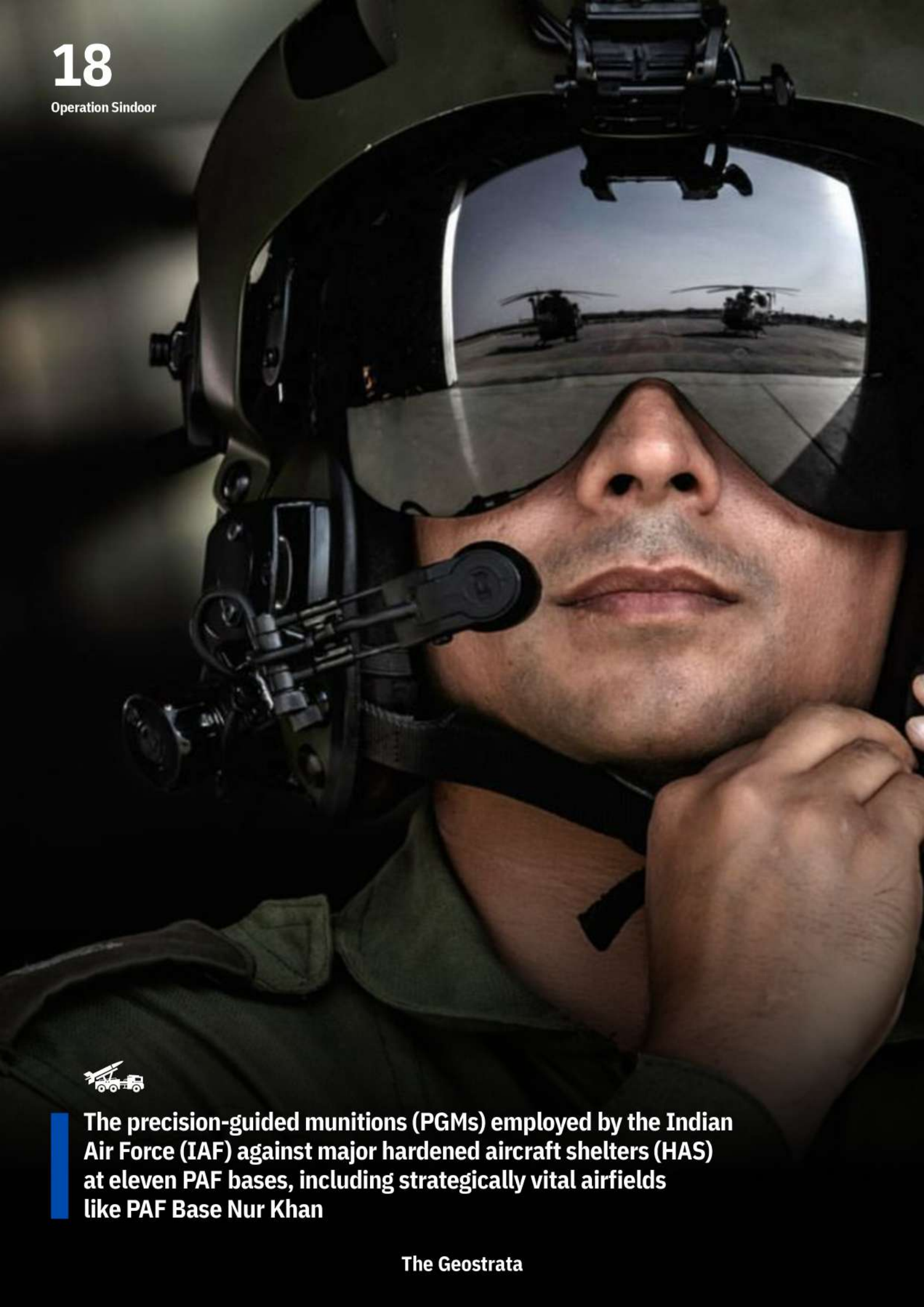


The precision-guided munitions (PGMs) employed by the Indian Air Force (IAF) against major hardened aircraft shelters (HAS) at eleven PAF bases, including strategically vital airfields like PAF Base Nur Khan (Rawalpindi/Islamabad) – a key node in their strategic airlift and potentially nuclear command and control – PAF Base Sargodha, a major combatant airbase, PAF Base Rahim Yar Khan, and PAF Base Rafiqui, have demonstrably curtailed Pakistan's airpower projection capabilities and inflicted significant materiel losses. The targeting of select command and control (C2) nodes aimed to disrupt their operational tempo and strategic decision-making cycle.

**Dismantling Terrorist Infrastructure Under a Secure Airspace and with Air Superiority:** The surgical strikes conducted in Phase One resulted in the liquidation of over 100 terrorists, including high-value targets (HVTs), across nine key terrorist training camps (TTCs) and headquarters. These direct action missions against locations such as Muridke, a known Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) logistical hub, and Bahawalpur, a Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) command element, alongside numerous facilities in Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PoJK), were conducted under the secure umbrella provided by India's robust air defence network and the IAF's demonstrated ability to achieve localised air superiority, enhanced by advanced weaponry like the Astra BVR missile. This demonstrates India's capability for deep penetration strikes and counter-insurgency operations at the strategic level, assured by its ability to deter and neutralise aerial threats and project airpower effectively.

