

DISCUSSION BRIEF

MARCH 2019

Summary of the roundtable discussion held on 5 March 2019

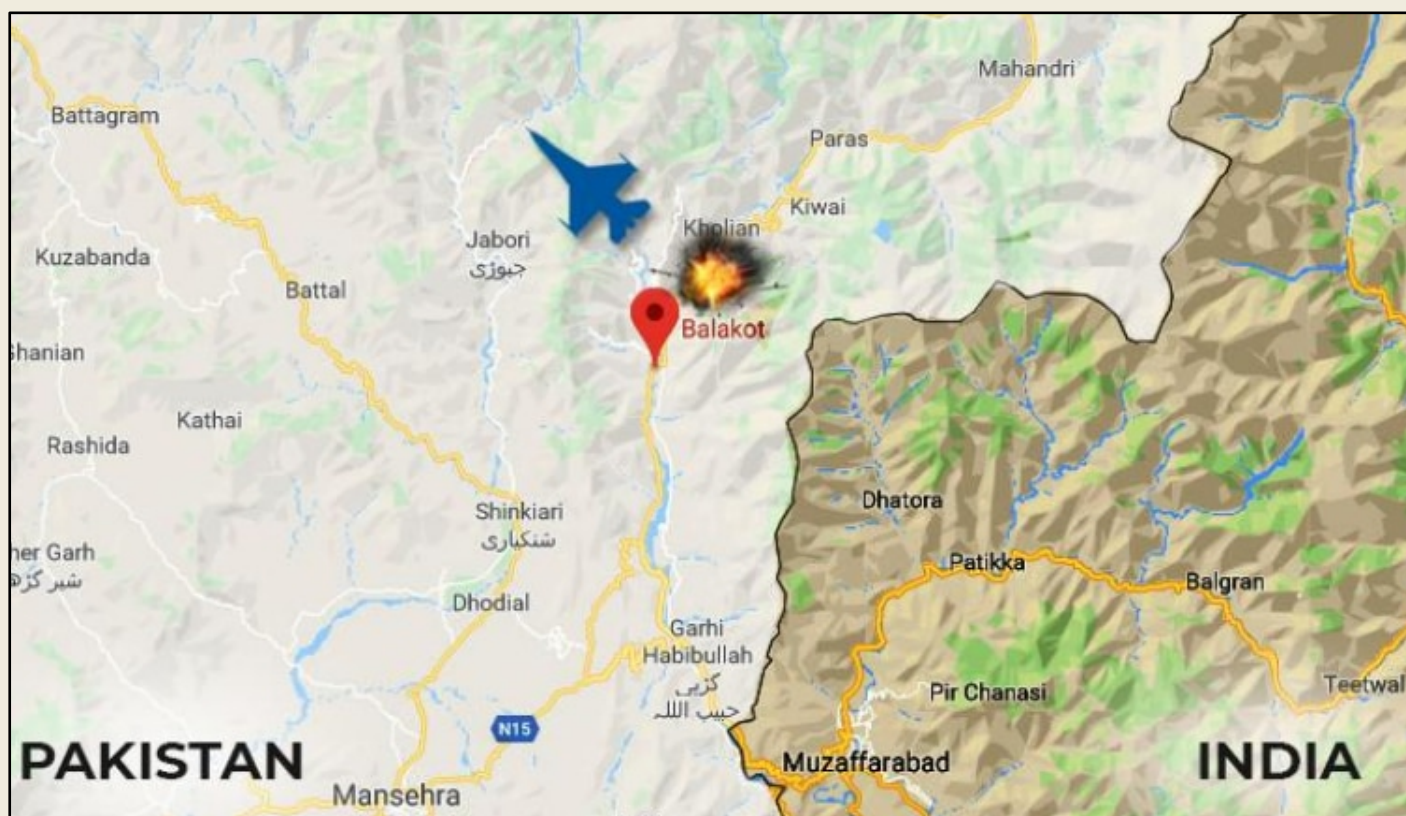
Countering Terrorism CHALLENGES AND OPTIONS

Exordium

The recent terrorist attack by the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) at Pulwama on the CRPF convoy on 14 Feb 2019, demonstrated yet again the continued involvement of Pakistan in cross border terrorism. The situation remains disturbed and tenuous. Most indicators suggest that the situation with regard to terrorism has not improved in Kashmir, despite a more robust counter terror response from India in recent years. The new government in Pakistan, as the previous ones, remains unwilling and unable to restrain the “deep state”, which continues to escalate its terrorist activities against India. With the US likely to pull out of Afghanistan in the near future, a new strategic environment is likely to

emerge in the region. In this environment of terrorism and state sponsorship, it is incumbent on India to evolve new policies and strategic choices.

Against this backdrop, the Forum for Strategic Initiatives (FSI) in collaboration with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) held a select round table discussion on 5 March 2019 among twenty distinguished members of the strategic community in New Delhi. The discussion analysed the post-Pulwama situation and, in particular, considered policy options for India in this context.





Why Pulwama?

From 2002-2003 there has been a perceptible reduction in terrorism related activities, primarily because of a responsive counter insurgency strategy adopted by India. Violence reduced considerably; but, sadly it was not followed up with comprehensive policy initiatives.

