



IN DEFENCE OF DETERRENCE

**Why India's Operation Sindoor
Marks a Dangerous Drift Toward
Compellence**

Dr Zahir Kazmi

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Framing the Stakes

India's Operation Sindoor, conducted in May 2025, has been prematurely celebrated in Indian [strategic literature as a doctrinal and strategic triumph](#), exemplifying an evolving posture of deterrence by punishment. The operation involved a series of stand-off strikes deep within Pakistani territory, purportedly targeting terrorist infrastructure. However, this narrative obscures a critical reality: Sindoor represents not a doctrinal success but a dangerous [drift from deterrence towards compellence](#), thereby risking destabilization of the fragile nuclear equilibrium in South Asia, where India historically [fails to achieve preferred outcomes](#).

Deterrence succeeds when no hostile action occurs; if force is employed, deterrence has by definition failed. By [lauding military action as evidence of deterrent credibility](#), India fundamentally misconstrues or deliberately distorts the logic of deterrence, which has preserved regional peace since the overt nuclearization of the subcontinent in 1998.

This essay revisits the [theoretical foundations of deterrence](#), challenges flawed assumptions in India's post-Sindoor narrative, and critically engages with arguments presented in a recent [Indian volume on the operation](#). It contends that rather than strengthening India's strategic position, Operation Sindoor has increased escalation risks, undermined established legal norms, and eroded the existing strategic restraint that South Asia cannot afford to relinquish. India's core issue is not terrorism per se, but its continued refusal to acknowledge that the unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute remains the principal catalyst of regional instability. Military force and conflating legitimate freedom struggles in the Indian Illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IIOJ&K) with terrorism cannot eliminate the fundamental fact of India's contested sovereignty and occupation.

Clarifying Deterrence vs. Compellence

In strategic terms, deterrence and compellence are distinct and are [not interchangeable](#). As articulated by [Thomas Schelling in *Arms and Influence*](#) (1966), deterrence involves preventing an adversary's action through credible threats of punishment: "Do not act, or face unacceptable costs." Conversely, compellence actively seeks to alter an adversary's existing behaviour through force or coercion: "Change your behaviour, or face consequences."

Within deterrence, scholars distinguish between deterrence by punishment (threatening costly retaliation) and deterrence by denial (making adversarial success unlikely through defensive measures). Compellence, by contrast, is [inherently escalatory](#), requiring visible force and

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facing high risks of failure, particularly when core interests or national prestige are involved. This makes [compellence a highly unstable strategy in nuclear dyads](#).

India's portrayal of Sindoor as a deterrent success thus demonstrates conceptual confusion. Effective deterrence, whether by denial or punishment, would have precluded kinetic action altogether. India's unilateral and rapid attribution of blame for the Pahalgam incident, followed by immediate kinetic escalation, implicitly acknowledges conventional deterrence failure. While nuclear deterrence thresholds remained intact, [Sindoor itself was an intended compellent action, not validation of deterrent credibility](#).

The Strategic Implications of Operation Sindoor

Unlike symbolic or limited past operations (such as the 2016 LoC raids or the 2019 Balakot strikes), Sindoor represented a doctrinal escalation: a multi-domain precision campaign extending beyond the LoC deep into Punjab province, targeting Muridke and Bahawalpur. Despite Indian claims of surgical precision, the operation targeted civilian areas, places of worship, and military infrastructure, representing reckless target expansion under the guise of counterterrorism.

Indian leaders explicitly outlined a posture best described as "compellence through coercion": asserting guaranteed retaliation for alleged future incidents, declaring nuclear deterrence irrelevant, and conflating Pakistani state institutions with alleged terrorist groups. However, Pakistan's calibrated response through Operation Bunyanum Marsoos demonstrated India's strategic and operational limits. Sindoor failed to compel behavioural change or achieve escalation dominance, exposing the vulnerabilities and limitations of India's coercive approach.

Indian strategic discourse misinterprets Pakistan's muted nuclear signaling as strategic submission, neglecting that Pakistan's FSD is deliberately quiet, characterized by calculated ambiguity, multiple response layers, and assured second-strike capabilities. Pakistan's measured conventional response avoided escalation traps, specifically targeting Indian military infrastructure and deliberately avoiding civilian casualties.