**Achieving Air Superiority and Neutralizing Enemy Air Defenses While Maintaining Airspace Integrity and Leveraging Advanced Air-to-Air Capabilities:** The confirmed and OSINT-reported attrition of Pakistani air assets, including unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) housed in targeted hangars, F-16 Fighting Falcons, C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, and JF-17 Thunders, signifies a temporary but significant degradation of their air-to-air combat and strategic lift capabilities. The successful air combat manoeuvring (ACM) engagements and surface-to-air missile (SAM) intercepts resulting in the downing of over three PAF aircraft, including Mirage multirole combat aircraft, further underscore the IAF's tactical proficiency. Crucially, the exceptional performance of India's indigenous Air Defence (AD) systems, including the Akash Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) systems, played a vital role in deterring deeper Pakistani airspace incursions and protecting key Indian assets and cities.





**The precision-guided munitions (PGMs) employed by the Indian Air Force (IAF) against major hardened aircraft shelters (HAS) at eleven PAF bases, including strategically vital airfields like PAF Base Nur Khan**



Complementing this, the presence and demonstrated capability of the indigenously developed Astra Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missile provides Indian fighter pilots with a significant technological advantage in aerial engagements, allowing them to engage and neutralise enemy aircraft from standoff distances, further contributing to air superiority. The strategic targeting and confirmed destruction of Chinese-origin HQ-9 long-range air defense batteries in the vicinity of Lahore, along with numerous early warning radar (EWR) sites, using anti-radiation missiles (ARMs), showcases India's capability to conduct suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) operations, achieving localised air superiority and freedom of maneuver within contested airspace, further bolstered by its reliable AD network and superior air-to-air weaponry.

#### **Information Operations (INFO OPS) and Strategic Signalling:**

The Director General of Military Operations (DGMO)'s Carefully crafted press briefings, employing strategic ambiguity regarding India's platform losses while confirming pilot recovery and disseminating evidence of PAF air defence degradation, constitute effective information operations. This projects an image of operational success and resolve while denying the adversary propaganda opportunities. The assertive statement from the Indian Embassy in Portugal, "Operation Sindoor is not yet over," serves as a clear strategic signal to Pakistan and the international community regarding India's enduring commitment to counter-terrorism, underpinned by a secure and capable air defence posture and a technologically advanced air combat arm.

#### **INTELLIGENCE EXPLOITATION, FORCE PROTECTION, AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIC IMPACT:**

Beyond immediate kinetic effects, the strategic success of Operation Sindoor is predicated on sustained intelligence exploitation and robust force protection measures, facilitated by a reliable air defence shield and a technologically superior air combat force.

- **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR)**

**Payloads:** Recovered captured enemy materiel (CEM) from the vicinity of targeted sites and forward operating bases (FOBs) provides critical intelligence for battle damage assessment (BDA) and understanding adversary tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs). Analysis of communication equipment, captured documents, and ordnance yields actionable intelligence for future counter-terrorism (CT) operations.





The Director General of Military Operations (DGMO)'s Carefully crafted press briefings, employing strategic ambiguity regarding India's platform losses while confirming pilot recovery and disseminating evidence of PAF air defence degradation, constitute effective information operations.



Force Protection Measures Under a Secure Airspace with Air Superiority: Enhanced counter-IED (C-IED) measures and heightened vigilance along the LoC and IB remain crucial for ground-based threats. The exceptional performance of indigenous AD systems like the Akash SAMs, coupled with the qualitative edge provided by the Astra BVR missile, significantly bolsters overall force protection by deterring and neutralising aerial threats, allowing ground forces to operate with greater security and ensuring the survivability of Indian air assets.

- **Long-Term Strategic Effects:** The degradation of terrorist leadership and infrastructure, coupled with the demonstrated ability to strike deep within Pakistani territory and degrade its airpower while maintaining airspace integrity thanks to a robust AD network and projecting superior air combat capabilities through missiles like the Astra, creates a significant strategic imbalance. This necessitates a period of reconstitution for terrorist groups and a significant recapitalisation effort for the PAF, providing India with a strategic advantage to pursue its counter-terrorism objectives through sustained intelligence operations, proactive border management, the maintenance of a credible conventional and strategic deterrent, all under the watchful eye of a capable air defence system and with the reach of superior air-to-air weaponry. The ultimate strategic aim is to compel Pakistan to abandon its policy of state-sponsored terrorism, knowing that its retaliatory options are constrained by India's effective multi-layered defence and technologically advanced air combat force.

## 2. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS INTELLIGENCE AND OPERATIONAL DOCTRINE:

The post-operation analysis yields critical strategic lessons demanding evolution in intelligence gathering and operational doctrine, with a renewed focus on maintaining air superiority and a robust air defence posture, underpinned by advanced air combat capabilities.

