
India-Pakistan: Doctrinal Inter-relationship

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Introduction

There is a doctrinal inter-relatedness between India and Pakistan, locked as they are in an adversarial relationship amounting to, in the words of a perceptive observer, a 'Cold War'.¹ Pakistan has been on the offensive on the subconventional plane. The rationale for this is apparently its perception of being disadvantaged on the conventional plane. It has also leveraged the nuclear plane in not subscribing to *No First Use* (NFU) and thereby attempting to doubly undercut Indian conventional advantage. India, on its part, has had to resort to subconventional operations as counter to the proxy war. On the conventional plane, it has acquired a proactive and offensive doctrine,² possibly countenancing *Limited War*. On the nuclear plane, it promises 'massive' nuclear retribution to stay

the Pakistan's nuclear hand.

This article reflects on the interrelationship of conventional and nuclear dimensions in the interactivity between respective doctrines at these levels of the two states. It arrives at a conclusion that at the conventional plane, India needs to articulate a *Limited War doctrine*, while at the nuclear plane it could move away from its current doctrine of 'massive' nuclear retaliation.³

Strategic equations

Political level

Over the past two decades India has been in the midst of an economic trajectory that has bolstered its power credentials. Its Grand Strategy is aimed at preserving its transformational growth.⁴ This entails managing threats so that they

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do not end up a distraction. Given that foreign and military strategy flow out of the grand strategy, managing Pakistan would imply containing it. The answers to the strategic problem posed by Pakistan have varied from the 'soft' line to the 'hard' line.⁵

The answer is not simple since Pakistan is difficult to interpret both as a state and society. Interpretations do exist providing varied elements including religion, the elite-mass divide, the praetorian military, the Establishment and the Punjabi ethnic group.⁶ An accurate picture perhaps is a collage of the principal ingredients of all these interpretations. In this article, the primacy of the military is taken as central to the understanding Pakistan.⁷ With the military at the core, the concentric circles starting from the inside can be taken to be made up of the Establishment, the Punjabi ethnic group and the identity related issues of Islam and Kashmir being on the outer periphery. The latter are remarkable for their instrumental value. This explains Pakistani use of both religion and 'Kashmir' for the purposes of national cohesion. If Pakistan is understood as having the Army at its core, then an understanding the military would help unlock the strategic conundrum India faces.

Theory has it that militaries are generally conservative, realist, power-oriented and seized with worst case scenarios.⁸ The additional feature of the Pakistani military is inclination towards Islam since the Zia years.⁹ This owes not only to its catchment area for recruitment being from an increasingly religious society but also because of an Islamic turn to military professionalism and warrior identity within the military. Pakistani strategy towards India becomes intelligible as a 'balance of power' strategy. Seeking to undercut India conventionally, it has sought to tie it down in manpower intensive tasks in defending marginal areas as Siachen and Kargil, and in counter insurgency operations. Conventionally, it has taken to external balancing by relying on China and the US. At the nuclear level, not subscribing to *No First Use* enables it to maximise nuclear brinkmanship in conflict.

Strategic level

Even as India has attempted to break out of the strategic predicament imposed on it by Pakistan, its attempts in doing so have served to heighten Pakistan's 'security dilemma'. This accounts for Pakistan continuing to rely on terrorists as 'strategic assets'; external balancing in banking on China; and adding to its nuclear capability. For

India, the constraining factor for a military reaction has been the nuclear backdrop and the possibility of it coming to the foreground due to Pakistani nuclear initiative. India has consequently given itself the necessary doctrine and the means in the form of the *Strategic Forces Command* and in its commissioning of a putative 'triad' in INS Arihant. A nuclear submarine capable of carrying nuclear capable missiles is on its way on lease from Russia. The Agni VI missile has been tested and Agni V is in the offing so as to cover the Chinese eastern seaboard. On the conventional level, the proactive and offensive doctrines are predicated on jointness. Increasing resources, made possible by a vibrant economy, have tripled the defence budget over the decade. A developing strategic culture have made George Tanham's earlier critical take, obsolete.¹⁰ Of consequence has been India's increasing proximity to the US. This has helped it to manage its 'two-front' problem better. Equally and importantly, the military 'Transformation' underway incorporating the developments in warfare, in particular the RMA and IT based MTR, and doctrinal adaptation has placed the Indian military in a position of dominance.

