



Defence Primer 2017

Today's Capabilities, Tomorrow's Conflicts



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Contents

Today's Capabilities, Tomorrow's Conflicts.....	2
<i>Pushan Das and Sushant Singh</i>	
Filling the Capability Deficit.....	6
<i>Avinash Paliwal</i>	
Future Challenges for the Army 2030	15
<i>Vipin Narang and Shashank Joshi</i>	
Modernising of the Indian Army: Future Challenges.....	26
<i>Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Philip Campose</i>	
India's Air Force at a Pivotal Crossroads: Challenges and Choices Looking to 2032	35
<i>Benjamin S. Lambeth</i>	
Future Challenges for the Indian Air Force: Innovations & Capability Enhancements	45
<i>Justin Bronk</i>	
Doctrinal and Technological Innovations in the Indian Armed Forces: Countering Future Terrorism and Asymmetric Threats	52
<i>C. Christine Fair</i>	
Preparing for the Future Indian Ocean Security Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for the Indian Navy	59
<i>S. Paul Kapur and RADM (Retd.) William C. McQuilkin</i>	
Future Technologies for the Indian Navy.....	65
<i>Abhijit Singh</i>	
The Poverty of Expectations: Likely but Unfamiliar Challenges.....	76
<i>Sushant Singh</i>	
Possible Indian Nuclear Options in 2030	82
<i>S. Paul Kapur</i>	
India's Cyber Defence and Tackling Tomorrow's Challenges	89
<i>Bedavyasa Mohanty</i>	
Creation of a Defence Space Agency: A New Chapter in Exploring India's Space Security.....	96
<i>Narayan Prasad and Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan</i>	

Doctrinal and Technological Innovations in the Indian Armed Forces

Countering Future Terrorism and Asymmetric Threats

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The principle asymmetric threat that India faces and will continue to face well into the policy-relevant future pertains to Pakistan's reliance upon terrorist proxies under its nuclear umbrella. Pakistan relies upon terrorist proxies for several reasons. First, they are relatively inexpensive. Analysts believe that the annual operating budget of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is about \$50 million of which about \$5.2 million is dedicated to military operations.¹ Compared to Pakistan's defence budget of \$7.4, this amount is meagre.² Second, no matter how robust India's counter-intelligence, counter-terrorism and counter-infiltration efforts are, it is impossible to detect and pre-empt every terrorist attack planned and supported by Pakistan. Third, these attacks achieve Pakistan's minimalist objectives. While they cannot and will not change the territorial dispensation of Kashmir, they do effectively focus international attention on the so-called 'Kashmir dispute,' which in turn prompts international calls for dialogue. Pakistan uses these calls at home and abroad to legitimise its claims to Kashmir. Finally, the use of proxies confers some degree of plausible deniability which hinders India's ability to argue persuasively for punitive actions bilaterally or by

the United Nations. Complicating this scenario is Pakistan's explicit reliance upon its ever-expanding nuclear arsenal to raise the cost of Indian action and to draw in international actors to shield Pakistan from the consequences of its actions.

This creates a series of dilemmas for the Indian state and, in turn, for its application of power. To date, India has generally opted to use "strategic restraint," which has generally involved not responding to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism militarily. Proponents of this approach argue that avoiding a major conflict with Pakistan will permit India to continue its economic growth, and thus its ability to continue to invest in military modernisation. Moreover, Pakistan's behaviour is self-marginalising and undermines the integrity of the Pakistani state. However, many observers fear that India is making a virtue out of a necessity to obfuscate the fact that India lacks the ability to punish Pakistan militarily while retaining control of the escalation ladder.³ Whether India is making a strategic decision or simply making a virtue out of inability to act otherwise, India is essentially accepting that dozens, if not hundreds, of Indians will continue to die as a transaction cost of India's economic growth. While such a trade-off seems distasteful once articulated, it is not irrational to argue the national benefits of such an approach. On the other hand, if India were to undertake the reforms in defence it would need to better manage the threat, the financial and political costs will likely be great and unlikely to fructify over the policy relevant future. And, despite these investments, success cannot be assured.

