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INDIA'S NEW "COLD START" WAR DOCTRINE STRATEGICALLY REVIEWED

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Introductory Observations: India unveiled officially its new war doctrine on April 28, 2004 at the Army Commander's Conference that took place last week. Obviously, the need for a new war doctrine was decades-long overdue, but it seems that the lessons of the Kargil War reinforced by the severe limitations imposed on the Indian Army in the run-up to and during Operation PRAKARAM in 2001-2002 hastened the Indian military hierarchy towards this end.

General Padmanabhan the Chief of Army Staff at the time of Operation PRAKARAM had initiated the process of formulating a new war doctrine and the fruition now seems to have taken place after a series of major joint exercises between the Indian Army and Indian Air Force including massive live fire power demonstrations.

It seems that the new Cold War Strategy would now be discussed at various levels of three Services and fine tuned. Needless to say that in any future conflict scenario where a "blitzkrieg" type strategy is going to be followed; joint operations involving the Indian Army, Indian Air Force and Indian Navy would be an imperative.

Security requirements did not permit the spelling out of adequate details of the "Cold Start Strategy" by the Chief of Army Staff. However, it is not difficult to visualize what this new war doctrine conceptually incorporates as it is said to revolve around the employment of "integrated battle groups" for offensive operations.

Such strategy did exist in NATO and was being taught at the Royal British Army Staff College, Camberley, UK which the author attended in 1971. In NATO terminology, “integrated” groups for offensive operations existed at three levels. The highest was “combat group” and “combat command” based on a divisional or brigade Headquarters (armoured/infantry mechanised) under which were a flexible number of “battle groups” (based on an armoured regiment/mechanized infantry battalion Headquarters) and the lowest was the “combat team” (based on an armoured squadron/mechanized infantry company Headquarters). The groupings at the each level were task-oriented in terms of varying composition of armour and infantry elements with integrated attack helicopters of the Army Aviation and the Air Force besides close support of ground attack Air Force squadrons. Also, was integrated Army Aviation surveillance helicopters. Command and control helicopters were available too.

Media, reports indicate that the new “Cold Start Strategy” visualizes the use of eight “integrated battle groups”. For the purposes of this strategic review the eight “integrated battle groups” being talked about will be taken to mean eight integrated armoured division/mechanized infantry division sized forces with varying composition of armour, artillery, infantry and combat air support- all integrated. This would be a fair assumption to be made for our discussion in case the intended aim of this new war doctrine is to be achieved.

The unveiling of a new war doctrine throws up a host of factors for discussion in terms of why a new war doctrine is required, what are the attendant factors in putting it into operation, the limiting factors that may come into play, the responses of the enemy to such a new war doctrine and a host of other associated considerations.

“Cold Start” War Doctrine-The Strategic Conceptual Underpinnings: In the absence of more details, and rightfully not spelt out due to security reasons, the strategic conceptual underpinnings of India’s new war doctrine can be envisaged as under:

- * Indian Army’s combat potential would be fully harnessed. The distinction between “strike corps” and “defensive corps” in ground holding role will be gradually diminished.
- * The offensive military power available with defensive corps in the form of independent armoured brigades and mechanized brigades, by virtue of their forward locations would no longer remain idle waiting to launch counterattacks. They would be employed at the first go and mobilized within hours.
- * Strike Corps may be re-constituted and reinforced to provide offensive elements for these eight or so “battle groups” to launch multiple strikes into Pakistan, fully integrated with the Indian Air Force and in the Southern Sector with naval aviation assets.
- * Obviously, then, India’s strike corps elements will have to be moved well forward from existing garrisons. It also means that Strike Corps would no longer sit idle waiting for the opportune moment, which never came in the last three wars. The Strike Corps remained

unutilised.

On another plane that is at the politico-strategic or politico-military level this new war doctrine seems to be aiming at the following:

- * Cutting out long drawn out military mobilization running into weeks.
- * The above results in loss of surprise at the strategic and military level.
- * The above also gives time to Pakistan's external patrons like USA and China to start exerting coercive pressures and mobilizing world opinion against India as witnessed in Operation Prakaram.
- * Long mobilization time also gives the political leadership in India time to waver under pressure, and in the process deny Indian Army its due military victories.
- * The new war doctrine would compel the political leadership to give political approval 'ab-initio' and thereby free the Armed Forces to generate their full combat potential from the outset.

Cold Start Strategy” is Aimed at Pakistan and is Offensive Oriented- The Pakistan Army, (not the Pakistani people) has a compulsive fixation for military adventurism against India, notwithstanding the Islamabad Accord January 2004.

