

India's Geopolitical Strategy and International Relations in the Post-Operation Sindoor Era

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Abstract

Operation Sindoor marked a pivotal moment in India's strategic and geopolitical trajectory, emerging as a direct response to the 2025 Pahalgam terrorist attack attributed to Pakistan-backed militants. This research paper explores the evolution of India's geopolitical strategy and international relations in the aftermath of this operation, emphasizing the doctrinal shift from strategic restraint to calibrated assertiveness. India's approach, combining kinetic military precision with non-kinetic tools such as economic sanctions, cultural isolation, information warfare, and diplomatic outreach, underscores a multi-dimensional strategy aimed at deterring terrorism and reinforcing regional leadership.

The paper critically examines India's recalibrated strategic doctrine, which includes narrative dominance, psychological ascendancy, and full-spectrum deterrence ranging from military to cyber and diplomatic spheres. The study also evaluates India's transformed bilateral and multilateral engagements, including relationships with the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, and Middle Eastern nations, within the context of post-operation geopolitical dynamics.

India's stance on unilateral action, rejection of third-party mediation, and assertive diplomatic narratives have redefined its role as a responsible yet resolute regional power. The operation also served as a stress test for India's crisis management capabilities and its ability to garner global support for counterterrorism, thereby setting a precedent for future conflict and cooperation.

Keywords: Operation Sindoor, India-Pakistan relations, strategic doctrine, counterterrorism, regional leadership, narrative warfare, Indo-Pacific security

Objective of the Paper

The principal objective of this research paper is to analyse and evaluate the transformation of India's geopolitical strategy and international relations in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor. Specifically, it seeks to dissect the evolving doctrines, mechanisms, and diplomatic postures that emerged as a response to asymmetric threats particularly state-sponsored terrorism.

The paper explores how India's national security doctrine has transitioned from passive deterrence and strategic restraint to an assertive model of "deterrence by punishment," wherein both state and non-state actors are held accountable. A central aim is to assess the implications of this shift on bilateral relations with adversarial and allied nations alike, and its role in shaping the regional balance of power in South Asia.

Furthermore, the study investigates the integration of non-kinetic strategies such as digital counter-propaganda, economic and cultural sanctions, and international diplomacy as part of India's holistic

counterterrorism toolkit. It evaluates the operational and symbolic effectiveness of these tools in strengthening India's internal resilience and global credibility.

The paper also aims to examine India's engagement with global institutions and forums post-Sindoor, analysing its role in shaping international norms on sovereignty, terrorism, and conflict resolution. By mapping India's realignment with key players like the U.S., Russia, the EU, and Middle Eastern powers, the study seeks to uncover the contours of India's emerging global strategy.

In sum, the objective is to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding India's strategic recalibration in the post-Operation Sindoor era, and to project how these adaptations may influence future regional stability, conflict deterrence, and global geopolitical dynamics.

1. Introduction

1.1. Attack on Pahalgam

On 22 April, India experienced a deadly terrorist attack on a tourist spot near Pahalgam, killing 26 people. The attack was carried out by the unknown terrorist group, The Resistance Front (TRF), in the Kashmir region. The international community condemned the attack and called for accountability of the perpetrators, organizers, financiers, and sponsors. Two weeks later, India responded with a military operation, leading to an escalation of violence between India and Pakistan. Although a ceasefire has been reached, New Delhi's hardened stance may mark a turning point in India's approach to countering terrorism.

1.2. Who are TRF

TRF, a proxy of Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba, was designated by India under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in January 2023. India claims TRF was involved in recruiting fighters and smuggling weapons into India-administered Kashmir. TRF has opposed the resettlement plan of Kashmiri pandits and has been responsible for targeted killings. TRF initially claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack on Telegram, but later denied responsibility.¹

1.3. Operation Sindoor

Operation Sindoor, launched by India in response to Pakistan-backed attacks on Pahalgam, aimed to destroy terror infrastructure across the border. However, Pakistan responded with drones and shelling, targeting religious sites and attempting to break India's unity. India clarified its response as focused, measured, and non-escalatory, stating that Pakistani military establishments were not targeted. India conducted retaliatory strikes on Radar installations in Lahore and destroyed Radar facilities near Gurjanwala. After a ceasefire, Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations agreed to cease all firing and military action on land, air, and sea. Despite the ceasefire, a wave of UAVs and small drones intruded into Indian civilian and military areas, successfully intercepted. India has been proactively responding to Pakistan's information war, focusing on strategic outcomes, discrediting sources, and promoting media literacy. This approach has helped create a more resilient digital environment and a more resilient digital landscape.

Operation Sindoor was a significant demonstration of India's military and strategic power, executed through a combination of military and non-military means. It neutralized terrorist threats, deterred Pakistani aggression, and enforced India's zero-tolerance policy towards terrorism. India's non-kinetic

¹ Lead, T. M. S. R. F. a. P. (n.d.). Operation Sindoor: a turning point for India in addressing terrorism in Kashmir? International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - ICCT. <https://icct.nl/publication/operation-Sindoor-turning-point-india-addressing-terrorism-kashmir>

efforts, such as strategic policymaking, information dominance, and psychological operations, diplomatically and economically isolated Pakistan while strengthening domestic preparedness and global backing.

A decisive move under Operation Sindoor was India's termination of the Indus Waters Treaty, which had far-reaching consequences for Pakistan, which heavily relies on the Indus River system for 80% of its agricultural land and 93% of its total water use. The suspension of the treaty allowed India full control over western rivers, boosting irrigation and hydroelectric power generation.

