

AIR POWER AT BALAKOT: EXPLOITING FLEXIBILITY FOR STRATEGIC EFFECT

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The lesson of a century of air power is unambiguously clear, that while air power cannot win wars by itself, no war can be won without it.¹

No one today questions the centrality of air power in wars. The US has already shown its air prowess in the many wars it has fought far away from its mainland. But these were mostly with countries that had little air power of their own to pit against the world's most advanced air capabilities. Even in the case of wars between countries whose air forces are roughly evenly placed against each other, the edge is sure to rest with the side that undertakes better employment of the available assets. However, not just in overtly declared and fought wars, but also in situations less than wars, air power has a role to play as an instrument of deterrence, and if and when that fails, then as a potent tool for imposing punishment. India's use of air power at Balakot was a clear case of exploiting the inherently flexible nature and reach of this instrument for achieving strategic effect by undertaking precise, punitive strikes on terror infrastructure allowed

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1. Jasjit Singh, "Some Reflections on the IAF", *AIR POWER Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Monsoon 2004 (July-September). Reproduced as chapter 1 in this volume.

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In an article written in 2007, Air Cmde Jasjit Singh, the well known national security strategist, had highlighted the need for India to acquire good Reconnaissance, Surveillance and Target Acquisition (RSTA) capabilities to ensure the ability to punish Pakistan for its use of terrorism. Twelve years down the road, India gave a live demonstration of this through the Balakot air strikes. This was an action taken by the Indian Air Force (IAF) in response to the terrorist attack on a convoy

of paramilitary forces at Pulwama on February 14, 2019, in which 40 Indian soldiers were killed.

Given India's long history of suffering terrorist attacks fomented and supported from across the border, Rawalpindi was assumed to be behind this attack too. But, even before New Delhi could point a finger towards Pakistan, the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), an outfit well known to operate from Pakistani territory with help of its military, owned up to the brazen and barbaric attack. The organisation has since been banned by Pakistan, and its leader Masood Azhar has been designated a global terrorist after China finally lifted its block to the move in May 2019. India had long demanded this action and was backed by all the major powers (except China). Finally, the desired result came about because of the high pressure that built upon Pakistan after the Pulwama incident. This once again shone the spotlight on Islamabad's actions that were not in compliance with its many commitments on eschewing terrorism, including to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Imposing the ban on the JeM became one move for it to prove its bonafides.

India has no illusions, however, that this spells a change of heart on the part of Pakistan's strategy of using terror. Therefore, the preparation to avoid/handle such incidents in the future, has to remain a point of focus for

New Delhi. The objective of this paper is to examine the role that air power played in the punitive action taken after the Pulwama attack. It needs to be highlighted here that the paper makes a case for air power in general without attribution to which military Service (army, navy or air force) has the ownership of the air assets.

The first two sections of the paper examine what the air action at Balakot achieved, and why air power can be an effective and prudent instrument of choice for inflicting punishment and raising the costs for what Pakistan has long perceived to be its low cost strategy. The third section of the paper offers some suggestions on the kind of capabilities that India must invest in to enhance its deterrence value and effectual exploitation when compelled towards its use. However, before getting to these specific sections, the paper first dwells upon the challenge posed to India by Pakistan's strategy of using terrorism from behind the shield of its nuclear capability. Understanding this would help place the use of air power at Balakot in context.

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PAKISTAN'S USE OF TERRORISM AND INDIA'S DILEMMA

Use of terrorism by Pakistan against India is neither a new phenomenon (having gone on for over two decades), nor a secret any longer. Its intentions and the concomitant build-up of nuclear and conventional military capability, as also the terrorist infrastructure meant for waging a proxy war against India, is today openly accepted by its military leadership as also acknowledged by the international community. In fact, while Pakistan has followed a strategy of covert warfare from the time of its creation in 1947, the acts of terrorism acquired a new lease of life, pace and intensity once the

Pakistan Army became confident of its nuclear weapons capability. These weapons have since served as the shield from behind which it can carry out acts of terrorism. Pakistan's nuclear strategy proclaims a low threshold for the use of its nuclear weapons, including through low-yield weapons in the battlefield. The obvious purpose of such a posture is to deter India from using its conventional military strength against terror strikes by invoking the risk of an inevitable escalation to the nuclear level.