India's misreading of this restraint as deterrence erosion rather than strategic maturity risks dangerous future miscalculations. Should India continue provocations, Pakistan retains ample doctrinal and operational flexibility for proportionate or escalated responses. Misinterpreting prudence as paralysis may be a costly strategic error.

Compounding Risks—Technological Entanglements and Strategic Miscalculations

Operation Sindoor exacerbated systemic risks through doctrinal ambiguity and technological entanglement. India's operational blending of conventional and nuclear missile capabilities, exemplified by [dual-capable systems like BrahMos](#) and the [integration of artificial intelligence into intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance \(ISR\) frameworks](#), significantly increases the risk of miscalculation and inadvertent escalation. Such doctrinal ambiguity complicates real-time decision-making, risking catastrophic misunderstandings in crisis scenarios.

Automating threat detection and target acquisition further compresses decision-making timelines already precariously short in the South Asian context. The potential for misclassification by machine-driven algorithms introduces a dangerous new element of instability into an already volatile environment.

[Pakistan has consistently highlighted these concerns](#) internationally, emphasizing responsible nuclear stewardship and warning against the dangers of autonomous warfare under the nuclear shadow. India's continued pursuit of these high-risk strategies undermines strategic equilibrium and regional security.

The Myth of Strategic Dominance: Who Prevented Escalation?

A persistent claim in the Indian and its like-minded narrative is that [Sindoor demonstrated India's ability to calibrate military action under the nuclear threshold](#), compelling Pakistan to stand down without retaliation. Some commentators asserted that Pakistani commanders were unnerved, that a call was placed by General Asim Munir to the [U.S. Secretary of Defense requesting off-ramps](#), and that Pakistan's retaliatory strike was cosmetic. In fact, Pakistan's Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos was a deliberate, proportionate, joint-force response that avoided escalation traps. Pakistan's response focused on Indian military infrastructure, airbases, and ISR nodes with precision and strategic restraint. Civilian areas were scrupulously avoided. In this calibrated deterrence, Pakistan avoided vertical or horizontal escalation while preserving coercive credibility.

Who ensured the crisis that it did not spiral? Was it India, which launched a complex strike package across the international border under a nuclear overhang? Or was it Pakistan, which absorbed the strikes, responded conventionally, and refrained from crossing strategic thresholds? To suggest that India alone controlled escalation is to ignore that escalation management is dyadic and it depends on both sides. And in this case, it was Pakistan that exercised greater restraint despite provocation.

Indian claims that Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) was disoriented or indecisive during the crisis are belied by institutional continuity, doctrinal clarity, and strategic discipline. As argued in my BASIC piece [No Space for War](#), the absence of performative signalling during a crisis should not be interpreted as strategic confusion. Pakistan's NCA is designed to function with deliberate ambiguity and silent readiness. When the stakes are nuclear, the loudest message can be silence, especially when backed by real capability.

The suggestion that Pakistan's invocation of the NCA was retracted or staged for international optics is incorrect. Once conventional deterrence stability was restored, there was no need for NCA to meet. To equate brief public references with policy reversals is to misunderstand both the institution and the messaging. If India continues to misread calibrated ambiguity as doctrinal collapse, it may one day find that the real redline is not announced but crossed.

The Compellence Dilemma: If India Justifies It, Why Not Pakistan?

A central contradiction runs through India's post-Sindoor logic. If cross-border punitive strikes are now justified in response to terrorism, even under nuclear overhang, then why is the same logic denied to Pakistan, which remains a target of Indian state-linked terrorism? [Pakistan has repeatedly presented proof of Indian complicity in terrorism](#), from the arrest and confession of Indian naval officer [Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav](#) to [financial traces linking India to Baloch separatist networks and TTP operatives](#). These are not speculative. They are documented and verifiable. By India's own new standard of justifying punitive action under the guise of counterterrorism, Pakistan could have invoked the same rationale for strikes inside India. It has not. Why?

Because Pakistan has not abandoned deterrence and understands the risks of drifting towards compellence. It [has consistently upheld restraint](#), offered dialogue on counterterrorism, and [called for legally binding negative security assurances](#), while [historically participating in global counterterrorism mechanisms](#), including as [Vice-Chair of the UN Security Council's Counterterrorism Committee](#).