India also revoked visas of all Pakistanis residing in the country and deported them immediately after the Pahalgam terrorist attack. A total ban was imposed on Pakistani artists, erasing Pakistan's cultural influence in India. These actions inflicted severe economic and diplomatic damage on Pakistan, deepening its international isolation and affirming India's commitment to a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism.²

2. India's Strategic Doctrine Post-Operation Sindoor

2.1. The New Normal

India's post-Operation Sindoor doctrine redefined victory and deterrence, replacing traditional notions of victory with a spectrum of outcomes ranging from psychological ascendancy to narrative dominance. Success is now measured by the ability to impose costs, degrade adversary capabilities, and achieve political objectives without necessarily seeking total military defeat of the opponent. Key Aims of India's post-Sindoor strategic doctrine include systematic targeting of terror camps, leadership, and support structures deep within Pakistan, discrediting its role as the architect of proxy warfare and raising the cost of continued support for terrorism.

The doctrine is anchored in the concept of punitive deterrence, a calibrated blend of kinetic (military) and non-kinetic (informational, diplomatic, economic) actions designed to impose costs that Pakistan cannot sustain, thereby undermining its proxy war strategy. The focus is on achieving psychological ascendancy and narrative legitimacy, denying, degrading, and disrupting adversary capabilities, maintaining escalation control under the nuclear shadow, and building a "Whole of Nation" approach for full-spectrum deterrence, including robust internal governance to address vulnerabilities.

Key Aims and Principles of India's post-Operation Sindoor doctrine include assured and proportionate retaliation, no distinction between state and proxies, challenging nuclear brinkmanship, strategic autonomy and decisive action, technological and non-contact warfare, and deterrence by punishment. The aim is clear: to deter and punish state-sponsored terrorism decisively, holding both non-state actors and their state sponsors accountable, and acting with strategic autonomy and precision in pursuit of national security.³

2.2. Assured Retaliation towards Acts of Terror

Operation Sindoor marked a significant shift in India's approach to terrorism from Pakistan. Unlike previous strikes, which focused on restrained force, this time, India aimed to dismantle Pakistan's terror factories. Targets included sites like Markaz Subhan Allah and Markaz Taiba, which were nerve centers for heinous attacks on India. This detailed targeting aimed to establish a new threshold for military force against terror attacks from Pakistan, setting a firm precedent.

² Operation SINDOOR: India's strategic clarity and calculated force. (n.d.). <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2128748>

³ Operation Sindoor: Redefining notion of victory in the Modern Limited Wars – CENJOWS. (2025, May 23). <https://cenjows.in/operation-sindoor-redefining-notion-of-victory-in-the-modern-limited-wars/>

2.3. Nuclear Blackmail will Not Go Unchallenged

Operation Sindoor challenged Pakistan's nuclear doctrine by treating terrorist attacks as acts of war, allowing space for military action below the nuclear threshold. India's campaign demonstrated the limitations of its nuclear deterrent as a shield for terrorism prosecution. Pakistan has long relied on its nuclear weapons to offset India's conventional options, which formed the basis of proxy warfare against India in Jammu and Kashmir. India's measured offensive action during Operation Sindoor exposed the failure of Pakistan's nuclear brinkmanship strategy, striking eleven major airbases and constricting Pakistan's missile delivery options. India's precision strike capabilities were also demonstrated, with a strike near Pakistan's command and control center indicating breach of air defence s.

2.4. State is not different from State-Sponsored Terrorism

Pakistan responded to India's missile strikes on nine terror sites with drone and missile attacks, demonstrating its direct complicity in sponsoring cross-border terrorism. India launched a comprehensive offensive against Pakistan's military infrastructure, demonstrating its ability to strike targets deep within Pakistan with precision and control. Pakistan's Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos exposed its desperation, and India's response served a dual purpose: to establish a clear dictum of imposing costs for future terrorist attacks and deliver a controlled retaliation short of full-scale war to Pakistan's military.⁴

3. India-Pakistan Relations: Conflict and Deterrence

India and Pakistan have a long-standing relationship, characterized by persistent conflict and territorial disputes over Kashmir. The first major military engagement occurred in 1947-48, leading to the division of the region and the establishment of the Line of Control (LoC). The 1960s saw diplomatic engagement, but the 1965 war over Kashmir ended in a stalemate. The 1971 war, sparked by the Bangladesh independence movement, marked a turning point, with India's intervention leading to Bangladesh's creation and India's victory. The Simla Agreement in 1972 reinforced the commitment to peaceful dispute resolution and formalized the LoC as the de facto border. Tensions resurfaced in the 1980s and 1990s, fuelled by insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir and accusations of Pakistani support for separatist groups. Nuclear tests in 1998 transformed the rivalry into a nuclear-armed standoff. The 1999 Kargil War resulted in intense fighting in Ladakh, with India eventually regaining lost ground. The 21st century has seen periodic escalations triggered by high-profile terror attacks, such as the 2001 Indian Parliament attack, 2008 Mumbai attacks, 2016 Uri attack, and 2019 Pulwama suicide bombing. India's approach has evolved from reactive military engagements to a doctrine of deterrence by punishment, emphasizing swift, proportionate, and technologically sophisticated responses to acts of terror.⁵

3.1. Impact of Operation Sindoor on cross-border terrorism and bilateral tensions.

Operation Sindoor has fundamentally altered the landscape of cross-border terrorism and the tenor of India-Pakistan relations. By employing advanced precision strikes and integrating cutting-edge military technologies, India has signalled a decisive end to the era of strategic restraint. This operation not only targeted terrorist infrastructure with unprecedented accuracy but also directly challenged the longstanding assumption that nuclear deterrence would prevent robust Indian responses. As a result, the established patterns of proxy warfare and retaliatory cycles have been disrupted, introducing a new level of uncertainty

⁴ Sahgal, A. (2025, May 22). Operation Sindoor establishes India's new response doctrine towards Pakistan - BASIC. BASIC. <https://basicint.org/operation-Sindoor-establishes-indias-new-response-doctrine-towards-pakistan/>

⁵ Staff, A. J. (2025, May 20). India-Pakistan tensions: A brief history of conflict. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/9/india-pakistan-tensions-a-brief-history-of-conflict>

and risk into bilateral dynamics. The operation has also placed significant pressure on Pakistan to reconsider its support for non-state actors, while highlighting the fragility of existing crisis management frameworks and the diminishing influence of external mediators. In sum, Operation Sindoor has redefined deterrence in South Asia, making the costs of cross-border terrorism more tangible and recalibrating the balance of power and perception in the region.

