

Restructuring the Indian Armed Forces

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This paper broadly deals with two important aspects. First, it analyses various security challenges that India is facing at present; and second, it examines the need for restructuring the Indian Armed Forces to address these security challenges. It explains that India is in a two front situation with China to the north and Pakistan to the west. Left Wing Extremism and jihadi terror form a half or a third front. The core of any Indian grand strategy must focus on dealing with these threats sequentially and never simultaneously. India will have to rely upon its own resources to safeguard its vital national interests. In the years ahead it will increasingly be called upon to respond to ever greater challenges from within its geo-political environment. It concludes by stating that great civilisations arise only in response to such challenges.

Background

Any attempt to restructure the Indian armed forces must first examine how the structure evolved in the post-independence era. The British had demobilised the Indian army from its all time high record 2.5 million men in the Second World War. Field Marshal Claude Auchinleck had recommended the following force structure for the armed forces of independent India's:

- A 200,000 strong army of some 10 divisions, devoted primarily to internal security;
- A 20 squadron air force;
- A navy of 69 capital ships. This was to be structured around two aircraft carrier Task forces.

But the J&K conflict intervened and plans for the Navy and Air force were largely shelved/downsized to focus more on the overland threat from Pakistan.¹

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In the decade before the 1962 fiasco, India was spending just a little over one per cent of its GDP on defence. There was a deeply entrenched mind set in our political leadership that there was simply no possibility of a major military conflict – that any such a conflict could lead to nuclear war! 1962 was a highly traumatic and chastising experience that served as a reality check for Indian policy makers.

- Post 1962, the army was rapidly expanded from 10 to 25 divisions. Eight mountain divisions were added for the China front. The Eastern Command was shifted from Lucknow to Kolkata.²
- A 64 squadron air force and a 54 capital ship navy were also proposed. However, these expansion plans were disrupted by the 1965 war and the subsequent downturn in the Indian economy in the decade of the late 1960s.³
- As such, the peak strength attained by the IAF was 45 squadrons and the navy never went beyond 44 capital ships. Both these services have since dipped well below these peak levels.⁴ What is noteworthy is that the Indian armed forces never fully actualised their post 1962 force expansion programmes that were designed to deal with a two-front war threat.

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However, post 1962, one decade of a determined military build up resulted in a stalemate in the 1965 War (as Pakistan tried to pre-empt this military build up) and finally in a resounding and decisive military victory in 1971. The former Soviet Union heavily subsidised this build up of hard power in India. India became the pre-eminent power in South Asia through the decade of the 1970s. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 engendered a paradigm shift barely a decade later. This made Pakistan a frontline state and brought American power to bear upon South Asia. The ISI executed the CIA's jihad in Afghanistan and morphed into a major agency for waging asymmetric war. In the 1980s, Gen Sundarji mechanised the Indian army by increasing the number of armoured divisions to three and added the RAPID divisions to ensure credible coercive/compellence against Pakistan.⁵ The air force diversified its inventory and the

navy bought the aircraft carrier *Virat* and added Russian submarines and destroyers. India's defence spending shot up to a peak level of some five per cent of the GDP.

The year 1989 saw the second paradigm shift in rapid succession. Pakistan emerged triumphant from its participation in the Cold War. The Soviet retreat from Afghanistan relieved Pakistan from a parlous two front situation and released its 11 and 12 corps for employment against India. Pakistan had achieved virtual military parity with India in terms of deployable force levels. The ISI, freed of its Afghan War commitment, now launched a full scale asymmetric assault on J&K. The Soviet Union collapsed economically in 1990 and the very next year, India itself came perilously close to economic collapse. It started its economic liberalisation in that year (13 years after China had begun to modernise its economy). The next two decades were devoted to economic reconsolidation and defence was badly neglected. Defence budgets were soon down to around one per cent plus of the GDP. In 1998, both India and Pakistan went overtly nuclear. This generated hubris in the Pakistani military-ISI complex; and the very next year it attacked India in Kargil.

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Post Kargil Restructuring

India's declining defence capability in the nineties, was undoubtedly one of the factors that prompted Pakistan's intrusion in Kargil. It was competently handled but operations were confined to the tactical level and on the own side of the border. "Operation Parakram" followed in 2001 and saw the mobilisation of the entire Indian armed forces for a massive coercive exercise with rather mixed results. The

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Integrated Defence Staff: The GOM recommended that a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) be appointed. This is yet to be implemented. It also made the very welcome recommendation for the establishment of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), for synergising the requirements of the three services and provide

sound professional advice to the ministry of defence (MoD). Proactive CISCs now began to provide the much needed strategic inputs for policy formulation and weapons acquisition programmes.⁶

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Enhanced Involvement of Military Leadership in Planning Process: Since independence, intelligence chiefs in India have had direct and privileged access to the prime ministers and considerable stability of tenures. As such, they largely monopolised the strategic policy- planning space (in concert with the ministry of external affairs). The MoD and service chiefs became peripheral to the process (being called upon only in times of actual conflict). The NDA regime cut off the direct access of the intelligence chiefs to the PM. They now had to go through the NSA; concomitantly, this led to greater interaction with and more inputs from the services for policy planning purposes. This curtailment of access of intelligence chiefs to the prime minister, continues with the UPA administration.⁷

