

Redlines Redrawn: Operation Sindoor and India's New Normal, by Maj Gen Bipin Bakshi, Air Mshl Rajesh Kumar, Amb Anil Trigunayat and Brig Akhelesh Bhargava, Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2025, pp. 189, Rs 900

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On 22 April 2025, four terrorists armed with automatic rifles carried out a brutal attack on unsuspecting tourists in the scenic Pahalgam valley of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). This heinous terrorist attack tragically claimed the lives of 26 tourists, thereby significantly disrupting the surge of tourism in J&K that had grown considerably after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019. This attack serves as a major setback to J&K's trajectory towards normalcy and underscores Pakistan's consistent subversive attempts to disrupt peace in the Union Territory. To the Indian public, the Pahalgam attacks evoked the painful memories of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, wherein Pakistan employed a similar modus operandi to target innocent civilians. However, unlike 26/11, the Pahalgam attack occurred at a time when India's political leadership had repeatedly affirmed its policy of zero tolerance to terrorism. This was evident from India's conspicuous and calibrated military action

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targeting terrorist infrastructure inside Pakistan in its 2016 surgical strikes and 2019 Balakot airstrikes. These military actions were India's response to the Uri and Pulwama terrorist attacks which claimed the lives of Indian military and paramilitary personnel. In this context, both the Indian strategic community and public anticipated a strong and decisive response by India against Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of the Pahalgam attacks. This highly anticipated response materialised in the form of Operation Sindoor launched by the Indian Military on 7 May 2025.

This operation was conceived by India's political and military leadership as a punitive attack targeting terrorist infrastructure deep inside the territory of Pakistan. This military action was characterised by swift offensive strikes employing high-precision missiles and other guided munitions, carried out without the Indian military personnel or platforms physically crossing the international border. According to India's official press release, a total of nine major terrorist camps situated deep inside Pakistan were struck while ensuring minimal collateral damage. Pakistan swiftly launched retaliatory strikes inside India using drones, missiles and artillery targeting India's military infrastructure. Much of these Pakistani retaliatory strikes were effectively countered and neutralised by India's robust and multilayered air defence grids.

In response to this escalation perpetuated by Pakistan, India launched a series of synchronised strikes targeting its military infrastructure as far away as 230 kilometres inside the Pakistani territory. After an intensive 88-hours military exchange, both India and Pakistan agreed for a ceasefire on 10 May 2025. Operation Sindoor is unprecedented compared to any other kinetic engagement between India and Pakistan in recent history. For the first time in over five decades since the 1971 War, India struck multiple military targets across the geographic expanse of Pakistani territory. It also marked the first military engagement between the two nations to be conducted entirely through the synchronised use of long-range missiles, drones and conventional artillery in both offensive and defensive operations, embodying the key characteristics of non-contact warfare. Politically, Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's resolve to redraw and redefine its red lines, warning Pakistan of the serious repercussions of their continued use of terrorism to target Indian civilians and military personnel. In his national address on 12 May 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi categorically declared that Operation Sindoor has set up the new normal in India's fight against terrorism.

Published just seven months after the ceasefire, the book *Redlines Redrawn: Operation Sindoor and India's New Normal* offers not only a

compelling narrative of the sequence events but also a critical assessment of the various facets of the operation. Jointly authored by Major General Bipin Bakshi (Retd), Air Marshal Rajesh Kumar (Retd), Brigadier Akhelesh Bhargava (Retd) and Ambassador Anil Trigunayat, the book provides critical insights into the political, military and diplomatic dimensions that shaped Operation Sindoor. The eight chapters of this book meticulously document these dimensions and present them in a manner that is easy for lay readers to understand, while remaining academically enriching for scholars seeking to draw key inferences from the military engagement.

The first three chapters, authored by Major General Bipin Bakshi, present a comprehensive analysis of the insidious political motives that drove Pakistan to plot the Pahalgam attack, the execution of the attack and India's multi-dimensional military retaliation. In the opening chapter, the author gives a data-driven assessment showing how India's multifaceted security measures over the past three decades have been effective in decisively curbing Pakistan-backed terrorism in J&K. The chapter also highlights how rapid economic growth and infrastructure development following the abrogation of Article 370 have been propelling J&K towards normalcy and driving consistent growth in tourism. The author argues that Pakistan's mounting domestic security and political challenges, combined with waning effectiveness of its proxy war strategy to destabilise J&K, prompted its military leadership to plot the despicable Pahalgam attack. The chapter also notes that the attack was deliberately timed by Pakistan to coincide with the visit of the US Vice President to India in a bid to internationalise the Kashmir issue.

