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# INDIA'S LIMITED WAR DOCTRINE

## THE STRUCTURAL FACTOR

ALI AHMED

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INDIA'S LIMITED WAR DOCTRINE  
THE STRUCTURAL FACTOR

ALI AHMED

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE  
STUDIES & ANALYSES

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# CONTENTS

<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i> .....	7
1. INTRODUCTION .....	9
2. DOCTRINAL CHANGE .....	16
3. THE STRUCTURAL FACTOR .....	42
4. CONCLUSION .....	68
<i>REFERENCES</i> .....	79



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Ali Ahmed





# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

India developed its Limited War doctrine in the wake of the Kargil War. Officially, the land warfare doctrine dates to publication of *Indian Army Doctrine* in 2004. It was for a period of time, in the century's first decade, colloquially referred to as 'Cold Start'. The doctrine *per se* is for conventional war, but embedded in it are the tenets of Limited War. The understanding is that whether a war is 'Limited' or 'Total' would depend on political aims of the conflict and their strategic and operational translation. Since political aims, can reasonably, only be limited in the nuclear age, the doctrine can be taken as being a Limited War doctrine.

The doctrine has evolved from the military developments of the past four decades. While India's earlier doctrine - post the 1971 War period - had been a defensive one, organisational and doctrinal innovations in the eighties served to enhance the offensive content of military doctrine. Initially, changes were prompted by the necessity of conducting conventional operations under conditions of perceived nuclear asymmetry. This took the form of mechanisation, deemed as more suited to a nuclear battlefield. The doctrine was one of conventional deterrence comprising a dissuasive capability (deterrence by denial) along with a counter offensive capability (deterrence by punishment). In the light of Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capability by the late eighties, the counter-offensive-capability, embodied by strike corps operations, became problematic. This was capitalised on by Pakistan to enhance its sub-conventional provocations taking advantage of the 'stability/instability paradox'. Consequently, India was forced, among other reasons, to adapt its offensive capability to bring its conventional edge back into the reckoning. The idea was to reinforce conventional deterrence and in case that was found wanting, then to be in a position to execute coercion or compellence as required.

Doctrinal development has been driven by the military experience since the mid-eighties. The period witnessed the crises of 1987 and 1990 and the peace enforcement operation in Sri Lanka. Internal conflict in Kashmir reached a climax with the Kargil War of 1999. Pakistan's proxy war culminated in the parliament attack that prompted Indian coercive diplomacy, and *Operation Parakram*, in 2001-02. Conflicts in the Gulf in 1991 and 2004 and *Operation Enduring Freedom* which showcased the changes in the character of conventional war influenced thinking. Organisational changes and equipment acquisitions prompted by the revolution in military affairs accelerated during this period. Cumulatively, these have led to considerable doctrinal evolution. However, it was overt nuclearisation that had the most profound effect and made conflict limitation an overriding imperative.

An offensive and proactive capability that under-grades the war doctrine speaks of a readiness to go to war, and, further, to take the war to the enemy. The conventional doctrine and the nuclear doctrine combined go beyond deterrence, to potentially enable coercion through offensive deterrence. The nuclear doctrine posits 'massive' punitive retaliation in its 2003 formulation by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS). This expansive formulation, it would appear, is designed for enhancing the deterrent effect and push up the Pakistani nuclear thresholds. Doing so enables the leveraging of India's conventional advantages in case Pakistani sub-conventional provocations are emboldened by nuclearisation.

Pakistan's offensive posture at the sub-conventional level and the consequent Indian offensive orientation at the conventional level, leads to heightened nuclear possibilities. The nuclear backdrop serves as reminder that escalation could occur, either by accident or design. The problem therefore has been as to how India should cope with sub-conventional provocations. It has responded by leveraging its conventional advantage. This needs to be tempered by an inbuilt limitation at the conventional level in order that the nuclear threshold is not breached. This challenge has proven difficult, with Pakistan attempting to posture a low nuclear threshold. India for its part has attempted to raise this threshold by promising higher order nuclear retaliation. This intersection of the Indian and Pakistani doctrinal postures at the conventional

and nuclear planes has an escalatory potential that could do with some mitigation.

The monograph makes the suggestion that limitation must attend both conventional operations (as is indeed the direction of thinking), and also equally importantly, nuclear operations. Its chief recommendation is that India's strategic doctrine should be informed by defensive realism. The compatible strategic doctrine is therefore one of defensive deterrence. India's military doctrine therefore needs to be tweaked away from the proactive offensive stance to one more mindful of the nuclear overhang. Merely acknowledging its presence as the nuclear backdrop is not enough in light of escalatory possibilities. The deterrence logic has its limitations. Given this, not only must conventional doctrine be cognisant of this, but indeed also nuclear doctrine.

### **Layout of the Study**

The introductory chapter sets out India's Limited War doctrine. Chapter 2, deals with the doctrinal shift in India's policy. It recounts the manner in which India's strategic doctrine has changed from defensive to the proactive. The corresponding change in military doctrine is also described. It traces the doctrinal change over the past four decades in an historical over view of the evolution of Indian conventional and nuclear doctrines. Chapter 3 attempts explain the change in India's strategic doctrine from defensive deterrence to offensive deterrence. The discussion is confined to the structural factor inherent in India's regional strategic predicament to explain how India's land warfare doctrine, in particular, has adapted to it. The change in threat perception over time, largely because of Pakistan's proxy war, is discussed. The effects of the emboldening of Pakistan following its nuclearisation are studied for their impact on Indian doctrine at the two levels- strategic and military. The chapter argues that the structural factor, interpreted in terms of the changes in the threat environment in part prompted doctrinal change. There are other influencing factors also such as the political and institutional factors, but these have not been covered in the monograph. The concluding chapter makes an assessment and discusses issues of policy relevance resulting from the nuclear-conventional interface.

## Limited War Thinking in India

The strategic protagonists of the subcontinent, India and Pakistan, having demonstrated and declared their nuclear power status in 1998, have irrevocably entered the era of Limited Wars. India is currently at the cusp of fulfilling K. Subrahmanyam's vision in which the two states, India and Pakistan, can arrive at a *modus vivendi*, despite, or perhaps because of the nuclear shadow. He had suggested that:

If both India and Pakistan were to have nuclear weapons, a situation of stable deterrence is likely to result in all probability... This is a perfect though an extremely unpleasant setting for mutual deterrence. Once that sets in the Kashmir line of control will become an international border (Subrahmanyam 1986: 287).

Jasjit Singh describes the change brought on by nuclearisation as follows: 'The significant point to note is that in the past, the wars in the subcontinent were limited (in time, scope, goals etc.) by choice. But nuclearisation has made wars limited as an imperative (Singh J. 1998: 311).' Such a war would be limited in time and scope. Given the limited time available, positional warfare would not be able to deliver results. In his opinion: 'Manoeuvre warfare is more likely to bring on a nuclear threat (Singh, J. 1998: 312)'. To him, a war of attrition would also not be a likely option due to limitations of capital stocks, resupply etc. A stand off or stalemate would enable the smaller country to achieve an impression of victory, and can, in the India-Pakistan context, be seen as not being in India's interest.

The problems of conventional doctrine and strategy have understandably been the staple of the Indian doctrine and planning staff since. In case India was to attempt to prevail, a nuclear response by Pakistan looms as a possibility, despite India's deterrence. In fact, the more India appears to be on the conventional military ascendance, the greater the nuclear insecurity it would subject itself to.

Even the remote possibility of a nuclear war outbreak implies Total War. Sundarji conjures up a scenario in which, 'When the dust

settles, the damage to India may be grave, but Pakistan as we know it will cease to exist... (Sundarji 2003: 191).' However, he stipulates that, 'efforts will continue after nuclear use to terminate hostilities after the lowest possible level of nuclear use (Sundarji 2003: 148).' In other words, given the possibility of Total War resulting from the introduction of nuclear weapons into the conflict, limitation is required to be built into nuclear doctrine as well - to the extent possible. Conventional limitation would prevent escalation into the nuclear domain, while nuclear escalation can be limited by restricting exchanges to the 'unacceptable damage' or 'lowest possible level' rather than annihilation.

It would be imprudent to venture into a war without having an explicit Limited War doctrine as guide. While a doctrine does exist, it is also meant for wider conventional war. Given the likelihood of conventional escalation in the absence of an explicit Limited War doctrine, the nuclear angle may come to fore rather unexpectedly. Sumit Ganguly and Paul Kapur highlight this, stating:

Indian doctrinal changes increase the likelihood that Indo-Pakistani crisis will escalate rapidly, both within the conventional sphere and from the conventional to the nuclear level ... In the nuclear realm, India's Cold Start strategy would likely force Pakistan to rely more heavily on its strategic deterrent (Ganguly and Kapur 2010: 77).

Since the nuclear doctrine for its part favours a higher order nuclear punishment being meted out in case of nuclear first use against India, the likelihood of nuclear escalation is virtually built into the doctrine. Consequently, Prakash Menon recommends, 'India must move away from the strategy of massive retaliation. Limited war objectives are inherently incompatible with maximal penalties. To risk all for modest objectives appears nonsensical (Menon 2005: 160).' This implies that there is scope for further evolution in terms of limitation in both conventional and nuclear doctrines.

### **India's Limited War Doctrine**

India has adopted a doctrine that posits limitation in conventional operations. This means that an India cognizant of Pakistani nuclear threshold would 'pull its punches' in order not to cross Pakistan's

nuclear red lines. The Indian army's doctrine has been dubbed 'Cold Start'. It has been evolved after taking on board its operational experience and the nuclear context. It enables it to react to Pakistan's terror provocations as also allows it to respond to the country's internal political compulsions in response to the public demand for 'decisive' action.

As the term, 'Cold Start', suggests the strategy is about operations from a standing start. This is to be achieved, as per the official Indian army doctrine, through operational 'readiness'. This is the closest reference to the term 'Cold Start' in the doctrine, with readiness described as:

Readiness of the Indian Armed Forces to meet national emergencies is a facet of national level endeavour. It calls for a synergised effort by all instruments of the Government to ensure that these forces are moved to their areas of operations, fully-equipped and within an acceptable timeframe... On the part of the Armed Forces, they are responsible for ensuring that they are operationally ready, troops are in a high state of morale and units are appropriately trained to execute the missions assigned to them (ATRAC 2004: 44).

Cold Start is expected to achieve three goals: 'inflict significant attrition on enemy forces; retain Pakistani territory for use as a postcolonial bargaining chip; and, by limiting the depth of Indian incursions, avoid triggering a Pakistani nuclear response (Ganguly and Kapur 2010: 76-77).' The doctrine has been under preparation since the Kargil War (2010: 28). The idea is to 'launch a large-scale offensive against Pakistan, within seventy-two to ninety-six hours of a mobilisation order (2010: 76).' This is to be done by augmenting the offensive capabilities of India's holding formations and shifting strike corps to bases closer to Pakistan (2010: 76). The logic is that 'small and few' and 'flexible conventional response strategies' are better than 'large and many' and 'massive conventional response strategies' in conflict with a nuclear backdrop (Kapoor 2010: 4).

In a situation where both India and Pakistan are armed with nuclear weapons, conflict avoidance is a desirable political objective (Menon 2005: 160). The military implications are that 'punitive

strikes and geographically confined skirmishes emerge as the political preferences albeit with questionable ability to produce substantial and enduring strategic effect (2005: 160).’ This possibility of conflict, other than war, has been mentioned in the army doctrine thus: ‘There may also be other methods of preparation for war even without ordering general mobilisation (ARTRAC 2004: 44).’ Prakash Menon opines that since restricted conventional space is available, military preparations must focus on the ‘feasible’ forms of war. This comprises punitive strikes without posturing of strategic reserves (Menon 2005: 160). It is for this reason he is of the view that: ‘Limited War in the Indo-Pak context may not have been born as yet and it is doubtful that whether it will survive its birth (2005: 160).’

## Conclusion

This introductory chapter has attempted to give the background for the doctrine and the impetus behind it. Despite the preponderant incidence of Limited War, India’s war doctrine has been designed for conventional war imagined as a wider, total war. Apparently, the thinking is that once the worst case is taken care of, applying the limitations required by political aims is not difficult. The Kargil War is an instance of Limited War, even though the then extant doctrine - *Fundamentals, Doctrines, Concepts – Indian Army* (ARTRAC 1998) - dealt with a total war and not with its variant, i.e. Limited War. The Limited War doctrine is not yet in the form of an explicit document. It has also drawn critical comment (Raghavan 2001) that requires to be taken on board in the next edition of the doctrine, generally due after half a decade of publication. Consequently, lately, there are indications that there will be an independent articulation, either as a separate specialised doctrine, as an adjunct to the existing doctrine or as a fresh chapter in the next edition of the *Indian Army Doctrine* (ARTRAC 2004). This is not only for dealing with the nuclear reality prevailing since 1998, but for coping with the increasing curbs on the use of armed force because of: international law; political necessity; diplomatic concerns; grand strategic tradeoffs; strategic circumstance; demonstration effect of wars elsewhere and impetus from within the strategic community.



## 2. DOCTRINAL CHANGE

### Introduction

The 1971 War is a benchmark for the India-Pakistan strategic relationship. With a truncated Pakistan, India gained a pre-eminent position as a regional power. India has since been the status quoist and stronger power, while Pakistan has been the weaker, revisionist one. Pakistan's revisionist aims were identified fairly early by Sisir Gupta as: 'to bring about a revision of the political map of the region, in terms of the distribution of both territory and power as between the two countries of the subcontinent (Gupta 1970: 423).' Over the years, the significance of 1971 as a watershed has become progressively more evident, with Pakistan attempting to redress the asymmetry. Pakistan, to offset its weakness, resolved, soon after, to acquire nuclear weapons (Cohen 1984: 152-3) and has since acquired a delivery capability to help off set power asymmetry which in its military mediated perception is in India's favour (Narang 2009: 156). Pakistan's army has also been determined to pay back India for the humiliation of 1971. This has led to a proxy war, launched ever since the military returned to political centre stage. The consequent changes in India's threat perception led to a change in its strategic orientation. This in turn furthered doctrinal developments within the military.

This chapter reviews the developments of doctrines both strategic and military, in India since the 1971 war. The chapter seeks to highlight the evolution from a defensive and reactive strategic doctrine to a more proactive and offensive strategic doctrine with respect to Pakistan. The chapter is in three parts. The first reviews the development of the strategic doctrine and its influence on military and nuclear domain in India. It does so by taking a look at the interplay of strategic doctrines of India and Pakistan decade wise. This background helps to understand the antecedents of the 'Cold Start' doctrine which is studied more closely in Part II. Lastly, Part III, brings in the nuclear dimension in the form of

India's nuclear doctrine of 2003 so as to elaborate on the inter-relationship between India's conventional doctrine and nuclear doctrine. It makes the case that there is imbalance between the two and suggests measures for reconciling the two in the concluding chapter.

## I

### Changes in Strategic Orientation

Over the last three decades, India's strategic doctrine has shifted focus from defensive to offensive deterrence that borders on compellence (Basrur 2006: 80-101). The change is marked by three phases: the first was the shift from the strategic defensiveness of the seventies to the strategic offensiveness over the eighties; the second phase was when India's policy, till the turn of the century was one of strategic defensiveness; and the third phase is the present one in which India has taken to strategic offensiveness. Military doctrines are analysed in the following section.

