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# OPERATION SINDOOR: A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

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### **OPERATION SINDOOR: A VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE**



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Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar, the former foreign minister of Pakistan, in an interview given to Doha News during the Doha Forum held on 06-07 December 2025, when asked about the current standing of Pakistan internationally, responded by profusely thanking India's PM Shri Narendra Modi for launching Operation Sindoor and attacking Pakistan in May 2025. As per her, the attack launched by India on nuclear-armed Pakistan assisted her nation in unravelling itself from the weight of Afghanistan and helped bring back the focus on Pakistan. It assisted Pakistan in concluding a defence arrangement with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and also re-affirmed the absolute strategic relation between China and Pakistan. Further, she highlighted the acknowledgement of Pakistan's continued engagement with the US and its strategic importance, which automatically qualifies it to become a 'Middle Nation' like Qatar, which could engage with both the US and China simultaneously. The discourse coupled with the repeated attempts being made by intelligentsia in Pakistan claiming victory in the four-day operations needs to be analysed for the impact Operation Sindoor has had on Pakistan with respect to its international standing, economy, military, and overall pertinency in comparison to India.

Operation Sindoor, the four-day military strikes launched by India in retaliation to the killing of 26 tourists in Pahalgam by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists in April 2025, generated two

different narratives for the consumption of two different population masses. In India, the operation has been celebrated as a big success from the hallowed halls of Indian Parliament to the streets of every state, while in Pakistan, the culmination of operations prompted the swift elevation of Asif Munir, their Chief of Army Staff, to the rank of Field Marshal and the declaration of victory against India's belligerent act. This was followed by further elevation of the Field Marshal to being nominated as the first Chief of Defence Forces through an act of Pakistan's parliament. The interesting part, however, is the outcome of one operation launched by India involving the use of mostly kinetic/non-kinetic means having two completely divergent narratives and fallouts. While both the nations have claimed victory consequent to the declaration of ceasefire, the resultant fallouts have been on unpredictable lines for both the nations. The absence of visible "Exploits of War" in the form of captured territory, war-waging resources, and prisoners of war in the possession of either of the nations, coupled with an aggressive information operations campaign further contorting the perceptions of the populace at large, wherein, both sides seized operations on declaration of a ceasefire with a notion of victory.

The views expressed by Pakistan's former foreign minister are quite in consonance with the narrative that the Pakistani establishment has been able to sell to its people and some of its allies. Despite the nation suffering huge losses in the intensely contested four-days operations against India, Pakistan very ingeniously has managed to emerge from a state of strategic isolation by manipulating diplomatic leverages at its disposal. It is therefore necessary to examine the outcome of the operations from Pakistan's perspective post declaration of ceasefire for its impact on regional security.

- **US and Pakistan Renewed Engagement.** Just prior to the commencement of Operation Sindoor, Pakistan's well-calculated move of adopting aggressive crypto diplomacy and strategically engaging with World Liberty Finances (WLF), a Trump family crypto enterprise, with Pakistan's burgeoning digital finance sector prepared the foundation to gain favours from the new US administration. Pakistan gained attention consequent to a public announcement by the US president, that he was instrumental in negotiating a ceasefire between India and Pakistan during Operation Sindoor using tariffs as a threat, a claim vehemently denied by India but endorsed by Pakistan. Seizing the opportunity, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, accompanied by Field Marshal Asim Munir, not only managed to get an audience with President Donald Trump but also showcased samples of rare earth minerals available