In this game, Pakistan's nuclear weapons are less for 'nuclear' deterrence and more for providing immunity to the country to wage other modes of conflict. Pakistan, in fact, uses the risk of escalation to achieve two objectives: one, to deter India from using its superior conventional military capability in response to the proxy acts of terrorism executed by groups sponsored and trained by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) or the Pakistan Army; and, secondly, to magnify the fears of the international community by suggesting the possibility of a nuclear exchange in the region. Pakistan assumes that a 'concerned' international community would restrain India from using military force. Therefore, its nuclear weapons, in Pakistani perception, "give it the immunity to execute its strategy of bleeding India through a thousand cuts, while curbing India's response to merely dressing its wounds without being able to strike at the hand making the injuries."²

Considered objectively, there are three ways in which India can respond to Pakistan's strategy of covert warfare under the nuclear shadow. One of these, which has largely been followed since 1989, is to maintain high defences and respond to terrorist strikes by fencing the borders better, or intercepting as many infiltrators as possible through timely intelligence and necessary action; a second way of handling the situation has been to reach out to those constituencies in Pakistan that are willing to be reasonable, that do not perceive an existential threat from India and are sympathetic to change the course of Pakistan's behaviour from a largely negative to a positive line of action. Unfortunately, these do not hold much sway in the national decision-making and, hence, despite India's attempts in this direction, no

2. Manpreet Sethi, "Defeating Pakistan's Nuclear Strategy", *AIR POWER Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 2011 (January-March), pp. 105-122.

substantive results are evident. Not much can be expected either, unless there is substantive change in the domestic power structure of the country; a third way of dealing with the situation is to act more offensively in order to impose punishment, not merely on the proxy actors, but the handlers of these proxies.

As is evident, the Indian government has predominantly been engaged in the first and the second types of responses in dealing with Pakistan's terrorism strategy. But, it is also evident that there are limits to the success that can be obtained by purely following these approaches. For Rawalpindi, the seat of military power in Pakistan, proxy war is a low cost strategy, raking in rich dividends for it. Therefore, the costs have to be somehow raised to bring about a change in this policy.

A realisation of this fact, frustration with the failure of the relatively softer diplomatic and economic actions resorted to over decades, the availability of apt military instruments, besides a strong political resolve to try other tools, led to India's response to the terror attacks in 2016 and 2019 being different from that in the past. India showed that it would not be deterred from military action, if it considered it necessary to undertake one. So, in the wake of the terrorist attacks on Uri on September 18, 2016, surgical strikes were carried out by the Special Forces (SFs) of the Indian Army on terrorist camps across the Line of Control (LoC) in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) on the night between September 28 and 29, 2016. And, in response to the JeM attack on the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy in Pulwama in 2019, the IAF was authorised by the political leadership to conduct air strikes on terrorist targets deeper inside Pakistan, beyond POK.

THE BALAKOT ACTION: WHAT DID THE USE OF AIR POWER ACHIEVE?

On February 26, 2019, a dozen IAF Mirage 2000 aircraft equipped with the Israeli-built SPICE (Smart Precise Impact and Cost Effective) 2000 bombs flew across the international boundary between India and Pakistan to target an intelligence-identified terrorist camp in Balakot in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa. Fitted with a robust guidance system that uses the onboard Global Positioning System (GPS), Charge Coupled Device (CCD), Infrared Radiation (IR) sensors to pick up the target in adverse weather/low-light (night) conditions, and scene matching capability (for pin-point accuracy), the SPICE-2000 navigates accurately to an intended target 60 km away. The SPICE-2000 was, therefore, found appropriate for the mission. The Mirages were reportedly accompanied by four Sukhoi-30s to provide air cover. Two surveillance aircraft, the Israeli Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and the indigenous Netra Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) system, were deployed, as were two IL-76s for mid-air refuelling.³

A few hours after the air strikes, the foreign secretary of the Government of India, presented a prepared statement at a press conference, in which he stated,

Credible intelligence was received that JeM was attempting another suicide terror attack in various parts of the country, and the *fidayeen jihadis* were being trained for this purpose. In the face of imminent danger, a pre-emptive strike became absolutely necessary. In an intelligence led operation in the early hours of today, India struck the biggest training camp of JeM in Balakot ... this non-military pre-emptive action was specifically targeted at the JeM camp.⁴

The government spokesperson took pains to underline that in view of the intelligence inputs received, India had acted in self defence by targeting the building that housed the trainees. This was done with precision weapons, taking utmost care not to cause civilian or even military casualties.

