

India: Strategic Doctrine- Military Doctrine Linkage

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Introduction

India has embarked on an ambitious programme on the conventional and nuclear fronts that taken together spell out its strategic doctrine. The strategic problem has been how India ‘causes’ security for itself. While the previous government’s strategic doctrine is often described as a “strategy of restraint”, the current government seems to have based its strategic doctrine on the realist philosophy of offensive realism. Since military doctrines – conventional and nuclear – derive from strategic doctrine, these must be considered in relation to the strategic doctrine. The doctrinal dissonance of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) period that practised restraint while building potential for an offensive shift, stands superseded, with the new government explicitly moving towards offensive realism in its strategic philosophy and towards, in the words of the National Security Adviser (NSA), “defensive offence” in its military doctrines. While the doctrinal dissonance of the UPA period has been resolved, whether strategic clarity makes India any more secure awaits the test of crisis.

The Doctrinal Inter-Linkage: Strategic and Military

Strategic doctrine and military doctrine are inter-linked. Strategic doctrine orients the state strategically. According to Kissinger, strategic doctrine translates “power into policy”. To him, “strategic doctrine must define what objectives are worth contending for and determine the degree of force appropriate for achieving

them (1969: 4)". Strategic doctrine orients the state to its security compulsions in the external and internal security environments.

Strategic doctrine is itself informed by the state's comfort levels in its security environment: whether its security policy is based on "defensive structural realism" or "offensive structural realism". Strategic doctrine is, therefore, not evolved in a vacuum. The security philosophy of the state, or more narrowly, its government, informs strategic doctrine. To illustrate, if there is a change in government, such as took place in India in mid-2014, there will be speculation that the strategic doctrine of the new Hindu nationalist government would be more assertive than that of its predecessor.

States do not always endeavour to increase their power without limits or single-mindedly. Self-imposition of restraint in pursuit of power, 'defensive structural realism', is also in evidence in state practice. In this understanding, states seek security. Threats are viewed in relation to relative power, proximity, intentions, and the defence-offence balance. As increments in capabilities can be easily countered, 'defensive structural realism' suggests that a state's attempts to make itself more secure by increasing its power are ultimately futile in the face of the responses these generate among neighbouring states. Therefore, states seek an 'appropriate' amount of power. 'Offensive structural realism', on the other hand, argues that since states face an uncertain environment, capabilities are of utmost importance and security requires enhancing these to the extent feasible (Mearsheimer 2001: 37).

States respond to the external security environment by adopting the appropriate strategic doctrine, placing them along the offence-defence-deterrence continuum (Posen 1984: 40). Heterogeneity along the dimensions of offence-defence-deterrence depends on the political objective of a state's grand strategy and the geographical, technological, and political constraints and opportunities it faces (Posen 1984: 40). This suggests that strategic doctrines could be defensive, offensive, deterrent or compellent, depending on the aims, opportunities and constraints. In Posen's words (Posen 1984: 14): "Offensive doctrines aim to disarm an adversary – to destroy his armed forces. Defensive doctrines aim to deny an adversary the objective he seeks. Deterrent doctrines aim to punish an aggressor – to raise his costs without reference to reducing ones own."

In the words of Henry Kissinger, strategic doctrine identifies whether "the goals of a state are offensive or defensive, whether it seeks to achieve or to prevent a transformation" (1969: 7). Accordingly, strategic doctrine "must define what objectives are worth contending for and determine the degree of force appropriate for achieving them" (1969: 4). Thus, a status quoist power usually

has a deterrent or defensive strategic doctrine, while an expansionist or revisionist power is likely to have an offensive one. The former seeks to preserve, the latter to change. A state with a security policy informed by defensive structural realism would have its strategic doctrine inclining towards the defensive and deterrence segments of the continuum, whereas a state with a security policy informed by offensive structural realism would favour offensive or compellent strategic doctrines.

Nations respond to external security environment with a combination of offence defence deterrence.

Military power, though one among the other power instruments, such as technological, political, cultural, etc., is a consequential component on account of the military instrument being the ‘ultimate’ arbiter. The effectiveness of the military instrument is not only a function of military budgets, leadership, etc., but also of appropriate doctrine. Scott Sagan defines military doctrine as, “Military doctrine refers to the underlying principles and specific guidance provided to military officers who produce the operational plans for the use of military forces” (Sagan 2009: 222). Military doctrine deals with “what” military means are to be employed and “how” (Posen 1984: 13). A military doctrine enables execution of grand strategy by aligning the military instrument to strategic doctrine. Formulation and implementation of military strategy is informed by military doctrine. Military strategy is formulated in the context of what eminent military sociologist, Morris Janowitz, termed as its “operational code” or “logic” of professional behaviour (Janowitz 1960: 257), or military doctrine. Military doctrine manifests the dictates of strategic doctrine: offensive or defensive.

India’s Conventional and Nuclear Doctrines

A Limited War Doctrine?