By the 1965 War, India had learnt its lessons the hard way through loss in the preceding 1962 War. Not only did India contest the Rann of Kutch aggression, but it also took over the Haji Pir Pass in late August 1965 and opened up the Punjab front to off set Pakistan's *Operation Grand Slam* in the Akhnoor sector in early September. This was under the leadership of Lal Bahadur Shastri. Nevertheless, India agreed to a ceasefire before any substantial gains could be made and, later, gave Haji Pir pass back to Pakistan. The offensive approach during the 1971 War was evident in the premeditated, multi-dimensional offensive involving a multi-pronged military operation. Thereafter, as the victor in 1971 War, India was a satisfied regional power.

After an introspective decade in the aftermath of the 1971 War, Pakistan sought to address the power asymmetry. Its military, when back in power, has also been trying to avenge itself. In the later part of the first phase, Pakistan has taken a strategic offensive posture to the extent of waging a revisionist proxy war in Punjab and J&K (Koithara 2004: 22). This has been in keeping with its practice, ever since independence, of employing irregular forces

against India e.g. sending tribal *lashkars* in 1947 (Marwah 2009: 30); the 1965 *Operation Gibraltar* (Cloughley 1999: 68), itself a prelude to the more conventional *Operation Grand Slam* (Cloughley 1999: 72), which once again witnessed the infiltration of irregular forces into Kashmir (Joshi 1999: 212). The later offensive on the sub-conventional plane was enabled by the strategic opportunity provided by India's mismanagement of its internal security, initially in Punjab (Koithara 2004: 41) and later in Kashmir (Koithara 2004: 43). Taking advantage of the internal problems of India, Pakistan has sought to tie down India in manpower intensive counter insurgency operations (Koithara 2004: 86) and in holding terrain that is of marginal strategic importance such as Siachen (Cloughley 1999: 291) and later Kargil (Chari et al. 2008: 126). With India's regional power ambitions peaking in the mid-eighties, Pakistan's attempts, to under cut India through external balancing also gained momentum.

The second phase beginning in the early nineties witnessed a defensive India. Hampered by coalition politics and managing the difficult transition from a socialist to a liberal economy in the midst of a new emerging world order, eclipsed the strategic profile after the high point of late eighties. A precipitate drop in the defence budget was seen post liberalisation and because of an inward looking polity (Thomas 1992: 36, Joshi 1992: 79, Singh, Jaswant 1999: 219-20). Defence allocation plummeted from a record high of 3.86 per cent of the GDP in 1986-87 to an abysmal 2.38 per cent of the GDP in 1995-96 (Mehta, 2004a: 6). The drop in budgets was due partially to India diverting funds towards the development of its nuclear deterrent. This was revealed by Narasimha Rao to the Kargil Review Committee (Verghese, 2010: 428). The apparent decline in the efficacy of India's conventional deterrence further emboldened Pakistan, even though that state was then itself in dire economic and political straits post the withdrawal of US support at the end of the Cold War and, later, the sanctions imposed in wake of the Chagai tests (Haqqani 2005: 247). The climax of the strategic contest was the Kargil War on the conventional plane in 1999 and the attack on Parliament on the subconventional plane in December 2001.

The cumulative impact of these two attacks (Kapur 2009: 202), led to the formulation of a proactive and offensive Indian strategic doctrine. Coercive diplomacy was attempted by *Operation Parakram* (Rajamohan 2003: 196-203). The resulting hardened strategic posture then has been compared by analysts to compellence (Kampani 2002, Chari et al. 2008: 154-55). It has found expression in military doctrines predicated on proactive offensives, but with full cognizance of the nuclear reality.

## Changes in Military Doctrine

### *The Seventies*

The seventies saw both states in defensive mode. K. Subrahmanyam, then Director, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) at New Delhi, outlined the national security policy that required: 'India to develop and keep at readiness adequate forces to deter China and Pakistan from launching an attack either jointly or individually and in case deterrence fails to repel the aggression effectively (Subrahmanyam 1972: 48).' On the Indo-Pak front this involved hunkering down behind newly created canal defences and 'ditch cum *bandhs* (embankments) (DCB)' (Sood and Sawhney, 2003: 150). This was made possible by the World Bank sponsored Indus Water Treaty and the loans made available to develop the respective water systems. Both states started constructing these canals and undertaking anti-flood schemes in the sixties. These acquired a pronounced defensive orientation. In the 1965 War it was the Ichogil Canal that helped save Pakistan in the Punjab sector. The defensive military doctrine shaped itself along the artificial geographical features across the Indo-Gangetic watershed (Thomas and Mansingh 1994: 360-364, 435). The defences, reminiscent of the pre-World War II Maginot line along the Franco-German border, and can be likened to the contemporary Bar Lev line along the east bank of the Suez Canal. This involved, in the main, holding of territory through the obstacle system by the infantry with armour spaced out in penny packets to provide immediate counter attack reserves. At the strategic level two armoured divisions were available for counter offensives and offensives if necessary.

The seventies were important because of the impact that the loss of Vietnam war had on the US military in particular and militaries in general everywhere. The doctrinal effervescence in the US, alongside the Operational Manoeuvre Group concept of the Soviet Union, had influenced the thinking in militaries. The Arab-Israeli wars of both 1967 and 1973 again impacted doctrinal thought with regard to both the offensive and the defensive. Emulation of militaries at the forefront of the military profession was possible. For instance, the TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) set up in 1973 (Chapman 2009: 17) was emulated by India in the setting up of the Army Training Command (ARTRAC). The organisational innovations in the US army, such as the ROAD (Reorganised Objective Army Division) to operate as the earlier Pentomic division in a nuclear battlefield (Chapman 2009: 17) led to similar thinking in India resulting in the setting up of what was General Sundarji's brainchild, the Reorganised Plains Infantry Division (RAPID). Sundarji had attended a course in the US in the late sixties. Doctrinally, the TRADOC's *Field Manual (FM) 100-5*, the influential outcome of the work of Dupuy, the first commander of TRADOC and the output on AirLand battle of his successor, Don Starry, (Chapman 2009: 18-19), was also studied with considerable professional interest in India, as elsewhere. Manoeuvre warfare now became the 'buzzword'.

The seeds of the mechanisation, influenced by changes in the 'global strategic culture', can however be traced to India's spectacular advance into East Pakistan. Ravi Rikhye commenting on the changed contours of the new armoured force, wrote, 'A new armoured force for India is the only way we can decisively defeat Pakistan instead of continually being forced to accept virtual stalemate (Rikhye 1973: 144).' The idea was to create a breach in enemy defences with the mechanised infantry and send in the armour through the gap deep into enemy areas for paralysing the mind of the enemy commander, besides disrupting, destroying and defeating the enemy piecemeal (Rikhye 1990: 323). After the war, India converted its II Corps that had been raised in the run up to the war and had played a role in liberating Bangladesh, into a strike corps by raising an armoured division. The 1975 study group under Lt Gen Krishna Rao, that also included K. Sundarji,

furthered the process in organisational and material terms (Gupta 1997: 49). Sundarji has since been linked to mechanisation, because of his keen interest in the raising of the mechanised infantry in the early eighties and thereafter putting the new concepts into practice during the controversial *Exercise Brasstacks* (Roy 2010: 165).

### *The Eighties*

In the days of the superpower rivalry, General Zia transformed Pakistan into a 'frontline' state after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This gave him much more access to military and economic support from the US than what he had earlier rejected as 'peanuts' (Cohen 1984: 151, Cloughley 1999: 278-87). The military aid was used for strengthening its military posture against India (Cloughley 1999: 288) while irregular warfare resources and know-how from the *mujahedeen* war were diverted to waging and sustaining a proxy war first in Punjab and later in Kashmir. Owing to rising security concerns, *inter alia*, India embarked on a major programme of modernisation and mechanisation. The strategic doctrine, though continuing as defensive and reactive, unexceptionable for a *status quoist* and stronger power, was based on the counter offensive capability of two strike corps. This suggests a strategic doctrine of deterrence based on a conventionally administered 'deterrence by punishment'. Nevertheless, the aggressive *Exercise Brasstacks* bordered on compellence, which was intended to persuade Pakistan to desist from aiding Khalistani terrorists (Koithara 2004: 42).

The change towards, what is known, as Plan 2000 (Tellis 1997: 27), for an army geared for the turn of the millennium, was brought about by *Exercise Digvijay* in 1983 under General Krishna Rao, with Lt Gen K. Sundarji as the commanding general. The better known effort was *Exercise Brasstacks* held under General Sundarji as Chief in 1986-7 (Chari et al. 2008: 44). The plan was ambitious and envisaged four strike corps, comprising four armoured divisions, eight mechanised divisions and seven RAPIDs (Rikhye 1990: 319). An air assault division was also on the cards. Conceptual innovations under the guidance of Sundarji led to the organisational change. With two combat divisions in the order of battle of Southern Command, the Desert (XII) Corps was raised at Jodhpur

during the volatile days of *Operation Trident*, a crisis brought on by *Exercise Brasstacks* (Indian Army website, n.d.). Desert defences were prepared based on the 'nodal point' concept, with important communication centres being as 'nodes'. These were to be denied to attacking enemy forces, thereby depriving him of sustenance and easy movement, so critical in desert terrain. All along the front at tactical and operational level counter attack reserves based on armour were held.

At the strategic level were reserves based on the strike corps for counter offensives (Sood and Sawhney 2003: 150). The response could be in the form of riposte, close on the heels of the enemy offensive to force him to retreat. Alternatively, it could be a counter offensive at a time and place of own choosing. Such formations could be dual-tasked to also carry out offensives. An offensive could be a limited offensive or a full-fledged one. A favoured scenario of the latter kind was bifurcating Pakistan through the middle by undertaking offensives in the desert sector or striking at politically important centres (Tellis 1997: 27). The thinking along these lines was already extant and culminated in the doctrinal thinking propounded by Sundarji, in the following words (Roy 2010: 169):

The strategy of conventional defence consists of two parts. The first is a dissuasive part; a strong defensive position, which can extract a heavy toll from the attacker... The second part of the strategy is the almost axiomatic counter offensive, at a time and place of the defender's choice... The threat of counter offensive, and the certainty of heavy damage to the original attacker, is the deterrent part of the equation (Sundarji 1996: 44).

### *The Nineties*

Pakistan's response was on two planes, nuclear and sub-conventional so as to sandwich the conventional plane of India's moves. This saw the 'stability/instability paradox' in operation. Stability at the nuclear level after covert nuclearisation was popularly seen as creating instability at the sub-conventional level. The concept was articulated in the *Cold War* by Glenn Snyder

(1965). Snyder was discussing the issue of stability at the nuclear level, which has arisen because of the MAD (Mutual Assured Destruction) capability of the two sides. Michael Krepon describes its working in the Cold War context as: 'The United States and Soviet Union managed to avoid nuclear and conventional warfare during the Cold War, while jockeying for advantage in myriad of ways, including proxy wars and a succession of crises that became surrogates for direct conflict (Krepon 2003: 1)' According to the concept:

...lowering the probability that a conventional war will escalate to a nuclear war, along preemptive and other lines, reduces the danger of starting a conventional war; thus, this low likelihood of escalation, referred to here as 'stability', makes conventional war less dangerous, and possibly, as a result, more likely (Chari et al. 2008: 148, 199).

However, in the South Asian case, stability at the higher levels - nuclear and conventional - has led to instability at the sub-conventional level (Bajpai 2009a: 171). Rajesh Rajagopalan highlights this dichotomy between the Cold War and the South Asian scenario, and writes that 'the stability/instability paradox was a proposition about the relationship between the nuclear and conventional military balances, not between nuclear and subconventional conflicts as is mistakenly assumed in much of the literature about the proposition in South Asia (2006: 5).' He contests the applicability of the paradox to the India-Pakistan setting, noting that, firstly, the instability obtains at the subconventional level as against the conventional level as posited by the concept; and, secondly, that the insurgency in Kashmir does not have a direct link with nuclearisation. The latter is a result of Pakistani propensity to interfere in India's internal problems (Rajagopalan 2006: 4, 11).

Paul Kapur in his book *Dangerous Deterrent* (2007) makes the argument that it is not the 'stability/instability' paradox, but the 'instability/instability' paradox that applies to the situation. His view is that both states have demonstrated militarised behaviour since nuclearisation, thus implying there is instability at the higher nuclear level also (Kapur 2007: 10). While Pakistan sought to use



the nuclear cover to launch a risky subconventional proxy war, India attempted to use the threat of conventional war and thereby the risk of nuclear war to deter proxy war. Thus, both states were offensive at different levels: India at the conventional and Pakistan at the subconventional. This made for instability at all three levels.

For India, the experience of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka and liberalisation-related cuts in defence budgets put the military under considerable strain (Babbage and Gordon 1992: 14). Fortunately, the draw down of the Cold War led to the exit of the US from the region, leaving Pakistan without a strategic lifeline. India created a third strike corps to reinforce its conventional deterrent. In keeping with the reorganisation of the Indian army as per Army Plan 2000, a strike corps had to be raised in the southern theatre. The HQ IPKF was re-designated as HQ 21 Corps in April 1990 (Indian Army website, n.d.). This became the offensive corps of Southern Command stationed at Bhopal in July 1990. Plan 2000 appears to have been revised (Badri-Maharaj 2000: 40-41) by the late nineties; perhaps because of the nuclear developments in Pakistan.

By the end of the decade, India conducted nuclear tests to reinforce the credibility of its 'credible minimum deterrent'. Simultaneously, as a mature nuclear power it attempted to engage Pakistan, through the Lahore process. The strategic thinking behind this move was found wanting in as much as it did not take cognizance of the Pakistani Army being the defining factor in Pakistan's national strategy. It mounted a military challenge in Kargil in an attempt to internationalise the Kashmir issue, among other reasons (Chari, et al. 2008: 124-128). Unsurprisingly, the decade ended in the Kandahar hijack, setting the stage for the surcharged context at the turn of the millennium that culminated in the dastardly attack on India's parliament on December 13, 2001.

### *The 2000s*

For over a decade India had been tied down in the proxy war in a 'bleeding war that cost the army one Kargil every 16 months' (Mehta 2004a: 6) and Rs. 1000 crores were being spent in the firing across the Line of Control (LC). These pressures resulted in a

'reduced conventional advantage over Pakistan from 1:1.7 at 1971 to 1:1.2 at the time of *Operation Parakram* (Mehta 2004a: 6).' India opted to respond with 'coercive diplomacy' by mobilising its forces so as to also not be deflected from its economic trajectory. More importantly, India's military was unable to bring its conventional power to bear within a viable time frame. Its doctrine of employment of strike corps had not sufficiently evolved to deal with the nuclear environment that had unmistakably dawned.

The outcome of the 'twin peaks' crisis of 2002-3 was along two lines, political and military. The political outcome of which has been under-appreciated. To Ashok Mehta (2004a: 6), the: 'CBMs (confidence building measures) and peace process were a direct outcome of Parakram.' He was of the view that *Operation Parakram* demonstrated that 'if pushed beyond a point, India is prepared in its national interest to do to the brink of war despite attendant nuclear risks to deter Pakistan from its policy of *jehad* (2004b: 6). At the strategic level, Ashok Mehta rued the lost opportunity largely because the military doctrine had not kept pace with nuclear developments, noting:

it (India) has lost the strategic space even for limited war against Pakistan. If the window for limited war under nuclear shadow has all but closed for good, the government and the military must do some creative thinking in rebuilding deterrence and crafting usable strategies that will impose costs and restraints on Pakistan (Mehta 2004b: 6).

