

INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS, OPERATION SINDOOR 2.0 AND REDEFINED RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

SHALINI CHAWLA

India-Pakistan relations remain strained and at an all-time low, with the new normal being established with India's posture and Operation Sindoor. The Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, 2025, in Kashmir, led to a four-day conflict between India and Pakistan (May 7-10, 2025) after New Delhi targeted militant sites in mainland Pakistan and in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in a swift and precise retaliation under Operation Sindoor. The gruesome terror attack, was claimed (and later disowned) by The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow organisation of the Pakistan-backed militant organisation, Lashkar-i-Taiba. Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's zero tolerance towards terrorism and redefined India's war doctrine, its red lines and rules of engagement with Pakistan. In February 2026, India's senior military officials talked about Operation Sindoor 2.0, which indicated India's resolve for robust military preparedness a harsher retaliation in the future in response to Pakistan-sponsored

Dr **Shalini Chawla** is a Distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Aerospace Power and Strategic Studies, New Delhi.

acts of terror. Operation Sindoor 2.0 indicates a continuation of India's intent and military readiness on a much more extensive scale.¹ According to Lieutenant General Rajesh Pushkar, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of 2 Corps, "Operation Sindoor is ongoing... The preparations for Operation Sindoor 2 are quite extensive. I cannot tell you right now how this operation will unfold because it will depend on how much damage we want to cause to the enemy. Whether it is damage of any kind, be it on land, sea, or air, we are always ready to carry it out."²

What is critical to understand here is that Operation Sindoor and Operation Sindoor 2.0 are not the result of one or two terror attacks. India's position indicates an extremely low threshold for terrorism. The position has been a build-up of decade of crises. India and Pakistan have not had a diplomatic dialogue since 2016, and the relationship has faced multiple crises. However, the phase following Operation Sindoor is distinct and has altered various dynamics for both countries. It would be useful to assess the position of India and Pakistan after the conflict in May 2025 and seek answers to some critical questions. What led to the build-up of bilateral tensions in the past decade? How has India's response towards Pakistan changed with the subsequent terror attacks? Is Operation Sindoor and now Sindoor 2.0 a new definer of the relationship?

A DECADE OF CRISES

Although varying degrees of intensity in tensions have been a persistent factor between the two nuclear neighbours, the relationship saw a steep decline after the terror attack on January 2, 2016, on the Pathankot Air Force Station. The attack conspired by the

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1. "Operation Sindoor 2.0: Indian Army Warns of 'Harsher' Retaliation Against Pakistan", *News 18*, February 26, 2026, <https://www.news18.com/india/operation-sindoor-2-0-indian-army-warns-of-harsher-retaliation-against-pakistan-9932239.html>. Accessed on March 10, 2026.
 2. Vinay Prasad Sharma, "Operation Sindoor 2.0 Underway, India Warns Pakistan of Harsher Response says 'Won't be Deterred by Nuclear Bluff'", *WION*, February 26, 2026, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/operation-sindoor-2-0-underway-india-warns-pakistan-of-harsher-response-says-won-t-be-deterred-by-nuclear-bluff-1772112033120>. Accessed on March 10, 2026.

Pakistan-supported militant outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM)³ was a blow to the newly elected (2014) Modi government's peace initiatives towards Pakistan. New Delhi had taken a series of initiatives displaying its willingness to proceed with the peace talks with Islamabad. Prime Minister Modi extended an invitation to Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to attend his swearing-in ceremony in 2014, which, to Nawaz's credit, he accepted, and visited New Delhi, despite the displeasure of the Pakistan military. The two leaders also met in Ufa (Russia) on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in 2015; Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Pakistan in December 2015 for the Heart of Asia Conference; and, in an exceptional move, Prime Minister Modi paid a visit to Lahore in December 2015. The Pathankot terror attack took place a week after the Indian prime minister's visit to Pakistan, and it derailed the ongoing peace efforts between the two countries. Pakistan denied its role in the attack and projected it as an Indian ploy for propaganda against Pakistan. India allowed the Pakistani investigation team to visit the Pathankot base from March 27 to April 1, 2016.⁴ New Delhi provided sufficient evidence to substantiate its claim that the attack was planned in Pakistan.⁵ The attack altered the trajectory of the relationship, and two developments were critical in this regard. First, the Modi government's trust towards the peace initiatives was dented, and there was a realisation in New Delhi that power brokers in Pakistan lacked consensus on peace with India. Second, New Delhi took a firm stance against Pakistan, suspended the bilateral diplomatic dialogue and took a position that *talks and terror cannot go together*.

