



From Restraint to Resolve: India's Emerging Military Doctrine Post-Operation Sindoor - Dr Nanda Kishor M S

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Key Takeaways

- India is shifting from a reactive regional power to a confident global actor with robust military capabilities, a coherent doctrine, and a vision of securing its national interests across multiple domains.
- Operation Sindoor marked a clear departure, embracing pre-emptive and punitive action against terrorist infrastructure beyond its borders.
- Operation Sindoor is a practical embodiment of India's evolving strategic autonomy, executed with minimal external influence and maximum sovereign decision-making.
- India's force projection capability is increasingly underpinned by the belief that strategic depth requires credible capacity to retaliate and dominate in theatres of India's choosing.
- India is no longer a reactive power but a norm-shaper willing to act decisively while staying within the framework of international law.
- India is now seen not only as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific but also as a voice of balance and restraint, without compromising on its core interests.
- India's doctrine must integrate its nuclear posture, space policy, and cyber strategy into a single overarching framework to avoid ambiguity and miscalculation.
- India's emerging military doctrine is not simply a response to external threats; it is a manifestation of national confidence and strategic foresight.

Introduction

India, a nation of civilizational antiquity and strategic significance, stands today at a critical juncture in its security trajectory. The 21st-century geopolitical landscape, marked by multipolarity, asymmetric threats, and strategic ambiguity, has compelled India to revisit and recalibrate its military doctrine.

The recent Operation Sindoor, India's high-profile evacuation and forward operational manoeuvre during the 2025 India-Pakistan skirmish following the Pahalgam terror attacks, has spotlighted India's evolving strategic posture. This article investigates India's Emerging Military Doctrine, contextualising it within Operation Sindoor, and explores its dimensions of strategic autonomy, force

projection, integrated diplomacy, and global perception. It aims to demonstrate how India is shifting from a reactive regional power to a confident global actor with robust military capabilities, a coherent doctrine, and a vision of securing its national interests across multiple domains.

I. Operation Sindoor: A Turning Point in India's Strategic Thought

The Context: Pahalgam Attack and the Need for a New Paradigm

The Pahalgam terror attack was unprecedented in its scale and complexity. The terrorists struck multiple civilian targets simultaneously during a religious festival, exploiting intelligence gaps and security vulnerabilities. Unlike earlier incidents which India responded to with measured retaliations or diplomatic protests, the 2025 attack ignited widespread domestic outrage and international attention. The government and military leadership

recognised that India could no longer afford a passive or reactive stance in the face of such provocations. For decades, India's military doctrine had emphasised strategic restraint, particularly in the Kashmir theatre, to avoid escalation with Pakistan and international censure. However, growing terrorist capabilities and the transnational nature of threats necessitated a fresh approach — one that combined swift punitive action with strategic messaging to adversaries and allies alike.

Aerial Surgical Strikes: Precision in the Heart of Terror Sanctuaries

One of the most critical components of Operation Sindoor was the aerial offensive targeting terror launch pads and training camps deep inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The Indian Air Force (IAF) deployed its most advanced platforms, including Rafale and Su-30MKI fighter jets, equipped with precision-guided munitions and electronic warfare suites. The strikes were conducted at night, leveraging real-



time intelligence gathered from human sources, electronic surveillance, and satellite reconnaissance. The use of precision-guided bombs minimised collateral damage, adhering to international humanitarian norms, while effectively destroying infrastructure critical to terrorist operations. This surgical approach was a marked departure from earlier limited strikes that mostly targeted border outposts or infrastructure near the LoC. By striking deep within enemy territory with minimal footprint, India demonstrated enhanced operational reach and the ability to impose costs without triggering full-scale war.

