

CHANGING NATURE OF NEW AGE TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented geopolitical landscape, South Asia stands at the epicentre of a rapidly evolving security paradigm that is marked by historical grievances, geopolitical tensions, and a complex tapestry of ethnic and religious identities. Today, this region is witnessing a wave of terrorism that is much more evolved and lethal in its nature due to technological savviness, ideological fluidity, and decentralised operational tactics. This emerging phenomenon is called “New Age Terrorism.” It is essential to note that these terror outfits have made a very clear departure from their traditional and centralised models of the past, harnessing tools of globalisation through various forms of new age media such as social media, encrypted messaging platforms, the deep, dark web, and transnational financial networks.¹ These are

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1. Eziho Promise Ogele, “Unveiling the Shadows: Exploring the Roles of the Dark Web and Encrypted Messaging Apps in Facilitating Online Terrorist Networks,” *Journal of Strategic and Global Studies*, 8, no. 2, 2025, pp. 142-143, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394252943_Unveiling_the_Shadows_Exploring_the_Roles_of_the_Dark_

used as strategic enablers to achieve their radical objectives. Unlike methods used by traditional terrorist organisations, these groups have now decentralised themselves, promoting lone wolf terror attacks, collaborating with local homegrown terror outfits, and operating within the fluid architecture of the digital world, encouraging media *jihad*.² Their agility creates a space for them to evade the conventional counter-terrorism framework and challenges the authority of the state by exploiting sensitive domestic issues with the aim of eroding the social fabric of the country through fear, misinformation, and polarisation.³

On April 22, 2025, the cold-blooded massacre of 26 civilians in Pahalgam, a town in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), served as a brutal reminder of the persistent and lethal nature of this threat.⁴ The attack, carried out by The Resistance Front (TRF), a Pakistan-based proxy of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), was not merely an act of violence but a very timely and calculated act of sending a political message to India, with the clear intention of disrupting peace and the burgeoning tourism in the Kashmir Valley.⁵ In the early hours of May 7, 2025, India responded by carrying out Operation Sindoor, a very bold and well-calibrated military response with a combination of advanced standoff weaponry, targeting terrorist infrastructures operated by the Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and LeT; not just limited to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) but, for the first time, penetrating deep and striking inside Pakistan.⁶ It is essential to

Web_and_Encrypted_Messaging_Apps_in_Facilitating_Online_Terrorist_Networks. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

2. Observer Research Foundation, "Global Terrorism in the Digital Age: How Terrorist Groups Adapt & Evolve," Observer Research Foundation Video, 36: 19-42: 37, January 26, 2025, <https://www.orfonline.org/videos/global-terrorism-in-the-digital-age-how-terrorist-groups-adapt-evolve>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
3. Ibid.
4. Sudha Ramachandra, "'Operation Sindoor': Will India's Military Strikes in Pakistan Curb Cross-Border Terrorism?," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 17, no. 4, 2025, p. 8, <https://rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/CTTA-June-2025.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
5. Amitabh Mattoo, "Responding to the Terror Attack in Pahalgam," *The Hindu*, April 24, 2025, <https://jammuuniversity.ac.in/sites/default/files/inline-files/All%20English%20Editorial%2024-4.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
6. Pawan Atri, "How Operation Sindoor Marked a Shift in India's Counter-Terror Strategy," *Sputnik*, May 16, 2025, <https://sputniknews.in/20250516/how-operation-sindoor-marked-a-shift-in-indias-counter-terror-strategy-9147772.html>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

note that India was cautious and avoided civilian and military targets. This operation evidently comprises a decisive retaliation showcasing the nation's proactive, assertive, and uncompromising approach to India's national security, a clear signal and undeniable paradigm shift in its counter-terrorism posture, moving from a policy of strategic restraint to a much more proactive and punitive deterrence policy, highlighting its zero-tolerance for terrorism.⁷

Though this kinetic response is strategically essential as the need of the hour for the nation's defence and deterrence, it is important to note that it only represents one facet of a much larger and more complex challenge.

A nuanced and multi-layered analysis that delves into the multi-faceted nature of non-state actors is essential in order to truly understand and effectively counter the scourge of new age terrorism in the South Asian region. This requires exploring its deep historical and ideological roots; the critical and active role of the state's breeding and sponsorship of terrorism; the strategic transnational playbook and operational tactics of global *jihadi* outfits; and the intricate factors of sociological and psychological vulnerabilities that create a fertile ground for radicalisation. This article aims to emphasise, that though proactive responses and a lasting security doctrine remain essential for immediate defence, to ensure lasting peace in the region, a holistic and multi-pronged strategy is the need of the hour.

HISTORICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF RADICALISM

Islamist radicalisation in South Asia is not a recent phenomenon of the 21st century; rather, it has been a product of the region's deeply embedded historical and complex political evolution. Its roots can be traced down to the century-old flow of ideological movements shaped by Islamic invaders, British colonial rule, and then the post-colonial struggle for political identity.⁸ Islamist groups of the *Salafi*

7. Priyadarshini Baruah, "Operation Sindoor & Beyond: Countering New Age Terrorism in South Asia," *Chakranewz*, July 9, 2025, <https://chakranewz.com/insights/operation-sindoor-and-beyond-countering-new-age-terrorism-in-south-asia>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

8. Arvind Gupta, Ashok Behuria, P.V. Ramana and Pushpita Das, "India's Experience in Dealing with Terrorism," in Dr Anand Kumar, ed., *The Terror Challenge in South Asia and Prospect of Regional Cooperation* (New Delhi: Pentagon Security International,

and *Deobandi* sects strongly believe in establishing a *Dar-al-Islam*, a concept radically advocating the rule of Islam, implementing a social and political order based on rigid and diabolically severe interpretations of the *Sharia* law.⁹ It is essential to note that the vision of *Dar-al-Islam* is clearly a part of the Common Strategic Objective (CSO) of Islamist outfits across the world. Time and again, these radical Islamist groups invoke and justify their actions by romanticising the medieval Islamic legacy in the Indian subcontinent, which they claim was disrupted due to British colonialism.¹⁰ Within this narrative, India is often portrayed as *Dar-al-Harb*, meaning 'state of war,' where Muslims are not in power but in constant struggle to recapture power for Islam by waging *jihad*.¹¹ This narrative framework legitimises their Islamist rhetoric of *Ghazwa-e-Hind* (a concept interpreted as a holy war against India; this has been derived from the Islamic *Hadith* to support their ideological campaign).¹² Such religious narratives are often used to gain support in order to achieve their radical strategic objective of converting Hindustan (India) from *Dar-al-Harb* to *Dar-al-Islam*. Although these Islamist groups share a common strategic objective, they differ tactically and adopt different approaches to achieve their objective.

The cataclysmic 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent led to the creation of Pakistan, based on the fundamental ideologies of Islam. The Pakistani military further aligns itself institutionally with the Islamic values and principles of *jihad* and operates under the official

2012), p. 46, https://idsa.in/system/files/book/Book_TerrorChallengesSouthAsia.pdf. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

9. Migration and Home Affairs, European Union, Magnus Ranstorp, "A Practical Introduction to Islamist Extremism," The Ran Centre of Excellence, December, 2019, p. 7, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-01/ran_factbook_islamist_extremism_december_2019_en.pdf. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
10. Priyadarshini Baruah, "Sindoor & Shadows: South Asia's Silent War," *Sri Lanka Guardian*, July 13, 2025, <https://slguardian.org/sindoor-shadows-south-asias-silent-war/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
11. Dr Bashir Ahmad Khan, "The British Imperialism in India and the 'Ahl-i-Hadith' Response," *Insight Islamicus*, 1, no. 1, 2001, p. 80, <https://islamicstudies.uok.edu.in/Files/36892408-1fed-4431-9848-0761b9e02587/Journal/94aa9725-1339-4c99-a869-2308b0f0374c.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.
12. Rasheed Kidwai, "The Complex Narratives of 'Ghazwa-e-Hind'," Observer Research Foundation, October 10, 2019, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/complex-narratives-ghazwa-e-hind-56257#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20phrase%20that,the%20government's%20decision%20on%20Kashmir>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

motto “*Iman, Taqwa, Jihad fi Sabilillah*” (faith, piety, and struggle in the path of God).¹³ For instance, the Pakistan Army launched an Islamist *lashkar* (tribal invasion) over the princely state of J&K in 1947, leading to the first India-Pakistan War (1947-48).¹⁴ This conflict marked a primary and most volatile flashpoint between the two nations. Since then, Pakistan has made several attempts to wrest control over J&K from India through both conventional and asymmetric warfare.

