



## India's Cold Start Doctrine Towards Pakistan and Its Operational Strategies

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### Abstract

*In December 2001, Indian parliament was attacked by Pakistan backed terrorists, which led to standoff between the two South Asian neighbours. The Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) came up in the Indian military setup post-2002 standoff between India and Pakistan. The Indian army took almost two months to mobilise and deploy troops on the Pakistan border and it was realized that a new doctrine is required to deploy a full strength invasion force within few days notice. The Cold Start doctrine envisages swift deployment of troops on the western border within days if a situation of a full blown war arises. The operation would be carried out by a unified battle group involving various branches of India's military. This research paper is to understand the strategic planning of Indian military forces in a situation of a full blown war or to avoid a full-scale war. It also throws light on the formulation of non-aggressive, non-provocative defense policy based on the philosophy of defensive defense.*

**Key Words:** Cold Start Doctrine, Military Exercise, Missile Development, Warfare and South Asia.

### I. Introduction

Cold Start is a military doctrine that was developed by the Indian Armed Forces for use in a possible war with Pakistan. The Former Defence Minister George Fernandes described it as “a non-aggressive, non-provocative defense policy based on the philosophy of defensive defense”.<sup>i</sup> The name ‘Cold Start’ suggests the wish to avoid a full-scale hot war. It means Indian forces making swift and hard inroads into Pakistan. Such strikes will be limited in scope so as not to give any reason to Pakistan to launch a full-scale retaliation. The key element of the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) is surprise. In traditional offense, the mobilization of troops takes a lot of time. By then, the enemy country cannot only prepare for a response but also activate international diplomatic channels to prevent Indian attack.<sup>ii</sup> The idea for the Cold Start was fuelled by Operation Parakram, launched after the terror attack on Parliament in December 2001. The operation exposed major operational gaps in India's offensive power, mainly slow troop mobilization along the border. After the attack, Indian strike corps took almost a month to reach the border. This gave Pakistan enough time to take countermeasures, and for the US to pressurize the then-NDA government to back off. In 2009, then Army chief General Deepak Kapoor said that “a major leap in our approach to conduct of operations has been the successful firming-in of the ‘Cold Start’ strategy”.<sup>iii</sup>

### **Why we need the Cold Start Doctrine?**

In all the India-Pakistan conflicts of 1947-48, 1965, 1971, 1999, and 2001-02, India has adopted the policy of restraint which remained unfruitful.<sup>iv</sup> The Kargil war and the Operational Parakarm exposed that cannot launch a conventional war that could risk escalation across the nuclear threshold. To remove these constraints, the strategy of Cold Start doctrine was evolved which highlights a shift from a defensive reactive strategic thinking to a more proactive approach backed by armed forces equipped, organized, trained and postured to be able to launch punitive attacks on Pakistani military and terrorist targets within days. These forces needed to be operational before Pakistan could mobilize its defense. However, the escalatory nature of the proactive strategy is a challenge which may destabilize the South Asia.<sup>v</sup>

The need for the Cold Start Doctrine also emerged out of the fact that Pakistan being a nuclear country, the war will ultimately be mutually destructive. Pakistan has used its nuclear-power status to counter India's warnings of armed conflict. Pakistan has indicated often that it would not shy away from using nuclear weapons against India. A Cold Start gives India an escape from the inevitability of nuclear conflict with Pakistan. A Cold Start allows India to attack Pakistan without the possibility of a full-scale war breaking out since Cold Start strikes are limited in scope and never raise enough temperature to give Pakistan a reason to mobilize its forces for a full war.<sup>vi</sup>

### **II. Operational Strategies to Implement Cold Start Doctrine**

The concepts of wars of maneuver and war of attrition are basic to the study of war. Sometimes these two broad categories are described as the wars of destruction and wars of exhaustion. Both concepts of war focus on compelling the enemy to do our will or reducing his ability to resist until he accedes to our will. Attrition and maneuver occur at all levels of war and are not mutually exclusive. Wars of maneuver are sometimes referred to as wars of annihilation or wars of destruction. Wars of attrition focus on the sapping of the enemy's strength through the loss of personnel and material. Wars of attrition are also known as wars of exhaustion. In war of attrition, one antagonist's ability to fight is exhausted and finally submits to the other's will. Future wars are likely to wars of attrition as such defense forces should be prepared for short and sharp conflicts.<sup>vii</sup>

