

'Abhinandan's release was a saving grace for both sides'

PARLEY

In the aftermath of the air strikes by India and Pakistan, strategic experts Happymon Jacob and Dhruva Jaishankar debate the responses by both sides and the outcome, in a discussion moderated by Suhasini Haidar. Excerpts:

Have we reached a point of no return? Have the air raids into Pakistan been a successful advance in India's strategic response to cross-border terror?

Happymon: Yes and no. Yes, because unlike earlier occasions, Indian forces actually crossed the Line of Control (LoC) and struck a target in mainland Pakistan. The Indian side wanted to create a new military normal by this action and this is unprecedented. But the Pakistanis have also struck back through their own air attacks. They have told India in a way that they won't accept the new military normal. It is a psychological game, where India wants to push the envelope and Pakistan wants to ensure that India does not do that.

Dhruva: I think there are two significant departures. One is striking mainland Pakistan and indicating that India would not be constrained by only Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) as a retaliation point. After all, we have had terrorist attacks outside Jammu and Kashmir in other parts of India in the past, so why should India be limited to PoK? The second is the use of air power.

What I do not think will change is any belief that this will actually deter Pakistan. I don't think that terrorist infrastructure would be wound down tomorrow. So, in that sense, I don't think it's a departure. It's part of an evolution. The one other change has been somewhat on the diplomatic front... the reactions of the U.S., Europe, Australia and others, and to a lesser extent the Gulf countries, in terms of accepting India's strike as pre-emptive self-defence.

Happymon, in normal times, we hear Pakistani generals and officials talking about tactical nuclear weapons. Yet, in this crisis, not once have we heard the word 'nuclear'. So India has, in a sense, called Pakistan's nuclear bluff. Would you agree?

Happymon: The Pakistani side has

always maintained, in Track II forums, that it is not as if Pakistan is going to use a nuclear bomb against Indian conventional aggression on day one. They have indicated that they have enough material to fight for at least two weeks. So, you're looking at the possibility of nuclear weapon use coming only at the end of that process. Second, the Pakistanis have also indirectly made it clear that anything India does within PoK, they will not respond with nuclear threats. Third, in this case, there was no nuclear posturing from their side. So, it would be incorrect to say that the Indian strike has called Pakistan's nuclear bluff. At the same time, it has conveyed in no uncertain terms to Pakistan that India will retaliate one way or the other to terror.

Dhruva, do you think from the international perspective there was a real fear of escalation?

Dhruva: It was a very interesting 48 hours after the Balakot strikes. The first day, after India indicated that this would be a limited strike, I didn't think they were concerned. But after the afternoon or evening of February 27 and the morning of February 28, there were a lot of panicky phone calls and messages going around the world about this.

It is also sometimes in Pakistan's interest to over-inflate the potential nuclear dangers because that is often used to invite third-party mediation, particularly to put constraints, as they see it, on India. We saw this on February 27 and early morning of the 28th.

Happymon: I agree, except that before a strike happens, it is in Pakistan's interest to inflate the nuclear threat. But once a strike happens, it is important for the Pakistani side to say, 'no, we never said that,' to be seen as lowering the threshold. It's about the post- and pre-posturing.

It seemed as if Pakistan then used the panic over the attacks in order to bring everybody in. Do you think that's one of the frustrations for Indian strategists - that in this escalatory ladder, it's always the case that no matter what India is able to do, Pakistan will then bring in this nuclear threat or the threat of escalation between the two countries to defuse it?



Happymon: Absolutely, it's in Pakistan's interest to play to the international community and tell them that it is something really bad happening here, so you come in and resolve it. This time, the international community waited for a little while, giving some time to the Indian side, saying 'you want to do a few things you go ahead and do it, because we're going to give you leeway'.

Given that we have had many crises, the international community understood how this game gets played in South Asia and that these are not really irrational actors who would nuke each other. There is some steam venting that will happen, and if that steam venting doesn't happen, it's going to be more difficult for domestic audiences. So, they understand the nuance of a two-level game that both the sides are playing: one at the domestic level and another at the international bilateral level.

Do you think international mediation is more pronounced than before? Did it actually work?

Dhruva: It's hard to know what exactly led to the release of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman. There were back-channel talks, and this is a double-edged sword as far as India is concerned. India does not mind mediation as long it puts more pressure on the Pakistanis. But this idea that they would be a neutral party would actually diminish the power disparity between India and Pakistan, which is why India has been resistant to such talks.

Happymon, you were prescient a

craft that went down in the Balakot operation. The possibility of at least one plane going down in that operation would have been contemplated by the Indian Air Force. They would have thought through to some degree except not exactly how it ended up playing out. The release was in some ways a turning point as it allowed de-escalation on both sides, but I would not over-read this, as a certain amount of pressure was put on Pakistan to try and find a face-saving device.

How important is it for the government to actually put out evidence on the number of casualties in the strike?