Key Points

- **Transformation of Response Paradigm:** Operation Sindoor marked a clear departure from previous Indian responses by leveraging precision strikes and drone capabilities, effectively raising the cost of cross-border terrorism for Pakistan.
- **Erosion of Nuclear Deterrence as a Shield:** India's willingness to conduct targeted strikes under the nuclear threshold has undermined Pakistan's traditional reliance on nuclear deterrence to shield its proxy strategies.
- **Escalation of Bilateral Tensions:** The operation triggered a series of retaliatory actions and countermeasures, intensifying military and diplomatic tensions between the two countries.
- **Narrative and Information Warfare:** India's approach included a robust information campaign, shaping both domestic and international perceptions and limiting Pakistan's ability to control the narrative.
- **Pressure on Pakistan's Policy Choices:** The heightened risk and increased costs associated with cross-border terrorism have compelled Pakistan to reevaluate its support for militant groups, while also managing rising internal and external pressures.
- **Diminished Role of External Mediators:** Traditional third-party actors, such as the United States and Gulf states, have found their capacity to de-escalate the crisis significantly reduced, leaving the two nuclear neighbours with fewer buffers against escalation.
- **Redefinition of Deterrence Dynamics:** Operation Sindoor has shifted the deterrence equation from one based solely on nuclear threats to a more complex model involving rapid, technologically sophisticated, and proportionate military responses.
- **Implications for Regional Stability:** The operation has introduced greater volatility into the region, with the risk of miscalculation and uncontrolled escalation now heightened due to the breakdown of established crisis management mechanisms.^{6 7 8}

4. The Role of International Mediation in the 2025 India-Pakistan Crisis

International mediation played a notable but contested role during the 2025 India-Pakistan confrontation following Operation Sindoor. As hostilities escalated with both sides employing advanced military technologies and engaging in tit-for-tat strikes the risk of uncontrolled escalation, including the potential for nuclear confrontation, drew urgent attention from global actors.

⁶ Malla, M. W. (2025, May 31). Crisis Without Closure: India-Pakistan confrontation in an era of fragile deterrence. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/crisis-without-closure-india-pakistan-confrontation-in-an-era-of-fragile-deterrence/>

⁷ Dabhadre, M. (2025, May 21). India-Pakistan ceasefire: a new deterrence Architecture takes shape. orfonline.org. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-pakistan-ceasefire-a-new-deterrence-architecture-takes-shape>

⁸ Singh, L. G. H. (2025, May 26). Shaping the new deterrent: The strategic shift in India-Pakistan conflict. www.business-standard.com. https://www.business-standard.com/economy/analysis/shaping-the-new-deterrent-the-strategic-shift-in-india-pakistan-conflict-125052600385_1.html

Key Aspects of International Mediation:

- **US-Led Diplomatic Intervention:** The United States was pivotal in brokering the eventual ceasefire. High-level contacts were established with both Indian and Pakistani leadership, including direct communications between the US Secretary of State and top military and political figures in both countries. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Iran, the UK, and China, also urged restraint and participated in diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the crisis.
- **Divergent Narratives on Mediation:** While Pakistan and several international sources credited the ceasefire to third-party mediation, especially by the US and Gulf states, India maintained that the cessation of hostilities was a result of direct, bilateral negotiations. Indian officials have consistently reiterated that issues with Pakistan are to be resolved bilaterally, rejecting external mediation as a matter of longstanding policy.
- **Limited and Fragile Mechanisms:** Despite the successful de-escalation, the underlying crisis management infrastructure between India and Pakistan remains weak. Beyond military hotlines and basic tactical communications, there are few established channels for crisis dialogue. Pakistani officials warned that the lack of robust mechanisms increases the risk that future crises could spiral out of control before the international community has a chance to intervene.
- **Diminishing Influence of External Actors:** Although international mediation was instrumental in halting immediate hostilities, the episode highlighted the shrinking window for effective third-party intervention. Both countries' entrenched positions India's insistence on bilateralism and Pakistan's openness to mediation suggest that future crises may be harder to manage externally, raising the stakes for regional stability.

While international mediation, especially by the United States and key regional actors, was crucial in securing a ceasefire and preventing further escalation during the 2025 crisis, its long-term effectiveness is constrained by India's firm stance on bilateralism and the lack of robust crisis management mechanisms. The episode underscores both the necessity and the limitations of third-party intervention in South Asia's volatile security environment.⁹

5. India's Relations with Major Global Powers Post-Operation Sindoor**5.1. India-U.S. Relations Post-Operation Sindoor**

The recent India-Pakistan standoff has highlighted evolving dynamics in India's relationship with the United States, revealing both the strengths and limitations of their strategic partnership. The U.S. response to the crisis was characterized by measured engagement, reflecting its broader regional priorities and the complexities of great power competition in South Asia.

