

## Military Response to a Future 26/11: A Dissuasive Analysis

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*The advantage in foregrounding the military option is in the deterrence value. Further, it helps the military and the government prepare for the exercise of the option in case of a shift to compellence. However, it leads to a displacement of alternative approaches from center stage. These approaches arguably have greater potentiality for delivering on long term peace and stability. The nuclear age requires that these be explored to the fullest extent.*

Pakistan has remained a security concern all through for India. Ever since launch of its proxy war in Punjab earlier, in Kashmir and recently elsewhere in India, India has had to keep the military option in response in the background. The terror attack of 26/11 has forced the military option to the foreground, for a future 22/11 could result in political pressures that could lead to a breach in India's considered policy thus far of strategic restraint. Any such consideration of conflict strategy would have to contend with the questions: What would be the purpose? To what extent would these be achievable? What would be resources required? What are the costs and opportunity costs? What could be the unintended consequences? This article attempts to answer these questions. Its conclusion is that conflict with Pakistan in the circumstance brought about by a future 26/11 is not in India's national interest.

Understanding Pakistan has been attempted along several dimensions, such as its relationship with Islam, the inter-ethnic relations there, the elite-mass divide and the manipulation of the state by external powers. However, a salient dimension of Pakistan is that it has a 'guardian' military. Since the Army controls the security, nuclear and India policy of Pakistan, it is at the heart of India's Pakistan

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dilemma. The Pakistani Army, as are most other armies, is conservative and realist. It sees India through realism-inspired lenses in which Pakistan is taken as the 'weak power' in a 'weak power – strong power' dyad.<sup>1</sup> Being in control of the state, the Pakistani Army is in a position to execute its strategy of neutralising Indian power, even while stalling India's attempts to reach out to a wider constituency in favour of peace within Pakistan. It follows a policy of a tying down India's conventional military power in manpower intensive operations ranging from Siachen, holding the Line of Control and in countering proxy war in J&K and, to an extent, in the North East. It attempts to neutralise India's conventional might by playing the nuclear card in refraining from subscribing to No First Use. It resorts to external balancing by relying China for military, technological and political support. In this manner it lends itself to the Chinese game plan of tying India down as a South Asian power, rather than a regional player on the Asian stage. It has historically used its strategic location with respect to US security interests to further enhance its military capabilities and buoy its economy.<sup>2</sup>

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If a maximalist view is taken of its objectives, such as wanting to absorb Kashmir or disintegrate India, as is attributed to it expansively in some quarters,<sup>3</sup> then Pakistan has fallen way short of achieving its aims. However, if a less ambitious aim is inferred through a look at its strategy from the perspective of a 'weak power/strong power' dynamic, then, it has had some measure of success. It has managed to tie down India's military in great numbers in Kashmir,<sup>4</sup> with even its action at Kargil, though defeated, resulting in India holding Kargil with an additional division. These deployments, though coped with in a manner as to return the internal security situation to near normal status, have been at the cost of stretching the forces. This was evident in the media interventions on perceived appreciation deficit and stress made by the Army in particular in the run up to the Sixth Pay Commission award.<sup>5</sup> Its strategic deterrence has

restricted India's options even in face of grave provocations such as the Parliament attack and lately at Mumbai. The nuclear factor has resulted in India changing doctrinal tack at least once in the decade since weaponisation. While the Draft Nuclear Doctrine talked about 'sufficient' numbers, the official doctrine of 2003 mentions 'massive' as the requirement for inflicting 'unacceptable damage' in punitive response. At the conventional level, it has shifted from the Sundarji-era vintage 'deep-thrust' doctrine to Cold Start with Integrated Battle Groups in the early part of the decade.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, finding strike corps too large for serving a purpose in a nuclear battlefield, thinking is now underway to restructure these.<sup>7</sup> Movement is on to 'Transform' the Army that apparently includes a relook at the armoured-infantry balance. Pakistan

centricity has resulted in a neglect of China as the primary future challenge, though this shortcoming is being speedily tackled. In terms of internal security, Pakistan is attempting to exploit Indian internal schisms elsewhere in the country, while keeping Kashmiris alienated. In short, Pakistan has succeeded in punching above its weight, even if it has not succeeded in gaining any revisionist aims. Its failure is evident from the de-hyphenation of India-Pakistan that has taken place in the perceptions of the world over this decade.

