
Review of the Indian Army Doctrine: Dealing with Two Fronts

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The Indian Army Doctrine was first published by the Shimla-based Headquarters Army Training Command in October 2004. The original publication was in three parts and a five-yearly review was envisaged. As reported in the media, the army held a closed door seminar at the end of 2009 as part of the ongoing review. Immediately afterwards, sections of the media reported one main thrust of the review, which led to a flurry of reactions, particularly from Pakistan. A public appraisal of the developments related to the ongoing review has now become necessary and topical.

Doctrine, strategy and tactics are closely related but they are not the same. A doctrine encapsulates the current dominant thinking on an issue or certain aspects of the issue without being prescriptive; it provides a framework for addressing an issue in its entirety and is, therefore, in the nature of recommendations rather than directives. A doctrine can be either oral or written or a mix of both. A military doctrine may cover all the levels of war – tactical, operational and strategic. Depending on the level at which it is pitched, a military doctrine would cover the nature of wars to be fought, the missions of the armed forces, the types of campaigns and how various operations of war are to be conducted.

On the other hand, strategy and tactics refer to the application of existing and planned military potential to the achievement of national strategic and military objectives. The application takes into account the specifics of the situation and involves making of decisions by political and military leaders over the time period

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covered by the specific circumstances. As in the case of the situation obtaining, both strategy and tactics are affected by the results to be achieved.

While doctrine and strategy are distinct, it bears keeping in mind that both are concerned with the strategic environment, objectives, operational concepts, organisations, force structures and training. Doctrine and strategy run on parallel tracks, with feedback loops linking the parallel tracks. Doctrine draws from the experiences of previous wars and can be aspirational as it defines the objectives that should be chosen for the future and the operational concepts to be followed to achieve them. In this mode, doctrine drives the nature of organisation, force structure and training. At the same time, resource constraints and the level of training achieved circumscribe what can be done within a given time-frame, and this can force a moderation of doctrine to suit the reality.

Published doctrines fulfill several roles, intended or unintended. In the intended roles, a published (or articulated) doctrine serves as a tool for communication not just for an internal audience but also for external entities or agencies. It indicates to adversaries what a military intends to prepare for and do in battle and, thus, serves the ends of deference or dissuasion. An articulated military doctrine can convey that political direction is already available to shape military strategy. More interestingly, in a situation where dialogue between the military and civilian leadership on military issues is unstructured or scanty, doctrine can serve the purpose of communicating the capability profile and thrust of operational preparedness of the military to the political leadership at large. Finally, Service doctrines can also serve the purpose of propounding the position of the individual Service on the competition over resources and mission capabilities. In keeping with the demands of secrecy, strategy and plans cannot be discussed in the open. Therefore, potential adversaries expend great time and resources in intelligence operations in order to glean enemy plans before they can be activated. Doctrine, force structure and training are comparatively simpler to observe. Being very closely linked to strategy, as discussed earlier, a study of the articulated doctrine of the adversary, when correlated with force structuring, technology development and training, provides a robust basis for assessing the adversary's strategy and tactics. In fact, many militaries assign the task of doctrine development and dissemination and operational planning to the same organisational entity in order to better leverage the overlaps and congruence between doctrine and strategy.

Enumeration of the myriad facets and purposes of a military doctrine carried out above is not without its own purpose. The preceding theoretical analysis

provides a valid framework in which to analyse the developments pertaining to the evolving Indian Army Doctrine. Specifically, the following aspects are discussed in the remaining part of this paper:

- Does the review account for the more important changes in the strategic environment? Which are these important changes?
- Is the doctrine only an aspirational document or is it aligned with strategy? In either case, what deductions could military observers draw from the observed contours of the review process and the final result?
- Which needs of strategic communication does it address and are those needs likely to be fulfilled?

According to credible reports, the review is organised along five major thrust lines:

- Dealing with the eventuality of a two-front war. It is quite clear from the context that the two fronts are Pakistan and China.
- Countering military and non-military facets of asymmetric and sub-conventional threats.
- Enhancing 'strategic reach' and out of area contingencies (OOAC) readiness to protect India's interests from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Strait.
- Attaining operational synergy among the three Services.
- Achieving a technological edge over adversaries.

The strategic environment in which the doctrine is placed has undergone considerable changes in the five-year interregnum. The most important change that has taken place is the continued ascendance of China at the expense of the United States. The global economic meltdown of 2008 has placed the US and China in a position of forced economic embrace from which either can extricate itself only at its own peril – an economic mutually assured destruction (MAD), to borrow a Cold War phrase. This has forced the US to virtually accede to the preeminence of China in Asia as evidenced from President Obama's refusal to meet the Dalai Lama during his visit to the US and the reference to China's possible role in addressing the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan during President Obama's visit to China. With a publicly declared time schedule for the US withdrawal from Afghanistan fast approaching in 2011, US leverage over Pakistan is also set to decline rapidly. President Obama's preoccupation with economic revival and health care reform is likely to rapidly deplete his remaining political capital in the US domestic arena, leaving the US with little to do in Asia.

