

The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: A Critical Analysis

*Dr Masood Ur Rehman Khattak**

Abstract

The Indian military is continuously transforming its doctrines to fill operational gaps, create synergy and integration in its tri-services, and execute realistic conventional limited war-fighting strategies. Its Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 (LWD-18) is a renewed form of previous limited war doctrines. Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and effective conventional counter measures have confined the India's military from any large-scale offensives. This is the reason why it is constantly looking for a gap between the nuclear and conventional capabilities of Pakistan to launch limited but intense quick and swift operations under the nuclear umbrella without invoking Pakistan's nuclear threshold. Through in-depth primary interviews supported by secondary sources, this study finds that the new LWD-18 has put greater emphasis on the restructuring of the Indian Strike formations into small Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) equipped with offensive elements for shallow manoeuvres in protracted, rapid and nimble warfare scenarios. The LWD-18 also focuses on force modernisation; synergy & integration; flexibility; agility and greater manoeuvrability to fill operational gaps; shorten mobilisation time; and execute limited war concepts against Pakistan. It also stresses the significance of hybrid warfare threats in modern times, Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities for real-time information about the adversary and enhanced battlefield transparency for precision strikes. All these capabilities are required for any quick and swift specialised operations in the South Asian strategic milieu. Such doctrinal transformation in the Indian Army is taking place rapidly and is going to put extreme strain on Pakistan's military to manage growing conventional asymmetries, counter hybrid nature of threats, and employ credible counter measures along with pragmatic conventional strategies backed by nuclear weapons, to ensure territorial integrity, manage internal security and deter aggression at all levels to maintain deterrence stability in South Asia.

Keywords: Land Warfare Doctrine-2018, Force Modernisation, Conventional Asymmetries, Surgical Strikes, Hybrid Warfare, Limited War.

* The author is Assistant Professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. He can be contacted at: masood.rehman@iiu.edu.pk.

Introduction

India's strategic thinking has revolved around China and Pakistan since its independence. It propagates China as a primary threat but its force modernisation and military orientation is aimed at Pakistan. Therefore, India competes with China at the system level and challenges Pakistan at the regional level because the latter is a stumbling block to New Delhi's hegemonic ambitions. India's relationship with Pakistan has always suffered from mistrust, intrigue, suspicion and persistent rivalries over unresolved issues including Kashmir, water distribution, Siachen, Sir Creek or proxy wars. Both states fought three wars and a small-scale conflict over Kargil in 1999, changing the dynamics of warfare in South Asia. After its 1962 defeat, India never pursued aggressive policies against China except a small-scale skirmish at Doklam.¹

However, after the 1965 and 1971 wars with Pakistan, it consolidated its position against the conventionally weaker Pakistan and adopted an aggressive force posture under which it not only re-organised the military's force deployment, but also focused on deep thrusts inside the country.² New Delhi has always been trying to work out a military way to restrain Pakistan's alleged aggression and terrorism in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) or on India's soil.³ Since, it cannot militarily defeat Pakistan without risking nuclear war, it introduced several military doctrines — from the Sunderji Doctrine or mechanisation period in the 1980s to the post-1999 Limited War under the nuclear overhang; from Cold Start Doctrine (CSD)/Proactive Doctrine to surgical strikes or hybrid warfare.

Such doctrinal development is a continuous process in the Indian Army. A major shift in the Indian Army's offensive doctrinal development

¹ Jonathan Marcus, "China-India Border Tension: Satellite Imagery Shows Doklam Plateau Build-Up," *BBC.com*, January 26, 2018, <https://bbc.in/2VuLLZP>.

² Jo Inge Bekkevold, Ian Bowers and Michael Raska, eds., *Security, Strategy and Military Change in the 21st Century: Cross-Regional Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 101, <http://opac.lib.idu.ac.id/unhan-ebook/assets/uploads/files/c40a4-031.security-strategy-and-military-change-in-the-21st-century.pdf>.