Naval Posturing: Deterrence Across the Maritime Domain

Simultaneous to the aerial strikes, the Indian Navy elevated its operational readiness in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. A naval task force, including guided missile destroyers, frigates, and submarine units, was deployed to key maritime choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait. This naval manoeuvre served a dual purpose. Firstly, it projected India's ability to secure sea lines of communication essential for energy and trade, deterring any attempts at maritime escalation by Pakistan or its allies. Secondly, the presence of Indian naval forces sent a clear message of India's resolve to assert its strategic interests beyond its land borders. The Indian Navy's role in Operation Sindoor reflected a doctrinal shift recognising the interconnectedness of land, sea, and air domains in modern conflict, and the importance of maritime power in regional security architecture.

Rapid Mobilisation of Mechanised Forces: Readiness on the Ground

On the ground, the Indian Army mobilised mechanised infantry, armoured regiments, and artillery units along critical sectors in Jammu and Kashmir. The rapid mobilisation was supported by improved logistics, airlift capabilities, and forward operating bases established over the past decade. The forces were tasked with both defensive posturing to deter cross-border infiltrations and offensive readiness to exploit tactical gains. This deployment showcased the army's ability to synchronise large-scale troop movements with air and naval operations, underscoring India's evolving jointness. The heightened presence along the LoC also ensured rapid evacuation and protection of local populations, further strengthening India's counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism framework.

Humanitarian Evacuations: Winning Hearts and Minds

Understanding the critical role of civilian populations in conflict zones, Operation Sindoor included simultaneous evacuation plans for vulnerable communities residing near the LoC. Specialised units of the Border Security Force (BSF) and Indian Army facilitated the safe passage of thousands of civilians to secure locations. This humanitarian dimension was essential not only for safeguarding lives but also for maintaining the moral high ground and countering enemy propaganda. It exemplified India's comprehensive approach, blending military strength with empathy and governance.

Cyber Defence and Offensive Capabilities: The New Frontiers

Perhaps the most contemporary aspect of Operation Sindoor was the deployment of cyber defence and offensive operations aimed at neutralising enemy communication hubs, disrupting terrorist networks' command and control, and safeguarding India's critical infrastructure. India's Defence Cyber Agency (DCA) launched coordinated strikes against Pakistani cyber assets linked to terrorism logistics and misinformation campaigns. Concurrently, India's cyber defence systems protected its military communication channels from retaliatory hacking attempts. This dimension highlighted the recognition of cyberspace as a vital theatre in modern warfare, where battles can be fought invisibly but with tangible impact.

Strategic Takeaways: Lessons from Operation Sindoor

Operation Sindoor was not merely a military manoeuvre; it was a doctrinal milestone that revealed key shifts in India's strategic thought.

1. Jointness and Integration: A Mature Military Ecosystem

One of the most striking features was the seamless integration of the three services — Army, Navy, and Air Force — along with intelligence and cyber agencies. The operation dispelled earlier criticisms of bureaucratic inertia and service rivalry. Real-time intelligence sharing, joint command and control centres, integrated logistics, and synchronised operational planning reflected the fruition of long-term reforms aimed at jointness, such as



the establishment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and theatre commands. This integration enhanced operational tempo and ensured that military action was swift, coherent, and strategically aligned.

2. Pre-emptive Doctrine: Breaking the Mould of Strategic Restraint

Historically, India's military doctrine emphasised strategic restraint and reactive defence. Operation Sindoor marked a clear departure, embracing pre-emptive and punitive action against terrorist infrastructure beyond its borders. This doctrinal evolution signals India's willingness to shift from reactive deterrence to deterrence by punishment, where potential adversaries are made to perceive the inevitability of a cost for aggression. It reflects confidence not only in military capabilities but also in political will — a rare combination in democratic nations constrained by domestic and international considerations.

3. Civil-Military Synchronisation: Strategic Maturity and Decisiveness

Operation Sindoor demonstrated exemplary civil-military coordination. The political leadership, including the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Defence, worked hand-in-glove with the armed forces, ensuring clear political objectives, timely decisions, and unified messaging. This synchronisation helped maintain internal coherence during crisis, prevented policy leaks, and ensured that military actions were legally and morally justified. Moreover, the government effectively managed international diplomatic fallout, combining military action with proactive diplomacy to prevent escalation into broader conflict.