If India claims the right to kinetic action against state-enabled terrorism, it should not expect reciprocal rights for Pakistan. It refuses to do so, not because Pakistan's case is weaker, but because India seeks the exceptionalism of compellence without accountability. This is not strategic doctrine, it is doctrinal hypocrisy, and it may yet prove dangerously costly.

Escalation Risks at Sea and the Illusion of Maritime Compellence

Among the most concerning propositions in the Indian post Operation Sindoor narrative is the growing emphasis on maritime compellence as the next frontier of India's force projection. Indian commentators, citing naval posturing during Sindoor, including the movement of Carrier Battle Groups (CBGs) and long-range naval aviation deployments, suggest that compellence at sea offers a cleaner, controllable space for escalation below the nuclear threshold. The [Indian Minister of Defence and the Chief of Defence Staff \(CDS\)](#) have even stated that the next war with Pakistan will be maritime. This reflects a dangerously flawed reading of both deterrence logic and escalation dynamics in the Indian Ocean Region.

First, the assumption that maritime domains carry lower escalation risks merely because they are "offshore" is deeply flawed. In the India–Pakistan dyad, geographic proximity, dual-use naval platforms, and compressed decision timelines extend into the maritime theatre as well. Moreover, India's coastal and inland infrastructure is more exposed and concentrated than Pakistan's, presenting a [far more target-rich environment in the event of escalation](#).

Second, suggestions that Pakistan may raise the so-called TNW flag at sea to deter Indian CBGs ignore two critical realities. One, there is nothing tactical about nuclear weapons and [their need for sea environment is often considered a fallacy](#). Two, the logic of escalation dominance at sea collapses if any side interprets use of sea-based missiles, drones, or coastal-based short-range missiles as strategic threats, especially if operating under ISR ambiguity or AI-enabled threat classification. In other words, sea-based [escalation is not safer](#), it is less predictable.

Third, Indian authors argue that by acting early and intensely at sea, India could pre-empt Pakistan's nuclear signalling and gain favourable termination conditions. But this is wishful thinking masquerading as strategy. Once escalation begins, whether on land or sea, control is illusory. The very idea that force can be precisely dosed in a nuclearized environment is a Kafkaesque that ignores the fog, friction, and feedback loops of real-world crises.

The Indian Navy's doctrinal interest in compellence, by its own admission, increases the chances of early confrontation, ISR misperception, and ambiguous signalling. [Indian Maritime Doctrine prescribes formal exclusion zones and advisories during naval operations](#). But in a high-speed crisis, especially involving drone incursions, undersea activities, or coastal strikes, the time required to verify intent or legitimacy simply doesn't exist.

Pakistan must be prepared for Indian recklessness from the sea. This includes expanding maritime ISR and early warning coverage, enhancing second-strike survivability at sea, and developing coastal missile dispersal, deception measures, and clear signaling that any threat to strategic leadership or NC3 infrastructure will trigger an asymmetric response. The logic is straightforward: maritime escalation cannot remain confined to the sea. If India assumes its CBGs can function as tools of coercive diplomacy under the nuclear shadow, it must accept the risk that a future crisis could involve ISR ambiguity, rapid retaliation, and disproportionate response both at sea and on land.

Dissecting the Psychological Warfare

In the aftermath of Operation Sindoor, India has increasingly relied on narrative weaponization as a substitute for factual analysis. One of the more egregious examples is the claim that viral images of Pakistan Army officers attending funerals in Muridke of individuals allegedly linked to banned organizations constitute proof of institutional collusion. This is narrative warfare is intended not to inform but to delegitimize. What is omitted from Indian accounts is that Sindoor actually struck civilian areas and places of worship, and that several widely circulated videos were later shown to be digitally altered or unverifiable, undermining the credibility of India's evidentiary claims.

