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Operation Sindoor

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ABSTRACT

Operation Sindoor, launched by the Indian Armed Forces on May 7, 2025, marked a significant evolution in India's counter-terrorism and military strategy. Initiated in response to the Pahalgam terror attack of April 22, 2025, in which 26 civilians were killed, the operation targeted multiple high-value terrorist infrastructure sites across Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (PoK). Coordinated across the Army, Navy, and Air Force, Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's enhanced tri-service capability, precision strike capacity, and doctrinal shift from strategic restraint to offensive deterrence. The operation deliberately avoided Pakistani military assets, minimizing escalation while sending a firm geopolitical message. Named to honor the widows of the victims, the operation reflects both symbolic and tactical dimensions of modern warfare. This paper examines the strategic planning, execution, and broader implications of Operation Sindoor within the context of regional security, hybrid warfare, and India's evolving defense posture.

Operation Sindoor constitutes a specialized legal and enforcement initiative undertaken by competent authorities to address and mitigate violations pertaining to matrimonial rights, with a particular focus on coercive practices such as forced or child marriages, abduction for marriage, and related offences under personal and criminal law. The operation underscores the enforcement of statutory provisions under relevant legal frameworks, including but not limited to the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and allied personal laws governing marriage, consent, and guardianship.

In furtherance of the objectives of gender justice and protection of minors, the operation entails coordinated efforts by law enforcement agencies, child protection units, and legal services authorities to identify, rescue, and rehabilitate victims, while ensuring prosecution of offenders through due process. The initiative serves to reinforce constitutional mandates under Articles 14, 15, and 21, upholding the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and the right to life with dignity.

Operation Sindoor thereby exemplifies a proactive legal intervention aimed at curbing systemic violations against vulnerable individuals within matrimonial and familial structures, promoting access to justice, and strengthening the rule of law in the realm of gender-based legal protections.

Introduction

Operation Sindoor is a targeted legal and administrative intervention initiated by law enforcement agencies in collaboration with child welfare and women protection authorities, aimed at curbing unlawful matrimonial practices, particularly child marriage, forced marriage, and related gender-based offences. The operation derives its nomenclature from the symbolic representation of marriage, underscoring its misuse as a tool of coercion and exploitation in contravention of statutory and constitutional safeguards.

This initiative operates within the ambit of established legal frameworks including the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (particularly Sections 361, 366, 370, and 376), the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO), and applicable personal laws. It seeks to uphold the principles enshrined under Articles 14, 15(3), 21, and 39 of the Constitution of India, ensuring protection of vulnerable individuals—especially minors and women—from matrimonial exploitation.

The primary objectives of Operation Sindoor include the identification and rescue of victims, prevention of imminent unlawful marriages, legal action against perpetrators, and rehabilitation of affected individuals through appropriate state mechanisms. By reinforcing legal awareness, institutional accountability, and inter-agency coordination, the operation plays a vital role in promoting access to justice and safeguarding human dignity.

Content

1. Legal Basis and Objectives

Operation Sindoor is a strategic legal and enforcement initiative undertaken with the principal objective of preventing, detecting, and prosecuting unlawful marriages—primarily child and forced marriages—constituting violations under Indian statutory and constitutional law. The operation derives its legal sanctity from:

- The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 – which declares child marriages voidable and penalizes those who perform, promote, or permit such marriages.
- The Indian Penal Code, 1860 – specifically Sections 361 (Kidnapping), 366 (Abduction for marriage), 370 (Trafficking), and 376 (Rape), when applicable in the context of forced and child marriages.
- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) – which mandates stringent punishment for sexual offences against minors, irrespective of marital status.
- Constitutional provisions, notably Articles 14 (Equality before the law), 15(3) (Protective discrimination in favour of women and children), 21 (Right to life and personal liberty), and Directive Principles under Article 39(e) and (f).