Cold Start Oriented Restructuring: The Cold Start doctrine stemmed from the frustration of the Indian army during Operation Parakram. However, they formulated the doctrine in isolation, without involving the political leadership or the other services. As such, the restructuring effected was only notional. It included:

- Creation of the South-Western Command.
- Bifurcation of the mammoth 16 corps and the parcelling off of its mechanised resources to Western Command. However, this was more a turf war between two regional commands.
- Re-designation of Holding Corps as Pivot Corps (without any additional allocation of resources). The shift, therefore, was only notional.
- There was no restructuring the Strike Corps and no shifting forward of the cantonments of the armoured formations.⁸
- Cold Start really was just one option to respond to Pakistan's asymmetric assault. It had more than its share of constraints that needed to be thought through.

China Threat Based Restructuring: Gen J. J. Singh had become army chief from Western Command. It was his view that the Indian army's emphasis on J&K was lopsided and excessive. Perhaps, it was so because it was the only serious ongoing conflict and it is essential for armies to win an ongoing conflict first before focusing on theoretically probable conflicts. Be that as it may, he recalled the dual tasked formations from the east that had been deployed in J&K. This was music to the ears of our political leadership who were under considerable US pressure to thin out troops from J&K. Also 3 corps had largely been freed of its counter insurgency (CI) duties in Nagaland, Tripura and Mizoram. Only Manipur continued to boil. This corps was reoriented towards a more meaningful role on the India-China border. The raising of two additional divisions for the China front is nearing completion. Frankly, however, if we are to transit from mere dissuasion to deterrence on the Chinese front, this amounts to mere tokenism. For real deterrence, we need to raise two additional strike corps for our Himalayan borders. Thanks to the intensive infrastructure building exercise, China can now bring in some 30 divisions into Tibet in just one season.⁹ Our belated attempts to catch up in infrastructure development are seriously languishing and falling behind time. These need to be urgently expedited so that we can field and sustain deterrence if not match force levels, with what the Chinese can now induct into Tibet.

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Modernisation

Stephen P. Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta in their engaging book *'Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernisation'*, have pointed out that, "the Indian military modernisation process lacks political support and guidance, is haphazard and bereft of strategic and organisational changes."¹⁰ The state of drift is clearly highlighted by the fact that the armed forces have drawn up a Long-term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP), but this is yet to be approved by the government. For that matter, the 11th Defence Plan (2007-12), which is in its fourth year, has not yet been accorded final approval! As a result, the armed forces are left with no choice but to stumble along from one financial year to the next and in a milieu where weapon systems have to be urgently inducted, we end up surrendering large amounts of budgetary allocations every year.¹¹

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is able to make up for its poor R&D performance by being able to access Russian, European, Israeli and now US technologies. However this has been at the cost of indigenous capabilities and reflects a level of geo-political weakness.

Richard Huntlay writes: “Advances in precision capabilities have made air power the decisive force in war – resulting in the doctrine of disengaged combat – where ground forces are applied only after the air war has been won.” This actually had become the norm as far back as the Second World War. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War reiterated this seminal lesson as did the Bangladesh War of 1971. The First and Second Gulf Wars and America’s initial war in Afghanistan showed airpower setting the stage for a quick mop up on the ground via short but intense campaigns by armies.¹²

Any future conflict on the Indian subcontinent will, in all probability result from the ongoing low intensity conflict in J&K (or its jihadi derivatives in the rest of India); or the unresolved boundary dispute with China and it will be a land conflict. Air power alone, however, can pave way for victory in such conflicts. Innovative strategies in land conflicts will require India to *exploit the operational manoeuvre from the sea*. Viable marine force landings on the Gwadar-Karachi coast can force Pakistan to face a two-front situation and disperse its forces. In a land war with

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China, the Indian navy can raise costs for China by interdicting its SLOCs through the Strait of Malacca. We need a three carrier navy with a significant marine landing capability and a sea based nuclear triad. Only thus, can we fully exploit India's huge locational advantage astride the Chinese SLOCs.

Restructuring Philosophies

Before we finally look at the capabilities needed for the next three decades, we must examine the two macro-approaches to restructuring in the Indian context on which there are two conflicting views:

