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Indian Strategic Doctrinal Transformation: Trends and Trajectory

Dr. Summar Iqbal Babar and Dr. Muhammad Nadeem Mirza¹

Abstract

From being one of the biggest proponents of non-alignment to becoming a state aspiring to be a regional hegemon, India has gone through a huge doctrinal transformation in its strategic thinking. This paper addresses evolution of this transformation while detailing major military doctrines such as Nehru doctrine, Sunderji doctrine, Cold-Start doctrine, Indian Maritime doctrine, Indian Land Warfare doctrine, and Indian Joint Armed Forces doctrine. This continuous doctrinal transformation aims at seeking a more synchronized modernization of the military, creating synergy to fill operational gaps and enhance agility for swift manoeuvrability under a nuclear overhang. The study concludes that under the present BJP government, Nehruvian influence over Indian strategic thought has reduced significantly and therefore ultimately led to the design and adaptation of more hawkish strategies – such as Land-Warfare Doctrine 2018, hybrid warfare, surgical strike stratagem – which are contrary to the behaviour of a responsible nuclear-weapon state.

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Key Words: Land Warfare, Maritime, Nuclear, Surgical strike, Cold-Start Doctrine, BJP.

Introduction

Coupled with massive military modernization, the Indian strategic outlook has undergone a rapid transformation with the ultimate objective to alter the power equation in South Asia. Pakistan's development of tactical nuclear weapons for establishing a strategic parity to avoid any military confrontation has failed to prevent India from adopting offensive behaviour. Furthermore, Indian hybrid warfare strategy,² "surgical strike" capability,³ Land-warfare Doctrine 2018,⁴ enhancement of its defence budget and arms procurement, and ongoing conventional military build-up have endangered the existing deterrence in the region.⁵ Indian plans to invest heavily in buying satellites and Airborne Early Warning Systems (AEWACS) 'eyes in the sky' from Israel and Russia,⁶ acquisition of Rafale fighter jets from France,⁷ signals intelligence, nuclear submarines, latest high range artillery guns, and reconnaissance assets to strengthen conventional asymmetry may invite conventional as well as a non-conventional arms race in

² Summar Iqbal Babar and Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, "Indian Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan," *Progressive Research Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2, No.1 (2020): 22.

³ Ankit Panda, "India's 2017 Joint Armed Forces Doctrine: First Takeaways," *The Diplomat*, April 28, 2017.

⁴ Masood-Ur-Rehman Khattak, "The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: A Critical Analysis," *IPRI Journal*, Vol. XX: No. 1 (Winter 2020): 105-134.

⁵ Walter C. Ladwig III, "Indian Military Modernization and Conventional Deterrence in South Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 3: No. 5 (29 July 2015): 729-72.

⁶ Ajit Kumar Dubey, 'IAF's Plans to Acquire Planes from Israel, Russia on Hold Due to Price Hike', *India Today*, September 11, 2017.

⁷ Manu Pubby, "India to Buy 36 Rafale Jets in Fly-Away Conditions from France; Deal to Be Worked Out," *The Economic Times*, July 14, 2018.

the region.⁸ India recently signed a geospatial intelligence-sharing agreement, “Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)” with the United States that has undermined strategic stability in South Asia.⁹ Given the conventional asymmetries, prolonged animosity due to unsettled territorial disputes, this bolstering strategic transformation in Indian doctrines has created security predicaments for Pakistan. Continuous violations along the Line of Control (LoC), disputes over water resources and diplomatic offensive to isolate Pakistan further add fuel to fire in a strategically volatile region that can have adverse effects upon the stability of the South Asian region.

Willingness and lobbying by the western states, specifically the United States to fast track transfer of military equipment and technology to India and Indian eagerness to strategically modernize itself have cultivated strategic disparity in South Asia. Pakistan’s efforts to maintain strategic stability in the region have been strained because of the US support for Indian permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, Indo-US nuclear deal, and facilitating the special waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group – while refusing to address Pakistan’s apprehensions.

Given the enhancement in military prowess, the Indian military has been tempted to flex its muscles, remaining below the perceived nuclear threshold. Balakot attacks in February 2019 by the IAF was a concrete proof of prevailing Indian strategic

⁸ Paul Bracken, “The Problem From Hell: South Asia’s Arms Race,” *The Diplomat*, November 29, 2012, accessed December 02, 2020.

