



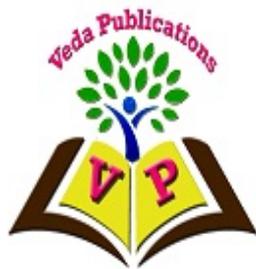
## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**OPERATION SINDOOR AND THE HUMAN COST OF LIMITED WAR:  
VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT ALONG THE INDO-PAK BORDER (2025)**Navjot Kaur <sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Prachi Atreya<sup>2</sup><sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar, Department of English, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tantia University, Sri Ganganagar, RajasthanEmail: [jagmeet.khaira@gmail.com](mailto:jagmeet.khaira@gmail.com)DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.13101>**ABSTRACT**

Operation Sindoor, which signalled the rise of Indo-Pakistani hostilities in 2025, brings to light the ongoing conflict between the limited war theory and its far-reaching human effects. To highlight civilian experiences that are often overlooked in state-centric security analyses, this article examines how Operation Sindoor contributed to patterns of violence, terror, and displacement along the Indo-Pak border.

The study conceptualizes border zones as areas of ongoing militarization where sporadic escalations increase daily vulnerability, drawing on frameworks from human security and critical security studies. The study examines the impact of shelling, increased surveillance, movement limitations, and anticipatory dread on both short-term and long-term migration through a qualitative analysis of official declarations, media coverage, humanitarian narratives, and secondary displacement data. The article argues that Operation Sindoor functioned as both a military operation and a catalyst for the escalation of pre-existing insecurity mechanisms in border towns. The article shows how civilian suffering becomes an incidental but accepted consequence of modern conflict management by placing relocation within the logic of strategic signalling and deterrence. By refuting the idea that limited war is a restricted occurrence and promoting the inclusion of civilian displacement and protection as key factors in Indo-Pakistan security discourse, the findings advance South Asian conflict studies.

**Keywords:** *Operation Sindoor; Indo-Pakistan Conflict 2025; Border Violence; Civilian Displacement; Human Security; Limited War; Militarization.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Cycles of animosity, crisis escalation, and uncomfortable restraint have always defined Indo-Pakistan ties. Although overt war has been averted since South Asia was nuclearized in 1998, peace has proven elusive. Rather, there have been numerous instances of limited military action, cross-border interactions, and coercive signalling in the area, all of which have been justified as being required to maintain deterrence while averting full-scale conflict. This pattern is demonstrated by Operation Sindoor, which was carried out in 2025 amid increased tensions.

Precision, proportionality, and strategic need are highlighted in official accounts of such operations. The idea that limited war is a controlled and controllable phenomenon is reinforced by the fact that civilian consequences are frequently acknowledged only in passing, if at all. However, violence is neither abstract nor episodic for communities residing along the Indo-Pak border. The lines between war and peace are blurred in heavily militarized border regions, where even brief escalations cause disruptions to daily life. This paper argues that limited conflict is only "limited" in strategic conception and not in actual reality by analysing Operation Sindoor through the prism of violence and displacement in border regions. The study contributes to an expanding corpus of research that highlights the human costs of modern conflict management and challenges prevailing state-centric approaches to security by emphasizing civilian displacement and insecurity.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The importance of nuclear weapons in preventing escalation while permitting lower-intensity combat is often highlighted in strategic literature on South Asia (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010; Narang, 2014). According to the stability-instability paradox, nuclear deterrence allows for limited military operations, proxy wars, and coercive diplomacy while also preventing full-scale war. But this approach has come under fire for favouring strategic results over humanitarian ones (Bajpai, 2021; Paul, 2018). The emphasis on deterrence stability obscures how limited war concentrates its consequences on border communities by redistributing violence spatially. The perceived effectiveness of escalation control takes precedence over injury to civilians.

Scholarship on border studies emphasizes how militarization turns borderlands into permanent exception zones (Jones, 2016; Reeves, 2014). Border areas in the Indo-Pak setting are marked by monitoring policies, limited mobility, and frequent violence. Insecurity is a constant state of existence for civilians, not just during times of crisis.