Pakistan views itself as the 'weak power' in the 'weak power-strong

power' dyad with India. It must be acknowledged that 9/11 has resulted in a temporary change of gears with a new found preoccupation on its western border. That it lacks strategic depth is another hardy perennial and informs not only its strategy of proxy war to gain depth forward of its territory, but also its policy of backing the Taliban with respect to Afghanistan. On the conventional level, it practices 'offensive defence' - a strategy dating back to the immediate post Zia period of General *Aslam Beg and Exercise Zarb-e-Momin*.¹¹ However, the Exercise *Azm e Nau* indicates that Pakistan has a more realistic conventional strategy, cognisant of its commitment to the western front, as also India's changed conventional doctrine. The strategy is characterized as 'early strategic offensive', implying that it would attempt to preempt India's integrated battle groups, howsoever quick the kick off. The nuclear card could well be employed along the lines of the 'option enhancing' strategy.¹² The twin objectives would be of deterring India from using its full conventional might; as also not provoking a nuclear exchange that would 'finish' Pakistan. It can reasonably be surmised that the aftermath of the Iraq war has not been lost on Pakistan and that resort to an asymmetric war as a counter in case of Indian offensives is very

likely. Lastly, it would continue to rely on its allies for mediating with India to moderate its aims and responses in case of conflict.

War strategies

Conventional level

Being the status-quoist and stronger power, India would likely to persist with its strategy of restraint; but it would be firm in exercise of its military power in case provoked by Pakistani sponsored terrorist provocation perennially. The ultimate aim to conflict would be compelling negotiations towards a better post-conflict peace. The method would be to punish through attrition the Pakistani military so that its hold over Pakistani state and society discriminated post-conflict. The conventional strategy of joint, proactive offensives on a broad front would unfold in a high lethality during, short duration conflict.¹³ The offensives would be nuclear redline cognizant. Early termination and retraction from occupied territory would help preserve Indian forces from an Iraq-style quagmire. At the nuclear level, India would prefer a retracted nuclear overhang. This can be done by signaling reassurance to negate Pakistan's strategy of brinkmanship directed at other powers in the hope that they would

intervene for an early war termination.

A rational Pakistani strategy would be premised on war avoidance. This was the case in the famous 'about turn' speeches by Musharraf of 12 January and 27 May 2002. Pakistan has two options. One, that it could attempt conventional defence in order to 'save face', since in its view not losing decisively would amount to a creditable showing. This would help in preserving its power in post-conflict internal political equations. Two, it might wish to launch its strategic reserves offensively. However, it may be denied time and space for this in the light of India reducing its launch timings to 72-96 hours. It would then attempt to preserve its military assets from attrition from the air and concentrated Indian operational fires. This could be along the lines Saddam Hussain attempted to preserve the Republican Guards for post war credibility and power. Irrespective of the progress in the conventional campaign, it would activate its asymmetric war assets. At the nuclear level, it is generally perceived that it has a high nuclear threshold. The posturing for a low nuclear threshold is to increase nuclear ambiguity and increase India's apprehensions regarding escalation in war. This is to stay India's conventional hand.

However, early nuclear use for war termination signaling cannot be ruled out; the initiative being with it. The logic may be that in case of defensive use on its own territory in a strike that does not have a high 'opprobrium quotient', India may not retaliate at the higher level of nuclear violence.

Nuclear level

India's doctrine is one of Assured Retaliation.¹⁴ The levels of retaliation have been promised as being of Assured Destruction levels, if the term 'massive' in the doctrine is so interpreted.¹⁵ However, in the event, India may likely resort to a strike sufficient to exact 'unacceptable damage' on Pakistan, not only to punish it for violating the nuclear taboo but also as deterrence against escalation. It is unlikely that it would itself launch higher order strikes of 'first strike' proportions of decapitating nature or counter value in the first instance of nuclear exchanges since it subscribes to NFU and doing so would forfeit it the political high ground and the conventional advantages it already has. It would modulate its nuclear alertness levels in such a manner as to not unnecessarily panic Pakistan into a 'use them-lose them' preemptive strike. It would likely use every communication channel to convey both resolve and reassurance

to Pakistan, to include channels furnished by mutually friendly powers.

Pakistan's nuclear strategy, though deliberately ambiguous, has been elaborately discussed. Its nuclear thresholds, as articulated by the head of Strategic Plans Division, have the term 'large' which has been used thrice over as prefixes to three out of four thresholds.¹⁶ This may indicate a high nuclear threshold, giving India the space it needs to prosecute conventional thrusts in a Limited War mode. Pakistan seeks to project a low nuclear threshold to deprive India of the conventional space necessary to achieve any worthwhile political goals of conflict. Its development of the Nasr and Hatf IX, stated to be a tactical nuclear weapons system, provided an illustration of such projection.¹⁷ However, due to exigencies of the conflict, a lowering of the threshold cannot be ruled out. This could occur due to a right wing internal lurch in Pakistani polity or perhaps under pressure of high tension decision making under a time constraint. The likely nuclear use in such a circumstance would be a strike with a low 'opprobrium quotient'. This would be at the lowest end of escalation so as not to be overly provocative of a violent Indian response.

