

Operation Sindoor is an apt and timely response to Pahalgam



(Graphic courtesy NDTV).

The kinetic strikes delivered by the Indian armed forces on the night of May 6–7 on targets in proximate Pakistan–Occupied Kashmir (PoK), as well as deeper in Pakistan, should have served to fulfil two underlying objectives in the larger framework of the India–Pakistan power play.

First, this was an overdue act of “retribution” to assuage justified public and political outrage at the barbaric and faith–based gunning down of 26 tourists in Pahalgam, Kashmir. It could have happened earlier but “revenge” as the old French adage goes, “is a dish, best, served cold,” because it is the assurance and inevitability of response, rather than its swiftness, that sends an appropriate message to the attacker and establishes the credibility of the victim.

Here, it bears mention that the euphemism “cross–border terrorism” coined by India’s national security establishment to describe what were clearly “acts of war” has repeatedly come back to haunt us. Training and arming fighters in Pakistan/PoK territory and then launching them across recognised boundaries to wreak death and destruction had always constituted acts of war and demanded an appropriate riposte. This was compounded by describing the perpetrators as “non–state actors”, providing an alibi for Pakistan, which claimed that they were Kashmiri “freedom fighters”. Let us also recall that following the 9/11

attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, then US President Bush declared that the terrorists’ actions were acts of war and gave America the right to act in self–defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

Secondly, no matter how spectacular or satisfying an act of “retribution” may seem to the public, it can only be classified as a tactical level response. What the Indian state actually needs to establish (or re–establish) vis–a–vis Pakistan is “conventional deterrence” as part of a well thought out strategy. Mutual nuclear deterrence has held for 26 years on the subcontinent (despite India’s “no–first–use” commitment), since neither side has employed nuclear weapons. But India’s significant conventional superiority over Pakistan was eroded when, (a) A “second front” became a reality, with the emergence of the China–Pak axis and (b) Pakistan deployed tactical nuclear weapons and switched to a doctrine of “flexible response” as a response to India’s putative “Cold Start” doctrine. In this context, it became apparent in the wake of India’s post–Uri surgical strike of 2016 and the post–Pulwama air strike of 2019, that although we had called Pakistan’s bluff of a lowered nuclear threshold, we had failed to deter it in the conventional domain.



Colonel Sofiya Qureshi addresses the media regarding ‘Operation Sindoor’ missile strike after Pahalgam terror attack, at National Media Centre in New Delhi on 7 May 2025. (Photo Credit: ANI)