At the same time, India continues to employ a dual strategy of denial and proxy warfare. While presenting itself as a victim of terrorism, India has used intelligence assets and third-country proxies to destabilize Pakistan internally. [The arrest and confession of Commander Kulbhushan Jadhav](#), [financial trails linking Indian operatives to Baloch insurgents](#), and documented Indian connections to TTP networks are well-established. India cannot plausibly advocate for preemptive compellence while simultaneously engaging in covert campaigns across Pakistan's western border that is a clear case of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

Pakistan, by contrast, has endured the [cumulative blowback of four decades of conflict in Afghanistan](#), and has remained a frontline state in the global war on terror. Its security institutions have lost almost [100,000 lives in counterterrorism operations](#). The social fabric of the country, already strained by sectarian and ethnic fault lines, was deeply wounded. No state invites terrorism, and no nation can simply be expected to manage its aftershocks in silence. While Pakistan continues the painful process of internal recovery and reform, India is increasingly drifting toward state-sponsored extremism, majoritarianism, and religious intolerance.

This transformation within the world's most populous democracy is not an internal matter alone. As India assumes a more assertive global posture, while normalizing domestic repression and strategic adventurism, the consequences will ripple outward. The international community must recognise that regional stability cannot be secured through unilateral coercion or selective narratives. If extremism gains state sanction in a nuclear-armed country of 1.4 billion, the risks will not remain regional, they will become global.

Hence, Indian claim that Pakistan uses terrorism as a tool of policy under the cover of nuclear deterrence is a narrative that not only obfuscates India's own role in proxy warfare but also ignores documented state-sponsored terrorism by India. If India wishes to adopt a doctrine of pre-emptive compellence based on pre-meditated attribution, then Pakistan has far more

credible grounds to do the same. Yet, it has avoided the risk of systemic breakdown for the sake of strategic stability.

The selective morality at play must be called out. While demanding global censure of Pakistan for alleged state support to terrorism, India has consistently shelved dialogue mechanisms, undermined bilateral frameworks, and pursued hybrid tactics. Its ambition to Finlandize Pakistan through diplomatic, economic, and informational pressure is no secret. Simultaneously, India has waged psychological disinformation campaigns, as revealed in the [EU DisinfoLab exposé on Indian media fronts](#), and has weaponized legal instruments, including the [manipulation and suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty's \(IWT\) arbitration processes](#).

Pakistan, conversely, has consistently offered dialogue on Kashmir, counterterrorism, and arms control. It has responded to provocations with restraint, even as Indian political and strategic rhetoric has increasingly crossed into open advocacy for the [disintegration of Pakistan, citing Balochistan, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#). Adopting compellence, in this context, would not represent a strategic necessity but a deliberate evasion of diplomacy and dispute resolution. It allows India to simultaneously present itself as a victim, act as an aggressor, and shift the cost of instability onto the region.

Water Wars and Legal Farce

One of the most alarming post-Sindoor trends in Indian strategic discourse is the instrumentalization of water and international law as tools of compellence. Indian analysts have argued that the IWT, long upheld as a model for transboundary water cooperation, can be reinterpreted or suspended on the basis of “national security imperatives.” In this framing, allegations of terrorism become a pretext to violate a legally binding agreement, brokered by the World Bank and registered with the UN.

India is not only an upper riparian on the Indus system, it [is also a middle riparian on multiple transboundary rivers shared with China](#), Nepal, and Bangladesh. Its attempt to weaponize water against Pakistan opens a Pandora's box of reciprocal legal and hydrological instability. The so-called “national security exception” it now invokes is unsupported by the IWT text or international water law jurisprudence. The treaty contains no provision allowing for suspension or conditionality based on extraneous issues like terrorism.

By contrast, [Pakistan's reliance on dispute resolution mechanisms, via the World Bank-appointed Neutral Expert and Court of Arbitration, is a textbook example of lawful conduct](#). India's unilateral suspension of dialogue and its claim of treaty obsolescence not only undermines international legal norms but also sets a dangerous precedent for global water governance. Conditioning future water engagement on the “credible and irreversible cessation of terrorism” amounts to imposing political preconditions on legal obligations, a position both logically untenable and legally unsustainable.

Equally troubling are [calls by Indian officials and commentators for the IAEA to inspect Pakistan's nuclear facilities](#), allegedly to assess its responsible behaviour. These proposals are technically unsound and diplomatically unserious. [Pakistan's civil nuclear program is already subject to IAEA safeguards. No nuclear weapons state, including India, opens its military nuclear infrastructure to the Agency](#). Pakistan is not in violation of any international legal obligation, particularly not the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which it is not a party.