³ Sunil Dasgupta and Stephen P. Cohen, "Is India Ending its Strategic Restraint Doctrine?" *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (2011):172, <http://bit.ly/2Vc31xO>.

took new shape in 1975 under the Government of Indira Gandhi. She tasked three Generals to formulate the Indian Army's Land Warfare Strategy against Pakistan.⁴ Subsequently, the Army focused on three Strike Corps; mechanised infantry; and armour divisions to carry out deeper attacks within Pakistan. India tried to operationalise the Sunderji Doctrine in 1986-87 in the *Brasstacks* wargames.⁵ Following Pakistan's conventional and non-conventional counter measures the Indian Army could not cross the border.⁶

In the post- nuclearisation phase, the Kargil conflict in 1999 between both states brought a huge shift in India's strategic thinking; and the concept of 'limited war under the nuclear overhang' was born.⁷ This thinking received further impetus from the wider strategic community in India after the failure of *Operation Parakram* in 2001-02. It took almost three weeks for the Indian Strike Corps to reach the border.⁸ During this period, Pakistan established its defences on the border and India could do nothing because of three things: first, nuclear factor/deterrence; second, international pressure; and third, the element of surprise was lost. The failure of *Operation Parakram* gave birth to the Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) in 2004.⁹ The CSD aimed at quick, swift, *Blitzkrieg* type shallow manoeuvres. The reaction time under CSD was set at 72-96 hours after any alleged terrorist attack in IOJ&K. Aims and objectives were kept limited to only hold small-scale territory, take out Pakistan's military outposts to

⁴ Ian Cardozo, *The Indian Army: A Brief History* (New Delhi: United Service Institution of India, 2005), 159.

⁵ Ali Ahmed, *India's Doctrine Puzzle: Limiting War in South Asia* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 44.

⁶ Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (California: Stanford University Press, 2012), 222.

⁷ V.P. Malik, "Fighting Limited Wars: A Major Challenge for the Military," *Centre for Land Warfare Studies*, July 3, 2010, <https://archive.claws.in/385/fighting-limited-wars-a-major-challenge-for-the-military-gen-v-p-malik-retd.html>.

⁸ Verghese Koithara, *Managing India's Nuclear Forces* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), 28.

⁹ Ibid.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

soothe the public back home.¹⁰ However, the CSD over a period of time could not achieve these objectives. For example, following the Mumbai 2008 attacks, the Indian Army could not operationalise the CSD against Pakistan because of operational weaknesses; lack of adequate offensive weapons & equipment; command and control issues; integration and synergy between the Armed Forces; and most importantly; adequate Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities along with required agility and training for quick and swift operations as required for such offensive manoeuvres. Close assessment of the CSD suggests that this doctrine has remained an aspiration of the Indian Army because of its operational and structural deficiencies.¹¹ However, Pakistan's countermeasures in the shape of conventional readiness; quick and swift warfare concepts to reciprocate any offensive manoeuvres; and development of Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) along with Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) restricted CSD-based operations:

With a combination of Pakistan's conventional and nuclear capability and the advantage of military geography since we have cantonments up there, forward-linked cantonments with which we can react (in some cases) within hours, we have found solutions to the Cold Start Doctrine.¹²

Many experts suggest that the CSD has been just a myth.¹³

Indian attempts to deter sub-conventional attacks from Pakistan via their conventional forces (e.g. Cold Start) have not succeeded. Despite the public attention such

¹⁰ Joseph F. Pilat and Nathan E. Busch, *Routledge Handbook of Nuclear Proliferation and Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 90.

¹¹ Vipin Narang and Walter C. Ladwig III, "Taking 'Cold Start' out of the Freezer?" *Hindu*, January 11, 2017.

¹² Lt. General (Retd.) Khalid Kidwai (Former Director General Strategic Plans Division), in discussion with the author, December 6, 2017.

¹³ Narang and Ladwig III, "Taking 'Cold Start' out of the Freezer?"

