

EVOLUTION OF NEW INDIAN MILITARY STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The overt nuclearization in South Asia brought peace and closed the doors for any conventional war between India and Pakistan. But the Indian military doctrinal transformation after 1998 threatened the deterrence stability in South Asia. The idea of limited war under the nuclear umbrella, also known as Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), compelled Pakistan to develop nuclear tipped low yield battlefield nuclear weapons to deter shallow manoeuvres by the Indian Army. Indian Military, later realized that the idea of limited war is risky, and it may escalate into a major war, thus, came up with the idea of sub-conventional warfare, the surgical strikes in its the Joint Armed Forces Doctrine-2017. The Indian military planners perceived that there is a possibility of surgical strikes or limited war in South Asia. However, Pakistani policy makers firmly believe that any attempt to carry out surgical strike will be massively retaliated within shortest possible time. Later, the risk and cost associated with any direct military engagement compelled Indian policy makers to emphasize more on hybrid warfare strategy and indirectly capitalize on the socio-economic, ethno-religious, and political vulnerabilities of Pakistan. The study seeks to analyse the Indian military's doctrinal shift and its implications for the strategic stability of South Asia. It also deals with Pakistan's conventional and nuclear response to the doctrinal transformation by the Indian military. The strategic shift in the Indian military's thinking is continuous because Pakistan came up with adequate answers to their doctrinal manoeuvring.

Keywords: Strategic Stability, Nuclear Deterrence, Indian Military Modernization, Hybrid Warfare, Network Centric and Electronic Warfare, Cold Start Doctrine.

Introduction

India and Pakistan share the most dangerous border in the world. The hazardous nature of this neighborhood is further compounded by unresolved issues like: Kashmir, water disputes, Siachen, Sir Creek, terrorism, conventional asymmetries and threat of a limited war. Nevertheless, Kargil conflict-1999 and the military mobilization 2001/2002 could only be averted owing to overt nuclearization of India and Pakistan in 1998, which brought strategic balance in South Asia. The Indian military strategists however, continued with conventional military modernization and formulating new

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military strategies, primarily to coerce Pakistan. This paper focuses on evolution of new Indian Military Strategy and its implications for Pakistan.

The attack on the Indian parliament had nothing to do with Pakistan but despite that, India mobilized 800,000 troops along Pakistani border apparently to avenge the attack and to coerce Pakistan in the wake of changing global environment.¹ Ultimately, after almost a year of standoff, both states agreed to deescalate the situation at the border because of the nuclear factor and intervention of the international community.² The US played an active role in the de-escalation of the military standoff between India and Pakistan. Frequent visits of the US and European officials, especially US Secretary of State and Defence Secretary played an important role in defusing the tensions. But despite the US diplomatic maneuvering, the most decisive aspect has been nuclear deterrence. The rapid mobilization of Pakistani armed forces and its nuclear capability prevented India from any aggressive manoeuvres. Moreover, the Indian military lost element of surprise, and lack of major conventional superiority vis-à-vis Pakistan made war or even a limited military conflict impossible.

Cold Start Doctrine: From Total War to Shallow Maneuvers

The failure of operation Parakram exposed the Indian military's operational weaknesses to fight a quick war against a nuclear weapon state. The Indian military took almost three weeks in mobilization and deployment of its strike formations, which gave enough time to Pakistan for countermeasures.³ To overcome mobilization time and nuclear threshold of Pakistan, the Indian military initially came up with the idea of 'limited war under the nuclear overhang' which was later reformed into CSD in 2004.⁴ The Indian military's rationale for CSD was to cut short mobilization time and carry out quick, swift operations within 48-96 hours in case of any alleged terrorist attack on the Indian soil. The objectives under CSD would be limited below the nuclear red-lines of Pakistan. Feroz Hassan Khan explained the Indian military's CSD in these words,

After 2001 change in the International mood, India brought shift in its doctrine from Sunderji to Cold Start and carried out military modernization at rapid scale..... So, they realized that Sunderji is not feasible, so they changed it to the shallow maneuvers which means short, aggressive, more firepower, less space, very intense and fast operations.⁵

