

Future Conflict: Doctrine is the Enabler

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“Cheshire Puss’ said Alice, ‘would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to’, said the cat.

— Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

A military doctrine could be defined as the intellectual foundation for military forces to launch, sustain, and conclude military operations. It could cover overall national military strategy and tactics or tactics and strategy for individual armed services branches, and guidance for specific kinds of military operations. This could be both for conventional and sub conventional conflict. The above would necessitate an understanding and determination of possible potential threats as also how such threats could manifest in future. The assessment of potential threats and how they should be addressed is a doctrinal issue. This understanding in turn drives acquisitions, leads to restructuring of forces and determines the training content of the field army. Doctrines hence are prime movers for strategy and tactics. They would also drive research and development efforts in futuristic defence technology, determine force structures and lead to innovation in tactical concepts.

Doctrines vary from country to country and depend on existing national security and political priorities and budgetary resources. At the policy level, the emphasis by each nation would broadly conform to one or more of the following parameters.

- Guaranteeing national security by equalising a threat and stabilising overall security.
- Guaranteeing national security by increasing other countries’ sense of security, consequently weakening threat sources.
- Guaranteeing security at the expense of other countries.

Change in circumstances would also dictate doctrinal changes. US nuclear doctrine metamorphosed from the 'Strategic Integrated Operation Plan' (SIOP) of the sixties to the 'Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) 1983' two decades later. The former sought to integrate land, sea, and aerial legs of U.S. nuclear weapon delivery components or triad. As a flexible military response, it sought to deal with possible Soviet military attacks through a mixture of theatre nuclear forces and conventional forces. With the SDI, the emphasis shifted to ballistic missile defences, rejecting the doctrine of 'Mutually Assured Destruction'. Subsequent Nuclear Posture Reviews seek to describe US Nuclear Weapon use policies.

Since Independence, India's military doctrine remained fixated on the defensive largely determined by mind-sets which were focussed not so much on winning wars but in ensuring that territory was not lost. This led to the concept of positional defence to guard the western borders based on an artificially constructed obstacle line such as the ditch-cum-bund, fortified by anti-personnel and anti-tank mines. Organisational and doctrinal innovations in the eighties served to enhance the offensive content of military doctrine with deterrence against Pakistan being sought to be imposed through a counter offensive capability based on mechanised forces. This deterrence had credibility only under conditions of nuclear asymmetry. With Pakistan acquiring nuclear capability by the late eighties, India's counteroffensive capability, embodied by strike corps operations, lost its sheen. This emboldened Pakistan to pursue conflict against India at the sub conventional level, to 'bleed India with a thousand cuts', with plausible deniability. Pakistan's proxy war culminated in the attack on India's Parliament, by terrorists promoted and prompted by Pakistan. In the absence of a suitable doctrine to respond quickly to such provocation, India launched 'Operation Parakram' in 2001-02, a massive, lumbering mobilisation of troops to the border in anticipation of hostilities. The time taken to mobilise the Army effectively neutralised the use of this option as a coercive tool and forced a rethink on a response strategy to be followed by India. This led to the evolution of a quick response proactive doctrine which colloquially came to be called the 'Cold Start Strategy'.

This strategy was initiated post 'Operation Parakram' and it sought to create a window for conventional operations, in a situation of nuclear parity. While earlier wars between India and Pakistan were limited in aim, time and scope by choice, both countries lacking the means for long drawn out campaigns, overt nuclearisation has made limited conflict a necessity. The proactive strategy thus aims at initiating conflict in a compressed time frame, with holding formations

being ready to launch limited offensive operations within 72 to 96 hours and the strike formations exploiting success achieved in a later time frame. The strategy dictates the launch of multiple offensives on shallow objectives, thus creating a window for conventional operations. Executing the strategy involves augmenting the offensive capabilities of the holding corps and shifting the peace time location of strike formations closer to the border.

As a response mechanism, the proactive strategy has been an effective instrument of deterrence for which Pakistan is still groping to find an answer. While this has not deterred Pakistan from continuing with its policy of training and hosting terrorists within its territory to be used against India as strategic assets, it has led to a realisation among the Pakistan military that crossing a threshold could well lead to India exercising options based on its proactive strategy. To that extent, terrorist activities supported by Pakistan are likely to be confined to small scale actions using Indian personnel which would be difficult to trace back to Pakistan. At the same time Pakistan will continue to use the threat of nuclear war to prevent India from exercising its conventional superiority. Pakistan's attempts to produce tactical nuclear weapons for use in conventional conflict are clearly aimed at achieving this objective.

While India's proactive strategy is an appropriate deterrent to be exercised when warranted it provides no answers to the continuous infiltration of terrorists and support given by Pakistan to terrorist activities within India. There is thus a need to reorient doctrines to enable response against threats which are currently being faced and which may manifest in the future. In essence, what is required is a flexible and targeted strategy, aimed at punitive strikes and geographically confined skirmishes. This would enable escalation control at the initiating level with ability to ratchet up hostilities if required.

Pakistan Specific Doctrine

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, a doctrine must be based on an assessment of threat and determination of measures required to neutralise the same. Pakistan does not pose a credible conventional threat to India. However, it does pose a very serious challenge in both the sub conventional and nuclear domains. India has a clear and unambiguous nuclear doctrine on measures to be taken in case it is subjected to nuclear attack. These measures are presumably in place in accordance with the doctrine which leads one to the conclusion that India's strategic deterrence will lead to stability at the nuclear level. However, at the sub conventional level, a doctrine to deal with continuous inflow of terrorists

from Pakistan and to negate Pakistani support to terrorist activities within India is conspicuous by its absence.