⁹ Strategic Vision Institute (2020), *SVI Webinar on 'India-US Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA): Implications for the South Asian Region,'* Islamabad, November 11, 2020, <https://thesvi.org/webinar-on-india-us-basic-exchange-and-cooperation-agreement-beca-implications-for-the-south-asian-region-published-in-dawn/>.

ambitions.¹⁰ A whopping increase in defence budget further substantiates Indian hegemonic designs. But the question remains that why and how has India embarked upon such a track to modernize its military, revolutionize its strategic thinking and enhance strategic capabilities? And what are the key features of this offensive doctrinal transformation? This paper traces the evolution of this transformation while detailing major military doctrines such as Nehru and Indira Doctrines, Sunderji Doctrine, Cold-Start Doctrine, Indian Land Warfare Doctrine, and Indian Joint Armed Forces Doctrine.

India's Strategic Thinking

India has evolved different perceptions of the strategic environment and challenges to its national security over the years. It has gradually drifted away from Nehru's approach to view national security as a political matter, and to manage threats politically rather than militarily. It has always kept the economy as its foremost priority in which a major share of the resources was allocated for economic development. Prime Minister Modi's India is far more different and hawkish in its strategic outlook, the pursuit of power, and policy objectives than any of the previous governments. India is diversifying its resources to build its military muscle and to expand its political influence for strategic purposes. This hawkish approach has disturbed regional stability and raised alarms about any possible Indian military adventure. This has compelled Indian elites to rethink and allocate more for the defence budget that has reached 63.9 billion-dollar, becoming the fifth largest spender on the military by 2018.¹¹ India's grand strategy is a by-product of offense-defence calculations, political objectives of the state, and geographic, technological, economic,

¹⁰ Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, *India's Surgical Strike Stratagem: Brinkmanship and Response* (Islamabad, Khurshid Printers, 2019): 15.

¹¹ SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2018* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 6.

and political constraints as well as opportunities. The military doctrine framework translates the strategic understanding into tactical, operational, and theatrical domains. This study elaborates on the evolution of Indian military doctrines starting from Prime Minister Nehru's.

Nehru and Indira Doctrines

Nehruvian strategic thinking revolved around non-alignment and an effort to keep the Indian Ocean "Indian" dominated. To keep the great powers out of the Indian Ocean, it tried to dominate the regional states and prevented them from letting great powers establish bases in their territories.¹² India in the post-colonial era focused on building an indigenous military-industrial complex to keep itself free from international pressures, with the primary focus on economic advancement.

The regional challenges emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the form of 1962 war with China and the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan. During the Sino-Indian 1962 conflict, it requested and received the US military assistance, which also exposed its inherent internal weaknesses.¹³ Subsequently, a five-year defence plan (1964) was launched that doubled the defence spending and

¹² Robert Potter, "India's Monroe Doctrine Is Dead," *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 21 March 2016, <http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/indias-monroe-doctrine-is-dead/>; Baljit Singh, "Nehru's Idea of Indian Security," *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 19: No. 2 (1 September 2012): 207–20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523114539599>; A. Z. Hilali, "India's Strategic Thinking and Its National Security Policy," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41: No. 5 (2001): 737–64.

¹³ Muhammad Nadeem Mirza, "Pak-US Relations: Legacy of Unrealistic Expectations and Disillusionments," in Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (ed.), *Indo-US (Re) Alignments in South Asia: Contemporary Trends and Future Trajectories (Forthcoming)*, 2021.

focused on expansion and modernization of the military through foreign weapons procurements.¹⁴

Indira Doctrine was more aggressive and significantly changed the defence outlook of India. It was aimed at achieving a hegemonistic status in the region and to have the liberty to interfere in the internal matters of other regional states. Indira Gandhi favoured military expeditions and was not afraid of waging war against Pakistan in 1971 despite the US's opposition. Later on, India also deployed forces in Sri Lanka and Maldives in 1980s.¹⁵ The Indo-Soviet 'Peace, Cooperation and Friendship' treaty was signed in 1971 which established a framework for Soviet military support and established them as India's primary suppliers of defence equipment. At the regional level, visit of President Nixon to Beijing in 1972 altered the wider context of Indian security which perceived the past policy of the US-Pakistan cooperation against communism being replaced by the US-China competitive cooperation against the Soviet Union.¹⁶

Sunderji Doctrine

Indian defence industry could rarely fulfil the demand of indigenous systems for its military forces. This resulted in doctrinal

¹⁴ From 1954 to 1962 India spent an average 560 million dollars on defence and from 1962-63 the defence spending increased to 750 million dollars. The target was set to increase troops from 0.5 million to 0.8 million and air force squadrons to 45. Maharaj K. Chopra, "Indian Defence at the Crossroads," *Military Review*, Vol. 44 (1964): 17.