Therefore, to operationalize CSD, the Indian military has carried out many military exercises close to the border with Pakistan since 2004, in which they practiced joint operations, synergy between air and ground forces, latest aircraft and tanks, Long Range Reconnaissance and Observation System (LORROS), Risaat-II- Spy Satellite, Battle Field Surveillance Radars (BFSR), Weapon Locating Radars (WLR) and advanced Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for surveillance and reconnaissance.⁶

Despite all these developments, it is difficult for the Indian military to execute CSD against Pakistan because of many reasons which may include: the Indian military's lack of synergy, coordination and offensive fire power and Pakistan's conventional and nuclear response. Many western analysts doubt the Indian army's ability to operationalize CSD against Pakistan.

According to Mark Fitzpatrick,

..... Cold Start remains an aspiration by the Indian Army. I have heard several times in the past the Indian current and former Chief of Army Staff referred to the CSD, it is always the Indian army that refers to this, not the Indian combined command not the Indian government so yes, the Indian army would like this capability, I do not see this capability as yet operationalized and I also think by the way that Pakistan's response has neutralized this idea already.⁷

Another expert on South Asia, Professor Bharat Karnard argued that...Cold Start'.....“Since that unfortunate doctrine was initiated, is “No start” because it is not an implementable or practicable strategy”.⁸ Pakistan has also taken serious counter measures to counter the Indian military's CSD. First step was the initiation of the Azm-i-Nau large scale military exercises in which Pakistan Army practiced the synergy, integration and offensive-defence concepts to counter any offensive manoeuvres.⁹ Secondly, Pakistan developed Al-Nasr-Hatf-IX nuclear tipped battle field missile to deter rapid thrusts by the Indian army.

Toby Dalton, Co-Director Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace considers that, “Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) may contribute marginally to deterrence stability in some contexts, but at considerable cost and risk of accident and inadvertent escalation”. Another expert of South Asia, Michael Krepon, of Stimson Center discussed the associated risks with the deployment of TNWs, that, there are the least safe and secure nuclear weapons in any country's arsenal, in large measure because they must be deployed near the battlefield, where they are susceptible to accidents and being overrun, or hit by airpower. Any mushroom cloud is a threat to uncontrolled escalation.

Pakistan considers that TNWs are as safe as other nuclear weapons, since all nuclear weapons have strategic dimension, it is only the usage which makes it otherwise, but the intended impact is always strategic. Pakistani nuclear programme and its command and control are best in the world. The development and deployment of TNWs aimed to avoid any limited or total war with India. According to the Pakistani perspective so far they have been successful in preventing India from any incursions inside Pakistani territory. Former Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant General (Retired) Muhammad Mustafa Khan, rationalized the induction of TNWs in these words,

India thinks they can fight a short term/ limited war under the nuclear umbrella. But we say we have developed TNWs and conveyed to the Indians if you impose conventional war on us or cross the border we will use TNWs to deter them. I think TNWs are stabilizing factor in South Asia with the sole purpose to deter a conventional war”.¹⁰

As compared to Pakistan, India possess huge number of conventional arms, has well defined Missiles Defence system, nuclear submarines, space based surveillance assets and spy satellites etc. Furthermore, owing to Indo-US strategic partnership, Indian technological edge in the conventional weapon system will increase with the passage of time. In this regard, Pakistan's indigenous defence industry has made

unprecedented progress in the development of conventional weapon system, but it still lacks behind Indian military might. In this regard, Pakistan's strategic collaboration with China and enhanced professionalism has reduced the gap that had existed between two militaries for decades. Nevertheless, the nuclear capability of Pakistan has proved to be a stabilizing factor in the regional politics of South Asia. Indeed, during the Kargil conflict-1999, the military mobilization-2001/2002 and Mumbai incident-2008 the crisis was averted owing to nuclear deterrence. Former Director General Strategic Plans Division (SPD) Lieutenant General (Retired) Khalid Kidwai said,

.....I believe the time of hot wars even limited war is out, because of the mutual nuclear deterrence, because of all this balance of terror. I said the hot wars as a policy are out; it would be madness to go for hot wars. So, we will define the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) by becoming mad....."