The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine-2018: A Critical Analysis

developments garner, I do not believe that they have affected strategic stability in and of themselves.¹⁴

The nuclear environment, proximity of border and threat of escalation restricted the Indian military's options against Pakistan, which resulted in consistent doctrinal manoeuvring. According Mark Fitzpatrick, 'Cold Start remains an aspiration by the Indian Army...I do not see this capability as yet operationalised, and I also think, by the way, that Pakistan's response has neutralised this idea already.'¹⁵ It is also believed that it was the balance of terror which prevented India from any proactive steps:

If aggression is manifested on us, we will use all our resources to fight back. If deterrence remains intact, which I hope it will, it has remained intact so far and likely to remain intact in future also. There is no likelihood of a nuclear exchange. But, if deterrence fails, then, that can lead to nuclear exchange because Pakistan is very clear on saying that we will use all our resources once it comes to aggression from an enemy. Of course we are not saying that we will use them (*TNWs*) immediately. We will keep our cards close to our chest. But, we are not going to accept defeat. We are not going to allow them success. That, is our doctrine.¹⁶

Since the CSD or proactive military operations entailed greater risks of escalation, and it was difficult for the Indian Army to execute this strategy because of operational paucities, the IAF introduced the concept of sub-conventional warfare strategy in 2012 aimed at the possibility of

¹⁴ Walter C. Ladwig III (Assistant Professor International Relations, King's College London) in discussion with the author, October 18, 2017.

¹⁵ Mark Fitzpatrick (Former Executive Director, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Americas; and head IISS Non-Proliferation and Nuclear Policy Programme), in discussion with the author, December 6, 2017.

¹⁶ Lt. General (Retd.) Naeem Khalid Lodhi (Former Defence Secretary of Pakistan; and Corps Commander XXXI Corps), in discussion with the author, October 22, 2017.

punitive surgical strikes against alleged terrorist camps across the border.¹⁷ This concept was further developed by the Indian military in the Joint Armed Forces Doctrine of 2017.¹⁸ Subsequently, in 2018, the Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 (LWD-18) was produced.¹⁹ Through primary in-depth interviews coupled with secondary data analysis, this study focuses on doctrinal transformation in the Indian military since 1975; and how LWD-18 is going to impact the strategic stability of South Asia, particularly Pakistan.

Critical Analysis of the Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 (LWD-18)

Unveiled in December 2018, the new LWD-18 mainly focuses on the Indian Army's threat perception and possible response in limited war scenarios. There are certain areas where the Indian Army has focused and improved over the past few years which needs careful examination and response. This section discusses the salient features of LWD-18 and relate it to the Indian military's operationalisation and modernisation plans (Figure 1):

¹⁷ Arjun Subramaniam, Satvinder Singh and K.K. Nair, *Basic Doctrine of the Indian Air Force 2012* (New Delhi: Indian Air Force, 2012).

¹⁸ Ministry of Defence, *Joint Indian Armed Forces Doctrine-2017* (New Delhi: Integrated Defence Staff, Government of India, April 2017), 26, <https://bit.ly/2SIUFXF>.

¹⁹ Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018* (Government of India, December 2018).

Figure-1
Main Features of India's LWD-2018



Source: Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*.

Multi-front Scenario: Formation of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs)

The LWD-18 envisages rapid mobilisation and force multipliers to support missions at high altitude (Himalayan region), plain and desert areas against Pakistan. This denotes that the forces deployed against both Pakistan and China would be self-reliant for any contingencies. China, Nepal and Bhutan border India on the north; and on the western front, there is Pakistan.²⁰ While Nepal and Bhutan are at relative peace with India, the Chinese border is active and both states are involved in small-scale skirmishes.²¹ On the ground, India and China cannot indulge in any large-scale conventional war because of three reasons:

²⁰ "International Land Border," *Ministry of Home Affairs*, Government of India, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2S3GYvR>.