Another blow to the relationship was within months of the Pathankot attack on September 18, 2016. The JeM targeted a highly

3. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, Media Centre, "Question No.164 Investigation Into Pathankot Attack", April 27, 2016, https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/26689/QUESTION_NO614_INVESTIGATION_INTO_PATHANKOT_ATTACK. Accessed on August 15, 2025.

4. Ibid.

5. Bharti Jain, "JIT Has Not Been Able to Refute Strong Evidences Placed by us, NIA says", *The Times of India*, April 7, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pathankot-probe-jit-has-not-been-able-to-refute-strong-evidences-placed-by-us-nia-says/articleshow/51732797.cms>. Accessed on April 10, 2021.

guarded army camp in an Indian Army Brigade Headquarters in Uri. Following the attack, India adopted a two-front approach in response to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. First, it openly exposed Pakistan's acts of terror on the global forum. Second, for the first time, India opted for military retaliation. The Indian Army conducted surgical strikes, nearly 10 days after the Uri attack, at the launch pads of terrorists in PoK. However, Pakistan denied India's military retaliation at both national and international fora.

On February 14, 2019, 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), in a gruesome terror attack claimed by the JeM. New Delhi's reaction this time was punitive air strikes at Balakot in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province of Pakistan, targeting a well-acknowledged JeM training camp. India's 'non-military pre-emptive action' against the JeM training camp in Balakot was aimed at countering future terror attacks for which the JeM was reportedly preparing. Once again, Pakistan denied its role in the Pulwama terror attack and took the position that no terror camps had been destroyed in KP. Pakistan retaliated with offensive air strikes in J&K, which Islamabad claimed were demonstrative strikes indicating Islamabad's capability and will to retaliate to India's military actions. The air battle resulted in the arrest of an Indian pilot by Pakistan, who was subsequently released after two days. The effectiveness of the Indian Air Force operation and the actual number of terrorists killed have been analysed at length by political actors, analysts and retired servicemen in India and abroad, and there have been varied opinions. However, developments in terms of India's strategic and diplomatic gains need to be understood. India's retaliation delivered critical messages: first, it challenged the Pakistani assumption and belief that New Delhi does not have the political will to react militarily to the Pakistan-sponsored acts of terror; second, India's punitive strikes challenged Pakistan's narrative of a projected low nuclear threshold.

In August 2019, India abrogated Article 370 which had granted special constitutional status to J&K. This, in many ways, challenged the Pakistani establishment's identity, built on its decades-old phoney claim on the Indian state (now Union Territory) of J&K.

Post abrogation of Article 370, Pakistan's leadership went on an aggressive mission to up its ante and intensify the anti-India strategy on all possible fronts. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan repeatedly and blatantly invoked the nuclear threat. Following India's decision of abrogation, Pakistan intensified its covert war in Kashmir by boosting a relatively fresh asset of the deep state, the TRF.

THE PAHALGAM ATTACK, OPERATION SINDOOR AND RULES OF ENGAGEMENT BEING REDEFINED

Stability Vs Crises

It was after almost a decade of crises that the Pahalgam terror attack took place. What has also been noticeable is that, over the last four to five years, India and Pakistan have had completely contradictory growth trajectories. India has been politically stable, with a strong democratic set-up, and Prime Minister Modi has successfully garnered widespread support. India has projected a resilient and dynamic growth trajectory, ranking among the world's top five economies. There have been aggressive efforts towards indigenous defence build-up, and India's foreign policy choices reflect its readiness to take bold decisions to cater to its strategic and economic interests.

On the other hand, during the same period, Pakistan has been facing multi-dimensional crises marked by a prolonged phase of political instability, mounting debt burden, polarisation within the society driven by Imran Khan's popular support, the military's efforts to tighten its grip over the democratic institutions, and an alarming security situation with the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) launching relentless terror attacks targeting the security personnel. Although the crises are not new to Pakistan, two factors were distinct during this period.

First, Pakistan's declining strategic relevance, which the state has cherished for decades due to its strategic location and recurrent engagement as a key ally of the United States (US). The US had relied on Pakistan for the peace negotiations with the Afghan Taliban at Doha. Pakistan took the credit for bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table with the US and, finally, bringing the Taliban to power (August 2021), which Islamabad perceived and celebrated as

its strategic victory. The US' interest in Afghanistan has decreased significantly post its exit from the region, and its reliance on Pakistan also has also shrunk. Additionally, the US' increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China did not offer space to Pakistan.