5.1.1. U.S. Diplomatic Approach and Strategic Calculations

During the escalation following Operation Sindoor, the United States adopted a policy of limited intervention, opting for quiet diplomacy rather than overt or forceful involvement. This approach was intended to balance American interests in regional stability, counterterrorism, and great power rivalry, particularly with China. While the U.S. has long sought to bolster India as a counterweight to Chinese influence, it has also maintained ties with Pakistan to preserve its leverage and prevent further destabilization.

⁹ IBID,6,7,8

5.1.2. Perceptions of American Support and Emerging Frictions

Despite the history of deepening defence and technological cooperation, India has grown increasingly frustrated with what it perceives as insufficient American backing during critical moments especially on issues related to cross-border terrorism and the Kashmir dispute. The lack of unequivocal U.S. support during the recent crisis has fuelled scepticism in New Delhi regarding Washington's reliability as a strategic partner, particularly when American statements appear neutral or fail to directly address Indian security concerns.

5.1.3. Shifting Defence Partnerships and Strategic Diversification

Amidst this ambivalence, India has continued to diversify its defence procurement, deepening its reliance on Russian military technology. The acquisition of advanced systems such as the S-400 air defence platform, and growing interest in the next-generation S-500, underscore India's intent to maintain strategic autonomy and hedge against overdependence on any single partner. At the same time, India is likely to pursue further acquisitions of Rafale fighter jets and other advanced Western platforms to enhance its military edge.

5.1.4. U.S. Arms Sales and Regional Perceptions

Recent American decisions, such as the sale of advanced missile systems to Turkey, have added to Indian apprehensions about U.S. consistency and commitment. While the U.S. continues to enjoy a generally positive image in India due to past support and ongoing cooperation, these actions have prompted concerns about Washington's willingness to prioritize Indian interests in a rapidly shifting geopolitical environment.

5.1.5. Implications for Future Cooperation

The convergence of these factors U.S. caution during crises, India's strategic diversification, and the assertive postures of China and Russia has introduced new complexities into the India-U.S. defence relationship. Growing mistrust and diverging interests may pose challenges for future collaboration, requiring both sides to recalibrate expectations and strengthen mechanisms for crisis coordination and mutual assurance.

In the wake of Operation Sindoor, India-U.S. relations remain fundamentally important but increasingly complicated by strategic ambiguity, shifting alliances, and the pressures of great power competition. India is expected to continue strengthening its military capabilities and diplomatic leverage, pursuing a balanced approach that safeguards its autonomy while engaging constructively with both Washington and Moscow to secure its long-term security interests.¹⁰

5.2. India-China Relations Post-Operation Sindoor

The aftermath of Operation Sindoor has brought renewed attention to the complex and often adversarial relationship between India and China. India's decisive military response to the Pahalgam terror attack, which included targeted strikes on Pakistani territory, not only heightened tensions with Pakistan but also drew China's involvement and scrutiny, given its deep strategic interests in the region.

5.2.1. China's Diplomatic Response and Strategic Interests

In the wake of the Indian strikes, China publicly called for restraint and urged both India and Pakistan to avoid further escalation. This diplomatic stance, articulated by Chinese officials, appeared somewhat inconsistent when contrasted with China's assertive posturing in other regional disputes, such as the

¹⁰ Saini, G. (2025, May 19). Partners or spectators? America's role in India's Security Calculations Post-Op Sindoor - CSDR. CSDR -. <https://csdronline.com/blind-spot/partners-or-spectators-americas-role-in-indias-security-calculations-post-op-sindoor/>

Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. However, China's call for calm is rooted in its significant economic and strategic investments in Pakistan, most notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a flagship project under China's Belt and Road Initiative.

China's support for Pakistan has been longstanding, encompassing military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions. Since the 1960s, Beijing has provided Islamabad with advanced weaponry, financial assistance, and political backing on international platforms, including the United Nations. During the recent conflict, Chinese state media amplified narratives sympathetic to Pakistan, sometimes echoing claims of civilian casualties and challenging India's justification for its strikes.

5.2.2. Military and Technological Support

China remains the principal supplier of military hardware to Pakistan, accounting for the bulk of Islamabad's arms imports. Recent years have seen the transfer of advanced fighter aircraft, drones, and missile systems, all of which were reportedly deployed during the latest India-Pakistan standoff. This military partnership not only strengthens Pakistan's defence capabilities but also serves China's objective of maintaining a strategic counterweight to India in South Asia.

5.2.3. Diplomatic Manoeuvring and Double Standards

While China has consistently shielded Pakistan from international censure over terrorism, including blocking moves to blacklist Pakistan-based militants at the UN, it has adopted a markedly different approach when its own interests are threatened. For instance, following terrorist attacks on Chinese nationals in Pakistan, Beijing has demanded robust security measures and even considered direct intervention to protect its assets and citizens.

China's criticism of India's suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty and invocation of UN resolutions on Kashmir further underscores its selective application of international norms, especially considering its own unresolved water disputes and territorial claims in the region.

5.2.4. Strategic Calculations and Regional Rivalry

Operation Sindoor has underscored the reality that China's engagement in South Asia is driven by a desire to balance India's rising influence and to protect its substantial investments in Pakistan. The deepening Sino-Pakistani partnership is not merely transactional; it is a calculated effort to constrain India's regional ambitions and to maintain leverage over the evolving security environment.

Despite India's efforts to manage its relationship with China by avoiding overt alignment with anti-China coalitions and seeking diplomatic engagement Beijing continues to view India as a principal strategic competitor in Asia. China's actions, from infrastructure development in contested territories to diplomatic support for Pakistan, reflect a broader strategy to preserve its own interests and limit India's rise.

