

DOCTRINAL SHIFT IN THE INDIAN ARMY AFTER 2018: IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Indian Army's doctrinal manoeuvring would create severe challenges for the strategic stability of South Asia. The New Land Warfare Doctrine envisage force restructuring. Under the new doctrine, Indian Army's Integrated Battle Groups will be highly equipped with reduced numbers but qualitatively a deadly force with modern weapons and equipment for quick shallower operations under the nuclear threshold of Pakistan. The LWD also focuses on a force to fight a two-front war against China and Pakistan. Still, this point is contentious because India's military deployment and force modernisation is Pakistan-focused, not against China. China is too assertive for India, and both states have huge asymmetry at all levels. In addition, the article concludes that under this new doctrine, India would also use sub-conventional warfare operations or surgical strikes. The study concludes that Pakistan will never accept any intimidation or bullying. Pakistan's response to any misadventure by India will be apt, quick and precise. The study emphasises that confrontation between two belligerents would have far-reaching regional and global security implications. Both nuclear powers of South Asia must engage themselves in a meaningful, consistent dialogue process for South Asia's long-term peace and stability.

Keywords: Land Warfare Doctrine, Surgical Strikes, Limited War, Nuclear Escalation, South Asian Security.

Introduction

Indian Army's doctrinal shift is linked with changing strategic dynamics in the region. The Indian government's approach towards Pakistan has been getting aggressive. It has started a diplomatic onslaught against Pakistan and is trying to build a case against Pakistan that it is sponsoring alleged militancy in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). In 2016, the Indian Army propagated that it conducted an alleged surgical strike against Pakistan, which later became propaganda.¹ Nevertheless, the Indian military kept of possibilities to find the gap between Pakistan's nuclear and conventional capabilities to impose a limited war

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against Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan's military always showed her preparedness and deterred the Indian army at all levels from maintaining strategic parity. This article reviews Indian Army's doctrinal shift under the Modi government after 2018 and its impacts on Pakistan's security.

Overview of Doctrinal Shift in the Indian Army

The nuclearization of South Asia established a balance of terror and deterred India from executing large-scale deeper armour thrusts inside Pakistan on the pattern of the Sunder Ji doctrine. However, nuclear weapons created severe troubles for Indian policymakers in Operation Parakram in 2001, when India mobilised almost 900,000 troops in three weeks but could not achieve any strategic outcome.² The massive mobilisation of the strike corps was an embarrassment. The failure of Operation Parakram forced Indian policymakers to shun thinking of slicing Pakistan into two and focus on shallower thrusts under the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) in 2004. The CSD required agile forces, greater firepower, synergy and integration, superior air force, long-range air defence and better reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities. The CSD was exposed after the Mumbai attacks. India wanted to avenge the 26/11 terrorist attacks and tried to link it with Pakistan. However, three factors downplayed the execution of CSD against Pakistan, i.e. lack of required offensive punch in the army, lack of the element of surprise and Pakistan's preparedness.³

Soon after 2008, the Indian military vigorously started massive military exercises to revamp its offensive capabilities and execute CSD against Pakistan; but the Pakistan military always came with adequate answers to the Indian military's strategic moves vis-à-vis Pakistan. Pakistan countered Indian Army's CSD in two ways; Azm-i-Nau military exercises and the development of tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs).

Pakistan, a responsible nuclear weapon state, prevented India from operationalising CSD and established conventional and nuclear deterrence simultaneously. The Azm-i-Nau military exercises focused on traditional responses to Indian aggressive moves, and TNWs put cold water on the CSD.⁴ Both strategies worked, and Pakistan deterred India at all levels. In 2012, the Indian Air Force introduced the IAF Doctrine.⁵ This doctrine meant deeper air raids against Pakistan military outposts. The IAF called such operations 'sub-conventional warfare operations' or surgical strikes, but it could execute the strategy that needed more time to fill gaps in its offensive capabilities. In 2017, the Indian military introduced the Joint Armed Forces Doctrine, emphasising the possibility of surgical strikes under the nuclear threshold. Finally, in 2018, the Indian army introduced Land

Warfare Doctrine (LWD) to incorporate lessons from previous military doctrines, improve overall warfighting capabilities, restructure pivot corps and add an offensive punch to maintain a strategic edge against Pakistan in South Asia.⁶