Under the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, Pakistan witnessed a critical shift in its political and strategic trajectory, as his policies actively promoted Islamist ideologies, empowering and funding Islamist groups, which intensified a mass-scale radicalisation within the Pakistani society.¹⁵ This served as a tool for two key purposes: first, it helped Zia to consolidate power and legitimise his military dictatorship domestically against secular political parties;¹⁶ second, Zia pursued an extremely hostile strategic foreign policy against neighbours, especially India.¹⁷ It was during this period that the infamous doctrine, “Bleed India with a Thousand Cuts,” was developed, encouraging non-state actors with Islamist ideologies to plant anti-India sentiments and destabilise the nation from within.¹⁸ The Pakistani deep state continues to instrumentalise this narrative and cement the idea of Kashmir as an unfinished business of the 1947 partition deep within the psyche and rhetoric of Pakistani nationals.

Simultaneously, the anti-Soviet *jihad* in Afghanistan (the holy war) during the late 1980s, which was heavily funded and supported by the United States and Saudi Arabia through Pakistan’s Inter-

13. Balbir Punj, “Operation Sindoor—Pakistan’s Price for Bigotry,” *The Indian Express*, May 15, 2025, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/operation-sindoor-pakistans-price-for-bigotry-10007126/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

14. “Defending Kashmir,” *Bharat Rakshak*, October 12, 2006, <https://www.bharat-rakshak.com/army/today/defending-kashmir/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

15. Shamil Shams, “Pakistan—Before and After Zia-ul Haq,” *DW*, August 8, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistans-islamization-before-and-after-dictator-zia-ul-haq/a-19480315>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. Major General Dhruv C Katoch, “Combatting Cross-Border Terrorism: Need for a Doctrinal Approach,” *Journal of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, 6, no. 4, 2013, pp. 2-4, https://archive.claws.co.in/images/journals_doc/212486728_DhruvCKatoch.pdf. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

Services Intelligence (ISI), further became a major turning point in the evolution of Islamist terrorism, as this conflict not only served as a lethal training ground for thousands of *jihadi* militants but also created a vast battle-hardened pool of terrorists influenced by the radical *Salafi-jihadist* ideology.¹⁹ This gave rise to regional groups like the LeT and JeM, that reoriented their focus towards India, particularly Kashmir, with the active support of the Pakistani state.²⁰

Over time, these groups evolved, aligning themselves ideologically and operationally with global *jihadist* networks such as Al Qaeda (AQ) and later the Islamic State (IS/ISIS), thereby integrating South Asia's regional conflicts into a broader transnational struggle and giving local grievances a global, apocalyptic dimension.²¹

PAKISTAN'S DOCTRINE OF ASYMMETRICAL WARFARE: BREEDERS OR SPONSORS?

For decades, the ISI provided a safe haven to the nation's powerful military establishment. Waging proxy wars is the cornerstone of Pakistan's security doctrine that allows it to maintain a veneer of plausible deniability on the international stage while working actively to destabilise India. The primary focus remains J&K, but its strategy involves making inroads into other sensitive areas like India's northeast, often using proxies and allied transnational terror groups based in Bangladesh and Nepal.²²

At the heart of this crisis lies Pakistan's troubling role of breeding and sponsoring terrorists. Evidence suggests not mere negligence but strategic complicity by the state and its intelligence apparatus, and is arguably the most critical factor crippling the security and stability of the entire South Asian region.²³ The 2011 discovery of Al

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Baruah, n. 7.

22. Dr Shalini Chawla and Priyadarshini Baruah, "Balancing Act: Combatting Islamist Radicalisation and Advancing Secular Education in Assam," *Defence and Diplomacy*, vol. 13, no. 4 July-September 2024, pp. 115-116, <https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/09-Shalini-Chawla-and-Priyadarshini-Baruah.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

23. Habib Mohammadi, "Khalilzad says Credible Reports Indicate Terrorist Camps in Pakistan," Amu TV, April 26, 2025, <https://amu.tv/170906/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden sheltered in a fortified compound in Abbottabad, a garrison city located a stone's throw from a major Pakistani military academy,²⁴ stripped away any lingering doubts about its duplicitous pattern in sheltering the world's most wanted terrorists.