II. Strategic Autonomy: The Bedrock of India's Military Doctrine

Strategic autonomy remains the foundational pillar of India's military doctrine, shaping its defence policies, force development, and diplomatic engagements. Rooted historically in the Nehruvian ideal of non-alignment, strategic autonomy has undergone significant transformation in its interpretation and application. While early Indian policy emphasised equidistance from Cold War blocs, contemporary strategic autonomy signifies India's resolute commitment to maintain independent decision-making, especially in times of crisis, and to pursue national interests without undue external influence or constraints.

A. Operation Sindoor and Strategic Autonomy

Operation Sindoor is a practical embodiment of India's evolving strategic autonomy. It demonstrated India's ability to independently assess threats, design multi-domain military responses, and execute them with minimal external influence, reinforcing the principle that sovereign decision-making is paramount.

1. Decision-Making Sovereignty

Unlike previous military operations where India often faced international pressures for restraint or diplomatic consultations before action, Operation Sindoor was launched swiftly and decisively without prior international approval. The government prioritised national interest and security imperatives above all else. Post-operation, India engaged

in diplomatic outreach, briefing major global capitals — including Washington, Moscow, Beijing, and European capitals — about its rationale and objectives. This sequence asserted India's sovereign right to self-defence and its capacity to manage international relations from a position of strength. This approach sent a clear signal that India would no longer be constrained by global power dynamics or vetoes when responding to terrorism or aggression, reinforcing the core of strategic autonomy.

2. Technology Independence and Indigenous Capabilities

A hallmark of Operation Sindoor was the significant use of domestically developed technologies, reflecting India's push for defence self-reliance. Indigenous drones equipped with AI-assisted surveillance and targeting capabilities conducted reconnaissance and provided real-time battlefield intelligence. The Indian armed forces employed locally manufactured precision munitions and communication systems hardened against cyber intrusions. This minimised dependency on foreign suppliers, reducing vulnerabilities related to supply chain disruptions, embargoes, or diplomatic hesitations. Furthermore, Operation Sindoor highlighted the success of 'Make in India' defence initiatives, showcasing how home-grown innovation in robotics, electronic warfare, and satellite-based reconnaissance could be integrated effectively into joint operations.

3. Avoidance of Entrapment: Selective Engagement over Alliances

India's strategic autonomy today means selective engagement rather than rigid

alliance commitments. While India maintains consultative relations with Quad partners (the United States, Japan, Australia) and other global players, it carefully avoids becoming entangled in alliance obligations that could limit freedom of action. During Operation Sindoor, India informed Quad members about the evolving situation and sought diplomatic support post facto but consciously refrained from requesting operational assistance or invoking treaty-based security guarantees. This calibrated approach preserves India's operational independence and diplomatic flexibility, allowing it to manoeuvre deftly across competing regional and global interests, including managing relations with Russia and Southeast Asian countries.

III. Force Projection: Beyond Borders and Across Domains

In contemporary strategic thought, force projection defines the capacity of a state to deploy and sustain military power outside its immediate geographical boundaries. China's attempt to internationalise the issue at the UN Security Council. Importantly, India's force projection is not rooted in imperial ambition or hegemonic designs. Instead, it is a calculated extension of its security architecture to secure national interests, protect maritime and economic lifelines, provide humanitarian assistance, deter asymmetric threats, and promote regional stability. The capacity to project power across multiple domains — land, sea, air, cyber, and space — is thus becoming indispensable to India's grand strategic posture.



A. The Instruments of Force Projection

India's ability to project force across domains has been steadily evolving, driven by both indigenous advancements and strategic partnerships. Each arm of the military contributes uniquely to this growing capacity.