## II

### Background

It is widely held that India's wars have been limited wars (Singh, Swaran 2000: 2183, Roy 2010: 144). In case of India, the 'gentlemanly' nature of the wars on the subcontinent, are taken as evidence of their 'limited' nature in terms, aims, means, extent, duration and intensity. The subsequent negotiated settlements at Tashkent and Shimla are seen as clinching the argument. Bharat Karnad also believes that none of India's wars have been Total

Wars. He attributes their remaining limited to cultural, religious and historical affinities (Karnad 2005: 243). Indo-Pak wars were once famously characterised by 'Monty' Palit as 'communal riots with tanks'!

The limited wars were more on account of limited means in 1962 and 1965. On the contrary, the 1971 War can be taken as a case of mission-expansion on the Eastern Front. The 1947-48 Indo-Pak conflict, in being restricted to Kashmir, can be considered as having been limited. During the 1965 war, there was an expansion to encompass the Punjab theatre, but no action was taken against East Pakistan. The restraint was partially because of incapacity. In 1971, the original aim was nibbling of adequate territory to implant the Bangladeshi government-in-exile on native soil (Jacob 1997: 66-67, 56; 2000: 1). However, J.N. Dixit maintains that the broad strategic objective was to see the 'departure' of the Pakistan army after a 'decisive defeat' (Dixit 1999: 92). With regard to the situation on the Western Front, it can be said to be in keeping with the requirements of Limited War, since theatre aims were kept restricted. That Pakistan did not attack on this front enabled ending of the war without expansion. The possible intervention of the US with the entry of *USS Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal influenced the decision of the ceasefire (Dixit 1999: 106-07).

The Indian army's first attempt at reducing doctrine to paper was in 1998 when Lt Gen Vijay Oberoi was the Army Commander, ARTRAC (Oberoi 2006: 332). It was published in the form of a book entitled, *Fundamentals, Concepts, Doctrine – Indian Army* (1998). The 1998 document did not favour Limited War. This owes perhaps to it being written immediately prior to the Pokhran and Chagai tests. Prior to the Kargil War, the logic was that nuclear weapons had made war recede as a policy option. The logic served to propel the Lahore peace initiative in February 1999. That the military allowed itself to be caught off guard at Kargil indicates how influential this theory was (Chari et al. 2008: 142). The Pakistani military, on the other hand - no doubt self-servingly - discerned that there existed a window of conventional opportunity between subconventional operations and the nuclear threshold. This explains their intrusion into Kargil (Chari et al. 2008: 200).

The Kargil War forced India to borrow a leaf out of Pakistani thinking (Chandran 2005: 39). The main idea was to restrict the space available to Pakistan at the subconventional level for conducting its proxy war (Chari et al. 2008: 147). Pakistan was seemingly emboldened to undertake the intrusion in the belief that its nuclear capability had neutralised India's conventional capability. Limited War thinking was initiated to undercut this reasoning and bring conventional war back into the reckoning (Sethi 2009: 307).

The first discussion on Limited War took place on January 5-6, 2000 at the IDSA, New Delhi, during a national seminar on 'The Challenge of Limited War: Parameters and Options'. At the seminar, the then defence minister, George Fernandes, observed: 'India has understood the dynamics of limited war after it declared its nuclear weapons status. Nuclear weapons do not make war obsolete but simply imposed another dimension on the way warfare could be conducted (Singh, S. 2000: 2180).' He initiated the change of doctrine to the offensive, noting:

India has traditionally pursued a non-aggressive, non-provocative defence policy based on the philosophy of defensive defence. This represents the political doctrine of employing military power. But military efficiency will continue to demand the pursuit of the principle that 'offence is the best manner of defence (PIB: 2000).'

Analysts have picked this up as 'the first signal of India's long-awaited shift from its original 'defensive defence' and 'war prevention' military doctrines to a more positive post nuclear war-fighting doctrine (Singh, S. 2000: 2180).' This presages one of the principles of war stated in the doctrine as (ARTRAC 2004: 30): 'Offensive action is the chief means of achieving victory. It results from offensive spirit and helps in the seizure and maintenance of initiative.'

The debate was taken forward by General V.P. Malik (2002), who put forward the argument that 'in the changed Indo-Pak strategic environment, there is a likelihood of limited wars than an all out war.' He propagated the view that space for conventional operations

existed between the subconventional and nuclear levels of war and that the 'escalatory ladder can be climbed in a carefully controlled ascent wherein politico-diplomatic factors would play an important part (Malik 2002).'

### **The Army's Conventional Doctrine**

The Army only released its revised doctrine in 2004 (ATRAC 2004), superseding its earlier document of 1998. It is interesting to note that *Indian Army Doctrine* (2004) includes no discussion of Limited War. It mentions Limited War just once in a diagram on the 'Spectrum of Conflict' (ARTRAC 2004: 19). Yet informed judgment has it that the doctrine 'defined an approach to limited wars in a nuclear environment (Kapoor 2010: 3).' The doctrine was released in two parts. The second part is classified. The first part of the open source document is itself in two parts. The second part is equally consequential since it deals with conduct of operations.

In the background briefing to journalists on the release of the doctrine 'sources' in the military hierarchy highlighted certain facets that have given the doctrine its name, 'Cold Start'. News reports attributed to these sources stated that the doctrine is about eight rapidly-deployable 'integrated battle groups', with support drawn from the navy and the Indian air force. These groups would be trained to make swift inroads into the enemy territory. The source is credited with saying, 'The idea is that the international community should not get the opportunity to intervene. Hence, the need for swift action starting from a 'cold start', instead of slow mobilisation (Pandit 2004).' This is how the term 'Cold Start' came to be used to describe the Army's new war doctrine in keeping with the Limited War concept. Sawhney attributes the term to the army spokesperson, Maj Gen D. Summanwar (2004: 7).

The strategy marked a change from the existing one of the slow amassing of India's three strike formations, headquartered in Mathura (I Corps), Ambala (II Corps) and Bhopal (XXI Corps), in preparation for war with integrated battle groups (IBGs). There was an apparent delay in mobilisation during *Operation Parakram* (Pant 2007: 248). It had taken the army almost a month to deploy

its three strike corps in 'launch pads' along the Indo-Pakistan border. As per the new doctrine the strikes should be 'limited' and 'calibrated', to ensure nuclear weapons do not come into play. Some of its tenets on 'limitation' are as below:

- *Conflict.* ... Today international mechanisms, including the influence exercised by major powers, are in place to resolve or limit conflicts because of their potential to lead to undesired war (2004: 20).
- *The State of War.* ... Disengagement from war is difficult because it develops its own dynamics and pace, which in themselves are unpredictable and could spin out of control (2004: 20).
- *Conventional War.* ... It may be total or limited in terms of duration, the range of weapon systems employed, scope, objectives and its ultimate outcome. Given the prohibitive costs in terms of human lives and material, as well as the rising lethality of modern weapons, conventional war may be of short duration (2004: 22).
- *Strategic Perspective.* ... Understanding the restrictions placed on military operations based on national policy (2004: 34).
- *Exit Policy.* Victory may not always be an appropriate term to describe the desired outcome of an operation; it may have to be defined in other terms such as reconciliation, stabilisation (acceptance of the status quo) or acceptance of an agreed peace plan...(2004: 37).
- *Attacking the Enemy's Will.* Conflict is subject to political, economic, ethical and moral constraints. These limit the freedom of military action (2004: 30).

The open source Part II of *Indian Army Doctrine* has two significant chapters. Chapter 4 is on 'Conduct of Operations', with a section each on 'Offensive and Defensive Operations' and 'Joint Operations'. The closest the doctrine gets to a the standing start of 'Cold Start' is in a tangential reference that states that, 'large-scale mobilisation of forces would normally follow a firm decision

at the highest level to adopt the military option *with minimum loss of time* (italics added) (ARTRAC 2004: 47).’ Further it states, ‘All planning should aim to mobilise forces in the minimum possible time in order to take advantage of the many benefits that such a step offers (2004: 50).’ At another place there is mention of mobilisation in the ‘shortest possible time (2004: 54).’ These lend credence to the term ‘Cold Start’.

Once launched, the forces conduct offensive operations as ‘a decisive form of winning a war. Their purpose is to attain the desired end state and achieve decisive victory.’ Decisive operations are defined as those that ‘force the enemy to submit to one’s will... Enemy vulnerabilities should be targeted to achieve a clear-cut victory. Such operations will invariably be joint operations (2004: 51).’ Such victories at tactical level are easy to concede, but gaining such victories at the operational level is to neglect the nuclear factor. The doctrine makes a laconic three line mention of the nuclear factor, ‘Future operations will be conducted against a nuclear backdrop; all planning should take this important factor into account (2004: 52).’ Since the doctrine mentions that nuclear escalation can occur if a state attempts to avoid defeat (2004: 17), pursuing ‘decisive operations’ for ‘decisive’ or ‘clear-cut victory’ will be out of sync with the strategic context.

There is also a tendency away from limitation in the stipulations for the pivot corps and strike corps, stated below (ARTRAC 2004: 55-56):

- *Employment of Forces.* Pivot or holding corps should be prepared to undertake offensive operations.... and create ‘windows of opportunity’ for development of further operations...
- *Strike Corps.* Strike corps should be capable of being inserted into operational level battle, either as battle groups or as a whole, to capture or threaten strategic and operational objective(s) with a view to cause destruction of the enemy’s reserves and capture sizeable portions of territory.

The term 'battle group' used above finds mention in strategic commentary as 'integrated battle groups' (IBG). The strike corps remains a potent force that can be employed as a whole. This is antithetical in the nuclear context. This brings to fore the feature of duality in which there are elements that favour limitation even as a wider conventional war is not ruled out. Whether the latter is at all feasible in a nuclear backdrop is questionable. The doctrine is oblivious to this, with its spectrum of conflict including 'Total' and even 'Global' War in the category of conventional wars below the category Nuclear War (2004: 19).

### *The Logic of Cold Start*

The Army's 2004 document stresses manoeuvre warfare, jointness, information warfare, net-centric warfare and an ability to operate in nuclear conditions (Chapman 2009: 91). The aim is to undercut the impunity Pakistan enjoys at the subconventional level by catering for Limited War at the conventional level (Chari et al. 2008: 174-75). This injects instability at the nuclear-conventional level, thereby, in the expectation of the planners, bringing about stability, through a refurbished conventional deterrence, at the subconventional level. The doctrine is responsive to the 'stability/instability' paradox.

'Cold Start', as the term suggests, is for early application of force in conflict. Cohen and Dasgupta believe that it is reminiscent of the European situation during the Cold War in which both armies were poised for speedy offensives, so as to enhance deterrence (2010: 59). In the Indian case too there is an emphasis on increasing the speed of mobilisation and launch for deterrence purposes by suggesting to Pakistan that India is not without options for hurting it right back. The equivalent term in tactics is 'attack from the line of march' (Bakshi 2010: 46). This being applicable only on the Pakistan front, it is more strategy of a kind rather than a 'doctrine' as such. The 'Cold Start doctrine' by this yardstick is a misnomer. 'Cold Start' is but a colloquial way of describing the army's wider doctrine that attempts to transform it from a lumbering giant, as was the case in 1999 and 2001-02 to a nimble, surefooted one (Cohen and Dasgupta 2010: 61).



Early mobilization is essentially to prevent Pakistan from playing the diplomatic card. It would yield operational dividends in terms of Indian attackers finding Pakistani defences under-prepared, given the element of surprise and the little time available for defenders to reach and prepare defences (Malik 2010). This would enable easier penetration of defences, thereby paralysing Pakistani response. This could produce the desired political dividend. It could also facilitate strategic surprise as dwelt on in the *Doctrine*: ‘Strategic surprise can herald both the beginning and the end of a war (2004: 45).’ Mobilisation time differentials are seen as being in Pakistan’s favour because of proximity of cantonments to the border (Kapur 2008: 88). Mobilisation is seen as being problematic in the Indian democratic context as against the same effort in military directed Pakistan. The problem, in the words of the *Doctrine*, is that:

Military mobilisation in the Indian context involves considerable effort because of the wide geographical spread of the peacetime locations of our units and formations, the considerable extent of our borders and the multiplicity of agencies that need to coordinate their actions in order to make it effective (2004: 44).

Walter Ladwig writes that, ‘the goal of military operations would be to make shallow territorial gains ... that could be used in post conflict negotiations to extract concessions from Islamabad (Ladwig 2008: 165).’ According to a news report:

The plan now is to launch self-contained and highly-mobile ‘battle groups’, with Russian-origin T-90S tanks and upgraded T-72 M1 tanks at their core, adequately backed by air cover and artillery fire assaults, for rapid thrusts into enemy territory within 96 hours (Pandit 2009: 1).

The perceived advantages are that more alert and agile IBGs would be off-the-blocks faster. They would not pack much punch and therefore would keep below the nuclear threshold. They would, blitzkrieg-style, mentally paralyse the operational level leadership of the enemy. Lastly, they would present a smaller target for nuclear attack (Ladwig 2008: 166-167). Gurmeet Kanwal describes the strategy option in the following manner:

The doctrine was premised on two major elements. Certain readjustments were carried out to enhance the offensive operations capability of “Pivot” corps (defensive or ground holding corps), so as to make it possible to launch offensive operations virtually from a “cold start” to deny Pakistan the advantage of early mobilisation... It is believed that the second element of the Cold Start doctrine conceptualises a number of “integrated battle groups” (IBGs; divisional-size forces) launching limited offensive operations to a shallow depth, to capture a long swathe of territory almost all along the international boundary. The success achieved by the IBGs would be exploited by one or more Strike Corps, where possible, but without crossing Pakistan’s nuclear red lines (Kanwal 2010).

How the doctrine serves limitation will depend on the strategy for the conflict. This would in turn be subject to political aims and parameters of limitation. The extent to which Indian troops would be allowed to penetrate would depend on aims set by the government and their translation into strategic ends by the military. This aspect is possibly dealt with in the classified Part II of the Doctrine, since the nuclear backdrop has not been covered in Part I. It has been assessed that these would be of necessity limited to avoid provocation, thereby indicating the influence of Limited War thinking in terms of the constraints on political aims and military objectives (Subrahmanyam 2002). The problem of the nuclear threshold would remain, since war aims are difficult to arrive at. The difficulty is evident of juggling the two aims - territory and attrition. Captured territory is expected to act as a bargaining chip to force Pakistan to wind down its institutional support to Jihadi elements. The ‘overall aim’ has been assessed as being to destroy the Pakistan Army’s war waging potential through the application of asymmetric firepower (Kanwal 2010).

Bharat Karnad’s ‘Sialkot grab’ scenario (Karnad 2002: 677-78, Karnad 2005: 244) offers clues on how India could resolve the problem posed by nuclear thresholds. He visualises India cutting off a 30 mile deep swathe of territory, thereby threatening Pakistan’s ‘centre of gravity’ located in the urban centres in Punjab. To him,

this would not entail a nuclear war since it would not threaten Pakistan's survival.

Limited War theories in India have a utility for deterrence. They constrict Pakistan's strategic space by making war 'thinkable'. The publicity attending the release of the doctrine and the later theorising has had three benefits. One was to prepare public opinion; second, to build pressure on Pakistan's security apparatus by indicating a hardening of Indian resolve; and lastly, it was directed at the international community, which increased pressure on Pakistan. A provocatively named exercise, *Exercise Poorna Vijay* (Total Victory) under Lt Gen J.J. Singh, later Army Chief, was deliberately publicised to send the message of the validation of the new doctrine in the new nuclear backdrop (Shrutikant 2001). Such posturing can be interpreted in terms of 'rationality of irrationality', contributing thereby to deterrence. In India's case this requires an effort, in the light of India's studied posture described by Ashley Tellis as 'passivity and restraint' (2000: 71).