This behaviour has been repeatedly flagged by international bodies. A 2021 report by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which had placed Pakistan on its "grey list" for years, heavily criticised the country's persistent failure to adequately regulate its vast network of radical *madrassas*.²⁵ The religious schools continue to serve as indoctrination hubs and recruitment centres for terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).²⁶ On more than one occasion, they have reportedly received opaque funding from external state and non-state actors who share similar anti-India ideologies.

This strategy of breeding and sponsoring terrorists was once again laid bare in the April 2025 Pahalgam massacre. In April 2025, Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal General Asim Munir, in a public address, delivered a venomous speech reasserting the two-nation theory and issuing thinly-veiled threats over Kashmir.²⁷ This rhetoric, coming from the figurehead of the ISI also during the deadly 2019 Pulwama attack, is a clear and unambiguous signal of intent.²⁸ It demonstrates the military's eagerness to disrupt Kashmir's growing stability, undermine its economic progress, and revive its own waning strategic relevance in the region. The Mumbai attacks

24. Bill Roggio, "Pakistani Complicity in Sheltering Osama Bin Laden is Evident," *Threat Matrix*, May 2, 2011, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/05/pakistani_complicity_in_shelte.php. Bruce Hoffman, "Abbottabad Revisited," *War on the Rocks*, June 22, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/06/abbottabad-revisited/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

25. U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Pakistan," 2021, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/pakistan/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

26. Ibid.

27. Shekhar Gupta, "What is Asim Munir Thinking?" *The Print*, May 10, 2025, <https://theprint.in/national-interest/what-is-asim-munir-thinking/2620633/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

28. Dr Shalini Chawla, "The Pahalgam Terror Attack and Pakistan's Growing Anxiety," *Expert View*, 6/25, April 6, 2025, Centre for Air Power Studies, April 28, 2025, https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/EV_SC_28_4_25-NIS-1.pdf. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

of 26/11, another complex, multi-target operation that was executed with military precision by the LeT, also stand as a devastating example of this policy.

THE TRANSNATIONAL PLAYBOOK: TECHNOLOGY, NETWORKS, AND GLOBAL JIHAD

New age terrorism is fundamentally characterised by its remarkable adaptability to modern technology and its decentralised structure. The contemporary groups operate as fluid, resilient, and networked cells in stark contrast to the hierarchical, command-and-control models of traditional terrorist organisations of the 20th century.²⁹ They employ a variety of commercially available technologies like affordable quadcopter drones for battlefield reconnaissance and weapon delivery, utilise sophisticated end-to-end encrypted communication applications like Telegram and Signal for discrete operational coordination, and master various cyber platforms for propaganda dissemination, terror recruitment, and fund-raising.³⁰

Through the production of slick and psychologically designed sophisticated online campaigns, they target, groom, and recruit vulnerable individuals, luring them with a potent cocktail of purpose, belonging, and empowerment. This model has been perfected in J&K by groups like the LeT and JeM that skilfully weave local grievances and separatist narratives into a broader, more appealing *jihadist* ideology.³¹ For instance, in the case of Burhan Wani, a terrorist commander killed in 2016, his adept use of social media was used to glorify *jihad* and project a charismatic, revolutionary image.³² His death sparked widespread unrest and a fresh wave of local recruitment, portraying the image of martyrdom in the digital age.³³

29. J.M. Berger, "How ISIS Games Twitter," *The Atlantic*, June 16, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/isis-iraq-twitter-social-media-strategy/372856/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

30. Ibid.

31. Khalid Shah, "Ideological Shift, Public Support, and Social Media: The 'New' in Kashmir's 'New Militancy'," Observer Research Foundation, January 10, 2020, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/ideological-shift-public-support-and-social-media-the-new-in-kashmir-s-new-militancy>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

This threat, however, is not confined to Kashmir. The ethnic conflicts in India's northeast, such as the violent clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities in Manipur, exacerbated by the porous India-Myanmar border and Myanmar's own political instability,³⁴ create fertile ground for radical elements and external actors. Similarly, the recent political vacuum in Bangladesh, following the fall of the Awami League, has created a similar opportunity for the hardline Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) to re-emerge and expand its influence.³⁵ This development raises significant security concerns for India's eastern region.

THE BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND: RADICALISATION AND THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA

A crucial and often underestimated dimension of this challenge is the socio-psychological battlefield where the seeds of radicalisation are deftly sown. The geopolitical or security lens falls short when examining the allure of extremism; it is deeply rooted in the personal and societal crises of identity, purpose, and belongingness.