1. Blue Water Navy: Maritime Dominance and Deterrence

The Indian Navy has undergone a fundamental transformation from a brown-water, coastal defence force to a blue-water navy capable of sustained operations across the vast expanse of the Indian Ocean and into the Western Pacific. Key platforms such as the indigenously built aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, alongside INS Vikramaditya, have significantly enhanced India's carrier battle group (CBG) capabilities. Complementing this are nuclear-powered submarines (e.g., INS Arihant) and state-of-the-art anti-submarine warfare (ASW) assets like the P-8I Poseidon aircraft and new stealth frigates and

destroyers, such as the Visakhapatnam-class. These platforms allow India to maintain a persistent presence from the Strait of Hormuz to the Malacca Strait, two of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints. The Navy's increasing role in defence diplomacy — through exercises like MILAN, Malabar, and bilateral operations with regional navies — further bolsters India's maritime outreach and cements its role as the net security provider in the IOR.

2. Air Power and Strategic Lift: Mobility and Deterrence

The Indian Air Force (IAF) plays a pivotal role in force projection through its expanding fleet of multirole fighters, heavy-lift transport aircraft, and mid-air refuelling platforms. The induction of Rafale fighters with advanced targeting pods, Meteor missiles, and electronic warfare capabilities has bolstered India's air superiority and precision strike abilities. Equally important is the strategic lift capability facilitated by C-17

Globemaster III, IL-76, and C-130J Super Hercules aircraft. These platforms enable the rapid movement of troops, artillery, and equipment to forward areas or expeditionary missions, both within India's borders and in friendly foreign territories. India's increasing focus on air mobility reflects a shift toward a proactive response doctrine — the ability to move fast, strike decisively, and signal deterrence in real time.

3. Cyber and Space Command: New Frontiers of Warfare

By 2024, India had operationalised its Defence Cyber Agency and Defence Space Agency, reflecting its recognition of cyberspace and outer space as crucial domains of modern warfare. Cyber force projection is about more than defence against digital threats. It encompasses offensive cyber capabilities aimed at disrupting enemy communication networks, neutralising command structures, and paralysing hostile infrastructure — capabilities increasingly used in conjunction with kinetic operations. On the space front, India's growing fleet of military-grade satellites, including those for reconnaissance (like RISAT and Cartosat) and secure communication, provides essential ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance) capabilities. These assets were vital in Operation Sindoor, facilitating real-time intelligence and target acquisition. India's successful demonstration of an anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon in 2019 under Mission Shakti had already signalled its intent and capability to defend its space-based assets, adding another layer to its deterrence matrix.

4. Special Forces and Expeditionary Capabilities

India's Special Forces—notably the Para Special Forces (Para SF) and the Marine Commandos (MARCOS)—are now critical tools of force projection, especially in scenarios requiring stealth, agility, and precision. These units have been deployed in cross-border raids, hostage rescues, anti-piracy missions, and peacekeeping operations. Beyond their tactical prowess, these units symbolise India's capacity to act swiftly and decisively in high-risk theatres without escalating to full-scale war. Their use in Operation Sindoor underscored their value in hybrid warfare settings, where conventional, irregular, and cyber domains intersect.

B. Operation Sindoor as Force Projection Template

Operation Sindoor, launched in response to the Pahalgam terrorist attacks, serves as a blueprint for future Indian military interventions that combine speed, precision, and strategic messaging.

1. Speed: Swift Deployment and Response

The operation demonstrated the Indian military's ability to mobilise and strike within hours of a provocation. Rafale squadrons were scrambled from forward bases in Ambala and Hasimara, and BrahMos missile batteries were activated and deployed within minutes. This level of responsiveness sent a powerful message — both domestically and internationally — that India would no longer rely on prolonged deliberation in the face of terrorism emanating from across the border. The armed forces were operating

under new rules of engagement, driven by real-time intelligence and political decisiveness.

