



Lines being crossed

Posted at: 04/03/2019

The reasons behind India's restraint after the 26/11 attacks are still valid today

- The February 26 aerial strike by India on a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) training camp in Balakot, located in Mansehra district of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, came hardly a fortnight after the Pulwama terror attack on a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy on the Srinagar-Jammu highway.
- The deadliest terror attack was carried out by a JeM suicide bomber, who rammed his explosives laden vehicle into the convoy, killing 40 CRPF personnel.
- It was seen as a message to India that 'Terror Incorporated' in Pakistan was upping the ante and taking matters to a qualitatively higher level.
- That it chose to do so when the general election in India is around the corner further made it an act of dare-devilry, almost inviting India to retaliate.

Turning point

- The aerial attack featured Mirage-2000 jets (designed to fly at speeds of up to Mach 2.2) fitted with state-of-the-art radar and fly-by-wire flight control systems, carrying precision guided missiles.
- Sukhoi Su-30MKI jets were standing by, and early warning aircraft — the Israeli Phalcon and the indigenously built Netra — were also deployed.
- The reliance on air power not only induced a new pattern in the India-Pakistan conflict post-1971, but also marks a paradigmatic change in the nature and character of India's battle against Pakistan-based terror.
- Recruits and tactics from the Afghan Jihad helped intensify the struggle in Kashmir and tilt it in favour of Pakistan.
- Terror, thereafter, became the strategic instrumentality employed to keep India in check.

A big provocation

- Pulwama was the ultimate provocation.
- Preparing a suicide bomber to carry out an attack entails a great deal of psychological training, which is conducted over a considerable length of time (this pattern was seen in the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and of suicide bomber Dhanu responsible for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination).
- Intelligence available suggests that the suicide bomber was assisted, guided and propelled to achieve maximum impact by handlers in Pakistan.
- India's decision to carry the battle beyond the Line of Control and into Pakistan has several implications.
- At its most basic level, it signifies that in the battle against terror, India is more than willing currently to side-step protocols that dictate conduct among nations not officially at war.
- Whether an aerial attack on a terror target inside Pakistani territory comes within the ambit of a credible minimum deterrent is, however, debatable.
- Employment of air power is per se recognised the world over as an escalatory step.
- No amount of diplomatic verbiage can obscure this fact.
- The reality is that while few would sympathise with Pakistan, well recognised as a country that harbours terrorists of every description, there are much larger issues at stake.
- There is the matter of maintaining the sanctity of the Westphalian Order, which has helped keep the peace across the world for centuries.
- This mandates certain rules and procedures as far as the conduct of international relations is concerned.
- Violation of the territory of another country, whether from land, sea or air, whatever be the degree of provocation, is generally perceived as an act of war.
- This should, hence, give us reason to pause, and to debate whether the world could construe our action of violating Pakistani airspace, even if it is to carry out an attack on a JeM training centre, as justified or not.

Upholding India's word

- It may be said that having already taken the step, there can be no going back.
- India's leaders, however, need to be reminded that India's restraint in

responding to previous terror attacks is the crucial factor giving India credibility as far as keeping commitments are concerned.

- It is important to recognise in this context that India is committed to 'No First Use' in nuclear matters, and the world has accepted this guarantee purely based on India's moral capital and stature.
- The question is whether India's word will be treated as inviolable in the future, even as India seeks a seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The Hindu