In the post-Operation Sindoor landscape, India's relations with China remain marked by rivalry, mutual suspicion, and strategic competition. The events following the operation have reinforced the centrality of the China-Pakistan axis in shaping regional dynamics, compelling India to recalibrate its diplomatic, military, and economic strategies to safeguard its interests and assert its role as a major power in South Asia.^{11 12}

¹¹ Pillalamarri, A. (2025, May 30). India's geopolitical position after 'Operation Sindoor.' The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/indias-geopolitical-position-after-operation-Sindoor/>

¹² Desk, I., & Kondapalli, S. (2025, May 14). China's Dual Stance: Response To Operation Sindoor and Its Long-standing Alliance with Pakistan - IMPRI. IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute. <https://www.impriindia.com/insights/chinas-responsetooperation-Sindoor/>

5.3. India-Russia Relations Post-Operation Sindoor

The aftermath of Operation Sindoor has underscored the enduring and strategic partnership between India and Russia, marked by mutual trust, robust defence cooperation, and expanding engagement across multiple sectors. As India faced heightened security challenges following its confrontation with Pakistan, the reliability and performance of Russian defence systems during the crisis have further strengthened pro-Russian sentiment within India.

5.3.1. Strategic Defence Partnership and Operational Impact

India's defence relationship with Russia is deeply institutionalized, guided by long-term agreements such as the Programme for Military Technical Cooperation and the 2021-2031 framework. Russian-supplied platforms most notably the S-400 air defence system and the BrahMos supersonic missile, a joint Indo-Russian venture played a pivotal role during Operation Sindoor, effectively neutralizing incoming threats and enabling precision strikes against adversary targets. The S-400's performance in countering Pakistani drones and missiles was widely praised by Indian military analysts and the public alike, reinforcing Russia's reputation as a dependable defence partner.

5.3.2. Expanding Military-Technical Collaboration

Beyond the battlefield, India and Russia continue to deepen their military-technical collaboration. Recent years have witnessed significant contracts, including the acquisition of stealth frigates, licensed production of T-90 tanks and Su-30MKI aircraft, and the ongoing supply of MiG-29s, Kamov helicopters, and advanced air defence systems. Joint research, development, and production efforts exemplified by the BrahMos missile and the AK-203 rifle project reflect a shift from a traditional buyer-seller relationship to one focused on co-development and technology transfer. The annual INDRA joint exercises further enhance interoperability and operational readiness between the two armed forces.

5.3.3. Political Trust and Diplomatic Support

The India-Russia partnership is also rooted in a history of diplomatic solidarity. Russia has consistently supported India's sovereignty and security interests, both in international forums and during bilateral crises. During Operation Sindoor, Moscow publicly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack and affirmed India's right to self-defence, further bolstering trust at the highest political levels. Unlike some Western nations, Russia has never allowed its territory to be used for activities hostile to India, a fact frequently cited by Indian commentators as evidence of Moscow's steadfastness.

5.3.4. Economic and Strategic Dimensions

While defence remains the cornerstone, India-Russia ties are expanding into new domains, including energy, space, and trade. The two countries are pursuing strategic projects in the Russian Far East, the Arctic, and along the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor, while also working to insulate bilateral trade from external sanctions and payment disruptions. The celebration of 78 years of diplomatic relations in 2025 highlights the depth and resilience of this multifaceted partnership.

5.3.5. Navigating Geopolitical Realities

Despite India's ongoing diversification of defence imports, Russian systems remain integral to India's military capabilities, valued for their affordability, reliability, and openness to technology transfer. Indian policymakers remain attentive to Russia's evolving ties with China, but the consensus in New Delhi is that Moscow continues to prioritize its strategic relationship with India, as evidenced by ongoing high-level exchanges and new defence initiatives.

In the wake of Operation Sindoor, India-Russia relations have emerged even stronger, with deepening defence cooperation, mutual political trust, and expanding economic engagement. The performance of

Russian systems during the crisis and Moscow's diplomatic support have reinforced the perception of Russia as India's most reliable strategic partner, ensuring that the partnership remains a cornerstone of India's security and foreign policy calculus.^{13 14}

5.4. India-EU Relations Post-Operation Sindoor

The aftermath of Operation Sindoor has marked a significant deepening of ties between India and the European Union, particularly in the realms of counterterrorism, defence, and maritime security. The EU's unified and prompt support for India's right to self-defence following the Pahalgam terror attack has set the stage for a new phase of strategic cooperation and mutual recognition of security imperatives.

5.4.1. Unified European Support and Recognition of India's Position

In response to India's precise and targeted military actions during Operation Sindoor, the European Union and all 27 member states issued a strong and unified statement condemning the Pahalgam attack and affirming India's sovereign right to defend itself against terrorism. The EU's stance was clear: India's actions were viewed as a legitimate response to a barbaric act of terror, and the bloc welcomed the subsequent cessation of hostilities, expressing hope for greater stability in the region.

5.4.2. Strategic Dialogue and Expanding Security Cooperation

EU ambassador Hervé Delphin emphasized the importance of ongoing dialogue and coordination between India and the EU, highlighting the potential for deeper cooperation in defence and security sectors. The EU's recognition of India as a key maritime and security partner in the Indian Ocean has led to expanded joint exercises and operational coordination, such as the upcoming naval drills between EUNAVFOR Atalanta and the Indian Navy. These exercises underscore a shared commitment to a free, open, and rules-based maritime order, vital for both European and Indian economic interests.

5.4.3. Building a Comprehensive Strategic Agenda

The EU and India are actively working towards a new strategic agenda that will form the basis for a joint roadmap, expected to be endorsed at the next EU-India summit in 2026. This agenda aims to broaden cooperation across at least fifty sectors, with defence and security emerging as areas of "impressive development." Both sides are exploring opportunities for collaboration not only in military operations but also in defence production and technology, reflecting India's growing role as both an importer and exporter of defence equipment.

