India's Air Strike on Pakistan

Why in news?

The Indian Air Force bombed the Jaish-e-Mohammad's biggest terror-training camp in Pakistan's Balakot.

What happened?

- Indian Air Force took a "non-military pre-emptive action" specifically targeted on a Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terror training camp in Pakistan's Balakot.
- The camp is based 70 km inside the Line of Control (LoC), in the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakthunkhwa.
- The operation was carried out by 12 Mirage-2000 fighter jets, which unleashed five one-tonne bombs on the camp.
- A large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis who were being trained for fidayeen action were eliminated.
- The attack comes few days after 40 CRPF jawans were killed by a JeM suicide bomber in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir.
- Following this, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan asked the armed forces and the people of Pakistan to remain prepared for all eventualities.

What is a "non-military pre-emptive strike"?

- - Hitting a military target would be construed as an act of war; a **"Non-military"**non military strike means that a military target has not been hit.
- So Pakistan's military personnel and infrastructure were not targeted, and civilian casualties were avoided.
- - By calling it a pre-emptive action, India clarifies that it was an act of **"Pre-emptive"** self defence and not that of revenge.
- It indicates that the action was based on an assessment of an imminent threat.
- It was said that credible intelligence was received that JeM was attempting suicide terror attack in various parts of the country.
- In effect, the operation was an intelligence-driven counter-terror strike rather than escalatory military aggression.

Does this signal a shift in India's stance?

- The present strike was carried out in Pakistani territory, not in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir which had usually been the target for retaliatory action in the past.
- The decision to send Mirage jets across the Line of Control (LoC) to fire missiles 70 km inside Pakistan represents a major shift.
- Notably, during the 1999 Kargil war, Indian PM Vajpayee had drawn a red line over the IAF crossing the LoC, to avoid international accusation.
- It is yet to be seen how far the JeM has been set back by the present strike.
- But the strikes mark a shift in India's willingness to push the war against terror into Pakistan territory.
- All other options had been exhausted in making Islamabad keep its commitments since 2004 on curbing the activities of terror groups like the JeM.
- India takes note of the shift in global opinion and there is little tolerance today for terror groups that continue to find shelter on Pakistan soil.

What could Pakistan do?

- Pakistan PM Imran Khan has called for a joint session of Parliament and for its diplomats to raise the matter at international fora.
- He has convened a meeting of the National Command Authority that oversees Pakistan’s nuclear policy.
- However, Pakistan’s options are limited.
- It could continue to deny that the Indian strike caused any damage on the ground, and rule out the need for retaliatory strikes.
- Otherwise, it could escalate the situation with a military response.
- It could also make a break from its past, and begin to shut down the terror camps on its soil, which can certainly invite international appreciation and ensure peace in the region.

Source: The Hindu, Indian Express

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