²¹ "Stabilizing Sino-Indian Security Relations: Managing Strategic Rivalry after Doklam," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 10, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MFmDrH>.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

- There is huge conventional disparity between India and China.²²
- Issues between both states are not serious enough for escalation into a major war; and,
- Geographical limitations are not suitable for a large-scale conventional war between the two.

Given the long-standing animosity and the unresolved Kashmir dispute, the Indian military's main focus is on its western front with Pakistan.

Concept of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs)

The LWD-18 emphasises deterrence; sharp, quick and swift operations in case of any contingencies; and deployment of Integrated Battle Groups-IBGs.²³ Since an all-out war is not possible in the nuclear environment, the Indian Army is envisaging quick and swift limited war under the nuclear umbrella. Any limited war in South Asian context would be a dangerous development. At the same time, its possibility cannot be ignored:

Any limited war over Kashmir would start with either (alleged) terrorist attack from Pakistan or the infiltration of Pakistani forces into Kashmir. The likelihood of those developments needs to be assessed. There could be limited fighting/firing if the realm of combat is confined strictly to Kashmir. Due to limitations on ammo, supplies and equipment, neither side can sustain heavy fighting for very long.²⁴

Under the CSD, the Indian Army focused on reformation of forces deployed on the western front. The concept of IBGs is not new in South Asia's strategic settings. Initially, the idea of IBG was coined by the Indian Army in 2005. In the beginning, it was referred as the 'Pivot Corps', in

²² Harsh V. Pant and Pushan Das, "China's Military Rise and the Indian Challenge," *Observer Research Foundation*, April 19, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2CIbvWe>.

²³ Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*.

²⁴ Walter C. Ladwig III (Assistant Professor International Relations, King's College London) in discussion with the author, October 18, 2017.

which the Indian Army started work on the reorganisation/restructuring of the Holding Corps (Defensive Corps deployed at the border), and claimed to have strengthened its offensive defences to react within a short span of time as compared to the mobilisation of its Strike Corps.²⁵

In 2018, the Indian Army reinforced its commitment that it would reorganise its strike formations into smaller IBGs for rapid mobilisation, quick and swift multiple operations for shallow thrusts and to achieve element of surprise against the enemy. The new force posture would entail well-equipped troops with modern weapons and equipment which may include immaculate air defence; and synergy between the air and ground forces. The likely composition of IBGs would entail T-90S tanks; advance Armor Personnel Carriers (APCs); 4-6 infantry battalions; artillery regiments; integral logistics; highly sophisticated gunship helicopters; and modern aircrafts for close air support, along with signal and an engineer unit for support (see Figure 2).²⁶

The Indian Army is planning to raise at least 9-10 IBGs against Pakistan to launch multiple thrusts from Punjab plains and the Rajasthan sector.²⁷ It is expected that every IBG would have six battalions (every Indian battalion contains approx. 800 to 1000 men), which means that every IBG would have 8,000-10,000 men along with other support staff.²⁸ The restructuring of the Indian Army would provide it with greater flexibility, manoeuvrability and faster mobilisation as compared to a Corps or Division. The IBGs would be smaller than a Division and slightly bigger than a Brigade. The Indian Army announced that they will test these IBGs in wargames to execute their doctrines in flawless manner: 'Not every Corps, Division or Brigade will be replaced by an IBG. The terrain, threat perception and options available to the enemy will go into deciding whether an IBG will replace the current structure.'²⁹

²⁵ Vijay Mohan, "Shift in Army's War Strategy," *Tribune India*, May 12, 2005, <https://bit.ly/2HAJju3>.