India, by contrast, has refused to place [eight of its “civilian” nuclear facilities under international scrutiny](#), continues to expand its unsafeguarded fissile material stockpile, and has operationalized [dual-capable systems like the BrahMos under its Strategic Forces Command](#), adding ambiguity to its conventional-nuclear threshold posture. That is a behaviour that needs closer examination.

New Delhi’s selective invocation of legal norms lacks moral coherence and international legitimacy. Its recent attempts to use legal arguments to justify Sindoor are legally hollow, reliant on unilateral reinterpretations that ignore treaty law and blur the line between lawfare and strategic opportunism.

Likewise, claims that Operation Sindoor will trigger “Pakistan’s strategic reckoning” are misplaced. India is attempting to abandon restraint, erode treaty frameworks, and normalize cross-border coercion. Analyses that present this shift as a legal evolution are not only misleading they are part of a broader effort to delegitimize Pakistan’s security posture while sanitizing Indian belligerence under the veneer of legalism. Even great powers find it difficult to legitimize such behaviour before their own people, let alone in the court of international opinion.

Symmetry and the Mirage of Escalation Dominance

Indian experts have been drawing equivalence between India and Pakistan’s postures, suggesting that both sides engage in nuclear brinkmanship: India, in response to terrorism; Pakistan, to shield proxies. This symmetry is convenient and misleading. India’s pattern since 2003 reveals a linear script: from Cold Start Doctrine to so-called surgical strikes; from Balakot to Sindoor; all while waging hybrid war, delaying dialogue, abrogating Article 370, and sponsoring proxy violence. In parallel, it weaponizes economic tools (such as suspending the IWT), invokes legal pretexts to delegitimize Pakistan, and constructs a global narrative of being the aggrieved party. But this script has not coerced Pakistan.

[Pakistan’s posture, by contrast, has remained grounded in Full Spectrum Deterrence \(FSD\), calibrated to deny India space for limited conventional war](#) while maintaining escalation control. The doctrine is intentionally flexible, avoiding declaratory thresholds to prevent adversary exploitation. Its silence during Operation Sindoor was not doctrinal confusion, as some Indian analysts imply, rather it was strategic messaging aimed at denying India escalation dominance. The attempt to conflate Pakistan’s Kashmir policy with global terrorism misses the central point: Pakistan seeks dispute resolution through diplomacy; it is India that has blocked dialogue, eroded institutional channels, and changed the status of Jammu & Kashmir that it illegally occupies.

The thinking that compellence must now replace deterrence is dangerously ahistorical. Some Indian experts assert that perception management and psychological dominance are keys to controlling escalation. But perception wars in nuclear dyads are games of mirrors, not margins. What one side sees as deterrent clarity, the other may interpret as prelude to war. The Kargil conflict is cited in Indian texts as a nuclear crisis, but [Pakistan had no operationalized nuclear delivery system in 1999](#). Today, that situation has radically changed. There is no excuse now for misreading Pakistan’s capabilities or resolve.

Indian arguments that future crises must begin at a higher threshold and be concluded quickly, by using AI, naval forces, and ISR to shock and awe, are based on techno-strategic fantasies.

They underestimate the fog of war, ISR ambiguity, compressed decision timelines, and internal political pressures. Worse, they mistake momentary political optics for lasting strategic advantage. As one Indian author candidly admitted, “Both India and Pakistan walked away claiming success, but the perception of victory on both sides has laid the groundwork for greater risks ahead.”

This admission reveals the problem: if compellence leaves both sides believing they prevailed, it creates a future where both prepare to do more. In such a dynamic, restraint, not action, is the only real measure of success.

Escalation Blueprints

Indian literature also lauds the symbolic impact of Sindoor, making startling claims. One author celebrates that “[a particular strike reportedly fell close to Pakistan’s command and control centre](#),” framing it as a display of India’s precision and reach. Another hints at “probing” the periphery of Pakistan’s nuclear infrastructure to signal resolve. Still others suggest that such strikes could be part of a broader strategy to “psychologically disarm” Pakistan’s military elite. These are escalation blueprints disguised as doctrine.