In the nuclear era, limited war is the only kind of ‘war of choice’ that India can possibly embark on. However, the preceding discussion indicates that there has to be political direction to the military on this score. The military can then reflect on doctrine accordingly. This first step not having been taken, the military has proceeded doctrinally without explicitly engaging with the requirement of limited war. While the confidential Raksha Mantri’s Directive exists, that it has left the doctrinal space to the military is self-evident. It is also not known if the doctrine the Services formulate receives political imprimatur since the ministry’s annual reports do not carry a mention of doctrine.

The *Indian Army Doctrine* (2004) has no discussion of limited war. What the new 2010 edition of the doctrine states in this respect is not known since, unlike its 2004 predecessor document, it is confidential. While air power permits flexibility, not having the limited war concept inform doctrine would result in greater scope for expansive targeting in the tradition of application of air power set by the US-led West. The Navy doctrine is also ambiguous. It takes general or total war as “involving nearly all resources of the nation, with few, if any, restrictions on the use of force, short of nuclear strike/retaliation” (*Indian Maritime Doctrine* 2009: 19). This formulation appears to suggest that total war aiming for “annihilation or total subjugation of the opponent” can yet occur below the nuclear threshold.

The overall impression is that the military is undecided to weigh in on the side of limited war unambiguously. This is surprising given that it needs to clearly communicate an intention to wage limited war in order to raise the nuclear threshold for conventional force application. If it does not reassure the enemy of a limited war, then the enemy may be stampeded into nuclear use. This makes lack of reflection on limited war counter-productive in the light of Pakistan’s lowering of the nuclear threshold in response to India’s conventional doctrinal movement.

Conventional Doctrines

Militaries conceptualise a ‘spectrum of conflict’, defined as “a continuum defined primarily by the magnitude of the declared objectives”, and plan to be capable of victory across the spectrum. Consequently, escalation dominance or superiority at the highest level of force in use along a particular scale in the spectrum of conflict assumes importance. Capabilities and plans aim for generating asymmetry and, in the case of financial or technological constraints, at a minimum, symmetry. Enemy capabilities become the defining yardstick rather than intentions or, indeed, even the aims of the government in cases of deficiencies in political control.

The Army’s so-called ‘Cold Start’ or officially, “proactive operations”, doctrine that was first mentioned in the open domain in April 2004, permits only a limited time window for crisis management and war avoidance efforts. This reveals that it was not entirely aligned to the national interest as explicated in the “strategy of restraint”, protective of the national economic trajectory. The strategy of restraint prefers a period of crisis management in order to explore if war, and its effects on the economy, can be avoided. The government may be inclined to manipulate the risk of war for prising concessions from Pakistan through coercive diplomacy. The problem this poses to the military is that it gains Pakistan the

time to mobilise and consolidate its defences, thereby increasing the challenge to any Indian military offensive later. This explains the Army's preparedness for proactive operations at short notice.

Whereas Cohen and Dasgupta (2010: 61) in their book *Arming Without Aiming* argue that "a strategy of compellence seems so high risk that the political leadership is unlikely to embrace it. There is little reason to expect the Indian government to abandon strategic restraint for a more assertive policy, but the army's plans continue regardless." However, what was true in 2010 may not be so in 2015, with a changed complexion of government subscribing to a more robust strategic doctrine and disavowing from a 'defensive' strategic culture. In effect, the earlier ambiguity in strategic doctrine stands dispelled, even if the strategic doctrine remains unarticulated in the public domain. The earlier lack of clarity was under the assumption that the doctrinal domain is the military's preserve. In the nuclear age, this is no longer tenable. Governmental ownership of the doctrinal sphere is evident as far as the nuclear doctrine goes, and the conventional doctrines cannot any longer be seen in isolation.

The Nuclear Doctrine

India's declaratory nuclear doctrine is that in case of a nuclear first use by an adversary in any manner against India and its forces anywhere, India will retaliate with a "massive" counter to inflict "unacceptable damage". When nuclear first use by the enemy is of such an order as to result in unacceptable damage to oneself, then it makes eminent sense to consider retaliation of levels that inflict unacceptable damage right back. But, in case the damage caused by the nuclear first use is not of an unacceptable order, such as in the popular scenario when it is a single warhead of low kilo-tonnage on a tactical level target, then inflicting unacceptable damage in return would be unnecessarily escalatory. The criterion that emerges then is a 'tit for tat' nuclear response.

It is conceivable, therefore, that in India's case, a declaratory doctrine is distinct from an operational doctrine and based on a 'tit for tat' response, at least in the initial stages and for lower order levels of nuclear first use. Beyond a point, there may be a need to limit damage to oneself by indeed going 'massive' to take out the enemy's ability to continue exchanges.

The Conventional-Nuclear Interface

The deterrence logic currently subscribed to is that the likelihood, if not inevitability, of the spiral of nuclear exchanges on introduction of nuclear weapons

Training and staffing of higher decision making structures needs immediate focus.

into a conflict, would see Pakistan worse off at the end of it all. This would ensure that it does not resort to first use in the first place. In the light of Pakistani self-deterrence, India can then proceed to administer conventional punishment for sub-conventional provocation. Since this would be a limited war, not intended to invade or occupy territory, first use thresholds will be steered clear of.