Technology can be Substituted for Manpower: This was first articulated in the pre-Kargil context, when defence was facing a serious resource crunch. The need was for the armed forces to seek a rise in the defence budget from a mere 1.2 percent of GDP to at least 2.5 to 3 per cent. Instead the top brass of that era came up with fanciful theories of downsizing the army (to please their political masters); and to generate more funds for modernisation. The downsizing mantra was borrowed from the Americans, who themselves came to grief in Iraq and Afghanistan for lack of adequate boots on ground (they have since increased the size of the US army and marine corps). The downsizing led to near disaster in the Kargil War when orders to disband the Mule and Pioneer companies had to be hastily rescinded.¹⁴ These were urgently needed resources and the move to demobilise them proved to be very unrealistic and unsound. Despite this glaring shock, intellectual dishonesty led some sections of the brass to persist stubbornly with their pet hobbyhorse of downsizing. The brutal fact was that India's threats came from LICs in mountains and jungles. These are heavily manpower intensive requirements. After the Kargil war, some 30 additional battalions of the RR had to be raised post haste (so much for downsizing). The internal security (IS) threat envelope has only been pushed exponentially since then. To the proxy war in J&K and the insurgencies in the Northeast, has been added the threat of jihadi terror in the whole of India and now the very serious threat of LWE (Left Wing Extremism) in the tribal areas of central and peninsular India. At the time of Operation Blue Star, and later, the diversion of our strategic reserves to Sri Lanka; the need had been felt for a six division sized force for internal security tasks. Thanks to the proxy war in J&K, we were forced to raise a final total of some six divisions worth of the Rashtriya Rifles.

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Technology as Add-on to Manpower: The second school of thought stems from the realisation that India today is in the midst of a major demographic youth bulge. By 2026, our population will overtake that of China and 68 per cent of this will be in the working age group. India will have the youngest population in the

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world and the average age of an Indian will be just 29. India will have the highest RMP (Recruitable Male Population) in the world. India, in fact, will be hard pressed to generate some 800 million jobs for our youth.¹⁴ Downsizing in such a context can be an unmitigated recipe for disaster. We will add to the ranks of the unemployed and provoke serious internal conflicts. Any force restructuring strategies therefore must exploit our key strength which is youthful manpower and a massive work force. By just increasing our share of GDP for defence from 2.5 to 3 per cent (which is the global norm for major powers), we could exploit our manpower assets and make them so much more lethal with technology as an add-on. There is no scope for an either-or equation. We simply need both manpower (which is our key resource) and technology. To get motivated manpower, we need to popularise the military ethic in this country.

China's regular armed forces number 1.4 million, compared to our 1.2 million. The Chinese People's Armed Police (PAP) tasked for IS tasks also number 1.4 million. These are not police forces but demobilized PLA units. India has some 60 battalions of RR and some 45 battalions of the Assam Rifles as the only genuine paramilitary forces for IS tasks. Keeping in view the exponentially rising threat of LWE (which clearly is beyond the operational capability of CRPF and even the BSF), realistically, India must raise six more infantry divisions for this task. These could be blooded in CI operations against the Naxals, and later provide the manpower for two additional strike corps for the Himalayan theatre. Such a force accretion alone can give us a decisive advantage over Pakistan (and a deterrence capability against China). If Pakistan tries to keep pace, it could torpedo its economy. It would also help us to transit from dissuasion to a robust deterrence on the Chinese front.

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Force structuring can be – threat based or capability based. Traditionally, Indian force structures have generally been premised upon a threat-based analysis in the post-independence period.

Economic Empowerment to Generate Revolution in Military Affairs (RMAs)

A nation must empower itself economically if it wishes to generate and sustain an RMA. A huge army needs the resources of a massive state. That was Kautilya's primary dictum. Post independence, India has unconsciously followed this paradigm. India came into its own by 1970 when the first green revolution gave it food security. The Soviets subsidised India's military capital stock in a very major way. Post-1962, a decade long military build up enabled India to acquire a decisive conventional military edge over Pakistan. This qualitative and quantitative edge was the cause of the brilliant military victory of 1971. In Indira Gandhi, India found a strong nationalist leader who was willing to use military force to further India's national interests. The year 1971 therefore marks the coming of age of the Indian Republic as a credible military power. The Soviet quasi- alliance however was the primary basis of that military power and build up. The impressive scope and scale of the 1971 military victory established India's credentials as a significant regional power. The Soviets had similarly subsidised the build up of the Egyptian and Syrian Armed forces, but all they could achieve was a stalemate in 1973. India thus displayed the managerial talent and strategic genius to wage a decisive conventional war which led to the creation of a new nation state by the force of arms.

The bane of the Indian economy has been its fossil fuel dependency. It imports up to 70 per cent of its fossil fuel needs from the Middle East. This oil dependency is likely to grow up to 90 per cent within a decade. Fluctuations in the price of oil have had a major impact upon the Indian economy in the past. The oil shocks of 1973 and 1991 derailed its economy and created major political crises. The first oil shock led to the Emergency and the decline of Indira Gandhi's centrist Congress Party. India carried out a peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974 but failed to follow through. By 1987 the sub continent had reached the level of recessed deterrence. By 1990 the Soviet Union was in precipitate decline. The oil glut of the late 1980s ruined its economy and the imperial overstretch of world wide competition with the West engendered the economic collapse of the Soviet Union. In grand -strategic terms this was a major strategic blow to India as the source of its subsidised arms build up evaporated over night. The Indian economy itself next reeled under the second oil shock of the Gulf War and came perilously close to collapse.

