FAKE NEWS WATCHDOG

Truth Matters, We Verify

INCIDENT REPORT 2025

The Truth Behind the IAF Chief's Operation Sindoor Claims

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Published on:
Friday, August 15, 2025

About Us

Fake News Watchdog (FNW) is a global initiative dedicated to identifying, analyzing, and countering the spread of misinformation and disinformation in today's digital world. We stand at the forefront of the fight for truth, empowering individuals, media professionals, academic institutions, and civil society to navigate the increasingly complex information landscape with confidence and clarity.

Our Mission

Our mission is to detect and debunk false narratives, monitor disinformation trends, and strengthen public resilience through media literacy. Leveraging artificial intelligence, advanced fact-checking tools, and rigorous research methodologies, we work to uphold the principles of transparency, credibility, and informed public discourse.

Our Vision

We envision a world where access to accurate, verified information is a fundamental right, and where communities are equipped to question, verify, and challenge misleading content. A well-informed society is the cornerstone of democracy, and we are committed to fostering a culture where truth triumphs over manipulation.

What We Do

- **Fact-Checking Services**: Verifying claims circulating in media, politics, and public discourse.
- **Reputation Management**: Monitoring digital platforms for false or misleading content about our clients and delivering timely, evidence-based rebuttals to protect their public image and credibility.
- **Research & Trends Analysis**: Studying patterns in disinformation to inform public policy and education.
- **Educational Outreach**: Promoting media literacy through training, resources, and awareness campaigns.
- **Global Collaboration**: Partnering with international organizations, journalists, researchers, and digital rights advocates to build a united front against fake news.

A Message from Our Team

At Fake News Watchdog, our mission is rooted in the belief that truth is not just a principle but a cornerstone of a thriving society. In an age where disinformation spreads faster than ever, the responsibility to uphold integrity in information is one we share collectively.

This report serves as both a reflection of the challenges we face and a call to action. It dives deep into the anatomy of disinformation, examining its sources, impact, and the societal vulnerabilities it exploits. By bringing these incidents to light, we aim to empower individuals, institutions, and policymakers with the insights necessary to recognize, combat, and prevent the spread of falsehoods.

Our work is not possible without the contributions of vigilant fact-checkers, dedicated researchers, and the trust of those who believe in a better-informed world. Together, we can build an ecosystem where truth has the power to outpace lies, fostering trust and accountability in every corner of society.

We hope this report inspires meaningful dialogue and decisive action. Thank you for standing with us in this crucial fight against misinformation.

– The Fake News Watchdog Team

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Copyright Statement

This white paper is intended for informational, academic, educational, media, and policy-making purposes. It explores the evolution and strategic redirection of India's space program from a development-focused initiative to one increasingly shaped by defense priorities.

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Publisher: Fake News Watchdog, Islamabad, Pakistan
Publication Date: Friday, August 15, 2025
Email: info@fakenewswatchdog.org
Website: www.fakenewswatchdog.org

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Executive Summary

In August 2025, Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh made a bold claim: that during Operation Sindoor, fought in May after the Pahalgam terror attack, India had destroyed six Pakistani military aircraft, including five fighter jets and a surveillance plane, using the S-400 missile system. The announcement, delivered months after the events and without presenting hard proof, ignited a storm of political and media reactions both at home and abroad.

Operation Sindoor unfolded over three tense days in early May. India carried out precision strikes on militant-linked sites, Pakistan retaliated, and heavy skirmishes followed until a ceasefire—said by the U.S. President to have been actively brokered by Washington—took effect. Singh's statement was hailed in much of India's mainstream media as a historic military success, with headlines and hashtags framing it as a game-changing victory.

Yet beneath the official narrative, doubts quickly surfaced. Independent defence analysts, fact-checking groups, and opposition leaders pointed to glaring gaps: no wreckage photos, no pilot testimony, no raw tracking data. The few images released were criticised for poor quality and for being recycled from earlier coverage. Pakistani officials rejected the claims outright, countering that no aircraft were lost and challenging India to open its records for independent inspection.

This polarisation in coverage revealed two competing storylines—one amplifying Singh's words as proof of India's military strength, the other portraying them as politically timed propaganda intended to deflect attention from domestic controversies. Viewed through the lens of hybrid warfare, where information and perception can be weapons in their own right, the episode underscores how swiftly fact, narrative, and political strategy can become intertwined. Without independent verification, Singh's claim remains a matter of contested truth rather than established history.