¹⁵ Bilveer Singh Bilveer, "Operation Cactus: India's Prompt Action in the Maldives," *Asian Defence Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 89 (1989): 30-33; David Brewster, "Operation Cactus: India's 1988 Intervention in the Maldives," in *India's Ocean: The Story of India's Bid for Regional Leadership*, 2014; V. P. Malik, *Operation Cactus: Drama in the Maldives* (Harper Collins, New Delhi, 2013); Bryan Pfaffenberger, "Sri Lanka in 1987: Indian Intervention and Resurgence of the JVP," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 28: No. 2 (1988): 137-47.

¹⁶ Henry A. Kissinger, "Memorandum for President: My Talks with Chou En-Lai," (US Government, 14 July 1971); Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Simon & Schuster, 2011).

development and an expert committee headed by General K. Sunderji was tasked to develop a 20-years plan for the army.¹⁷ Indira Gandhi carried out the recommendations with maximization of India's research and development capacity to reduce dependence on imports. The Army Air Defence (AAD) was made airmobile and could move to battlefields, scores of miles away, in a single day.¹⁸ India's external debt by 1991 had soared to US \$70 billion and the idea had to be shelved. Yet, as part of India's efforts to produce technologically advanced and sophisticated weapons, an Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGDMP) was launched to develop ballistic missiles.¹⁹

Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) 2004

Since full scale conventional wars are not possible between India and Pakistan, therefore limited tactical conflicts can be generated and thus carried out in targeted territories with specific goals and to do so India should first enhance its specific conventional capabilities (offensive and more mobile) and bring about some reforms into its military strategy.²⁰ A limited war could be the result of a border dispute or Pakistan's political support to Kashmir struggle, could easily escalate towards a conventional conflict in the future. Also, Indian failure to rapidly mobilize troops against Pakistan during operation Parakram (2001) following the Indian Parliament attacks²¹ prompted it to launch the CSD. The military

¹⁷ Shekhar Gupta, "General Krishnaswamy Sundarji, Soldier of the Mind Who Rewrote India's Military Doctrine," *The Print*, February 8, 2018; Ali Ahmed, "In Tribute: Recalling the Sundarji Doctrine," *USI Journal*, Vol. 138: No. 571 (2008): 22; Amit Gupta, "Determining India's Force Structure and Military Doctrine: I Want My MiG," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 35: No. 5 (1995): 441–58.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Sannia Abdullah, "Cold Start in Strategic Calculus," *IPRI Journal*, Vol. 12: No. 1 (2012): 1–27.

²¹ John F. Burns and Celia W. Dugger, "India Builds Up Forces as Bush Urges Calm," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2001.

objectives were to destroy Pakistan's Army Reserve Divisions (North & South). India Corps I, II, and XXI are divided into eight Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs).²² Similarly, many integrated groups will present monitoring and intelligence challenges and pose smaller targets to nuclear weapons. Another challenge would be to perceive India's limited objectives that could include slicing Pakistan's territory or holding it for negotiations. The CSD is aimed at dividing the cohesive strength of Pakistan and creating confusion.

CSD is based on five pillars:²³ The first is preparedness to fight a two-front war at the western and north-eastern border. The second is the strategic consideration of both military (conventional, sub-conventional, and nuclear) and non-military factors into outlining objectives. The third is the capacity to take war into the enemy's territory while protecting India's interests in the region and the littoral states surrounding the Indian Ocean. The fourth is developing interconnectedness between the three branches of the Indian Army. The fifth is the feasible degree of technological advancement required to pursue a limited-objective war.²⁴ CSD aims at setting objectives well below the nuclear threshold levels.²⁵

There are doubts about the CSD's operational capabilities and the heightened output expectancy against Pakistan due to latter's Credible Minimum Deterrence policy and short-range tactical nuclear weapon TNW, Hatf Nasr. Pakistan has categorically warned India of its ambitious misadventure at any time, and that in case of

²² Walter C. Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine," *International Security*, Vol. 32: No. 3 (Winter 2007): 49.

²³ Yagesh Joshi, "The End of the Cold Start Doctrine," *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 13 October 2010.

http://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=3258

²⁴ Zafar Khan, "Cold Start Doctrine: The Conventional Challenge to South Asian Stability," *Contemporary Security Policy* Vol. 33: No. 3 (1 December 2012): 577–94.

²⁵ Ladwig III, "A Cold Start for Hot Wars?", 158-190.

violation Pakistan reserves the right to protect its territory by launching the tactical nuclear weapon within its territory which would be enough to destroy IBGs. Pakistan believes to plug in all the strategic, operational and tactical gaps to shatter Indian dreams of operationalizing the CSD. Furthermore, Pakistan views Nasr as less provocative and more defensive in nature that leaves little justifiable options for any Indian military adventure.

