

## SURGICAL STRIKES: HALLENGING OR DESTABILIZING THE STATUS-QUO?

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### ABSTRACT

*The Indian populace has erupted with the cheer of enthusiasm and patriotism after the announcement about successful execution of the surgical strike on the terror launch pads situated along the Indo-Pak line of control in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). The act of surgical strikes and the brave decision of any government, give their citizens the sense of security and assurance of peaceful life. However, such scenario does not bode well for the long-term interests of the national security and leads to the undermining of, critical perspectives, and adverse consequences of such aggressive move. In this study, various pros and cons of the surgical strike have been studied and concluded that surgical strikes should be the last resort to combat terrorism. Before opting for the surgical strike, non-offensive, non-invasive approaches such as political dialogues, cultural connections, economic sanctions, and diplomatic isolation must be considered.*

### I INTRODUCTION

The buzz word “Surgical Strike” which is in vogue now a days, has struck the minds and hearts of Indian masses recently after the Uri attack in Jammu and Kashmir. It is a kind of calibrated, stealthily carried out and precision attack on the enemy, which is adopted to destroy the enemy/terror targets across the boundary without incurring any collateral damage to itself. The offensive surgical strike, also known as pre-emptive strikes, is a part of four-pronged defense measures (prevention, deterrence/ defense, reaction, and prediction) as enumerated by Shultz (1986). The history is full of successful such clinical surgical strikes, i.e. Raid on Entebbe, Uganda by Israel in 1976, Operation Neptune Spear in Abbottabad, Pakistan by the United States. As pre-emptive strikes involves reaction coupled with the prediction, the key factors of the success of the operations have been the element of surprise and the precision of attack. Further, post-surgical strike scenario and global politics were influenced by the global position in the politics and economic strength of the country.

On 30th September 2016, the Indian populace has erupted with the cheer of enthusiasm and patriotism after the announcement made by Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) about successful execution of the surgical

strike on the terror launch pads situated along the Indo-Pak line of control in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). Given the amount and magnitude of success and subsequent euphoria, many defense experts termed it as a watershed moment in the history of policies regarding national security. The notion was also bolstered by the open declaration of hitherto covertly carried out operations.

A lot has been written and spoken in all forms of media about the advantages or sometimes overrated merits of such strikes. It has certainly quenched the thirst of nationalists who dreamt of stern action against the terror attacks. It also provided the luxury for political leadership to bask in the glory and find the vast media space in electorally vital time. By virtue of the inclination of the ruling party and its ideology, India is witnessing politically charged environment on the issue of nationalism. It is the time when the aggressive defense policy or military adventurism is seen as a touchstone to testify the nationalist credentials of government as well as the citizens. Such scenario does not bode well for the long-term interests of the national security and leads to the undermining of, critical perspectives, and adverse consequences of such aggressive move. In such situations, it is pertinent to evaluate the pros and cons of the newly adopted combat policy, surgical strike, which is catching the imagination of masses. In this article, authors attempted to put forwards another perspective of the surgical strikes which is being conveniently ignored in the shadow of euphoria.

## II PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS ON MASSES

In time, when the Islamic terrorism is on a high at the global level and anti-global forces are on the rise as evident from Brexit, it has become increasingly difficult to profess the ideology of non-violence. People are desperate to find the solution of violence/terrorism imposed upon them irrespective of dwelling upon origin and cause of terrorism. In such scenario, the act of surgical strikes and the brave decision of any government, give their citizens the sense of security and assurance of peaceful life. Such solutions readily catch the eyes of people who find it as a viable solution to combat the terrorism due to human nature of seeking an over-simplified solution for the hitherto complex issue.

However, it is important to note that such sudden pre-emptive move in the form of the surgical strike also have a psychological influence on the masses. They tend to start believing that violence is the feasible solution against the terrorism. These change in contours of thoughts may lead to greater consequences, it triggers the hatred deep down in the hearts of people and makes them impatient.