India in the past has been hamstrung in cutting Pakistan to size due to a combination of United States pressures coming into play in the run-up to decisive military action and the hesitancy of India's political leadership. Military surprise was lost due to long mobilization times. The “Cold Start Strategy” can be said to be aimed militarily at Pakistan and is offensive-operations specific.

“Cold Start Strategy”- The Indian Political Parameters That Need to Come into Play: Such an offensive strategy can only be successful if the Indian political leadership at the given time of operational execution of this strategy has:

- * Political will to use offensive military power.
- * Political will to use pre-emptive military strategies.
- * Political sagacity to view strategic military objectives with clarity.
- * Political determination to pursue military operations to their ultimate conclusion without succumbing to external pressures.

* Political determination to cross nuclear threshold if Pakistan seems so inclined.

If the above are missing, as they have been from 1947 to 2004, Indian Army's new war doctrine would not add up to anything. For more detailed views on this subject, see the authors recent book: "India's Defence Policies and Strategic Thought: A Comparative Analysis" (reviewed on SAAG website as "Igniting Strategic Mindsets in Indians:; SAAG paper no. 657 dated 09-04-2003)

India's National Military Directives Need Change: Indian Governments, irrespective of political hues have shied away from enunciating India's national interests from which flows all military planning. However, what can be called as a sort of national military directive, which the Indian Army under political compulsions stands fixated is "No Loss of Territory, Not Even an Inch". Heads have rolled in the Army on this account in past wars.

"Cold Start Strategy" with its inherent character of mobile warfare using mechanized military formations, and especially where defensive formations may be called upon to undertake such operations, may at times involve some loss of territory in plains warfare.

If the above is not acceptable then strategically and militarily the status quo needs to be maintained with Indian Army fixated on linear defences. This author had argued against this as early as 1985 in an article "India's Linear Fixations" in the Combat Journal of what is now called the Army War College.

India's Strategic Military Objectives Needs to be Made Clear: India's strategic military objectives need to:

- * Shift from capturing bits of Pakistan territory in small scale multiple offensives to be used as bargaining chips after the cease fire.
- * Focus on the destruction of the Pakistani Army and its military machine without much collateral damage to Pakistani civilians.

All the three armed forces have to synergise operations towards destruction of the Pakistan Army as it is that which enslaves Pakistan, impedes democracy in Pakistan and indulges in military adventurism against India, including proxy wars and terrorism.

It is for nothing that the Pakistani military rulers and the Pakistani Army have hid from the Pakistani nation the causes of their military failure against India in 1971, 1999 (Kargil) and a catastrophic defeat in January 2002 if India's political leadership had not restrained the Indian Army during Operation Prakaram. "Cold Start Strategy" should therefore be aimed at the destruction of the Pakistan Army's military machine. India's Army Commanders can infer what this implies.

"Cold Start" War Doctrine-The Imperatives of Dedicated Air Force Close Air Support and Dedicated Ground Attack Squadrons: The Indian Air Force (IAF) would have a very crucial and critical role to play in the successful implementation of this new war doctrine. The "Cold

Start” eight or so “battle groups” cannot undertake “blitzkrieg” type military operations without an overwhelming air superiority and integrated close air support.

The IAF would therefore have to proportionately assign its combat assets to cater for the following:

- * Achieve overall air superiority so as to paralyse the enemy’s Air Force or render it so ineffective as to be unable to seriously affect the area of operations of the “Cold Start” offensive “battle groups”.
- * Dedicate a fair portion of its combat assets for the air defence of the Indian homeland.
- * Earmark dedicated close air support and ground attack squadrons in direct support of the “battle groups”.

The IAF would be hard pressed to execute the tasks from within its existing combat assets. Earlier, the IAF could initially allocate all its combat assets to achieve air superiority as any operations by “strike corps” would hope to subsequently follow.

In the new war doctrine scenario all these tasks would have to be concurrent. It was such a visualization that made this author in his strategic papers (“ India’s Strategic and Security 2004 Imperatives”: SAAG Paper no 884 dated 06.01.2004) reiterate that the IAF needs at least 70 combat squadrons. India has the financial resources to afford them. In any case even disconnecting from the new war doctrine requirements the IAF needs 70 combat squadrons in the context of India’s revised strategic frontiers discussed in an earlier paper of this author.

Indian Navy Aviation Support for “Battle Groups”: Besides its traditional tasks of sea control, naval blockades etc. the naval aviation support for the “battle groups” operations is a welcome step in filling some of the voids of IAF combat assets besides dividing the enemy’s aerial combat strength.

The Indian Navy, more importantly should concurrently be focusing in the new war doctrine scenario on amphibious operations deep in the enemy’s rear, so that Pakistan is forced to fight on three fronts, and in the process its resistance is fragmented.