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3. Raj Chengappa, "Balakot: How India Planned IAF Strike in Pakistan—An Inside Story", *India Today*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20190325-balakot-airstrikes-pulwama-terror-attack-abhinandan-varthaman-narendra-modi-masood-azhar-1478511-2019-03-15>
 4. "Text of Foreign Secretary's Statement on Air Strike". *Hindu Business Line*, February 26, 2019. Available at <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/text-of-foreign-secretarys-statement-on-air-strike/article26372848.ece>

While Pakistan acknowledged the IAF's intrusion of its air space, and its own aircraft scrambled in response, it denied that any damage had been caused on the ground, except to some pine trees on nearby hills. Pakistan's Climate Change Minister, Malik Amin Aslam, described this as a case of "ecological terrorism" and announced the intention of his country to lodge a protest at the UN! Meanwhile, in an emergency meeting of the National Security Council held the same day, the Pakistani prime minister made it clear that his country would retaliate at a time and place of its own choosing.

As promised, the counter action came the next morning with 24 Pakistan Air Force (PAF) aircraft, a mix of the F-16, JF-17 and Mirage-5. According to media reports, "Mirage-5 tried to bomb the Indian Army's 25 Division headquarters, and an ammunition and logistics depot close to the brigade headquarters in Poonch."⁵ Whether it was a pre-planned move on the part of Pakistan not to deliberately hit Indian military targets but only to "lure Indian fighters",⁶ or a case of luck that the bombs did not fall on Indian Army installations, in either case, another round of escalation was prevented. One of the Indian MiG 21 Bisons that scrambled in response to the PAF aircraft on February 27, entered into a dogfight with an F-16 and suffered a hit. The pilot had to eject and he fell across the LoC in POK. He was captured by the Pakistan Army and freed 60 hours later after much drama. His capture and the efforts that went into his being handed back to India proved to be sobering developments. No further military action took place by either side thereafter. The relationship has since settled down into an uneasy state and the future looks troubled.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the future of Indo-Pak relations. Its purpose, rather, is far more narrow – to examine the role that air power played in the retaliation that India decided to launch after the Pulwama attack. It was the first time since 1971 that India decided to use this instrument. And, it was also the first time that military jets were granted political permission to penetrate the Pakistani air space to hit at targets

5. R. Prasannan, Namrata Biji Ahuja and Pradip R. Sagar, "Inside Story of India's Air Strike and Pakistan's Counter Attack", *The Week*, March 2, 2019, <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2019/03/02/stealthy-skydivers.html>

6. Ibid.

The important point of the IAF action was not whether it managed to kill 2 or 20 or 200 terrorists or the extent of damage caused to structures. Its significance lay in something far more than the material destruction. It exposed the ineffectualness of the Pakistan projection of an automatic connection between Indian military action and its use of tactical nuclear weapons.

deeper inside the country.⁷ Most war-games simulating Indo-Pak crises have accepted that India's initial military response to a Pakistani terror trigger would be confined to POK. But India chose to buck the template. So, what did the air strikes achieve?

A lot of focus of the Indian television channels was on the exact number of casualties that the air attacks managed to cause and the demand for its proof. But, the number of terrorists killed or the amount of damage caused on the ground was really an insignificant dimension of this episode. It must be remembered that

in Pakistan, any number of terrorists can quickly be recruited without much effort; the training imparted to the recruits ranges from as little as two weeks to a few more weeks, depending on the complexity of the terrorist operation. Damaged buildings can be reconstructed easily too. Therefore, the important point of the IAF action was not whether it managed to kill 2 or 20 or 200 terrorists or the extent of damage caused to structures. Its significance lay in something far more than the material destruction.