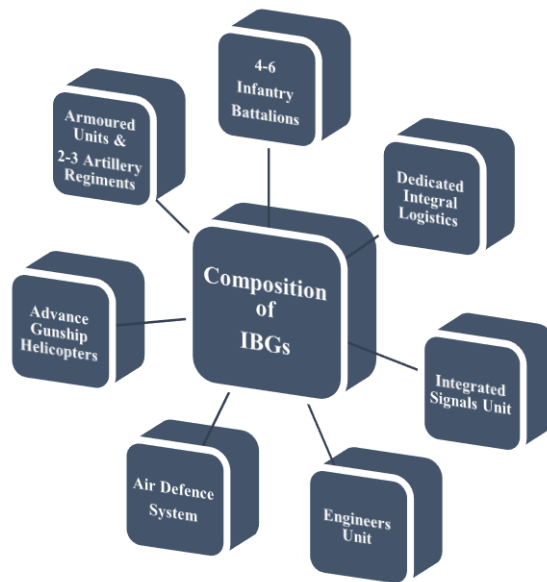
²⁶ Himanil Raina, "Integrated Battle Groups Are India's Response to Pakistan," *National Interest*, November 18, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2AT88Mb>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Sudhi Ranjan Sen, "Integrated Battle Groups Now a Reality as Indian Army Braces for Sweeping Changes in Combat Strategy," *Hindustan Times*, October 14, 2018.

²⁹ Ibid.

Figure-2
Composition of IBGs under LWD-18



Source: Raina, “Integrated Battle Groups Are India’s Response to Pakistan.”

The Indian Army’s former Chief has emphasised on the induction of Apache helicopters for close air support and joint operations: ‘We think the Apaches are tank killers and are necessary to be grouped with strike formations.’³⁰ The procurement of Apache would be a force multiplier for the Indian Army in any quick and swift warfare scenario. Rawat further expounded that India is looking for two types of IBGs - smaller for mountainous terrain; and bigger for plains.³¹

For any quick and swift operations it is necessary for the Indian Army to cut short its mobilisation time. In the 2011 *Vijayee Bhava* wargame, India claimed to have achieved the 48 hours mobilisation time as

³⁰ “Army to Carry out Major Reform, Roll out Integrated Battle Group: General Bipin Rawat,” *Economic Times*, January 10, 2019.

³¹ “New Battle Groups to Face Pak, Says Army Chief,” *Tribune India*, November 5, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2CytQVv>.

compared to three weeks in *Operations Prakaram*.³² While wargames are different from real warfare scenarios, the Indian Army's force posture, military acquisitions and consistent exercises depict that it is seriously vying to operationalise its limited war doctrine against Pakistan:

I see limited war. There is a probability of limited war because India's entire military build-up is to fight a limited war, Cold Start Doctrine, Military purchases, talking about Surgical Strikes.³³

In this context, re-formation and restructuring of the strike formations is a necessary element for the operationalisation of any limited war doctrine. Once the restructuring or formation of the IBGs takes place, the next step would be to equip these forces with adequate advance weapons and equipment to achieve stated goals. The idea behind re-formation of the Strike Corps into smaller IBGs is to conduct quick and swift operations against Pakistan, and perhaps the Chinese border. According to an Indian Army official:

We carried out an exercise to test the Integrated Battle Groups concept under the Western Command. The feedback from the formations and top commanders has been very positive and that is why we are going to start by raising two to three IBGs along Pakistan border by October this year.³⁴

The Indian Army commanders in the post-wargame meeting asked the commanders-in-chief to raise the IBGs in their respective areas of responsibilities. Three IBGs will be composed of elements from the

³² Suman Sharma, "Army Mobilization Time: 48 hours," *DNA India*, May 16, 2011, <https://bit.ly/2HpxKWv>.

³³ Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan), in discussion with the author, October 24, 2017.

³⁴ "Army to Raise New Battle Formations along Pakistan Border by October," *Economic Times*, June 19, 2019, <https://m.economictimes.com/news/defence/army-to-raise-new-battle-formations-along-pakistan-border-by-october/articleshow/69855566.cms>.