India was forced to reinvent its economy and 13 years after China, set itself on the trajectory of accelerated economic growth through liberalisation. By 2006/07 it had

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achieved GDP rates of growth of close to 9 per cent per annum. However so far, it has failed to translate its economic growth into usable military power commensurate with its regional or global aspirations. This enabled Pakistan to rent its territory, first for the CIA's anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan and next for the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) which it engendered. It reaped economic and military windfalls from US and Chinese support which enabled it to gain nuclear and conventional military

parity with India. Pakistan fully exploited this parity to launch an asymmetric assault against India in 1989. For two decades it waged a proxy war in J&K and then extended its jihad to the cities of India, confident that India lacked a clear conventional and nuclear edge to be able to respond forcefully.

India has exercised deliberate restraint for over three decades and focused on economic development. The Pakistani economy in the meantime has twice come to the point of collapse in the last ten years (1998 and 2008). Its persistent use of jihad and asymmetric warfare has resulted in an indiscriminate weaponisation of its civil society. This unprecedented level of weaponisation has now made the state dysfunctional. Pakistan's patrons, the USA and China have pumped in/promised some \$30 billion worth of aid to revive Pakistan's society and shore up the crumbling state. Pakistan's military-ISI complex however is consumed by its need to compete with India militarily (both in nuclear and conventional terms). It is rapidly enhancing its nuclear arsenal and is going on a conventional arms purchase spree that could once more derail its economy. American pressure to vigorously pursue the GWOT is putting it under serious systemic strains that could easily fragment its polity. The paradox lies in the truculence of its military-ISI elite which continues to dream of a new Islamic caliphate centred on Islamabad. They are confident the Americans will exit Afghanistan and leave their Taliban protégés in charge in Kabul. They are persisting with their war of a thousand cuts to bleed India to death. This irrational behaviour could lead to more 'Mumbais' and ultimately to serious conflict in South Asia.

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How then can India generate an RMA in South Asia?

- By major accretions in air power and transparency. Air power helps to strike deep and in a devastating manner and transparency revolution such as in satellites, AWACS, UAVs etc helps to look deep within the enemy territory.

- By developing “Over the Hump” air Assault capabilities that can be used across the Himalayas, in J&K and also for regional power projection.
- By using its navy to project power along the Pakistani coastline to support air-land offensives. This translates into a viable marine capability of one to two divisions that is based on amphibious tanks/ICVs that can rapidly project power ashore in concert with major land offensives in the desert sector. To affect an RMA India needs to generate over the horizon (OTH) beach assault capabilities using helicopters and hover crafts (Air Cushion Vehicles). India must exploit the sea flank in any future conflict with Pakistan. A turning manoeuvre from the sea could unhinge Pakistan’s defences and lead to victory.¹⁵

Ground Forces

India needs to invest heavily in night fighting capabilities to increase the tempo and pace of its operations. The tank and infantry formations must overcome their night blindness to usher in a revolution in surface combat in South Asia. The investments will be limited but provide the highest payoffs.

Holding Ground by Firepower Instead of Manpower: In 1956 the Pak army had transited to holding ground by firepower instead of manpower. As a result they hold the same length of ground with half the troops that India deploys. The American gifted Recce and Support battalions enabled Pakistan to hold ground with firepower and release matching force levels for offensive operations. It is amazing that the Indian army has still not redressed this ground holding differential that enables an army half its size to release a matching number of formations for offensive tasks. India’s Pivot Corps must now hold ground with mobile fire power based upon fast attack/light strike vehicles and thereby release much more force levels for offensive tasks.¹⁶

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Artillery: The artillery calibre must be standardised on the 155mm calibre at the earliest so that effects can be massed. The Indian artillery as an arm has been the victim of criminal neglect. After the Bofors crisis, it has not been able to induct any new medium calibre artillery systems. It had purchased 400 Bofors howitzers. Sweden was thereafter supposed to transfer the technology to build another 1000 such guns in India. This never happened as the Bofors scandal broke out. It had to improvise by converting Russian 130mm medium guns to 155mm

calibre. It also went in for further purchases of the World War II vintage Russian 130mm guns and 122mm guns. Only lately has it been able to add the Russian Smerch multi-barrel-rocket launcher system and the indigenous Pinaka system. It is yet to get its 1000 medium guns and its tracked/self-propelled artillery for supporting its armoured formations. The Indian air defence artillery is still stuck with guns and SAMs of the 1960s era. India must complete these badly delayed modernisations most urgently to keep pace with the rising profile of threats from China and Pakistan. As India's economic profile rises exponentially, India must create capacities to dominate the arc from the straits of Hormuz to Malacca and create out of area contingency capabilities that are credible and usable. It must create the capacities to be able to intervene militarily in Afghanistan and Central Asia to safeguard its vital interests and not cede this strategic space so supinely to Pakistan or China. It cannot afford to ignore its land or maritime environments. Both are equally vital to its well being and national security. The means concepts of actualising such capabilities are detailed below:

Turning the Sea Flank

The India navy must acquire the capability to project power in the Littoral and contribute meaningfully to any air-land conflict with Pakistan. It will have to project power ashore and must rapidly acquire the land attack capabilities in terms of three carrier battle groups, enhanced naval aviation and a viable marine corps based not on straight legged infantry but amphibious tanks, ICV and hover

