

BOOK REVIEW

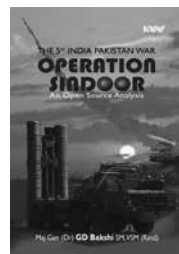
The 5th India Pakistan War: Operation Sindoor—

An Open Source Analysis

Maj Gen (Dr) GD Bakshi

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The 5th India Pakistan War: Operation Sindoor—An Open Source Analysis by Major General (Dr) GD Bakshi adds to the discourse on the ongoing conflict with Pakistan that presently is on pause. It also attempts to give a narrative of a hypothetical conflict taking place between the two countries in the future, based upon the author's analysis of Operation Sindoor.

The book offers a comprehensive operational history, giving an open-source analysis that is combined with a practitioner's perspective along with available data in the open domain and in contemporary doctrinal debates. It gives a nuanced description of force planning, escalation ladders, air power and the employment of drones and integrated air defence systems by India. The discourse is anchored in an Indian military professional's reading of national security thought post the Kargil conflict. The author systematically highlights the importance of indigenous technology with respect to the integration of missiles and Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS)

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that demonstrate India's shift towards indigenous weapons and networked warfare. The author critiques India's historical self-restraint and suggests that Operation Sindoor marked a decisive shift towards action. Against this backdrop, the interplay between deterrence, compellence and the 'stability-instability' paradox has been deftly analysed in the book.

The book also endorses the prevalent discourse post the conflict on India's limitations in information warfare and narrative building while highlighting the importance of narrative dominance in contemporary conflicts, with practical examples. The views of foreign military analysts are used to support the assessment of campaign outcomes and this provides a degree of independent validation and credibility to the book.

The book, however, despite its strengths, exhibits a few constraints in terms of analytical balance and evidentiary robustness. The perspectives of both Pakistan and China are interpreted through intelligence and Indian military lenses without providing critical engagement with their doctrinal or historical sources except to point out their weaknesses or failures. Many claims regarding the destruction of Pakistani command centres, "decapitation" of nuclear infrastructure are based on speculative sources without independent open-source corroboration. The need to distinguish between confirmed and plausible outcomes is necessary to avoid jingoism and presenting speculation as established fact.

The tone of the book is advocacy oriented that displays a strong endorsement of national shifts while dismissing alternative strategic thinking. It celebrates Indian military operations and readiness by adopting a triumphalist approach that relegates losses or criticisms to brief mentions relative to lengthy accounts of success. Reference of adversaries with pejorative metaphors like "Mullah Munir" and "migraine called Pakistan" does not augur well for analytical rigour and scholarly neutrality. The conclusion of the book moves into outright policy advocacy that calls for a massive increase in defence expenditure and warnings against reduction of manpower. It also advocates the potential for a large-scale decisive campaign in the future that overstates the strategic feasibility of such options without

a nuanced appreciation of the political, economic or escalation risks. While Operation Sindoor is presented as a model for a limited future war, the unique strategic, operational and political circumstances may not be representative or repeatable and would warrant greater deliberation of uncertainty, adversary adaptation and operational friction.

This book is a valuable contribution to Indian military campaigns and 'future war' literature, that mirrors a genre bridging strategy, history and operational art in the shadow of a contested nuclear overhang. It shapes doctrinal discussion on limited war below the nuclear threshold, advocating a combined high-tech air power led strategy as the "new normal" response, seeking to update Indian strategic consensus in the face of provocations by Pakistan.

This book would be of interest to military professionals, strategic studies scholars and defence policymakers concerned with escalation dynamics, defence technology and the trajectory of India's defence development. The book is internally consistent and robustly written, however it should be read as a normative scenario-driven work that advocates a new doctrinal posture for India. It demonstrates the strengths of the Indian military that would border on hubris without a critical engagement with adversary sources and careful distinction between scenario, aspiration and proven historical outcomes.