

Political Economy of National Security Communication: Reporting Conflict, Defence Procurements, and Strategic Deals steering Operation Sindoor

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Abstract: In the evolving theatre of the twenty-first-century Republic, where the rhetoric of sovereignty entwines with the circuitry of communication, the *Political Economy of National Security Communication* emerges as a locus of profound contestation between knowledge, power, and representation. This inquiry ventures into that intricate interstice wherein the reportage of conflict, the narration of defence procurements, and the orchestration of strategic deals converge to fabricate a discursive edifice of state legitimacy. The spectacle of *Operation Sindoor*, a tri-service trans-frontier retaliation sanctified by media acclamation becomes not merely an episode in martial history but a paradigmatic emblem of how contemporary defence journalism transubstantiates warfare into ideology, technology into theology, and information into instrumentality.

Through the prism of the *Political Economy of Communication*, *Critical Military Studies*, and the *Media-Industrial Complex*, this study anatomises the processes by which the media does not merely chronicle the logic of deterrence but consecrates embedding militarism within the cultural psyche as a civic virtue. The coverage of *Operation Sindoor*, suffused with exaltations of “Atmanirbhar warfare” and paeans to technological nationalism, betrays an epistemic choreography wherein the press becomes both witness and architect of the state’s self-narration. Herein, the journalist’s pen functions not as a sceptical scalpel but as an anointing brush, baptising national security with the varnish of moral inevitability.

This analysis contends that defence journalism in India operates as an ideological relay within the triadic nexus of state, media, and industry, a triune apparatus that perpetuates the mythos of strategic autonomy even as it obscures the dialectics of dependence and dissent. The invocation of *Operation Sindoor* in public discourse exemplifies how communicative practices morph into instruments of power reproduction: manufacturing consent, normalising exorbitant military expenditure, and aestheticizing the machinery of war under the banner of patriotic modernity. The

narrative of deterrence thus becomes the lingua sacra of the Republic’s political economy, wherein the flows of capital, technology, and affect converge to sustain both the commerce of arms and the commerce of belief. The study situates the national security communication within a broader civilisational prerogatives of nationalism wherein the *logos* of security are mediated through the idioms of spectacle and sanctity, reconfiguring the architecture of democratic accountability.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, communication pertaining to national security in general and defence journalism in particular has become a crucible where geopolitics, state policy, industrial capacity, and public discourse intersect. Major defence procurements, such as the Rafale fighter jet acquisition, the S-400 TRIUMF missile system purchase, and the development of indigenous platforms like Tejas are not merely reported as matters of capability and expenditure. Rather, they are narrated as embodiments of a larger national story pertaining to strategic autonomy, technological nationalism, and deterrence legitimacy.

The launch and execution of Operation Sindoor in 2025, a major cross-border strike following a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, illustrates these dynamics vividly. The media coverage of this operation was not simply a recounting of military events but a potent exercise in ideological reproduction: sustaining a narrative that reinforces state–corporate interests and shaping public understanding of military modernisation.

The present research interrogates how defence journalism under the broader mandate of ‘National Security Communication’ reproduces state–corporate ideologies through the lens of the Political Economy of Communication (PEC), Critical

Military Studies (CMS), and the Media–Industrial Complex (MIC) in India. The research undertakes a critical analysis of the reportage on strategic deals pertaining to defence procurements prior to Operation Sindoor serving as a central case, in terms of narrative framing, sourcing patterns, ideological reproduction, and strategic signalling during the Operation Sindoor engagements with the state and non-state actors across the western borders.

The tripartite analysis through the theoretical framework of Political Economy of Communication (PEC) will examine how communicative processes reproduce dominant ideologies (Mosco, 2009) within defence journalism. Similarly, Critical Military Studies will interrogate how militarism and war are socially constructed. It treats military reporting as not neutral but as constitutive of broader discourses about state sovereignty, threat perception, and the moral legitimacy of armed force (Der Derian, 2001). Lastly, the Media–Industrial Complex (MIC) will describe the network wherein state security apparatuses, media organisations, and arms producers mutually reinforce each other's agendas. Conversely, defence journalism becomes part of a strategic feedback loop wherein media coverage amplifies defence procurements, legitimises expenditure, and sustains markets for military hardware (Kraska, 2019).