India's proactive doctrine is directed towards conventional operations. However, in a situation of nuclear parity with Pakistan, it would be unrealistic to use the strike corps in deep thrust operations to capture territory. Strike corps capabilities need to be tailored to a different set of objectives which while retaining the ability to strike deep would not involve the holding of ground in depth except perhaps for short durations only. Capture and holding of multiple shallow objectives would have greater traction as tools of deterrence and both the strike and pivot corps needs to be configured accordingly. This would require creating strike capability in the mountains where the objectives in any case are shallow and also integrating rotary wing and unmanned combat aerial vehicles with the manoeuvre arm. Rotary capability would involve the use of attack, observation and utility helicopters. Unmanned aerial vehicles would be required to maintain surveillance over the target area as also to deliver precision kinetic munitions where required. The manoeuvre element should hence consist of a mix of mechanised and rotary wing elements along with unmanned aerial vehicles and artillery support, configured into the overall design of battle using all elements of combat power. Moving towards a capability based force is a function of doctrine which must determine the likely threat and lay down how such threats are proposed to be addressed. This would in turn lead to right sizing of force levels and reorientation of training objectives for task accomplishment. The current force configuration is not optimum as most of it is unusable in the current context. The challenge of reorganising and equipping our forces must be based on a doctrinal application of power to achieve national objectives. It must hence also address the issue of cross-border terrorism to make such activities prohibitively expensive to the perpetrator. The capability to inflict prohibitive punishment in the conventional plane is essential to deter Pakistan's continuous support and abetment to terrorist activities within India. At each stage, measures to prevent the escalation of conflict should be in place. However, if conflict control does not succeed, measured escalation must be factored into the doctrine.

Doctrinal Issues: China

With China, a different paradigm would have to be used to counter the perceived threat along our Northern and Eastern borders. This would encompass an understanding of Chinese military doctrine and how threats are likely to manifest over the high Himalayas. Doctrinal issues to be addressed would include

information war, the entire gamut of Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Integration, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4I2SR) operations, outer space, cyber space and air aspects as also all other aspects of conventional war fighting. What needs to be understood here is that conflict may not necessarily begin with kinetic operations. It is more likely to be initiated at the cyber space, outer space and information warfare domains. Kinetic operations are likely to be initiated with a concentrated attack by long range missiles subsequent to which we could see operations as conventionally understood. At each stage, China would endeavour to control escalation and would aim at conflict termination at the earliest once its objectives have been achieved. Our own doctrine must be aimed at countering Chinese designs and must clearly spell out the capabilities required in this regard. Force structuring, equipping and training must thereafter follow based on doctrinal precepts. The capabilities required to ensure protection of our Eastern and Northern borders must include the following: -

- High technology Command, Control, Communication, Computer, Intelligence, Integration, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4I2SR) capabilities, reinforced with Space capabilities.
- Precision and stand-off firepower.
- Empowerment of Special Forces to undertake unconventional military operations in the role of point elements of conventional forces.
- Smaller, modular units manned by highly trained troops that are effectively organised to undertake special missions in the mountains.
- Synergy among political, military and civilian organs of the state.

Doctrine: Shaping Perceptions and Influencing Attitudes

Winning wars in today's globalised world is not by itself enough. It is essential to also win the moral high ground in the public domain on a global scale – and not just in the short term. This is where perception management plays a dominant role. In the Gulf War and presently in the war in Afghanistan, while western politicians insist that this is not 'a clash of civilisations' they have recognised, in Tony Blair's words, that they need to address 'a gulf of misunderstanding' in order to explain to Muslim populations that this is not a war against Islam when there are many in the Arab world who believe that it is. In the Indian context, the raging debate on the 'Armed Forces Special Powers Act' (AFSPA) is symptomatic of the distrust that still prevails between the Indian Army and affected populations in Jammu and Kashmir and some of the states in Northeast India.

In the battle for shaping attitudes and perceptions, the role of non-state actors is assuming greater significance. While means of communication were earlier solely in the hands of government, the situation today is more diffused. The on-going 'Arab Spring' which commenced in Tunisia has spread well beyond its borders, overthrowing in the process the dictatorial regime of not only Tunisia but Egypt and Libya as well. This is a testament to the power of the new media which includes the social media exemplified by the internet, Facebook and Twitter, mobile telephones, television and radio. These information technology and mass communication tools in the hands of the people have powered perceptions in an extraordinary effective manner. As tools they are value neutral. In terms of exploitation they could be used by both national and anti-national elements to devastating effect.

There would be a requirement for enunciating at the national level a clear doctrine for influence operations. The caveat here is that too rigid an adherence to a laid down format is dangerous and counter-productive. As the issues are too fluid and political and battlefield developments move too quickly, things cannot be etched in firm substance. Ideas will remain the key, and processes must change and mutate quickly in today's fast paced information environment. The doctrinal challenge would be to find a balance between the need for strategic guidance and operational flexibility especially in the vertical silos we operate in today and the increasingly bureaucratized manner of functioning where decision making is done at higher and higher levels of command.

Conclusion

Doctrines hold the key to the effective functioning of a force. They determine and assess potential threats and focus on measures required to be taken to counter them. This must in turn lead to force restructuring and equipping for optimising own resources and must also lead to training the force for task accomplishment. Our ability to structure our doctrines based on potential threats will form an important part of winning the conflicts of the future.

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