Here I argue that in the near term, India should consider military options other than war for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, it is far from obvious that India can achieve its objective of compelling Pakistan to abandon terrorism under its terrorist umbrella through war. Thus what India may be able to do is raise the cost of this strategy to Pakistan while seeking to deny some of the benefits that it

enjoys. In this essay, I make three assumptions. First, I assume that India has chosen to cease making a virtue out of a necessity. Second, I assume that Pakistan will not resort to the use of nuclear weapons unless the very existence of the state is imperilled. The reason for this is straightforward: presently, the conditions of "mutually assured destruction" do not hold. While Pakistan can inflict grievous damage to India, India will ultimately survive. Pakistan, on the other hand, will not survive a nuclear retaliation. Most of its military, industry and population is concentrated in the Punjab region and the country lacks strategic depth as is well known. Third, I assume that China will remain as uninvolved as it has in the past and will not undertake military action against India in defence of its client's continued ability to use terrorism as a tool of policy.

The Challenge

India's central challenge is to compel Pakistan—particularly its army and Inter-services Intelligence Directorate (ISI)—to cease using groups like LeT to terrorise India into making some concession to Pakistan's equities in Kashmir. This challenge is daunting as Perkovich and Dalton note, despite their reckless misformulation of India's principle challenge.⁴ As they note, for a compellent strategy to be effective, the chain of action and reaction must ultimately inflict more harm on the object of the compellence strategy (Pakistan) than on the compeller (India). Put differently, how can India inflict such costs upon the Pakistan army and the ISI that they will cease and desist from attacking India using terrorist proxies that does not ultimately impose more cost upon India?

Does it make sense for India to initiate war over a terrorist strike? If India were to launch a limited aims war with the intent of seizing valuable territory before the international community intervenes and use that territory as a bargaining chip to

force Pakistan to concede to a comprehensive peace, would that peace hold? How can India ensure that the war remains limited? When the dust settles, with countless dead on both sides, has the status quo changed? Is there anything that India can do to impose such costs that is short of a comprehensive defeat of Pakistan and the ISI? Under the conditions of such a defeat, would India be more or less secure? These are incredibly difficult questions to answer and, in my view, have not been asked and answered effectively in the open source domain.

To achieve a comprehensive defeat of Pakistan, as Dalton and Perkovich have argued, India must make massive overhauls in virtually all aspects of its civilian-military relations, higher defence organisation, defence procurements, defence modernisation and service-specific visions of the future battlefield, among others. The military is not integrated into civilian decision-making, the services resist jointness; the Defence Research and Development Organization in India has a monopoly on defence development but often fails to deliver; the Ministry of Defence often fails to make important acquisition deals in part because it lacks a specialised cadre of defence professionals, and there is little political will to redress these sundry hindrances. Most exigently, India requires “[p]olicies and capabilities to decisively punish Pakistan in the event of another major terrorist attack against India,” yet has not rigorously analysed much less articulated such a strategy, nor debated the resources and methods that could be reasonably acquired and deployed to “move Pakistani leaders to curtail the terrorist threat.”⁵

For these reasons, I argue that India should pursue military operations other than war in the near term while the above-noted issues are debated and hopefully resolved. (Despite a crippling misframing of the puzzle which exculpates Pakistan from direct responsibility of using these groups as tools of policy, Dalton and Perkovich exhaustively

examine the range of military requirements needed to compel Pakistan and the myriad political and financial investments that would ensue.) These options, detailed below, include sub-conventional actions in Pakistan, limited actions along the Line of Control (LoC), and continued fortification of the LoC and border with better integration with police organisations.

Sub-conventional Operations

One of the puzzling aspects of Indian behaviour is that it has generally demurred from engaging in sub-conventional operations in Pakistan in the recent past. Presumably India’s own nuclear deterrent should provide India the same umbrella of impunity for such operations as Pakistan’s umbrella affords it. In the 1980s, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi ordered the Research and Evaluation Wing (RAW) to establish two covert groups: one to target Pakistan generally and another to target Khalistan groups in Pakistan.

The two groups were responsible for carrying out insurgency inside Pakistan. A low-grade but steady campaign of bombings in major Pakistani cities, notably Karachi and Lahore, were carried out. This forced the head of the ISI to meet his counterpart in RAW and agree on the rules of engagement as far as Punjab was concerned. The negotiation was brokered by then-Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan bin-Talal, whose wife, Princess Sarvath, is of Pakistani origin. It was agreed that Pakistan would not carry out activities in Indian Punjab as long as RAW refrained from creating mayhem and violence inside Pakistan.⁶

The reason for this seems to be a policy decision undertaken by former Prime Minister I. K. Gujral to demobilise assets that Indian intelligence cultivated for sub-conventional operations.⁷ It takes years to cultivate such assets and they cannot

be simply re-activated. India should reverse this policy of sub-conventional restraint immediately. It will likely take years to re-establish the kinds of assets inside Pakistan needed for effective sub-conventional deterrence. India would be wise to commence this immediately.