The overwhelming voter turnout in Kashmir in 2014 elections and the formation of the BJP-PDP government rattled Pakistan and served as a wake up call for Pakistan's Kashmir policy. With the commencement of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015, a decision was taken by Islamabad to indigenize insurgency in Kashmir and to introduce religious radicalisation as an alternative to terrorism. This became apparent in poor voter turnout in recent years (April 2017) that had dipped embarrassingly low to seven and two per cent.

The introduction of *fidayeen* attacks in Kashmir by local Kashmiri youth in Pulwama is a manifestation of this changed political security environment that yet again seeks to enlarge the scope for sub conventional warfare.

What about Balakot?

Balakot will be remembered for a few firsts. For the first time a nuclear country hit another nuclear country so deep; for the first time in India-Pakistan peace scenario, 12 aircrafts crossed the LoC and the international border; and it was the first time that an F-16 was shot down by a MiG-21. On India's

part, Balakot was a historic decision that demonstrated coherence of action by political actors, military forces and the diplomatic apparatus.

Balakot had three clear goals: Retaliation for Pulwama; question and challenge Pakistan's nuclear deterrence; and, compel Pakistan to change its policy of sponsoring terrorism in its neighbourhood. Regardless of a final assessment of Indian success, the results were clear. India successfully called Pakistan's nuclear bluff. The strikes have clearly established that nuclear weapons are not for war fighting. India's careful diplomatic delineation of the strike also ensured that it did not seek an escalation of the conflict. It also demonstrated that war was not the choice; but a robust armed response will always be within the realm of strategic planning.

Questions have been raised on the number of casualties and the success of the strikes. However, these conditions to assess success are irrelevant. It does not question the necessity for counter action against heinous terrorist acts. The fact that Pakistan responded with a counter strike with 24 aircrafts does indicate that the Indian strikes were successful and achieved their strategic objectives. In that context, it is irrelevant whether five or fifty or five hundred died, but the fact that India crossed the LoC and the IB for a punitive strike represents a doctrinal change that needs to be recognised.

The flip side to Balakot is that should India witness another terror attack, can it do less? A new benchmark in response has been established, which too needs to be recognised.

Way Forward and Policy Options

Military

The goal of military force in counter insurgency is restricted to the management of violence and not a resolution of the conflict. And the insurgency, even in the same context and geography, evolves/mutates over time, and requires a counter insurgency strategy that needs to adapt and evolve with the changing dynamics of the conflict.

Given the above, any counter insurgency strategy cannot have a pure security option and must include winning hearts and minds and assuage the sense of alienation the people experience. India today has to address comprehensively, issues of governance and radicalization of the people by foreign forces and terrorist organizations while developing effective counter terror tactics against radicalized elements and terrorists simultaneously.

Political

There is a need to re-examine India's Kashmir policy, particularly with regard to the youth. Emotionally and mentally they have seceded from India, though they are aware that it will never come to pass due to the historical, cultural and geographical connect with India. India needs an appropriate policy to address this.

The Kashmiri youth, who constitute the biggest demographic group in the state, have for long been influenced by radicalization and have witnessed violence most of their lives. Earlier rigged elections and political

manoeuvrings also led to disenchantment from mainstream politics. The central government has to change many of these aspects and develop a consistent policy to meet the aspirations of this cohort. Through changing the narrative of violence and falsity propagated by the terrorists, the state has to build and strengthen its own narratives. There is an urgent need to provide the youth with the correct historical and cultural perspective, and invest in particular in the small communities of youth studying outside Kashmir.

Has terrorism succeeded anywhere? That's a message that needs to be emphasized and be the core of India's strategic messaging for the Kashmiri youth.

The situation in Kashmir calls for great deal of creativity in solutions - being a region with far less people below poverty line, and where poverty is not the principal problem. Adding to the challenge is the lack of suitable leaders, and deficit of legitimacy across the political spectrum, be it national or regional.

Diplomatic

At the Organisation of Islamic Countries, India managed a historic breakthrough and did well despite Pakistan's efforts. Building on this momentum, India should aim to have smart and selective sanctions imposed on Pakistan, and make use of key international moments like G-20 summits to bring pressure on Pakistan. Now would also be an appropriate time to mobilize pressure against the IMF bailout that Pakistan is seeking.





The question in the mind of the international community is what would India do in the event of another attack, and what would the next cycle of violence look like? Far from being a frozen conflict, Kashmir is now increasingly being seen as something where no one is able to analyse and anticipate action and reaction. This concern of the international community needs to be addressed.

Despite its moderate and balanced approach, countering terrorism in the context of South Asia has evolved into a major security challenge for New Delhi. To counter this comprehensively, a robust and calibrated policy response is required. It is expected that the international community will continue to lend it its full support as was the case this time.

Programme

Background situation and the terror strike at Pulwama | Recent developments in the Valley, spread of terrorism, Pakistan's role:
Lead Speakers : Lt Gen Subrata Saha and Lt Gen Gurmit Singh

Counter responses – Balakot and aerial operations | Nature and effect of the response, proportionality and effectiveness:
Lead Speaker : Air Marshal Vinod Patney

Role of the International Community | Multilateral Platforms and how to take forward the Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism proposed by India pending since 1996 before the UN.
Lead Speakers : Amb. Kanwal Sibal and Maj Gen Nilendra Kumar

Strategy and Policy Options for India
Lead Speaker : Maj Gen Dipankar Banerjee

Discussion on Choices, Options & Strategies

