

THE WEEK AFTER: ON INDIA-PAK RELATIONS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

With India and Pakistan [deciding to de-escalate post-Balakot tensions](#), the focus has moved to the diplomatic sphere. India's strikes on a target deep inside Pakistan were coupled with diplomatic manoeuvres that ensured no country censured India for the move. And in a turnaround for ties with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation after half a century, [External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was able to put the country's case before the body](#), while [Pakistan stayed out](#). In recognition of India's justification to act against an imminent terror threat from the Jaish-e-Mohammad, the U.S., the U.K. and France also moved in at record speed to bring another listing request against the group's founder, Masood Azhar, at the UN Security Council's committee for terror designations. There is a reasonable assumption that China will not block it this time as it did during the last three attempts. There were other outcomes that defied the past. Although Islamabad had spoken in the past of its abilities with "tactical nuclear devices", there was no such mobilisation after India's strikes. On the other hand, Pakistan was able to, with its aerial response, also indicate that it was not without non-nuclear options. Finally, indications that the international community was involved in effecting a breakthrough are clear. U.S. President Donald Trump hinted at a breakthrough in talks hours before Pakistan Prime Minister [Imran Khan announced the release of Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman](#).

Abhinandan was not released under any pressure: Pakistan

The government must, however, also assess what it has actually achieved in strategic terms, and the consequences of the "new normal" it has sought to create with Pakistan. Despite the strikes, it is far from clear that the capabilities of the JeM have been degraded to the point where it can no longer carry out attacks in India. New Delhi must also track the JeM's assets and abilities within Jammu and Kashmir, as well as any intelligence and security protocol failures that may have preceded the Pulwama attack. Second, while Pakistan announced it would study the dossier given by New Delhi on Azhar and the JeM, it does not appear to be willing to act against either, and has not taken steps akin to the few it had after the 2001 Parliament attack, the 2008 Mumbai attacks or the 2016 Pathankot attack. Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's [comments practically defending the JeM](#) and putting out excuses of "illness" for Azhar make that clear. It is also necessary to realise the limits of calling international attention to India's concerns, to ensure that there are no curbs on what India sees as its strategic autonomy. Finally, the government must have a firmer handle on its messaging after the events of the past week, so that a public reading of its strategic purpose is not lost in the claim vs counterclaim spiral with Pakistan.

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