2. Precision: Minimising Collateral Damage, Maximising Impact

One of the most striking features of Operation Sindoor was the calibrated use of precision-guided munitions. Satellite-guided missiles and drone-based surveillance ensured that only the intended terror infrastructure was neutralised, thereby avoiding civilian casualties and reducing the risk of international backlash. The operation also demonstrated India's commitment to ethical warfare, adhering to international norms while achieving tactical superiority. The judicious use of firepower projected not just strength, but also responsibility.

3. Depth: Strategic Reach Without Escalation

Indian forces demonstrated a capability to strike deep within hostile territory—well beyond the traditional tactical zones near the LoC—without violating political or strategic thresholds that could have triggered a wider conflict. This was a textbook example of deterrence by punishment, whereby a strong retaliatory action is designed to discourage future attacks by imposing unacceptable costs. It marked a shift from the older doctrine of deterrence by denial, which relied on border fortification and static defence. By employing surgical, multi-domain strikes while maintaining clear communication lines with global stakeholders, India achieved its strategic goals without provoking a full-blown war — an exemplar of modern force projection.



The command and control centre for Operation Sindoor

India's Doctrinal Shift: From Reactive to Assertive Posture

Operation Sindoor encapsulated India's doctrinal shift toward pre-emptive and punitive action. This is not about warmongering but about strategic clarity — ensuring that the price of aggression is too high for adversaries to consider. India's force projection capability is increasingly underpinned by the belief that:

- Strategic depth requires a credible capacity to retaliate and dominate in theatres of India's choosing.
- Cross-domain synergy is essential — integrating land, sea, air, cyber, and space for a cumulative effect.
- The deterrent value of visible power projection enhances both defensive readiness and diplomatic leverage.

IV. Diplomacy in Uniform: Integrating Military and Foreign Policy

India's Operation Sindoor in April 2025 marked a textbook case of this integration, where military precision was matched with diplomatic preparedness, narrative control, and international engagement.

A. Strategic Signalling and Narrative Control

With Operation Sindoor, India wasted no time in launching a comprehensive diplomatic offensive aimed at shaping global opinion. Indian envoys in Washington, Moscow, Paris, Beijing, and London—the five permanent members of the UN Security Council

(P5)—delivered coordinated briefings highlighting the nature of the terrorist provocation and India's limited, proportionate, and responsible military response. Simultaneously, Indian High Commissions and Embassies in South Asian capitals and major international hubs issued carefully worded statements underlining India's right to self-defence as per Article 51 of the UN Charter. This proactive approach ensured that Pakistan's narrative of victimhood found little traction, while India's case for responsible regional leadership was broadly accepted. The diplomatic signalling was precise: India is no longer a reactive power but a norm-shaper willing to act decisively while staying within the framework of international law.

B. Civil-Military Coordination: Institutional Synergy in Action

One of the more underappreciated but crucial elements of Operation Sindoor was the unprecedented civil-military coordination during the operational window. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) reportedly functioned as an integrated crisis command, monitoring military developments while anticipating diplomatic consequences in real-time.

This joint functioning ensured several outcomes:

- Global Isolation was avoided: By communicating proactively, India prevented any perception of recklessness or overreach.
- Crisis remained localised: The operation was tightly choreographed

to avoid escalation into full-scale conflict, and no territorial claims were made.

- **Narrative management:** India's messaging was internally consistent and externally persuasive, reflecting political maturity and strategic foresight.

C. Diplomacy of Capability: Power with Responsibility

India's successful execution of Operation Sindoor had an important second-order effect—it enhanced India's diplomatic capital. The ability to conduct precise and proportionate strikes without collateral damage or escalation sent a powerful message to friends and adversaries alike: India has both the capability and the restraint to uphold regional stability. Countries like France and Japan publicly endorsed India's right to self-

defence, reinforcing long-standing strategic partnerships. Middle Eastern powers such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, while maintaining neutrality, refrained from issuing condemnatory statements, marking a subtle diplomatic victory for India.