The idea that forced migration exclusively happens through large-scale refugee movements is being challenged by displacement research (Lubkemann, 2008; Brun, 2015). Displacement is frequently transient, cyclical, and underreported in conflict areas like the Indo-Pak border. Despite this, these types of "invisible" displacement have significant social and psychological repercussions.

**THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK:**

Human security theory, which moves the referent of security from the state to the individual, is the main source of inspiration for this work (UNDP, 1994). Human security prioritizes the preservation of dignity, freedom from fear, and protection from violence—aspects that are often disregarded in conventional security paradigms. Critical security studies are also discussed in the paper, especially its criticism of state-centric threat building (Booth, 2007). According to this viewpoint, military operations such as Operation Sindoor are seen as actions that purposefully create instability for specific populations rather than just being reactions to threats. Lastly, the idea of "everyday militarization" is used to examine how daily living in border regions is impacted by conflict, making it difficult to distinguish between wartime and peacetime circumstances.

**OPERATION SINDOOR: CONTEXT AND STRATEGIC FRAMING:**

Operation Sindoor was part of a larger pattern of frequent crisis escalation in Indo-Pakistan relations, which was influenced by changing limited war theories, domestic political constraints, and nuclear deterrence. Instead of being an isolated incident, the operation was a continuation of a strategic pattern that has become more common in South Asia: the use of calibrated military action to reassert deterrence, manage domestic audiences, and signal resolve without going over the line into full-scale war.

Nuclear weapons have limited Indo-Pakistan conflict behaviour since the late 1990s, creating a geopolitical climate where lower-intensity military

action is still possible but outright war is deemed unaffordable. In this environment, limited war has become a governing logic of conflict management rather than just a tactical option. The goal of operations is political signalling rather than territorial conquest, and they are characterized as precise, time-bound, and proportionate. This reasoning is necessary to comprehend Operation Sindoor. In addition to highlighting a commitment to escalation management, official discourse placed the operation in the context of a necessary reaction to security concerns by emphasizing control and moderation. This conceptualization is consistent with what academics refer to as deterrence signalling rather than deterrence breakdown—military action is carried out to convey credibility and resolve rather than to destroy the enemy (Paul, 2018; Narang, 2014). Nevertheless, an implicit hierarchy of security concerns is also reflected in this paradigm. Limited war policy deprioritizes civilian effects, viewing them as regrettable but acceptable externalities, by defining success mainly in terms of strategic signalling and escalation avoidance.

Border regions were mainly portrayed as strategic buffers, observation zones, or lines of defence in official narratives around Operation Sindoor. Rarely was civilian presence substantively incorporated into operational rhetoric; instead, it was acknowledged symbolically, frequently through allusions to national sacrifice or resiliency. This abstraction is indicative of a larger trend in state-centric security theory that views boundaries as borders rather than social spaces. Critical border scholars contend that these depictions marginalize borderland residents by



erasing their everyday experiences (Jones, 2016; Reeves, 2014).

By strengthening the idea that border regions are acceptable locations for extraordinary measures, Operation Sindoor exacerbated this abstraction. Even though they directly hampered civilian mobility and economic activity, increased troop deployment, increased monitoring, and mobility restrictions were rationalized as necessary security measures.

### **VIOLENCE IN BORDER AREAS: MILITARIZATION, EVERYDAY HARM, AND CIVILIAN EXPOSURE:**

It is important to view violence in Indo-Pak border regions during and after Operation Sindoor as a multi-layered, cumulative process moulded by long-standing militarization rather than just an isolated military encounter. Border violence takes many forms, including ongoing danger exposure, disruption of civilian routines, and the acceptance of insecurity as a regular part of daily life. It is not limited to dramatic acts of shelling or armed confrontation. These dynamics were heightened by Operation Sindoor, which demonstrated how small-scale military operations can cause widespread devastation that extends beyond their immediate temporal and spatial limitations.