Cold Start Doctrine represents a pure maneuver strategy. Maneuver doctrines offer a higher level of both risk and reward than does a war of attrition. The vulnerability of maneuver strategy is their dependence upon the precise application of force against identified points of weakness. Cold start's emphasis on maneuver demands radical change within the army itself to make it operational. Maneuver strategy needs highly trained personnel who can take initiative and assumes responsibilities beyond their rank. The strategy also requires a different approach to information management. Close consultation with IAF and Navy, a combined service approach to warfare and streamlined decision making process are also necessary.<sup>viii</sup> The various operational strategies to implement Cold Start Doctrines can be discussed as under:

- **Reorganizing Strike Corps into Battle Groups**

India and Pakistan are probably the two countries in the world which have separate Holding and Strike Corps for defensive and offensive operations respectively. The concept of Holding corps (Pivot corps) was evolved after the wars experiences in 1965 and 1971 when both nation's army succeeded in making incursions into the adversary's territory.<sup>ix</sup> The Sundarji Doctrine which was formulated in early 1980s against the Pakistan felt that the need of having two corps- holding and strike corps. The holding corps is meant to be deployed at the international border with a primary task is to hold the advancement of adversary along the border. The function of the strike corps is to do offensive operations. India currently has three strike corps on the border to launch military offensive against

Pakistan simultaneously in three different sectors.<sup>x</sup> During the operation Parakram it was concluded that slow mobilization of strike corps resulted in the loss of too much time to launch an offensive operation. This prompted fresh thinking about the operational planning and force structure for offensive operations. It was realized that offensive operations must be launched quickly to beat the mobilization time of Pakistani forces to become successful. The success of such offensive operations requires reorganizing the strike corps and holding corps. The three strikes corps should be split into several division-plus size 'battle groups' like that of Russia's operational maneuver groups (OMGs) that could be launched at shortest possible notice (Forty eight hours to seventy two hours).<sup>xi</sup>

- **Military Exercises**

Military exercises enable militaries to understand each other's drills and procedures, overcome language barriers, and facilitate familiarization with equipment capabilities. Military exercises prepare defense forces to do joint operations. The most important advantage of joint military exercises is strategic signaling. On the other side, military exercises promote brotherhood and coordination between the armed forces.<sup>xii</sup> Military exercises conducted by Indian armed forces demonstrate the operational capability of India to execute the Cold Start Doctrine.

- **Exercise Divya Astra**

India conducted exercise Divya Astra in Rajasthan to test the capability of Indian army to launch a pre-emptive strike against Pakistan. The purpose of the exercise was to test the ability of the Indian army's various combat arms to deliver integrated firepower with the air support and to penetrate fortified defenses by mechanized attack supported by artillery and ground support aircraft.<sup>xiii</sup> In the exercise for the first time Indian military used Long-Range Reconnaissance and observation system (LORROS). The system utilizes a night camera, video surveillance equipment and a laser range finder to detect enemy movement up to a range of 13 km during the day and 16 km at night and enhances the effective surveillance system to check the deployment of enemy position and night time fighting capabilities which is a fundamental element of Cold Start Doctrine.<sup>xiv</sup>

- **Exercise Vajra Shakti**

In May 2005, India tested its short duration warfare capabilities in an exercise code named Vajra Shakti making use of satellite imaging facilities. First time a Force Multiplication Command Post (FMCP) was set up to integrate real time flow of information as a principal tool for decision making and NCW capabilities in the Indian army. In this military exercise, India brought flexibility in the operational concept of its holding corps. These holding corps was designated as Pivot Corps and was assigned to initiate offensive if required in the battlefield and to facilitate the strike corps to open a new front elsewhere. This change of strategy will give element of surprise and tactical advantage to Indian forces.<sup>xv</sup>

- **Exercise Desert Strike**

In November 2005, India tested its War fighting capabilities in Rajasthan in the exercise code named as Desert Strike aiming at a synergy between air and ground forces during the exercise. Indian Army deployed Russian T-90 tanks, mechanized combat vehicles in tandem with force multipliers, like the Israeli Searcher Heron unmanned aerial vehicles, Air Defence missile system and other electronic sensor and surveillance system.<sup>xvi</sup> IAF

fighter jets and helicopters coordinated with their counterparts on ground. The exercise had two main goals. The first is to test the Indian Army's ability to work mutually with air force in joint operations and second was to enhance Indian army's capabilities to launch proactive military operations under the Cold Start Doctrine.<sup>xvii</sup>

- **Exercise Sange Shakti**

In May 2006, India did an exercise code named Sanghe Shakti at Sidhwan Khas, near Phillar in the plains of Punjab. About 20,000 troops and around 2000 to 2500 vehicles from II-corps (Strike Corps) participated in this exercise. In this exercise the An-32 aircraft dropped an entire parachute battalion while IL-76 dropped the equipment in the dark flying information without lights. In this exercise, India participated its night time fighting capabilities to launch offensive operations under the Cold Start Doctrine.<sup>xviii</sup>