Land Warfare Doctrine-2018

The Indian Army's LWD of 2018 brought a massive change in the Indian strategic approach towards the South Asian neighbourhood. This doctrine is peculiar from previous doctrines because, in this written document, the Indian army categorically declared that India would use force to achieve its strategic objectives if threatened. The Indian Army's LWD emphasises multiple thrusts to fight a two-front war, against China and Pakistan. However, ground facts are opposite to this notion. The Indian Army's deployment is mostly against Pakistan, not against China. India and China will never indulge in any major conflict because of the following:

- India and China do not have any severe unresolved issues like the one India and Pakistan confront.
- There are substantial conventional and nuclear asymmetries between both states, and the balance of power favours China.
- Substantial economic stakes are involved; 2022 estimates show India's bilateral trade with China crossed \$138 billion, outweighing large-scale military confrontation.
- Most of the Indian military's deployments are against plain and desert areas of Pakistan, not in the Himalayas.
- In short, Pakistan will remain the prime target of the Indian military's doctrinal shift in the near future.

Indian military's strategic thinking revolves around Pakistan because it is the only irritant in South Asia that questions and challenges India's hegemony. Pakistan's nuclear weapons forced India to revamp its overall military strategy. The most dangerous element in the new land warfare doctrine is restructuring the army's strike forces. The next part of the study focuses on the Indian Army's restructuring of its Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs).

Restructuring of Integrated Battle Groups

In the LWD of 2018, India emphasises the restructuring of IBGs.⁷ The idea of IBGs was discussed in CSD, but India never operationalised it against Pakistan. In CSD, these IBGs were referred to as Pivot Corps, possessing offensive and defensive capabilities, close air support, gunships helicopters, air defence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, spy satellites, modern tanks, long-range artillery, etc. The strategic circles talked about a division-sized force in CSD which makes 23000

troops,⁸ but in LWD, the Indian Army envisage 5000 troops with modern weapon and equipment.⁹ The idea is to shrink force size, make it agile for quick shallower incursions under Pakistan's nuclear threshold, and deny Pakistan a reason to use TNWs instead of engaging India in a conventional limited war. India can afford a limited war because it is the largest economy in South Asia. Still, Pakistan does not want to fight even a limited war for nuclear escalation. No one can guarantee that a limited war imposed by India will remain limited. Pakistan may counter these developments with better preparedness, offensive-offence strategies, and further miniaturisation of nuclear weapons. Pakistan may follow NATO's cold war experience of TNWs. NATO's and Soviet Union's induction of nuclear land mines, nuclear artillery, and short-range nuclear-tipped rockets deterred both parties from any limited conventional war in Eastern Europe.¹⁰ Pakistan may also follow suit to prevent India's idea of restricting IBGs and derail their plans of shallower operations under the LWD of 2018. To execute the New Land Warfare doctrine, India needs massive force modernisation.

Force Modernisation

The Army's LWD also envisages force modernisation as an essential factor for the execution of limited war concepts. For the operationalisation of modern concepts of limited war, the Indian army would require better Tanks which they are inducting with the help of Russia.¹¹ The T-90 MBT is one the leading tank in the world with thermal imaging, greater mobility, outreach and firepower. The Indian forces would also require close air support from gunship helicopters and modern aircraft. India is dealing with the US to induct the Apache helicopter, also known as a flying tank, because of its lethal capabilities. The IAF is acquiring Rafale and SU-30 MKI with the help of France and Russia to fill the gaps in their air arm.¹² In addition, greater firepower through modern long-range artillery would help the Indian Army's rapid thrust against Pakistan. India is acquiring modern artillery guns, Vajra and Howitzers, with South Korea's and the US's help, respectively.¹³ In addition, it is also developing Dhanush indigenously, which may provide the Indian army with greater firepower along the border and offensive punch vis-à-vis Pakistan.