in Pakistan for mining. This resulted in the signing of a major rare-earth deal between the two countries. Under the agreement, the US Strategic Metals (USSM), a Missouri-based firm specializing in the recycling and processing of critical minerals, will invest nearly US\$500 million in Pakistan to explore, develop, and refine rare earth and critical minerals. The deal targets Pakistan's estimated six trillion USD in untapped reserves, primarily in the restive province of Balochistan. This perhaps pulled Pakistan out of its strategic isolation, as it provided a platform wherein it not only succeeded in placating the American administration but also was accorded prominence in the signing of the Gaza settlement in Egypt, a unique consortium mostly led by the Arabs. Pakistan could also manage to limit the impact of tariff enhancement to only 19% through proactive engagement. Further, in Dec 2025, the US administration approved military aid amounting to 686 million US dollars to upgrade the F16 fleet and other military hardware. Pakistan managed to successfully exploit its geographical location to justify to the Trump-led administration the necessity to strategically re-engage with it for gaining access to Iran on one hand and Afghanistan on the other, both being areas of strategic significance for the US, which it wishes to control not by committing boots on the ground but through proxy, which Pakistan is more than willing to become.

- **Pakistan-Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Defence Agreement.** The Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) signed in September 2025 aims to coordinate aspects of defence cooperation between the two nations and strengthen the joint deterrence mechanism against any aggression against any one or against both. To Saudi Arabia, the agreement provides easy access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and Chinese military equipment as an alternate to the US-backed security umbrella. For Pakistan, it would provide access to Saudi deep pockets and energy security. As a starter, Pakistan has offered to sell military hardware like JF-17 fighter aircraft to the Saudis in lieu of the USD 4 billion of loans, which Pakistan is finding hard to service. While an informal arrangement existed in the past, Pakistan believes that a formal declaration of alliance will rejuvenate its strategic relevance and sagging economy. It has also resulted in the deployment of Pakistani military assets in Saudi Arabia for various roles and in support of the Saudi-supported actions in Yemen. Further, Pakistan has been proactively attempting to leverage the SMDA with the Saudi kingdom to secure energy and economic aid from the resource-rich Gulf countries on one hand and also include Turkey in a similar agreement for harnessing its military technology capacities.

- **Enhanced Engagement in the Middle East.** Since gaining independence, Pakistan has always nurtured the dream of gaining relevance amongst the Middle East; however, despite being an Islamic nation, it failed to fully align with the Arabs. Post Operation Sindoor, it found sudden prominence when it was one amongst the Arab and Muslim nations, which the US consulted in the run-up to the signing of the Gaza peace plan at Sharm El-Sheikh. Pakistan further catapulted into eminence when it conceded to contribute its military assets for the proposed international stabilisation force. Fully realising the economic potential of the Arab world, Pakistan aims to capitalise on its military and nuclear-armed status to mitigate its economic woes in exchange for military assets for deployment in support of Islamic nations. The Islamic nations view nuclear-armed Pakistan not only as a guarantor but also as a cheap source of acquiring Chinese-origin Pakistan-manufactured military hardware and human resources. Consequent to entering into a defence arrangement with the Saudis successfully, it is also exploring the feasibility of incorporating Turkey and other Islamic nations into a similar agreement, a step towards the establishment of an 'Islamic NATO'.
- **China-Pakistan Friendship.** China has been involved in modernising the PLA and strengthening its exports of military hardware since past decades; however, the lack of combat experience and the use of weapon platforms in actual conflict have consistently remained grey areas. While it has become the biggest supplier of military equipment to Pakistan, Operation Sindoor provided the Chinese defence industry and strategic planners the unique opportunity wherein the capability of military equipment supplied to Pakistan got validated in actual military conflict. China was also quick to seize the opportunity to join Pakistan in announcing the grand success of their JF class of combat aircraft, radars, and associated equipment. Besides validating the battle worthiness of equipment, the operation provided both countries the opportunity to authenticate the robustness of Chinese-manufactured and supplied surveillance, communication, and electronic warfare resources in a collaborative environment. China, of course, would be studying the data for hardening, improving, and incorporating necessary enhancements. The operation also confirmed the strong strategic convergence between the Chinese and Pakistani militaries, which has been constantly hailed by the establishment by calling China an all-weather strategic partner.
- **Pakistan and its Neighbourhood.** In a well-calculated diplomatic and strategic move, Pakistan seems to have reviewed its engagement with its immediate

