

Indian Army: Vision 2020

*Ali Ahmed**

Kanwal, G., *Indian Army: Vision 2020*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, 2008, pp. 342, Rs. 495/-, ISBN 13: 978-81-7223-732-5

The author is a retired brigadier with a distinguished record in service. More significant is the mark he has made even while in service through his writings on security matters. His earlier stint in the IDSA as a research fellow on sabbatical from the service had resulted in a well received book '*Nuclear Defence: Shaping the Arsenal*' (2001). Having been in the elite military operations directorate and in the doctrine section of the HQ IDS (Integrated Defence Staff), he has brought to bear his intimate experience with the military aspect of security to his current work. However, since his conception of India's nuclear doctrine, explicated in the book under review, is critical to his argument for a muscular military and strategic posture made in the book, it requires extended interrogation.

Brigadier Kanwal writes that any alternatives to 'massive retaliation', such as 'proportionate response', would dilute India's 'massive retaliation' based deterrence. That the Brigadier has read the official press release on the nuclear doctrine of the Cabinet Committee on Security of 4th January 2003 is evident from his statement: "India's nuclear deterrence is based on launching massive punitive retaliation to a nuclear first strike and any talk of a graduated response would undermine its efficacy". He has registered the term 'first strike', but has not registered the implication. According to the adopted nuclear doctrine 'massive retaliation' is only against '*first*

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strike' and *not 'first use'* that does not amount to a 'first strike', implying that 'flexible response' is not ruled out. He argues against any move away from reflexive massive retaliation, which he mistakes for India's current position – which it is not - to 'graduated response', to which it has possibly already moved.

A recapitulation of the relevant portion of the press release is in order: “(ii) 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; (iii) Nuclear retaliation to a *first strike* will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.” (Italics added). Clearly, there has been a move away from the formulation of the draft nuclear doctrine (DND) of August 1999 which read: “(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' does not appear in the DND.

India's doctrine is thus an evolved one. It can be said to be *assured nuclear retaliation* to an adversary's nuclear use which could be of the order of massive retaliation as response to a 'first strike'. Massive retaliation against a sub 'first strike' level nuclear use by the adversary would lack proportionality, be subject to self-deterrence, would lose the peace and on these counts would neither be rational nor credible. Therefore, flexible response is apparently not ruled out. This change has neither been noticed nor found mention in strategic literature, and therefore, the author cannot be entirely faulted for missing it.

It is important to first interrogate the understanding of the nuclear doctrine of the author since it under grids his argument for 'strike hard – strike deep' conventional operations. He recommends “massive punitive retaliation with the full force of India's nuclear capability” to any Pakistani nuclear

strike. The author's concept of offensive conventional operations requires an aggressive nuclear posture in order to stay Pakistan's nuclear hand. In the nuclear age this is not sustainable logically since nuclear cards should dictate the manner of conduct of conventional operations and not vice versa.

He notes the prerequisite for a nuclear doctrine is a strong political will. He also notes that 'Indian political leaders have failed to exhibit the type of resolve necessary'. If the required resolve is already in deficit, it begs the question as to why pitch for a doctrine for which there is self-confessedly little capability to follow through with. Just to operation a nuclear doctrine a nation should not be required to change its political system, processes and attitudes. Again logically the political systems and practices should dictate the kind of nuclear posture adopted and not the other way round.

He rejects General Sundarji's 'quid pro quo' and 'quid pro quo plus' response concepts stating, "After over a decade of Pakistan's proxy war and particularly after Kargil, the national mood is much different. Indian public opinion will accept nothing short of final dismemberment of Pakistan.", even if the nuclear Rubicon is crossed by Pakistan in a counter force mode under severe Indian military provocation! Firstly, elevating public opinion to becoming a determining parameter for nuclear response is a unique argument to make and the author would do well to elaborate on it for informed discussion. Secondly, the Sundarji options may be an even more viable deterrent cover for the deep thrusts the Brigadier envisages – which is perhaps why the Indian nuclear doctrine has mutated from 'massive retaliation' to countenance 'flexible response' without the change even being noticed.

The author admits that "the book narrowly focuses on operational challenges and looks for ways and means to resolve them". His resolving the challenge in recommending a 'massive retaliation' nuclear doctrine is

problematic. This detracts from the credibility of the conventional doctrine he favours. Thus the downstream recommendations on force structure, firepower resources, force multipliers, equipment acquisitions and forces accretions require reappraisal. His prescription is at its most expansive in his recommendation for raising a mountain strike corps of two divisions each, for each front. In his current position as head of the Army's Centre for Land Warfare Studies, he is in a position to propagate the ideas raised in his Vision for the Army. But prior to doing so revisiting the issue of nuclear doctrine raised here may be useful. 