Second, the Pakistan military's image stood severely dented due to a multitude of reasons: Imran Khan's popularity and his overt anti-military campaign, which amassed significant support; the inability of the army to counter the TTP's relentless terror attacks; and the failure to contain Baloch resentment and counter the nationalism of the Pashtuns, who have been, for years, despairingly shouting the slogan "*Ye jo dehshat gardi hai, iske piche vardi hai*" (The people in uniform are behind these terrorist activities).

Pakistan has witnessed anti-military sentiments in the past. General Musharraf's tenure witnessed the assertiveness of a robust judiciary, and General Kayani's tenure experienced grave humiliation after Osama bin Laden was killed in Abbottabad (2011). But the recent years have probably been the worst for the Pakistani military's image and stature. General (now Field Marshal) Asim Munir's speech at the Convention for Overseas Pakistanis in April 2025⁶ indicated the military's growing frustration, and its efforts to revive its declining relevance and prestige. Munir talked about the two-nation theory, asserted that Hindus and Muslims are different, threatened action in Kashmir, and challenged the growing Baloch resentment, which Pakistan has perpetually blamed on India.

As Pakistan's society and institutions stand polarised, the military has been desperate to revive its esteem and dominance, for which the India factor has probably served as the most apt consolidating factor. The army under Munir has expanded its powers, and the democratic institutions have been paralysed through a series of Constitutional Amendments.

The Pahalgam Attack and Operation Sindoor

The Pahalgam terror attack, which killed 26 people, including one national of Nepal, was distinct in terms of the dimensions of religion

6. "Army Chief Asim Munir's Full Speech From Convention for Overseas Pakistanis", *Dawn News*, April 16, 2025, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN0DWmJyGBU>. Accessed on June 20, 2025.

and gender, and the targets were Hindu men. This indicated a motive of triggering community violence in India, apart from challenging the normalcy in Kashmir, and bringing Kashmir into the international limelight. Within 24 hours of the Pahalgam attack, India announced its non-kinetic response, which included the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) with immediate effect, suspension of the visa services, closure of the Attari border, and declaration of the defence/military, naval and air advisors in the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi as *persona non grata*.⁷ Pakistan responded with retaliatory measures, including holding all bilateral agreements with India in abeyance, closing its airspace to Indian airlines and suspending the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) visas for Indian nationals.

On May 7, 2025, India launched Operation Sindoor and targeted nine militant sites in Pakistan, leading to a four-day conflict, which ended after a request for a ceasefire came from Pakistan. Although Pakistan has been on a chest-thumping victory narrative since the ceasefire, the conflict clearly demonstrated India's military capability and competence, with India conducting strikes deep into Pakistan's mainland with deep precision. Pakistan's air defence and strike capabilities struggled to perform and stood paralysed. The conflict highlighted the vulnerabilities of the Pakistan Air Force, including gaps in its air defence system and the penetrability of its existing equipment.

The conflict has led to critical shifts in terms of India's positioning, its declared war doctrine against Pakistan, Islamabad's strategic partnerships, and the internal and external dynamics of Pakistan. There are serious concerns about the future of the India-Pakistan relationship and its potential impact on regional security dynamics.

Rules of Engagement Being Redefined

India Sets a New Normal: A shift in India's long-held position of strategic restraint was seen in the military retaliation after the

7. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India, Transcript of special briefing by the MEA, April 23, 2025, https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/39443/Transcript_of_Special_briefing_by_MEA_April_23_2025. Accessed on August 10, 2025.

terror attacks in Uri and Pulwama. However, India's response post-Pahalgam attack was more potent, and it hit targets in mainland Pakistan, sending a clear message that the anti-India militant organisations can no longer enjoy impunity from India's punitive actions because of their 'protected location'. India has set a new benchmark for its actions against acts of terror:⁸

1. If there is a terrorist attack on India, New Delhi will respond on its own terms and conditions.
2. India will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail and will strike decisively at terrorist hideouts mushrooming under the umbrella of nuclear blackmail.
3. India will not discriminate between the government sponsoring terrorism and the masterminds of terrorism.⁹