As seen in last three decades, whenever Indian military made doctrinal shift through new strategic thinking, Pakistan came up with adequate and befitting response. The Indian strategic thinkers understand that any misadventure or a miscalculated military operation would plunge the region into further instability and turmoil, since Pakistani response would be uncertain, and threat of escalation would deteriorate the security situation. Since Pakistan has weak economy and it is overwhelmingly engaged in tribal areas against terror groups, the ultimate response would be to rely on tactical or strategic nuclear weapons to counter the Indian military's aggressive moves.

The Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine-2017

The Indian military is looking for an opportunity for a short, limited and intense warfare with greater speed, maneuverability and strategic outreach. After learning lessons from the past operational doctrines of Indian Army, Air Force and Navy, Indian Military has announced a Joint Warfare Doctrine in 2017. The most threatening aspect of this new joint warfare doctrine is the possibility of a surgical strike against Pakistan.¹² Initially the idea of surgical strike was coined in the IAF doctrine of 2012. After years of military analysis, Indian military commanders were able to convince their political leadership that, they could carry out surgical strikes against Pakistan in case of any militant attack on the Indian soil.

Whether it was for the public consumption or electoral support, the BJP led Indian Government was convinced by the incumbent Army Chief, General Bipon Rawat and his predecessor that, Indian Army would carry out surgical strikes in Pakistan.¹³ Indian Army even staged such a drama in October 2016, after alleged Uri Attack. Pakistan however, strongly rejected these claims, with physical evidence shown to international and domestic media the following day. Indeed, this Indian claim was meant to divert attention of Indian masses from the internal political crises which the BJP Government was facing at that time. In fact, India cannot afford such an offensive act, which might have invited quid pro quo response from Pakistan.

Indeed, the BJP Government has created war hysteria in India and labeled each and every action of indigenous Kashmiri freedom struggle in Indian Occupied Kashmir

(IOK) with Pakistan. Now, the political forces and masses were demanding an action, which Indian Government fulfilled through fabricated surgical strikes. Indeed, it was a connivance of political and military leadership to satisfy the masses besides labeling the genuine indigenous Kashmiri struggle as militancy. The execution of the sub-conventional operations or surgical strikes would require political will and military capability which is lacking in the incumbent political and military leadership in India. Indian leadership may have a desire to carry out surgical strikes inside Pakistani territory,¹⁴ but, have not calculated its response as yet. Many a time Indian Army Chief, General Rawat has threatened Pakistan with dire consequences and a military response of cross LoC firing with time and place of Indian choosing?¹⁵

Despite clear Pakistani redlines about any incursion, some of the Indian writers and scholars still see the possibility of surgical strikes. Bharat Karnard says, "Indian military may carry out, Deeper surgical strikes in case of egregious terrorist actions against India and Indian targets".¹⁶ Former Brigadier of the Indian Army, Gurmeet Kanwal said that ".....In India we believe there is space for conventional conflict below the nuclear threshold". Professor Harsh V Pant of the Kings College London believes that, "there is a possibility of limited war, CSD or surgical strikes". However, Rajesh Basrur was of the opinion that "Yes, it (surgical strike) is possible; but such strikes will remain very limited in scope."¹⁷ Research Fellow at RUSI, Shashank Joshi says; "I would suggest repeat (surgical) strikes are not only possible, but also quite likely within the next few years. They have proven possible, politically successful, and internationally accepted."¹⁸ The Indian perspective revolves around a thinking that India is a great power and it must go for surgical strikes in future.