In most of the South Asian region, rapid socio-economic change, coupled with persistent issues of economic marginalisation and systemic inequality, creates a pervasive sense of hopelessness and frustration. For a young person facing a future with bleak career prospects, extremist narratives can be a powerful, albeit deceptive, alternative.³⁶ These ideologies provide simple, black-and-white answers to complex questions, identifying a clear enemy responsible for the individual's suffering and offering a path to retribution and divine glory.³⁷ It gives a sense of empowerment to the disenfranchised

34. Srinivasan, "Manipur and the Myanmar Conflict: Challenge for India with Implications for Regional Security Competition," *Security Nexus* 26, 2025, pp. 1-4, <https://dkiapcss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/N2672-Manipur-and-the-Myanmar-Conflict.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

35. Saurabh Gupta, "What Big Bangladesh Verdict on This Radical Outfit Means for India," *NDTV World*, June 2, 2025, <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/radical-outfit-jamaat-e-islami-may-soon-contest-bangladesh-polls-how-it-impacts-india-8567685>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

36. Fahim Nawaz, "Socioeconomic Hardships, Religiosity, and Radicalization: A Non-Linear Exploration," *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10, no. 1, 2024, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311886.2023.2286042#d1e165>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

37. Ibid.

and a heroic identity to those who feel invisible. This process is being further accelerated by the advancement of the new media platforms. Social media algorithms designed to maximise user engagement, inadvertently create digital echo chambers and filter bubbles that systematically reinforce extremist viewpoints while screening out moderate or opposing perspectives.³⁸ Digital self-radicalisation makes the threat more diffuse and unpredictable, as individuals can also be inspired to act as “lone wolves” with little or no direct contact with a formal terrorist organisation, quickly morphing their radically trained thoughts into acts of violence.³⁹

Adding another layer of complexity to this issue is the role of certain segments of the South Asian diaspora. While the vast majority of diaspora members are law-abiding citizens who contribute positively to their host countries, vocal and well-funded minority groups in the Western nations have become a significant source of ideological and financial support for extremist and secessionist movements back home.⁴⁰ Operating from the safety of countries with robust free speech laws, they are easily able to exploit political and social justice platforms to lobby against India.

From organising protests, running social media campaigns, and funding organisations with links to radical terrorist groups, this “long-distance nationalism” of theirs provides a crucial lifeline to extremist movements, earning them international legitimacy and a steady stream of funding that is difficult to track.⁴¹ For instance, some Khalistani separatist movements, largely dormant in India, are kept alive and energised by financial and ideological support from pockets of the diaspora in Canada, the UK, and the US, posing a persistent, albeit low-level, security challenge.⁴² This external

38. Priyadarshini Baruah, “Harvesting Souls Online: Islamic States’ Media Propaganda,” *Defence and Diplomacy*, vol. 13, no. 4, July-September 2024, pp. 71-72, <https://capsindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/06-Priyadarshini-Baruah.pdf>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

39. Ibid.

40. Bruce Hoffman, “Radicalization, Terrorism, and Diasporas,” The RAND Corporation, 2007, pp. 1-4, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/conf_proceedings/2007/RAND_CF229.pdf. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

41. Ibid.

42. Roshni Kapur, “Western Governments’ Response to Diasporic Separatists: Weighed and Found Wanting,” Observer Research Foundation, September 28, 2023, <https://www.>

dimension adds yet another complex layer to counter-terrorism, requiring cooperation with foreign governments to monitor and disrupt these networks.

INDIA'S TWO-FRONT RESPONSE: THE SYNERGY OF KINETIC AND NON-KINETIC STRATEGIES

India's response to this multi-faceted threat has evolved into a comprehensive, two-front strategy that integrates both hard power kinetic measures and soft power non-kinetic approaches. Operation Sindoor, launched on May 7, 2025, represents the sharp and decisive end of this strategy. Utilising a combination of BrahMos cruise missiles and advanced Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), the operation precisely targeted nine terrorist launchpads and training camps across Pakistan and PoK, neutralising over 100 terrorists.⁴³ This was a demonstration of India's newfound political resolve to impose significant costs on the sponsors of terror. The operation's name itself, 'Sindoor', a reference to the vermilion powder worn by married Hindu women, symbolising a sacred bond, was a deliberate act of powerful geopolitical communication.⁴⁴ It merged cultural symbolism with a resolute message of unwavering commitment to protecting the nation's integrity.