India's Position on the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT): The IWT of 1960 has withstood the tests of a series of India-Pakistan tensions, wars and extreme rhetoric on both sides. India did react to Pakistan's continued acts of terror and expressed its unease with the continuation of the rather less favourable terms and conditions of the treaty and said "blood and water cannot flow together".¹⁰ Pakistan, on the other hand, accused India of water terrorism. The treaty was signed in goodwill and was generous towards Pakistan. From the time the treaty was signed in 1960 to the present, there have been considerable changes in the status of Himalayan glaciers, and a re-evaluation of the treaty has been actively discussed within India over the last five years, given the challenges posed by climate change and population expansion. India has made formal and informal requests to Pakistan for the review of the treaty. The latest request for a review

8. PM Modi's Address to the Nation, YouTube, May 12, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXxeQvuYP6o>. Accessed on August 1, 2025.

9. Ibid.

10. "Blood and Water Cannot Flow Together: PM Modi at Indus Water Treaty Meeting", *The Indian Express*, October 27, 2016, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indus-water-treaty-blood-and-water-cant-flow-together-pm-modi-pakistan-uri-attack/>. Accessed on August 2, 2025.

and modification of the treaty was made in September 2024, from the Indian side.¹¹

India's decision will have both short-term and long-term impacts on Pakistan's water situation. Islamabad seems to be anxious at this point about India's position and has been using India's decision on the treaty for nuclear sabre-rattling. The treaty remains suspended and not terminated, implying that further negotiations on it will be contingent upon Pakistan's behaviour and its strategy towards India.

Pakistan Relies on Narratives as the Dominant Tool of Engagement: Narrative building has been a significant tool in the India-Pakistan dynamics. Over the decades, power brokers in Pakistan have relied heavily on narratives to rationalise and garner support for the changing power dynamics, which have often involved the expansion of the military's dominance and its control over civilian domains, to justify military spending at the cost of developmental expenditure, and building alliances with the major powers (the US and China). Pakistan has been aggressively pushing some noteworthy narratives in the aftermath of the conflict.

Dominant narratives by Pakistan include: (i) *Denial of its role in sponsoring terrorism*, even though Pakistan's efforts to shelter the terror groups are well acknowledged. In the aftermath of the May 2025 crisis, Pakistan's defence minister accepted Pakistan's role in nurturing terror groups in the past.¹² Despite repeated confessions and well-known historical details, Pakistan claims sincerity towards combating terrorism; (2) Pakistan has extensively used *the narrative of India sponsoring terrorism in Balochistan* to counter India's claims of Pakistan's support for militancy in J&K; (3) Pakistan has hailed

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11. "India Issues Notice to Pakistan Seeking Review of Indus Waters Treaty: What to Know", *The Indian Express*, September 19, 2024, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/india-notice-pakistan-indus-water-treaty-9574375/>. Accessed on August 10, 2025.
 12. "Pakistan Warns Kashmir Row Could Lead to 'All-Out War' with India", *The World With Yalda Akim*, Interview with Khawaja Asif, *Sky News*, April 24, 2025, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ir8pJbKE37U>. Accessed on June 23, 2025.

the *narrative of victory on multiple fronts*. Bilawal Bhutto, chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), stated that Pakistan has won on three fronts: the diplomatic front, the narrative war, and the military front, by defending its borders.¹³ The narrative of military victory has been primarily based on Pakistan's claims of having shot down a significant number of Indian jets (5-6) on May 7, 2025. India has neither denied losing the jets nor provided details on the numbers. This has been perhaps the most crucial narrative for the Pakistan military, as the revival of its image was based on how it managed to declare a military victory against a conventionally superior and larger India. Pakistan has not talked about the damage inflicted on its air bases on the last day of the conflict (May 10, 2025), which pushed it to a ceasefire. Pakistan was indeed quick in formulating its claims on winning in the conflict, although the realities do not align with the claims; (4) Pakistan's *narratives on the Indus Waters Treaty* have oscillated between emotions of anger, frustration and issuing of threats.

The narrative war and information warfare have emerged as the most crucial aspects of the India-Pakistan conflict. Pakistan's reliance on narratives and perception management is not new, and the country has successfully navigated through some of its most challenging situations with these narratives. India, on the other hand, has refrained from an aggressive narrative war, which has been seen as a lapse in its strategy to deal with Pakistan.