The Network Centric Warfare (NCW)

Capabilities based on shock and awe tactics (rapid dominance) seek to exploit the situational awareness during a time of crisis and decapitate the Observation, Orientation, Decision and Action (OODA) loop of the decision-makers.²⁶ The NCW also allows for the integration of military/battlefield strategy in a result-oriented framework with the real-time reorientation of goals in an empowered self-synchronized manner which takes input from intelligence gathering, reconnaissance aircraft, and satellite monitoring.²⁷ However, the conversion of defence corps into strike corps presents a challenge of a counter strike by Pakistan as well as the reliance of Pakistan on nuclear deterrence to deter Indian designs.²⁸

Indian Maritime Doctrine 2015

India maintains the ambitions to build its military capabilities to achieve its own 'manifest destiny' to wrest control of the Indian

²⁶ Carlo Kopp, "Understanding Network Centric Warfare," *Australian Aviation*, February 2005; Martin Révay and Miroslav Líška, "OODA Loop in Command Control Systems," in *2017 Communication and Information Technologies (KIT)* (2017 Communication and Information Technologies (KIT), IEEE Xplore, 2017): 1–4, accessed August 11, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.23919/KIT.2017.8109463>.

²⁷ Kopp, "Understanding Network Centric Warfare"; Révay and Líška, "OODA Loop in Command Control Systems".

²⁸ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Nasr Pours Cold Water on India's Cold Start Doctrine: Bajwa," *Dawn*, July 6, 2017.

Ocean,²⁹ and achieve regional hegemony. While taking inferences from the Monroe Doctrine, Holmes and Yoshihara have developed three force models to measure Indian capabilities from 2004 and 2007: free-rider, constable, and strongman models.³⁰

Free-Rider Model requires the naval capability to neutralize low-level maritime threats such as illegal trafficking, sea-based terrorist activities, piracy, and the like. It is the least aggressive model in posture which focuses on safe trade transit and sea lanes. This model does not diversify resources for expensive military apparatus. It seeks the presence of some other powerful maritime power to guarantee smooth sailing and maritime security in the region. It is an approach to avoid exhausting resources in mere muscle build-up as those can be utilized more in economic resources, multiplying trade, and maintaining a good image as well.³¹ India, in this model, seeks the United States as dominant maritime force to play as guarantor and help in its economic endeavours. Furthermore, the United States works as a balancer against China, given the account of its assertive policies and comparative military prowess in the region, thus relieving India of threats emanating from the Oceans.³²

In the Constable Model, a state seeks political restraint not to allow maritime access to any state forcefully. It requires dominant maritime security, better equipped and military capable to go for

²⁹ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "India's "Monroe Doctrine" and Asia's Maritime Future," *Strategic Analysis* Vol. 32: No. 6 (23 October 2008): 997–1011.

³⁰ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Strongman, Constable, or Free-Rider? India's "Monroe Doctrine" and Indian Naval Strategy," *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 28: No. 4 (1 October 2009): 332–48. Also see David Brewster, "An Indian Sphere of Influence in the Indian Ocean?" *Security Challenges*, Vol. 6: No. 3 (Spring 2010): 1–20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Iskander Rehman, *India's Aspirations of Naval Doctrine*, Carnegie Endowment 2009,

https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Indias_Aspirational_Naval_Doctrine.pdf

denial operations. This model requires sufficient capacity to not let any conflict being provoked prematurely.³³

The Strongman Model requires a state capable of denying any external threat emanating from the ocean. For this, a state has to build its capacity, develop the latest military hardware, and acquire advanced technologies to respond to any sort of maritime threat.³⁴ Holmes and Yoshihara believe that India at the time is following the Free Rider Model and aspires to reach to the Constable Model to develop its naval and military capabilities to be able to conduct denial operations. It is evident in the Indian Ministry of Defence' 2014-15 annual report that deliberates on maritime sovereignty of the state and full use-of-sea.³⁵ It elaborates that the prime objective of the Indian Navy is to deter any maritime threat and dissuade acts against its national interests. Statistics display massive Indian defence purchases that aim at building its image as a major power, and leveraging its political influence in the region.³⁶ Holmes and Yoshihara noted that the Indian military modernization drive is reciprocal to its continuously growing economy so it can allocate more budgets to expand its strategic clout in the region.³⁷ To establish its power, India requires aircraft carriers for its Navy. Holmes and Yoshihara found that those carriers will have the capacity to execute traditional and non-traditional maritime roles such as air-to-air combat, air-ground attack, sea denial, anti-submarine, anti-surface warfare, mine and counter-mine, anti-piracy, and non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs).³⁸

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ James R. Holmes, *Indian Naval Strategy in the Twenty-First Century*, 24.