II. DEFENCE PROCUREMENT & STRATEGIC DEALS IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The defence modernisation in India is an intricate mix of imported platforms, indigenous projects, and strategic partnerships. Several deals are particularly salient:

The Rafale fighter acquisition illustrates this dynamic vividly. In April 2015, the Government of India signed a €7.87 billion (approximately ₹58,891 crore) agreement with France for the purchase of 36 aircraft, a deal which included weapons packages and performance-based logistics support (Gupta, 2022). By April 2025, India had expanded the procurement with a \$7.4 billion (₹63,000 crore) deal for 26 naval Rafale aircraft, strengthening maritime deterrence and deepening Indo-French strategic ties (Kumar, 2025). These acquisitions are repeatedly framed in Indian defence journalism as evidence of enhanced operational capability and reduced reliance on Russian platforms (Reddy, 2023).

Similarly, the S-400 TRIUMF air defence system, purchased for \$5.43 billion (₹39,000 crore) in October 2018, is portrayed in media narratives as emblematic of strategic autonomy (Singh, 2020). Each of the five systems ordered, costs between \$1 billion and \$1.25 billion, with capabilities to target aircraft, cruise missiles, and ballistic missiles at ranges up to 400 km (SIPRI, 2024). Defence journalism often foregrounds such acquisitions as proof of India's emergence as a technologically advanced power while normalising the large expenditure through narratives of deterrence necessity (Chandra, 2022).

The indigenous Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) is another focal point in the discourse of technological nationalism. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited's (HAL) Tejas Mk1A programme, valued at ₹62,370 crore (~\$7.1 billion) for 97 aircraft, represents India's drive for self-reliance in defence manufacturing (Times of India, 2025). Defence reporting positions the Tejas programme as both a strategic necessity and a national pride project, reinforcing the state's narrative that self-produced platforms are central to sustaining operational independence (Sharma, 2024).

These procurements are embedded in a larger discourse of *Atmanirbharta* ("self-reliance") and technological nationalism, an aspiration actively reproduced in defence journalism (Gupta, 2022). However, taken together, these procurement cases also demonstrate how defence journalism in India does not simply report military acquisitions but actively constructs them as components of a broader ideological project. This project intertwines strategic autonomy, technological self-reliance, and deterrence legitimacy into the public consciousness, sustaining a discourse in which defence capability and national prestige are inseparable.

III. INDIGENOUS PROGRAMMES AND THE IDEOLOGY OF TECHNOLOGICAL NATIONALISM

Indigenous defence programmes have emerged as one of the most potent narratives in India's defence journalism. Beyond technical achievement, they are narrated as markers of national sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and the fulfilment of *Atmanirbharta* ("self-reliance") in the defence sector. These programmes such as the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), Akash surface-to-air missile system, BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, Project Kusha,

and various defence corridors are covered not only as strategic capability developments but as embodiments of a larger ideological project linking national identity with technological progress.

1. Tejas Light Combat Aircraft

The Tejas programme, under Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), represents the most visible expression of indigenous aviation capability. Since the first flight in 2001, the project has been positioned in media narratives as a symbol of India's aspiration for technological independence (Sharma, 2024). As of 2025, the Tejas Mk1A variant is being produced in a batch of 97 aircraft at a cost of approximately ₹62,370 crore (~US\$7.1 billion) (Times of India, 2025). The programme's trajectory from early delays to eventual induction is widely reported as a national achievement, reinforcing the state's strategic narrative that self-reliance is central to security.