Nuclear Sabre-Rattling: Nuclear weapons play a crucial role during crises and heightened tensions between India and Pakistan. This can be well understood in the context of the distinct nuclear postures of India and Pakistan. India has always positioned its nuclear weapons for deterrence and embraces the restraint of a *No First Use* doctrine. On the other hand, Pakistan seeks to fulfil the objectives of war prevention and aims to conduct a covert war under the nuclear umbrella, and has asserted on the *First Use* doctrine. The role of nuclear weapons has been to deter India

13. "Pakistan Secures Victory on Three Fronts in Conflict with India: Bilawal Bhutto", *msn*, June 27, 2025, <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/asia/pakistan/pakistan-secures-victory-on-three-fronts-in-conflict-with-india-bilawal-bhutto/ar-AA1HxDBc>. Accessed on June 27, 2025.

from a potential conventional aggression against Pakistan's acts of terrorism.

Pakistan has claimed that it avoided nuclear escalation during the May 2025 conflict. However, the fact remains that it did try to highlight the threat of nuclear weapons, and nuclear sabre-rattling was noticeable. Pakistan's Minister of Railways, Hanifa Abbasi, in response to India's decision on the Indus Waters Treaty, said, "If they cut off our water supply, (the Indians) must be ready for an all-out war. The weapons we have, the missiles we have, are not for display. Nobody knows where we have deployed our nuclear weapons."¹⁴ Bilawal Bhutto also indicated a nuclear threat.¹⁵ In addition to the statements, Pakistan also conducted a test of its 450 km range, nuclear-capable, surface-to-surface Abdali missile on May 3, 2025.¹⁶ It test-launched a Fatah series surface-to-surface missile with a range of 120 km, two days later.¹⁷

After the ceasefire, Pakistan has used the threat of nuclear weapons rather loosely and irresponsibly, citing India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty as an existential crisis for Pakistan. Field Marshal Asim Munir issued a nuclear threat against India on US soil, followed by Bilawal Bhutto and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.¹⁸

14. "Pakistan Railway Minister Threatens India: We have 130 Nuclear Warheads For You", NOVA.News, April 27, 2025, <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/il-ministro-delle-ferrovie-del-pakistan-minaccia-lindia-abbiamo-130-testate-nucleari-per-voi/>. Accessed on June 24, 2025.
15. "Either Water Will Flow or Their Blood Will: Former Pakistan FM Bilawal Bhutto's Threat to India on Indus Waters Treaty", *The Times of India*, April 26, 2025, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/either-water-will-flow-or-their-blood-will-former-pakistan-fm-bilawal-bhuttos-threat-to-india-on-indus-waters-treaty/articleshow/120634986.cms>. Accessed on June 24, 2026.
16. "Pakistan Says it Test-Fired Ballistic Missile with 450 km Range Amid Strained Ties With India", *The New Indian Express*, May 3, 2025, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2025/May/03/pakistan-says-it-test-fired-ballistic-missile-with-450-km-range-amid-strained-ties-with-india>. Accessed on August 10, 2025.
17. Jon Grevatt and Sohini Mandal, "Pakistan Tests Fatah Missile System", *Janes*, May 6, 2025, <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/defence/pakistan-tests-fatah-missile-system>. Accessed on August 12, 2025.
18. Praveen Swami, "The Print Exclusive: Asim Munir's India Nuke Threat from US Ballroom—'Will Take Half the World Down' " *The Print*, August 10, 2025, <https://theprint.in/world/pakistan-army-chief-field-marshal-asim-munir-florida-speech-nuclear-threat-india/2718095/>. Accessed on August 20, 2025.

Position on Talks: Not Talking is Also Talking: The diplomatic dialogue between India and Pakistan has been suspended since the beginning of 2016, post the Uri terror attack, and the space for official talks further shrank with the subsequent terror attacks. The civilian leadership in Pakistan has, off and on, issued statements regarding having talks with India, but no sincere efforts from Pakistan have surfaced. Post-Pahalgam crisis, Pakistan's position on negotiations has oscillated between expressing keenness for stability and peace and blackmail. India has maintained a stance that discussion with Pakistan will be only on the issue of terrorism. Pakistan, on the other hand, has repeatedly asserted that it will have talks on the Kashmir and water issues. Pakistan is keen for mediation and has repeatedly urged the US to do so. India, on the other hand, has consistently maintained that this is a bilateral issue and needs to be resolved without mediation.