Dhruva: I don't think it's that important. I think the most significant aspect was that India could show that a strike could be done in the future on a terrorist campaign. One of the reasons why that is so important is we've seen after every crisis a pull-back away from the PoK. After 2008, after the 26/11 attacks, we saw Lashkar-e-Taiba move a lot of its assets out of PoK into Pakistan proper, because they were worried about Indian reprisal.

We will find out more information in the coming days and weeks on what exactly happened in Balakot. But I will say there are a few more significant things. One, Pakistan had to effectively admit that it was in touch with Jaish-e-Mohammad, which Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has done twice. The images of a signpost that clearly mentioned Masood Azhar and others have now made the rounds. They had to use F-16s in retaliation, which will have raised red flags in the U.S. because F-16s were provided to Pakistan under conditions that they would not be used for offensive operations. So, I think these things have been somewhat embarrassing to Pakistan.

Happymon: I agree that the objective was to show that India has a resolve to do something vis-a-vis terror wherever it is in Pakistan. But when Pakistan struck back at India, saying that they will not let a new military normal [settle], what we are looking at is the fact that we are back to square one now. Will India strike again? If it strikes, Pakistan will strike back. So, to that extent, the fact that we are back to the status quo, it is important for the go-

vernment to show evidence of the destruction of the terrorist camp. **Dhruva:** If evidence is released, it could add pressure on Pakistan to retaliate. So that is probably why the evidence has not been released.

Pakistan has admitted that Azhar is there. But I do want to ask whether this kind of a strike does have the potential of making Pakistan change its mind, and if not, what will?

Happymon: Absolutely not. This kind of a strike will not and is unlikely to make Pakistan change its mind. We knew that Azhar was in Pakistan for a long time. We know that there are terrorist havens in Pakistan. But the fact is, this sort of a dogfight and the Pakistani messaging was very good for them. Prime Minister Imran Khan came out on top in the battle of perceptions.

While Prime Minister Narendra Modi was busy electioneering and campaigning, here was a man who was messaging the international community, addressing Indians and Pakistanis at the same time. His messaging was pretty good and the entire attention has now shifted away from terrorism to escalation and the dogfight and the attack using aircraft against Pakistan. For some reason, I think the messaging has not been all that accurate on our side as far as that particular issue was concerned. There was an additional question about what will make Pakistan crack down on terror. Now, this may be a very unpopular opinion, but I don't agree with the argument that 'terror and talks' don't go together. I think we should engage in various kinds of talks even when you have a situation of terror being given safe haven in Pakistan. Pakistan is a complicated country. If it is the Army that's in power there, let's reach out to the Army.

In the event of another strike of the kind we saw in Pulwama. Do you think India's response will be targeted strikes on some kind of terror facility or will there be something else?

Dhruva: I think it will have to be something else because I think that card has been played at least this time around. I think there are other options on the table.



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Scan the QR code to watch the full interview online

SINGLE FILE

Being global

The World Bank's board will have a huge responsibility if Trump's nominee becomes its President

VINOD THOMAS



The World Bank is in the news because of the imminent change at its helm. That is an opportunity for the Bank to help countries confront the dangers of climate change, widening income gaps and hindrances to trade. But this chance might be squandered if U.S. President Donald Trump's nominee for the presidency, David Malpass, an Under Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, is put there mainly to reverse climate action and limit the Bank's developmental role.

The arrangement whereby an American always heads the World Bank, and a European leads the International Monetary Fund, is deeply flawed, not least because these institutions advise countries to follow merit-based governance. Be that as it may, the crucial question going forward is whether the Bank can help the world confront daunting challenges. The potential is huge given the size of its lending: \$64 billion in 2018. Over the past 70 years, India is the largest recipient of lending from roads and energy to health and education.

The World Bank's support for open markets and trade can be partly credited for parts of the developing world delivering high growth and poverty reduction. Estimated declines in extreme poverty have been striking over the past quarter of a century in China and India. But the Bank should also share the blame for the costly and often irreversible damage to the environment that accompanied the charge for growth. In addition, India's daunting agenda also includes reducing huge inequalities, especially in access to education, health, water and sanitation.

A specific concern about Mr. Malpass is that he might not pursue the Bank's plan to lend \$200 billion over the next five years to fight climate change. This is an area where the private sector is doing too little and even governments are falling short of the modest goals they set at the Paris climate summit in 2015.

The World Bank also needs to couple financing with expertise in tackling problems of rapid urbanisation and gaps in service provision. Improving governance and tackling corruption are guaranteed silver bullets for progress in these areas.

One way to enable the World Bank to tackle the new development challenges, irrespective of who is at the helm, is to fortify its board of directors with strong development leaders. If there is a desire to avoid a situation where the Bank primarily serves U.S. interests, notwithstanding Mr. Malpass's nomination, the board, comprising 25 directors, must be vastly strengthened. The Bank is a highly capable organisation. But to deliver on its potential, it must focus on the new challenges, blend financing with knowledge, and reform its governance.