However, Pakistani perspective totally shrugs off the idea of surgical strikes. Surgical strike in its true sense, meaning and spirit would entail the use of Air Force, Gunship Helicopters and Special Forces; you go to a certain area, achieve your specified targets and come back unhurt. Keeping in mind the geographical proximity, Pakistan's air defense capabilities, heavily militarized and monitored Line of Control, which is manned round the clock with vigilance, it unlikely that India would ever dare to launch surgical strike inside Pakistani territory. General (Retired) Ehsan Ul Haq believes that slogan of surgical strike is more for their domestic electoral politics;-

.... In my view the Indian military leadership very categorically know this if they were to carry out the surgical strike or any incursion across the LoC or across the international border or the working boundary, Pakistan will retaliate, they are very clear on this.....¹⁹

The Indian military's doctrinal shift entails serious implications for the South Asian security. Indian doctrine is based on the assumption that it can undertake surgical strike owing to strategic alliance with US and global acceptability of its military might. However, it ignores the fact that Pakistan's conventional capabilities will make it costly for India in case of any misadventure. The response to any surgical strike would be massive which may push India to escalate the conflict to avoid embarrassment back home and ultimately limited war may escalate into a major war. It is imperative that

India needs to realize that any sub-conventional operation or surgical strike would invite aggressive response from Pakistan.

India's Hybrid Warfare Strategy against Pakistan

The hybrid warfare strategy is not new to the world. Since ages countries have been employing covert operations against their enemies to create subversion, get intelligence, destroy enemy without actually directly engaging in any war. The classical realist, Chankya Kautilya gave the concept of undeclared war in his book *Arthshastra*, in which he advised the king to use the secret agents, religion or superstition, and even women against the enemies.²⁰ The Indian covert operations against Pakistan are not new. Indian is using hybrid war against Pakistan since the establishment of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) in 1968.²¹ The creation of Mukti Bahini, a terrorist organization, was the first operation of RAW, which played crucial role in the dismemberment of Pakistan. Mukti Bahini was trained, funded and nurtured by the Indian army and RAW. They were involved in heinous crimes against Pakistan army, their families, and even the local people of East Pakistan including Biharis.²² India has been actively carrying out subversive activities against Pakistan and many of their high-profile agents were captured in Pakistan since 1970s. Most notable were Surjeet Singh, Sarabjit Singh, and Kashmir Singh, Ravinder Kaushak and recently held Kulbushan Yadav and many others.²³ General (Retired) Ehsan Ul Haq explains the Indian covert operations in Pakistan in these words,

*.....those elements of the hybrid warfare have been at work for a very long time. We saw its manifestation in 1971 in the East Pakistan.....they have accordingly enhanced into all these facets whether it is psychological information, media, cultural, economic, military, diplomatic all these things have been at work against Pakistan and it will continue to be so.*²⁴

The Indian policy makers after the Mumbai attacks in 2008 launched renewed covert operations against Pakistan to curtail its support for Kashmir cause. India's subversive activities against Pakistan have a long history but after 2008 these gained momentum.

The Formation of Technical Service Division (TSD)-2008

The former Indian Army Chief, General (Retired) V.K Singh formed a secret unit in the Indian army called Technical Services Division (TSD), to buy the loyalties of the Kashmiri leaders in the IOK and to carry out terrorist activities inside Pakistan.²⁵ This unit had endorsement of the Indian Director General Military Intelligence, Vice Chief and Army Chief.²⁶

Under TSD, the Indian Army carried out three covert operations in the post 2008 period. *Operation Rehbar I-II-III* was launched in IOK, *Operation Seven Sisters* in Northeast of India and *Operation Deep Strike* was carried out inside Pakistan.²⁷ Since, these operations were highly secretive in nature, therefore no details are available in the open media but reportedly, the TSD Unit carried out eight covert Operations in a

foreign country, and paid money from “secret service funds to enroll the secessionist chief in a province of a neighbouring country”.²⁸

The evidence on ground suggests that TSD unit played its role in creating subversion in Pakistani province of Balochistan. The arrest of Indian Spy Kulbushan Yadav is the evidence of Indian covert operations inside Pakistan. Kulbushan Yadav, in his confession, accepted that he was involved in the subversive activities in Karachi and Baluchistan in which many Pakistanis lost their lives.²⁹ He was tasked to create uncertainty in Pakistan, disrupt CPEC and target Gwadar port.³⁰ According to Lieutenant General (Retired) Naem Khalid Lodhi,

*Kulbushan Yadav and other network which has been caught are a proof that they are actually pursuing this doctrine (hybrid warfare). It is not that they have to wage a war; we are already in the middle of a war. They have already waged hybrid war against us. They will undermine us especially in the field of economy that is the reason that they are so much against CPEC.*³¹

This is the reason that, Pakistan has witnessed many terrorist attacks in Baluchistan, Karachi and other parts of the country in last few years. However, the overall security situation has improved after the successful military operations in tribal areas and intelligence based operations under operation Radd Ul Fasad in urban centers.