The operation is also aligned with India's obligations under international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

2. Scope and Implementation

Operation Sindoor is executed as a multi-agency, time-bound initiative involving the coordinated efforts of the following stakeholders:

- Local police departments and Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs)
- District Child Protection Units (DCPUs)
- Child Welfare Committees (CWCs)
- Juvenile Justice Boards (JJBs)
- State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR)s
- Legal Services Authorities under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987

The operation is typically launched in high-incidence areas and vulnerable districts, often timed around wedding seasons and festivals, during which the incidence of child marriages tends to rise.

Preventive action includes surveillance of mass marriage ceremonies, scrutiny of age-related documents, community awareness drives, and immediate intervention upon receipt of credible information regarding proposed illegal marriages.

3. Investigative and Judicial Process

Upon identification of a case under Operation Sindoor, law enforcement authorities are mandated to:

- Register a First Information Report (FIR) under appropriate legal provisions.
- Rescue and produce the minor before the Child Welfare Committee within 24 hours, as per the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.
- Conduct medical examination and age verification through ossification or other prescribed methods.
- Ensure psychological counselling and safe shelter for the rescued individual.

Prosecution of the accused proceeds under both special and general laws, and efforts are made to expedite trial proceedings, particularly in POCSO and trafficking cases.

4. Challenges and Observations

Despite its legal foundation and institutional backing, Operation Sindoor faces several challenges:

- Societal and familial complicity in underage and forced marriages.
- Manipulation or non-availability of birth records and age documents.
- Reluctance of victims to testify due to social stigma or fear of retaliation.
- Inadequate infrastructure and manpower within child protection institutions.

However, successful execution of the operation in several districts has led to increased public awareness, deterrence, and strengthening of legal safeguards for minors and women.

5. Legal and Social Impact

Operation Sindoor has had a demonstrable impact on:

- Reduction in reported cases of child and forced marriages in targeted areas.

- Greater inter-departmental collaboration and data-sharing.
- Strengthening community vigilance mechanisms.
- Promoting the legal rights and bodily autonomy of women and children.

By ensuring the rule of law and upholding constitutional morality, Operation Sindoor acts as a pivotal step in India's journey toward gender justice, child protection, and enforcement of human rights.

Effects of Operation Sindoor

– At a Glance

1. Neutralization of Terrorist Infrastructure & Personnel

Nine terror camps destroyed across Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), targeting groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Hizbul-Mujahideen

Approximately 70 to over 100 terrorists were reported killed

2. Advanced Indigenous Military Capability Displayed

Deployed precision tools like Akash and MRSAM missiles, BrahMos, D4 anti-drone systems, AWACS, and Akashteer, showcasing India's self-reliant defense tech

Employed SCALP missiles, AASM Hammer glide bombs, BrahMos cruise missiles, and SkyStriker loitering munitions during the rapid 23-minute strike

3. Superior Air Defense & Counter-Drone Success

Neutralized around 70 Pakistani drones in Gujarat and Rajasthan using layered air defense systems

Thwarted 413 attempted drone attacks in Rajasthan mid-air, with none causing damage

4. Enhanced Operational Coordination

Notable joint synergy between the Army, Air Force, Navy, and BSF, especially under challenging terrain like Jaisalmer and Kutch

Women personnel from all services played key roles, from aerial to maritime operations

Key suggestions

Key suggestions for improving and learning from Operation

Sindoor, based on strategic, operational, and diplomatic perspectives:

1. *Strengthen Intelligence Gathering*

- *Improve HUMINT and TECHINT integration*: Ensure high accuracy before strikes to prevent civilian or collateral damage.
- *Pre-emptive tracking* of terror activities across borders using AI, satellite surveillance, and social media monitoring.
- Encourage *deeper coordination with local informants* in Kashmir and PoK for ground validation.

2. *Enhance Asymmetric Warfare Capabilities*

- Expand use of *loitering munitions (kamikaze drones)* and swarm drone technology for precise and cost-effective attacks.
- Develop *cyber-offensive tools* to target enemy command, control, and communication infrastructure without kinetic action.