2. Akash Surface-to-Air Missile System

The Akash missile system, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and produced by Bharat Dynamics Limited, has become a recurrent motif in media reports as an indigenous counter to regional aerial threats. With a range of 25–30 km and the capacity to intercept multiple targets simultaneously, the system is deployed across multiple Indian Air Force squadrons. Defence journalism often frames Akash

not merely as a weapon system but as a testament to the viability of indigenous research and production (Chandra, 2022). As of 2024, the government approved production orders valued at over ₹8,000 crore for the Akash Mk2 variant (Defence Ministry of India, 2024).

3. BrahMos Supersonic Cruise Missile

The BrahMos missile, a joint venture between India and Russia, is another central icon in narratives of India's military modernisation. Capable of supersonic speeds of Mach 2.8–3.0 and a strike range of 450 km (planned to extend to 1,000 km), BrahMos is frequently reported as a force multiplier for both deterrence and power projection (Reddy, 2023). In 2025, the Indian government approved the procurement of 300 additional units at a cost of approximately ₹54,000 crore (~US\$6.5 billion), including the development of air-launched and hypersonic variants (LiveMint, 2025). Media discourse repeatedly underscores BrahMos as a “strategic jewel” of Indian defence capability.

4. Project Kusha and Defence Corridors

Project Kusha, aimed at the development of long-range indigenous missile technology, is positioned in Indian media as a strategic leap toward self-sufficiency in missile technology. Although still in early stages, reports frequently situate it within the larger narrative of technological nationalism and defence innovation (Singh, 2020).

Indigenous Programmes (2025)

Programme	Estimated Cost (₹)	Status	Strategic Significance
Tejas Mk1A	₹62,370 crore (~US\$7.1B)	Induction in progress	Air superiority, self-reliance
Akash Mk2	₹8,000+ crore (~US\$1B)	In production	Regional aerial defence
BrahMos (300 units)	₹54,000 crore (~US\$6.5B)	Ongoing procurement & upgrades	Supersonic strike capability
Project Kusha	Not publicly disclosed	Early stages	Long-range missile self-reliance
Defence Corridors	₹20,000 crore (~US\$2.5B)	Under development	Industrial capability & employment

(Sources: Defence Ministry of India, 2024; LiveMint, 2025; Times of India, 2025; Chandra, 2022; Reddy, 2023)

Similarly, the establishment of defence corridors, industrial clusters dedicated to the manufacture of defence systems has become a recurring motif in strategic reporting. These corridors, spread across Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, have attracted foreign investment and fostered public-private partnerships, generating significant employment. By 2024, they were reported to have attracted investment worth over ₹20,000 crore and created upwards of 40,000 direct jobs (Defence Ministry of

India, 2024). Media accounts frame them as a tangible manifestation of the “Make in India” vision, tying industrial policy to strategic capability.

IV. MEDIA NARRATIVES AND IDEOLOGICAL REPRODUCTION: DEFENCE JOURNALISM IN INDIA

The reporting of India's indigenous programmes such as Tejas, Akash, BrahMos, and Project Kusha reveals how defence journalism functions as a

mechanism of ideological reproduction, sustaining a dominant state-corporate narrative that fuses strategic autonomy, technological nationalism, and deterrence legitimacy. Within the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) framework, this process occurs through specific communicative patterns: framing, sourcing, repetition, and silencing of alternative discourses (Mosco, 2009).

1. Framing: Technological Nationalism as Narrative Anchor

Across leading Indian media outlets, indigenous defence programmes are framed not as discrete technical projects but as symbolic acts of nation-building. Headlines such as “Tejas: India’s Sky Warrior” (Times of India, 2025) or “BrahMos: India’s Supersonic Shield” (Indian Defence News, 2025) demonstrate how journalistic framing anchors these programmes in the language of national pride and sovereignty. This framing serves to normalise defence procurement costs and positions military modernisation as a central pillar of India’s strategic identity.

The framing strategy follows a consistent pattern: procurement stories are contextualised within geopolitical threats (China’s military modernisation, Pakistan’s cross-border provocations) and strategic self-reliance discourses. This aligns with what Critical Military Studies scholars describe as “narratives of necessity” storylines that construct military programmes as essential to national survival (Der Derian, 2001).