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craft-based mechanised infantry that can rapidly break out from beach heads and execute decisive tasks in a manner that speeds up the overall tempo of operations. It must also build up a sizeable inventory of land attack cruise missiles and contribute to surface operations by deploying more special forces (MARCOS) units. These capabilities will also help in any out of the area contingencies. In the event of a conflict with China, it will help it to safeguard the Andamans and respond to any Chinese aggression by retaliatory interdiction of Chinese Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).¹⁷

Force Structure: Right Sizing

One of the key lessons of Indian military history is the need for large armies. In fact, internal security requirements have always necessitated the need for maintaining huge standing armies in India. India had provided a peak level of 2.5 million men in World War II (all volunteers). Today at 1.1 million men it is still the second largest army in the world. All talk of downsizing it is down right dangerous and

completely out of sync with our demographic realities and threat profile. The Maoist threat demands that we urgently raise six additional infantry divisions. These could generate two additional mountain strike corps in case of a war with China or Pakistan or both.

Role Redefinition: There is a new school of thought in the army that believes that it must be kept out of CI/CT operations as these detract from its main task of conventional warfare. In the same breath, post nuclearisation, the chances of conventional warfare are said to be practically next to zero. This is creating a crisis of relevance. There is a similar debate in the US army. Should it prepare for the conventional wars with peer nations (Russia/China) that may never come to pass or should it more realistically prepare to fight CI/CT campaigns that are actually going on in Iraq and Afghanistan? The Indian army's dilemma is very similar. Ideally it would like to prepare for conventional conflicts with China or Pakistan. These may or may not materialise. What it will have to deal with are rising threats to India's internal security in the form of jihadi terrorism and Left Wing Extremism. The Indian army's response in the last ten years has increasingly bordered on denial. The rise of a non-combat experienced leadership in recent years is reinforcing this denial. The Indian army does not want to be involved in tackling IS threats like LWE as these will take it far away from the borders. Such an attitude unfortunately, is breeding irrelevance. LWE is a tribal and virulent insurgency. It can not be tackled by the police. Combating insurgencies provides valuable combat experience – especially at the tactical levels. It enables a combat hardened junior leadership to emerge. As per the Chinese theory, guerrilla armies, overtime, grow into successful regular armies. The Vietnamese army is a model of this very effective switch from irregular to regular operations. The theory that CI/CT operations distract an army from its main task is pernicious and seriously flawed. It is unfortunately being propagated by a new peace time breed of officers who lack combat experience. Combat experience is a sine qua non for higher command assignments. With live ongoing CT operations in J&K and CI operations in the Northeast – the bulk of our higher military leadership cannot emerge from our peace stations. The no-mistake syndrome can destroy the fighting spirit of any military force. There is a serious need for introspection. Is the Indian army back to the pre 1962 era of a complete absence of operational challenge? The low intensity conflicts in J&K and the Northeast are petering out. India's last conventional combat experience was in Kargil (over a decade ago). There has been a decade without a major environmental challenge. A sword that is not used rusts rapidly. A peace time army is the very anti-thesis of what a combat army should be. We need to

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nurture our combat experience and ensure that we keep our cutting edge honed. The prime training ground of the British Indian army during the Second World War was in the jungles of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. A major left wing tribal insurgency is now raging here. It is about time that the Indian army stepped in and nipped this movement in the bud before it becomes unmanageable in correlation with any worsening of the situation on our northern or western borders. The late Gen BC Joshi was a strong proponent of the value of CI/CT operations in training our army. There is no better training experience than the adrenalin rush of live combat. Professional armies welcome such hands on experience. The argument that CI/CT operations distract the army from its primary role is pernicious and seriously flawed. It calls for a redefinition of the role of a 1.1 million strong army

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in the new post- nuclear setting. In India's case the Rashtriya Rifles, an army force tailor-made for CI/CT operations provides the optimal answer.¹⁸ It lets the main army focus on conventional operations even as it spreads combat experience in the parent body by the rotation of manpower. A realistic assessment of our internal-security environment clearly indicates the urgent need to raise six additional Light Infantry/ RR divisions. Regular infantry divisions would be preferable as these would be most useful in any conventional war and would permit India to exercise meaningful pro-active responses.

Islands of Excellence in a Large Army: India therefore will require a large standing army. Will that divert funds towards manpower instead of the capital budget for acquiring new technology? The answer lies in not aiming for across the board modernisation of the entire mass but a three tier approach of high tech and cutting edge capabilities being fielded in some key formations and units that form islands of excellence. The balance may have technology that is fairly current or under discard. The Panzer divisions in the World War II were such Islands of excellence in a mass army many of whose formations that invaded Russia were using horse drawn carts for logistics support! The special forces, paras, the armoured corps and mechanised infantry are technology intensive arms that must form such Islands of excellence in our case.

By 2026 India will have the youngest population profile in the world. In theory therefore it could field the world's largest army, marine corps, para military and internal security forces. What are the structural changes that the Indian

armed forces would need to usher in to face the challenges of the 21st century? Within manpower intensive land forces, it will have to create islands of technological excellence. The force structure must increasingly be capability based and not just threat based. These capabilities merit elaboration.