### III

#### **India's Nuclear Doctrine**

Although India's nuclear doctrine remained unarticulated, through the nineties a 'recessed deterrent' based on existential deterrence was adopted (Basrur 2001: 95). This implied that the nuclear capability had not been 'weaponised', but was capable of being fielded in a short time frame. Nuclear weapons were taken as 'political weapons' meant only for deterring enemy nuclear use (Sethi 2009: 205). India stood for NFU and for existential deterrence. The weapons were to be used in a counter value mode in case of enemy nuclear first use. The aim was to avoid the stockpile build-ups that had been done by nuclear weapon powers in the Cold War. This is the connotation of 'minimum' in India's nuclear doctrine. The advantages of this posture were: a nuclear arms race was averted; India's conventional superiority could continue to count; and lastly, missile delivery capability could continue to be built up.

The situation changed dramatically with the nuclear tests, code-named *Shakti*, conducted at Pokhran on May 13, 1998. The tests

involved: a fission device with a yield of 12 kilotons; a thermonuclear device with a yield of 43 kilotons; and a third tactical device of less than a kiloton. The two tests used devices with yields between 0.2 and 0.6 kilotons (Joint Statement 1998). In a letter to the US president –which was leaked - the Indian prime minister explained that the tests had been compelled by the threat posed by its nuclear armed neighbours and the collusion in the nuclear and delivery fields between the two (Text 1998). India simultaneously attempted to defuse concerns by laying out the broad principles of its doctrine in a *suo moto* statement made in the Parliament by the prime minister on May 27, 1998 (*Suo moto Statement* 1998). The expectation appears to have been of peace having ‘broken out’, in light of the the risks associated with going to war in a nuclear environment.

The first NSAB of the National Security Council (NSC) system was set up in 1998 and charged with preparing a nuclear doctrine. It formulated a Draft Nuclear Doctrine (hereafter Draft) for the government’s approval in August 1999 (NSAB 1999, Pant 2007: 244-46). The Draft was a unique document in that it was a departure from the India’s tradition of not articulating its strategic thinking. It nevertheless generated considerable controversy. Its credibility was affected when Jaswant Singh, then minister for external affairs, said, that it was ‘not a policy document of the Government of India (Rajamohan 1999).’ The great contribution of the Draft was in the debate that it sparked off and its contribution to strategic culture. Eventually, the government gave its approval to many of the provisions of the Draft nuclear doctrine in January 2003 (Sethi 2009: 125).

The CCS met on January 4, 2003 to review the progress made in operationalising India’s nuclear doctrine (CCS 2003). The key features of the declaratory nuclear doctrine are as below:

- Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent;
- A posture of “No First Use”: nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere;
- Nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.

- Nuclear retaliatory attacks can only be authorised by the civilian political leadership through the Nuclear Command Authority.
- Non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states;
- In the event of a major attack against India, or Indian forces anywhere, by biological or chemical weapons, India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons;

Further, it approved the setting up of a Strategic Forces Command to handle nuclear assets under the control of the Nuclear Command Authority (NCA). The latter comprises a Political Council and an Executive Council (Sethi 2009: 160). The Political Council is chaired by the prime minister. It is the sole body which can authorise the use of nuclear weapons. The Executive Council is headed by the National Security Advisor (NSA). It provides inputs for decision making by the Nuclear Command Authority and executes directives given to it by the Political Council.

The doctrine is taken as being one of ‘Assured Retaliation’ with the proviso that this would be ‘massive’. In Indian thinking ‘first strike’ is equated with ‘first use’ or the introduction of nuclear weapons into a conflict (Ahmed 2008). Thus, any introduction of nuclear weapons into a conflict would result in ‘massive’ punitive retaliation. Kanwal articulates the logic thus:

However there can be no doubt that for India’s No First Use to be credible, India’s strategy should be to target high value population and industrial centres in adversary countries with a high level of assurance after absorbing the full weight of what in all probability be a disarming first strike. Only then would the adversary be sufficiently deterred to avoid launching a nuclear strike against India (2000a:1071).

Thinking through what may constitute ‘unacceptable damage’, Kanwal had earlier arrived at a number of 8 to 10 cities that require targeting (2000b: 1062). For the sake of analysis, Manpreet Sethi believes ‘that unacceptable damage for Pakistan would constitute

no more than four or five 20 kt weapons each on 5-6 major cities... (Sethi 2009: 251).'

### *Analysis of the Nuclear Doctrine*

It emerges that 'massive' punitive retaliation would be a pronounced escalation of the conflict. The only circumstance it makes sense is in case Pakistan has provoked it by attempting a 'first strike', defined as an attempt to disarm and decapitate. This is distinct from the term 'first use' or the introduction of nuclear weapons into the conflict. An introduction can be in various ways - not amounting to first strike. It can involve demonstration strike(s), nuclear signalling by targeting intruding forces, and a more potent strike in case valuable objectives are being threatened with capture. In case of lower order nuclear first use, a 'massive' response would be disproportionate and abandonment of Limited War at one go.

India's new conventional doctrine envisages a 'proactive' India, implying that it would be taking the initiative at the very start of the conflict. In accordance with the tenets of its doctrine, the aim would be limited. Conventional forces thus would not unnecessarily provoke. However, as the Pakistani nuclear threshold is not known, nuclear first use cannot be ruled out. Since the Pakistani military will determine nuclear strategy in war, a military rather than a political approach may be expected. Thus, thresholds would be under cumulative pressure from the tri-service and joint military action of India.

Presently, Pakistan has admitted to four thresholds: territorial; attrition in military and strategic assets; economic strangulation; and, lastly, externally induced internal instability (Cotta-Ramusino and Martellini 2002). Even if the Indian military is fighting within the politically set limited war parameters, the risk of pushing the Pakistani thresholds, individually for each service or collectively, remains. For instance, the first draft of the new air force doctrine formulated in 2007 revolves 'around the primacy of airpower in "shaping" or "customising" the battlefield in such a way that the army, as also the navy, can carry out their designated tasks (Pandit 2007).'

In view of the experience during the Kargil conflict and

*Operation Parakram*, the navy can be expected to address Karachi port, the Pakistani navy and enemy shipping. Along with this, intelligence operations, that Pakistan is most sensitive to in light of its ethnic vulnerabilities, would be also scaled up. Diplomacy to insulate Pakistan from US and Chinese support and to pressure it to concede would also be in full swing. These offensive actions cumulatively could prompt nuclear use for political and psychological reasons rather than strategic rationality. This may happen even if the threshold was 'high' to begin with. Since it is the Pakistani military that is in control of its arsenal and has been known to privilege military over political considerations earlier, such as at Kargil, nuclear use is possible.

Pakistan's nuclear doctrine, though not in the public domain could be along the lines suggested by Sardar Lodhi. He writes that, 'Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine would therefore essentially revolve around the first-strike option.' He uses Stephen Cohen's term and defines the Pakistan's undeclared nuclear doctrine, as an 'option-enhancing policy'. According to him this would entail a 'stage-by-stage approach in which the nuclear threat is increased at each step to deter India from attacking (Lodhi 1999).' Graduated deterrence through escalatory steps, is described by Lodhi thus:

The first step could be a public or private warning, the second a demonstration explosion of a small nuclear weapon on its own soil, the third step would be the use of a few nuclear weapons on its own soil against Indian attacking forces. The fourth stage would be used against critical but purely military targets in India across the border from Pakistan. Probably in thinly populated areas in the desert or semi-desert, causing least collateral damage (*sic*). This may prevent Indian retaliation against cities in Pakistan. Some weapon systems would be in reserve for the counter-value role (Lodhi 1999).

This means that India's nuclear doctrine of 'massive' punitive retaliation and of inflicting 'unacceptable damage' is credible for higher order nuclear first use. However, it may not be prudent and proportionate for lower order strikes. There is therefore scope for limitation even at the nuclear level.

If the introduction of nuclear weapons into conflict is not overly destructive and is a lower order use such as for targeting tactical forces – which is the more likely form of first use as against a pre-emptive attempt at first strike - then for India to go ‘massive’ in response would be a departure from the Limited War concept. This is understandable since the war would no longer be a Limited War, if defined as a non-nuclear war, but a nuclear one. However, to abandon limitation, even in a war that has gone nuclear, may prove suicidal. In case Pakistan has a proportion of its retaliatory capability intact in such a circumstance, then India would be immeasurably damaged, besides the unforeseen costs to environment and society. Its economy would suffer a set back over the longer term, leaving India vulnerable to volatile politics and attempted takeovers by both the extreme right and left of the political spectrum. This may not be a price worth paying. Thus, the disjuncture between India’s conventional war doctrine and nuclear war doctrine needs to be reviewed. This can be resolved by movement in either of the two doctrines, discussed in the concluding chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter has set the stage for discussing the drivers behind doctrine formulation by attempting to highlight the developments in doctrine. The current status of the conventional doctrine has reportedly been articulated by the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) thus, ‘A major leap in our approach to conduct of operations (since then) has been the successful firming-up of the Cold Start strategy (to be able to go to war promptly) (Pandit 2009: 1).’ However the latest amendment to the Limited War doctrine is the statement of General V.K. Singh downplaying Cold Start. The Army Chief stated:

There is nothing called ‘Cold Start’. As part of our overall strategy we have a number of contingencies and options, depending on what the aggressor does. In the recent years, we have been improving our systems with respect to mobilisation, but our basic military posture is defensive (Pabby 2010).



This remark indicates that the army has registered the criticism Cold Start has come under. A view has it that, ‘a manoeuvre doctrine and a limited-war concept face practical questions about how they relate to India’s broader national security concerns (Kapoor 2010: 5).’ It is already being questioned as to whether the army had taken necessary measures to implement it in letter and spirit such as: remodelling the strike corps, staging forward strike units closer to the border etc. (Bakshi 2010: 46). Its command and control methods have not made any appreciable shift towards *Auftragstaktik* (mission tactics) based on delegation and ‘recon pull’ (reconnaissance pull). G.D. Bakshi, terming Cold Start a ‘land power centric doctrine’, rates it ‘poorly on the vital aspects of escalation dominance and escalation control (Bakshi 2010: 166). He therefore feels there is a ‘primary need’ to ‘urgently articulate’ an Indian doctrine for Limited War, ‘driven primarily by air and naval power-centric responses (Bakshi 2010: 167).’

It would therefore appear that even as much has been done to operationalise the doctrine, what remains undone is equally consequential while making an assessment. Organisational restructuring has been undertaken along the Pakistan border by the creation of 9 Corps and the South Western Command (Ladwig 2008: 184-185). The affiliation of a strike corps to each of the three commands along the border are indicative of the offensive punch available with the theatre commanders, along with the offensive content created by relocating pivot corps resources away from positional defence. Yet, the doctrine continues to be a ‘work in progress’ (Kanwal 2010). Ladwig’s conclusion is that, ‘Cold Start remains more of a concept than a reality (2008: 190).’

The shift away from the doctrine is to enable an appropriate response to Pakistan’s expansion of the proxy war from J&K into the rest of India, such as the Mumbai 26/11 terror attack. Jasjit Singh reflecting on the lack of response in case of the attacks on parliament and Mumbai suggests a possible direction for India’s strategy. His view is that the aim of changing Pakistan’s strategic posture would require greater subtlety of means. He writes:

(O)bviously, our response strategy should be based on discrete conventional punitive strikes against selected

politico-economic targets (preferably in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir – POK)... The aim of these strikes would be to generate effect-based outcome. These no doubt would generate military effects, but their real goal should be to create political-economic effects with the aim of influencing change in the policy and strategy pursued by Rawalpindi (2010: 16).

The inference from the life-cycle of Cold Start is that the earlier high profile of Cold Start was during the period when the doctrine was being firmed up. The pieces having fallen into place, it is possible to underplay the doctrine now. The higher profile earlier enabled deterrence, in terms of instilling fear in Pakistan on the possibilities of Indian reaction. Its present state of operationalisation gives the military confidence to make it expendable from the deterrence point of view. The current focus as stated by General V.K. Singh is on 'operations' depending on the 'contingency'. This re-evaluation may result in short, sharp military engagements, with escalation to Limited War possibility being readied for alongside, if only to deter it.

# 3. THE STRUCTURAL FACTOR

## Introduction

This chapter attempts to discern the impact of the structure in terms of developments in regional security; changes in India's strategic doctrine; and, in turn, the evolution of military doctrine. At the structural level, continuing security threats emanating from a military-dominated Pakistan negate possibility of the exclusion of a military response option. There is therefore a continuing perceived utility of military force in the nuclear age. Conceptually, this was arrived at during the post-Kargil period as the Limited War concept discussed in Chapter 2. Operationalisation of the Limited War concept awaited the formulation of the 'Cold Start' doctrine in the post *Operation Parakram* period. The expectation is that the resulting offensive posture would reinforce deterrence and also serves to achieve compellence - if deterrence falls short.

The argument is that while in the seventies, a status quoist India was content to have a defensive doctrine, an upward trend in Pakistan's power position in the early eighties because of US largesse, led to India making a shift towards a strategic doctrine of defensive deterrence, based on counter offensive capability. Post its covert nuclearisation by the late eighties, Pakistan was emboldened to step up the proxy war and, eventually, after overt nuclearisation in 1998, launch the Kargil intrusion a year later. India, finding a deficit in its deterrent posture in the wake of the parliament attack of 2001 went in for a potentially offensive doctrine. This is reflected in the offensive intent built into the military doctrine and, consequently, in the offensive content built into its forces. Since the doctrine is cognizant of the nuclear threshold, it is one informed by the Limited War concept.

Part I of this chapter studies India's changing strategic doctrine 1971 War onwards. In the backdrop of changing threat perceptions of Pakistan since the 1971 War, it reviews the evolution of its

military doctrine. Part II analyses the implications of military doctrine at the conventional and nuclear levels to bring out the consequent tension between offensive deterrence and compellence.

## I

### The Seventies

Through the sixties, the army had concentrated on building up its strengths learning from its 1962 experience. Shankar Roychowdhury, a former army chief, writing of the period, says:

Post 1965, the army reshaped itself into a dual-front operational structure which incorporated a light, infantry-intensive post 1962 component for the mountains, and now, a heavier mechanised-intensive post 1965 one for plains and deserts (2002: 151).

This set the stage for the seventies. India, having acquired regional pre-eminence through the vivisection of Pakistan in the 1971 War, was ready to realistically pursue its interests, without getting into strategic competition. It would maintain a capability that would be enough to deter its putative adversaries. K. Subrahmanyam, outlined the aim and strategic doctrine as: 'India has to be strong enough to deter interventionism and aggression by other nations but at the same time should not adopt a posture which will induce fears in the minds of other nations (Subrahmanyam 1972: 48).' The defensive strategic orientation for India that he advocated is evident from his view that:

India does not want to become a big power in the pejorative sense and to throw its weight about in international arena. Our aim is limited to ensuring our own security and that of our immediate neighbourhood when it affects our security adversely (1972: 48).