India must also tread carefully in the kinds of sub-conventional operations it would pursue. In recent years, India has flirted with giving a fillip to the Baloch insurgency. This is appealing at first blush. However, I believe it may not be wise for several reasons. First, the Baloch militant groups are not disciplined, prone to competition among each other and killing civilians. Supporting such groups run the risk of undermining India's pristine reputation of not engaging in such activities in Pakistan. Second, the Pakistani state has no compunction about massacring Baloch. Any Indian interference will be used as further justification at home and abroad for ever more brutality. Similarly, providing funding to the Pakistani Taliban would likely be unwise even though it has a demonstrable record in undermining the Pakistani state. Because the Pakistani Taliban are Deobandi, they have strong ties with Deobandi groups that target India and Afghans. The potential for blowback is quite high for this option.

Instead, India should focus its efforts on degrading groups like the LeT, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) as well as their enablers in and out of uniform. India would not likely attract international opprobrium if it focused its covert operations to non-state combatants and their enablers in the state. Dalton and Perkovich recommend against this, citing Israel's history of leadership decapitation and the ever-more sanguinary violence that the targeted groups perpetrate. It is true that leadership decapitation strategies are not suitable for groups with whom one wants to negotiate because such strategies remove from power the persons who can control the production of violence.⁸ This is not the case with LeT, JeM

network. In fact, LeT has a very hierarchical structure and tends to move the same leaders about these various positions. LeT has not developed a deep bench of replacements. Thus India should consider seriously how it can degrade key leaders. LeT seems particularly ripe for such options given its hierarchical structure.

Given that these leaders tend to roam about in cities, with Pakistani protection, this will not be an easy feat. However, it should not be impossible. JeM is similar. While the organisation had a serious leadership split in late 2001 with most of its members turning against the state, Massood Azhar remained loyal. The ISI has invested considerable resources to relaunch JeM in recent years as a part of its strategy to manage the Pakistan Taliban problem. Given the hierarchical nature of these groups' organisational structure and given the dependence of the groups upon key personalities, their elimination could be an effective means of degrading their lethality.

India should also focus upon those in and out of uniform who are providing assistance to these groups. These individuals link the terrorist group, the army and the ISI; and are important conduits for money, training, mission planning and personnel selection. Pakistan is riven with criminal and competing terrorists who could potentially be cultivated for these tasks. Additionally, India's historic ties to Afghan intelligence may also be a propitious partnership to undertake operations in Pakistan.

Actions Along the Line of Control and International Border

The Uri raid of September 2016 drew high praise from Indians. However, Indian armed forces had been conducting these raids for years: they simply were not made public.⁹ Clearly these kinds of

raids are not adequate to degrade the terrorist organisations' ability to conduct strikes even if they are an important kind of operation that must be performed routinely. When India went public with the raid, Pakistan denied it. This was likely a wise move on Pakistan's part: had it conceded the raid took place, there would have been domestic pressure to respond demonstrably. As it was, Pakistan undertook reprisals. Only Indian security professionals know whether India inflicted or suffered more costs. What is clear is that while these kinds of operations are important, they are not game changers.

The task for India is to develop a capability to conduct strikes against terrorist infrastructure as well as those military formations that enable them to operate in territories that would not justify Pakistan launching a larger punitive offensive. Arguably, the Indians should work with supportive international partners to ensure that the Pakistan response is muted. The most likely terrain for these operations is Pakistan-administered Kashmir. However, there may be need to do so along parts of the International Border as well on occasion.

To conduct these operations effectively, India needs to invest much more heavily in special operations units that are specifically designed for infiltration operations to conduct high-risk missions on enemy soil. This suggestion is not intended to denigrate India's current capabilities or numerous special operations groups; rather to emphasise the need for specific elite that conduct these kinds of operations in this terrain. India should also consider inducting armed drones. However, drones are frequently misunderstood. Drones are simply a means of delivering ordinance without putting a pilot at risk. Drones are only effective if used in conjunction with a sophisticated human intelligence network inside Pakistan, operating in concert with signals and other forms of intelligence as well as requisite command and control capabilities.

The United States has been widely criticised for its use of drones in Pakistan. Opponents of the policy have argued that the strategic effects of drones outweigh their tactical benefits. Others claim that drones create more terrorists than they kill. However, there is scant evidence for the maximalist versions of these claims while there is evidence that drone strikes in Pakistan have helped curb violence, particularly high value targets. As these hard targets became increasingly off limits, Pakistani terrorist groups reverted to their older habit of targeting civilians.¹⁰ If India pursues the use of armed drone strikes, it should consider and learn from US experiences with signature strikes (in which individuals are killed based upon their behaviour even if their identity is unknown) versus personality strikes (in which specific persons are targeted based upon a robust intelligence package). The former strikes were very controversial and often had high civilian casualties whereas the former tended to be more precise with fewer collateral deaths and injuries.