Without real-time information, the Indian army cannot execute its offensive raids. It is the reason that India is inducting designated satellites for tri-services.¹⁴ These spy satellites would give the Indian military information edge against Pakistan in any operations under LWD. In line with LWD, the Indian military would require extended-range air defence capabilities to dissuade Pakistan Air Force from quick response to limited incursions or surgical strikes. India is already dealing with Russia and Israel for this domain's S-400 and Barak-8 long-range air defence systems.¹⁵ These air defence systems would give the Indian military confidence to feel secure

against PAF or missiles. Such thinking is aggressive and would invite a severe response from Pakistan. However, the induction of these extended-range air defence capabilities would give the Indian army an edge against Pakistan and help the Indian army to execute its limited war or surgical strike operations. The Indian Army is quickly filling the operational gaps and inducting modern weapons and equipment, which may undermine Pakistan's security.

Punitive Raids

Pakistan's military has responded well to India's doctrinal manoeuvring since the 1980s. India's failure to execute the Sunder Ji Doctrine, Cold Start Doctrine and proactive military operations forced it to introduce a new doctrine to maintain a strategic edge against Pakistan. The nuclear factor and risk of escalation coerced India to lower the ladder and focus on surgical strike options after 2012. India practised these concepts previously as Hot Pursuit and Sub-conventional Operations. After 2017 and 2018, India added this concept of surgical strikes to its new doctrines and vigorously worked on it. In 2018, the Indian army mentioned in their LWD that it would resort to 'punitive responses' or surgical strikes to counter the alleged proxy war from across the border. On February 27, 2019, IAF conducted a failed surgical strike in Balakot. In retaliation, PAF carried out successful surgical strikes against military targets in IIOJK and established conventional deterrence. In that process, India lost two aircraft and faced embarrassment back home. Despite the failure of the Balakot Surgical Strike, the Modi government used that misadventure to enhance their political clout in India. A fake media campaign propagated that India carried a successful surgical strike and shot down a Pakistani F-16.¹⁶ The idea of a surgical strike will not fade away, but it may be executed in future with more preparation and better contingency planning. The induction of armed drones by India, long-range air defence and modern aircraft will give Indian policymakers confidence to re-enter the line. In such a scenario, it will be tough for Pakistan to respond with greater impunity because, this time, S-400 and Barak-8 will be waiting for Pakistani aircraft. Pakistan must do contingency planning and must be prepared for future surgical strikes and counter it with a *quid pro quo plus* policy and give a befitting response to any aggressive operation by the Indian military and maintain conventional deterrence in the region.

Military Diplomacy

LWD also envisages India forging strategic alliances with major powers to improve its overall capabilities. India is already in defence collaborations with major powers like Russia, the US, France and Israel. Indian military not only buys modern weapons from these developed states but, in many cases, technology transfer

revamps India's defence industry. Military diplomacy with major powers like QUAD, COMCASA, BECA, 2+2 Security Dialogue and AUKUS with the US;¹⁷ India also conducts war games with these developed countries and engages in military training. India's close strategic ties with Israel improved India's Network Centric Warfare capabilities. Both states are collaborating in many domains, including spy satellites, refurbishment of aircraft, tanks, surveillance radars, air defence, armed drones and joint intelligence. Indo-Russian strategic and defence ties are well-established and deep-rooted. India relies not only on Russia for modern MBTs, APCs, advanced aircraft, naval pods, cruise missiles, military training and war games.¹⁸ India is pursuing its military diplomacy and strategic ties with major powers as planned. These strategic ties with major powers have benefitted India greatly and helped India improve operational readiness and preparedness. These collaborations have also given a boost to the indigenous defence industry of India. Moreover, India's close strategic partnerships with these powers also boost India's political clout in the global forums and diplomatically enhance India's position.

Implications for Pakistan's Security

The Indian LWD is a declared policy, and India is already executing many tenets of this doctrine. Such an aggressive doctrine entails severe implications for Pakistan's security.

a) Conventional Asymmetries: Strategic Disparity

India's doctrinal shift and the mad rush for military modernisation would seriously impact the balance of power in the region. Conventional asymmetries would increase because Pakistan's dwindling economy cannot afford an arithmetic arms race with India. In this way, the balance of power will shift in favour of India and create a security dilemma for Pakistan. The previous confrontation between India and Pakistan after the Balakot air raids proved that Pakistan's conventional deterrence is credible and can make it costly for India to breach Pakistani air space. However, the acquisition of modern aircraft, standoff precision-guided munitions and long-range air defence systems by the Indian military would undermine Pakistan's conventional deterrence and create a gap for India to execute limited war strategy or surgical strike options.