Western Command and their primary areas of operations would be against Pakistan. The Army tested two types of IBGs in their wargame on the border. First category of IBGs would have offensive element to initiate or cross the border or Line of Control (LoC) to take out targets as planned. However, other types of IBGs would play the role of a holding corps to stop enemy advance. A similar concept was also practiced in 2005 when Pivot Corps was introduced having offensive and defensive role. IBGs of the future would have different orientation as far as their size, composition, capabilities and offensive elements are concerned.

According to one source, the IBGs would be commanded by a Major General and consist of about 5,000 troops in each battle group, which is a shallower force than the previous estimations under CSD (Division-sized IBGS 20,000 estimated force).³⁵ India envisages that the IBGs will change the nature of warfare in South Asia between two nuclear powers. It wants to utilise the gap between nuclear and conventional capabilities and remain well below the nuclear *red-lines* of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Army must study and carefully observe the developments related to the formation of IBGs and develop an adequate conventional response to deter India from any adventurism under the nuclear umbrella. To validate the concept of *manoeuvre warfare* in the mountainous region, the Indian Army conducted an exercise at an altitude of 10,000 ft (Figure 3):

³⁵ “Army to Raise New Battle Formations along Pakistan Border by October,” *Economic Times*.

Figure-3

IA Exercise at Chandni Mandir (Western Command)



Source: From Google Maps, composed by author.

The Indian Army airlifted three Mountain IBGs extracted from 17 Corps to the forward areas. Although, details of the military exercise were kept confidential, it can be assumed that the Indian Army practiced how to ‘interdict a strategic highway, make an initial bridgehead for launching further offensives, seize an area posing a threat to the Chumbi Valley or launch an offensive across a frozen river to capture posts.’³⁶

These drills in the mountainous region may also come in play in any future attack against Pakistan across the LoC or international border. Since 2016, Pakistan and India have been involved in low intensity conflict along the LoC. Since then, it has been reported that the Indian Army is, ‘restocking missiles, tank and artillery ammunition to be able to fight a 10-day intensive war, or what it calls 10-(I) scales,’ and that the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) has commenced learning the

³⁶ Sandeep Unnithan, “The New Strike Strategy,” *India Today*, October 5, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/the-big-story/story/20190916-the-new-strike-strategy-1595666-2019-09-06>.

topography from Jammu and Kashmir to the Rann of Kutch to see how well these IBGs could be deployed and used against Pakistan.³⁷ On the possibility of the limited war question, Rawat has claimed:

You don't announce a war....nobody would want to go to war, but if the (situation) were to go out of hand, we won't hesitate to do some limited action.....Out of hand is a clear reference to an act of grave provocation. For instance, a mass casualty terrorist attack originating from across the border.³⁸

The Indian Army plans to have about 'a dozen IBGs along the western border with Pakistan, in the next four to five years' to not only move quickly and break Pakistan's defence lines within a few hours not days, but to also seize small-scale territory, or to establish 'launch pads' for the remaining forces to join in for consolidated action.³⁹

The Western Command looks after four primary areas of interest: Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and New Delhi. The Indian Army will reorganise the IBGs keeping in mind terrain and areas of operations – 'sector- and terrain-specific IBGs' equipped after assessing the Threat, Terrain, Task and Resources (TTTR).⁴⁰ It could be assumed that on the Punjab border (which is a heavily defended border with anti-tank units, strong defensive bunkers and armour units), the Indian Army may pitch its modern T-90S tanks for rapid thrusts, advance infantry combat vehicles, strong air defence system, and lethal Apache helicopters along with close air support.

However, in the Rajasthan desert, where opposition is not likely to be as taut, the main threat will come from Pakistan's tanks, artillery and anti-tank units. Here, the Indian Army can pitch its long-range advance artillery for back-up along with gunship helicopters and air force for close air support to the rapidly moving tanks and mechanised infantry.