This action was the culmination of an evolving security doctrine. As addressed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, India's fight against terrorism is now an integral part of its national defence doctrine, shifting from a historically reactive posture to one of proactive

orfonline.org/research/western-governments-response-to-diasporic-separatists-weighed-and-found-wanting#:~:text=The%20Khalistan%20movement%2C%20which%20started,today%20are%20largely%20based%20overseas. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

43. Sameer Patil and Rahul Rawat, "Operation Sindoor: Understanding Context and Consequences," Observer Research Foundation, May 9, 2025, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/operation-sindoor-understanding-context-and-consequences>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

44. Anubhav Shankar Goswami, "Operation Sindoor: Gendered Framing and Strategic Messaging in India's Retaliatory Strikes," Australian Institute of International Affairs, May 22, 2025, <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/operation-sindoor-gendered-framing-and-strategic-messaging-in-indias-retaliatory-strikes/>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

defence and “retaliation on India’s terms”.⁴⁵ This can be seen as the actualisation of the *Shishupala* Doctrine, a concept that draws from the ancient epic, the *Mahabharata*, advocating for strategic patience and the absorption of up to a hundred provocations, followed by decisive, overwhelming force once a clear red line has been crossed.⁴⁶ Operation Sindoor, coming in direct response to the Pahalgam massacre, effectively called Pakistan’s nuclear bluff and forced its leadership to reassess the costs of a long-standing proxy war.⁴⁷

However, India’s strategy is not solely reliant on military might. The non-kinetic dimension is equally, if not more, critical for long-term success. This front focusses on prevention, counter-radicalisation, and societal resilience. Diplomatic offensives are continuously waged in global fora to build and maintain an international consensus against terrorism and maintain diplomatic and economic pressure on states like Pakistan. Economic levers such as the symbolic suspension of aspects of the Indus Water Treaty are employed to impose costs without resorting to military conflict. Domestically, a range of programmes work to address the root cause. For instance, the de-radicalisation initiative by the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) in Maharashtra and Kerala’s innovative community policing programmes are currently working to identify, counsel, and rehabilitate at-risk youth. In Assam, a landmark 2020 educational reform initiative successfully transformed nearly 1,200 state-funded *madrassas* into secular schools, integrating them into the mainstream educational system to promote modern education. Furthermore, long-standing initiatives like Operation Sadbhavana by the Indian Army in J&K continue to build trust and goodwill through community development projects, providing education, healthcare, and infrastructure in remote areas.

45. Ministry of Defence, Government of India, “India’s Fight Against Terrorism is Now Part of National Defence Doctrine, We will Root Out this Hybrid & Proxy Warfare: Raksha Mantri at Bhuj Air Force Station,” May 16, 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2129052>. Accessed on July 30, 2025.

46. Baruah, n. 7.

47. Ibid.

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE AND ENDURING PEACE

The security landscape of South Asia is, thus, plagued with an unprecedented complex challenge in the form of new age terrorism. Driven by decentralised global networks, empowered by the tools of modern technology, and fuelled by a mix of radical ideology, historical grievances, and local socio-economic despair, a situation as fragile as this requires a response that is equally sophisticated, adaptive, and multi-faceted. The Pahalgam massacre and India's subsequent Operation Sindoor comprise a stark illustration of the absolute necessity of a robust, proactive, and credible security posture. India's evolving doctrine, which skilfully blends decisive kinetic operations with a wide array of non-kinetic measures, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing both the imminent dangers and the underlying drivers of terrorism.

The *Shishupala* Doctrine signals a clear and unambiguous message: provocations will be met with decisive force, shattering the calculus of deniability that has long enabled state-sponsored terrorism. Military and diplomatic victories alone shall not suffice. The success of this comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy will hinge on its ability to win the long, arduous battle of hearts and minds. It must address the root causes of radicalisation that make extremist narratives so dangerously appealing. Winning this battle requires sustained efforts in inclusive education, equitable economic development and credible counter-messaging in the digital domain. Since the threat is inherently transnational, its defeat demands international cooperation to dismantle terrorist networks, choke off their financial lifelines, and counter their poisonous narratives to foster a future of regional stability and enduring peace and prosperity.