Pakistani successes do not necessarily imply Indian failure. India has managed to keep Kashmir off the boil for some years now.<sup>8</sup> Taking advantage of the ceasefire, it has firmed in along the Line of Control and in Siachen comfortably, with casualties in Siachen being reduced to negligible. It has managed a rotation system of its troops in such a manner as to enable quality peace time tenures extending up to three years. It has blooded its troops in Kashmir through rotation in Rashtriya Rifles. Such employment has superior training value in that its troops are no strangers to combat anymore. By incorporating lessons from its Kargil and Operation Parakram experience, it has evolved its higher defence structures, operational level military organisations and doctrine and is even contemplating an American military style 'Transformation'. It has used the opportunity provided by 26/11 to credibly refurbish its internal security scheme. Pakistani apprehensions of Indian action and intent in Afghanistan and in Baluchistan, best evidenced by the controversial insertion made by their PM, Mr. Gilani, into the Joint Statement at Sharm es Sheikh, indicate the manner India has placed Pakistan in a strategic quandary.<sup>9</sup> The Indo-US nuclear deal and extant military cooperation best signifies its moving closer to the US, thereby neutralising Pakistan's proximity with the US as also partially check-mating China. It is attempting to forge economic linkages with China and thereby make gains as premised in the neoliberal paradigm. India's maintaining of growth rate of 7 per cent even in recession hit times is clinching evidence that Pakistan has not managed to deflect India from its economic trajectory adopted in early nineties.

If Pakistan has not succeeded and India has managed to succeed to the extent it has, jeopardising this success through conflict in a nuclear backdrop makes little sense. This proposition begs the question: Would India's success be jeopardised?

Taking the cues to the negative first, it is obvious that any conflict would be a limited one, limited by the

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nuclear backdrop. In keeping with India's Cold Start doctrine, India would likely launch the IBGs into limited depth along a wide front.<sup>10</sup> These offensives, along with air attrition of its military and infrastructure, would punish Pakistan's Army and greatly increase political pressure on it by inconveniencing civilians not only in the combat zone but all across Pakistan. Thus, as in the Israeli model against the Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006 and against the Hamas in Gaza early this year, India could withdraw to positions status quo ante. It may not choose to do so with respect to gains made on the Line of Control. In this manner, Pakistan's 'nuclear bluff' of nuclear 'first use' would be called and the space it has been exploiting for waging proxy war against India at the subconventional level constrained by international pressure brought on by the threat of nuclear war.

This is the ideal scenario. It is complicated by two factors. One is the perennial one of Pakistan Army's aims; and, the second - promising to be a perennial one all through any future such consideration - is of nuclear escalation.

Any running of the nuclear risk in conflict would only be useful if it enables a better peace. This implies a change of paradigm in Pakistan's Army. A military defeat may result in this but even this is no guarantee, given its return to power in a few years after a resounding military drubbing in 1971. In effect, a regime change is what is required. India needs knocking the Pakistani Army in such a manner that it empowers the civilians with respect to the Army in post conflict internal politics of Pakistan. The Pakistani Army can be expected to resist such an outcome, being used to power either directly or as a guardian military all through Pakistan's existence. It is unlikely to resist this by recourse to nuclear use, since, as the cliché has it, it would not want to 'kill the goose that lays the golden egg', even if maximises the nuclear card by nuclear rhetoric and signalling. It can ensure a post-conflict extension in power for itself by keeping itself intact to the extent it can in the high intensity, short duration war India intends waging. Militarily, this implies that it would unlikely use its strategic reserves in dislodging Indian penetrations. It would use these in a counter offensive role. In case of failing to find space for launching these into India due to India's wide front offensives, it would like to ride out any air inflicted attrition. Just as Saddam survived Iraq War I, it would be ready post conflict to retain control. It would instead employ irregular forces in asymmetric war in an imitation of Iraq after victory was prematurely declared there by the Americans on 1 May 2003. In short, it will wait out India, and when India returns to the starting blocks, like the Hamas and Hezbollah, claim victory. With nothing having changed substantially, what then would be the gain from running the nuclear risk?