India Will Have to Use Conventional Short Range Battle Field Missiles (SRBM) and Cruise Missiles: The entire success of ‘Cold Start’ war doctrine would overwhelmingly rest on the application of long range devastating fire power and this would perform have to include conventional SRBMs and cruise missiles.

Use of SRBMs and cruise missiles will not only help in softening enemy's 'Vulnerable Areas' and 'Vulnerable Points' but also thicken fire support assisting "battle groups" operations. These assets would more increasingly be required in support of "battle groups" operations in case of bad weather when IAF combat power cannot be applied.

Associated with this would be India's imperatives to accelerate her ICBM development and production which is India's sovereign right. "Cold Start" war doctrine without ICBM back up would be susceptible to external pressures.

Inventories of these weapons have to be significantly expanded and the time is now to jump-start India's defence production apparatus to this end.

Special Forces and Air Assault Capabilities Expansion and Employment in New War Doctrine: The successful implementation of the new war doctrine for force multiplication effect, for reinforcing the offensive punch and for exploitation of fleeting apparatus in fast paced military operations would call for sizeable employment of :

- * Special Forces
- * Air Assault Divisions.
- * Air Cavalry brigades.
- * Light infantry divisions with air-transportable combat power.

In the 'Cold Start' war doctrine scenario widespread use of the above forces including the capture and holding of airheads behind enemy lines would confuse the enemy, divide his reaction and counterattacks and spread panic. The Indian Army's capabilities in this direction are limited and need to be comprehensive enhanced.

Logistic Support For Cold War Doctrine: Such operations which can be expected to be swift, fluid and rapidly changing directions of attack cannot rest for logistic requirements on Indian Army's conventional logistic support which is ground based and wheel-based and incapable of swift cross country mobility.

Indian Army's own aviation assets and heavier utility helicopters of the IAF would need significant mustering for logistic support of "Cold Start" battle group.

India's strategic stockpiles of fuel, ammunition and military hardware spares along with "War Wastage Reserves" will have to be maintained

at full levels at all times to enable “Cold Start” war doctrines to take off. Without these at full levels ‘Cold Start’ operations may end up as cold start.

Pakistan’s Responses to India’s “Cold Start” War Doctrine Enunciation: India’s ‘ Cold Start’ war doctrine stands discussed in a recent Corps Commanders Conference of the Pakistan Army, and even amongst their strategic experts. Curiously, the discussions of the latter seem diverted to Pakistan’s special relationship with USA post 9/11 and there appears to be an implied assurance that the “special Pakistan-USA military relationship” would take care of the challenges posed to Pakistan by India’s new war doctrine. Pakistani strategic analysts view the enunciation of India’s “Cold Start” war doctrine as :

- * Putting pressure on Pakistan prior to peace talks.
- * The growing Pakistan-Bangladesh nexus is also curiously drawn in as an Indian concern requiring new war doctrines.

Surprisingly, no major military analysis has emerged so far Probably, it would take time to digest and come up with responses.

Pakistan’s Military Challenges Arising From India’s “Cold Start” War Doctrine: Strategically and militarily, it can be visualized that Pakistan would be faced with a number of military challenges arising from India’s new war doctrine, namely:

- * India’s “surprise” factor in terms of when, where and how “Cold Start” battle group would be launched.
- * Fighting the air-battle in an environment where the IAF has a significant superiority in numbers and quality of numerical strength.
- * Devising a credible anti-ballistic missile defence.
- * Re-constitution of Pakistan’s “strike corps” and its three ‘Army Reserve’ formations which were so far configured and located to take on India’s three “Strike Corps”.
- * When and how does Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent and its doctrine of “First Use” comes into play.
- * How to offset India’s overwhelming long range artillery fire support.
- * How to counter India’s force projection capabilities deep in Pakistan’s rear.

Pakistan cannot combat the Indian challenges by the oft-repeated bravado statement that “One Pakistan Soldier is equal to ten Indian

Soldiers” leading to strategic wags countering “what happens when the Eleventh Indian Soldier emerges”.

If the “Cold Start” doctrine is applied in its purist form, then in terms of military operations it does not become a game of military numbers but a game in terms of military technological superiority in terms of weapon systems, firepower and aerial combat assets besides the force multiplication effects of the Indian Navy.

Pakistan would have to divert sizeable financial resources for its weapon systems build-up to counter this doctrine. Of course, it can look to its external strategic patrons like USA and China for assistance and military largesse, but there is a limit here.

Pakistan’s Nuclear Deterrent and the Myth of Pakistan’s Low Nuclear Threshold: The Indian political leadership and its national security establishment fed on US academia planted stories (probably officially inspired) of Pakistan nuclear deterrent and Pakistan’s low nuclear threshold have been inordinately awed by its fearful consequences.