Under these circumstances, China would be free to assert its hegemony in South Asia. The early indicators of such an approach have been visible for a considerable time. These include but are not limited to the issue of stapled visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir and the aggressive stance on the visit of the prime minister and then the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh. Frequent transgressions into hitherto Indian held areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), particularly in the central and northern sectors, have become par for the course as seen in the Dokbug area in Nyoma sector in December 2008 and at Mount Gya in July 2008 where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) intruded as far as 1.5 km inside Indian territory, writing on rocks in Chinese. It would be surprising if this posture of the Chinese went unnoticed by the political leadership, much less the military. In a departure from his normally measured and deliberate approach, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh acknowledged this during his interaction at the US Council for Foreign Relations on November 23, 2009, when he conceded publicly that he did not "fully understand" the reasons for China's recent assertiveness but that "it has to be taken note of". With China and Pakistan being freed of most external restraints, the possibility of a collusive threat manifesting itself has increased in comparison to the time when the first doctrine was issued. This more than validates the first thrust line of the review of the army doctrine.

The 'Global' War on Terror is now floundering due not only to its overreach but also the inability of organised nation-states to set up a global security infrastructure that can combat a distributed and networked agglomeration of *jihadi* elements for whom borders and the rules of international conduct hold little significance. In a sense, these elements have created a new paradigm of "network-centric asymmetric warfare" which the conventional organs of state power are unable to counter. With multiple failed/failing states in its vicinity a distinct possibility, India has to contend with sub-conventional and asymmetric warfare in all its manifestations. The recent proposals of Home Minister Chidambaram on the reorganisation of the Home Ministry give enough indicators that the Indian capabilities to respond to such challenges need a thorough overhaul. Intelligence and force structures are the two main areas that require addressing, both being plagued by a plethora of organisations and poor coordination. Important issues include the role of the army in countering left wing insurgencies in the hinterland and its role in providing manpower for the Rashtriya Rifles, Assam Rifles and other similarly placed organisations.

The third major thrust of the ongoing review pertains to enhancing strategic reach and developing OOAC capabilities stretching from the Persian Gulf to

the Malacca Strait. This thrust is closely linked to the requirement to attain operational synergy with the navy and the air force. The logic for this thrust line has been provided by the government with the prime minister himself delineating the extent of India's strategic perimeter. While the relevance and risks of launching Indian armed forces in OOACs are open to discussion, the security of India's island territories, its international commerce over the sea lanes and its heavy reliance on the oil resources of West Asia leave hardly any doubts about the extent of India's regional geo-strategic interests. Further, an eventual withdrawal of the Western military forces from the region does require India to have a credible military option to bring to the table in a discussion of any new regional security structures.

The Cold Start doctrine enunciated by the Indian Army after Operation Parakram has been dissected by many commentators in the strategic community. That doctrine may have structural infirmities and a perceived lack of overall resources and processes to ensure its execution. However, the violent reaction to its basic concept from almost all shades of opinion in Pakistan, does point to its relevance in the realm of deterrence and strategic communication. The reactions span a wide range of assessments. Writing in the *Khaleej Times* of January 7, 2009, Maleeha Lodhi, the former Pakistani ambassador to the US and UK, finds the Cold Start doctrine "aspirational" because of an apparent lack of Indian capabilities. She also finds it "emulative" as India seems to be trying to behave like a big power like the US without being one. Another thrust of the current doctrine review also draws her ire wherein she feels that India's attempts to acquire a technological edge are misplaced since it is a "dangerous presumption that anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defences can protect India against Pakistani missiles". At the other end of the spectrum, Pakistan Army Chief General Kayani gives much greater credibility to the Cold Start doctrine by stating that those planning the use of conventional forces in a situation of "nuclear overhang" are "charting a course of dangerous adventurism whose course can be both unintended and uncontrollable". No doubt, assessments of this kind are designed to create a scare in the international community and amount to little less than brinkmanship.