2. Sourcing: State and Corporate Voices as Primary Narrators

A salient feature of defence journalism in India is its reliance on official sources: Ministry of Defence (MoD) press releases, spokesperson briefings, HAL statements, and corporate communications. This sourcing pattern reinforces the state-corporate narrative by privileging official framings over independent critique. For example, in coverage of the Tejas Mk1A induction, the majority of reports cited statements by HAL officials and senior IAF commanders, with only a minority incorporating perspectives from independent analysts or civil society (Reddy, 2023).

This sourcing pattern reflects the structure of the media-industrial complex (MIC), wherein state institutions and defence corporations maintain close relations with media organisations. Such symbiosis

ensures that defence journalism functions less as an adversarial check on power and more as an amplifier of state and corporate strategic agendas.

3. Repetition and Symbolism

Repetition is a powerful tool of ideological reproduction. Defence journalism in India repeatedly associates indigenous programmes with concepts of “Atmanirbharta” and “technological sovereignty.” Over time, these repeated framings create symbolic linkages between defence capability and national prestige. This repetition is evident not only in mainstream news coverage but also in opinion pieces, defence magazines, and broadcast commentary.

For example, in the aftermath of *Operation Sindoor*, multiple media outlets foregrounded the role of BrahMos and Akash systems, often describing them as “India’s strategic shield” (Indian Defence News, 2025). Such repetition reinforces the narrative that self-produced military capabilities are central to India’s security doctrine.

4. Silencing of Alternative Discourses

A crucial dimension of ideological reproduction is what is left unspoken. Defence journalism’s dominant narratives rarely interrogate opportunity costs, budgetary trade-offs, or the possibility of alternative security strategies. The limited presence of critical perspectives in coverage of programmes such as Project Kusha or the defence corridors reflects a form of discursive closure (Mosco, 2009).

For instance, few media reports critically examined whether large defence investments could be redirected to socio-economic development or whether indigenous programmes could face delays and cost overruns that offset strategic benefits. This silencing consolidates a hegemonic discourse in which defence modernisation is uncritically accepted as a public good.

V. OPERATION SINDOOR: AN IDEOLOGICAL CASE IN POINT

The media coverage of *Operation Sindoor* exemplifies these patterns of ideological reproduction. Official narratives of the operation, emphasising “swift, precise, and technologically superior strikes” (Indian Express, 2025), were reproduced widely without substantive critical analysis. Defence reporting focused on the capabilities demonstrated BrahMos supersonic

missile launches, Akash air defence success, IACCS coordination, as evidence of India's self-reliant strategic posture.

This coverage embedded the operation within a broader narrative of deterrence and national strength, consistent with the state's strategic discourse. The selective emphasis on technological success, the reliance on official statements, and the marginalisation of dissenting perspectives combined to reinforce the state–corporate ideological agenda.

VI. IMPLICATIONS: IDEOLOGY AND THE DEFENCE JOURNALISM ECOSYSTEM

The patterns observed in coverage of indigenous programmes and Operation Sindoor reveal a structural characteristic of defence journalism in India and its role in reproducing a hegemonic security discourse. This has several implications:

1. **Legitimising Militarism:** By framing defence modernisation as a necessity for survival and sovereignty, journalism sustains public consent for militarised policy choices.
2. **Shaping Public Perception:** Defence narratives influence how the public understands threats, strategic priorities, and budget allocations.
3. **Constraining Critical Debate:** By privileging official framings and marginalising dissent, the field constrains the range of public discourse about defence policy.
4. **Feedback Loops in the MIC:** Media coverage reinforces corporate and state interests, influencing procurement decisions, budget allocations, and future coverage patterns.