- **Predictive Intelligence and Integrated Air Defence with Offensive Air Capabilities:** The civilian casualties in Poonch underscore the imperative for enhanced predictive intelligence regarding Pakistan's retaliatory tactics, including potential escalation involving air assets. The seamless integration of intelligence with a robust and layered Integrated Air Defence System (IADS) and the effective deployment of advanced air-to-air weaponry like the Astra are strategically vital.





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- **Asymmetric Threat Mitigation Doctrine Across All Domains:** The persistent threat of asymmetric warfare, including UAV incursions and long-range indirect fire, now explicitly includes the need to counter aerial asymmetric threats effectively and maintain air superiority through technological advantages in air combat. Doctrine must evolve to incorporate the successful employment of indigenous AD systems, the development of advanced C-UAS capabilities, and the effective utilisation of BVR missiles.
- **Joint Operations and Integrated Air-Ground Combat Protocols:** Seamless interoperability and synchronised operations across the tri-services (Army, Navy, Air Force) and intelligence agencies are paramount for effective joint operations and integrated air-ground combat. Enhanced joint training and communication protocols, specifically addressing airspace control, AD coordination, and the tactical employment of advanced air-to-air missiles, are strategically crucial.
- **Enhanced Situational Awareness Across All Domains, Including Air Combat Scenarios:** The casualties at forward OPs emphasise the need for real-time situational awareness (SA) across ground and air domains. Integrating data from ground sensors with air surveillance systems and providing pilots with enhanced SA for air combat engagements, including BVR capabilities, is critical for a comprehensive threat picture and maximising combat effectiveness.

#### **STRATEGIC FORCE MODERNISATION DIRECTIVES, EMPHASISING AIR DEFENCE AND AIR COMBAT SUPERIORITY:**

The lessons learned directly inform critical force modernisation imperatives, with a strong emphasis on bolstering India's air defence capabilities and enhancing its air combat prowess.

- **Dominance in Unmanned Systems and Advanced Counter-UAS Capabilities:** Achieving air dominance in the unmanned aerial systems (UAS) domain remains crucial. The development and deployment of advanced counter-UAS (C-UAS) systems are paramount.





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- **Augmenting Air Power Projection Capabilities and Maintaining Air Defence and Air Combat Superiority:**

Maintaining air superiority and enhancing power projection necessitates a robust fleet of AWACS and aerial refuelling tankers. Simultaneously, continuous upgrades to indigenous AD systems, alongside the acquisition of more advanced long-range SAMs and the continued development and deployment of advanced BVR missiles like the Astra with enhanced range and electronic countermeasures, are vital to maintain a technological edge in both air defence and air combat.

- **Indigenous Advanced Radar Technology and Networked Multi-Domain Operations:**

The timely operationalisation and widespread integration of DRDO-developed AESA radars across the IAF's fighter fleet are essential for enhanced detection, tracking, and electronic warfare capabilities, crucial for both offensive and defensive air operations, including maximising the effectiveness of BVR missiles. The seamless networking of all air defence and air combat assets into a robust Integrated Multi-Domain Operations (IMDO) framework is essential for effective threat detection, tracking, and engagement across all domains.

- **Continuous Modernisation Across All Domains:**

Continuous research, development, and acquisition of next-generation technologies in air defence, air combat (including advanced BVR missiles and electronic warfare suites), and other domains are essential to maintain a qualitative edge over adversaries.

### **3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS SUGGESTIONS FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATION, THE ARMY, AND INTEL AGENCIES**

#### **Long-term security frameworks and development overlays:**

Based on the observed patterns of Pakistani behaviour following Operation Sindoor, specifically the deliberate targeting of Indian civilian populations and infrastructure, the following policy recommendations are put forth for consideration by the Indian government:





The observed patterns of illicit Pakistani behaviour, following Operation Sindoor, specifically highlights the deliberate targeting of Indian civilian populations and infrastructure.



### **Enhancement of Community Protection Infrastructure and Strategic Awareness in Border Regions:**

Given the demonstrated propensity of Pakistan to engage in retaliatory actions targeting civilian areas, even in response to demonstrably counter-terrorism operations, a proactive and robust policy initiative focused on enhancing community protection in vulnerable border regions is paramount.

This necessitates a centrally funded and nationally coordinated program for the development and construction of hardened community protection sites, such as underground bunkers and reinforced shelters, particularly in forward towns and cities along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB).

The successful implementation of this policy requires more than just infrastructure development. It necessitates robust and active participation from local government bodies at all levels, empowering them with the necessary resources, training, and administrative frameworks to oversee the construction, maintenance, and effective utilisation of these protection sites. Furthermore, a comprehensive and sustained strategic awareness campaign must be undertaken to educate local populations about the prevailing security realities, the importance of these protection measures, and the procedures to be followed during periods of heightened tension or conflict. This will foster a greater sense of preparedness and resilience within these communities.

### **Sustained and Comprehensive Policy of Isolation and Active Counter-Terrorism Measures Against Pakistan:**

The observed behaviour of Pakistan, characterised by the continued support for and utilisation of terrorist proxies, coupled with direct military actions targeting Indian civilians even in the context of a focused counter-terrorism operation, necessitates a recalibrated and resolute long-term policy framework with the whole of the government approach.





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## *At Strata*

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