

How India unfolded Mission Balakot beyond the LoC



On February 26, while India woke up with the word of "surgical strike 2.0" as a retaliation for the Pulwama attack, the biggest camp of the Jaish-e-Mohammed in Balakot on Pakistani side of LoC was long shaken with the 1000kg air strikes by IAF. Here's how mission Balakot strike unfolded.

In 11 days after the Pulwama terror attack, New Delhi had been planning for a confidential bold comeback, something that would tremble those who pick up guns against the nation and its army. New Delhi says that Mission Balakot had received political clearance last week with support from all parties. Unlike the ground forces-aided surgical strike after Uri, the plan this time was to use some of the finest pilots, best aircraft and most modern weapons of Indian Air Force and pin-target the terror training camps instead of Pakistani army.

The target was Balakot, around 80 km from Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir beyond the LoC, the region which was reported to be one of the largest training camps of Pakistan-based terror outfit Jaish-e-Mohammed. Balakot was picked as a target because Indian intelligence had received "credible information that JeM had shifted many terrorists and hardcore operatives, along with their trainers, to the Balakot camp - a facility that can house as many as 500 to 700 people. The risk stakes were high, and the pressure for a guaranteed success was even bigger - but at 3:30 mission Balakot was launched with NSA Ajit Doval and PM Modi tracking it live.

As per reports, four Sukhoi Su-30 aircraft escorted a dozen of Dassault Mirage-2000 fighter jets - executing a "forward sweep" to allow the escorting aircraft to test the adversary's response before the strike aircraft move in to hit the target. Two decoys and masking hill techniques were used to distract Pak radars - and then, enter Mirage-2000 jets. These French-made fighter jets are loaded with night vision-capable glass cockpit, upgraded navigation and IFF (identify friend or foe) systems, advanced multi-mode multi-layered radar, and a fully integrated electronic warfare suite - all ready for the strike.

At 3:45 am on February 26, while everyone at the JeM camp was "sleeping" and Pakistani defence "had no clue" that the Indian jets had entered so deep into their country, the jets rained down 1000 kg laser guided missiles. The SPICE-2000 and Crystal Maze Mark2 also known as AGM 142 Popeye missiles were used to pin-target the camps and destroy it to rumbles in no time.

According to official data, the strikes took just 1.5 minutes and the fighter jets returned home after a 19-minute operation, without a scratch or any casualty. Once the bombs were dropped, two IL-78 mid-air refuelling tankers helped the Sukois and Mirages to fuel up and return to Indian airbases - all safe and successfully completing Mission Balakot.