³⁵ MOD India, *India Ministry of Defence - Report* (Government of India, 2015), 32.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Holmes and Yoshihara, "Strongman, Constable, or Free-Rider?," 340–45.

³⁸ Ashley J. Tellis, "Making Waves: Aiding India's Next-Generation Aircraft Carrier," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (22 April 2015): 6–9, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/22/making-waves-aiding-india-s-next-generation-aircraft-carrier-pub-59872>.

Looking at India's ambitions, it would require at least three aircraft carriers in its east and west coast fleets, with a third in a training cycle.³⁹ This behaviour is not only evident in maritime domain but also in the overall Indian strategic thinking represented in this paper through a doctrinal transformation.

The Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine 2017

Various arms of the defence forces have individual doctrines that are cognizant of the nature of operations and their respective mediums of operation. The perspectives and attitudes are acquired as the individual grows within the service.⁴⁰ A doctrine tries to streamline those perspectives and attitudes; it aims at prioritizing activities rather than platforms or services involved in the execution. The Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine (2017) lists the following national interests and security objectives:⁴¹

- a. To preserve sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of India
- b. To preserve democratic, secular and federal character of the India
- c. To safeguard India's existing and emerging strategic, political, economic, and military goals

India's National Security Objectives are:

- a. Maintain a credible deterrent capability to safeguard national interests
- b. Ensure defines of national territory, air space, maritime zones including our trade routes and cyberspace

³⁹ Shishir Upadhyaya, "Projecting Power... and Politics? Carriers in the Indian Ocean," *IHS Jane's Navy International*, Vol. 11 (2015): 9.

⁴⁰ Johnson Chacko, "Indian Military Doctrine: An Analysis," *Indian Defence Review*, vol. 32: No. 4 (December 2017): 7.

⁴¹ "Joint Operational Doctrine For Army, Navy, Air Force Unveiled," *The Economic Times*, July 12, 2018.

These interests and objectives are relevant in a larger strategic perspective which entails the following:

- a. India's aspirations for a greater role in the New World Order do not allow it to remain detached from global developments and it has to harness all aspects of national power and influence the world through its geography
- b. Effective deterrent capabilities to protect strategic interests in regions along Northern, Western and Eastern borders and sensitivities across the LOC and the LAC
- c. Addressing concerns of instability and radicalism in the immediate and extended neighbourhood which arises from geopolitical rebalancing, assertiveness by emerging powers and regional instabilities
- d. The centrality of land borders and Indian Ocean Region to India's growth and security as land and sea routes are vital for trade. Cooperative security and strategic partnerships in this regard are also crucial.

The Joint Armed forces doctrine (2017) focuses on the following aspects:⁴²

- a. Jointness – a high-level of cross-domain synergy for the optimized capability to engage in Joint-War fighting. Joint Military Objectives and resource allocation for cross-domain requirements while keeping in mind the uniqueness and special attributes of each service.
- b. Other elements of integration are Joint Strategic Military Education, integrated logistics structure, integrated human resource development structure, integrated procurement, integrated perspective planning and emerging 'triad' to the traditional mediums of Land, Sea and Air, wherein future

⁴² Ibid.

wars are likely to be fought, viz. in the domains of Space, Cyber and Special Operations.

The doctrine tasks the establishment of synergy between three wings of the armed forces which is based on the notion that the application of joint force yields better results than the cumulative effect of the three wings applied individually.⁴³

The notion of strength of defence suggests that 'any chain is as strong as the weakest link in it,' and in modern warfare, such a weak link in the airpower target system will be the pilots as they are the hardest to replace in real-time.⁴⁴ A Special Force tasked to neutralize the adversary's pilots will render its airpower futile. The multiplicity of roles in the Air Force warrants flexibility for bogies and similarly the perception related to the nature of theatres varies in Army and Air Force calculations. Military doctrine tried to operationally optimize the use of integrated force across the military forces.⁴⁵

Execution of operations along the Army, Navy, and Air Force requires an integrative military authority for coordination of functions, rendering a change in the structure that would aid the prioritization of objectives and utilization of available resources in a timely, efficient, and cost-effective manner. The task of training, administration, and support including as a function to aid civil government would have to be performed by the existing military organizations.⁴⁶ Moreover, military divisions need to be placed in such operational settings which resemble their operational preparedness and need. Peacetime will be utilized for training,

⁴³ Bratton and Smith, "India's Joint Doctrine: Hopeless Muddle or the Start of the Strategic Articulation," *War Room United States War College*, 2017, accessed June 29, 2020, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/indias-joint-doctrine-hopeless-muddle-start-strategic-articulation/>

⁴⁴ Chacko, "Indian Military Doctrine: An analysis."

⁴⁵ Bratton and Smith, "India's Joint Doctrine."