Subrahmanyam required that India have in 'readiness adequate forces to deter China and Pakistan from launching an attack either jointly or individually and in case deterrence fails to repel aggression effectively (1972: 48).' With respect to Pakistan, Subrahmanyam argued that 'with a clear margin of superiority

both in numbers and firepower, it should be possible to deter Pakistan from contemplating any more aggression against this country or invoking external political or military support to pursue a policy of confrontation against this country (1972: 53).’ With two adversaries to cater for, he outlined India’s aim as being to hold one and to reach a quick military decision with the other. To him, it was ‘obvious’ that the latter could only be Pakistan. While not making a detailed threat assessment, he was sanguine that India’s ten mountain divisions were adequate against the one hundred thousand Chinese military men in Tibet. The 15 divisions left for the Pakistan front did not provide an adequate safety margin (1972: 52). Therefore, he advocated that force requirements include more manpower, additional firepower, mobility and water crossing equipment, vertical envelopment capability and ability to operate in the desert (1972: 53).

However, given that strategic doctrine is a matter of political choice, there were other opinions in the discourse. Ravi Rikhye advocated a more offensive strategic orientation for the twin front problem:

We must follow a forward strategy and recognise the outposts for India’s national security... Our strategy in the next decade against the twin Pak-China threat has to be based on the Delbruck-Clausewitz theory i.e. strategy of annihilation against Pakistan and one of exhaustion against China (1972: 365).

Politically, there was little incentive for India to adopt an offensive strategic doctrine. Soon after the 1971 victory, it was beset with internal problems that acquisition of the nuclear capability in 1974 did little to dispel. These culminated in the Emergency (Verghese 2010: 185-210). The impact on security was minimal owing to Pakistan itself being beset with internal problems of its own relating to internal security in Baluchistan and civil-military relations. According to the ‘secret’ part of the Shimla Agreement, Bhutto was to take steps to integrate the Pakistan occupied part of J&K in such a manner as to enable both states to agree to convert the Line of Control (LOC) into an international border (Dhar 1995). The LOC, dating back to the Ceasefire Line (CFL) of the Karachi

Agreement of July 1949, had been demarcated, - apart from a few changes that occurred in 1971 operations- endorsed by both sides (Armed Forces website n.d.). Mired in internal political problems, Bhutto fell to a military coup and was hanged. Since both states were internally preoccupied and were not averse to the *status quo*, there was little inter-state security tumult.

The 1971 War had represented a quantum leap in the Indian employment of the military, from defensive and restrained military operations to taking the war into the enemy's territory. However, the victory has had its critics. The war outcome was deemed fortuitous and dependent on the adversary's poor handling of his forces (Dasgupta 2006: 95). The 1965 and 1971 Wars had demonstrated that the area under Western Command was too vast for effective command. Accordingly, in 1971, duplicate headquarters had been set up at Shimla and Bhatinda. After the 1971 War, the headquarters of the Northern Command were established at Udhampur, taking over responsibility for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Shimla was considered unsuitable for being the Western Command headquarters. The HQ moved to Chandigarh with Punjab and northern Rajasthan under its jurisdiction (Army website n.d.). After its successful showing in East Pakistan, the II Corps, raised in the run up to that war, was absorbed into the 'orbit' (order of battle) of the Western Command. This added another strike corps to the pre-existing I Corps that had participated in operation with questionable success in the Shakargarh sector of the western theatre. Thus, there were two strike corps arraigned against Pakistan. For its part, Pakistan had only one strike corps (I Corps); the second (II Corps) having a ground holding role (Globalsecurity.org, n.d.).

Doctrinally, refinements to the DCB obstacle concept were undertaken. A DCB, as the name suggests, constitutes a formidable obstacle designed to separate the armour from the infantry. The concept had been inspired in part by the experience of the army at the Ichogil Canal in the 1965 War (Kapila 1987: 7) and was in keeping with military thinking elsewhere, such as the Bar Lev line along the Suez Canal. However, doctrinal thinking that led to the Sundarji innovations of the next decade was for a more offensive

orientation. Speed in operations was taken as necessary to undercut international pressures for ceasefire. Therefore, an offensive capability that would bring about gains in a short time frame was required would be come in useful on the negotiating table. Carrying the war to the enemy territory required avoiding a frontal assault on his prepared defences. This meant having manoeuvrable forces to hit his lines of communication, These ideas figured in the famous Rao-Sundarji report of mid-seventies (Roychowdhury 2002: 153). The main findings of the report were implemented when the two became chiefs subsequently.

### **The Eighties**

To the eighties can be traced the strategic dialectic that is continuing to the present. The hiatus of the seventies in Indo-Pak strategic equations was broken by the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union at the turn of the decade. In the event, Pakistan profited from its 'frontline' status, with implications for the Indo-Pak security relationship. Pakistan's perception was that as the 'guardian of the Khyber Pass', it required a powerful military capability. Indian strategists 'vehemently disagreed' with this proposition (Cohen 1983: 82). Cohen (1983: 82) writes: 'They (Indian strategists) saw a strong Pakistan as disruptive; their image of regional stability envisioned a Pakistan as an Afghanistan: a weak, not a strong buffer.'

Taking this view seriously, Pakistan, in the period, kept India at the centre of its strategic cross-hairs. This had its antecedents in its leaving East Pakistan virtually defenceless in both 1965 and, compared to the threat, also in 1971. Even during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it did not transfer any forces for the defence of its frontier along the Durand Line (Cohen 1983: 85). Its threat perception is based on geography. It has its major port, subject to interdiction or blockade close to the border. Its population centres in Punjab are also within striking distance of armoured columns. The bulk of the armed might of the two states is maintained in ideal tank country in the plains along the border (Cohen 1983: 83). Given its size, location and terrain, it 'evolved a *strategic style* (italics in original) which may be termed as a strategic doctrine' of 'offensive defence' (Cohen 1983: 85; Palsokar 1986: 143). In Cohen's

description, the doctrine envisages that in time of heightening crisis, Pakistan would not hesitate to be the first to employ heavy use of force to gain an initial advantage. It was thought that a short, sharp, war would achieve Pakistan's military as well as political objectives (Cohen 1983: 85). Its lack of strategic depth virtually necessitates an offensive mindset. It sees war as an opportunity to bring international opinion to focus on Kashmir, though this involves a political risk. The doctrine hopes to achieve deterrence by raising the risk of Indian resort to war in short order, leaving no time for international pressures to act as Pakistan may prefer. This doctrine assumes a higher technical threshold and leadership across the hierarchy.

In the early eighties, to respond to its two-front problem due to Soviet presence towards its north, Pakistan arrived at a two-pronged answer (Cohen 1983: 86-87). One was the nuclear checkmating of India; and, second, fostering of a people's guerrilla war, experience for which it was then speedily gaining through the Central Intelligence Agency's activities with the *mujahedeen*. The nuclear capability would help neutralise an assumed Indian nuclear capability. The assumptions were that India had several nuclear weapons; that these were Pakistan centric; and that these could be used politically to paralyse Pakistani reaction by holding its population centres hostage in case of Indian action in Kashmir (Cohen 1983: 84-85). Nuclear weapons capability could also provide cover under which the Kashmir issue could be reopened by checking a conventional Indian counter. It could be used to cover a bold conventional offensive in Kashmir in case the Indian leadership proved to be 'weak and indecisive' (Cohen 1983: 86). The second prong, guerrilla war, had been resorted to earlier in 1965 with unsuccessful results. The idea of training and arming friendly populations in the neighbour's territory would help tie him 'down in a hundred places' or inflict damage a strategy of 'a thousand cuts'.

In the light of Pakistani thinking and actions, India broke out of its defensive mindset. A willingness to use force can be seen in the conduct of *Exercise Brasstacks*, the Indian pre-emption of the Pakistani takeover of Siachen through deployment on the Saltoro



ridgeline in 1984, and the military intervention in Sri Lanka in the form of peacekeeping. The pursuit of mechanisation is also evidence of this. The development of the AirLand Battle concept in the US had an influence on such thinking in India. The political constraint of not losing any territory had forced the fixing of linear defences, breeding a 'Maginot mentality'. In the context of the DCB defences and non-linear desert warfare, striking deep would disrupt attacks and help preserve territory. Instead of the defensive concept of 'spoiling attack' – an attack involving disruption of an enemy attack at its forming up stage – and counter attack on enemy bridgeheads, divisional level counter attacks into enemy build up and logistics areas, suggested an offensive vein.

Offensive operations were further cast in a more aggressive mode. The usual progress of operations involving breaking the crust of defences, establishing a bridgehead and breakout were taken as being operationally unacceptable. Instead, deeper attacks involving seizure of enemy's nuclear weapon and stowage sites, area centres of gravity and terrain choke points were considered to be of equal import. Such operations required air and heli-borne capability for attacks on multiple tiers in depth simultaneously with multiple thrust lines along a wide front.

The head of the College of Combat, in his Commandant's Note in the *Combat Journal*, set out the agenda for mechanisation which was witnessed through the decade. He sought the creation of a:

...viable strike force capable of being speedily launched into enemy territory for the capture of objectives in considerable depth... air mobility... mechanisation of these formations...and the armour content of the division increased and greater flexibility provided by the introduction of at least one more battle group headquarters... to do justice to the requirement to move fast and strike deep (Tuli 1981: iv).

On defensive operations, the commandant required even holding formations to 'introduce and practice with realism the capture of enemy positions across the border on the outbreak of hostilities; such actions would go a long way in... furthering our offensive aims.' He maintained that:

...unless this is practiced... it will be too much to expect our troops that are secure in pill boxes to get out to tackle the enemy defences... if we were to achieve any positive change in our present defensive approach we must reorient our thinking and training on a completely offensive basis (Tuli 1981: iv).

Since the College of Combat performed the function of disseminating doctrine through training and changing mindsets, the Commandant's words made clear the direction in which the army was headed.

A better alternative to counter attacking the enemy bridgeheads as per the linear defensive system, whether based on canal or DCB, lay instead in launching a 'mini counter offensive' on the territory through which the enemy's offensive forces were transiting into the bridgehead. The preoccupation with 'loss of territory' was to end, with a temporary loss of ground not seen as a disaster as long as the aim was to launch a riposte. Thus, the force was being suffused with an offensive, manoeuvre warfare, orientation; with defensive operations seen only as a 'temporary phase'. Thinking along these lines culminated in Exercise Brasstacks, a brainchild of General Sundarji to test his mechanisation initiatives.

The military aim of the exercise was to test the new formations and to ascertain the viability of the new deterrence doctrine. The political aim of the exercise was to coerce Pakistan to desist from aiding Khalistani insurgents. The genesis lay in the military support that Pakistan had obtained from the US by offering itself as a 'frontline state' (Ganguly 2002: 85). This aid had emboldened Pakistan into supporting the Khalistani insurgency in Indian Punjab. Ravi Rikhye writes that the military aspect was to learn how to handle multiple strike corps together, while the 'covert', coercive, part was to remind Pakistan that India could sever Sindh in case of its continued support to Khalistanis. Pakistani moves were an anticipatory extension of its army exercises *Flying Horse* and *Saf-e-Shikan* and the air force's *Exercise High Mark*. Counter moves of the Army Reserve South (ARS) northwards to threaten Punjab resulted in the Indian mobilisation, *Operation Trident*. The other

aspect introduced in security calculus in the latter half of the decade was the nuclear one. It made its first appearance in the open domain in the famous AQ Khan interview with Kuldip Nayar (Bakshi 2009: 163; Ganguly 2002: 86). The militarised crisis was eventually defused (Sahni 2008: 27).

## The Nineties

There were three factors of significance in the nineties for the Indian military. One was the intensifying of proxy war by Pakistan, with Kashmir erupting even as Punjab continued to be on the boil. The second was pressure of declining defence budgets brought on by liberalisation (Roychowdhury 2002: 128). The last was the effect of nuclearisation, initially covert, but requiring the military to take cognisance of the emerging security situation. These cumulatively had a retarding effect on the turn to the offensive seen in the previous decade. Thus, even as the threat grew in terms of a more aggressive Pakistan, India could not leverage its power. Pakistan's acquisition of the nuclear capability rendered India's conventional superiority questionable. Therefore the Sundarji era doctrine of 'deep strike' could not be employed. This detracted from credibility of India's conventional deterrent and resulted in its testing by Pakistan in the Kargil War.

Released from a 'two front' scenario by the withdrawal and the later demise of the Soviet Union, Pakistan was single-minded in addressing the perceived Indian threat (Bakshi 2009 (b): 78). It had adopted the doctrine of 'offensive defence' in *Exercise Zarb-e-Momin* under General Mirza Aslam Beg who envisioned a pre-emptive launch of two strike corps pincers (Bakshi 2009b: 79). The exercise attempted to incorporate the AirLand Battle concept (Banerjee 1990: 66) and could be seen as an answer to India's earlier *Exercise Brasstacks*. Irrespective of the Indian 'threat', there were other reasons prompting its proxy war, including revenge for the 1971 break-up of their country and its pre-existing irredentist claims on Kashmir.

The Cold War had ended and the contours of the new world order to replace it were unclear. An influential scenario building exercise - *Op Topac* - undertaken by an *Indian Defence Review*

team in mid-1989, had it that Pakistan could repeat its 1965 *Operation Gibraltar*, only more successfully (IDR Research Team 1989). Infiltration and fuelling a Kashmiri uprising was to be followed up by a conventional attack in Phase II. The manner in which events unfolded on the ground in Kashmir lent credence to this scenario. It was often mistaken as the blueprint of Pakistani plans (Jagmohan 1992: 140). The conventional response option was not in the foreground, though its existence did ensure that Pakistan kept the provocation below the Indian 'tolerance threshold'. Despite constrained circumstances, India's conventional capability ensured that Pakistan was deterred from escalating its military support to levels where India would feel compelled to use its superior military capability. Pakistan persisted with its 'low cost, low risk' operation (Banerjee 1990: 66), with the diplomatic advantage of 'plausible deniability'. India's response was restricted largely to counter insurgency operations, both in Punjab and Kashmir.

The conventional reticence was owing in part to declining defence budgets through the period. However, this was a period in which Pakistan also faced constraints, primarily withdrawal of US assistance in October 1990 when President George Bush was not able to give the necessary certification required under the Pressler Amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act (Lodhi 1998) that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device. Pakistan's declining financial position reinforced its proxy war policy, since being less able to cope increased the seeming need to keep Indian forces tied down.

Implications of the economic liberalisation through the nineties proved dire for the army. A former vice chief had it that the lack of funds for modernisation automatically led to a delay in the restructuring plans of the services. The army's mechanisation had been held up and the overall effect was loss of the technological edge (Singh V.K. 1996: 21). Kaushik Roy records that the conventional balance fell from 1.99:1 in 1993 to 1.4:1 in 1997 (Roy 2010: 167). The strategic option during the decade was restricted to defence. Of its two variants - dissuasion and deterrence - an analysis had it that declining defence budgets would affect

deterrence capability adversely. Even dissuasive capability was difficult to maintain. A balanced military prefers a mix of both; the proportion of each depends on the war objectives and the operational situation. It was assessed that India had a 'deterrent' capability with respect to Pakistan and a 'dissuasive' one against China. India's deterrence was limited to the conventional level. Since Pakistan was not interested in a conventional tryst, it was instead emboldened at the sub-conventional level. No further reduction was thought possible lest it be construed out as an invitation for hostile action by Pakistan (Banerjee 1996: 46-47).

The third aspect - nuclearisation - necessitated the resort to Bernard Brodie's re- conceptualisation of Clausewitz's classical definition in light of the impact of the nuclear age. Brodie wrote on the caveat on understanding Limited War thus:

Clausewitz's classical definition must be modified, at least for any opponent who has a substantial nuclear capability behind him. 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 (1959: 313).