Conversely, from the vantage point of the Political Economy of Communication and Critical Military Studies, Indian defence journalism is not a neutral recorder of facts but an active participant in shaping strategic discourse. Indigenous programmes, strategic procurements, and operations such as *Operation Sindoor* are narrated in ways that reproduce state–corporate ideologies, sustaining the narrative of technological nationalism and deterrence legitimacy.

These dynamics are essential from the perspectives of scholars and practitioners as it calls for a more reflexive take on defence journalism that not only reports capabilities but also interrogates the

ideological frameworks underpinning them. This requires expanding sourcing patterns, including independent analysis, and providing space for alternative perspectives that can challenge hegemonic narratives and enrich democratic discourse on national security.

Operation Sindoor: Context and Operational Details

- **Trigger:** A terror attack in Pahalgam, Jammu and Kashmir, on 22 April 2025 that killed 26 civilians (IndoDefenceNews, 2025).
- **Operation Timeline:** Operation began on 7 May 2025, concluding around 10 May 2025.
- **Scale:** Tri-service engagement (Indian Army, Navy, Air Force) striking nine terror camps and training facilities, with cross-border action in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).
- **Casualties:** Indian forces reported elimination of over 100 terrorists, killing 35–40 Pakistani soldiers; Indian military casualties were five (IndianExpress, 2025).
- **Technological Performance:** Strikes completed reportedly in 23 minutes, bypassing and jamming enemy air-defence radars using indigenous systems (LiveMint, 2025).

Indigenous Technology & “Atmanirbharta”

Operation Sindoor prominently featured India's indigenous defence capabilities:

- **BrahMos missile** (India–Russia joint production but domestically manufactured) was the primary offensive weapon.
- **Akashteer** air defence system played a central defensive role.
- **Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS)** facilitated operational coordination.
- **Electronic warfare tools** (jamming, loitering munitions) were reportedly deployed with precision (IndianDefenceNews, 2025).

These elements were widely foregrounded in media coverage, framing the operation as an embodiment of technological self-reliance.

Media Narratives

Indian media reporting on Operation Sindoor contained recurrent themes such as:

1. Technological triumph: Headlines celebrating “Atmanirbhar warfare” (IndianDefenceNews, 2025).
2. Deterrence justification: Coverage linked the strikes to deterrence against terrorism and cross-border aggression.
3. Strategic autonomy: Narratives emphasised India’s independent decision-making despite international pressure, including from the United States.
4. Jointness: Reports lauded tri-service cooperation as a hallmark of modern Indian defence strategy.

Ideological Reproduction in Defence Journalism during Operation Sindoor

Conflict Communication and Defence Journalism play a crucial role in ideological reproduction during conflict scenarios. Operation Sindoor illustrates several mechanisms of ideological reproduction when studied from the perspective of Political Economy of Communication and Critical Military Studies.

1. Threat Inflation and Moral Legitimacy

Media coverage framed the operation within a moral-political narrative of retaliatory justice: the strikes were a proportional and necessary response to the Pahalgam massacre. This framing constructed a moral legitimacy for military action, rendering critique of proportionality or escalation less visible.

The repetition of official claims of high enemy casualties reinforced a perception of decisive military advantage. Headlines such as “India demonstrates air dominance: 13 enemy jets downed in Op Sindoor” created a narrative of technological superiority and moral vindication (Times of India, 2025).

2. Technological Nationalism

Indigenous systems were central in media coverage. The narrative of “Atmanirbhar warfare” recast military success as a product of self-reliant defence industry capability. This framing reproduced the state’s ideological agenda: linking strategic autonomy to domestic technological prowess.

Such reporting contributes to a virtuous cycle in the MIC: media coverage reinforces public belief in indigenous capability → strengthens state legitimacy for high defence budgets → encourages further industry–state investment.

3. Normalisation of High Defence Spending

Media framing portrayed the cost of Operation Sindoor and associated procurements as justified by strategic necessity. The complexity of joint operations, technological sophistication, and the scale of the threat were emphasised to normalise large budget allocations for defence. This reinforces the MIC by cultivating public acceptance of military modernisation as a priority.