CONCLUSIONS

The India-Pakistan relationship is defined by critical shifts, which include Pakistan's heavy reliance on narratives and its efforts to collaborate with the major powers and regional actors. India has redefined its strategic position, war doctrine and resolve to impose costs on Pakistan for its acts of terror. India's position challenged Pakistan's nuclear posture and its rhetoric on full spectrum deterrence, which asserts the horizontal and vertical dimensions, signalling a low nuclear threshold and use of weapons at any point of a potential crisis. India's strikes on Pakistan's air bases on the morning of May 10, 2025, left Pakistan with limited options, and the leadership was desperate for a ceasefire. However, after Pakistan's Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) reached out to India's DGMO on May 10, and the ceasefire was agreed upon, Pakistan moved rapidly and sneakily in the information domain. Pakistan pushed the narratives of military and strategic victory against a "much larger and militarily superior India." Narratives of victory and heroism for the armed forces were crafted for the domestic audience, while narratives of India's aggression and its own victimhood were constructed for the international domain.

After the May 2025 conflict, Pakistan's engagement with the major powers and regional actors has been noteworthy. Pakistan relied heavily on external assistance to deal with the crisis and, after the conflict, to leverage its strategic position. China's support to Pakistan was perhaps the most crucial for Islamabad. Not only was more than 80 per cent of Pakistan's inventory from China, but Beijing's support in the domains of sharing strategic military intelligence and cyber security was significant.¹⁹ China supported Pakistan's propaganda against India, and its overt role on two fronts was substantial. First, diluting the April 25, 2025, United Nations Security Council statement, which excluded the mention of the TRF, the militant organisation which claimed responsibility for the Pahalgam attack. Second, the draft of the SCO communique, which did not include a mention of the Pahalgam terror attack, and, hence, India's defence minister refused to sign the document.²⁰ Türkiye's support during Operation Sindoor, was important for Pakistan. Pakistan relied extensively on the Turkish drones (Songar armed drone systems, manufactured by the Turkish defence firm Asisguard) and cherished the diplomatic backing from Türkiye's leadership.

Pakistan's relations with the US have been under stress in recent years, specifically after former Prime Minister Imran Khan repeatedly blamed the US for Pakistan's economic and security woes. The US projecting itself as a peacemaker during the India-Pakistan crisis has offered Pakistan much-awaited leverage to revive its ties with Washington. Asim Munir credited President Trump for easing the tensions with India and also nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Asim Munir's much-touted lunch at the White House with President Trump in June 2025 was celebrated in Pakistan and projected as a diplomatic and strategic victory.

19. The Wire Analysis. "Five Key Revelations from Army's Deputy Chief on Operation Sindoor", *The Wire*, July 4, 2025, thewire.in/security/five-key-revelations-lt-gen-rahul-singh-operation-sindoor. Accessed on August 10, 2025.

20. "Rajnath Singh Refuses to Sign SCO Document as Pak-China Snub Pahalgam", *India Today*, June 26, 2025, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/no-shanghai-meet-joint-statement-as-rajnath-singh-refuses-to-sign-document-sources-2746381-2025-06-26>. Accessed on August 12, 2025.

In the past, Pakistan has not been a reliable partner for the US, and even after providing Islamabad with over \$30 billion of aid post 9/11, the US found Osama bin Laden sheltered in a guarded military compound in Pakistan. However, the US' mollicoddling seems to have emboldened Pakistan's strategic posture. US-Pakistan relations have been on a reset, and Pakistan is extremely cautious in dealing with Washington.

India's position remains firm with the following:

1. Operation Sindoor 2.0 is ongoing. India's resolve for military retaliation doesn't change with Pakistan's narratives and its efforts to leverage external support.
2. The new rules of engagement clearly reassert that there is space for a conventional war below the nuclear threshold and above terrorism.
3. Talks with Pakistan will be on the issue of terrorism, as terrorism has remained the core issue of tensions between the two countries for decades now.

Pakistan's position vis-à-vis India has been a mix of victimhood, anger, frustration and display of strength, which it derives from the support of the major powers. Pakistan's insecurity as a state is unlikely to settle down, as it has failed to work towards building its strengths as a nation. The political situation remains volatile, with a hybrid regime becoming a new normal, and democratic institutions being undermined under the growing prowess of the military. The economy remains dependent on external funding and is being suffocated by a mounting debt burden. Pakistan's strategic calculus remains unaltered, with covert war as a potent tool against India. The terror attacks, irrespective of their intensity, do not allow the space for talks or negotiations. It remains to be seen if the redefined rules of engagement will compel Pakistan to rethink its strategy of terrorism.