V. Global Perception: From Strategic Restraint to Strategic Responsibility

For decades, India was largely viewed through the prism of strategic restraint—a doctrine shaped by its historical aversion to conflict, moral leadership in the post-colonial world, and the desire to preserve stability in a volatile region. Operation Sindoor, in particular, has served as a turning point in altering global perceptions of India, from a passive actor to a strategically responsible power.



Tri-Services Chiefs Meet President Of India Post Halt in Military Operations

A. From Passive to Proactive

India's traditional approach, especially post-1971, emphasised non-aggression, even in the face of persistent provocations. The doctrine of strategic restraint, while morally commendable, often emboldened hostile actors, notably Pakistan, to engage in cross-border terrorism without fearing decisive retaliation. This changed after the 2016 Uri strikes and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes, but Operation Sindoor represented a new level of doctrinal clarity—one that combined swift military retaliation with diplomatic finesse and humanitarian sensitivity. International observers took note of the professionalism, proportionality, and precision that marked the operation. Unlike earlier responses, Sindoor was executed with minimal collateral damage, avoiding civilian casualties and targeting only verified terrorist infrastructure. This careful calibration signalled to the world that India is not acting out of vengeance, but out of a considered strategy grounded in international norms.

B. Perception as a Responsible Regional Power

India's actions during and after Operation Sindoor drew measured endorsements from key global powers. The United States, while urging de-escalation, acknowledged India's "legitimate right to defend its citizens." France and Australia called India a "pillar of stability in the Indo-Pacific." Even traditionally non-committal actors like the European Union took a neutral, if not supportive, tone, recognising India's need to respond to a serious

security threat. Strategic responsibility here is understood as taking necessary action to preserve regional peace, while managing escalation and adhering to legal norms.

C. Counter-Narrative to Chinese Assertiveness

In the broader geopolitical context, India's measured response also served as a counter-narrative to China's coercive practices. Where China's actions in the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and Himalayan border areas have often drawn criticism for unilateralism and disregard for international norms, India's conduct during Operation Sindoor showcased a rules-based response mechanism—one that uses power not for expansion but for deterrence and stability. This contrast has increased India's strategic capital, especially among middle powers and developing countries seeking an alternative to great power rivalry. India is now seen not only as a net security provider in the Indo-Pacific but also as a voice of balance and restraint, without compromising on its core interests.



VI. Challenges and Road Ahead

India's emerging military doctrine, as demonstrated during Operation Sindoor, reflects a bold shift towards assertiveness, strategic autonomy, and integrated force projection. However, the path ahead demands structural reforms, doctrinal clarity, resource prioritisation, and effective communication strategies.

A. Doctrinal Coherence: Bridging Theory and Practice

One of the most pressing challenges is the absence of an updated and unified military doctrine. India's last officially published doctrine dates back to 2004, and although various operational directives and reviews have been conducted since, a comprehensive tri-service doctrine—encompassing land, air, naval, cyber, and space domains—is yet to be formally articulated. The lack of doctrinal coherence leads to ambiguity in defining strategic redlines and thresholds—when and how India will respond to threats, and at what cost. This ambiguity may offer flexibility, but it also risks miscalculation, particularly when dealing with nuclear-armed adversaries like Pakistan and China. Moreover, India's doctrine must integrate its nuclear posture, space policy, and cyber strategy into a single overarching framework. While India maintains a credible minimum deterrent and a “No First Use” policy, the absence of a public articulation on how conventional force escalation interacts with nuclear thresholds leaves room for strategic uncertainty.

B. Resource Constraints: Balancing Ambition and Capability

India's ambition to emerge as a regional security provider and global military player hinges on sustained investment in defence capability. However, defence budgets remain constrained by competing developmental needs, with capital expenditure often short of requirements for modernisation.