⁴⁶ Chacko, "Indian Military Doctrine."

maintenance and administration of the units. And the units will be placed within military regions with a special focus on the possible need to neutralize an impending threat. The military authority in individual regions for these divisions will be supplemented by senior support staff from the three services to enhance interconnectedness.

The commander of the Air Forces would require command over aerial assets even belonging to other organizations. Similar integration mechanisms will be worked out at lower level military regions and subsequently at the integrated task force levels within the region.⁴⁷

This is quite an incoherent approach, more army-centric and unable to provide joint mechanisms with other force instruments. Furthermore, it is a manifestation of hyper-nationalism spearheaded by the BJP too. This doctrine exhibits Indian strategic thinking to induce strategic imbalance through acquisition of Rafale and S-400 anti-ballistic missile systems, induction of more sophisticated and disruptive technologies to outsmart Pakistan in limited conventional warfare means. Though, presently India has not achieved its listed objectives but with the ambitions that go beyond conventional military imperatives, it can endanger strategic stability and peace in the region.

Land Warfare Doctrine 2018

Indian Army has long been propagating its doctrine of engaging in a two-front war,⁴⁸ which is, against Pakistan and China. Ever since the partition, India has been involved in an armed conflict, directly or indirectly with Pakistan mainly over the Kashmir issue. Furthermore, since the 1962 war with China, India found itself in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ N. C. Vij, R. K. Dhowan, K. K. Nohwar and Krishan Varna, "Two-Front War: What Does it Imply?" *National Security* Vol. I: No. I (August 2018): 1-20.

hot waters from the second front as well. To deal with this security dilemma, India felt a need to devise a doctrine that could compensate for its geopolitical vulnerability.

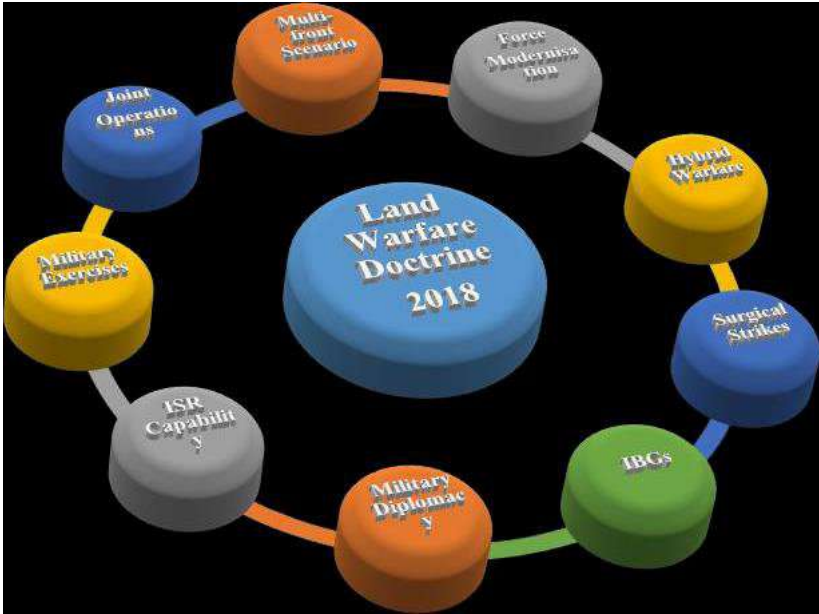


Figure 4.1. Main Features of India’s LWD-2018.⁴⁹

The 2018 Land Warfare Doctrine (LWD) is an extension of the Indian military strategy based on a wide range of threats. The striking features of this doctrine can be summarized into three groups: the multi-front environment, hybrid warfare (contact or non-contact confrontation) and the introduction of new technologies in the battle.⁵⁰ Analysis of these features highlight modernity in the strategic thinking of India. The previous Army doctrines lacked the strategies of fighting a two-front war.

⁴⁹ Khattak, “The Indian Army’s Land Warfare Doctrine 2018,” 105-134.

⁵⁰ Yasir Hussain, “India’s Pakistan-Specific Land Warfare Doctrine: An Overview,” *South Asian Voices*, March 15, 2019, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://southasianvoices.org/indias-pakistan-specific-land-warfare-doctrine-an-overview/>.

Furthermore, they also lacked the approaches of tackling the non-state actors.

First major feature of the LWD includes detailing explicitly two regions, that is, Northern Border (China) and Western Border (Pakistan). In an overall security of the region, India faces threats from the aforementioned states while other states being smaller in size, are either incapable of challenging India militarily or are dependent upon it in the economic and military terms. Hence, India has to focus all of its energies towards Pakistan and China. India also feels uneasy with the growing cooperation between Pakistan and China; thus, complexity of the situation compels it to treat threats emanating from them in a singular manner.