3. *Invest in Indigenous Technology & Defense R&D*

* While Operation Sindoor showcased indigenous power (e.g., Akash, BrahMos, SkyStriker), further push is needed in:

- Stealth drone tech
- Hypersonic missile development
- Counter-drone electromagnetic systems
- Prioritize production under "Make in India" to reduce foreign dependency and increase deployment speed.

Ways of Operation Sindoor

Operation Sindoor was a coordinated, multi-domain military response by India after the Pahalgam terror attack in April 2025. It combined air, ground, missile, and drone-based assets with strategic precision and indigenous technologies.

Here are the main ways in which Operation Sindoor was executed:

1. Precision Airstrikes

Conducted by the Indian Air Force (IAF) using:

- ✦ SCALP missiles
- ✦ AASM Hammer glide bombs
- ✦ BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles
- ✦ Targets included terror camps and launch pads in Pakistan and PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir).
- ✦ All strikes were highly time-bound (reportedly under 25 minutes) to ensure surprise and minimize risk.

2. Use of Indigenous Weapons & Technology

- ✦ Akash and MRSAM missiles for aerial defense.
- ✦ Akashteer air defense system to integrate radar and weapons platforms.
- ✦ SkyStriker loitering munitions (made in India) used for tactical strikes.
- ✦ D4 Anti-drone systems deployed to neutralize UAV threats.

3. Joint Forces Operation

Involved coordinated efforts by:

- ✦ Indian Army
- ✦ Indian Air Force
- ✦ Indian Navy
- ✦ Border Security Force (BSF)
- ✦ Navy provided maritime surveillance and deterrence on western coasts.
- ✦ Army and BSF managed ground security and counterinfiltration ops near borders.

4. Drone Neutralization Operations

Over 70 Pakistani drones intercepted and destroyed using:

- ✦ Kinetic fire (guns, missiles)
- ✦ Non-kinetic tools (jammers, spoofers)
- ✦ Operation included real-time drone threat neutralization, especially over Rajasthan and Gujarat.

5. Cyber & Electronic Warfare Support

- ✦ Used to jam enemy radars, suppress communications, and mislead surveillance efforts.
- ✦ Enabled stealthy movement of strike aircraft and missiles.

6. Strategic Narrative Management

- ✦ Operation was named “Sindoor” as a symbolic tribute to the Pahalgam attack victims (especially the widows).
- ✦ Post-operation messaging focused on:
- ✦ India’s right to self-defense
- ✦ Zero tolerance to terrorism
- ✦ Indigenous defense capability

7. Women's Participation

For the first time, women officers were actively involved in combat support roles including:

- ✦ UAV operations
- ✦ Missile targeting coordination
- ✦ Combat logistics and mission planning

8. No Ground Invasion – Limited Objective Strike

- ✦ Avoided escalation into full-scale war.
- ✦ No troops crossed borders; all hits were via stand-off weapons or airstrikes.

Conclusion

Operation Sindoor stands as a significant legal and institutional measure aimed at eradicating the entrenched social evil of child and forced marriages, which continue to violate fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India and statutory protections afforded by various special legislations. Through its proactive and preventive framework, the operation reinforces the principles of legal accountability, child welfare, and gender justice.

By invoking the combined application of the Prohibition of Child

Marriage Act, 2006, the Indian Penal Code, 1860, the POCSO Act,

2012, and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, Operation Sindoor ensures that both preventive and punitive mechanisms are employed in safeguarding vulnerable individuals— particularly minor girls—from coercive matrimonial arrangements that compromise their physical, psychological, and legal autonomy.

While the operation has encountered practical challenges in terms of evidentiary limitations, societal resistance, and administrative constraints, it has nonetheless established a model for inter-agency coordination and legal enforcement. Its execution reflects the State's commitment to uphold constitutional mandates under Articles 14, 15, 21, and 39, and to honour its obligations under international human rights instruments.

In essence, Operation Sindoor is not merely a law enforcement initiative but a manifestation of the broader jurisprudential goal of ensuring justice, dignity, and equality for all individuals—especially those most susceptible to exploitation under the guise of tradition and cultural practices.

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