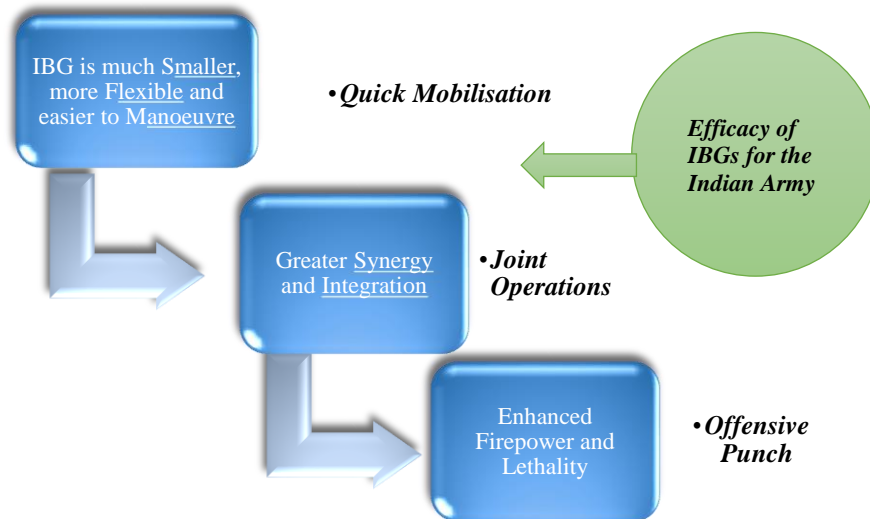
³⁷ Unnithan, "The New Strike Strategy."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Figure-4
Efficacy of IBGs for the Indian Army



Source: Author's own.

The Indian military believes that that modern conflicts would be limited, intense and unlikely to be lengthy campaigns. However, the element of surprise would be key to any limited war concept. These IBGs, according to the Indian Army, would provide agility, rapid mobilisation and the element of surprise against Pakistan.

Pakistan also carried out *Azm-i-Nau* to practice swift and quick warfare exercises to conduct counter-offensives. The element of surprise is a difficult thing to achieve keeping in mind Pakistan's border proximity; surveillance and recon capabilities through Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS); fighter aircrafts; Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs); and intelligence. However, at the same time, these capabilities may not stop advancing IBGs because of the growing conventional asymmetries in the air defence domain (*S-400* and *Barak-8*). Secondly, both states share a vast border which would be difficult for Pakistan to cover from all sides.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

To successfully execute their limited war options, the Indian military must achieve overwhelming air dominance; induct advanced attack helicopters; long-range air defence system which can cater Pakistan's standoff capabilities; massive armour force for rapid thrusts and quick manoeuvres; synergy and integration (land and air force); lethal artillery with greater range precision and firepower. The Indian Army is in the process of plugging these gaps. Pakistan must also improve its overall capabilities in all domains and establish conventional deterrence to make it costly for the Indian Army to breach the LoC or international border.

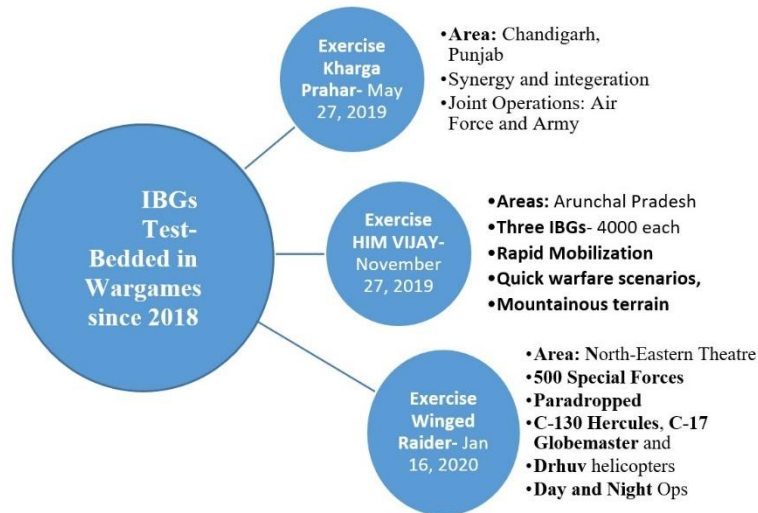
IBGs Test-Bedded after LWD-2018: Operationalisation