While the main focus on the China border is aimed at securing the frontiers through deterrence, the LWD classifies Pakistani border as an area where swift damage should be imposed⁵¹ through directing the forces towards the gravity of the adversarial operations. It is explicitly evident that through the multi-layered forces, India tries to de-escalate tensions with China while focusing more on Pakistan.

The second major feature is combating non-state actors through hybrid warfare which includes cyber, space, and communication along with the other arenas irrespective of the battleground.⁵² This also signifies importance for Pakistan⁵³

⁵¹ "Land Warfare Doctrine 2018," *Indian Army document*: p. 5.

<http://www.ssri-j.com/MediaReport/Document/IndianArmyLandWarfareDoctrine2018.pdf>; Ali Ahmed, "Understanding India's Land Warfare Doctrine," *South Asian Voices* (blog), 26 February 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/understanding-indias-land-warfare-doctrine/>; Younis Chughtai, "Indian Land Warfare Doctrine-2018: What It Means for the Region," *Daily Times*, January 10, 2019; Joy Mitra, "India's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst," *The Diplomat*, January 3, 2019.

⁵² "Land Warfare Doctrine-2018," 6.

considering the Indian posture in Kashmir, where it accuses Pakistan of funding and supporting the groups fighting for their independence. The term “non-contact war” also signifies the Indian strategy of inflicting damage on Pakistan from within the territories.⁵⁴ This can be argued in the form of developing the spy-network within the territorial limits of Pakistan.

Finally, the last strategy which Indian military has adopted is the inclusion of advanced technologies in the form of artificial intelligence, nanotechnology and hypersonic missile systems. In the pursuit of this objective, India has already strengthened its ties with Israel which range from the economic domains to being the strategic allies. India has also ventured through into space collaboration with Israel along with the defence systems and missile technology.⁵⁵

It is quite evident that LWD is Pakistan centric. Even though the Indian strategic calculations of threat perception have always skewed towards Pakistan and China, there is a lesser possibility of conventional warfare between India and China. Chinese conventional forces have a vivid edge over India. There are also geographical complexities between both which combined with the nature of outstanding disputes, would keep the escalation level low. Owing to these reasons, the overt and covert focus of the Land Warfare Doctrine is evidently towards Pakistan.⁵⁶

⁵³ Babar and Mirza, “Indian Hybrid Warfare Strategy: Implications for Pakistan.”

⁵⁴ Jaibans Singh, “Land Warfare Doctrine – 2018: An Assessment,” *Indian Defence Industries*, 30 January 2019, <https://indiandefenceindustries.in/land-warfare-an-assessment>; Mitra, “India’s Land Warfare Doctrine 2018”; P.K. Mallick, “Indian Army’s Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: Questions and Concerns,” *The Wire*, 3 January 3, 2019.

⁵⁵ Mumtaz Ahmad Shah and Dr. Tabraz, “India’s Israel Policy: From Nehru to Modi,” *Journal of Critical Reviews*, Vol. 7: No. 9 (2020): 872-878.

⁵⁶ Khattak, “The Indian Army’s Land Warfare Doctrine 2018,” 105-134.

This doctrine has various features. The most important among them is the formation of the IBGs. The rapidness and responsiveness at the time of escalation are desired from these groups. Since the chances of nuclear or full-fledged war are not possible, India has been preparing to fight a limited yet decisive war with Pakistan.⁵⁷ It has the aspiration to fight with a full-scale victory under the umbrella of nukes.

The Indian Army recognizes its inability and is committed to improving rapid mobilization of troops. In 2018 multiple small and active groups were formed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of IBGs. In each IBG, there has to be a clear synergy between the air and land forces. In this regard, every IBG would have 4-6 battalions, Armoured Personnel Carriers, and highly sophisticated helicopters. Currently, the Indian Army has been planning to raise around 9 IBGs. In every IBG, the staff of 8,000 to 10,000 would be included. They would also be given additional air support and modernized firepower. These are not the ends but means to achieving operational and long-term objectives.

In addition to this, force modernization is a decisive aspect of the LWD. Every state tries to enhance the capability and capacity of its forces. Indian armed forces are also working on this track. It has been trying to fight and win the limited war with Pakistan. Imbalances in the three services are also being reduced. In this regard, India is trying to acquire modern T-90 tanks, Russian S-400 missile defence system, Apache and Chinook helicopters, Rafale, and SU-30. These acquisitions would make the Indian army aligned with a winning army.⁵⁸

Moreover, the LWD also intends to take punitive actions. Any terrorist attack on the Indian soil and forces would be

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

responded through proper action. The rebuttal and rebuke would be given at a specific time. The possible insurgency threats and terrorism would be responded through cross-border actions. The option of surgical strikes is also given precedence in the LWD.⁵⁹

Similarly, hybrid warfare is also part of the new doctrine. Along with the conventional use of force, new avenues would also be explored. India would utilize its technological power to attack the targets of the enemy. Internal tensions through propaganda and lobbying would also be created. It would weaken Pakistan internally. The exploitation of ethnic and religious differences through cyber means would give an edge. Several practical examples and instances have also been witnessed. Moreover, India has constantly been trying to exploit and sabotage the CPEC.