India's air strikes questioned long held assumptions and created new mind space for retaliation possibilities. Three things particularly stand out and must be recognised for the paradigm shift in India's response strategies. *First of all, the significance of the action lay in India's debunking of Pakistan's nuclear strategy of brinkmanship.* It tested the assumption that Pakistan's nuclear weapons have tied India's hands and provided Rawalpindi with a *carte blanche* for provocative acts. In fact, it exposed the ineffectualness of the Pakistan projection of an automatic connection between Indian military action and its use of tactical nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, the resolve exhibited

7. Everyone well remembers the restrictions that were imposed upon IAF operations during the Kargil operation in 1999.

in the conduct of the air strikes showed an appetite for risk taking which India had shied away from for many decades.

The IAF strikes at Balakot showed that India would not be deterred by the posture of a low nuclear threshold and could conduct military action when it so desired. The surgical strikes had done something similar in 2016. But those had been confined to POK. These air strikes went deeper into Pakistani territory and delivered a message of the availability of capability and resolve.

This is not to suggest that India was unconcerned about the possibility of escalation. Some kind of retaliation at the conventional level was expected. But the IAF strikes demonstrated India's willingness to take that risk and shifted the onus of escalation back to Pakistan, while deterring it from action by exhibiting capability and resolve.

The second significance of the air strikes lay in the rather intelligently calibrated use of military capability by India. New Delhi well recognises the change in circumstances since 1998. The essence of this was well put by Martin van Creveld, a well known analyst on war, when he wrote, "From Central Europe to Kashmir, and from the Middle East to Korea, nuclear weapons are making it impossible for large sovereign territorial units, or states to fight each other in earnest, without running the risk of mutual suicide."⁸ Of course, factors other than nuclear weapons are also impacting the nature of warfare and transforming it from total to limited. But, nuclear weapons with the adversary do cast a shadow that must be accepted. This is not to suggest that force cannot be employed in the presence of nuclear weapons, even though this exactly is Pakistan's contention. It only implies that force needs to be employed differently, "in a manner whereby the risk of escalation to the nuclear level is minimised

Precise use of air power on carefully chosen targets, where India scrupulously kept away from causing any military or civilian damage to its neighbour did manage to send a powerful message of resolve, while indicating no desire for a military engagement.

8. Marin van Creveld, *On Future War* (London: Brassey's, 1991), p. 194.

because the targets are chosen so as not to threaten the survival of the state or its critical elements.”⁹

The surgical strikes in 2016 and the air strikes in 2019 demonstrated how India can tailor military actions to keep them well below Pakistan’s nuclear threshold. India has shown the ability to exploit available capabilities to extract maximum effect with an eye on least risk. Of course, the national leadership is cognisant of the fact that the risk of any military action can never be zero. But, precise use of air power on carefully chosen targets, where India scrupulously kept away from causing any military or civilian damage to its neighbour did manage to send a powerful message of resolve, while indicating no desire for a military engagement.

In a related sense, the *third myth busted in the recent use of air power was that its use is necessarily escalatory*. This has been long held conventional wisdom in India, particularly since the non-use of air power in the war with China in 1962. The impression that had gained ground then, and since, was that because air power widely expands the envelope in which destruction could be caused, it held a high risk of escalating wars. Surely, if the air strikes were to take place as a case of area targeting or indiscriminate bombing on non-combatants or economic targets deep inside another nation’s territory, it would call for a counter action that could exacerbate the extent, intensity or scope of further military action. But, this would have been true when the ability to conduct attacks against targets on the ground from the air was more inaccurate and the risk of collateral damage was high enough to make political leaders unwilling to take them.

Better Information, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) and precision strikes, however, have significantly altered air strike capabilities to ensure minimum collateral damage while making the strike more effective with less force. In the current circumstances, therefore, air power has demonstrated the ability to be used discriminately, especially customised to avoid escalation. Its inherent flexibility and spatial reach allows it to be tailored to handle a delicate situation.

9. Manpreet Sethi, *Nuclear Strategy: India’s March Towards Credible Deterrence* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2009), p. 297.