Introduction

Propaganda has long been a familiar feature of political conflict, but in the era of hybrid warfare its role has shifted from background noise to a primary weapon. Today, information campaigns can run parallel to—or even ahead of—military action, blending economic pressure, cyber operations, and narrative control to influence outcomes before the first shot is fired.

The events surrounding Operation Sindoor in May 2025 offer a striking example. The operation was India's response to the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam, which claimed 26 civilian lives. Over three days in early May, India launched missile strikes on nine militant-linked targets inside Pakistan, taking care—according to official statements—not to hit civilian or core military infrastructure. Intense cross-border skirmishes followed, ending around May 10 under a ceasefire that the United States claims to have helped broker.

Three months later, in August 2025, Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh made a headline-grabbing declaration: India, he said, had shot down six Pakistani aircraft—five fighters and an airborne early warning platform—using its S-400 air defence system. He also spoke of successful strikes on parked F-16s and another surveillance aircraft. This announcement, delivered during a public lecture rather than a formal military briefing, quickly dominated India's news cycle.

Parliamentarians pressed for clarity. If India had been in such a strong position, why agree to a ceasefire under U.S. pressure? Why had the information been held back for months? Critics suggested the timing was politically convenient, coinciding with heated domestic controversies, while Pakistani officials dismissed the claims as "fabricated," challenging India to allow independent verification of aircraft inventories.

In the weeks that followed, Indian media split into two camps. Pro-government outlets celebrated the announcement as proof of India's military edge, often recycling dated footage and expert commentary to support the IAF's position. Others questioned the credibility of the evidence—or lack thereof—and noted the absence of independent confirmation. Against this backdrop, Operation Sindoor became more than a brief border conflict; it evolved into an information battle, where the fight for narrative dominance continued long after the shooting stopped.

Background

When Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh took the stage in August 2025 to deliver the 16th Air Chief Marshal L.M. Katre Memorial Lecture, his remarks instantly became the focal point of India–Pakistan discourse. Speaking with confidence, he credited the S-400 air defence system for destroying five Pakistani fighter jets and a large airborne surveillance aircraft during Operation Sindoor. According to Singh, these kills—achieved from distances of up to 300 km—represented a record-breaking feat in surface-to-air engagements. He also displayed newly created computer-generated images depicting supposed Pakistani losses.

The statement was remarkable not only for its scale but also for its timing. Until that moment, no official Indian account had claimed such extensive Pakistani losses, and even India's most nationalistic media outlets had not hinted at such a decisive aerial victory. The announcement came three months after the operation, during a period of heightened political tension, and closely followed diplomatic engagements between India and Russia—an important supplier of the S-400 system.

Pakistan's reaction was immediate and uncompromising. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif dismissed the claims as "fabricated" and accused India of trying to rewrite the facts of the conflict. He countered that Pakistan had inflicted significant losses on the Indian Air Force, including the destruction of jets, drones, and even S-400 batteries, and challenged India to open its aircraft inventories for independent inspection.

Within India, reactions split sharply. Supporters framed Singh's remarks as overdue recognition of military success, while opposition leaders linked the announcement to efforts to distract from domestic controversies, including allegations of election irregularities. Independent defence analysts questioned the absence of supporting evidence—such as wreckage photographs, pilot testimony, or raw radar data—particularly when earlier IAF claims in past conflicts had been backed by satellite imagery and open-source verification.

Although the IAF chief's emphasis on the S-400 system carries a notable strategic undertone, particularly given India's defense ties with Russia. Political commentators directly link the timing of his statement to Indian National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval to Russia to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin to influence Russian decisions about S-400 support and Russian President visit to India.

In this atmosphere, Singh's statement was more than a military update—it became a political event. Whether seen as an assertion of air superiority or a calculated narrative move, it underscored the blurred lines between battlefield outcomes, strategic communication, and domestic politics in the conduct of modern hybrid warfare.

The Disinformation Campaign

The May 2025 conflict was fought not only in the skies but also across television screens, news feeds, and social media timelines. Both India and Pakistan accused each other of spreading misinformation and disinformation to shape public perception. Even before the IAF Chief's later claim, exaggerated or false reports had circulated. On the Indian side, some outlets aired stories of dramatic military successes—such as an alleged Indian Navy attack on Karachi—that were later shown to be unfounded.