5.4.4. Shared Interests in Regional Stability and Counterterrorism

The EU's approach to Operation Sindoor and its aftermath reflects a broader alignment with India's priorities in countering terrorism and maintaining regional stability. European leaders have consistently recognized the need to address the root causes of cross-border terror and have supported India's calls for accountability and restraint. This partnership is further reinforced by regular high-level dialogues, joint maritime security initiatives, and a shared understanding of the strategic environment in South Asia.

Operation Sindoor has catalysed a new era in India-EU relations, characterized by strong diplomatic backing, enhanced defence cooperation, and a shared vision for regional security. The EU's unequivocal support for India's right to self-defence and its proactive engagement in maritime and security partnerships

¹³ PTI, & PTI. (2025, May 25). All-party delegation's Russia visit deepened bilateral strategic meet on issues of significance: Indian Embassy. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/all-party-delegations-russia-visit-deepened-bilateral-strategic-meet-on-issues-of-significance-indian-embassy-3556422>

¹⁴ India sees surge in Pro-Russian sentiment after operation Sindoor. (2025, May 19). Sputnik India. <https://sputniknews.in/20250519/india-sees-surge-in-pro-russian-sentiment-after-operation-Sindoor-9159337.html>

signal a maturing relationship that is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the Indo-Pacific security architecture in the years ahead.^{15 16 17 18}

5.5. India's Relations with Middle Eastern Countries Post-Operation Sindoor

Operation Sindoor has ushered in a new era of diplomatic engagement between India and the Middle East, marked by proactive outreach and nuanced regional responses. India's multi-party delegations visited key countries in the region, aiming to present its position on cross-border terrorism and reinforce its commitment to global and regional security.

5.5.1. High-Level Diplomatic Outreach and Solidarity

India's outreach began with an all-party delegation to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), led by Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Shinde. The delegation's meetings with senior Emirati officials, including the Minister of Tolerance and members of the Federal National Council, underscored the deep partnership between India and the UAE. Both sides reaffirmed their shared resolve to combat terrorism in all its forms, highlighting the significance of zero tolerance towards extremism and the importance of international cooperation.

5.5.2. Diverse Regional Responses and Mediation Efforts

The Middle East's response to the India-Pakistan crisis was notably cautious and multifaceted:

- **Israel** stood out as a strong supporter of India, unequivocally condemning terrorism and backing India's right to self-defence.
- **Turkey** took a sharply contrasting stance, vocally supporting Pakistan, criticizing India's actions, and calling for international investigations into the crisis.
- **Iran** and most Arab states adopted a more measured approach, calling for restraint and de-escalation. While some expressed religious solidarity with Pakistan and echoed broader conspiracy narratives against India, Iran also offered to mediate, though its influence was constrained by its own regional tensions and complex ties.
- **Turkey** likewise expressed willingness to mediate, but its capacity was limited by its overt alignment with Pakistan and lack of broader regional influence.

5.5.3. Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Quiet Diplomacy

The GCC countries, leveraging their history of mediating India-Pakistan tensions, played a particularly active role in behind-the-scenes diplomacy. They increased mediation efforts through diplomatic visits and discreet talks, aiming to de-escalate the situation while preserving their strategic relationships with both India and Pakistan. This approach reflects the GCC's pragmatic interest in maintaining regional stability, especially as global powers took a more limited role in direct mediation during the crisis.

5.5.4. Promoting Harmony, Tolerance, and Shared Interests

India's delegations emphasized the ethos of harmony and tolerance that underpins its relations with Gulf

¹⁵ Admin, S. (2025, May 9). Operation Sindoor: India receives strong international support against terrorism -. <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/operation-Sindoor-india-receives-strong-international-support-against-terrorism/>

¹⁶ Phadke, M., & Phadke, M. (2025, May 30). EU recognised India's right to protect itself after 'barbaric' Pahalgam attack—envoy on Op Sindoor. ThePrint. <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/eu-recognised-indias-right-to-protect-itself-after-barbaric-pahalgam-attack-envoy-on-op-Sindoor/2641946/>

¹⁷ Pti. (2025, May 29). Op Sindoor was reaction to Pahalgam, EU recognises India's right to defend itself: Envoy. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/op-Sindoor-was-reaction-to-pahalgam-eu-recognises-indias-right-to-defend-itself-envoy/articleshow/121496059.cms?from=mdr>

¹⁸ PTI, & PTI. (2025, May 29). Operation Sindoor was reaction to Pahalgam, EU recognises India's right to defend itself: Envoy. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/operation-Sindoor-was-reaction-to-pahalgam-eu-recognises-indias-right-to-defend-itself-envoy-3563327>

nations. By engaging with influential leaders, think tanks, and community representatives, India projected its inclusive values and commitment to peaceful coexistence an approach that resonated with the UAE and other moderate Arab states.

5.5.5. Broader Regional Dynamics

The region's cautious and balanced response to Operation Sindoor reflects the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. While some countries expressed solidarity with Pakistan based on religious or political considerations, the overall priority remained de-escalation and the avoidance of a broader conflict. The limited involvement of major global powers further highlighted the region's growing role as a mediator in South Asian affairs.

In the wake of Operation Sindoor, India's relations with Middle Eastern countries have been reinforced through high-level diplomatic engagement and a shared commitment to counterterrorism. The region's careful balancing act supporting mediation, calling for restraint, and maintaining strategic partnerships demonstrates both the complexity of Middle Eastern geopolitics and the growing importance of regional actors in crisis management. India's outreach has laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation on security, tolerance, and stability, even as the Middle East continues to navigate its own diverse interests and alliances.^{19 20 21 22}

6. India's Strategic Posture After Operation SINDOOR: Reinforcing Regional Leadership and Global Responsibility

6.1. Introduction: A Turning Point in Regional Security Dynamics

On April 22, 2025, a heinous terrorist attack struck Pahalgam, with militants targeting civilians based on their religion, leaving 26 dead. The incident, orchestrated by Pakistan-backed elements, aimed not just at causing violence but at fracturing India's social harmony. This marked a transition from cross-border assaults to attempts at internal destabilization. In response, India launched Operation Sindoor, a decisive campaign to neutralize the infrastructure and leadership behind the terror network.