At this juncture, it is important for us to recall that India, a land where even mundane activities of life are woven with morals of Buddha and Gandhi, has been the proponent of the majestic idea of non-violence since King Ashoka. Even independent India has recognized the non-aggression as a bedrock of foreign policy. Similarly, the notion of non-violence in thoughts has also envisaged the Constitution of UNESCO by stating "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed". The virtue of the strong nation is

recognized in the time of crisis when it opts not to dismantle its time-tested age-old principles. The non-violence is one of such principles, we (as a nation) have received from our freedom fighters and ancestors, which should not only be preserved but also be reinforced.

The underlying argument is not to solely oppose the surgical strikes and undermine their importance but to establish the need to insulate the masses from adopting the thought of violence even in time of crisis. In recent time, in post-strike duration, chest thumping seems to have taken over the mature admiration of the government's decision. All four pillars of healthy democracy viz. judiciary, executive, legislature, and media must exhibit the maturity educating the masses about the vulnerability of violent approach rather than chest thumping.

### III FOREIGN RELATION

The efficiency of the surgical strike is closely related to the world politics and global scenario. The success of strike is determined not only by the in-situ execution of plan but also the perception management at the global level among the world powers in the post-strike scenario. Even the perfectly executed strike may rage the emotions and interests of other countries if the situation is not handled properly by political leadership. India has been lucky that this time, popular sentiments are against the terrorism at global and domestic level. The idea of good terrorism and bad terrorism is losing its sheen in various power blocks at the global scale. India has managed to garner the support at an international level. However, such conducive conditions may not prevail in future, in time of need. Hence, given the dynamic nature of world politics, surgical strikes should only be the last resort rather than part and parcel of policy.

Further, any lack of coordination between cabinet (Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defense) can also hamper the outcomes of the strike. As we have embarked on a situation where strikes are publicly accepted, such options will be open for future governments too in time of crisis. To avoid the hasty, uninformed and abrupt decision in times of crisis, it is of utmost important to put an institutional arrangement, involving the Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Defense and intelligence agencies, for decision making which will help in taking an informed decision. As long as such institutional arrangement is not in place, the country should refrain from adopting such radical move in future.

### IV HOW EFFECTIVE THESE STRIKES ARE?

When the very first official attempt of the surgical strike comes with the outstanding success, it tends to raise the expectations of the countrymen. At this juncture, it is imperative to understand how effective these strikes are? Let us accept that history has also witnessed the horribly failed surgical strikes. Black Hawk Down, Somalia by the United States, Operation Eagle Claw, Iran by the United States are few of such failed attacks in which the USA

suffered heavy casualties and economic losses. The severely failed strikes by technically, and strategically superior country such as the USA highlights the uncertainty involved due to local geographical or other such factors.

Further, even a successful strike in a particular area does not guarantee the success at the same spot in next time. Such cases were observed during surgical strikes in Syria, where surgical strikes started to be proven as unproductive with time because enemy learned and became more alert. In a way, execution of surgical strikes also demonstrated the proven concept of economy, the law of diminishing return. This very concept is sufficient to argue against the sustained and regular execution of surgical strikes.

Furthermore, interestingly, a very different approach was adopted by Iran in the wake of suspicion of a surgical strike on their nuclear establishment. They have shifted them in urbanized pockets of the country, which makes them difficult to be targeted by using surgical strikes without causing heavy civilian casualties. Any civilian causality may become the cause of embarrassment for the attacking country and may lead to a breach of principles of war ethics according to Vienna Convention. In India's context, surgical strikes may result in the shift of terrorist camps in the urban pockets of Pakistan, which may make them harder to trace them in future. Hence, there are enough pieces of evidence from the Syrian and Iranian crisis, each time the pre-emptive strike is carried out, the terrorist and their state sponsor become safer in the long term. Hence, the political advertising of such strikes may prove to be not only disastrous but also cause a face-palm situation in future.

## V ECONOMIC BURDEN

As evident from the rapid plunge in Sensex by more than 450 points in a day after the official announcement of the strike, it indicates that such strikes adversely affect the investment sentiments in the country. Strikes as an accepted norms by the government may result into increased doubt on the political stability of the country. The political stability has a definite influence on the credit ratings which in turn dictates the growth story of the country.