Air Power: If India is to generate the next RMA in South Asia it will have to embrace air power and naval aviation in fifth generation fighters, AWACs, aerostats, air to air refuelling capabilities and a massive increase in its inventory of precision guided munitions. Precision strikes can only be launched with precise intelligence and this will need a transparency revolution based upon satellites, synthetic aperture radars, aerostats and UAVs.

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Naval Aviation: India needs a three carrier navy with the ability to project power ashore not only in terms of naval aviation but also land attack cruise missiles and SLBMs. The third leg of the Indian nuclear triad must be based on nuclear powered submarines. It would need a viable marine corps. Why does India need

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this marine capability? It will give it the capability to execute Operational Manoeuvre from the sea. Its capability to turn the flank in a war with Pakistan is immense and overwhelming. India would need this to counter China's growing amphibious assault capability which was created for Taiwan but is now largely rendered surplus. This could be used to seize the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Such marine intervention capability could help India to come to the aid of island microstates like Maldives, Mauritius or the Seychelles, and react strongly to pirate attacks upon its shipping fleet in South Asia or off the coast of Africa. It could enable India to assist friendly countries (like Vietnam) in case of need or even assist the Indian diaspora in case it faces threats or persecution.

Power Projection Assets

Marine Corps/Naval Infantry: India has so far created a brigade plus sized amphibious capability of straight legged infantry. These infantry battalions are rotated once every three years and as such lose their specialisation. Once landed,

their mobility and reach is painfully restricted. What India needs is a full fledged marine corps of two divisions. This should be patterned on the erstwhile Soviet naval infantry which was fully mechanised (It used BTR-60 and BMP amphibious Infantry Combat Vehicles and PT-76 tanks) It was 16000 strong and had one naval infantry division with the Pacific fleet and one naval brigade each with the Baltic, Northern and Black Sea fleets. The Baltic fleet staged marine landings in Georgia recently (2008). The Soviet concept relied upon landing of armour and mechanised Infantry directly on to the beach in amphibious ships and air cushioned vehicles (ACVs). The Soviet naval infantry brigades had four naval infantry battalions, one amphibious tank battalion along with an artillery and anti-tank battalion each. It had 83 assault ships and 82 ACVs. Mechanisation would make it a dual tasked capability. It could be used over land and it could be projected ashore by the Navy.

India's existing amphibious equipment and methods make surprise very difficult to achieve. Only some 30 per cent of the world's beaches lend themselves to assault by the existing equipment. This severely restricts options and choices. The enemy can easily identify and defend the beaches that are assaultable. Besides amphibious ships have to come within 10-20 nautical miles of a beach to launch the amphibious assault vehicles. This makes the assault force critically vulnerable to mines, coastal artillery and anti ship missiles. The Americans are now talking in terms of a new RMA that can be initiated by the employment of tilt rotor helicopters and ACVs which can negotiate up to 70 per cent of the world's beaches. It is this that which will enable 'over the horizon' assault and make opposed landings a thing of the past. Tilt rotors would land troops to secure a beach. The ACVs would then rapidly deliver tanks and mechanised infantry directly on to the beach to counter the enemy's response and break out for depth areas/ vital objectives in the enemies' rear. Given the high mobility of amphibious ships, (e.g. water jet powered ships can carry 12,000 tons of military cargo- including Abram tanks and Bradley ICVs

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and travel 1000 miles in 24 hours or 7000 miles in a week!) Tilt rotors could strike suddenly at any point over a wide area of littoral and secure landing areas for ACVs. In the tilt rotor- ACV- water jet powered ship combination we have the makings of another military RMA.¹⁹

Air Assault Capabilities: A direct spin off of airpower would be the creation of air assault capabilities. India needs these urgently to counter the rising threat profile from China. China has brought about a paradigm shift in its logistical capabilities in Tibet by extending a railway line to Lhasa. It is planning to extend the same to Nepal. It is also planning to create two more rail lines

into Tibet. As part of generating trans-regional mobility, this will enable China to mass massive forces for any conflict with India. The Chinese mobilisation will now be by air, rail and road. The very scale of the initial Chinese offensive would foreclose most of India's response options. Unless India wants to confine itself to a suicidal defensive-defence format, it will be forced to counter attack uphill, over the Himalayan hump. To speed up this process it needs credible air assault capabilities.²¹

An Air Borne Corps: China's 15 Air Borne corps could well serve as the model for a Rapid Reaction Force capability for India. It would surprise most to learn that during the Second World War, the British Indian army had an Air Borne Corps of two divisions. These included:

2nd Indian Air Borne (AB) Division

- 50 Para Brigade (still existing);
- 77 Para Brigade (disbanded after 1947-48 J&K war);
- 14 Air Landing Brigade (went to Pakistan).