neighbours. It does not consider engaging with Iran and Afghanistan of any significant strategic benefit, as both nations are heavily sanctioned by the US and EU. In a short-term horizon, it does not mind junking its immediate neighbours and cozying up with the West for strategic gains, including blunting India's emerging economic as well as military stature and influence. Asif Munir becoming President Trump's favourite field marshal is no coincidence but a calculated gamble by Pakistani establishment wherein it is being perceived to be more than willing to provide the Americans with logistic support for operating in Iran and Afghanistan in exchange for Military aid in the guise of executing counter-terror operations against Afghanistan mujahedeen groups. Further, it aims to leverage the American support to keep India in check along its eastern borders.

The Pakistan Army has always been given primacy throughout the history of Pakistan's existence in matters relating to the forming of strategic alliances, foreign policy, and its national security. Over the years every government very ingeniously mastered the art of exploiting its geographical location for fostering strategic alliances. It forged a military alliance with the US to take on the erstwhile USSR, to gain control in Afghanistan in the late 1990s till the exit of US forces from the region in 2024. It was quick yet again to map the new US administration's disruptive and interventionist policies wherein it needed allies to exert influence on Iran and Afghanistan directly or through proxies. The opportunity suited the weak Pakistani establishment in not only consolidating the narrative of the 'notion of victory', but also in blunting India's remarkable victory and justification for the launch of Operation Sindoor. To further provide credence to the narrative, it concurrently elevated Asif Munir, the all-powerful Army Chief, to second Field Marshal on 20 May 2025 in recognition of the perceived success of Pakistan's defence forces. Fully appreciating that the US needed Pakistan's support for executing operations against Iran during the 12-day Israel-Iran conflict, Asif Munir promptly seized the opportunity and met President Trump on 19 June 2015, wherein his willingness to serve American interests apparently won him the title of 'Trump's favourite field marshal'. Subsequently, Munir very shrewdly coaxed the government to pass the 27<sup>th</sup> amendment through the parliament on 13 November 2025, wherein the chief of the army would also be the chief of the defence forces, overseeing the army, navy and air force, thereby staging a well-planned "coup-less-coup". The new amendment transforms a politically powerful army into an even more powerful one through the parliamentary nod to the appointment of the Chief of Defence Forces. In addition, the amendment envisages that anyone who is promoted to the rank of a field marshal in the

army, marshal in the air force, or admiral of the fleet by the federal government “shall retain the rank and privileges and remain in uniform for life and shall not be removed”. Munir not only successfully capitalised on the weakness of the Pakistani establishment by legally becoming the most powerful entity in Pakistan but also succeeded in countering the adverse impact of Operation Sindoor.

Operation Sindoor will be analysed for several reasons for its impact on India and Pakistan post declaration of ceasefire. While both nations claimed victory, on cessation of active operations, it was Pakistan that had undergone maximum churning within and with its engagement with the world outside. It not only managed to very surreptitiously manipulate and articulate the narrative of victory for consumption of its domestic as well as gullible international audience but also has embarked upon a different trajectory altogether. Interestingly, within Pakistan and outside, many are convinced that Pakistan withstood India’s aggression and its army came out victorious. It needs to be studied as to what has gone in Pakistan’s favour that it could successfully peddle the notion of victory by manipulating the cognitive domain. From Pakistan’s perspective, its claim to victory stems from the notion that it has transitioned from a state of strategic isolation to strategic relevance and used events following declaration of ceasefire to substantiate the same as under: -

- Promoting the army chief despite suffering huge losses to the rank of field Marshal in a four-day operation wherein the opposing sides did not even cross the borders, thereby covering up for the military failures. In addition, within one month of becoming Field Marshal, Asif Munir gets hosted by the President of the most powerful and oldest democracy in the world.
- Getting tacit legitimacy for the hybrid form of governance from several democracies, including the oldest wherein an elected government is being run by the military.
- Rejuvenation of strategic alliance with the US and Gulf nations, particularly with Saudi Arabia, as they are the biggest lenders to Pakistan, and de-hyphenating from Taliban-led Afghanistan and also Iran in consonance with the US strategic outlook.
- From the state of isolation to being considered an important Islamic nation by the US while preparing the Gaza peace plan and seeking military assistance for deployment as part of the international stabilisation force in Gaza.
- Realigning with US interests for building partnership in exchange for military aid for upgradation the F16 series of aircraft and other military hardware for combating terror originating from Afghanistan, as well as attracting investment in the crypto market and rare earth mineral mining from the US-based corporate houses.