Television channels played a key role, often running recycled or AI-generated footage as if it were real-time coverage. These visuals, paired with patriotic commentary, fed into a pro-war narrative that resonated with parts of the public. Fact-checkers inside India were quick to challenge some of Pakistan's accusations—such as claims that India had targeted mosques or civilian areas—but were less willing to address questionable narratives coming from within the Indian political and media establishment itself.

The result was a fragmented information environment. Supporters of the government saw evidence of resolve and capability; skeptics saw a coordinated propaganda push designed to maintain public morale and political advantage. In the fog of this information battle, verifiable facts often struggled to break through.

Third-Party Intervention

The role of the United States in the May 2025 ceasefire added another layer of complexity to the competing narratives. India's official position was that the truce resulted from direct talks between the militaries of both countries. In contrast, U.S. officials—including the President—publicly stated that Washington had been "directly involved" in brokering the agreement.

This mismatch in accounts was not a minor detail. For critics of the Indian government, the U.S. version suggested that New Delhi had come under diplomatic pressure to halt operations, undermining claims of a dominant battlefield position. For the government and its supporters, downplaying U.S. involvement allowed India to project an image of control and strategic independence.

These conflicting narratives reinforced the sense that the war's end—and the events within it—were being shaped as much by diplomatic theatre as by military reality.

Key Development

The turning point in the information battle came during Singh's August lecture. Standing before an audience at the HAL Management Academy, he declared that India had achieved one of the largest long-range surface-to-air kills in history, destroying five fighters and a large surveillance aircraft from a distance of roughly 300 km. This was the first time the IAF had publicly claimed such a scale of success in a single engagement.

To support his account, Singh presented newly produced computer-generated images of Pakistani aircraft allegedly targeted in the operation. Almost instantly, major Indian news outlets treated the announcement as a landmark moment, running primetime specials and celebratory headlines. Social media lit up with patriotic hashtags, videos, and infographics, some produced by ordinary users, others by public figures and influencers.

Yet the presentation lacked the kind of evidence that might convince neutral observers. There were no photos of wreckage, no recorded pilot debriefs, and no independent verification from foreign defence agencies. The absence of this proof did little to slow the story's momentum inside India, but it ensured that outside the country, the claim remained contested. In a conflict where perception was half the battle, Singh's statement proved to be a powerful move—whether or not it reflected the full truth.

Narrative War

Once Singh's statement hit the airwaves, the conversation in India split sharply along political and media lines. Many mainstream outlets, along with prominent commentators, embraced his claims without hesitation. Headlines framed the operation as a "historic achievement" and a "game-changer," evoking comparisons to past conflicts and branding it with hashtags like **#IAFChief**, **#OperationSindoor**, and **#PakPlaneShotDown**. These narratives painted the engagement as proof of India's air superiority and the success of its high-end Russian-supplied systems.

But not everyone bought in. On social media, critics countered with hashtags such as **#IndianDisinformation**, accusing the government of peddling propaganda for domestic political gain. Pakistani defence analysts used words like "absurd," "illogical," and "comical" to describe the IAF's account, while their own media pushed back with counterclaims of Indian losses.

What stood out was the lack of rigorous fact-checking within India's own media ecosystem. Even outlets known for their investigative work largely steered clear of challenging the official version. This silence suggested either editorial caution, political pressure, or a calculation that questioning the narrative would not sit well with audiences during a moment framed as national triumph. In effect, the story became less about what happened in the skies and more about who controlled the story on the ground.

Independent Voices Challenge IAF Chief's Operation Sindoor Claims

India's independent commentators and defence analysts have mounted a strong challenge to Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's claim that the IAF downed six Pakistani aircraft during Operation Sindoor. While Singh presented the assertion as a matter-of-fact operational update, critics argue it appears to be part of a political communication strategy rather than a transparent military disclosure.

Singh's account contained two key elements: a description of the alleged engagement, and technical "evidence" he described as electronic tracking data and radar cross-section signatures. Unlike earlier IAF claims—such as the destruction of nine non-military ground targets on the first night of the operation, which were supported by satellite imagery and open-source verification—this latest statement was presented without visual proof or third-party corroboration. The absence of wreckage photographs, pilot testimony, or independent confirmation from international media has left the claim unsubstantiated, existing largely within India's official military narrative and pro-government media ecosystem.

