

Commentaries

Operation Sindoor: Early Lessons

Never since the end of World War II in 1945 has the world been turned asunder as much by regional and global disruptions as currently taking place. India, despite shorn of territorial ambitions and working for peace and harmony in its neighbourhood, too has not been spared of kinetic conflicts effecting its security and wellbeing. That after the grossly inhuman gunning down of 26 innocent and unarmed tourists in the picturesque meadows of Pahalgam in J&K by Pakistani terrorists on 22 April 2025, India was left with no other option but to teach the Pakistani terrorist fraternity a lesson they would imbibe and desist from their decades long policy of fostering terrorism as an extension of their statecraft towards India. Thus, Operation Sindoor was conceived and executed with precision, effectiveness and yet a sense of balance and maturity.

"Sindoor", a turmeric based red powder has since the days of the ancient Harappan civilization in India, symbolizes the sanctity of the Hindu married woman and she wears it, above her forehead, till her husband is alive. That many of the Hindu women tourists accompanying their husbands saw their husbands being murdered in front of their eyes, meant some of them witnessing their sindoor being cruelly removed from their heads----- thus the operation to eliminate the terrorists who robbed the women of their right to wear the Sindoor was so named. The operation, though an unqualified success, is as stated by the government, will be carrying on till the threat to India from these terrorists and their mentors is completely over. Thus, India remains in a state of high alert.

All operations, battle campaigns, kinetic/ non-kinetic conflicts of various types or insurgency counter measures throw up many useful lessons for various forces to study and suggest them to the powers -that -be to adapt. Since the last 6 months or so, with the ongoing Israel-Hamas, Russia-Ukraine, Israel- Lebanon, the conflict in Syria most nations with professional armies will be analysing the nuances of such conflicts in their respective contexts. Thus, after the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam massacre and India's launching of Op Sindoor from 7 June to 10 June 2025, many strategic, operational level and tactical lessons for India have emerged. Thus, it will be prudent to analyse them threadbare by all stakeholders in India for, as it appears, Pakistan's terror exports to India and other machinations, China's continuing assertiveness in

this region are likely to continue. With the US finding again its long-lost love in Pakistan, for inexplicable reasons, and the self-appointed Field Marshal Asim Munir, the Pakistani Army Chief, continuing with his ant-India tirades, the environment in the Indian subcontinent is indeed bound to worsen. To prove that his rise to the Field Marshal's chair was deserving Munir can go to any extent, including indulging in something kinetic or initiating a major terrorist act against India. in a speedy time frame. Thus, the first lesson India has to imbibe is that there has to be 24/7 eternal vigilance against Pakistan by the Indian security establishment. Thus, intelligence gathering and its analysis has to be of the highest order.

Operation Sindoor has brought forth a new paradigm in our security preparedness. We have unequivocally emphasised that the era of passive deterrence is over, and India's traditional strategic patience has given way to a strategy of punitive deterrence. India has courageously displayed that despite having a rogue nuclear neighbour, we can carry out operations under the nuclear threshold. India must continue with this new strategy and our future actions should be equally a carefully calibrated politico -military event. India has prudently declared that terror acts against India will not be merely treated as low-cost proxy wars but will be met with a full spectrum overwhelming response. During Op Sindoor, the Indian forces first struck at only the terrorist camps/ infrastructure and Pakistan was duly informed. However, when the Pak military retaliated engaging Indian military and civil targets, India too struck back strongly against military targets only causing major destruction to some of their airbases, runaways, command and control centres etc. The message was thus soundly delivered to Pakistan concerning India's ability and intentions to retaliate strongly. The lesson for India is to maintain some level of counterattack contingency measures ready to be delivered at a moment's notice if required. Even kinetic conflicts can emerge unexpectedly and without any notice. Accordingly, building up India's combat capability to successfully confront a two front war remains sine-qua-non.

A major lesson albeit on the geopolitical and diplomatic front is that since some years and across many other conflicts the world over, it is amply clear that in this multipolar world, each nation---no matter how powerful one is--- during the conduct of the kinetic conflicts--- one has to fend for itself. Nations may support you vocally or even with weapons and platforms but no nation, by and large, will support you with their boots on ground! Frankly, there is no rule-based international order and international agencies including from the UN and Security Council remain toothless in cessation of hostilities. After the Pahalgam massacre, some nations did condemn the terrorist attack on the innocent tourists but after India's retaliation on Pakistan's terror infrastructure and military targets, there was no nation who voiced support to

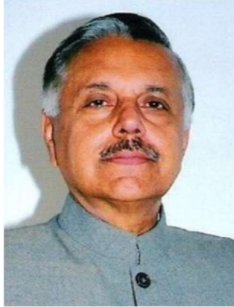
India to destroy Pakistan's terror havens. This thus points towards the question that were we isolated diplomatically during this period? Do we need to accordingly recalibrate our foreign policy? However, another aspect diplomatically which has irked most Indians is the fact, that the US has, after Op Sindoor, cleverly rehyphenated Pakistan with India when there is virtually nothing in common between the two nations. India must not allow this to further become a scar on Indo- US relations. India was never a geopolitical pawn and as we strive towards self-reliance for our defence needs, the same applies in our diplomatic standards.

It was indeed a prudent step by New Delhi to send seven multi-party parliamentary delegations to 32 different nations to explain India's stance during these days. Thus, India must imbibe expertise in Information Warfare thereby "shaping the narrative " during such confrontations with its adversaries and even during peacetime. Pakistan, despite the casualties and other losses it incurred had been indulging in a lot of disinformation and misinformation the Indian security establishment must take adequate cognisance of this shortcoming with us and take appropriate counter measures.

Owing to large scale damages to civil, private and at times even military property, ways and means must be found to invest in ambulances, hospitals, alternative civil structures to cater for all emergencies as well.

The events of the recent past have clearly highlighted the turmoil and the severe disruptions prevalent and, unfortunately, increasing by the day in the world. Thus, being prepared is the only answer if not the only deterrent. As a nation, without any extra-territorial ambitions and with a clear quest for peace, India still has to ensure, that its military preparedness caters for the collusive challenges emanating from its neighbourhood. Its newly pronounced policy of shedding Strategic Restraint to Punitive Deterrence will hopefully be more in keeping with the times.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lt General Kamal Davar retired from the Indian Army in 2004 after a most distinguished service spanning four decades. He has held coveted command, staff and instructional appointments both in India and abroad. A renowned operational soldier, the General has served in all theatres of operations in India and was also wounded in action in the 1965 operations. His last appointment at Army HQ, for which he was especially selected by the Government, was as the first Chief of The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and Deputy Chief of the Integrated Defense Staff.