This is plausible, but neglectful of nuclear risks and environmental consequences of nuclear use that additionally must inform decision-making in India's Political Council of the Nuclear Command Authority. That the political domain of nuclear decision-making is distinct from the strategic is clear in the separation of the Political Council from the Executive Council. Since the Political Council has to be attuned in to the nature of post conflict peace, it needs to override the Executive Council advice if based on the current declaratory nuclear doctrine.

The earlier emphasis on 'unacceptable damage' was due to a buffer existing then at the conventional-nuclear interface. India's conventional doctrine was a defensive one of counter-offensive in the wake of Pakistan's taking to the offensive first, in keeping with its (Pakistan's) military doctrine of offensive defence. This situation has changed in the light of a changed conventional doctrine in India. This means that proactive operations can make Pakistan reach for the nuclear button as its Foreign Secretary officially intimated this September. Consequently, being more offensive at the conventional level, India needs to be more restrained at the nuclear level. Therefore, India's distancing from its declaratory nuclear doctrine needs to be publicly acknowledged in favour of an operational nuclear doctrine informed by 'graduated' or 'flexible' nuclear retaliation.

The Future Direction

From the direction of India's deterrent, it is clear that India is going in for 'something of everything'. India is going in for a nuclear triad and ballistic missile defence shield. Together, these two could position India to even consider abandoning no first use at will. First strike considerations in the light of surveillance capability and missile accuracy developments will be the pull factors. This possibility will enhance the 'will he, won't he?' apprehension on both sides, building in a tendency to preemption in a 'bolt from the blue' attack in both sides. An emergent Indian first strike capability would then only await a preventive or preemptive war rationale. This can be provided by the vicissitudes

of future strategic equations, the security situation and the internal political configurations.

Strategic doctrine remains little articulated. It is essentially a civilian responsibility. The new government can remedy this by removing from the apex defence structure the firewall between the civilian and military (Prakash 2015). The ministry does not have either the 'hardware' or 'software' to think through linkages between the strategic and military doctrines. Further, the ministry is also not the site for nuclear doctrinal thinking. That is the preserve of the National Security Council (NSC) system comprising the National Security Council and its Secretariat (NSCS). There is no equivalent staff in the HQ Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) that can serve as the secretariat for the Chairman Chiefs of Staff (CoSC) guidance of the Strategic Forces Command and input for the NSC. The Strategy Programmes Staff cannot serve both the NSA and COSC.

Cognisant of the potential for disconnect, an organisational innovation has been the creation of the Strategy Programmes (Strategic Programme) Staff within the NSCS. This multi-disciplinary entity perhaps replicates some functions of the Strategic Plans Directorate (SPD) of Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA). According to Shyam Saran (2013), then Chairman of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB), this unit is charged with looking at the reliability and quality of our weapons and delivery systems, collating intelligence on other nuclear weapon states, particularly those in the category of potential adversaries, and working on a perspective plan for India's nuclear deterrent in accordance with a ten-year cycle. This agenda makes it resemble the Development Control Committee of the Pakistani NCA. Missing is mention of the operational nuclear strategy staff to mirror the SPD. Since this cannot be located in the Strategic Forces Command that is concerned only with execution of nuclear decisions reached, the input to these decisions to both the councils of India's Nuclear Command Authority requires a nuclear trained staff. Nevertheless, that it has uniformed and civilian components, suggests that there is a linkage, amounting to interpenetration between the nuclear and conventional levels; and on that count, is an advance.

Conclusion

In a speech for the Subbu Forum Society for Policy Studies at the India International Centre in April 2013, Ambassador Shyam Saran, reiterated India's nuclear doctrine, stating: "...India will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, but if it is attacked with such weapons, it would engage in nuclear retaliation which will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage on the

adversary.” His view finds reiteration, such as most recently by Ambassador Parthasarathy (2015), “Pakistan will be very foolish to test out Indian resolve to respond massively to its use of tactical nuclear weapons.” Parthasarathy recommends taking out Pakistani Punjab. What this will do for India’s abutting provinces is not pursued by him. Such blind spots increase the urgency to revisit the nuclear doctrine since it is cognisant of deterrence, but less so of the potential for deterrence breakdown. Consequently, the government needs to ‘do more’.

The logic of ‘mutual assured destruction’ in the light of vertical proliferation in the subcontinent implies that India needs to ensure a limitation not only in the conventional doctrine – that it is already apparently pursuing – but also in attempting to limit a nuclear war. It has to, in this case, abandon the understanding that nuclear use inevitably triggers a nuclear exchange. It needs to ensure that the nuclear war is brought to a speedy close at the lowest levels of nuclear use by either side. Since this cannot be done unilaterally, it must engage with Pakistan on this score directly and with mutual strategic partners for working out the modalities of facilitative intervention.

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