The second chapter presents a chilling narrative of how the brutal terrorist attack unfolded, based on harrowing testimonies of survivors while revealing the personal stories of the innocent victims who lost their lives on the fateful day. The third chapter provides a chronological assessment of the key developments in the days leading up to Operation Sindoor, along with a detailed account of the progression of the 88-hour military engagement. The chapter also throws light on the key role played by the Indian Navy and the Border Security Forces (BSF) in the course of the operation. This enables the reader to understand how resolute political decision-making, coupled with deft diplomatic maneuvering, empowered India's military planners to mount a befitting kinetic response to punish the perpetrators of the Pahalgam terror attack.

The fourth chapter authored by Air Marshal Rajesh Kumar, examines the critical role of combat air operations and space surveillance in both offensive and defensive actions during Operation Sindoor. It offers valuable

insights into how the combat air operations were meticulously planned and precisely executed, while also providing authoritative details on the weapons and unmanned systems employed to conduct the initial strikes as well as the counterattack. The chapter elucidates several key lessons that were derived from this operation while also exploring the nuclear dimensions of Operation Sindoor. The subsequent chapter, authored by Brigadier Akhelesh Bhargava, shifts the focus on the air defence operations that played a critical role in thwarting Pakistan's escalatory strikes. The chapter effectively presents a comprehensive picture of how India's robust air defence grid succeeded in safeguarding Indian airspace and territory against Pakistan's indiscriminate missile and drone attacks. Both these chapters succeed in providing key operational insights, reflecting the extensive professional experience and expertise of their respective authors in these domains.

The sixth chapter, authored by veteran diplomat Ambassador Anil Trigunayat, shifts focus to the diplomatic dimensions of Operation Sindoor. The chapter highlights how India's diplomatic measures, including the suspension of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), had set the stage for its subsequent military action against Pakistan. Reflecting on the underwhelming support of the global community for India's resolute actions against terrorism, the chapter argues that India must not hesitate to pursue a *Walk Alone* strategy, even in the absence of international backing, to assert its unwavering stance against state-sponsored terrorism. The last two chapters again authored by Major General Bakshi draw crucial inferences from Operation Sindoor regarding the strengthening of India's warfighting capabilities, strategic communications and cybersecurity infrastructure. In these chapters, the author provides an extensive analysis of the escalation matrix of Operation Sindoor and India's adoption of Dynamic Response Military Doctrine to guide responses to future exigencies of a similar nature.

Overall, this book succeeds in presenting a compelling narrative of the sequence of events before, during and after the 88-hour combat engagement, while also offering incisive analysis and drawing key inferences based on empirical study of open-source information. What makes these analyses nuanced and balanced is the fact that while the authors prominently highlight the successful attributes of the military operations, they do not shy away from pointing out the lacunae, especially India's strategic communication and media management. This is important, given the book's observation that despite India's overwhelming upper hand in the military engagement, the absence of proactive narrative-building undermined the strategic messaging of Operation Sindoor.

Apart from the academic and scholarly nature of its analysis, the book stands out for the technical accuracy of its assessment of Operation Sindoor. As brought out earlier, this aspect can be attributed to the vast operational experience and subject-matter expertise of the authors in their respective domains. As the lead author, Major General Bipin Bakshi has done commendable work in both setting up the contextual backdrop of the analysis of Operation Sindoor through his initial chapters and articulating the key takeaways and recommendations in the concluding chapters. This is notably highlighted in the Foreword by General Upendra Dwivedi, Chief of the Army Staff, who commends the authors for the clarity, depth and vision evident in their analysis of Operation Sindoor. He further describes the book as a testament to the spirit of jointness and ‘whole-of-nation approach’ that underpins the Indian Army’s architecture in this ‘Decade of Transformation’.

The publication of this book, just seven months after the ceasefire, is particularly timely as its inferences and recommendations are grounded in factually authentic open-source information. The book’s immediate relevance and long-term significance are underscored by the fact that its important findings have been published at a time when public memory and national discourse on Operation Sindoor remain fresh. Hence, this book is a must-read for the military planners, policymakers, strategic observers, diplomats, media personnel and the general public, as they collectively play a vital role as stakeholders in India’s resolve to combat terrorism.