Border settlements saw increased alertness, frequent army movement, and sporadic shelling during the time leading up to Operation Sindoor. The constant presence of military operations turned civilian areas into areas of uncertainty, even in cases where there were few direct civilian casualties. The distinction between military and civilian areas became hazier as homes, schools, and agricultural fields became possible danger zones. An existing

substantial military presence along the Indo-Pak border was strengthened. The spatial arrangement of civilian life was changed by increased soldier deployment, security checkpoints, and monitoring technologies. Access to markets and farms was hampered, roads were watched over, and mobility was restricted. From a civilian standpoint, these actions blur the lines between secure and dangerous areas. Access to healthcare, education, and agricultural labour becomes dependent on security evaluations rather than civilian needs.

Psychological harm is one of the most common, yet least obvious, kinds of border violence. Uncertainty, rumours, and recollections of previous escalations all contribute to anticipatory anxiety, which is a major factor in determining civilian reactions. Even in the absence of prolonged combat, Operation Sindoor reinforced anticipation of possible escalation by evoking collective memories of past crises. In and of itself, this fear is a kind of violence. Fear frequently precedes physical violence in border regions, causing social disengagement and pre-emptive displacement. Unpredictability is what keeps the economy of dread alive. Civilians are forced to rely on unofficial networks and conjecture because they seldom receive precise information on the length or intensity of military operations. Stress is increased, and confidence in state institutions is weakened by this uncertainty.

Because it is unpredictable, shelling along the border has a disproportionate impact even when it occurs seldom. Intermittent shelling upsets civilian routines without permitting adaptability, as contrasted to continuous bombardment. Because of the ongoing threat of violence, civilians are unable to



confidently plan their travels, education, or agricultural cycles. By instituting new stages of vigilance and increased readiness, Operation Sindoor exacerbated this unpredictability. The idea that violence could happen again at any time was strengthened by the lack of a distinct conclusion. Violence becomes a permanent background condition as a result of this temporal uncertainty, which intensifies insecurity.

Displacement and violence in border regions are inextricably linked. Displacement becomes a sensible survival strategy when people are exposed to physical, psychological, and institutional forms of violence. Civilians frequently relocate because the accumulation of insecurity makes their prolonged presence intolerable, rather than because they are actively attacked. The traditional dichotomies between violence and displacement, war and peace, are challenged by this continuum. Operation Sindoor serves as an example of how restricted military action, as opposed to mass flight, creates displacement through dread, expectation, and tiredness. The majority of the displacement associated with Operation Sindoor came from anticipatory migration and brief evacuations. Instead of attacking directly, families responded to fear by taking preventative action. The fact that these movements seldom ever show up in official data serves to further emphasize how invisible they are.

#### THE NORMALIZATION OF CIVILIAN SUFFERING

Instead of developing completely new dynamics, Operation Sindoor exacerbated pre-existing insecurity mechanisms in border regions. Although the limited war concept is effective in preventing

widespread escalation, it also makes civilian casualties more commonplace. This is a significant drawback of state-centric security thinking from the standpoint of human security. Strategic rhetoric perpetuates a hierarchy where civilian lives are subservient to abstract ideas of deterrence by portraying violence and displacement as incidental effects. The legitimacy of limited war techniques is called into doubt by the displacement and suffering of civilians. Its moral basis is compromised if deterrence stability is attained at the expense of normalized suffering among civilians. This does not mean that states will stop taking strategic factors into account. It does, however, highlight the necessity of incorporating displacement mitigation and civilian protection into frameworks for conflict management. Without this kind of integration, limited war runs the risk of spreading rather than limiting violence.

#### CONCLUSION

Despite being presented as a limited and controlled military operation, this study has shown that Operation Sindoor had serious civilian repercussions in the Indo-Pak border regions. Strategic restraint did not create violence and displacement; rather, it was a contributing factor. This research challenges state-centric theories that put escalation control ahead of civilian well-being by emphasizing human security. In a security system that accepts their suffering, border communities emerge as structurally marginalized subjects rather than as helpless victims. It is more than just a scholarly exercise to reframe the Indo-Pakistan war through the prism of displacement and daily bloodshed. In one of the most unstable areas of the world, it is crucial to create moral, long-lasting conflict resolution strategies.

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