Besides, India has been using all the possible avenues to explore alliances with the major powers. It is working to enhance cooperation with the US, France, and Israel and has been acquiring new weapons from these countries. It would give impetus to Indian security. Its reputation at the international level would also witness a significant edge. Indian joint exercise with other countries is also becoming a norm. So, at every front, the Indian Army has inched towards its desired objectives.

The LWD is inevitably a point of concern for Pakistan. The challenges ahead are colossal. The options are limited to respond. The response ought to be calculated and incremental. Pakistan does not have similar resources or the ability to tackle these challenges at a proportionate level.

⁵⁹ "Land Warfare Doctrine 2018," p. 5.

Conclusion and Possible Future Trajectory

Indian doctrinal shift in the strategic arena suggests that it considers itself capable enough of carrying a limited operation under the nuclear threshold.⁶⁰ The Cold-Start Doctrine is another indicator of such Indian intentions but Pakistan's preparations against the Cold-Start Doctrine and adoption of Credible minimum deterrence has jeopardized Indian plans. Pakistan has created a more mobile, well-equipped, and trained force to counter such possible future endeavours of India. Indian doctrines delineate a two-front situation in which China and Pakistan are considered major threats. The June 2020 Sino-Indian military engagement in Laddakh confirms Indian fears of facing unprecedented threat from China.⁶¹ But for the time being India has found it more convenient to de-escalate the situation.⁶² But it continues to show a highly provocative attitude vis-à-vis Pakistan. It is aggressively following a hybrid strategy of surgical strike, across the LOC and the international border and an enhanced diplomatic campaign to isolate Pakistan. Pakistan has always maintained that it will respond to such attacks come what may.⁶³ For Pakistan, competing and matching Indian conventional hardware is not a feasible option due to fragile economy and the much lesser budget than that of India. Pakistan's strategic posturing is overwhelmingly dependent upon its nuclear capability. However, Pakistan must also devise ways to counter the limited-conventional warfare vis-à-vis its eastern neighbour – India – while simultaneously delineating strategies to

⁶⁰ Jaspal, "India's Surgical Strike Stratagem," 15.

⁶¹ "India-China Dispute: The Border Row Explained in 400 Words," *BBC News*, September 10, 2020.

⁶² Ashok Sharma, "'The Most Important Step': India, China to de-Escalate Border," *Christian Science Monitor*, September 11, 2020, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2020/0911/The-most-important-step-India-China-to-de-escalate-border>.

⁶³ News Desk, "PM Imran Offers India Probe into Kashmir Suicide Attack," *The Express Tribune*, February 19, 2019.

deal with the hybrid warfare which now is an important component of Indian strategic thought.

Indian acquisition of Rafale, signals intelligence, induction of nuclear submarines, and reconnaissance assets would revamp the Indian military's overall war fighting capabilities, fill the operational gaps and enable India to operationalize the CSD under nuclear overhang against Pakistan. But limited war envisaged by the Indian military may not remain limited for Pakistan. Pakistan's quid pro quo response may push India to escalate the conflict which may endanger the deterrence stability in South Asia. Pakistan's hot pursuit of tactical nuclear weapons under its efforts to achieve the Full Spectrum Deterrence has, for now, checkmated the Indian Cold Start Doctrine as it leaves India with little room to punish Pakistan at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. Therefore, the Indian CSD is not a threat to the regional peace and stability. India needs to consider shunning such types of strategies and resort to peaceful negotiations with Pakistan to resolve all outstanding issues for long term peace and stability in South Asia.

Furthermore, the Full Spectrum Doctrine of Pakistan might seem to be an active provocation of war yet given the limited choices Pakistan has, it is a feasible solution to limit the conflict through peace-oriented deterrence. Moreover, the Indian military adventurism and the support it gained by the US is actually to contain China. However, as the Kashmir issue is the conflicting point between Pakistan and India, any military build-up by India against China would definitely have a crippling effect on Pakistan's security. Hence, within the security environment marked by distrust, the interconnectivity of the security problems is bringing the deterrence threshold to a minimum level, evoking the possibility of a conflict.