Changing Subcontinental Mindsets

By all accounts our military did a superlative job during Operation Sindoor, so much so, that Pakistan was either cajoled by the United States, or voluntarily approached us directly, to agree to a cessation of hostilities/ceasefire. The possibility that the invitation to Field Marshal Munir for lunch at the White House may well have been a reward for de-escalating the conflict, points to the former. May be the Israeli-American plan to attack Iran had already been set in motion and they could not afford the distraction of a conflict, between two nuclear neighbours in the immediate neighbourhood, at the same time.

If there is any truth to the speculation that Pakistan was pressured to terminate hostilities, we too must have been compelled to do so likewise, probably with the caveat that Pakistan publicly approaches us, so as to enable us to save face. Nothing else really explains the abruptness with which hostilities ceased, or for that matter, Mr. Modi's public display of petulance with President Trump's claims of having intervened. Clearly, our repeated insistence that operations are on pause is purely a matter of semantics, aimed at the domestic audience, especially because of the forthcoming Bihar elections. Moreover, any military, including ours, can only maintain a heightened state of alert for only so long, without routine administration, maintenance, unit turnovers and training being adversely impacted.

The passage of time has now allowed us to delve more deeply into all facets of Operation Sindoor. What emerges, is that neither the political nor the military aims, we supposedly set for ourselves, were achievable. Neither have we been able to bring to justice the perpetrators of that heinous attack in Pahalgam, nor have we been able to deter/dissuade the Pakistani state from indulging in such futile ventures in the future. To suggest that future incidents will be responded to with equal, if not more ferocity, is just plain bluster. Moreover, there is a dichotomy in the strategic narrative we have publicly expounded. If, Pakistan is a state sponsor of terror against us, as we claim, then why did we only attack terror infrastructure and not elements of the Pakistani State aiding and abetting that terror? Their top military and ISI leadership, for example, who undoubtedly played a crucial role. Obviously, we were worried about escalation, which implies Pakistan's use of nuclear blackmail still has some traction.

Similarly, in terms of our diplomatic initiative, we were forced to send parliamentary delegations abroad because our message against Pakistan just did not seem to be getting through. Also, while we may now have an opportunity to rework more favourable terms for ourselves with respect to the Indus Water Treaty, to believe we will garner international support if we unilaterally abrogate it and stop all water to Pakistan, is plainly fanciful and pernicious. Dangerous, too as well, as it would then pose an existential threat to Pakistan, forcing it to respond militarily.

Because of our lack of strategic clarity, there were two major downsides in our conduct of Operation Sindoor from the military point of view. Firstly, the loss of aircraft, that has been officially acknowledged, though we remain blissfully ignorant of the numbers and types lost. Obviously, this must be because of speculation that the political leadership has egg on its face for not having permitted the IAF to undertake suppressive operations prior to launch of its deep penetration attacks. Secondly, the delay in initiating the operation, obviously allowed Pakistan the time needed to put in place appropriate measures to ensure minimal loss of life would occur, as also gave the PAF an opportunity to plan and execute suitable counter measures successfully on the first day. If our capabilities are to improve, the defence budget needs to be hiked substantially.

What the Pakistani leadership had probably not envisaged was that the headquarters of the LeT and the JeM, at Muridke and Bhawalpur, respectively would also be targeted. While their leaders would have gone into hiding to avoid assassination bids, their cadres did suffer casualties at these two locations. Similarly, the PAF would not have anticipated the escalatory attacks that targeted their infrastructure, including command and control and other high value assets. However, despite our spectacular success, as evidenced by publicly available satellite photos, we were unable to fully exploit the impact of these attacks on the Pakistani population because we agreed to a ceasefire before we could press home the advantage.

This allowed Pakistan to claim victory as well, which may not be a bad thing in the long run, for obvious reasons. While continuation of the status quo may have political benefits for ruling elites on both sides, the overwhelming majority of our populations are held hostage to the ambitions of their rulers and continue to pay a heavy price. This needs to change now, and indeed if President Trump has actually been able to stop hostilities between Israel and Iran as well as halt the genocide in Palestine, as he claims, then his intervention here would be greatly

appreciated by the people, and maybe make him worthy of the Nobel Prize, for which Pakistan has nominated him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brigadier Deepak Sinha (Retd) is a second-generation paratrooper with over three decades of service in the army. He has an M.A. and M.Phil. in Defence and Strategic Studies from the University of Madras. He has also attended the Armed Forces Certificate Course on Business Management from MDI, Gurgaon. During his service he has held various command, staff and instructional appointments in India and abroad. He has extensive experience in airborne special operations forces and counter- insurgency operations have served in and commanded a Parachute Battalion in counter insurgency operations in the North East and Jammu & Kashmir.