- **Exercise Ashwamedh**

India conducted exercise Ashwamedh in April, 2007 in a 130 km corridor between Suratgarh in Rajasthan and Bhatinda in Punjab. The exercise was designed specifically to test how Indian strike units will enhance their combat power utilizing advanced sensor networked with weapons on ground in a multi prong attack. The exercise gave confidence to Indian military to launch an offensive strike inside Pakistan.<sup>xix</sup>

- **Exercise Shatrunash**

In May 2007, India conducted an exercise code named as Shatrunash in Ludhiana, Punjab. India tested the battle readiness of its strike formations. Coordination between Indian Army and Indian Air force was also tested. Another aim was to examine India's new weapon system and surveillance system in combat like situation for conducting swift military operations in quick time. In this exercise more than 15000 troops, 150 MBT, gunship helicopters and fighter jets took part. Troop level indicated that Indian Army practiced Integrated Battle Groups to make the Cold start Doctrine operational.<sup>xx</sup>

- **Exercise Brazen Chariots**

In 2008, the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force jointly conducted large-scale war maneuver in the Thar desert during the exercise code named Brazen Chariots to prove their respective capabilities. In the exercise while Indian military displayed the firepower of T-90 Bhishma tanks and air defense missiles, Indian air force demonstrated the capability of Su-30 MKI, Jaguar, MiG-27, MiG-21 and armed helicopters.<sup>xxi</sup>

- **Exercise Hind Shakti**

The Former Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor referred the just concluded Hind Shakti war exercise as another step in army's continued endeavour to fine tune its proactive strategy. The Exercise included effective offensive support by air power and attack helicopters. The exercise proved the capability of the corps to do operations in network centric warfare and also in a nuclear-biological-chemical warfare environment.<sup>xxii</sup>

- **Modernization of Defense Forces**

Modernization of the armed forces is a complex process which includes cardinal changes of the material capacities in order to accomplish all the strategic objectives. It aimed at qualitative level transformation of the defense forces into a well trained and equipped professional force.<sup>xxiii</sup> It will not only improve the capability of armed forces but also provide confidence and raise the morale of armed forces.<sup>xxiv</sup>

- **Maritime Strategy**

The maritime strategy describes how maritime forces can be deployed to interdict the enemy's foreign trade lifeline in an attempt to starve its industry economy and people and bring its military machines to halt. The Navy can provide progressive strangulation to the enemy by the strategy of denial during the land battle. The Indian navy aims to achieve conventional deterrence by maintaining preponderance in conventional maritime capability in terms of warships, submarines and aircraft. The induction of nuclear submarine INS Arihant into its strategic forces has provided nuclear triad and a strategic advantage for India.<sup>xxv</sup>

### III. Nuclear Strategy

The 1962 war, China's nuclear test in 1964 and another threat from China changed the mindset of Indian strategists to opt for nuclear status.<sup>xxvi</sup> India follows a cautious policy towards the nuclear weapons. The neglect of nuclear policy was rebased in mid 1980s when it was reported that Pakistan was in possession of bomb. In 1998 India did nuclear tests and a nuclear doctrine was prepared which embraced the idea of nuclear deterrence but called for a minimum deterrent just enough to deter an unnamed adversary from launching a nuclear attack on India. Nevertheless this minimum deterrent would require a triad of air, ground, and sea delivered weapons to ensure the survivability of an Indian nuclear force. Further India adopted a NFU against other nuclear states and no use against non nuclear state.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had stated in Parliament in 1998 that India not:

“Intend to use these weapons for aggression or for mounting threats against any country; these are weapons of self defense to ensure that India is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

India's nuclear doctrine is premised on credible minimum deterrence and is based on a no first use posture. This implies that India will not initiate to use of nuclear weapons and as a corollary, is willing to absorb the damage that the first use of nuclear weapons or a first strike by an adversary may cause in India. In turn India has declared its intention to counter a nuclear attack by launching retaliation that will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.<sup>xxix</sup>

#### **Credible Minimum Deterrence**

The tenets of credible minimum deterrence requires building and maintaining nuclear stockpiles so as to ensure a counterstrike capability that can inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy despite suffering a first strike. Credible minimum deterrence imposes two prerequisites for credible deterrence. First is how to estimate the unacceptability threshold of the adversary. As nuclear weapons can cause unacceptable damage so a sufficient number of weapons are needed to maximize damage suffice for credible deterrence. The second requirement is ensuring that sufficient warheads and delivery vehicles survive a first strike and are available for retaliation.<sup>xxx</sup>