Ajit Doval’s Defensive Offense Doctrine

Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor (NSA), while describing his approach in dealing with threats to the Indian National Security said that, “we deal with enemy at three levels”. First is *defensive mode*, in which he said “we improve our defenses at home and deal with it on our own soil”. Second mode is *defensive-offense*, in which “you have to proactively go to the area from where threat is coming and neutralize it there”. And third is *offensive mode* which implies that “you go for offensive out rightly”.

When it comes to dealing with Pakistan, he was of the view that nuclear weapons prevent India from offensive mode, but it does not cross threshold in *defensive-offense* approach. He emphasized on *defensive-offence* strategy which aimed at “exploiting the vulnerabilities of Pakistan, which could be economic, internal security, political, its isolation internationally, proxy war in Afghanistan and making it difficult for Pakistan to manage its internal security”.³²

The former Indian Defense Minister Manohar Parrikar has also openly declared that India will proactively deal with Pakistan. He said, “We have to neutralize terrorists through terrorists only.....kaante se kaanta nikalta hai (you remove a thorn with the help of a thorn)”.³³ It seems that the Indian policy makers have already made up their minds that any alleged terrorist attack in IOK or Indian soil would be orchestrated by Pakistan. Such an approach is threatening to peace and stability in South Asia. The Indian government’s aggressive thinking to use militants and spies to destabilize Pakistan has already been put into practice.

It is worth mentioning that, ever since 9/11, Pakistan suffered economic losses worth \$ 123 billion.³⁴ Besides, it lost over 80,000 human beings which include 5,498 military personnel.³⁵ In addition, Pakistan has deployed 200,000 troops in FATA,³⁶ to curb terrorist networks, supported, funded and nurtured by India from across the border. Their activities were disclosed by ex-TTP commander Latif Mehsud who was nabbed in Afghanistan by the US forces and later handed over to Pakistan. He was in Afghanistan to collect funds and instructions from RAW and Afghan authorities.³⁷

Another major achievement in 2017 was the surrender of ex-TTP spokesman Ehsan Ullah Ehsan. In his confession, he revealed that Afghan soil is being used by the TTP and other militant organizations against Pakistan. His claim was verified by Kulbushan Yadav in his confession, that India is sponsoring militancy in Pakistan from its consulates in Afghanistan.³⁸ Apart from promoting militancy, another Indian policy guideline is to isolate Pakistan globally through diplomatic coercion. India's boycott of SAARC meeting in 2017 and forcing other countries like; Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Bhutan were part of isolating Pakistan diplomatically.³⁹ Indeed, Indian policy aims at regional domination while bullying other regional states.

Implications for Pakistan

The doctrinal change and rapid military modernization drive by India would create security dilemma for Pakistan. The conventional asymmetries would create strategic disparity in South Asia, allowing India to carry out limited operations under the nuclear threshold. Such thinking is aggressive and would plunge the region into further mayhem and turmoil. After the induction of nuclear weapons, though the possibility of a total war has diminished, but Indian Military and RAW are continuing with the planning to fight a sub-conventional war with likely usage of special forces, advanced helicopters, UAVs and highly sophisticated aircraft. It is destabilizing Pakistan through hybrid war and 5th Generation warfare. All these eventualities would lead to a clash between India and Pakistan, which may escalate into a full-fledged conflict.

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India is world's largest importer of major arms, accounting for 13 per cent of the global total sales. Pakistan's economic conditions do not support arms race with India. It is trying to fill the gaps through its indigenous defense industry and through a better professionalism. India is in the process of purchasing long-range air defense systems (S-400 and Barak-8), Long endurance UAVs, P8I anti-submarine-surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, nuclear submarines, fifth generation aircraft and spy satellites. With all these sophisticated war munitions, Indian military strategies are directly threatening Pakistan's sovereignty.