The impetus to doctrinal thinking was the emerging threat posed by the nexus between China and Pakistan in both nuclear and missile spheres (Perkovich 2002: 410). This was referred to by Prime Minister Vajpayee in his letter to the US President justifying Indian tests of 1998(Perkovich 2002: 417).

Through the nineties, the perceived threat grew more pronounced with Pakistan continuing to pursue its weapons oriented nuclear programme. Ballistic missile proliferation was another major area of concern, especially since the technology was acquired by clandestine means or transfer of technology from external sources (MoD 1990-91: 2). Pakistan had reportedly acquired M11 missiles from China with a range of more than 300 Kms and believed to be capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Consequently, on May 11, and May 13, 1998, India successfully completed a planned series of nuclear tests, called 'Shakti' (Perkovich 2002: 416). As a responsible

nuclear weapons state, it declared that 'India does not intend to use its nuclear weapons for aggression or for mounting threats against any country. Neither does it intend to engage in an arms race with anyone (MoD 1997-98: 6).' The aim was to have 'a secure and effective deterrent against the use or threat of use of weapons of mass destruction against India (MoD 1997-98: 2).' The nuclear doctrine was termed as 'recessed deterrence' (Singh, J. 1998: 318).

The decade ended with doctrinal innovation on both conventional and nuclear planes. The National Security Advisory Board's Draft Nuclear Doctrine was presented to the government in August 1999 (NSAB 1999). As mentioned earlier, the IDSA initiated a move towards Limited War thinking at a conference on January 6, 2000.

### The 2000s

In keeping with Clausewitz's emphasis on the destruction of the enemy's military capability in order to dominate its 'will', the *Indian Army Doctrine* (ARTRAC 2004) laid down, that 'military force contributes by the defeat of an opposing force (ARTRAC 2004: 29).' It defined 'defeat' as 'diminishing the effectiveness of the enemy to the extent that he is either unable to participate in combat or, at least, not being able to fulfil his intention (ARTRAC 2004: 29).' It follows that war strategy is the joint plan employing the three services to bring about a condition in which the enemy is disabled and own intent is fulfilled through combat. The goal is the psychological paralysis of the enemy leadership by application of combat power for the purposes of pre-emption, destruction, dislocation and disruption. Causing such attrition to the enemy to induce it to quit the conflict is understandable in a non-nuclear scenario. The logic was perhaps that nuclear deterrence, predicated on infliction of 'unacceptable damage', would hold (Banerjee 1996: 47).

However, nuclearisation, requires a more circumspect attitude to the use of force. The strategic doctrine that was implicit in the promise of a refurbished national security system has not been forthcoming. The expectation that the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) would undertake India's maiden Strategic

Defence Review (SDR) as a preview to formulating the national security doctrine (Bedi 2000: 27) has been belied (Mukherjee 2011). While each NSAB that is constituted does submit a strategic review to the government, not a single one has been released officially.

Consequently, the military propensity for maximising employment of force needs self-regulation. That an explicit doctrine on Limited War has not been articulated by the Indian military suggests otherwise. While the air and naval components of military power lend themselves to easier insertion, moderation and retraction in a conflict situation, the land component lacks the inherent flexibility. There is advocacy for building flexibility into India's strike corps through the introduction of IBGs in the tradition of Soviet Operational Manoeuvre Groups (OMGs) (Kanwal 2008: 309; Kapoor 1986: 62-63). It awaits the next iteration of the Indian army doctrine or a separate report on pu Limited War as a specialised form of war (Ahmed 2009a).

Since wars have a dynamic of their own and if uncontrolled have a tendency towards escalation, there has to be a 'deliberate hobbling' (Bernard Brodie) of the effort in the nuclear age. This implies a move away from viewing war as a means to impose one's 'will', but as a 'strategy of conflict' (Thomas Schelling) in which adversaries bargain through graduated military responses for the attainment of a negotiated settlement (Cannon 1992:85). The difference that nuclear weapons make is that only one of the two types of wars as defined by Clausewitz can be waged. The total defeat of the enemy of a nuclear armed enemy is not impossible, but may prove too dangerous and hurtful to attempt. However, a war for bringing him to the negotiating table then appears as the only option (Echevarria 2007: 99).

The decade began with worsening terrorism in Kashmir, because of the inability to control infiltration due to the momentary diversion of attention from counter insurgency during the Kargil episode. Thereafter, terrorism also spread in the rest of India, spurred by Pakistan and due to local roots in a worsening communal situation. Overt nuclearisation further cramped India's

conventional might, particularly during *Operation Parakram*. Jasjit Singh brings out two aspects of the nuclear overhang. The first is:

The next conventional war that India may be involved in would have to be a limited war. ... But what is clear is that the presence of nuclear weapons with both our potential neighbours would certainly be a constraining factor in war where our own interest would require that as far as possible nuclear weapons should not be allowed to come into play (Singh, J. 2010: 14).

The second, is that:

... nuclear weapons must not be allowed to eliminate the choice of conventional war... a close study would indicate that there would be adequate strategic space below the nuclear level that can be exploited for the successful conduct of a war with conventional military capabilities' (Singh, J. 2010: 14).

The seeming erosion of India's conventional power through the nineties was best evident from Pakistan's upping of the ante in launching the Kargil War. An apprehension of the erosion of the power base has been compensated by the adoption of an offensive stance. The perception of symmetry with Pakistan is offset by the suitable leveraging of the military capability. India therefore had to innovate its military doctrine to bring conventional power back into the reckoning of the balance of power between the two states. The resulting doctrines, formulated in the nuclear era, have had to engage with the implications of nuclearisation.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US and the militarised counter added to the seeming utility of military power brought about by continuing terrorism. Of significance to its employability, however, was the presence and action of the US in the vicinity of Pakistan for waging the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Taking advantage of this turn of events, Pakistan was back to being a 'frontline' state. Its change of policy with respect to the Taliban regime helped end the US sanctions imposed on it. By the end of



the decade, the situation was relatively stable in Kashmir. The multiple terror attacks in Mumbai 26/11 indicated India's continuing vulnerability to terror and continuing limitations of the military as the preferred instrument of choice in the circumstance. In wake of the terror attack, various military response options were considered. These included at the lower end, surgical strikes, covert action, activation of the Line of Control, raids by Special Forces and heliborne troops and border clashes. At the upper end was possible execution of Cold Start. This could be restricted to the Line of Control or be extended to the plains and desert sectors. Reservations in the exercise of choice along these lines, indicates that Limited War has its limitations as a policy option (TNN 2008).

Terrorism continued to be seen as India's primary security threat through the decade (MoD 2003-04: 7). There was no conventional threat because of Pakistan's preoccupation with war on terror being waged in its north since October 2001, however, Pakistani adventurism cannot be discounted, as the events in Mumbai in November 2008 reveal. In view of this perception, the key elements fundamental to India's security planning have been identified by the ministry to include: preparation for full spectrum operations; non-membership of any military alliance or strategic grouping; requirement of an independent deterrent capability; involvement in the internal security function, corresponding force structures and orientation; and a maritime interest requiring a blue water naval capability (MoD 2003-4: 13-14).

A strategic doctrine is meant to serve the state to navigate in regional and global power play. The Limited War thinking in the early part of the decade led to the acknowledgment that 'the importance of strategic (politico-military) doctrine is much higher for limited war than those that are full scale, leave alone total wars (Singh, J. 2000: 1212). Jasjit Singh laments that in India's case, there has not been a clearly articulated strategic doctrine. The consequence is that:

In the absence of a well established doctrine, there is a strong tendency to simply keep building on existing force

levels and structures in what can only be described as an add-on strategy. Inevitably such an approach tends to be highly reactive... An overall defensive philosophy only tends to reinforce this reactive characteristic. This would be a serious handicap in limited war (J. Singh 2000: 1213).'

Jasjit Singh has attempted to offer a prescriptive strategic doctrine. He takes India's national aim as being the building of a sustainable peace for ensuring socio-economic growth. The pillars of his framework include prevention of war, removal of the threat and risk of war and reduction of the threat perception of potential adversaries. He acknowledges a 'fundamental need to move from the classical paradigm of competitive security to cooperative model of inter state security (J. Singh 2000: 1213).' He requires 'necessary precautions' amounting to deterrence to remain, but alongside efforts towards détente and strategic stability are to be made. Broadly, two alternatives emerge: defence through either a strategic defensive or strategic offensive strategy; and second, prevention of war through credible deterrence, at a minimum. He is inclined to favour the second alternative - prevention of war through deterrence. This would entail quantitative and qualitative superiority but one tempered by affordability (J. Singh 2000: 1214-15). He favours air power as an instrument that furnishes both deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment, as against land power that can only deliver the former (J. Singh 2000: 1219). The doctrine that emerges, as recounted in the previous chapter, is considerably more offensive (Singh, H 2011: 17).

The diplomatic strand of the grand strategy currently takes advantage of military self-confidence stemming from an improved counter insurgency situation, as also the predicament of Pakistan. On the J&K issue, success is reportedly forthcoming following the multi-pronged strategy adopted by the security forces being able to create near 'normal conditions' for the state government to function (MoD 2003-04). This optimistic perspective translated into India being ready to consider other options, short of redrawing the boundaries, to find a pragmatic solution. It was prepared to work out cooperative, consultative mechanisms so as to maximise

the gains of cooperation in solving problems of social and economic development of the region (MoD 2006-07: 4). This built on the November 2003 ceasefire along the LOC and the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL), and the Islamabad Joint Statement of January 2004 in which President Musharraf made an unconditional commitment to not allow any territory under Pakistani control to be used to support terrorism in any manner (Joint Statement 2004).

A number of initiatives were taken to ease tensions, normalise and improve relations. At the level of the government, the Composite Dialogue was initiated with the resumption of foreign secretary level talks in June 2004. At the level of armed forces, a number of CBMs were envisaged. Upgrading the link between Directors General Military Operations, new communication links at division/corps level, annual meetings of vice chiefs of army staff (VCOAS) and exchanges between the armed forces related academic institutions (MoD 2004-05: 9, 21). Not all have progressed as desired; but the pace and direction of progress is itself a pressure point in the overall two-pronged effort to both incentivise and pressurise Pakistan into ending its strategy of proxy war. Expectedly, Pakistan was reluctant to keep to its end of the bargain.

While India reached out to Pakistan even while exercising quasi-compellence, Pakistan has been prevaricating. The drawdown in the support to terrorists in Kashmir has not resulted in the rolling back of the supporting infrastructure. This enabled launch of the 26/11 attacks on Mumbai. This highlights the necessity of formulating a strategic doctrine, linking it to military doctrine and communicating the same to the adversary. Under-gridding the logic of punishment is to end Pakistani impunity by punishing its military, which is at the bottom of India's strategic predicament (Gurung 2011: 39). The idea is that once the Pakistani military is hurt directly and there are prospects of its losing power, then it would be more amenable to India's friendly overtures. Increasing lethality of modern war has led to the army's strategy to conduct war on enemy territory.

## II

### Implications for Military Doctrines

#### *Conventional Doctrine*

The military doctrine reflecting the strategic doctrine is the *Indian Army Doctrine* (2004). As noted in the last chapter, the term 'Limited War' occurs but once in this publication and that too on a graphic showing the Spectrum of Conflict (2004: 12). This is problematic since the graphic in question seamlessly melds Limited War with the next stage of Total War. Further, it makes a distinction between Total War and the next higher stage of nuclear war, indicating that wider a conventional war is possible in a nuclear environment. Instead, the nuclear overhang virtually negates the concept of Total War. Even Limited War has escalatory possibilities (Kumar 2009). An example of this is the employment of India's Special Forces (SF). It is reported that:

Eight new battalions will be in the airborne mode and trained to take out enemy's N-capabilities. The air borne would enable the Special Forces to carry out a variety of sensitive and surgical strikes... the Special Forces would now have the capabilities to inflict heavy damage on strategic targets in an enemy country including nuclear installations...(Dutta 2006: 1).

Such a position has two implications: one, that in the nuclear era preventing war from turning into Total War is imperative; and two, that nuclear war could yet erupt even during prosecution of what is originally intended to be a Limited War. A corollary to this is that nuclear war is not necessarily a Total War.

While Limited War requires a deliberation that only a separately articulated doctrine can ensure but more importantly it needs to be done in keeping the nuclear doctrine in mind. Any change in one may entail a corresponding change in the other. Therefore, the doctrinal exercise cannot be restricted to being internal to the military. It could be 'military led', with input and enabling cross-fertilisation from a wider field under aegis of the NSC system (Ahmed 2009a).

Typically, it was the perceptive General Sundarji (1992: 77) who had by the early nineties discerned that this was the direction of the future, writing, 'Indian conventional operations should be modulated in scope and depth of penetration into Pakistani territory so that ingress can stop before Pakistan resorts to the use of nuclear weapons.' Manpreet Sethi, writing in the same vein, states that, 'Military strikes would need to be restricted in depth into enemy territory and spread in geographical expanse, or limited in scope to carry out deeper, narrow thrusts into adversary territory in order to remain well away from the expressed 'red lines' of the nuclear threshold... (Sethi 2009: 308)'. Bharat Karnad's view in his 'Sialkot Grab' scenario is:

Converging rapidly on major towns... for shallow but decisive ingress into Pakistani territory is that it is doable...and in each case confronts the GHQ with the dilemma of major proportions of how to stanch the flow... restricting advance to populated environs... capturing a string of major towns (Karnad 2005: 8).

Since Limited War would unfold in the nuclear backdrop, its implications for nuclear the doctrine and the implications of the nuclear doctrine needs also be factored in. The military has been seized of this for the last decade. This is a departure from the earlier situation. The disconnect between the conventional and nuclear dimension has been a given in the period of development of nuclear weapons. Describing the situation in the nineties, General Shankar Roychowdhury writes of the vacuum of information in which doctrine developed:

Denied any interaction with the national leadership, and in the absence of any guidelines or directions from the government, each Service tried to develop individual doctrines for nuclear warfare. However, as always, personal mindsets and egos at the highest level in each Service obstructed the evolution of an inter-Service approach to the subject. As a result there was little or no movement towards a common, synergised nuclear doctrine (Roychowdhury 2002: 276).

He further reveals that the ARTRAC was given the mandate to prepare an updated manual on nuclear warfare. In absence of any official parameters, it proceeded on the basic assumption of an adverse nuclear balance. The only options were restricted to protective and defensive measures (Roychowdhury 2002: 274). On the conventional front, the Army Training Command (ARTRAC) 'was already working extensively on development of concepts (Roychowdhury 2002: 160).' Their 'intellectual basis was essentially the doctrinal theories of Airland Battle and Deep Attack, restructured to cater to the subcontinent. The emphasis was on mobility, long range firepower, deep surveillance, electronic warfare, secure communications and air defence in the tactical battle area (Roychowdhury 2002: 160).' The current situation is greatly improved, not only because the SFC is no longer a nascent organisation, but the NSCS with a core group of military men is also involved in assisting the NSA in his task as head of the Executive Council of the NCA.

### *Nuclear Doctrine*

The trend in nuclear doctrine favours 'credible' over 'minimum'. The offensive direction of the doctrine is evident from the caveat to NFU over chemical and biological weapons use and the use of the term 'massive'. Developments in ballistic missile defences and acquisition of launch capability of multiple satellites in space technology indicate that India can move to a first use posture in the future. It would have the submarine deterrent in place with at least two nuclear submarines operational by mid-decade. The submarine launched ballistic missile K-15 is undergoing tests as is the Agni V that will cover the Chinese east coast from peninsular India. Scott Sagan (2009) and Rajesh Basrur (2006) believe these developments are enabled by an expansive reading of 'credible'. Sagan writes that, 'India's nuclear doctrine in 2003 moved, subtly but clearly, away from the pure form of no first use that was previously espoused toward a more flexible and potentially "offensive" nuclear doctrine (2006: 221).'