The claim was delivered casually during a keynote at the HAL Management Academy, months after the events. While international outlets had acknowledged Indian strikes on certain Pakistani airbases on 10 May, none had reported losses on the scale Singh alleged. Even India's most nationalistic outlets had not previously suggested such a major Pakistani defeat.

Singh's emphasis on "political will" in achieving success appeared calibrated to reflect positively on the Modi government. Critics see this as a political counter to remarks in Parliament—particularly from Rahul Gandhi—accusing the government of "tying the hands" of Indian pilots.

Independent journalists and analysts have been at the forefront of the scrutiny. *The Wire*'s Siddharth Varadarajan faced legal action under a new law after publishing a report citing a defence attaché whose account contradicted the government's version. Pravin Sawhney, editor of *Force* magazine, told Karan Thapar that the claim "doesn't stand to scrutiny" and appears to be a "last-minute instruction" aimed at political distraction.

Sushant Singh, former Deputy Editor of *The Indian Express*, argued that such statements must be critically examined in a democracy. He noted Singh's omission of any reference to Indian air losses—acknowledged by the Chief of Defence Staff and even former U.S. President Donald Trump—and stressed that Pakistan's porous information environment

makes the absence of wreckage images highly suspicious. He also pointed out the lack of confirmation from U.S. defence officials, who track Pakistan's F-16 fleet.

Congress leaders Udit Raj and Imran Masood linked the timing of the disclosure to domestic political controversies, suggesting it was meant to divert attention from election-related allegations. Outside India, a Chinese defence strategist dismissed the claim as "comical," while Pakistani analysts labelled it "domestic propaganda" contradicted by both historical records and the lack of evidence.

Across this spectrum, the common demands are clear: verifiable proof, independent validation, and answers as to why such a momentous claim emerged only months after the operation. Without these, critics maintain, the IAF Chief's statement remains politically charged rhetoric rather than an authoritative military account.

Pakistan Challenge Indian Claim

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif strongly rejected the claim, calling it a baseless fabrication intended to distort the facts of Operation Sindoor and mislead domestic and international audiences. He stated:

> *"The belated assertions made by the Indian Air Force Chief regarding alleged destruction of Pakistani aircraft during Operation Sindoor are as implausible as they are ill-timed. Not a single Pakistani aircraft was hit or destroyed by an Indian. Pakistan destroyed 6 Indian jets, S400 air defence batteries and unmanned aircraft, disabling several airbases…"*

He issued a challenge to India, declaring: "If the truth is in question, let both sides open their aircraft inventories to independent verification…Wars are not won by falsehoods but by moral authority, national resolve and professional competence.

What is End-Use Monitoring (EUM)

Sales of US made fighter planes especially has a tag attached with it, known as the post-sales monitoring agreement. Pakistan first purchased F-16 fighter aircraft from the United States in December 1981, when it signed a letter of agreement to acquire 40 F-16A/B jets—specifically, 28 F-16A (single-seat) and 12 F-16B (dual-seat trainer) models. These aircraft were part of the Block 15 production run and were delivered between 1983 and 1987, with the first jet's arrival in October 1982.

This deal was a pivotal moment in U.S.-Pakistan defense relations, largely influenced by their strategic partnership during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The F-16s became a cornerstone of Pakistan's air combat capabilities and continue to serve in its

air force today. The purchase of F-16s by Pakistan is governed by the End-Use Monitoring (EUM) agreement. This agreement restricts Pakistan's use of the F-16s to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations, prohibiting their deployment in conventional warfare without prior US approval.

According to this agreement, F-16s can only be used for counterterrorism missions, targeting non-state actors or terrorist groups. In case of conventional war like what happened during Operation Swift Retort when Pakistan's response to Indian airstrikes on February 27, 2019 and during May 7-10 India Pakistan conflict, Pakistan required prior approval from US Government. The US has a Technical Security Team (TST) and contractors in Pakistan to oversee the use of F-16s and ensure compliance with EUM regulations. If in case Pakistan breaches the agreement, as claimed by India the US could halt military support or delay future aircraft sales, straining Pakistan-US relations.

The EUM agreement also includes programs like Golden Sentry and Blue Lantern, partially paid by Pakistan and partially by the US, which involve US teams monitoring the use of American-made weapons in Pakistan to prevent misuse. The US has released significant funds, such as $397 million, to support the TST ensure Pakistan's compliance with EUM regulations, and agreement between Pakistan and US in days after the meeting between President Donald Trump and Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, the Pentagon notified to the Congress its decision to approve military sales worth $125 million that would result in 24x7 end-use monitoring of the F-16 fighter jets of Pakistan.

