

Editorial

The *Journal of Defence Studies* (JDS) is presently in its 20th year of publication. Launched as an annual publication in 2007, JDS has been publishing four issues in a year since 2009, covering the core issues of defence, national security and strategy. The journal has seen tremendous growth over the years, as evident from the increasing number of submissions for generic as well as special issues.

I am pleased to present to the readers the second issue of 2026, comprising 10 articles, six commentaries and two book reviews. This issue will be followed by two special issues titled “The Year of Reforms: Reshaping India’s Defence for the Decade Ahead” (July–September 2026) and “Harnessing New Age Technology for Defence Capability Development” (October–December 2026).

The character of air power has undergone a significant transformation in the 21st century, and Operation Sindoor, which involved precision strikes against terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir while deliberately avoiding Pakistan’s political leadership, critical infrastructure, and other high-value state targets, presents an interesting puzzle for air power theory. In the first article titled “Air Power Under the Nuclear Shadow: Operation Sindoor and the Logic of Strategic Restraint”, Dr Gajula Sai Niranjan and Dr Nanda Kishor M.S. examine Operation Sindoor through the analytical lens of John Warden’s Five Rings Model and argue that the operation reflects an emerging pattern in India–Pakistan crises in which military force functions less as an instrument of decisive victory and more as a mechanism of strategic communication. The article highlights that contemporary military operations increasingly derive effectiveness from restraint as much as from destruction.

The second article titled “Flying Testbeds Cannot Be Foreign Assets: Building India’s Flight-Science Infrastructure”, by Mr Srivatsa Ragi Venkatesh, talks about the absence of a sovereign, domestically available flying laboratory and how the systemic reliance on foreign flying testbeds severely limits India’s autonomy in aerospace research and further stretches already tight development timelines. This article proposes the conversion of

an Indian Air Force (IAF) IL-76 into a sovereign, multi-role National Flying Laboratory, and also presents a phased inter-agency funding model to ensure fiscal viability.

The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the major theatre of global power and military dominance. China's rapid rise as a military and economic power has increased pressures and dilemmas for the 'middle power' countries in the region. Despite being a close military ally of the US and a 'middle power', South Korea has maintained a largely ambiguous position on the Indo-Pacific strategy promoted by the US, Japan, India and Australia. In the article "Dynamic Middle Power: Exploring South Korea's Response to the Military Rise of China", Dr Ranjit Kumar Dhawan discusses South Korea's response to the military rise of China, and explores the benefits of Seoul's more active and dynamic 'middle power diplomacy' in the Indo-Pacific region.

The next article titled "Analysing China's Pursuit of Self-reliance in Defence Industry" is by Dr Abhishek Kumar Darbey. China has made significant improvements in defence production, particularly in the 21st century. Focusing on the key drivers of building a self-reliant defence industry in China, the article analyses the military modernisation of the People's Liberation Army, external assistance in defence technology and reforms in Chinese defence industry as the main factors shaping its present defence industry.

The fifth article titled "Evolution in Open-Source Intelligence and Coercive Limitations in Contemporary Conflicts: Lessons for India", is by Col Rajnish Maahi. The article examines global open-source intelligence (OSINT) methodologies and draws analytical lessons through Indian experiences, to show how open information, when combined with appropriate technologies and institutional practices, becomes central to intelligence in an age of negative peace and informationalised warfare.

In the sixth article titled "Drivers of Change in the Indian Defence Industrial Base: From Indigenisation to Structural Capacity-Building", Dr Sujit Thakur examines whether the changing policy framework of the last decade has substantively enhanced the capability of India's defence industrial base, and how specific post-Kargil war policy measures broke with the earlier state-led model to create conditions for a collaborative, private-sector-integrated ecosystem.

Over the past three decades, gang-related violence involving Indo-Canadian criminal networks has emerged as a significant public security concern in Canada. Recurring cycles of gang warfare linked to drug trafficking, extortion and organised crime have been witnessed. The article

titled “The Transnational Nexus: Organised Crime, Extremism and the Indo-Canadian Diaspora”, by Dr Abhishek Verma, explores the interface between immigration and organised crime as well as the migration of members of the Punjabi community in Canada and their association with criminal gangs, while also investigating the sociological aspects of their involvement in such activities.

The next article is “India’s Preparedness Against Technological Adaptations of Terrorism”, in which Ms Saanya Sidhra assesses India’s institutional, regulatory and operational preparedness across counter-UAS frameworks, cyber governance structures, inter-agency coordination, and public–private security integration. The article emphasises that in the longer term, India’s security resilience will depend on integrated policy reform, technological innovation and cohesive institutional coordination.

In the ninth article titled “Chinese Aviation Hegemony Along India’s Northern Borders: The Nine-Year Surge Since Doklam”, Col Rajiv Lathar provides an in-depth analysis of the new aviation infrastructure developments and enhancements to existing aviation infrastructure, opposite India’s northern border, post-Doklam 2017. The article provides a detailed analysis of China’s infrastructure initiatives, examining their hegemonic and coercive intent and the resulting strategic implications for India.

The Venezuela crisis of January 2026 provides a contemporary case for examining the conduct of hybrid warfare in which cyberspace operations, kinetic actions and information-domain effects were integrated to shape the operational environment. In the last article of this issue titled “Integrated Cyber–Kinetic–Information Warfare: Insights from the Venezuela Crisis of 2026”, Brig Jitendra Nandan Bhatt and Lt Col Abhishek Lal discuss how proper integration of cyber operations into joint operational design can create decisive windows of advantage by degrading the adversary’s ability to sense, decide, command and communicate. The article also underscores that India needs to treat cyberspace and the information domain as permanently contested battlespaces, fully integrated into operational planning, deterrence, resilience and national security preparedness.

This issue carries six commentaries—“Hypersonic Weapons: A Transition or a Transformation? A Theoretical Approach to Examining Hypersonic Weapons in Contemporary Conflicts”, by Wg Cdr A. Pichipoo Raja; “Two Seas, One Future: The Mediterranean and the Bay of Bengal in Comparative Perspective”, by Dr Mahfuz Parvez; “Bridging Strategy and Technology Beneath the Waves: Lessons from France’s Seabed Warfare Strategy”, by Cdr Tarun Kumar Jha; “Infrastructure and Deterrence: Is India Risking

a Fiscal Plateau on Its Strategic Frontiers?”, by Lt Gen Rajeev Chaudhry (Retd); “Iran–Israel Twelve-Day War: From Missile Precision to Defence Saturation”, by Ms Bhawna Budhwar; and “Defence Technology Security Architecture in India: Comparative Analysis and Strategic Roadmap”, by Ms Khyati Singh. Two book reviews also feature in this issue.

We hope that this issue will be received well by our readers. We would also like to thank the authors and the referees who assisted us in the peer-review process. We would appreciate feedback from our readers on topics they feel should be addressed by the journal. We hope that along with our growing readership, we will see a further increase in the number of contributions for our future issues.

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