While the movement is prompted by the perception of China as a threat over the long term, the implications for the Pakistan front are in terms of escalation dominance. The desired effect is

principally the forcing upwards of the nuclear threshold by promising nuclear retribution to any form of nuclear first use, even against intruding tactical spearheads. This was regarding the alternative to shallow front offensives on the conventional plane articulated by Gurmeet Kanwal thus: “Broad Front - Shallow Objective’ offensive planning is unlikely to dissuade Pakistan... The only sensible option for India would be to call Pakistan’s nuclear bluff and plan to launch Strike Corps offensive operations to ‘Strike Hard- Strike Deep’ (2009: 81).’

Alternatives for nuclear retaliation for enemy nuclear first use also exist. For Manpreet Sethi, it would be logical to use the weapons on cities to cause ‘unacceptable’ damage (Sethi 2009: 145). She is not persuaded by India’s current doctrinal understanding that unacceptable damage requires ‘massive’ punitive retaliation. Bharat Karnad has been a strong votary of ‘graduated deterrence or discriminate deterrence... A nuclear version of ‘flexible response’, but one that is furthered by a variegated nuclear force structure (Karnad 2005: 5).’ Unlike Karnad, Sundarji does not believe in variegated nuclear forces (Sundarji 1992b: 45), but in ‘minimum deterrence’ (Sundarji 1992a: n.d). The emphasis of late on ‘credible’ is missing from his articulation of a nuclear doctrine for India. His formulation is more in line with limitation in war, including one that has for some reason gone nuclear. He wrote: ‘Terminate nuclear exchange at lowest possible level with a view to negotiating the best peace that is politically acceptable (Sundarji 1992c: 77).’ This is in line with Bernard Brodie’s view, ‘The main war goal upon the beginning of a strategic nuclear exchange should be surely to terminate it as quickly as possible and with the least amount of damage possible - on both sides (Brodie 1983: 79).’ This does not require an emphasis on ‘credibility’ at the expense of ‘minimum’. This is in keeping with a war-detering as against a war-fighting posture.

## **Contention over Strategic Doctrine**

### *Coercion*

India’s acquisition programme indicates that the proactive doctrine has downstream effects. While this programme has been criticised

as 'arming without aiming' (Cohen and Dasgupta 2010), it instead indicates that India is building up muscle to prosecute Limited War. Yearly imports have jumped by over 50 per cent over the last three-four years. These deals include the \$1.5 billion *Admiral Gorshkov*, the \$1.1 billion Phalcon early warning radar and communication system, the \$1.7 billion Hawk AJT project with Britain and the \$ 2 billion Scorpene deal with France (Pandit 2004: 5). India expects to spend \$100 billion on arms, to not only to refurbish its obsolete systems, but go in for state of the art systems as remotely piloted vehicles, net centricity, fifth generation fighter, nuclear submarines etc. Its defence budget has gone up from \$11.8 billion in 2000 to over \$ 36.03 billion in 2011. India emerged as the second largest arms importer, second only to China.

The strategic purpose that can be read into this, is that of increasing the power asymmetry with Pakistan. This is at variance with Cohen and Dasgupta's understanding that, 'strategic restraint also contributes to the astounding lack of political direction in Indian efforts at military modernisation (2010: xii).' Instead, the ongoing arming is to the tune of India ending up as the largest global arms importer (Pandit 2011) is to enable prosecution of Limited War and for escalation control through escalation dominance. The assumption behind this could well be to bolster conventional deterrence and extend it to credibly cover sub conventional war. But that it has overtures of compellence in light of the proactive doctrine cannot be denied. The strategy is also reminiscent of the eighties in the Cold War in which the US exhausted the USSR through increasing military competition. Even if this interpretation is erroneous, it is the one that Pakistan will inevitably alight on. The dimension of security dilemma is discounted and likewise linked Pakistani actions with India's security dilemma. Intervention to break this 'chicken-egg' conundrum requires a revisit to strategic doctrine.

### *Strategy of Restraint*

In so far as an offensive posture is meant to reinforce deterrence to convey the threat of deterrence by punishment for sub conventional transgressions, it is in keeping with India's 'strategy



of restraint'. (Incidentally, the term was used first in the early eighties by then Major Shamsheer Mehta (1980) - later a general officer- writing in to the Editor of the *Combat Journal!*) The strategy of restraint, being itself subject to change due to internal political compulsions and interplay of strategic partnerships, indicates that the compellence option is not ruled out. While India is not an expansive power, it is provoked by Pakistani truculence into an offensive doctrine so as to acquire the capability to bring about change in Pakistani attitude and behaviour as necessary. Offensive posture is to end Pakistani sense of impunity. Thus, deterrence appears to rely on the capability for compellence. The moot question is whether this is at all feasible, and wise, in a nuclear context.

The strategy of restraint can be expected to have been informed also by budget constraints. The expectation behind the offensive doctrine has been that it would be suitably materialised by the GDP that was set to grow in the region of nine per cent. Even if the military budget is pegged at two per cent, money would not be a constraint. The China factor, in terms of its spending being three times that of India, would remain as the rationale. The implication for the Pakistan front could be a move away from the strategy of restraint since resources would no longer be a constraint. With a Limited War Doctrine amenable to operationalisation through capability development, compellence will figure among the possible directions of the future. This has been the case in India's earlier defensive and conventional deterrence doctrine. Since Indian military budgets and capabilities have expanded in keeping with its growing economy, India has sufficient resources to countenance offensive doctrines. However, the situation has changed in light of the global financial meltdown and its effects on India's economy.

The strategy of restraint, adopted as a doctrine, also implies a hardnosed cost-benefits based strategic choice for India. Cohen and Dasgupta (2010: xii) believe, that, 'The political preference of restraint has wisely sought to escape the security dilemma rather than embrace it...' India wishes for a period of peace and stability in order to consolidate on its economic gains. This is analogous to

the Chinese doctrine of keeping a low profile so as to further their development in the early period since reforms began in 1978 (Rajamohan 2003: 153). Even if India can afford a military diversion with Pakistan in terms of sustaining physical and financial losses, it would be set back in relation to its larger challenge, that of China. Indeed, such a setback to India can be taken as part of Chinese strategy of using Pakistan to tie India down. Therefore the Indian preference for war avoidance is understandable. It was sustained despite energetic arguments for a military response to 26/11 (Roemer 2010). However, it would come under considerable strain in case of another provocative terror attack. This may have had some impact on Pakistani calculations of sub conventional restraint, among other factors such as radicalisation in that state and the unfolding situation in 'Af-Pak' (Afghanistan-Pakistan).

The Indian initiative to resume the peace process, that have been in the pipeline since the Sharm el Sheikh meeting between the two prime ministers of 2009 (PIB 2009), is to create the space for the strategy of restraint to continue. The hope is to create the conditions of trust that would defuse Pakistan's sub conventional strategy. This would then keep the strategy of restraint untested, and India's economic trajectory on course. The state of the economy, though valuable in itself, also has the advantage of delivering on power credentials that under gird military power. Thus, India would be able to employ the military option, not necessarily for compellence but for punishment, if required in future. Compellence is difficult to achieve, however, retribution is easier to administer. The consequences of such reaction are not necessarily benign and may result in the need to periodically resort to such military action. These are the strategic considerations that would inform any departure from the current strategy of restraint.

There needs being explicit articulation of the Limited War Doctrine, over and beyond it's currently being embedded in the subtext of the doctrine document. Scepticism regarding the basis of Limited War Doctrine informs the Wikileaks revelation of mail from the US ambassador in New Delhi to the state department describing Cold Start (Roemer 2010). The US assessment was scathing as it said that, 'The Indian Army's "Cold Start Doctrine"

is a mixture of myth and reality. It has never been and may never be put to use on a battlefield because of substantial and serious resource constraints.’ This Roemer attributes to the ‘GOI intent to ever actually implement Cold Start is very much an open question.’ He believes that the hesitation is because the , ‘Indian leaders no doubt realise that, although Cold Start is designed to punish Pakistan in a limited manner without triggering a nuclear response, they cannot be sure whether Pakistani leaders will in fact refrain from such a response.’

Reacting to the leaked cable, the Army Chief said that Cold Start does not exist. He is reported to have said, ‘We know what has to be done ... things (are) in place ... We practice our contingency depending on situations. We are confident that we will be able to exercise the contingency when the time comes (PTI 2010).’ This implies that Cold Start is not a default option, but one of many. In other words, it is a Pakistan-centric, situation-dependent strategy. The ‘operations’ mentioned by the chief are the army’s answer to the posers regarding dangers of Cold Start. Cold Start is possibly not an option that India will employ reflexively, but could choose to do so or be forced into making the choice depending on Pakistani counter moves to India’s launch of ‘operations’ under grave terror provocations.

## **Conclusion**

The Indian objective has apparently shifted to forcing Pakistan ‘to do something’ (compellence) i.e. dismantle its infrastructure of terror. Its earlier position was persuading Pakistan ‘not to do something’ (deterrence) i.e. conduct proxy war. The capacity for compellence not only bolsters deterrence but facilitates a switch to compellence, if necessary. The problem is that compellence lacks the limits of deterrence and is more difficult to achieve and manage. This accounts for the advocacy here of spelling out a Limited War Doctrine. While the Indian military practices its formations on manoeuvres keeping the nuclear backdrop in mind, there is a need to do more. A Limited War Doctrine would make the military doctrine compliant with the nuclear context. It will bring the military doctrine in line with strategic doctrine. Since the latter is not articulated, it can be seen in the response to 26/11 as a ‘strategy

of restraint'. For an offensive military doctrine, 'restraint' implies limitation. Therefore, as against the earlier case in which limitation was built into doctrine through appropriate strategy, the converse is more applicable now. Whereas the existing version of the doctrine deals with war, with limitation being worked in by strategy as per the political aims set, the doctrine could well instead be one for a Limited War lending itself to escalation as per the dictates of strategy. Since this aspect is indeed fraught, it needs explication in a Limited War Doctrine.

The current status of the army's conventional doctrine is that Cold Start does not exist as a doctrine, even if it does provide the basis for a possible strategy against Pakistan in case of terror provocation. This enables inclusion of a measured politico-military response not amounting to war into the repertoire. That Cold Start nevertheless does figure in the discourse was made plain by the army chief's remarks on Army Day, 'A lot has changed since the days of *Op Parakram*. If we did something in 15 days then, we can do it in seven days now. After two years, we may be able to do it in three days (Pandit 2012).'

## 4. CONCLUSION

### Introduction

In the chronological narrative, the doctrine was conceived at a conference at the IDSA in wake of the Kargil War. The Kargil War had brought home to the Indian military that there was a conventional space between the sub conventional and nuclear threshold for military exploitation. Even as conceptualisation of the change was underway, the 'twin peaks' crisis intervened. The limitations of India's 'all or nothing' approach, that had hitherto been dependent on strike corps being launched after mobilisation, were highlighted. The 2004 document, *Indian Army Doctrine*, was an outcome of the 'lessons learnt'. With a large body of work of Cold War vintage preceding India's conscious tryst with the Limited War concept, it is remarkable that discussion of limited has been absent from Indian strategic thinking. The implicit assumption in this is that India has only fought Limited Wars. The Kargil War was epitome of a Limited War, and understandably so, since both states had gone nuclear a year prior to then. The Limited War concept as an intellectual construct overtly arrived in India only in wake of the Kargil War.

A deliberate psychological movement away from the 'defensive mentality' of the preceding two decades provided a fertile intellectual space for the proactive doctrine. India had earlier moved away from 'deterrence by denial' or 'defensive defence' to deterrence based on counter offensive capability conferring an ability to inflict punishment. This had occurred incrementally over the preceding period since the mechanisation dating to the eighties. The military mindset therefore was receptive to the doctrine becoming being 'proactive' and offensive. The strategic predicament posed by Pakistan at the structural level, the churning in strategic culture by the infusion of political culture into cultural nationalism at the state level, and the need for the military to adapt to the nuclearised conflict circumstances were the compelling drivers.

The aims that Limited War helped fulfil in the India-Pakistan context were to deter Pakistan, to coerce it if necessary, into reversing provocation to below Indian thresholds of tolerance and, if that was to fail, to prosecute war for compellence. Such a war was envisaged as comprising proactive joint offensive operations across a broad front and involving multiple offensives. These were to advance to shallow depths so as not to trigger the adversary's nuclear reaction threshold. Swift mobilisation and manoeuvre warfare inspired operations were to ensure speedy end to the conflict in terms of time. The assumption was that the political go-ahead at the outset would set off the chain of events. This was necessary to overcome the mobilisation differential in Pakistan's favour because of its cantonments being closer to the border and its operating on interior lines of communication. This was the way to get round prepared defences. This did not then require a full mobilisation of defence potential of the country. The gains made were to be traded for future good behaviour and to punish the Pakistan army in particular through attrition, particularly by air and fire power. Strike corps were to 'posture' in the background, either for exploiting success or to keep the adversary's reaction non-escalatory, depending on whether the war aim was self-effacing or expansive. Naval operations, intelligence and covert operations, diplomatic and political action would form the additional prongs operating to suitably influence the mind of the Pakistani decision makers, in effect, its military apex.

The full implications of the nuclear context to the conflict have come into the reckoning in response to the criticism the doctrine has received. For instance, the *Indian Army Doctrine* states, 'Offensive operations are a decisive form of winning a war. Their purpose is to attain the desired end state and achieve decisive victory (2004: 7).' The term 'decisive victory' ideally should not figure at all, given that just a page later the doctrine has it that, 'Future operations will be conducted against a nuclear backdrop; all planning should take this important factor into account (2004: 8).' The term 'decisive victory' had figured in the 1998 document, even though that had been written in a period of recessed deterrence. The 2004 document does not go into specifics of the planning required in view of the nuclear backdrop. The doctrine is reported

to have a classified second part. This may perhaps be where the Limited War issue has been discussed. Nevertheless, since doctrines need not be classified, there is a case for an explicit non-classified articulation. This indicates that India is still on a learning curve as a newly nuclearised state.

### **The Structural Factor**

At the structural level, the regional security situation has impacted India's strategic posture. At this level the primary threat was the one posed by Pakistan, India's revisionist neighbour. Given its revisionist aims and weak power status, Pakistan went nuclear covertly. This has accounted for its venturing to prosecute a proxy war. India was consequently forced to respond with restraint, both at Kargil and during *Operation Parakram*. Emulating Pakistan, it reworked its doctrine to exploit the space between sub-conventional war and the nuclear threshold for conventional operations. This was in accord with the tenets of the Limited War concept. The expectation is that an offensive posture would reinforce deterrence.

The threat posed by Pakistan has been manifest at the sub conventional level over the last three decades. In the eighties there was also the apprehension that Pakistan could follow up its sub conventional proxy war with conventional war. In response, India's strategic doctrine moved from being defensive in the seventies to deterrence in the eighties with mechanisation. India's military doctrine was increasingly in favour of the offensive to the extent that the first edition of the written doctrine issued in 1998, stated its intention to fight the war on enemy territory. By the end of the eighties recessed deterrence was in place. This reduced India's mechanised advantage, though the military doctrine did not evolve correspondingly. This lack of development in military doctrine was owing to the military being kept out of the nuclear loop; the assumption that nuclear deterrence based on counter-value targeting would hold; and an internal fixation with counter insurgency in the nineties. It was only post over nuclearisation and the Kargil War that the military was forced to contend with an obsolescent military doctrine.