Six Air Borne Division (ex Europe)

This AB Corps was disbanded on October 23, 1945. However, its elements had earlier played a significant role in the second Chindit operations that tried to affect a deep turning manoeuvre in Burma by getting injected into the depth of the Japanese army in Burma. Unfortunately, the wrong depth area had been selected and did not draw the level of Japanese reaction that it was meant to. The second Chindit operation was largely an air landed operation using Glider borne troops that landed in improvised airfields cleared by the first wave of paratroopers. India is heir to this military historical tradition, yet its "think small" attrition mindset led it to disband all of its air borne assets (less 50 Para Brigade). India at least needs one Air Borne corps consisting of one air assault division and one air landed division along with up to division strength of Special Forces capability. To create the space for their employment and for exploiting the air flank, India first and foremost needs to invest most heavily in the current RMA based on air power. With such an Air Borne Corps, India can force Chinese offensives

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to recoil by seizing airheads on the Tibetan plateau for large scale air assaults that execute significant turning manoeuvres and directly threaten the Chinese lines of communication. An air assault capability can achieve, and create serious problems for Pakistan in any future war in the subcontinent. These air assault capabilities must primarily be raised and tasked for conventional conflicts with China and Pakistan, but would have a secondary role for 'out of area' contingency tasks, say in Afghanistan, Central Asia or the microstates of the Indian Ocean, as also to assist the legitimate governments in South Asia in case they ask for our assistance. Air Assault capabilities could play a significant role in any international coalition that seeks to prevent/retrieve Pakistan's nuclear assets from falling into the hands of jihadi non-state actors in the event of that country experiencing a collapse of the state.

Addressing the Ground holding Differential with Pakistan

In the late 1950s, Pakistan as a member of the SEATO and CENTO alliance architectures received massive amounts of American military aid. This enabled Pakistan to switch from holding ground with manpower to holding it with Firepower instead. This was done by the newly raised Recce & Support Battalions (R&Sp). These battalions had large numbers of machine guns and Anti- Tank recoilless rifles mounted on jeeps. It served Pakistan quite well in both the 1965 and 1971 wars. In these conflicts the Indian army spent the bulk periods of the war in the western theatres fighting the R&Sp battalions and Recce regiments of the Pakistan army. The most amazing aspect is the fact that India has not been able to

The Cold Start doctrine tried to redress the aspect of Pakistan's geographical advantage in mobilisation timings by using the defensive /pivot corps to launch rapid offensives into Pakistan virtually from the line of March.

redress this ridiculous ground holding differential for the past 50 years. Post Operation Parakram, the mobilisation differential of the Pakistan army was once more highlighted rather painfully. The Cold Start doctrine tried to redress the aspect of Pakistan's geographical advantage in mobilisation timings by using the defensive /pivot corps to launch rapid offensives into Pakistan virtually from the line of March. To generate this offensive potential, it is imperative that the defensive /holding corps hold the existing lengths of ground with far fewer troops and thereby generate greater force levels for offensive operations across the border. The way to achieve this would be to raise Pakistan style R&Sp battalions. These could be based on tracked BMP infantry combat vehicles. However, technology today offers a radical new solution which could generate a mini RMA. India could base these new R&Sp units on fast attack vehicles (FAVs) or light

strike vehicles (LSVs). These are very high mobility cross country vehicles which mark a quantum jump from the jeep technology of the Second World War. The jeep class vehicles weigh some 4-5000 kg whereas the FAVs weigh just a 1000kg or less. With 400 or more HP engines these have a terrific power to weight ratio and pack a lethal punch in the form of an anti-tank guided missile, a machine gun and an automatic grenade launcher. These are low silhouette vehicles with very low levels of engine noise and hence low acoustic and infra-red signatures. As such these depend on stealth and not armour protection for survival. The best part is their heli-portability. One Mi-17 class helicopter could carry two to three such FAVs to place in the path of any surprise enemy breakthrough. FAV based R&Sp battalions or even infantry battalions equipped with such vehicles could generate a revolution in the South Asian context and enable India to generate far greater force levels for offensive tasks.²¹

Overcoming Night Blindness: Another significant RMA can be wrought in South Asia by making India's tank and BMP fleet fully capable of night fighting. In fact, every soldier of the infantry should be equipped with third generation night-vision devices and all army aviation helicopters must rapidly acquire the ability to fly by night in all weather conditions. Though this is currently being done, what is needed is an all out effort to speed up the scope and scale of this project

Internal Security: The growing profile of LWE in central and peninsular India is an ominous development. India will have to raise up to five to

The bulk of manpower for these should be recruited from the tribal areas themselves (so as to suck out the recruitable male population) and to provide immediate gainful employment to the forest tribes.

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six additional Rashtriya Rifles / regular divisions to cater for the same. The bulk of manpower for these should be recruited from the tribal areas themselves (so as to suck out the recruitable male population) and to provide immediate gainful employment to the forest tribes. Forty to 50 per cent of the recruitment should be from the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. This would prove to be the greatest vehicle for the upward social mobility of these groups.

Doctrinal Approach

India needs to urgently revamp its Cold Start doctrine. It is too land power centric to be credible or viable. Airpower centric response options that graduate up the escalation ladder and set the stage for a meaningful limited air-land war that seeks to inflict severe costs on Pakistan for its continuing support to jihad/proxy war in India, need to be formulated at the earliest.