Further, in post-strike situations, attacker country will have to be more vigilant against the possible retaliation. As any pre-emptive strike has the surprise element as a fundamental idea, its retaliation also becomes unpredictable. Given the approximately 3323 km land boundary of India with Pakistan and 7500 km of the maritime boundary, it becomes severely challenging to be vigilant over the border. The enhancement of vigilance over the long boundary leads to high cost. Furthermore, to avoid the possible escalation of the situation, minimum deployment of the army also appends the cost in vigilance.

## VI EVACUATION OF MASSES FROM BORDER AREA

After the announcement of the execution of the surgical strike, it is vital to protect the boundary from possible retaliations. The enhanced vigilance and troop deployment require the evacuation of the people living in the vicinity

of the border. The sudden evacuation of the people disrupts not only their daily life but also general arrangement necessary for normal individual and community life. More importantly, the most severe suffering inflicted upon the villagers are because of the destruction of their agriculture and education of their kids. These are most important and fundamental issues on which their very existence is depended. These are the nothing less than the building blocks of their aspirations. The breakthrough of strikes may vary due to dynamic and complex political and global scenario, but one thing is certain in the course of post-strike management, which is the disruption of aspirations of poor masses residing near the boundary.

## VII OPENING THE PANDORA BOX

Nothing can be more disastrous if policy makers assume that enemy will retaliate only at the boundary as a part of vengeance of surgical strikes. The porous boundary, non-uniform population, cultural divide are sound arguments for the enemy to devise strategy otherwise. As direct action on the boundary may lead to international pressure, the enemy may devise a long-term strategy which can disrupt the very fabric of the Indian society. These strategies include indirect funding to the caste struggle, class struggle, communal violence and building dummy NGOs to cause political instability. Further, large metropolitan cities can be targeted by terrorists, which can cause the loss of thousands of crores within a day as witnessed during 26/11 attack. Similarly, the enemy can intensify the funding to armed rebels such as Maoists or re-activate the sleeper cells in economically and strategically important cities. These kinds of indirect actions can damage the social and communal harmony and impede the growth of the country as a whole to the greater degree. Further, in extreme conditions, under popular demand, the vexed situation can be escalated to war, which can inflict irrecoverable wounds to the growth story and severely undermine the wishes of alleviating the poverty.

## VIII CONCLUSIONS

As the term “surgical”, herein used for military purpose, is basically a medical term essentially deals with post disease condition, in which a problematic part of the body is focused and dealt. Here, in the present context, the disease is terrorism. Upon deteriorating the situation, surgery is undeniably an only solution. However, the pre-emptive strikes becomes the symbol rather than viable too to fight against terrorism in long terms. In the present commentary, various aspects of the surgical strikes were delineated. It is concluded that before taking such aggressive steps, it is important to adopt an integral approach involving all the important ministries and security agencies. Simultaneously, consideration of social, political, and economic conditions of the country coupled with the global scenario is vital. Any lapses in the process can lead to disastrous results.

The surgical strikes focus on the symptoms of the terrorism. However, in parallel, we must devise a strategy which necessarily deals with the origin and cause of the terrorism. Before opting for the surgical strike, non-offensive, non-invasive approaches such as political dialogues, cultural connections, economic sanctions, and diplomatic isolation

must be considered. At the same time, the domestic populace must be educated about demerits of the war mongering and the importance of peace, love compassion and non-violence. We must set the platform where peace loving society can be built upon. Similarly, we must make an attempt to bring the nations on the same page to bring about the peace by realizing the beautiful thoughts of Benjamin Rush.

*“As the War Office of the United States was established in a time of peace, it is equally reasonable that a Peace Office should be established in a time of War.” ~Benjamin Rush*

### REFERENCE

Shultz, R. H. (1986): “Can Democratic Governments Use Military Force in the War Against Terrorism? The U.S.Confrontation with Libya”, World Affairs, Vol. 148, No. 4 (spring 1986), pp. 205-215.