This was impelled by a change in strategic posture from deterrence to coercion and quasi-compellence as demonstrated by *Operation Parakram*. It was only in wake of *Operation Parakram* that the military formulated the Limited War doctrine, discerning a window below the nuclear threshold to bring conventional advantages to bear. The current doctrine is termed the 'strategy of deterrence'. This implies a reversion to deterrence, but has been refurbished by rising defence budgets over the decade. The direction of the future is a move away from the Limited War Doctrine, since this is seen as potentially disruptive of the national economic trajectory. The military is possibly contemplating contingency operations, with Limited War as a possibility triggered by Pakistani reaction.

There is a case for the move towards a defensive doctrine. The advantage is that it would not provoke a nuclear reaction. Pakistan is already suitably deterred – at the conventional level – from attacking India. A defensive doctrine would therefore remain untested, which by implication means there would be no question of crossing the nuclear threshold. In such a case a doctrine which sought to inflict 'massive' or 'unacceptable damage' is of little consequence, since 'push' would never come to 'shove'. This was the case in the early period of covert and recessed nuclearisation. Nuclear deterrence was based on the city busting notion of unacceptable damage, in order to ensure that nuclear outbreak does not take place in first place. The possibility of this transpiring was remote even then in light of India's defensive posture of awaiting a Pakistani attack and then launching strike corps in counter-offensive.

However, this buffer has been degraded, with India now keeping its conventional might honed. It is doing this to be able to deter Pakistan at the sub conventional level from crossing Indian threshold of tolerance. The coincidence in Pakistan's acquiring of a nuclear capability and proxy war outbreak leads India to believe that Pakistan has utilised its nuclear card to prosecute proxy war. Overt nuclearisation made the Kargil intrusion possible for Pakistan. This venturesome attitude of Pakistan requires countering, for which India is keeping its conventional card handy. A change at the conventional level may not be readily forthcoming. Therefore, a change in the nuclear doctrine can be considered.



According to India a conflict fought in the conventional domain should be controlled. On the other hand, it maintains that any limitation would be abandoned if the nuclear threshold is crossed. The dichotomy is obvious and is in strategic writings critical of the formulation 'massive'. According to Manpreet Sethi:

While the draft nuclear doctrine mentioned 'punitive retaliation', the 2003 official version changed it to 'massive retaliation'. But this has not necessarily enhanced credibility of deterrence because it actually restricts the available response to an adversary's first strike to an all-out nuclear attack. This may appear too drastic for use except in extreme circumstances... In fact, 'punitive retaliation' is credible enough since it provides alternatives relative to the nature of strike and level of provocation (2010: 126).

In case the two doctrines are to be reconciled in keeping with Limited War tenets, a move away from 'massive' punitive response to a 'flexible' punitive response is worth considering. 'Assured Retaliation' would remain, even if 'Assured Destruction' levels of retaliation would no longer be the default option. This is to avoid the counter retaliation in unsustainably destructive levels of retribution. The shift can be made easily by interpreting the term 'first strike' in the nuclear doctrine formulation. The distinction is made in Lawrence Freedman's *Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (1989: 139). He indicates that 'first strike' is the opening volley with the intent of crippling the adversary's means of nuclear retaliation. Such a strike would amount to nuclear first use of a higher order and be demanding of 'massive' punitive retaliation. A massive response would be rational, politically acceptable and legitimate in such a case. However, retaliating to nuclear first use of lower 'opprobrium quotient' with 'unacceptable damage' in return can result in a 'tit for tat' response. The adversary, Pakistan with its 100 plus arsenal, will have enough left to ensure that India is suffers a major set back. While Pakistan would no doubt be finished, India's back would be broken. The trans-boundary environmental effects and population movement also need to be factored in. This is a price that India may be loath to pay. Therefore, a revision of the nuclear doctrine in terms of limitation and making it compatible with the Limited War concept, makes sense even if

it stretches the definition of Limited War to include Limited Nuclear War.

### **Towards Flexible Nuclear Retaliation**

The possibility of flexibility was thoughtfully worked into the Draft (1999) in Para 2.4:

India's *peace time* (italics added) posture aims at convincing any potential aggressor that: (a) any threat of use of nuclear weapons against India shall invoke measures to counter the threat; and (b) any nuclear attack on India and its forces shall result in punitive retaliation with nuclear weapons to inflict damage unacceptable to the aggressor.

Interestingly, the term 'massive' has not been used in the Draft of August 1999, but finds mention in the press release of January 4, 2003 issued by the Cabinet Secretariat, that services the CCS (CCS 2003). That it has not been used in the Draft indicates that retaliation need not have 'massive' connotations, so long as its quantum would make it 'unacceptable' to the aggressor. 'Punitive retaliation' to inflict 'unacceptable' damage does not necessarily require 'massive' nuclear retaliation. Therefore, the quantum of retaliation was left as a matter of political choice to be dictated by the circumstance. The decision maker is not constrained by the options available for nuclear retaliation, which could be massive, while not necessarily so.

This is evident from the fact that the Draft does not mention the nature of the retaliation during war time, restricted as it is to the projection of the posture in peace time. It is understandable for in-conflict deterrence posture to be different from a peace time and has been factored into the Draft. The nature of the deterrent posture in war time has not been reflected on which indicates that other options have not been ruled out. The Draft, in not overly restricting the government's nuclear options, had potentially ruled in 'flexible nuclear response'. Since the Draft has been a precursor for the officially adopted doctrine and there is an element of continuity between the two (Sagan 2009: 246), a questioning of the doctrine along these lines is possible. Besides, as the *Doctrine*

informs, 'Military doctrine is neither dogma nor does it replace or take away the authority and obligation of the commander on the spot to determine a proper course of action under the circumstances prevailing at the time of decision (2004: 3).' Departures in practice are acceptable in theory.

Flexible options, while not ruling out 'massive' response, could include a *quid pro quo*, *quid pro quo plus* or a *spasmic strike*, as posited by General Sundarji (2003: 146-153). India's response is to be dictated by the guiding philosophy given in the Draft as: 'India will not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike, but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail.' Action, informed by such intent, while ruling out *quid pro quo*, could still countenance a *quid pro quo plus* response.

In reinterpreting 'first strike', India would have a nuclear deterrent posture that potentially rules in 'flexible' punitive retaliation. It is possible that because India possessed fewer warheads earlier, counter value targeting was the only option, if 'massive' is to be interpreted in terms of 'unacceptable damage' to population centres. But over a decade since Pokhran II, India is going in for a second strike capability based on a triad privileging 'credibility' over 'minimum' (Sagan 2009: 220). Envisaging the possibility of nuclear limitation would bring the nuclear doctrine in consonance with the Limited War doctrine and further moderate India's nuclear trajectory.

## **The Conventional-Nuclear Interface**

Doctrinal divergence with Pakistan is over NFU. While India adheres to NFU, Pakistan relies on nuclear weapons to deter not only a nuclear but also a conventional attack by India. Thus, the assessment of Pakistani nuclear threshold is an important determinant of India's conventional military calculus. In case of a misreading of the threshold, Pakistani nuclear use may result. In the light of India's Cold Start doctrine, Pakistani analysts opine that this would tend to lower Pakistan nuclear threshold (Almeida 2101: 1).

India's nuclear doctrine posits 'massive' punitive retaliation in case of nuclear first use by Pakistan (CCS 2003). In case of deterrence

breakdown, unless Pakistani nuclear capability is not adequately down-graded and decapitated successfully by a 'massive' Indian strike, Pakistani response could be in a similar vein. It is however possible for India to envisage a lower order response that lends itself to limitation, if 'flexible' punitive retaliation is brought into the reckoning. A Limited Nuclear War would result if escalation control is brought within the realm of feasibility by prior doctrinal and structural arrangements.

A critique of this idea would be that by making nuclear war appear fightable, it would make going nuclear in conflict appealing. The counter to this is that not trying will lead to avoidable automatic escalation. Since India cannot legislate on first use by the adversary, it must think up a sensible response, one predicated on preserving itself rather than inflicting damage on the adversary (Ahmed 2012). In India's case this is essential since its growth makes it not only more vulnerable but also, since it has more to lose, would be more prone to self-deterrence. Since limitation is not necessarily to argue for war-fighting, there is little reason for India to be averse to thinking through this change. That limitation has not been thought through in India's case owes to the nuclear doctrine having preceded the conventional doctrine. Nevertheless, it can always be upgraded or else the subsequently released doctrine could have been formulated taking the nuclear doctrine into account. That this has not been done is evident from only the tangential and inferential references to Limited War in the conventional doctrine as against an explicit mention. If Limited War is one possibility, and that strategic circumstance would determine the levels of ingress into Pakistan, then the nuclear doctrine requires rethinking the 'massive' punitive retaliation formulation.

### **Policy Recommendation**

The foremost policy relevant conclusion is that India needs to arrive at an explicit Limited War doctrine. A recent remark by General V.K. Singh, in his avatar as chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, gives out the current state of the art: 'Conceptualisation and promulgation of joint doctrines, including the visualisation of Limited War against a Nuclear Backdrop, forms an important facet of our integrated approach (Bakshi 2011).' This

suggests a welcome, top-down initiative in which the concept is first fleshed out as a joint one and then services can dwell on respective roles. This is a sign of the maturing of jointness in the doctrinal sphere, notably absent earlier when each service had set out its doctrine autonomously.

However joint doctrine must be cognizant of the nuclear-conventional interface. The military needs to first make the structural changes necessary, in particular by the creation of the 'CDS' (Chief of Defence Staff equivalent appointment). Even so, it must be mindful that Limited War has its limitations and the nascent impulse of distancing the military from a default resort to Limited War, as the term 'Cold Start' suggests, should be taken to its logical conclusion. This is not the place to provide an outline of such a doctrine and therefore no pointers are provided for such an endeavour. Suffice it to mention that the finding here is that this needs doing in the light of the nuclear threats.

The nuclear threat is an offshoot of the conventional-nuclear interface, rendered untidy by India's declaratory nuclear doctrine. The term 'massive' in the doctrine needs to be reviewed. Instead, building limitation into the nuclear doctrine is warranted since the onus of moving to the nuclear level is on Pakistan, over which India has only indirect influence. Therefore, instead of a counter city strategy, a graduated counter military and counter force would help avoid a spasmodic nuclear release. A flexible punitive doctrine could be considered.

War avoidance is more important, as Bernard Brodie (1946) reminded right at the beginning of the nuclear age. This implies taking the promise inherent in nuclear weapons acquisition seriously: that of the weapons providing a cover under which to resolve outstanding disputes. This implies working meaningfully towards: firstly, a detente in the near term and, subsequently, an entente. To tide over the interim an 'NRRC plus' or 'enhanced NRRC' (Nuclear Risk Reduction Centre), and its tasks appropriately framed for dealing with peace, crisis and conflict situations, needs to be in place.

India needs therefore to reset its strategic doctrine. It is apparent that fearing a realist backlash, articulation of a strategic doctrine is

not done by the government; as a result the cardinal downstream factors in the military doctrine are nebulous. The strategic doctrine apposite to its internal political and strategic circumstance is best for the defensive structural realism. This would involve a reorientation of the inclination towards offensive structural realism currently discernible in the unarticulated strategic doctrine arising from the direction taken by India's defence budgets, acquisitions and geopolitical posturing.

The implication of a reliance on defensive structural realism is a return to deterrence with a defensive bias on the Pakistan front. This would alleviate Pakistan's security dilemma, making a meaningful reaching out to Pakistan fruitful. Currently, the numerous dialogue initiatives go unreciprocated since they appear incongruous with India's strategic posture. Given that a 'carrot and stick' policy is unfolding, the stick overshadows the benign carrot, not only in what India proffers but in what a military dominated Pakistan wishes to see. The strategic doctrine needs to rework the balance between the two. Since strategic doctrine is a political function and the grand strategy orchestration a political prerogative, the exercise of political control is desirable to this end.

A replacement strategic doctrine could ideally be one of defensive deterrence. The consequences of this for military doctrine are stark, with, for instance, proactive offensives on a short fuse in the Cold Start mould being reconsidered. The current course of moving a step away from Cold Start is a right start point. Additionally, the intermeshing of the doctrinal sphere into the dialogue process with Pakistan is necessary. Institutionalisation of a strategic dialogue will help to progress from mere confidence building measures to security building (Ahmed 2010). While doctrinal interplay could figure in the talks at the start, eventually mutual and balanced forces reduction may be broached. This extensive agenda is only seemingly far-fetched. Having counter-intuitively seen in the study how powerplay unduly risks national security, the inference is along constructivist lines: that a changed strategic doctrine can beget a more secure future. The military doctrine would move further towards making military power less counter-productive. This would be in keeping with the principal diktat of the nuclear age.

## Conclusion

The wider lesson is that India's military exertions have not led to expected levels of security. In short, the realism-inspired understanding that power and its application has limitations. The problem is accentuated in India's case since not only do challenges in external security remain unmitigated; but inevitably get interlinked with its vulnerability in internal security. The experience over the past three decades has led to the belief that India needs to 'do more' in respect of security. The route of 'more of the same' in terms of bolstering the military instrument and its nuclear dimension may not be the most appropriate. The understanding is that India has acquired a strategic culture, resolved organisational shortcomings substantially and has sustainable finances to do so. The incentive is there in terms of joining the 'great power' club. Its strategic doctrine is one of escalation dominance, geared to a 'failing' Pakistan.

The examination of India's conventional doctrine has an understudied area. While nuclear and counter insurgency doctrines, that have the aura of urgency, have got some attention, conventional doctrine has remained unexamined. This study has significance in terms of tracing the formulation and eclipse of India's Cold Start doctrine through the century's first decade. The doctrine was conceptualised and brought out in January 2000 and the military is currently in the process of moving away from the doctrine towards one that is more suitable to the defining reality of the period – the nuclear dimension. The study has engaged with a problem of contemporary relevance and is pitched at the conventional-nuclear interface. The limitation parameters have therefore been highlighted with the policy relevant finding being that limitation needs to attend both the conventional and nuclear realms of military application. India needs therefore to reset its strategic doctrine to defensive realism. One implication of the reliance on defensive realism is a return to deterrence with a defensive bias on the Pakistan front. This way, the military doctrine – conventional and nuclear – will be compliant with the principal diktat of the nuclear age: strategic prudence.

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The aim of the monograph is to examine the structural factor behind the development of India's Limited War Doctrine. At the structural level, the regional security situation has impacted India's strategic posture - primarily the threat posed by Pakistan, India's revisionist neighbour. Given its revisionist aims and relative lack of power, Pakistan covertly went nuclear. This has accounted for its prosecuting a proxy war against India. India was consequently forced to respond albeit with restraint, exemplified by its response during the Kargil War, *Operation Parakram* and in the wake of 26/11. Emulating Pakistan's proactive posture at the subconventional level, India reworked its conventional war doctrine to exploit the space between the subconventional level and the nuclear threshold for conventional operations. This has been in accordance with the tenets of the Limited War concept. In discussing India's conventional war doctrine in its interface with the nuclear doctrine, the policy-relevant finding of this monograph is that limitation needs to govern both the conventional and nuclear realms of military application. This would be in compliance with the requirements of the nuclear age.

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