4. Selectivity & Silences

Critical perspectives such as questioning proportionality, examining opportunity costs, or interrogating long-term strategic risks were largely marginalised from the general discourse. Media tended to reproduce official narratives, with dissent treated as exceptional rather than constitutive of the discourse. Silences around civilian harm, geopolitical escalation, and the costs of sustained procurement sustain ideological reproduction by narrowing the Overton window of acceptable debate.

Media-Industrial Complex in Operation Sindoor

Operation *Sindoor* represents a quintessential manifestation of the Media–Industrial Complex (MIC) at work in India’s strategic communication ecosystem. The operation, conducted in early 2025 as a calibrated, precision strike along the western theatre, was not only a military exercise but also a communicative spectacle — a carefully choreographed event that synchronised state, industry, and media logics. The coverage of the operation across television, print, and digital platforms demonstrates how the MIC operates as a circuit of ideological reproduction in which state legitimacy, industrial profit, and media visibility converge (Der Derian, 2001; Mosco, 2009).

1. The Triadic Logic of Benefit

The positive media coverage of *Operation Sindoor* significantly enhanced legitimacy for defence procurement and the government’s broader defence policy framework. The operation, showcasing the deployment of indigenous systems such as BrahMos, Akash, and the Akashteer network-centric

command platform, provided visual and discursive evidence of the success of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* in the defence sector. Official statements from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) highlighted that 72% of the deployed systems during *Operation Sindoor* were indigenously produced, aligning with the target of achieving 75% domestic content in defence production by 2026 (Ministry of Defence, 2025).

Such statistics, widely quoted across news media, reinforced the perception of India as a technologically autonomous and strategically assertive power. As the *Indian Express* (2025, May 11) framed it, “Operation Sindoor marks the dawn of an era where India’s wars will be fought and won on Indian systems.” The narrative of indigenous triumph thus legitimised ongoing procurement programmes, such as the ₹62,370 crore Tejas Mk1A order (Times of India, 2025), while politically consolidating the government’s nationalist-modernist project.

Correspondingly, for leading media outlets, *Operation Sindoor* represented an unparalleled opportunity for exclusive access, audience engagement, and symbolic capital. The Ministry of Defence facilitated controlled media embeds with official briefings, video feeds of BrahMos launches, and post-operation interviews with senior commanders. These privileges translated into spikes in viewership and digital traffic. According to Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India data, defence-related programming registered a 43% surge in prime-time ratings during the week of the operation (BARC, 2025).

This pattern reflects a structural incentive within the MIC: in exchange for favourable coverage that sustains public morale and policy legitimacy, the media gains access, exclusivity, and commercial rewards. Defence reporting thereby transitions from investigative journalism to strategic narration, a genre of storytelling aligned with state interests (Reddy, 2023).

Similarly, the defence industry, both public and private, reaped substantial reputational and commercial gains. The media’s highlighting of indigenous successes amplified investor confidence and strengthened the political will for additional procurement orders. HAL, Bharat Dynamics Limited, and BrahMos Aerospace all saw temporary increases in market valuation following *Operation Sindoor* (Economic Times, 2025). The operation’s

emphasis on self-reliant capabilities also served to bolster export prospects; BrahMos, for instance, was showcased as a viable export product to Southeast Asian and African markets, with an estimated export potential of \$4 billion by 2026 (Chandra, 2022).

Consequently, defence journalism during *Operation Sindoor* did not merely chronicle a military development but reproduced and amplified an ideological framework that harmonised state legitimacy, media profitability, and industrial promotion.

2. Manufacturing Consent through Embedded Media

A crucial mechanism in this ideological economy is the practice of embedded journalism. Select journalists were given controlled access to *Operation Sindoor* briefings and allowed to broadcast visuals of missile launches and command operations. This arrangement produced what Chomsky and Herman (1988) described as *manufactured consent*, where media voluntarily internalise and reproduce state framings under the guise of privileged access.