India’s development of a [conventional Agni-5 “bunker buster”](#), to deliver an eight-ton warhead to destroy deeply buried nuclear command and control nodes, marks a shift from deterrence to compellence. Cloaked in the language of conventionality, the weapon system would erode the firebreak between conventional and nuclear conflict, introducing a disarming strike capability against Pakistan’s strategic assets, presenting it as a conventional strike. In crisis scenarios, such ambiguity is a recipe for miscalculation, compressed decision-making, and uncontrolled escalation. Any nuclear power would likely treat launch of a nuclear-class missile toward its nuclear infrastructure, regardless of payload, as initiation of nuclear hostilities that would invite assured retaliation under attack or with survivable assets. Likewise, any attempt towards decapitating strike would certainly invoke an assured and proportionate response by any rational nuclear power. Zero tolerance must be the declared standard. The onus of irreversible escalation spiral would be on India if it attempts to strike Pakistani NC3.

Unlike India, Pakistan does not boast about nuclear targeting. But should it adopt a mirror approach, India presents far richer, more vulnerable, and more congested targets. The geography, strategic concentration, and exposure of Indian decision nodes make them unsuited for a contest of escalation dominance. Terrain and dispersal afford Pakistan natural survivability, enabling it to withstand first strikes and assure second-strike capability. The misplaced belief that India can coerce Pakistan by “showcasing” surgical reach without facing reprisal is strategically naive.

Impracticality of Internal Destabilization as Policy

Perhaps the most revealing and disturbing element of the Indian post-Sindoor literature is its open flirtation with internal destabilization as an instrument of national strategy. Some have gone so far as to propose that [India fans Baloch, Sindhi, and Pashtun separatist movements, not necessarily to fruition, but to increase pressure on the Pakistan Army](#). This is framed as a nuanced policy option. Encouraging insurgency or internal fragmentation violates the UN Charter, the principles of non-intervention, and international law governing state sovereignty. It also reveals the intellectual bankruptcy of a security doctrine that sees subversion as a

substitute for diplomacy. India itself is a federation grappling with multiple internal fault lines. [Khalistan movement](#) has resurfaced globally, especially after the [extraterritorial assassinations of Sikh leaders in Canada and the U.S.](#) [Manipur remains wracked by ethnic violence](#), displacement, and a near-total collapse of civil governance. [Naxalite-Maoist insurgency](#) once declared a top national threat still festers across central India. [Separatist grievances simmer in Nagaland, Assam, and other northeastern states.](#)

If India justifies covert or overt support to unrest in Pakistan, what prevents reciprocal logic from applying to its own internal challenges? Do Indian strategists truly believe they can ignite a fire in their neighbour's house without sparks blowing back across their own borders? Further, invoking [Modi's "pride" in the dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971](#) as justification for similar strategies today is anachronistic and irresponsible. That historical context involved conventional war, mass refugee flows, and international mediation, which is not a template for modern-day hybrid warfare in a nuclear dyad. No responsible state should institutionalize the breakup of another sovereign country as a doctrinal goal.

Strategic restraint is the bedrock of survivability. India's attempts to conflate Pakistan's Kashmir policy with terrorism while ignoring its own sponsorship of separatist networks will not hold at the bar of international law or at the court of long-term strategic reckoning. Pakistan's consistent calls for dialogue, commitment to sovereignty norms, and participation in UN platforms underscore its maturity. Should India pursue a policy of covert destabilization, it must accept the reciprocal right of Pakistan to respond and the strategic chaos that would follow.

Conclusion

Deterrence works when war does not happen. It fails when leaders begin to believe that military action under a nuclear shadow can be choreographed without consequence. India's Operation Sindoor may have generated domestic political capital, but it extracted strategic costs that will outlast any fleeting triumphalism.

South Asia's nuclear stability has never rested on shared values or trust. It has endured because deterrence, for all its flaws, asymmetries, and silences, offered a framework of predictable restraint. India's drift toward compellence upends that balance, opening the door to reciprocal adventurism, crisis compression, and miscalculation.

If India insists that Sindoor is the new normal, it must be prepared to face its mirror. Pakistan, so far, has chosen restraint. That choice must not be misread. For if compellence becomes India's language of peace, Pakistan's reply will not be scripted in silence. Deterrence endures because rational actors choose it over ruin. The region still has time to recover that choice. But only if both sides remember that nuclear stability is not preserved by action but by deliberate inaction.