A defense and analysis group Quwa, TST has been present in Pakistan since 2019 when the US approved its current deployment with a $125 million support package for the PAF F-16 fleet.

Why S-400 is important for India

The events of Operation Swift Retort in February 2019 served as a key wake-up call for the Indian Air Force (IAF) and validated the need for a modern, long-range air defense system like the S-400. During the dogfight, a Pakistani aircraft, reportedly armed with a U.S.-made AIM-120 AMRAAM missile, shot down an Indian MiG-21 Bison. This event underscored the vulnerability of India's legacy fighter fleet to modern BVR missiles. The S-400, with its ability to engage targets at a range of up to 400 km, is a direct counter to this threat. It can create an "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) bubble, pushing enemy aircraft and their BVR missiles further away from Indian airspace. Pakistan's air force reportedly used electronic warfare to confuse and disrupt

Indian systems during the brief conflict. The S-400's advanced radar and command-and-control systems are designed to be highly resistant to jamming and can track multiple targets simultaneously, mitigating the effectiveness of such tactics.

The manufacturer of the S-400 missile system, The Russia, claims that its S-400 missile system is capable of intercepting aircraft at a range of up to 400 kilometers and is widely supported by military and technical sources. The key to this long-range capability is the 40N6 missile. The 40N6 is the longest-range missile in the S-400's arsenal. Its reported operational range is up to 400 kilometers. This missile is specifically designed to engage high-value, low-maneuverability targets like Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft, tankers, and electronic warfare aircraft.

India signed a deal with Russia for the S-400 Triumf air defense missile system in October 2018. The contract, valued at approximately $5.43 billion, was for five regiments of the system. This acquisition was a major defense deal and was signed despite warnings from the United States about potential sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

The first S-400 regiment was delivered to India in December 2021. It was subsequently deployed in the Punjab sector to counter threats from both Pakistan and China. The second regiment was delivered in 2022 and deployed in the Rajasthan sector, further bolstering India's air defense on the western front. The third regiment was delivered in 2023 and has been deployed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China. Russia has delivered three of the five S-400 regiments. The delivery of the remaining two regiments has been delayed due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict.

When the S-400 components were delivered to India, a number of Russian experts were also sent to the country to help their Indian counterpart to install, train and maintain the S-400. Unlike the United States, which has a very robust and formal EUM program for its defense exports, Russia generally does not impose the same kind of strict, formal EUM agreements on its long term partner like India. Russia has shown a greater willingness to transfer technology to India, which creates a collaborative relationship. This is a contrast to the U.S. approach, which can be seen as more of a "buyer-seller" relationship with strict controls.

The May 7-10 conflict has been characterized by two completely different narratives. While India claims the S-400 performed exceptionally, Pakistan claims the system was a "total failure" and was successfully evaded and even partially destroyed one of the three S-400 installations.

Fact Check:

According to the media-monitoring group Fake News Watchdog, the claim that Pakistani aircraft were destroyed during Operation Sindoor is false and fabricated. Key findings were as follows:

1. Poor Quality and Delayed Release of Images:

The images of Pakistani airfields were poorly produced, released long after the event, and contained no new verifiable details. Experts stressed that the delayed release and poor technical quality cast serious doubt on their authenticity and raise questions about the motives behind their publication.

2. No Verifiable Evidence from Indian Air Force:

Singh did not identify the make or model of the aircraft allegedly destroyed, nor specify the locations where these incidents occurred. This absence of basic operational details significantly weakens the credibility of his assertions.3. Timing Designed to Deflect

Criticism: The announcement appeared timed to counter mounting criticism of the IAF's performance during Operation Sindoor, where Indian aircraft reportedly suffered losses after being struck by Pakistani missiles. Analysts described this as a deliberate tactic to divert public and media attention from the operational shortcomings revealed during the conflict.

4. Media Amplification Without Proof:

Despite the lack of credible evidence, both state-run and private Indian media outlets extensively reported the Air Chief's statement, framing it as part of their routine anti-Pakistan narrative. This widespread, uncritical coverage amplified the claim domestically without providing any independent verification.

5. Broader Disinformation Strategy:

Analysts argue that such narratives are aimed at rewriting the events of May 7, reinforcing nationalist sentiment, and deflecting attention from strategic and operational failures. This reflects a broader pattern in which official statements are leveraged to shape public perception and mask military setbacks.