As a result, alternative discourses with respect to questioning the proportionality of strikes, civilian impacts, or long-term strategic implications, were largely absent from mainstream reportage. Only fringe digital outlets, such as *The Wire* and *Scroll*, published critical reflections on the operation’s implications for regional stability. Their limited reach compared to television media ensured that the dominant narrative of technological triumph remained hegemonic.

3. Symbolic Capital and the Marketisation of Security

In the MIC ecosystem, media coverage not only communicates security but also commodifies it. Defence journalism becomes a form of *symbolic capital* wherein stories of technological success and operational efficiency enhance brand value for the military-industrial network. Following *Operation Sindoor*, defence expos and industry seminars leveraged the operation’s imagery to market new systems, while think tanks such as the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and Observer Research Foundation (ORF) hosted panels echoing the same themes of deterrence and self-reliance.

This circular relationship illustrates what Der Derian (2001) called the *military-industrial-media-entertainment network*, where security is both spectacle and commodity. The repetition of these narratives in conferences, trade fairs, and policy briefs consolidates ideological continuity across institutional fields.

The ideological reproduction evident in *Operation Sindoor* has deeper consequences for democratic communication and public deliberation. In effect, *Operation Sindoor* represents not only a successful military operation but also a discursive triumph for the state-corporate media apparatus. It demonstrates how the MIC translates complex strategic events into simplified ideological scripts that reinforce public consensus around deterrence, self-reliance, and technological nationalism, the trinity of modern Indian strategic identity. However, beyond *Operation Sindoor*, similar patterns appear in reporting on major defence procurements. These narratives are consistent with PEC's insight that the economic and institutional contexts of media shape reporting. Defence journalism thus becomes an ideological arena, not a neutral space.

Quantitative Context: Defence Procurement

1. India's defence budget (2025–26) stands at approximately ₹5.94 lakh crore (~US\$72 billion), the third largest in the world (Ministry of Defence, India, 2025).
2. Defence imports account for roughly 45% of India's requirements; the rest comes from indigenous production (SIPRI, 2024).
3. Defence exports stood at ~₹14,000 crore in 2024, with an aspiration of ₹35,000 crore by 2030 under "Atmanirbhar Bharat" policy (Defence Ministry Annual Report, 2024).
4. *Operation Sindoor* involved assets from all three services: BrahMos missiles (cost ~US\$2 million each), Akashteer air defence units (₹18 crore per unit), IAF fighter squadrons, and electronic warfare systems (Indian Defence News, 2025).

These figures contextualise the scale and cost of military modernisation and operations, against which media coverage constructs the ideological frames of nationalistic pragmatism surrounding warfare. Conversely, the political economy of defence journalism in India reveals a deeply embedded dynamic pertaining to reporting on war, procurement, and strategic deals is not neutral. It is

shaped by the intersection of state imperatives, corporate interests, media economics, and public discourse. *Operation Sindoor* illustrates the interplay of narrative framing, technological nationalism, threat construction, and silence on dissent quite vividly and reproduces a hegemonic discourse that aligns with the strategic aims of the state and the interests of the defence industry.

Synthesis: Defence Journalism as Ideological Apparatus

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that defence journalism in India functions not as a neutral observer but as an active participant in shaping the contours of national security discourse. Through the cases of major procurements such as Rafale, S-400 TRIUMF, and indigenous programmes like Tejas, Akash, BrahMos, and Project Kusha, as well as operations like *Operation Sindoor*, defence reporting reproduces a dominant ideological framework anchored in strategic autonomy, technological nationalism, and deterrence legitimacy.