To counter the massive military built-up of India, Pakistan has to rely on its nuclear assets, especially tactical nuclear weapons with small yield and shorter range to deter any advance of the Indian army's Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs). Though Ashley J. Tellis say that, "*TNWs are unlikely to be effective as nuclear deterrents, except for strategic signaling. Their value operationally is modest, and the risks associated with their deployment are considerable.*"⁴⁰

The Pakistani perspective is different from the Indian and Western perspective. Pakistani policy makers and scholars believe that the sole purpose of the TNW is to deter Indian military's limited conventional war strategy as perceived through CSD. It has no aggressive intent. The command and control, safety and security issues could be addressed and managed effectively. Indeed, Pakistani nuclear programme is safest in the world. In fact, if Pakistan is able to develop TNWs, it also has capability to ensure fool-proof security system for their safety and deployment. The former Director General of the SPD, Lieutenant General (Retired) Khalid Kidwai rationalized development and deployment of TNWs in these words,

As far as Pakistan is concerned it is well within our sovereign right to find an answer to the cold start doctrine, so at the conventional level, at the nuclear level we have tried to find answers to how to neutralizes the CSD, which takes care of the mobilization time, the exercises, cutting down of the reaction time etc etc. It is the kind of a doctrinal game that goes on between any two adversaries. An adversary when develops a new doctrine the other side tries to find answers to that, we have also found the answers to cold start doctrine, because of which I feel confident enough to say that the era of hot wars is over.⁴¹

Owing to repeated doctrinal changes, rapid military modernization and aggressive behavior of the Indian military, the South Asian strategic stability is seriously endangered. The Indian military's doctrinal shift coupled with massive military modernization would seriously create strategic disparity, and force Pakistan into countermeasures which may undermine deterrence stability in South Asia. It is imperative for both nuclear states to show some restraint and work together to resolve their issues in an amicable way as per the internationally laid-down mechanism.

Conclusion

The Indian military's doctrinal transformation would seriously challenge strategic stability in South Asia. The region applauded peace after the nuclearization of South Asia in 1998, but after the Kargil conflict and military standoff in 2001-02, India's strategic thinking vis-à-vis Pakistan transformed. The idea to fight a limited war under nuclear umbrella is not only dangerous but also entails serious implications for regional security, since a limited war may not remain limited after the response of other side.

The development and deployment of TNWs will deter the Indian military from any adventurism under CSD or proactive military operations. However, the Indian military's shift from CSD to 'surgical strike' would further complicate things between India and Pakistan. The Indian strategic thinkers believe that surgical strikes are possible, and acceptable at domestic and global level. Whereas the cost associated with such strikes would outweigh the objectives of the Indian military. What if the Indian aircraft or helicopters carrying out surgical strikes are shot down by Pakistan air defense systems, the Indian Special Forces commandos are nabbed or killed by Pakistani security forces or Pakistan reciprocate with counter surgical strikes and imposes greater damage?

All these scenarios would not only embarrass the Indian military in front of its domestic population, but it will be pressurized to escalate the conflict. In such a situation, things may go out of control and both states may resort to a full scale war which may lead to nuclear exchange.

The Indian policy makers are well aware of the consequences of all these scenarios and arms races. Therefore, instead of directly engaging Pakistan, new Indian strategy aims at promoting militancy in Pakistan through hybrid war. Pakistan has already taken some concrete steps to counter the Indian hybrid warfare in Karachi, former FATA and Balochistan. But still it has to go a long way. The strategic outlook of South Asia looks intense and in near future it may face greater instability and turmoil because of the doctrinal shift in the Indian military along with huge military modernization drive. To counter India at conventional level, Pakistan must improve its indigenous defense industry to reduce dependence on foreign powers especially the US. Already the defense production of Pakistan has risen and except for a few heavy weapons, Pakistan is arming its military through its own defense production complex. Rather, in some cases, Pakistan is exporting small arms.

NOTES

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