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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Operation Sindoor at One Year: Underground Infra to Air Defence — India's New Security Priorities

INDIAN EXPRESS

8 May 2026 · SECURITY & DEFENCE · IR · GS3 · GS2

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's capability but also revealed critical vulnerabilities — one year later, is India building the right defences for the next conflict?"

THE ONE-YEAR RECKONING

Operation Sindoor (May 7–10, 2025) established India's capacity for precise, multi-domain military retaliation against state-sponsored terrorism — striking nine terror infrastructure targets in Pakistan in 22 minutes, achieving air superiority within 72 hours, and successfully integrating **Rafale (SCALP/HAMMER)**, **BrahMos**, loitering munitions, and electronic warfare suppression in a single operation.

The **Indian Express's** May 8 editorial assessment focuses not on what went right, but on what the operation revealed needs urgent fixing — and what India is doing about it.

KEY VULNERABILITIES EXPOSED

1. Air Defence Gaps

Pakistan's retaliatory drone and cruise missile attempts during the conflict — though largely unsuccessful — revealed that India's forward air-defence coverage had significant gaps in detection-to-interception chaining. Individual platforms (S-400, Akash, CIWS systems) were not connected into a seamless defensive architecture.

India's response: The **Sudarshan Chakra mission** — a nationwide integrated air defence network:

LAYER	SYSTEM	RANGE
Long-range (strategic)	S-400 Triumph (Russian)	400 km
Medium-range (area)	Project Kusha (indigenous DRDO/BDL SAM)	100–150 km
Short-range (point)	Barak-8 (India-Israel JV), Akash-NG	25–70 km
Close-in/terminal	AK-630 CIWS, Phalanx equivalent	1–5 km
C2 Integration	Akashteer — automated command and control system linking all layers	—

2. Forward Infrastructure Vulnerability

Conventional concrete bunkers in forward areas require weeks or months to build. The conflict compressed military timelines. **3D-printed modular bunkers** — deploying in hours, with comparable protection — are now being fast-tracked for LAC (China border) and LoC (Pakistan border) forward posts.

3. Munitions Depth

The operation consumed precision-guided munitions at rates that exposed import dependency. **Key domestic production priorities post-Sindoor:**

- **Rudram** (anti-radiation missile, DRDO)
- **Astra Mk-2** (beyond visual range air-to-air missile)
- **SAAW** (Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon)
- **Loitering munitions** (iDEX-funded startups: Skyroot, Sagar Defence)

4. Dual-Use Infrastructure

Combat exposed the need for:

- **Highway airstrips** — key NH segments now certified for IAF fighter operations (NH-8, NH-44 have had exercises)
- **Border industrial corridors** with pre-positioned logistics facilities
- **Strategic underground fuel/ordnance storage** near forward bases

THE DOCTRINAL SHIFT

Before Operation Sindoor, India's counter-terrorism response doctrine was shaped by **strategic restraint** — absorbing cross-border attacks without crossing the international border. Operation Sindoor broke that threshold — striking inside Pakistan proper (not just PoK).

This is now **India's new normal**: precision conventional retaliation that maintains **nuclear ambiguity** (not using nuclear weapons) while crossing the **threshold of strategic significance** (hitting Pakistan military and terror sites simultaneously).

The Joint Commanders' Conference (May 7–8, 2026) is institutionalising this doctrine into operational planning for all three services.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Operation Sindoor (May 7–10, 2025); Sudarshan Chakra mission; Akashteer C2 system; S-400 Triumph; Project Kusha; Barak-8; Astra missile; SAAW; Rudram anti-radiation missile; iDEX; BrahMos; CDS General Anil Chauhan

India's defence modernisation; indigenous defence production; jointness and theatre commands; strategic deterrence; proxy war and cross-border terrorism; China-Pakistan axis

India-Pakistan relations; nuclear doctrine; strategic restraint vs assertive deterrence; India's security architecture post-Sindoor

Source: Indian Express, May 7–8, 2026

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Operation Sindoor revealed that India's future defence posture must shift from platform-centric thinking to integrated, multi-layered, and self-reliant systems — particularly in underground infrastructure, air defence, and counter-drone capabilities.

✓ SUPPORTING

- The operation exposed vulnerabilities in India's forward air-defence coverage and the inadequacy of isolated ground-based systems against sophisticated UAV and cruise missile combinations, accelerating the Sudarshan Chakra integrated air defence mission.
- Underground bunker requirements for forward military posts — previously addressed through conventional construction — are now being met through 3D-printed modular structures for speed and resilience, reflecting lessons from Ukraine and Israel operations.
- Dual-use civil-military infrastructure — expressways as emergency airstrips, industrial corridors near borders — is being fast-tracked, recognising that future conflicts will

compress logistics timelines beyond what dedicated military infrastructure alone can handle.

COUNTER

Defence modernisation priorities post-Sindoor risk creating a new strategic imbalance: over-investing in force protection and air-defence systems while underinvesting in the surveillance, intelligence fusion, and strategic communication capabilities that the next conflict will demand.

WAY FORWARD

India must institutionalise the inter-service jointness demonstrated in Operation Sindoor through theatre command formation, integrate AI-driven ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) with existing weapons platforms, and accelerate domestic production of critical munitions to reduce import dependency during conflict.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

Operation Sindoor marked a doctrinal shift in India's approach to cross-border terrorism. Examine the lessons learned and the defence modernisation priorities that the operation has accelerated. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

One year after Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's ability to strike terror infrastructure deep inside Pakistan with precision, the Indian military is translating battlefield lessons into a comprehensive modernisation agenda — from underground bunkers to integrated air defence — that will define India's force posture through the 2030s.

BODY

Operation Sindoor's key operational lessons fall into three domains. First, air defence: Pakistani drone and cruise missile responses during the 4-day conflict exposed gaps in India's layered interception. The Sudarshan Chakra mission — integrating the S-400 (long-range), Project Kusha indigenous SAM (medium-range), Barak-8 (short-range), and Akashteer command-and-control system — aims to create a seamless detection-to-interception chain. Second, infrastructure resilience: forward military posts require hardened, rapidly deployable shelters; 3D-printed modular bunkers are now being deployed along the Line of Actual Control and Line of Control, drawing on Israeli and Ukrainian precedents. Dual-use infrastructure — highways designed as emergency airstrips, border roads with concealed hardstands — is being integrated into defence planning. Third, munitions depth: the operation consumed precision-guided munitions and loitering munitions at rates that exposed import dependency; accelerating domestic production of Rudram anti-radiation missiles, Astra air-to-air missiles, and SAAW (Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon) is now a stated priority. The ongoing Joint Commanders' Conference (Jaipur, May 7–8, 2026) is the institutional vehicle for embedding these lessons into doctrine.

CONCLUSION

India's challenge is not merely to replicate Operation Sindoor's success but to build a force capable of sustaining multi-domain pressure over a longer time horizon — against an adversary (China-Pakistan axis) that will not offer the same 4-day limited conflict window. Jointness, indigenous production, and AI-enabled ISR are the three pillars that will determine readiness.

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