- Showcasing Pakistani-manufactured Chinese-origin military hardware as robust, reliable, and cheap in comparison to the West and repeated claims on sealing of military deals with Saudi Arabia, Libya, and other Islamic nations.
- Piggyback China in providing credence to the efficiency and accuracy of Chinese-origin weapon platforms, which were used by the Pakistani military to counter Indian and Western-origin platforms, to include Rafael combat aircraft. Besides, continue to portray China as its all-weather reliable strategic partner.
- Imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian imports against 19% on Pakistan. Further, the laying of restrictions on importing Russian oil and the visible straining of the Indo-US relationship, particularly with the repeated assertions of the US president on his claims on the brokering of a ceasefire, as well as the downing of combat aircraft during Operation Sindoor.
- Successfully securing additional loans amounting to approximately USD 43 billion, despite India's relentless efforts to portray Pakistan as the epicentre of terrorism.

The outcome of any conflict between two nations is invariably established based on captured 'war booty' in the form of territory, prisoners of war, or other exploits of war. It is difficult to do so when conflicts are fought in the cognitive domain, where every claim can be effectively countered by either of the sides. While it is easy to determine the winning side in the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine due to the capture of territory by the Russians, the same is difficult to adjudicate in the case of the 12-day Iran-Israel conflict. However, in the case of Operation Sindoor, in the absence any substantial war exploits in the possession of India or Pakistan, the outcome has been left to interpretation by each side, despite Pakistan suffering losses to its critical war-waging capabilities. Pakistan's hybrid government, in its fervour to peddle the propaganda of victory so as to cover up for the humiliating surrender of its military, seems to have succeeded with its narrative in the short term. However, how long and to what extent the façade of victory being spread by Pakistan sustains itself remains to be seen. While post Operation Sindoor, India has been at the receiving end of the Trump administration on account of the weaponisation of tariffs, it will be interesting to watch Pakistan's economic and military trajectory post the churning it has undergone. Pakistan which has already started facing challenges along the Durand Line with Afghanistan, is being accused by Iran of providing support to the US forces and is experiencing fissures in its role in Gaza peace plans. Further, its repeated claims of the sale of the JF series of aircraft to friendly Islamic nations hang in limbo; it is being aggressively pushed by the Chinese for the failing CPEC project and may need a fresh lease of economic lifeline from the rich Gulf

partners. With external debt exceeding \$130 billion, Pakistan faces major challenges involving debt servicing, requiring continuous negotiations and rollovers, especially with China, to manage the balance of payments crises. Besides, the internal political and military fissures in Pakistan have the potential to implode and annihilate the existing hybrid model anytime. Should the same continue, it will not be too long before, from becoming relevant, it is yet again discarded by its new allies for being a liability. Interestingly, India, to the contrary has taken a two-pronged approach to address its vulnerabilities. Firstly, it is encouraging investment in the indigenous defence industrial base for becoming self-reliant for its military hardware requirements without calling off Operation Sindoor. Secondly, it not only continues to remain one of the best-performing economies, but has also embarked upon diversifying its trade through signing of free trade agreements with the UK, New-Zealand, Oman, and the EU while negotiations with the US have already resulted in reduction of the tariff to 18% as a prelude to concluding the FTA. In the present, Pakistan can afford to bask in the glory of its newfound relevance and, in the words of Hina Rabbani, continue to “Unravel itself” till it lasts.

#### **DISCLAIMER**

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