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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Operation Sindoor at One: A Watershed in India's Strategic Doctrine

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"One year after Operation Sindoor, has India's doctrinal shift from strategic restraint to zero-tolerance deterrence made South Asia more stable or more dangerous?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

One year after Operation Sindoor, The Hindu examines how India's May 2025 strikes redefined its national security posture — from strategic restraint to calibrated deterrence under nuclear constraints — and asks whether the institutional and diplomatic architecture has kept pace with this doctrinal leap.

THE DOCTRINAL TRANSFORMATION

Operation Sindoor was not merely a military event — it was a strategic statement. For decades, India absorbed terrorist provocations from across its western border with calibrated diplomatic responses, premised on the logic that military escalation against a nuclear-armed Pakistan risked uncontrollable consequences. The Pahalgam attack of April 2025, in which 26 civilians were massacred, broke that equilibrium.

India's response — launched in 2025, specifically on May 7 — nine precision strikes in 25 minutes hitting terror infrastructure in both PoJK and Pakistan's Punjab province — demonstrated a fundamental shift in threat calculus. The message: India would strike where terrorists operate, not merely where they cross the border.

OPERATING IN THE NUCLEAR SHADOW

The most consequential strategic lesson of Sindoor is that India demonstrated the ability to conduct **offensive kinetic operations against a nuclear-armed adversary without triggering escalation to the nuclear threshold**. This requires:

- 1 **Precision:** Civilian-free targeting preserves international legitimacy

- ② **Proportionality:** Striking terror infrastructure, not Pakistani state institutions
- ③ **Narrative control:** Briefing international partners within hours
- ④ **Escalation management:** Accepting a DGMO-level ceasefire rather than pursuing unlimited military objectives

The nuclear deterrence calculus in South Asia is permanently altered. Pakistan's strategy of using nuclear ambiguity as a shield for proxy terrorism has been tested and found wanting.

TECHNOLOGY AS FORCE MULTIPLIER

- **BrahMos cruise missiles:** Mach 2.8+ supersonic delivery; near-zero collateral damage
- **S-400 Triumf (Sudarshana Chakra):** Intercepted Pakistani aerial counter-attacks
- **Space-based ISR (RISAT-2BR series):** Real-time satellite imagery enabling target verification

THE UNRESOLVED QUESTIONS

A year on, several questions remain:

- ① **Diplomatic consolidation:** Indus Waters talks remain suspended; normalisation hostage to Pakistan's counter-terrorism commitments
- ② **Institutionalising doctrine:** Codification, rules of engagement, civil-military coordination — work in progress
- ③ **Alliance implications:** India's relationships with Russia (S-400), France (Rafale), US each carry different crisis-response expectations
- ④ **Sub-conventional resilience:** Sindoor addressed infrastructure, not the political will that funds terrorism

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Key arguments:

- Sindoor establishes India can calibrate escalation below nuclear threshold: "graduated deterrence"
- Technology (BrahMos, S-400, space ISR) enabled precision without escalation
- DGMO ceasefire format: bilateral, military-to-military — preserved sovereignty

Counterarguments:

- Doctrine without codification is policy by precedent — risky in future crises
- Pakistan’s nuclear first-use posture not formally revised despite Sindoor’s demonstration

Keywords: Zero-tolerance deterrence, sub-conventional warfare, graduated escalation, DGMO protocol, nuclear threshold management, BrahMos, S-400 Sudarshana Chakra

The Hindu’s core argument: Operation Sindoor is a genuine doctrinal watershed — but a watershed is only the beginning of a new journey. The operational success must be matched by diplomatic consolidation, institutional doctrine, and sustained counter-terror pressure. Military capability without political strategy produces tactical wins and strategic stalemate.

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