6. Indian Air Force Press statement:

The Indian Air Force itself understands that the Chief's statement is primarily aimed at local consumption, generating headlines and offering media commentators talking points, rather than being taken seriously. Notably, the official IAF press release issued after this lecture made no mention of any Pakistani aircraft losses during Operation Sindoor.

IAF / Indian Govt. Claims vs Independent Assessment & Evidence Gap

IAF / Indian Government Claims	Independent Evidence Gap Review
Indian Air Force downed 5 Pakistani fighter jets and 1 large aircraft during May 7–10 operations	No wreckage photos, pilot testimonies, or independent verification. International and Pakistani media (including leaks from PAF insiders) have reported no such losses.
Evidence based on electronic tracking data and radar cross-section signatures.	No raw data released for peer review. Past credible claims were backed by satellite imagery and open-source intelligence; this was not the case this time.
Claim reflects unrestricted political will enabling military success.	Critics say emphasis on "political will" is politically motivated designed to counter opposition allegations of government-imposed restrictions.
First official disclosure made months later in an academic lecture.	Delay seen as politically timed. Analysts note major operational successes are normally announced promptly to maximise strategic impact and credibility.
International media validated IAF strikes on PAF bases.	True for infrastructure strikes (10 May), but no foreign outlet confirmed downing of multiple PAF aircraft.
The statement counters Parliament criticism.	Independent voices argue the announcement was choreographed to deflect from domestic political controversies, including election-related disputes.

Methodology

This report employs a qualitative, document-based research approach to examine the Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief's claims regarding the downing of Pakistani aircraft during Operation Sindoor (May 2025) and to assess the associated narratives, political context, and information warfare dimensions.

1. Source Collection

Primary and secondary sources were gathered from:

- Official statements from the Indian Air Force, Indian government, and Pakistani authorities.
- Parliamentary debate transcripts addressing the claims.
- Independent media reports, including national and international outlets.
- Defence analysts' commentaries and expert interviews published in reputable platforms.
- Fact-checking reports from organizations such as Fake News Watchdog.
- Archival records of earlier public statements and imagery released by the IAF.

2. Verification & Cross-Referencing

Each claim was cross-checked against:

- Satellite imagery and open-source intelligence reports where available.
- Independent third-party confirmations from defence analysts and foreign military tracking agencies.
- Timelines of disclosure to identify political or strategic motivations.

3. Content Analysis

A thematic content analysis was conducted to identify recurring narratives in both Indian and Pakistani media. This included:

- Identifying framing techniques used in headlines, hashtags, and social media posts.
- Categorizing media outputs as supportive, neutral, or critical toward the IAF's account.
- Assessing the use of recycled or AI-generated imagery and its timing relative to political developments.

4. Political Context Assessment

Statements were analyzed alongside concurrent political events, such as parliamentary criticism, election controversies, and diplomatic engagements (e.g., Indo-Russian defence discussions), to evaluate potential influence on narrative timing and framing.

5. Limitations

The absence of independently verifiable physical evidence—such as wreckage photographs, pilot testimony, or raw electronic tracking data—limits the ability to conclusively verify or refute the claims. This methodological constraint is addressed by relying on triangulation from multiple independent narrative sources.

6. Analytical Framework

The findings are interpreted through the lens of hybrid warfare and disinformation theory, situating the IAF Chief's statements within broader patterns of information operations in South Asian security crises.

Conclusion

The controversy over Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh's claims during Operation Sindoor illustrates the complex interplay between military action, political messaging, and media amplification in modern conflicts. While the IAF's account was embraced domestically by large segments of the press and public, it was met with skepticism by independent analysts, opposition leaders, and foreign observers—largely due to the absence of verifiable evidence.

Pakistan's outright rejection of the claim, combined with the lack of confirmation from international defence sources, left the story unresolved in factual terms. What did emerge clearly, however, was the power of narrative dominance. In an era where perception can shape strategic outcomes as much as battlefield results, controlling the story became as important as controlling the skies.

This case also highlights the risks of delayed and unsupported official statements. Without timely, transparent, and verifiable information, public trust is eroded, and even legitimate achievements risk being dismissed as propaganda. Operation Sindoor, therefore, serves as both a study in the mechanics of hybrid warfare and a cautionary tale about the fine line between strategic communication and contested truth.