

Book Review

Sanjay Singh & Mukesh Kaushik, *Air Strike @ Balakot*, Nayi Kitab, New Delhi (2019), Pages-137, Price: Rs.350

Book Review by **Dr. Sudhir Singh**#

In February 2019, Pakistan sponsored terrorists targeted a CRPF convoy in Kashmir (Pulwama) and killed over 40 soldiers. This brazen act of terrorism created a huge anger across the country and there was emerging pressure on the government to take revenge and at the earliest moment. PM Modi invited all SAARC heads of the state during his 1st oath taking ceremony as the Prime Minister of India in May 2014. Pakistan's PM, Nawaz Sharif was also invited. Given the turbulent trajectory of Indo-Pak relations, it was historic given the fact that Narendra Modi was known for his zero tolerance against terror and he rose in politics while asserting that Pakistan is the nursery of the global terrorism. PM Modi led BJP has also been known as hawk against Pakistan.

Coincidentally in February 1999, PM, A.B. Vajpayee went to Lahore and inked an agreement with PM Nawaz Sharif, well known as Lahore Declaration, which almost retreated the commitment from both sides to cooperate and prosper together. It was responded with the Kargil incursion which later turned in a mini war consumed over 1000 soldiers culminating into the withdrawal of terrorist and army by Pakistan after an agreement of July 1999 declared at Washington and guaranteed by US President, Bill Clinton.

This example did not deter Modi to invite Nawaz Sharif in his oath taking ceremony in May 2014. Modi also airdropped at Lahore in December 2015 to participate in the marriage ceremony of the grand daughter of Sharif. But it was also replied with the Kargil like model and air base at Pathankot was targeted in January 2016 by the terrorists again. Incidents of incursions have also increased in the following months.

In 2016, India executed surgical strike inside Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) and destroyed many terror launching pads.

Terror strike at CRPF convoy in February 2019 was unique by many counts. For the first time in any terror strike such a huge number of

Book Review

soldiers had been killed in Kashmir or elsewhere. Public opinion was charged and arrival of death bodies of the slain soldiers in different parts of the country further aggravated the pressure on the government to take action against the perpetrators. In May 2011, United States special Naval seal forces targeted Abbottabad and eliminated terror don, Osama Bin Laden and that was a precise example of using the international law mechanism called 'Hot Pursuit'.

In the last week of February 2019, Modi government used the same right to retaliate under the ambit of the international law and took the revenge while targeting Balokot which was the training ground for the terrorists (JeM). JeM took the responsibility immediately after attack on CRPF convoy so Modi govt. had the adequate ground to target their training headquarter at Balakot. It is beautiful located mountainous city of Khyber Pakhtunwah province. Chinese CPEC also passes through this district. Since 1971, Indian air force had not entered into the Pakistani air space. Even during Kargil war, air force was restricted not to attack even in the parts of Pak occupied Kashmir which legally belongs to India perhaps due to the threat of use of the nuclear weapons.

According to gamut of sources over 350 JeM terrorists were killed during this air strike. It was a maiden attack by the Indian air force deep into Pakistan and also an open challenge to it. This attack has not only dismantled the will power of the terror groups but also vindicated that nuclear blackmail of Pakistan has been hollow. Since Chagai blast (1999) Pakistan was univocal that nuclear weapons are deterrent against any attack on Pakistan. Balakot strike dismantled this hollow claim.

The global fraternity came into the support of India minus few exceptions. John Boltan, NSA, United States candidly asserted that Indian air strike was perfect and India possess every right to retaliate against the perpetrators of terrorism. Pakistan's all weather friend China took line against India but gradually reduced the quantum of criticism because of terror infected its western region of Xingjiang.

After November 2008, Mumbai was targeted by Pakistan propelled terrorists. Manmohan Singh govt. adopted peaceful means to settle it but could not find adequate results. Balokot strike put India equivalent to Israel which has been following the consistent policies to retaliate after terror strike. This air strike also erased India's image as a lazy country which has not been able to take any strategic crucial steps to ensure safeguard to its own territory.

Book Review

Sanjay Singh recalls that just after November 2008 terror attack on Mumbai, journalists were called at Vayu Bhawan just 400 meters away from parliament building at New Delhi and it was asserted that we will take adequate revenge but nothing happened and after meeting of PM Manmohan Singh with his Pakistani counterpart, Yousuf Raza Gilani in early 2009 at Sharam Al Sheikh (Egypt) during a NAM summit, issue was put into the rest even before the dust of the attack was not adequately settled.

In contrast, Balakot put India in an elite club of countries which are known to retaliate back after any such attack. It also encouraged the moral of the armed forces because on earlier occasions they prevented stopped to take any revenge. Balakot therefore will be remembered as unique into the annals of Indian strategic history.

Sanjay Singh and Mukesh Kaushik has done adequate justice with the cause. Entire book is must read for all. The book is in English and Hindi so it enables large class of common readers to know about this historic moment in the history of our strategic planning and action. Earlier these books were solely published in English and this was excluding larger reader groups from about these delicate strategic moves of the country.

Air strike @ Balakot is must read book for all concerned including students, journalists and strategic community. In fact, it is perhaps maiden attempt to systematically put strategic discourse into the public domain in largest Indian language, Hindi besides in English.

Sanjay Singh and Mukesh Kaushik covers strategic issues since last many decades and known for their professional excellence in the domain of strategic journalism. I wish that this book will be of equal use for all concerned.

Dr. Sudhir Singh teaches Political Science at Dyal Singh College, University of Delhi, India and has contributed enormously into strategic issues since his last two decades of academic carrier.