AIR POWER AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE

The use of air power as an instrument for imposing punishment creates space for the use of force below Pakistan's low projection of its nuclear threshold. If precision is matched with the right choice of target, the use of air power gains further legitimacy. Of course, any military action against another sovereign nation could create pressures on the adversary to respond. Pakistan felt compelled to do so too. But given the signal inherent in the nature of the Indian strike, it did so in a manner by which it got to prove a point about its own capability, but consciously stayed clear of escalation. This gave space to both countries to manoeuvre towards de-escalation.

In contrast, if India had used land forces, the situation could have become more difficult and long drawn. Once engaged in combat, the army cannot be disengaged unless one side either concedes defeat or a ceasefire is agreed to. Land forces are best suited for territorial occupation and for deterrence by denial. But, when land grab is not the politico-military objective and the requirement is to punish in order to deter future actions, then which instruments are most apt for action? Obviously, ingress into Pakistani territory with an aim of territorial occupation to achieve this objective makes no sense. But, hitting out at the terrorists, their leaders, and the infrastructure that supports their activities, does. Therefore, these become the logical and legitimate targets for retaliation and the instruments that can get to them would automatically be the preferred tool of choice.

Balakot underscored the utility of the air arm to meet this objective. Here it must be underscored that the strikes from the air could have been executed by the air assets owned by the army, navy or air force. In this particular case though, in view of the location of the target and the availability of the matching capability to hit, it was best found with the IAF. The important point here is not which military Service was used. All of them belong to the nation and are raised to meet national interests. The issue at hand is the unique attributes of air power that lend themselves to strikes that can be used for flexible response and to cause maximum effect.

Air power, by its characteristic of transcending borders and terrain barriers, offers the unique ability to punish an adversary without having to defeat him first. The need to apply punitive force for political-military effect but at significantly reduced risk of escalation to nuclear levels makes air power a handy instrument to use and less escalatory than sending the army across borders.

The advantage of flexibility that is offered by air power came in most useful at Balakot. It allowed the element of surprise since the aircraft could take off from any airfield (air-to-air refuelling facilitated this), with any combination of weapon systems on board, use precision strikes to ensure calibrated use of force, and enable the benefit of quick escalation and de-escalation. In an essay written on the concept of limited wars in the year 2000, Air Cmde Jasjit Singh had expounded the necessity of military operations that could be used to quickly raise the tempo for strategic effect while also offering

the advantage of quick winding down in order to avoid the risk of further escalation. He wrote, "In the years ahead, air (and missile) power will be the central tool for conventional deterrence, as well as controlled punitive strikes for coercive diplomacy. Naval power, in this regards, would play a close second."¹⁰ For two nuclear armed states, such instruments are of particular importance to avert or minimise the possibility of things spinning out of control.

The Balakot episode provides a case study of the possibilities of use of the air instrument for effective punishment with strategic reach, speed, surprise and calibrated lethality. It serves as one of those military instruments that offers the advantage of flexibility of employment, calibrated control over military engagement, and, hence, over escalation. It visibly demonstrates resolve while simultaneously offering the option of speedy disengagement.

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10. Jasjit Singh, "Dynamics of Limited War", *Strategic Analyses*, vol. 24, no. 7, October 2000.

defeat him first. The need to apply punitive force for political-military effect but at significantly reduced risk of escalation to nuclear levels makes air power a handy instrument to use and less escalatory than sending the army across borders. By ensuring a high modicum of control over engagement and disengagement, air power can be seen to be not just a tool of war, but a means of deterrence and statecraft too.

India's preparedness to take more such actions, as and when necessary, in the case of future acts of terrorism from across the border, calls for deep thinking on the kind of equipping of the armed forces that is necessary.

FUTURE REQUIREMENTS TO RAISE COSTS FOR PAK STRATEGY OF TERRORISM

Pakistan has long believed that terrorism is a low cost strategy for keeping India unsettled. The only way India can hope to change Pakistan's propensity to use the abundantly available and inexpensively trained terrorists is by raising the costs of its activities across all spectra – economic, diplomatic, political, and military – especially to the Pakistan armed forces and the intelligence establishment.