Hardening the Borders and Integrating with Improved Law Enforcement

India continues to make efforts to frustrate ability of Pakistan's security forces to facilitate the infiltration of their terrorist proxies into India. India should consider continued investing in ever newer technologies to harden the LoC and parts of the International Border from which infiltration takes place. However, even the most robust of efforts will be inadequate to pre-empt every terrorist cell or every agent provocateur. Once the perpetrators are on Indian soil, it is the task of domestic law enforcement and intelligence agencies to catch the person. There has been adequate ink spilled about the seams that exist across and among these different agencies by Indian analysts. The question remains: why have these previously identified reforms been slow to transpire or not at

all? This is an Indian domestic political question that is beyond the remit of this author. However, it is a well known fact that terrorists exploit these seems. (In Europe, the analogue is Belgium which is riven with competing, dysfunctional and non-cooperating security agencies as well as a thriving arms market.)

Another related problem is the failure to robust reform India's police. This is a well known problem. The police are poorly trained, poorly compensated, poorly armed and lack basic personal protective equipment. Acquisitions are riven with corruption and often result in India's police using defective gear. This is not the fault of the police. It is the failure of state legislatures to prioritise modernised policing. The reasons for this are lamentable and tragic: politicians in India would prefer to have police forces under their control rather than acting as professional forces to serve and protect the polity. India's policing still derives from the Indian Police Act of 1860, which created forces to subdue rather than protect the citizens. Unfortunately, failures in policing can have enormously strategic impacts.

One example of this is afforded by the Kashmir crisis of the summer of 2016. After the killing of a known Kashmiri militant, Pakistan was able to orchestrate stone throwing by women and children in Kashmir with the intent of provoking a disproportionate response from police. This ruse worked when Indian security forces shot and killed protestors with so-called non-lethal munitions when they were surrounded. This created a situation that became ever-more ripe for Pakistani interferences which in turn brought to the two nations to loggerheads. This could have been avoided had the police in Kashmir had a different concept of policing. Instead of seeking out the chimeric non-lethal munition, policing should focus upon crowd control. This requires the police to have the appropriate gear for crowd maintenance, which Indian police force generally lacks. (The United States is NOT an example of

effective policing in crowds. Instead, India should look to Japanese or western European models.) The British, German and Japanese police, among others, are adept at managing crowds of thousands of people without a single fatality.

Unfortunately India's domestic political imperatives make such changes very unlikely. There is very little pressure from the public for police reforms and legislators have their own incentives to not engage in the revolutions in policing that are needed to effectively protect India. Moreover, private industries have not developed lobbying efforts to pressure police reforms because they seem to prefer using private security. This is rational: lobbying will require them to spend resources with dubious outcomes while investing in private security has obvious and immediate gains. While policing is not traditionally seen as an issue for the armed forces, in environments afflicted by insurgencies and terrorism, police forces are a necessary if overlooked part of the overall security puzzle.¹¹

Conclusions

While Indian capabilities to deliver a decisive defeat to Pakistan may take decades to develop, in the near term India should consider military operations other than war to contend with this continuing security threat from terrorist groups like LeT and their masterminds in the Pakistani army and ISI. The task will be calibrating these responses to deprive Pakistan of an opportunity to launch a larger conflict. This will require working with partners like the United States and Britain to force Pakistan to acquiesce. This is not akin to asking for permission; rather a notification of Indian intentions immediately before undertaking the planned operation. These efforts will fall short of the overall goal of coercing Pakistan to cease and desist from using terrorism as a tool of policy; however, they may provide an important interim step in degrading their lethality.

Endnotes

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- 4 This differs from the formulation of Perkovich and Dalton who argue that India's task is to compel groups like LeT to cease and desist from attacking India. Alternatively, they argue India must motivate Pakistan to stop these groups from attacking India. The authors fatuously argue that the state does not control these organizations. George Perkovich and Toby Dalton. 2016. *Not War. Not Peace?: Motivating Pakistan to Prevent Cross-Border Terrorism* (Oxford University Press: New Delhi).
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- 11 See case studies in C. Christine Fair and Sumit Ganguly. 2014. *Policing Insurgencies: Cops and Counterinsurgents*. New Delh: Oxford University Books.



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