

India's Surgical Strike: Stratagem, Brinksmanship and Response

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Peace in South Asia has been elusive as Indian governments have been feeding on ethno-nationalism and identity politics since its inception. With its fragile inclination towards obligations to international law, India's afoul conduct with respect to the alleged surgical strikes against Pakistan was not surprising. In this context, "*India's Surgical Strike' Stratagem, Brinksmanship and Response*" authored by Professor Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, is a well-researched academic account, which offers a comprehensive overview of India's military doctrines, evolution of the Indian military institutions and use of sham 'surgical strike' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as an overpowering political tool. It critically scrutinizes the operability of 'Surgical Strike Stratagem' particularly, in the context of Pulwama incident and examines the legal status of India's so called 'surgical strike' operation under International Law.

While going by the script, it becomes evident that India's adventurism in the guise of surgical strikes has major implications for deterrence stability in South Asia. Expansionism being the motivating factor for India, the discourse of this book reflects India's innate desire to dominate the region by hook or crook. However, the author struggles throughout the book to connect Indian expansionist policy with its covert strategy of 'jaw for a tooth' to punish Pakistan and its armed forces. This difficulty in establishing a link between these two factors is because of

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successful Hindu's hyperrealist strategic thought originating from the classic Arthashastra authored by Chanakya Kautilya in 323 BCE. Nevertheless, it has become obvious from the previous events (like Pulwama) that the Indian military establishment made concocted phantom 'surgical strike' a salient feature of the Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces (JDIAF) - 2017 (P. 6), as well as its strategic culture that is progressing as an aggressive, directive and expansionist rather than absorptive, defensive and inward looking(P. 8).

In the first chapter, titled, "India's Military Doctrine: Philosophical Bedrock", Professor Jaspal establishes that India is an expansionist state and pursues hegemony frantically in the region. The Offensive Realism propagated by BJP Command is akin to the political Hinduism. It is the philosophical bedrock of the current Indian ruling party (P. 22). While theoretically explaining the constructs of India's military doctrines as well as evolution of the Indian military institution and doctrine, the author infers that "New Delhi's increasing militarism is the product of the Hindu nationalists' mindset"(P. 4). Importantly, Pakistan has continuously remained the referred object in the evolution of the Indian strategic thought (P. 19) and its focus remained stuck Pakistan as China and India were enjoying cordial relations in the 1950s (P. 29) until the Sino-Indian War in 1962. In other words, India used its rivalry with Pakistan to justify its military modernization and its aspirations of becoming a major power in South Asia. Indian urge of reaching to the level of major power status brought the menace of 'Surgical Strike' in Indo-Pak strategic equation. Indian strategic thinking started believing that preparing for war is not warmongering: it is instead a responsible and wise statecraft.

What exactly is the Indian phantom of surgical strikes, is the theme of book's next chapter. It critically investigates the reality of

India's surgical strikes on September 29, 2016. The chapter divulges, albeit with proof, that claimed Indian surgical strikes were just to win public support as it was becoming increasingly necessary for Prime Minister Modi to prove that his government can take the decision to attack. BJP and military establishment have been propagating the fictitious surgical strike operation since September 2016 (P. 64). The BJP leaders, with typical hawkish relish, had interpreted that "it was a very bold decision of our PM to approve the surgical strike" (P. 88).

Subsequent chapter titled "India's Surgical Strike: A Sham Stratagem" cautions international community of Indian desire against Pakistan under JDIAF-2017 - a preemptive, punitive, destructive and disruptive Indian war strategy. However, the author argues that the critical examination of the Indian armed forces reveals that in reality, its surgical strike gimmickry is a sham stratagem and only aims at gaining political mileage. Nevertheless, the makers of Pakistan's modern strategy for sustaining strategic equilibrium are cognizant of the Indian strategic enclaved thinking and therefore, seem prepared to give a befitting response to Indian military adventurism (P.129). Moreover, Pakistan purposefully avoided an escalation in a post Pulwama nuclear-tinged crisis because its ruling elite believed in a nuclear taboo. i.e., an all-out nuclear conflagration is unthinkable (P. 160).

Coming to its case study, author indicates the causes and outcomes of Pulwama incident in the fourth chapter, titled, "India's aggression: A Befitting cum Restraint Response". The discourse in the chapter also substantiates the argument that Prime Minister Modi wanted to create political capital under the umbrella of Pulwama attack that, by the way, helped him successfully winning Lok Sabha's Elections of 2019. The discussion reconfirms time and again that India's surgical strike stratagem is a sham stratagem.

The author attempts to conclude the book with legal implications for international community because of surgical strikes. Titled "Risky and illegal Strike", the chapter deliberates that there is a need to shun risky warfare approach by India as "United Nation's Charter Article 2(4) directs states to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state..." (P. 180). So the Indian justification of phantom surgical strike in September 2016, and conduct of the surgical strike on February 26, 2019, at Balakot for destroying the launching camps of militants is an illegal act (P. 196). Giving an alternative, the author proposes that the world needs law fare approach to avoid nuclear Armageddon between the nuclear armed belligerent neighbors.

The write-up is very timely and apt. The book is first of its kind which comprehensively converse with the Indian notion of surgical strikes and questions them. Dr. Jaspal proves that its linkage to alleged terrorists' bases in Pakistan is an illusion and being deliberately generated by India to create false effects. The author has made excellent use of whatever material is there. It covers in great detail the doctrinal evolution of the Indian strategic thought. It also briefly traces the history of conflict between the two countries, with emphasis on the issue of Kashmir for which, after over seven decades, there is no solution in sight. Pulwama incident, too, was a continuity of *Kashmiris* resistance against the brutality of Indian law enforcement agencies in IOK. Dr. Jaspal's main concern is the possibility of a nuclear conflict between the two neighbors if perchance one of the countries decides to go that way. This is a small book. Good for those who want a concise overview of seven decades long conflict between India and Pakistan.