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*Report – Public Talk*

# **“Balakot Strike and its Impact on Destabilizing South Asia”**

**February 28, 2022**



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### PICTURES OF THE EVENT



In order to commemorate Pakistan Air Force's victory over its Indian counterpart on February 27, 2019, The India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) organised an Public Talk titled “**Balakot Strike and its Impact on Destabilizing South Asia**” on February 28, 2022.

Welcoming the guests, Dr. Saif Malik, Director India Study Centre ISSI, said that it was a huge miscalculation on the part of India to think that there would be no response from Pakistan. To their surprise, Pakistan Air Force conducted six air strikes near Indian military installations in the region of Indian occupied Jammu and Kashmir, shot down two Indian fighter planes and captured a pilot. Thus, Pakistan busted the myth of Indian invincibility superiority. Since 2019, February 27 has become a day of national pride.

In his introductory remarks, Director General ISSI, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry said that India was trying to create a new normal that it can engage in a conventional confrontation below the nuclear overhang. Similar claims of conducting surgical strikes were made in 2016 which in reality never happened. At that time, the Indians were checking the waters. In 2019, when they actually conducted the surgical strike, Pakistan was better prepared. Pakistan Air Force made us proud that day. Pakistan Air Force conducted the operation that was swift and magnanimous. By releasing the Indian pilot, Pakistan sent a message that there is no need to engage in confrontation.

Sharing his views on “*Operation Swift Retort and Future Challenges for PAF*”, Air Marshal Farhat Hussain Khan, HI (M), (Retd), President, Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), said that the events of February 2019 almost shook the strategic stability of the region. He appraised the audience in detail about operational details of Indian air attack and Pakistan's operation swift retort. Entire tactical environment suited the Indians but despite that they failed to engage any worthwhile target because the planning was flawed. They underestimated the adversaries and their selection was also not good. Overall, it was an aimless and purposeless strike where India failed to achieve political as well as military objectives.

Dr. Rizwana Abassi, Associate Professor (IR), National University of Modern Languages (NUML), talked on “*Balakot Crisis and Strategic Stability in South Asia.*” She said that the eruption of the Pulwama/ Balakot crisis set a new pattern of engagement between India and

Pakistan. This misadventure was raised with dangerous escalatory risks that carried the potential to have swiftly breached the nuclear threshold. This episode posed new threats to regional strategic stability. The Balakot incident was an example of the Stability-Instability Paradox - the notion that two nuclear states are more likely to engage in small scale conflicts because each side knows that the other side does not wish to escalate the conflict given the nuclear risks. India miscalculated that it could defy the credibility of deterrence of Pakistani forces, thus questioning its national resolve. Yet, credible deterrence was held. Breaches are bound to occur but deterrence hold. She said that risk reduction measures can include reinitiating dialogue, rehabilitating strategic communication dialogue channels and regulating the role of media during times of crisis.

Lt. Gen Yasin Malik spoke on “*False Flag Operations - A Threat to Peace in South Asia.*” While explaining the origin of the term “false flag operation”, he said that the term has been derived from maritime affairs where ships used to fly the wrong flag to send the wrong identity of the ship. This was done with wrong intentions. In this milieu, the concept of False flag operation emanates from the domain of conspiracy theory wherein an operation is conducted by a party or a government which may look to appear it was sponsored by another party or government. He said that 9/11 was the biggest false flag operation ever conducted in the history of mankind. In India –Pakistan context, the rape and killing of Bengalis by men wearing Pakistan army uniforms, attack on Taj hotel or Pulwama attack are just few examples of false flag operations. India has launched a massive campaign by building a narrative of declaring Pakistan a hot belt of violence and terrorism. The entire election campaign was built on an anti-Pakistan narrative. The war frenzy of Indian media can be gauged by the fact that whenever terrorist attack takes place in India, it starts blaming Pakistan even before the start of an investigation. In order to ensure peace in the region, Lt. Gen Yasin Malik suggested that India must stop contemplating the military option to subjugate Pakistan, failing which it will resort to false flag operations to initiate and justify hostilities. These hostilities may be initiated by India but will be concluded by Pakistan as and when it decides.

Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan, shared his view on “*Post Balakot Trends and Trajectory of India -Pakistan Relations.*” Recalling Pakistan’s steps for improving relations with India for resolution of outstanding issues, Ambassador Aziz Ahmad Khan said that whenever both

countries made substantial achievements in resolving the disputes, India always later backtracked. Referring to various statements regarding opening trade channels between India and Pakistan, Ambassador Aziz opined that with present dispensation in New Delhi, the possibility of forward movement between these two countries does not exist at the moment. India's recent acts in Kashmir are against the international law, Simla agreement and Indian constitution. Similarly, the situation of Muslims is also not good in India. Elections are just round the corner and if BJP does not get the desired result in ongoing UP elections, India will get ballistic as far as Pakistan is concerned to divert the attention of masses. He warned that Pakistan must remain vigilant as anything like Balakot is likely to happen. He also suggested that instead of being too optimistic about improving relations, Pakistan should concentrate on resolving the Kashmir issue.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed highlighted two elements in national security that are Pakistan's finest hour i.e. when Pakistan went nuclear and Operation Swift Retort. He said that Pakistan did not brag but showed magnanimity in victory as it released the Indian pilot within three days. Senator Mushahid said that India is a bully. If Pakistan had blinked, it would have tried to overrun Pakistan. But Pakistan did not blink and instead retaliated, India backed off. India knows that Pakistan has the will, capacity and courage to hit back. He lamented the silence of the International community over illegal annexation of Kashmir by India. It is clear that Pakistan cannot expect the west to play the role of crisis manager. He said that India is going through the most profound transformation of its state and society in the last 75 years. It is becoming the republic of Hindutva. India has a strategic clarity towards Pakistan. They want to demonize, damage and destabilize Pakistan. Under Modi, India has an ideological policy – Muslim bashing at home and Pakistan bashing outside.

With these remarks, the event came to its end. Board of Governors ISSI Ambassador Khalid Mahmood presented mementos to the speakers.