Though this aspect is a subject of detailed analysis in a separate paper the following observations can be made:

- * Pakistan has declared that it will go for nuclear strikes against India when a significant portion of its territory has been captured or likely to be captured. Secondly, when a significant destruction of the Pakistani military machine has taken place or when Pakistani strategic assets (read nuclear deterrent) are endangered.

- * India’s “Cold Start” war doctrine does not seem to be allowing Pakistan to reach at the above conclusions by indulging in deep long range penetrative strikes.

- * The Indian doctrine seems to be aimed at inflicting significant military reverses on the Pakistan Army in a limited war scenario short of a nuclear war.

- * Nuclear war fare is not a “commando raid” or “command operation” with which its present military ruler is more familiar. Crossing the nuclear threshold is so fateful a decision that even strong American Presidents in the past have balked at exercising it or the prospects of exercising it.

- * Pakistan cannot expect that India would sit idle and suffer a Pakistani nuclear strike without a massive nuclear retaliation.

- * Pakistan’s external strategic patrons can coerce or dissuade both sides to avoid a nuclear conflict, but once Pakistan uses a nuclear first strike no power can restrain India from going in from its nuclear retaliation and the consequences for Pakistan in that

case stand well discussed in strategic circles. Pakistan would stand wiped out.

When the obvious intention of India's new war doctrine is not to cross the nuclear threshold, and it seems declaratory in content, then a higher responsibility rests on Pakistan's external strategic patrons that their wayward protégé does not charge foolishly and blindly into the realms where even fools or the devil do not dare.

Pakistan's crossing the nuclear threshold has crucial implications for USA and China too. In fact a USA-China conflict can be generated which may have its own nuclear overtones. Therefore it is incumbent on both USA and China to strategically declare that they would not countenance any Pakistani first nuclear strike against India i.e. crossing the nuclear threshold.

Pakistan proclivities to threaten nuclearisation of an Indo-Pakistan conventional conflict is more of a blackmail to force USA and China's intervention. And if sincerely both USA and China are interested in South Asian peace and global security then Pakistan's nuclear proclivities have to be pre-empted now with a strategic declaration against Pakistan as above.

India, in any case, has to be prepared militarily, eitherway, notwithstanding any such caution that may be imposed on Pakistan.

Concluding Observations: From the Indian perspective, enunciation of a new war doctrine was long overdue and it is significant for the following reasons:

- * India now plans and is ready to act offensively against Pakistan for any perceived acts of strategic destabilization of India and proxy war and terrorism
- * India moves away from its defensive mindset of last 50 year plus.
- * India will now prepare to undertake offensive military operations at the out set.
- * India has in declaratory tones enunciated that it will undertake offensive operations short of the nuclear threshold

The Indian Army, despite any limitations in its hierarchy of not being forceful to make the political leadership in the last 50 years plus to adopt strategies which are strategically desirable but may be politically distasteful, has done well this time to bring India's war doctrine in public debate. The vast majority of the Indian public will be in support of any war doctrine that puts Pakistan into place and forces it to desist from proxy war and terrorism against India.

From the Pakistani perspective the following needs to be recognized with the enunciation of India's new war doctrine:

- * India will undertake offensive operations against Pakistan without giving Pakistan time to bring diplomatic leverages into play against India.
- * India has declaratorily implied that in such offensive operations against Pakistan it will not cross the nuclear threshold nor prompt Pakistan into crossing it. Should Pakistan opt for crossing the threshold the onus lies squarely on Pakistan.

The United States and China have not come out with any response so far. Nor should they since national security interests of India need to be respected, as those of a responsible, politically stable and a mature regional power which has exercised restraint even to the extent of being ridiculed for its restraint.

Since a nuclear conflict initiated by Pakistan has global overtones and has the potential to bring them to conflict with each other, both the United States and China need to strategically declare that they will not countenance Pakistan, initiating a nuclear conflict in South Asia. Alternatively both USA and China, as Permanent Members of the UN Securing Council initiate steps jointly, to bring Pakistan's (failed state WMD proliferator) nuclear assets under international control to be released only in the event of a nuclear threat.

Lastly, it needs to be reiterated that India may never have to put into effect its new "Cold Start" war doctrine if the United States and China restrain their wayward military protégé i.e. Pakistan from military adventurism and military brinkmanship. Also if United States and China wish to add value to their relationships with India, they need to desist from equating India with Pakistan when it comes to the prospects of the nuclear conflict in South Asia. India's strategic maturity is not in doubt; it is Pakistan's strategic maturity, which is in doubt. A nuclear conflict will take place in South Asia, only if the United States wants it and lets Pakistan permissively cross the nuclear threshold.

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