India's political elite seem to have sadly come to the conclusion that post-nuclearisation, conventional military force is no longer a usable option. India's failure to respond militarily to Pakistan's persistent sub-conventional provocations is needlessly encouraging the ISI to widen and extend the scope of its asymmetric assault on India. It will lead to many more Mumbai-like mayhems and the continuing loss of innocent civilian lives. Such unchecked terrorist depredations in mainland India will make a mockery of India's regional/global power aspirations. An asymmetric war cannot be countered by defending each and every target in India. The targets of terrorist assaults are infinite. It would be dangerously foolish to eschew all proactive response options that seek to raise costs for the aggressor forever. The onus of conventionalising the conflict lies on India. For this it will have to field dominant war fighting capabilities that generate a convincing conventional military edge.

India's Grand Strategy: India is in a two front situation with China to the north and Pakistan to the west. LWE and jihadi terror form a half or some feel a third front. The core of any Indian grand strategy must focus on dealing with these threats sequentially and never simultaneously.

India's Grand Strategy: India is in a two front situation with China to the north and Pakistan to the west. LWE and jihadi terror form a half or some feel a third front. The core of any Indian grand strategy must focus on dealing with these threats sequentially and never simultaneously. India will have to deal decisively with China's cat's paw in South Asia – Pakistan; and compel it to rollback its asymmetric war against India. It will then have to prepare itself to deal with any aggressive/hegemonic behaviour by a China that is emboldened by its rising military power and a probable retreat of the USA from the Asia-Pacific region. While doing so it must be prepared to deal with the worst case scenario of a two- front war with the Maoists and jihadis fully trying to exploit such a dire situation. The entire thrust of such an Indian grand strategy should be to deal with these threats sequentially and not concurrently.

An Indian doctrine for limited wars in South Asia will have to be airpower centric. It should mirror itself on the Chinese doctrine of limited/local wars. These envisage very high levels of the use of conventional military force and place the onus of going nuclear solely on the aggressor. These also envisage pre-emptive strikes and stress surprise and deception. These seek to focus trans-regional capabilities upon a single theatre of conflict or a war zone.

In Korea, the Chinese had thrown in a million troops (wholly unfazed by US nuclear capabilities). In Vietnam, they threw in some 250,000 troops (despite Soviet nuclear capabilities). In Taiwan today they are talking of employing, some 300,000 troops and the bulk of their air force, navy and missile assets to ensure access control that will deal savagely with any US attempts to intervene.²²

Such actions stem from a clear cut practical resolve to safeguard national interests. The Indian political elite unfortunately, seem to have let themselves be overawed by Pakistan's nuclear rhetoric and capabilities to an extent that they appear to have been paralysed into inaction. For three decades they have not summoned up the will to retaliate across the LC/border and raise costs for Pakistan (one decade in the Punjab and two in J&K). Possibly the decision to defer conflict till a sound economic base was created was pragmatic. The time has now come to call Pakistan's nuclear bluff in South Asia. India now has the economic strength to field dominant conventional war fighting capabilities in South Asia. It must rapidly introduce the fourth RMA in the subcontinent. Only such an RMA will have a decisive impact upon the course of military history in South Asia.

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In recent years, India has been unconsciously emulating Japan. Japan may be a great economic power but its (till recent) unwillingness to militarise itself had reduced it to a geopolitical non-entity in Asia and the world. The first signs of the revival of Japanese militarism however have generated genuine alarm in China. The US is the biggest debtor nation in the world. Yet it carries so much clout in the global affairs because it has translated its economic power into military strength. It spends some \$650 billion on defence annually (more than the next 20 countries put together). That alone explains its dominant unipolar position in the world affairs. The Indian economic elite somehow seems uncomfortable with translating economic prowess into military power. They have been sluggish in military modernisation and have mired the Indian arms acquisition process in a forest of red-tape that is unprecedented and is now becoming a cause for serious concern in view of the fast escalating nature and number of threats to Indian security. The Chinese threat

is now manifesting most malignantly via Pakistan. China's aggressive behaviour in J&K raises the spectre of a major two front war with China and Pakistan. J&K is one theatre where they can attack jointly. India can no longer afford to avoid

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facing up to it. Dealing firmly and vigorously with such challenges would constitute as the primary qualification for attaining great power status. India has the economic and demographic capacity. It has to firmly make up its mind and muster the political will, and determination to uphold its vital national interests in the face of such unprovoked assaults on its security and dignity as a nation state. India clearly has the capacity. In the years to come it will have to display the will and vision to actualise the same in a time frame that is realistic and responsive to the challenges that are emerging at such a rapid and accelerating pace, not only in South Asia but in the whole world in general. India initially sought an alliance first with the Soviet Union and then

America to face up to the China-Pakistan combine. The time may well be coming when India will have to face them alone. It will have to rely upon its own resources to safeguard its vital national interests. In the years ahead it will increasingly be called upon to respond to ever greater challenges from within its geo-political environment. Great civilisations arise only in response to such challenges. 

Notes:

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