6.2. Regional Leadership and Strategic Clarity

Operation Sindoor was not merely a retaliatory strike; it represented a recalibration of India's regional doctrine. India demonstrated its capacity to take calculated and proportionate action without destabilizing the broader South Asian security framework. By confining military action to terror-linked targets and maintaining restraint in escalation, India affirmed its commitment to responsible state behaviour while reinforcing its leadership position in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

Through precision strikes, India dismantled nine major terror camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu & Kashmir (PoJK), targeted high-value assets deep within enemy territory, and exposed

¹⁹ Bhatia, S. (2025, May 24). Full Text | India-Turkey relationship before and after the recent conflict with Pakistan - The Wire. The Wire. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/full-text-india-turkey-relationship-before-and-after-the-recent-conflict-with-pakistan>

²⁰ HT News Desk. (2025, May 22). What India's Op Sindoor global outreach delegations told UAE, Japan as they exposed Pakistan. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/what-indias-op-Sindoor-global-outreach-delegations-told-uae-japan-as-they-exposed-pakistan-101747907869763.html>

²¹ Ramani, S. (n.d.). How the Middle East responded to India and Pakistan's crisis. *The New Arab*. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-middle-east-responded-india-and-pakistans-crisis>

Ramani, S. (n.d.). How the Middle East responded to India and Pakistan's crisis. *The New Arab*. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-middle-east-responded-india-and-pakistans-crisis>

²² PTI, & PTI. (2025, May 27). Indian delegation engages in diplomatic outreach across Muslim world post Operation Sindoor. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/indian-delegation-engages-in-diplomatic-outreach-across-muslim-world-post-operation-Sindoor-3558619>

vulnerabilities in Pakistan's defence infrastructure. The Indian Air Force's use of advanced technology and electronic warfare displayed a capability that outpaced regional adversaries and asserted India's military-technological edge.

6.3. Participation in Multilateral Forums and Peacekeeping

Post-operation, India emphasized its commitment to international law and norms, presenting its actions as defensive, lawful, and morally justified. Indian diplomats engaged with multilateral platforms including the United Nations and the G20 to clarify that the operation was an act of counterterrorism, not war. By clearly distinguishing between terrorist groups and the civilian population, India gained broad diplomatic backing.

India's peacekeeping history and participation in multilateral institutions such as the UN Peacekeeping Forces, BRICS, and the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) further strengthened its credibility. Operation Sindoor became a case study in calibrated response and conflict de-escalation aligning with India's long-standing image as a peace-seeking democracy with strategic depth.

6.4. Counterterrorism Cooperation and Intelligence Sharing

Operation Sindoor set a new benchmark for intelligence-driven operations in South Asia. India's success was rooted in detailed intelligence mapping, real-time surveillance, and robust coordination between defence and intelligence agencies. Recognizing the regional threat posed by transnational terrorism, India has since expanded its counterterrorism collaborations with key allies including the United States, France, Israel, and members of the Quad.

India also launched digital initiatives to combat online radicalization and disinformation campaigns. Following the operation, Pakistan's efforts to spread propaganda were met with swift fact-checking and narrative control, supported by Indian cyber agencies and global tech firms. India further rolled out domestic awareness campaigns to boost media literacy and resist foreign information warfare, enhancing its cyber resilience and global leadership in combating hybrid threats.

6.5. Strategic Diplomacy and Economic Pressure

India employed a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic strategies to isolate Pakistan diplomatically and economically. Measures such as suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, halting bilateral trade, shutting the Attari-Wagah border, and revoking the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme for Pakistani nationals applied calibrated pressure without inviting global criticism.

By suspending the water-sharing treaty, India exercised its legal rights under extreme provocation and turned a diplomatic instrument into a strategic tool. The move, while controversial, highlighted India's new doctrine "terror and talks cannot go together" and created serious implications for Pakistan's water security and economy.

6.6. Cultural and Diplomatic Isolation

India imposed a total cultural boycott of Pakistan, banning artists, streaming content, and any form of bilateral cultural exchange. Furthermore, India declared Pakistani defence attaches in its High Commission as *persona non grata* and drastically reduced Pakistan's diplomatic presence in New Delhi. These actions, symbolic yet substantive, reinforced India's firm stance on non-engagement with state sponsors of terrorism.

6.7. Global Support and Strategic Messaging

India's disciplined communication during and after Operation Sindoor ensured it retained narrative control. By framing the operation as a counterterrorism initiative with minimal civilian impact, India

gained support from multiple global leaders. For the first time, many nations openly supported India's right to defend itself, signalling a shift in the global perception of South Asian security.

Operation Sindoor also reframed the Kashmir discourse on the international stage. Instead of being tied to territorial or political narratives, the operation was discussed purely in counterterrorism terms an achievement in diplomatic messaging and geopolitical reframing.

Operation Sindoor has emerged as a watershed moment in India's foreign and security policy. It marks a shift from passive deterrence to proactive engagement, combining force with foresight. India's response was guided by legal principles, strategic restraint, and moral clarity establishing a new template for how democratic nations can respond to asymmetric threats.