b) Costly Arms Race

Indian Army's new land warfare strategy aims at an agile force equipped with lethal weapons. Pakistan cannot afford to remain idle in case of aggressive manoeuvring by the Indian military. However, Pakistan will not indulge in an arithmetic arms race with India but will maintain strategic equilibrium in conventional deterrence. Pakistan's indigenous arms industry would help Pakistan to

maintain symmetry in aircraft, standoff weapons, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles, short-range but armed UAVs, modern Al-Khalid tanks with night vision capabilities and greater firepower and mobility in plain and desert areas.¹⁹ Pakistan would have to buy modern weapons in certain areas to maintain conventional deterrence against India. Pakistan would also have to induct a long-range air defence system, spy satellites, gunship helicopters, weapon locating radars, and advance long-range artillery guns to impede Indian armour threats. Pakistan has to indulge in a costly arms race to maintain strategic parity.

c) Possibility of Limited War

India's aggressive doctrinal manoeuvring may destabilise South Asia's fragile strategic environment. Any aggressive act by India would invite a befitting response from Pakistan. In the post-Balakot failed surgical strike by India, Pakistan replied with a *quid pro quo plus* strategy.²⁰ It has been established that Pakistan will not accept intimidation or the *new normal* by the Indian military.²¹ The Indian Army's rapid force modernisation with the help of major powers would improve its operational warfighting capabilities. After filling essential gaps, the Indian military may execute its limited war strategy with a shallower operation under the nuclear umbrella. Any aggressive limited operations would be met with tit-for-tat response, which may impose heavy damages on either side. Such a scenario may initiate a limited war between Pakistan and India, which may impact the strategic stability of South Asia.

d) Nuclear Escalation

Pakistan's reliance on nuclear weapons would increase in case of substantial conventional asymmetries between India and Pakistan. Pakistan developed TNWs in 2011 to deter India's CSD or proactive military strategy, emphasising limited incursions with division sized IBGs.²² The idea of TNWs and full spectrum deterrence of Pakistan worked, and India had to put a hold on her limited war options. However, India's doctrinal transformation brought into play the idea of sub-conventional warfare or surgical strikes in South Asia. It has been established that Pakistan Army will respond to any aggrieve move by India. The Indian LWD envisages restructuring IBGs into a smaller force with greater firepower, offensive punch and agility, which depicts that India will operationalise its limited war doctrine with shallower thrusts in multiple sectors to undermine Pakistan's conventional deterrence. Such a scenario would invite an apt retort by Pakistan Army which may escalate the conflict from limited to total war. Nuclear escalation in South Asia would seriously affect regional and global peace. Pakistan will never allow India to undermine Pakistan's conventional or nuclear deterrence. A quick and Swift response from Pakistan will not be a choice but necessary to maintain the credibility of Pakistan's deterrence at all levels.

Conclusion

Indian Army's doctrinal manoeuvring in South Asia has undoubtedly been aimed at Pakistan, not China. India will never indulge in a misadventure with China because of substantial conventional and nuclear asymmetries between the two powers. India's doctrinal shift and force modernisation would impact Pakistan's security and create a security dilemma for the latter in South Asia. India's massive military modernisation would fill operational gaps and enable it to execute limited war strategies or continue with sub-conventional or surgical strike options. On the other hand, Pakistan is well prepared at the moment. Still, in the near future, conventional asymmetries would allow India to find the gap between Pakistan's nuclear and conventional deterrence and impose limited war. Any misadventure under this new doctrine would meet a fitting response. It is necessary for Pakistan to closely monitor strategic development in India and devise a comprehensive strategy to meet this threat at all levels.

Pakistan needs to shore up its indigenous defence industry to research high technology areas to dissuade the Indian army from any edge in modern warfare. Pakistan's military must add an offensive punch in its Air and Land forces to deny Indian Army any advantage in network-centric or electronic warfare domains. Pakistan must improve its surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities to maintain vigilance and keep the clock in check on the enemy's movement in the air or land. Natural time information edge would deny India elements of surprise in any limited war scenarios and become an embarrassment for the Indian army. India must resolve outstanding issues with Pakistan and initiate a meaningful, consistent dialogue process without strings to establish long-term peace and stability in South Asia.

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