#### **Nuclear Force Structure**

India's nuclear force structure comprises a land, sea and air-based triad. India has The Commander in Chief of Strategic Forces Command advises the Chiefs of Staff Committee on all aspects of nuclear deterrence and exercises operational and technical control over the nuclear forces. The nuclear delivery assets are raised, manned, equipped and maintained by respective services. India has established a National Command Post that will also act as a tri-service operation centre during the war. India follows a policy of deterrence by

punishment through counter value targeting strategy aimed at destroying the adversary's nuclear forces. Beside this India's nuclear weapons are firmly under civilian control.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### **Missile Development**

India has at least three reported cruise missile development programs: the Lakshya- based on the design for a pilotless target aircraft, the Coral-designed to produce improved Russian Moskit (Sunburn) anti-ship cruise missiles for deployment on Indian destroyers, and the Sagarika program is believed to cover the development of both a ballistic and a cruise missile for deployment on its nuclear submarine when it completes development. The cruise missile part of this program reportedly is focused on providing a land- attack cruise missile system that uses a turbojet engine to provide the missile with a planned range of 300 km. The system will be based on radar technology for tracking and fire control which the DRDO developed jointly with Israel and France.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### **Inter Service Cooperation**

War is rarely won by one single component of services.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Future wars cannot be operated without the coordination of three forces. The coordination and cooperation among the three forces can lead to easy and quick success in the war. There is a need of harmonization of the doctrine of the three military services.

### **Integrated Theatre Command**

The concept of an integrated theatre command was pioneered by the United States military. In 1947, the US set up five geographic tri-service commands to cover the globe. It now has 11 unified commands with the four geographic ones being Africa, Central, European, Indo-Pacific, Northern, Southern and Space. In 2016, China mimicked the US' model, reorganizing its military and Navy into five joint theatre commands – Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central. Its Western Theatre Command oversees China's border with India. With the growing threats at the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-China border, the establishment of tri-service commands may come with numerous advantages.

### **AI Powered Warfare**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) also dubbed as the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has been making giant strides in scientific and technological innovation across varying fields. It is capable of bringing significant transformations in the military operations. AI being a dual-use technology may have interesting implications on the distribution of military power in the future.

### **Space Warfare**

Space affords numerous military capabilities such as real-time communications, reconnaissance and surveillance, highly precise navigation and space based missile guidance. Satellites are also being employed to provide real-time positioning data of ships, aircraft or missiles, which facilitate various military operation and is extremely useful to assist movement of ground troops, especially in areas devoid of navigational aids, ascertain accurate disposition of troops and guidance of missiles/ weapons.

### **Special Forces for Rapid Deployment**

India has very competent and capable Special Forces (SF) which has proved their mettle in various operations. Besides operating in various parts of the country, the SF has distinguished them while operating beyond the geographical confines of the country.

‘Operation Pawan’ in Sri Lanka, ‘Operation Cactus’ in Maldives, ‘Operation Khukri’ in Sierra Leone and deployment in various United Nations peace keeping forces are a testimony to the prowess of India’s SF.

### Network Centric Warfare

Network centric warfare (NCW) integrates modern weapons, reconnaissance, surveillance and target acquisition (RSTA) and communications technology by optimally networking weapons, sensors and decision makers to synergize the combat potential of a force.

### IV. South Asian Strategic Stability

Strategic stability can be described as the absence of incentive to use nuclear weapons first (crisis stability) and the absence of incentive to build up a nuclear force (arms race stability). It can also be described as the absence of armed conflicts between nuclear armed states and in which states enjoy peaceful and harmonious relations. Strategic stability is normally assumed to mean deterrence stability. The central idea of strategic stability is balance and symmetry. It is a product of deterrence stability, crisis stability and arms stability.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

### V. Conclusion

India has carefully calibrated Cold Start strategy to fight Pakistan’s proxies within its own borders and on its own side of the LOC, in order to keep the level and the intensity of conflict low. Cold Start’s emphasis on maneuver demands radical change within the army itself to make it operational. Maneuver strategy needs highly trained personnel who can take initiative and assumes responsibilities beyond their rank and also requires a different approach to information management and command and control system. The strategy demand reorganization of strike corps into battle groups for quick mobilization and surprise. Close consultation with IAF and Navy, a combined service approach to warfare and streamlined decision making process are also necessary. Besides this modernization of defense forces is also a necessary for the procurement of force, technology and weapons. India is also conducting military exercises, development of missiles, and introduction of modern warfare technologies to test the cold start doctrine.

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