



Pakistan's Response to Operation Sindoor

By

Nawal Nawaz

After publicly asserting that the government of Pakistan was involved in the April 21, 2025, Pahalgam terror attack in Kashmir, India launched a barrage of missile strikes on nine sites in Pakistan. These sites included Bahawalpur and Muridke in Punjab; Kotli, Bagh, and Muzaffarabad; and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)—in a [night attack](#).

Despite India's conventional superiority, the Pakistani Air Force (PAF) shot down [five Indian fighter jets, including its three French Rafales, one Russian MiG-29 and one Su-30, and a Heron surveillance drone](#). The interception and neutralization of the drone, and the shooting down of the fighters about 17 miles from the line of control (LOC), highlighted the Pakistani Air Force's (PAF) expeditious response to Indian missile strikes.

The [Rafale](#), a 4.5-generation multirole fighter jet, which is capable of performing interdiction and aerial reconnaissance, is one of the reasons for India's muscle flexing in the region. Although the Rafale is not a stealth aircraft, it does have a smaller radar cross section. The Rafale was also touted as a game-changer for the Indian Air Force (IAF), boosting the country's technological edge over its regional adversaries especially Pakistan.

However, the successful [shoot down](#) revealed New Delhi's low operational efficacy and false perception of Indian air superiority. The MiG-29, a twin-engine fighter jet designed for air combat, was also believed to be shot down. With features like advanced avionics and radar systems, the loss of such aircraft was unexpected.

Likewise, the downing of India's primary frontline fighter, the Russian SU-30, which is known for its maneuverability, indicates weaknesses in Indian operational tactics and a clear vulnerability to Pakistani air defense forces. Contrary to common belief, the PAF historically outperforms the IAF aerial engagements. The excellence of PAF was first made evident when it [defeated the IAF](#) on the ground and in the air during the first full-scale war with India ([1965](#)). In 2019, the IAF conducted airstrikes in Balakot in response to the Pulwama incident, accusing Pakistan of involvement in the terrorist attack. The following day, the PAF retaliated with an [airstrike in the Rajouri sector](#) of Jammu, downing an Indian MIG-21 and capturing Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman in the process.

In the latest example of conflict between the two countries, Pakistan responded with its best fighters, the Chinese-made J-10C, which is a multirole fighter and was unproven in combat until these events. With the shoot down of Rafale fighter jets, shares of Dassault Aviation declined by [6 percent](#). The PAF response to Indian airstrikes displays its enhanced air combat capabilities.

According to the Indian Ministry of Defense, [Operation Sindoor](#) was India's effort to punish the perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack. However, Pakistan, which has denied any involvement in Pahalgam, deemed these strikes "unprovoked." Beginning on May 6, 2025, Indian officials undertook [drills and exercises](#) in preparation for their attack. This "show of strength" was designed to send a clear message to the international community that India can employ conventional force under a nuclear shadow. However, the reluctance of the international community to get involved in the dispute served as a concern for the Trump administration, which ultimately aided in ending military clashes.

On May 9, 2025, [India fired air-to-surface](#) missiles at three air bases in Rawalpindi, Chakwal, and Shorkot, as well as Rahim Yar Khan airport, normalizing escalation between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. Pakistan deemed these missile strikes an "[act of war](#)," authorizing the military to take corresponding military action against India.



In response, Pakistan launched [Operation Bunyanum Marsoos](#) after four days of Indian strikes. These strikes targeted wide swaths of Indian territory, including military bases in Udhampur, Pathankot, Drangyari, Nagrota, Adampur, and Buj Air Base. As the escalation veered from the disputed state of Kashmir towards the brink of nuclear escalation, the United States, shifting from its previous stance of non-interference, brokered a [ceasefire](#) between Pakistan and India.

Vice President JD Vance initially [remarked](#) on May 8, 2025, that the latest escalation between Pakistan and India is not the United States' business. The situation changed after Indian missile strikes hit Pakistan's Nur Khan Airbase in Rawalpindi, fearing potential nuclear escalation. Nur Khan serves as a key transport and refueling [hub for the PAF](#), lying just kilometers from the strategic plans division, which oversees Pakistan's nuclear arsenal.

Before the situation expanded into widespread conflict, the United States announced an immediate ceasefire between the two states, offering assistance for resolving the Kashmir issue. The efforts of President Trump, an advocate of peace, led to the 2025 ceasefire and are a notable diplomatic achievement for the US. However, the success of this ceasefire rests upon a fragile equilibrium. In absence of institutions and channels of communication for resolution of key disputes between Pakistan and India, peace and stability of South Asia will remain uncertain. Without addressing structural issues like the dispute over Kashmir, the region will remain locked in cyclical deterrence failures, with the future of peace less likely than escalation.

Nawal Nawaz is a Research Assistant at the Center for International Strategic Studies (CISS), Islamabad.