The writer is a former Senior Vice-President for Independent Evaluation at the World Bank, and co-author of 'Multilateral Bank and the Development Process'



DATA POINT

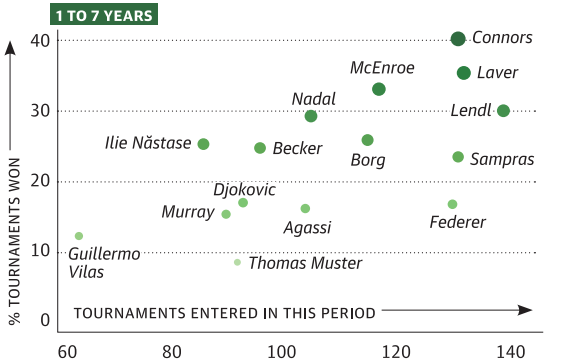
Ageing like fine wine

Roger Federer won his 100th career title at the Dubai Tennis Championships on Saturday. Analysis of the Swiss great's career shows that he has won more titles compared with other prolific winners as the years progressed. By Vignesh Radhakrishnan & Varun B. Krishnan



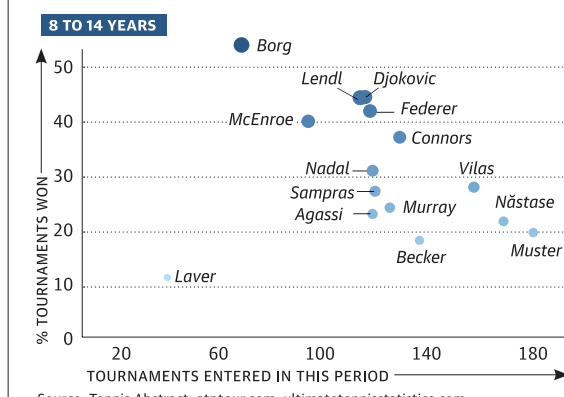
From beginner...

In the first seven years, Federer won close to 17% of tournaments, significantly lower than the success rate of Jimmy Connors (45%) and Rod Laver (35%)



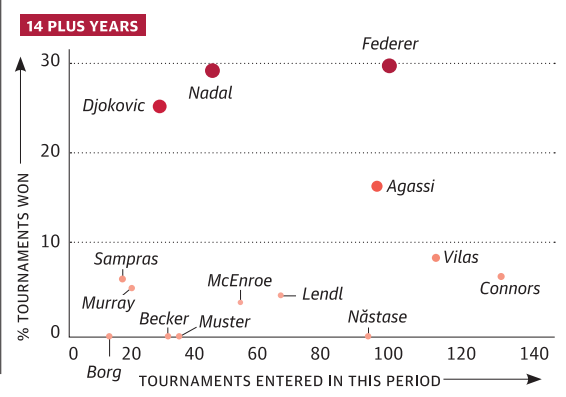
...to champion...

Federer won more tournaments in the next 7 years, winning 41% of the titles for which he played. Novak Djokovic and Ivan Lendl had a similar career trajectory. Bjorn Borg was the outlier winning 53% of tournaments he played



...to legend

In the final phase, Federer outclassed others winning 29% of the titles for which he played. Rafael Nadal and Djokovic are close on his heels. Connors, despite playing for 138 titles, won only 7% of them



FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 8, 1969

Astronauts' hazardous day

Apollo-9 astronauts James McDivitt and Russell Schweickart to-day [March 7] launched their flimsy moonship on a critical manoeuvre which will decide if a man can step on the moon this year. After just over four hours flying separated from the command module, the fragile lunar module headed back towards rendezvous with its mother ship and the relative safety of its control capsule - the only vehicle which can bring the two astronauts back to earth. Mission control at the Manned Space Centre here [Houston (Texas)] reported the first firing of the spider-like lunar module's ascent engine was "good and on time" at 16:58 G.M.T. (22-28 I.S.T.). Confirmation of the firing was slightly delayed as the spacecraft was out of radio range of ground stations at the time.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 8, 1919.

The Indian Press Act.

(From an Editorial)

The latest attack of the Madras Government upon the liberty of the Press is in declaring the forfeiture of the security deposited by the Tamil Daily, the Desabhaktan, in Madras. The order has been made under section 4 (1) of the Indian Press Act, and the articles upon which action has been taken were published in the paper on the 24th June 1918, 28th June 1918, 4th July 1918 and 20th November 1918. That articles which appeared seven months before now should have been availed of to put into operation the drastic provisions of the Press Act is a very significant circumstance. If they were of such an inflammable nature as the present action of the Government implies, the officials of the Government must have been sleeping at their post of duty. We have perused those three articles as well as the one published on the 20th November 1918, and they are such as a journalist imbued with a proper sense of duty would feel justified in writing.

CONCEPTUAL Diseases of affluence

MEDICINE

This refers to diseases that are increasingly common among the populations of the various developed countries of the world. Obesity, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and coronary heart disease are considered to be the most common examples of such diseases. They are seen as the outcome of improving living standards in the Western world that have led to a significant increase in the lifespan of people but also led to drastic changes in their daily lifestyle. Diseases of affluence are in contrast to diseases of poverty that are the result of low living standards that prevent people from having sufficient access to quality healthcare.

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