A nuclear optimist's perspective of the nuclear risk, mentioned earlier, is that Pakistani nuclear threshold is 'high' enough for India to achieve its limited war aims. This is arguably a defensible position since Pakistan would stand to lose proportionately more in a nuclear war than India. If at all there is an imbalance

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between the nuclear forces, it is in India's favour, even if marginally so.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, a reading of Clausewitz informs that war - itself an inter-play of passion, chance and will - has autonomous dynamic that is inherently unpredictable. Since nuclear war has not taken place yet, there is no precedence to appreciate how it may unfold to rely on. Indian military pressures in all dimensions and internal political pressures, to include a right wing threat, would impact time-critical decision making in Pakistan. Therefore, an in-conflict lowering of the nuclear threshold cannot be ruled out. In such an instance, a nuclear exchange may result. Such an eventuality would change the nature of the war from one intended as limited at its start to potentially a Total War. While it is conceded that managing Limited Nuclear War may be in the event possible, there is no proportionate gain to be made by running the risk. The point is that the present circumstance is not so bad as to countenance the risk.

This nuclear risk would increase the longer the war continues with greater passions and resources being sucked in. Therefore, the answer may lie in waging a short, sharp war. The pertinent question then is: Is it possible to make any military gains in a short, sharp war?

A standing start enabling the time differential in mobilisation brought about by Cold Start may not happen, for Pakistan would be equally prepared for the race to its defences. The Line of Control sector being a heavily militarised mountain region, operations here would likely be slow. The population along the LC, comprising settlers with military background and radicalised by its association with jihadis over two decades, is likely to present advancing Indian forces with the problem of levee en masse. Further south, is the developed terrain in Pakistan's immensely populated heartland, Punjab. This also has a multiplicity of artificial water-based obstacles. Since this the consequential theatre of decision, making gains here is important so as to demonstrate to the people the inefficacy of the Pakistani Army. But doing so would lead to considerable collateral damage that can only serve to heighten passions and a jihadi backlash in these areas. The people, considerably inconvenienced, instead of blaming the Pakistani Army for bringing about such a plight would likely in the short term rally behind it; thus negating any Indian intent of driving a wedge between the self-interested Army and the long-suffering people. The nuclear threat could increase with the number of obstacle systems progressively crossed. In the desert sector, gains would be possible, but inconsequential. Gains here, however, would most likely provide the nuclear trigger in case Pakistan contemplates nuclear first use in a defensive mode on its own territory. It would likely do so where there is least collateral damage and where it is not able to stem India's superiority in armoured quality and

quantity. In a nutshell, military gains are possible, but may take longer and require running the nuclear gauntlet.

The implication of the military 'solution' - found to be an undue risk here - is that alternative means to tackle Pakistan need be found. In the barest outline, these include engaging Pakistan meaningfully over issues as Kashmir as part of the composite dialogue process. This has been the Indian strategy consistently. However, what is missing is to get the Pakistani onboard. The 'talks as strategy'<sup>12</sup> approach is to enhance the interface with Pakistani polity and society and thereby enlarge the constituency in favour of peace in that state. However, the Pakistani Army, fearing a loss in its position atop the power hierarchy in Pakistan and a threat to its corporate interests, has equally consistently stalled the success of Indian strategy. Therefore, India could consider engaging the Pakistani military also in a strategic dialogue. Such a dialogue in a standing forum could address the threat perception of Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> Pakistan has indicated that it is not averse to the idea. A strategic dialogue has precedence in India entering one with the US<sup>14</sup> and in the expansion of the dialogue with China to include strategic matters.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, a strategic dialogue with Pakistan is a suggestion whose time has come. Its agenda could include nuclear and conventional doctrines, strategic postures of the two states and nuclear security concerns. It could eventually serve as a joint crisis defusing forum. This would be an aid to reconcile Pakistan to the growing asymmetry with India over time. It could influence Pakistan's China relationship and minimally ensure that in any future India-China contest for strategic space in Asia, Pakistan does not serve Chinese ends.

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#### Notes

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8. See statistics available at [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data\\_sheets/annual\\_casualties.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/jandk/data_sheets/annual_casualties.htm)
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10. Ladwig, W., "A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's new Limited War Doctrine", *International Security*, 32 (3), 2008, pp. 166-67.
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