Raising costs, however, cannot be a one-action exercise. It must comprise a number of actions across a range of realms in a sustained manner over time to have an impact. The Indian air strikes at Balakot, as also the surgical action across the border in 2016 in response to the terrorist strike in Uri, managed to cost Pakistan's military a loss of face. In both cases, the armed forces were not able to 'save' their country from a response across the border that targeted terrorist training or launch camps. In both instances, the armed forces were left red-faced and it was a chip off their credibility.

India's preparedness to take more such actions, as and when necessary, in the case of future acts of terrorism from across the border, calls for deep thinking on the kind of equipping of the armed forces that is necessary. According to Air Chief Mshl BS Dhanoa, "In the Balakot operation, we had technology on our side, and we could launch precision stand-off weapons with great accuracy.

In the subsequent engagements, we came out better because we upgraded our MiG-21 Bisons, and Mirage-2000 aircraft ... The results would have been further skewed in our favour had we inducted the Rafale aircraft in time.”¹¹

In order to ensure that the technological edge is maintained to be able to use air power effectively for deterrence and for strategic effect in the case of deterrence breakdown, the acquisition of the right capabilities is a must. The requisite number of aircraft in the right mix of high and less than high end aircraft,¹² equipped with the right weapon systems, particularly of the Beyond Visual Range (BVR) capability, the right kind and number of force multipliers and the training that goes with it are obvious requisites. Better stand-off capabilities of aircraft and weapon systems will ensure better reach as well as own safety. Better air defence will also ensure better protection of own assets. Neither can be ignored. Deep basing of aircraft would allow India to make maximum use of the advantage of its geographical expanse or strategic depth.

At the same time, a very high level of importance needs to be placed on intelligence gathering that utilises all possible instruments and assets in space, at sea or on the ground. Only this can enable the right choice of targets for precise action, with zero collateral damage. International and national legitimacy for actions will rely heavily on this. India’s ability to undertake precision strikes enabled by accurate intelligence was a demonstration of its capability. Though the action was unprecedented and fraught with the risk of escalation, it was nevertheless seen as justified by most political leaders across world capitals only because of the choice of target, enabled by good intelligence.

This article has purported the relative advantage of the use of air power as an instrument of deterrence, and for its effective use in case deterrence fails. A reading of this article must not be taken as an argument for the use

11. “Technology on India’s Side in Balakot Operation: IAF Chief”, *Economic Times*, April 16, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/technology-on-indias-side-in-balakot-operation-iaf-chief/articleshow/68889661.cms?from=mdr>

12. Air Chief Mshl Dhanoa, Chief of the Air Staff, was right in pointing out that for a developing country like India, with its resource constraints, having to arrive at this mix is necessary.

of only the IAF as the only offensive arm to deal with the challenge posed by Pakistan. The use of maritime power, including its air assets, would have its own advantage, especially of surprise, which is critical for a punitive strike. But it would also entail risks to the maritime assets at sea. The pros and cons of use of naval force for punitive action will, therefore, have to be weighed against its vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, let us not forget that even the insertion and return of the SFs after an operation in enemy territory would also demonstrate the effective use of air power. Therefore, it is the advantages of reach, precision, speed and quick escalation and de-escalation that skew the balance in favour of air power.

Meanwhile, it must also be remembered that India's strategic culture favours the use of force always as a choice of last resort. As stated earlier, India absorbed many incidences of terrorism because it chose to remain focussed on economic growth and development. Distractions of military action were avoided. The Indian society and economy have shown the resilience to withstand such strikes and move on. But, tolerance has its limits. Owing to many internal and external factors, the need for punitive action was felt by the government of the day since other economic and diplomatic instruments had failed to change Pakistan's course of action.

Through the use of precision air power in Balakot, India signalled that its fight with Pakistan is not with the citizens of the nation, but with the terrorists and the elements of the deep state that use them to mount a proxy war. Rather intelligently, the Pakistan Army keeps itself out of harm's way, letting the terrorists bear the losses of life, while unabashedly taking credit for keeping India's ability to retaliate in check by showcasing its own strength, particularly drawn from its nuclear weapons. For long, this has been a win-win strategy for the Pakistan armed forces. However, with its recent military action New Delhi has shown its resolve to craft a new approach to cross-border provocations. Use of air power in Balakot has demonstrated a strategy that will not shy away from exploiting the flexibility offered by air power for strategic effect.