In the post-Sindoor geopolitical landscape, India has reinforced its leadership in South Asia, solidified its role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture, and emerged as a key global actor in counterterrorism cooperation. By intertwining military precision, diplomatic outreach, and multilateral engagement, India has redefined what it means to be a responsible regional and global power.²³

7. Future Outlook: Sustaining Relevance in an Evolving Geopolitical Landscape

7.1. Anticipating Shifts in Warfare: Hybrid, Cyber, and Proxy Threats

Operation Sindoor has highlighted the rapidly changing nature of modern conflict, where traditional military engagements are increasingly supplemented and sometimes overshadowed by hybrid warfare, cyber operations, and proxy conflicts. India must anticipate that future threats will not be confined to physical borders or conventional battlefields. Instead, adversaries are likely to exploit information warfare, digital sabotage, economic coercion, and non-state actors to undermine national security. The lessons of Operation Sindoor reinforce the need for India to invest in advanced cyber capabilities, robust intelligence networks, and integrated command structures that can respond swiftly to multi-domain threats.

7.2. India's Strategic Adaptability and Diplomatic Engagement

India's response during and after Operation Sindoor demonstrated a new level of strategic flexibility. By combining precise military action with assertive diplomatic outreach, India has shown it can adapt to evolving challenges without escalating crises beyond control. Going forward, India's foreign policy will need to remain agile balancing deterrence with dialogue, and retaliation with restraint. Proactive engagement with global and regional powers, as well as multilateral organizations, will be essential to shape international norms on counterterrorism, cyber security, and rules-based conduct.

7.3. Building Resilient Alliances and Managing Rivalries

The post-Sindoor environment underscores the importance of resilient alliances and pragmatic management of rivalries. India's ability to garner international support from the West, the Middle East, and strategic partners like Russia and Israel demonstrates the value of diversified partnerships. Strengthening existing alliances, while forging new ones in technology, intelligence sharing, and defence production, will be vital. At the same time, India must continue to manage complex rivalries with China and Pakistan, leveraging both hard and soft power to deter aggression and protect national interests.

In the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, India stands at a strategic crossroads. To sustain its relevance and security in an unpredictable geopolitical landscape, India must embrace innovation in warfare, maintain diplomatic agility, and invest in robust alliances. By doing so, India will not only protect its sovereignty

²³ Operation SINDOOR: India's strategic clarity and calculated force. (n.d.). <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=2128748>

but also shape the regional and global order in its favour, ensuring stability and prosperity in the years ahead.

Conclusion

Operation Sindoor has emerged as a transformative event in India's geopolitical history, fundamentally altering the country's strategic posture, diplomatic engagements, and regional leadership narrative. Unlike past incidents, which often saw limited retaliatory actions constrained by international pressure and fears of nuclear escalation, Operation Sindoor redefined the boundaries of response and reasserted India's strategic autonomy. It was not just a tactical military success but a doctrinal leap asserting that state-sponsored terrorism will invite both military and non-military costs, and that deterrence is no longer limited to reactive posturing but includes pre-emptive and punitive frameworks.

The operation's impact on India-Pakistan relations was immediate and profound. By striking deep into Pakistani territory and targeting terror infrastructures with precision, India dismantled the long-held assumption that Pakistan's nuclear capability could serve as a shield for sponsoring proxy wars. The erosion of this strategic comfort zone has forced Islamabad to reassess the sustainability of its low-intensity conflict doctrine. India's retaliation further blurred the lines between state and non-state actors, firmly placing responsibility on the Pakistani state for cross-border terrorism. This recalibration of accountability is a significant development in South Asian strategic affairs.

Operation Sindoor also highlighted the expanding nature of modern conflict encompassing cyber operations, information warfare, economic pressure, and cultural diplomacy. India's integrated use of these tools demonstrated an understanding that 21st-century warfare extends beyond the battlefield. By successfully managing the narrative both domestically and internationally, India garnered support from key global powers, while marginalizing Pakistan diplomatically. This operation thus serves as a blueprint for hybrid warfare where military success is augmented by information dominance and strategic diplomacy.

India's relations with major global powers evolved significantly post-Sindoor. While ties with the United States were tested due to Washington's restrained response, India's partnership with Russia was reinforced through operational military support. Engagements with the European Union and Middle Eastern nations demonstrated India's growing acceptance as a responsible regional power capable of handling crises without global mediation. The refusal to involve third-party mediators, and insistence on bilateralism, elevated India's position as a self-reliant actor in international conflict resolution.

Another notable consequence was the strategic reassertion of India in multilateral platforms. The country's measured, transparent communication during and after Operation Sindoor positioned it as a global advocate for counterterrorism, legal use of force, and regional stability. India's active participation in the UN, BRICS, the Quad, and other forums reinforced its commitment to a rules-based international order while bolstering its leadership image in the Indo-Pacific region.

On the home front, the operation enhanced national cohesion and public confidence in India's security apparatus. Strategic decisions such as the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, revocation of visas, and total cultural boycott of Pakistan illustrated a whole-of-government approach. The deterrence message was loud and clear: India will defend its sovereignty through a combination of hard power and smart power.

However, the operation also exposed gaps that need to be addressed. India's crisis communication infrastructure, civil defence readiness, and cyber resilience must evolve in anticipation of similar or more

complex hybrid threats in the future. Further institutionalizing cross-agency coordination, refining doctrinal clarity, and investing in cyber and space capabilities are vital for sustaining long-term security and influence.

In conclusion, Operation Sindoor redefined India's geopolitical strategy through the prism of decisive action, doctrinal evolution, and comprehensive engagement. It set new standards for counterterrorism operations, diplomatic assertiveness, and regional leadership. The post-operation landscape is one where India has asserted itself as a principled yet powerful actor willing to defend its national interests while engaging constructively with the international community. As India prepares for future uncertainties, the legacy of Operation Sindoor will serve as a strategic compass for balancing conflict deterrence with cooperative global leadership.