The Chinese reactions to the Cold Start doctrine and the ongoing review have been comparably, and perhaps surprisingly, muted. Given that the two-front scenario forms a major thrust of the review, fresh reactions from Chinese analysts may be expected in due course. That the two-front thinking is not aspirational should be clear from the force structuring decisions being taken. These include the resuscitation of airfields on the Chinese border, a major

fillip to road construction in the border areas, the raising of two new infantry divisions for the Eastern theatre, placing of modern aircraft like the SU-30s at Tezpur and highly public demonstrations of the ABM trials by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) pointing to the government's intentions of developing a robust conventional capability against the Chinese threat. The government also appears to be addressing the nuclear deterrence capability through the focus on development and acquisition of nuclear powered submarines and the continuing development of the Agni III. It appears that the message has reached the Chinese. Hao Ding from the China Academy of Military Sciences, an institution known to be a significant player in the development of Chinese military strategy, in his paper of November last year, refers to the Indian Army formations being given "double combat missions" in the pursuit of a "two-front mobile warfare" strategy. He also refers to Indian strategy shifting from "only deterrence" to "punishment deterrence", most certainly the equivalents of "deterrence by denial" and "deterrence by punishment" respectively. The publication of this paper a full month ahead of the public announcement of the review of the army doctrine was certainly prescient. While such a shift on the Pakistan front is acknowledged by Indian military planners, the observable features of the Indian political and military posture clearly point to a shift from "dissuasion" to "deterrence by denial". If the enhanced military force levels in the Eastern theatre are employed in a manner that denies the PLA the ability to seize any significant military objectives like Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, deterrence by denial could be achieved. Therefore, the development of the new doctrinal concepts needs to be watched carefully by those following Indian military strategy.

It is, thus, quite clear that the doctrine does address the needs of strategic communications as far as potential adversaries are concerned. The lack of a structured interaction and top-down guidance from the political leadership to the military is often unfavourably commented upon by many analysts and has also been pointed out by many retiring military leaders. However, the developments listed above point to a healthy congruence between the political and military perspectives as far as military capability development is concerned. It remains to be seen whether the application of the same capabilities in an emerging conflict situation can also be managed in an equally effective manner. Perhaps the new doctrine would cover the same with the possible aim of generating enough public discourse towards improving the inter-agency processes à la Chidambaram.

Finally, the ongoing review provides a context for evaluating the synergy among the three Services and the state of jointmanship. In a military as large as India's, competition for resources and mission capabilities is natural. A larger operational role gives greater access to resources, and as a much desired corollary, greater upward mobility to the cadres. It was, therefore, hardly surprising that the army's doctrine of 2004 was followed within two months by the maritime doctrine. The revised maritime doctrine was released in end August 2009 by Admiral Sureesh Mehta, the outgoing chief of Naval Staff. It lays emphasis on "synergy" and "intelligence" and also envisages the employment of the navy in an expeditionary role with amphibious capabilities. The Indian Air Force was the first to come out with an air power doctrine as early as 1997. In later years, the air force has been emphasising its role in making India a "regional" power and in "shaping the battlefield" for the army and navy. These envisaged roles emphasised out of area and offensive capabilities, raising apprehensions in the army over a possible lack of emphasis on close air support. In January 2007, Air Chief Marshal SP Tyagi announced that India would establish an Aerospace Command to exploit outer space and that the Command's assets would include satellites, radars, communications systems, fighter aircraft and helicopters. Needless to say, this discounted the role of the Integrated Defence Staff and the two other Services in the establishment of such a capability. The Integrated Defence Staff itself has to compete for operational and bureaucratic space in the inter-Service competition, and joint doctrines are a major instrument of such assertion. Notwithstanding, a slew of major exercises with a joint Service nature include Exercise Sanghe Shakti in 2006, Exercise AMPHEX-07 and Exercise TROPEX 2009 in February 2009. These resulted in due course in the issue of the Joint Forces Doctrine in May 2006 and the Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations along with the Joint Doctrine for Special Force Operations in September 2008. Thus, it is clear that articulation of the doctrines has been an essential component of inter-Service interaction in the face of the failure (or unwillingness) of the government to carry through the recommendations of the Kargil Review Committee pertaining to the office of the Chief of Defence Staff. Given the thrust on "synergy" in the ongoing review of the army doctrine, incremental progress in achieving jointmanship is to be expected with eagerness.

In conclusion, the ongoing review of the Indian Army Doctrine appears headed in the right direction. While its relationship with military strategy and capability development appears highly credible and reassuring, not much can be said on the basis of current evidence, about the intricacies of employment

of military potential in wars with short notice, in an escalatory ladder where the political leadership and second order effects may have a greater role to play than the capture of shallow territorial objectives and partial destruction of conventional military potential. It is to be hoped that the government, represented by the Ministry of Defence, the National Security Advisory Board and the National Security Council Secretariat would be launching similar exercises, not necessarily public, to align the respective Service doctrines with the Joint Forces Doctrine and to develop a structured guidance for military planning in the form of a national security strategy and defence planning guidelines. Doctrine articulation would then have served a greater purpose.

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