In the consideration of nuclear exchanges, political logic would likely supersede strategic logic.¹⁸ A major consideration that would affect the levels of retaliation includes the desire to end escalation decisively. This can be done through the counter strike conveying the message of resolve as also of restraint. This can best be done by a *quid pro quo plus* response, rather than an indiscriminate strike.¹⁹ The possibility of damage limitation would weigh heavily on the minds of the political decision makers in the Political Council. No democratic leadership can be expected to countenance counter value strikes with any equanimity.²⁰ The Civil defence authorities and structures cannot hope to cope up with this in either country. Politically, such an environment would breed right wing extremism in both sides that both the countries would not like to incite. The original limited war aim, though subject to modification in the changed circumstance of nuclear intrusion into conflict, cannot however, on that score be completely jettisoned. Lastly, India cannot be compelled to abandon its national values, ethos and character at a time when the requirement of influence of these is the maximum.

There are also the unknown environmental effects of large scale

exchanges, best to be avoided. If the counter strike to India's massive punitive strike from Pakistan's arsenal numbering in the low three digits is to be degraded, then India would require degrading the arsenal, alongside counter value targeting. This has implications for the 'minimum' in India's nuclear doctrine of 'credible minimum deterrence'. Secondly, since neutralising the arsenal implies counter force targeting, it would in most cases require ground bursts. Therefore, for instance if half the arsenal is to be neutralized, then those many number of ground bursts, at a minimum, would be required. The environmental implications are stark in terms of toxic dust clouds resulting areas requiring permanent evacuation etc.²¹ The affected population would move outwards and end up as migrants in India. These consequences would detract India going in for a default choice of higher order nuclear retaliation to nuclear first use by Pakistan.

Given these arguments, it is possible that India's nuclear strategy as it unfolds may depart from the doctrine of 'massive' nuclear retaliation. As is well recognized, doctrine is meant as a guide and not a tyrant. Therefore, strategy would be dependent on circumstances. This implies India's nuclear employment

doctrine could well differ from its deterrent doctrine, since employment would be where deterrence has failed. Employment would be cognizant of in-conflict deterrence against escalation and continuing exchanges.

Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, Limited War thinking requires ballast afresh. Clausewitz in his magnum opus, *On War*, has dilated on the tendency of war towards Absolute War, saying, 'If one side uses force without compunction undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand. That side will force the other to follow suit; each will drive its opponent towards extremes....' His recommendation for Limited War was on the lines as: 'The smaller the penalty you demand from your opponent, the less you can expect him to try and deny it to you; the smaller the effort he makes, the less you need to make yourself. Moreover, the more modest your own political aim, the less importance you attach to it and the less reluctantly you will abandon it if you must... The political object – the original motive for the war – will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires...'²² Following from this, the modern day nuclear theorist, Bernard Brodie, has

in his book, *Strategy in the Missile Age* written, 'Clausewitz's classical definition that, the object of war is to impose one's will must be modified, at least for any opponent who has a substantial nuclear capability. Against such an opponent one's terms must be modest enough to permit him to accept them, without his being pushed by desperation into rejecting both those terms and the limitations in war fighting.'²³

In view of this compelling theory, there is a need for the Indian military to articulate a Limited War doctrine.²⁴ This is not a substitute for the doctrine it already has, but a supplement to it. The advantage of having such a doctrine is that it would guide thinking to make the conventional advantage relevant in the nuclear era. It does not take away from the ability to up the ante as and when required, depending on the adversary's game plan. Not to have such a doctrine would make India's political decision makers apprehensive of the utility of military force in the nuclear age. Additionally, there is a need for movement from 'massive' nuclear retaliation to 'flexible' nuclear retaliation. 'Massive' nuclear retaliation, as seen, has an underside that detracts from its credibility. Since doctrine is not etched in stone, but is to be living document, its evolution is indicative

of good health. Therefore, moving to a usable nuclear strategy would enhance the deterrent and materialize the conventional intent in case of 'Incident Day'. Doctrinal change can help with crisis avoidance, conflict prevention and escalation management. ■

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