

Understanding India's 'Surgical Strike' Special Operations and Pakistan's Response

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Abstract

There is no systematic examination of India's special operations' doctrinal thinking under the new "Surgical Strike" lingua in the extant literature. To fill this gap, this article resurrects Sun Tzu's ingenious principles of special operations as an embarkment point. Accordingly, it unpicks India's idea and practice of surgical strike special operations and its relationship to broader military strategy. Plausibly, nuclear weapons have induced strategic restraint and caution in India-Pakistan relations. However, nuclear weapons could not affect the decades-long underlying power-political antagonism between them. India is developing its armed forces to gain strategic advantage by exploiting the existing stability-instability paradox against Pakistan. For this purpose, it has weaved together and tailored various doctrines for different levels of warfare, including surgical strikes under the rubric of special operations. To reinforce conventional deterrence, Pakistan promptly makes preventive, proportionate, and non-escalator

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adjustments in its military capabilities (both conceptual and material). To understand India's concept of surgical strike and Pakistan's response, this article employs a methodological framework of analysis and synthesis with theoretical and policy implications. On the theoretical side, it underlines the enduring relevance of classic principles of special operations espoused by Sun Tzu. On the policy front, it reinforces that states tend to pursue special doctrine for different levels of warfare, with seamless integration. India and Pakistan have entered a fresh round of special operations, causing enormous conceptual and operational implications.