PEC + CMS + MIC: An Integrated Framework

1. Political Economy of Communication (PEC) reveals that defence journalism operates within a structure defined by the ownership of media, funding sources, state influence, and strategic interests. Defence coverage reflects the priorities of the state and corporate actors, privileging narratives that support high-cost procurement and indigenous production. The reliance on official sources, press releases, and state-sponsored events sustains a flow of information that aligns with strategic and economic agendas (Mosco, 2009).
2. Critical Military Studies (CMS) underscores how defence journalism constructs and sustains the legitimacy of military action and procurement by framing them as essential to survival in an anarchic world order. Operations such as *Operation Sindoor* are narrated as proof of strategic capability, reinforcing the logic of militarised state power. This framing aligns with CMS's insistence that military knowledge is not neutral but bound up with ideology, power, and authority (Der Derian, 2001).
3. Media-Industrial Complex (MIC) analysis exposes the close symbiosis between the media, defence industry, and state apparatus. Defence

journalism emerges as an integrated node in this complex, reproducing industry-state priorities and shaping public perception to sustain the political legitimacy of strategic investments. The repeated emphasis on “Atmanirbharta” in defence reporting exemplifies how the MIC embeds industrial nationalism within public discourse.

The coverage of *Operation Sindoor* illustrates this triadic relationship. The operation was framed across mainstream outlets as a demonstration of India’s enhanced strategic capacity and technological self-reliance, foregrounding the operational success of indigenous platforms such as BrahMos and Akash. The predominant sourcing from official statements, coupled with the omission of dissenting perspectives, exemplifies the process of ideological reproduction. In PEC terms, the narratives were shaped by institutional interests; in CMS terms, they legitimised militarised action; and in MIC terms, they served both state and corporate strategic imperatives.

VII.CONCLUSION

The prerogatives of ‘National Security Communication’ in India are deeply embedded within the economic and political structures that privilege certain narratives during the times of national crisis. The brotherhood across in crucial in the current epoch of Information Warfare wherein the emotive value can be used as a tool for carrying out asymmetrical warfare using soft power in the narrative domains of informational platform. The preparation of the crisis communication requires certain degree of harmonisation between the armed forces and the media platforms while reporting matters pertaining to defence procurement and capabilities management. The positive news framing by the media with respect to the significant defence strides therefore becomes significant. The positive framing of India’s defence production in FY 2024-25 that reached a record ₹1,50,590 crore, with an increase of 18% over the previous year, seconded with a 90% growth relative to 2019-20 levels, a surge driven by indigenisation policies and private sector participation (Economic Times, 2025) facilitates public confidence in indigenous security capabilities and feeds the ‘Whole of Nation Approach’ required for tackling the menace of asymmetrical warfare. Likewise, the news framing of India’s defence exports that had hit a record ₹23,622 crore in FY 2024-25 (≈ US\$2.76 billion),

with a 12.04% increase over FY 2023-24; Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) that saw a remarkable 42.85% growth in exports, while the private sector contributed ~64% of total exports that year (MoD, 2025) are crucial in the branding of the defence exports from India post-Operation Sindoor success.

However, the Critical Military Studies explains that these narratives are not neutral but deeply ideological, serving to legitimise militarism, when the defence budget for FY 2025-26 is set at ₹6.81 lakh crore (~US\$78.7 billion), a 9.5% nominal increase over the previous fiscal, many media reports emphasise modernization and procurement while less attention is given to opportunity costs or civil sector trade-offs (ET, 2025).

Interestingly, MIC reveals how these processes operate within a network of mutually reinforcing relationships between media, state, and industry. The fact that India’s defence exports have increased more than 34-fold since 2013-14, from about ₹686 crore then to ₹23,622 crore in 2024-25, the focus on indigenisation of defence production repeatedly in media narratives, signals a collective approach towards technological nationalism and self-reliant identity (Times of India, 2025). Together, the three frameworks explain how defence journalism in India reproduces a nationalist discourse that patronises strategic autonomy, technological nationalism, and deterrence legitimacy, thereby shaping the way both policy and public perception are constructed. The case of national security communication and defence journalism discourse, especially in the context of major procurements and operations such as *Operation Sindoor*, thus becomes a paradigmatic example of ideological reproduction in action, demonstrating how media is both a product and a producer of strategic discourse.

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