Key areas requiring urgent attention include:

- Indigenous defence manufacturing under the “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiative, to reduce reliance on foreign arms.
- Border infrastructure development, particularly in high-altitude and remote regions facing Chinese aggression.
- Next-generation technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, hypersonic weapons, and advanced cyber warfare tools.

C. Strategic Communication: Managing the Information Battlespace

Modern warfare is as much about perception as about firepower. In an era where information warfare shapes battlefield outcomes, India must institutionalise strategic communication cells within its defence and diplomatic apparatus. Operation Sindoor demonstrated improved narrative control, but India still lacks a dedicated body for real-time media management, psychological operations, and counter-disinformation campaigns during crises.

A centralised, multilingual information command can help India tell its story, counter propaganda, and build domestic and international support during conflict scenarios.

D. Escalation Management: Preparing for Grey Zones and Red Lines

Even as India sharpens its limited war doctrine, it must simultaneously invest in escalation dominance frameworks. Engaging a nuclear-armed adversary like Pakistan—or a conventionally superior China—requires layered options to control conflict intensity. This involves:

- Building resilience in command-and-control systems.
- Investing in ballistic missile defence (BMD) and early warning systems.
- Establishing backchannel and hotline mechanisms for crisis communication.

Without escalation dominance and conflict de-escalation tools, any bold military action risks spiralling into larger wars with disproportionate costs.

Conclusion: Towards a Credible, Capable, and Conscientious Power

India's emerging military doctrine, crystallised through the lens of Operation Sindoor, marks a significant evolution in the country's strategic trajectory. It is no longer sufficient for India to be merely a reactive power guided by restraint; instead, the current doctrine reflects a more assertive, self-assured, and multidimensional approach to national security and regional stability.

The transformation underway is not abrupt but represents the culmination of lessons learned from decades of conflict, strategic hesitation, and the imperatives of a changing geopolitical landscape.

Operation Sindoor was not only a tactical military success but a doctrinal inflexion point. For the first time, India combined kinetic strikes, force mobilisation, humanitarian support, and cyber capabilities under a unified strategic vision. The operation's orchestration showcased India's ability to carry out swift, precise, and calibrated action without succumbing to the escalatory traps of adversaries. It also demonstrated India's capacity to maintain diplomatic composure, narrative control, and international engagement, critical for sustaining legitimacy in the global order. At the heart of this evolution lies strategic autonomy, a principle deeply ingrained in India's post-independence worldview but now reinterpreted to meet the demands of a multipolar and contested global environment. Autonomy today is not about isolation or non-alignment but about retaining freedom of action through a carefully crafted balance of partnerships, self-reliance, and deterrence. India has shown it can act decisively when provoked, yet diplomatically when required—an indicator of a mature and responsible power. The emergence of force projection capabilities, especially in maritime and aerial domains, further augments India's status as a regional security provider. From the Persian Gulf to the Strait of Malacca, India's naval and air assets now serve not just defensive roles but active deterrent

functions, contributing to the security of sea lines of communication, disaster relief, and counter-terrorism operations. The establishment of cyber and space commands further reflects India's adaptation to the changing nature of warfare, one that is increasingly hybrid, non-linear, and multidomain. However, India's march towards doctrinal consolidation is not without hurdles.

Equally important is the dimension of strategic perception. India's ability to act with restraint and resolve has begun to alter global perceptions—from a nation bound by strategic caution to one defined by strategic responsibility. This

shift enhances India's credibility among major powers and developing nations alike, positioning it as a balancing force in the Indo-Pacific and a champion of a rules-based international order. In sum, India's emerging military doctrine is not simply a response to external threats; it is a manifestation of national confidence and strategic foresight. It combines historical wisdom with contemporary needs, soft power with hard capabilities, and restraint with readiness. If guided with vision, investment, and coherence, this doctrine can empower India to rise as a credible, capable, and conscientious power in the 21st century.





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