The Indian Army has been practicing with IBG formations in wargames close to the border with Pakistan to fine tune formations after getting the feedback on the ground from the field commanders. The following exercises have been undertaken (Figure 5):

- Exercise Kharga Prahar [May 27, 2019]
- Exercise HIM VIJAY [November 27, 2019]
- Exercise Winged Raider [January 16, 2020]

Figure-5

IBGs Test-Bedded Wargames since 2018



Source: Author's own.

Under the LWD-18, regular military exercises would help the Indian Army to validate their doctrines, enhance synergy and integration among all branches and mitigate any loopholes in their overall military strategy or execution when it comes to intense warfare scenarios.

Force Modernisation

States modernise their military capabilities with the perception that once their armed forces are modernised, they will be able to pursue their political objectives through military means. On the other side, they feel that modernisation of weaponry and doctrines will strengthen their defence. In both cases, it intensifies the security dilemma within a region which motivates other regional actors or neighbours to modernise their armed forces accordingly or come up with their own counter-measures in the shape of aggressive doctrines/strategies or weapons.

The Indian Army in LWD-18 also puts greater emphasis on 'force modernisation, resource optimization and innovative conceptual processes

leading to winning strategies for future wars.’⁴¹ Any swift warfare doctrine requires agile forces and advance weaponry to achieve the element of surprise against an adversary with greater speed, manoeuvrability and firepower. The Indian military under Prime Minister Modi has started a massive military modernisation programme. Although, military modernisation is a sluggish process, the Indian Army is vying to get highly sophisticated weapons and equipment to execute their limited war doctrine (Table 1):

Table-1

India’s Force Modernisation to execute LWD-2018

	Aircrafts	Main Battle Tanks/ATG Ms	Air Defence	Spy Satellites/ UAVs	Advance Artillery	Gunship Helicopters	Weapon Locating Radars
1	SU-30 MKI	T-90S MBTs	Russian S-400	Risaat-II	American M777-Ultra Light	Apache helicopters	Long-Range Reconnaissance & Observation Systems
2	Rafale	Modern APCs	Israeli Barak-8	GSAT-7A Satellite	Dhanush Artillery Guns- 1&2	Chinook Helicopters	Swathi Weapon Locating Radars
3		NAG ATGMs		GSAT-6	South Korean-K9 Vajra Howitzers		Battlefield Surveillance Radars
4		Israeli Spike ATGMs		Heron TP UAV			
5				Harpy UAV Missile			
6				Harop UAV Missile			

Source: Author’s own.

India is slowly and gradually filling operational gaps in its overall limited, quick war-fighting strategy. These force multipliers would increase the conventional asymmetries in South Asia: ‘India’s military

⁴¹ “Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*.

modernisation obviously gives New Delhi more military options.⁴² However, it is also opined that increase in conventional asymmetries would push Pakistan towards counter-measures:

Imbalance in forces whether Army, Navy or Air force would actually make the other party apprehensive. The best way out is to resolve your differences politically/diplomatically. If that is not possible then any nation which is being threatened would like to defend itself with whatever means they can get or whatever methods, they can get. And they will do it. There is no doubt that Pakistanis are very resilient people, and they will do everything to ward off this kind of looming threat.⁴³

'Punitive Response Options': Possibility of Surgical Strikes?

The LWD-18 also hints at the possibility of limited strikes in case of any alleged terrorist attack on Indian soil or IOJ&K. The Indian Army has contextualised the volatile security situation in IOJ&K and reiterated enhancing capabilities at the LoC to maintain dominance. Moreover, the LWD-18 has also declared that the Indian Army will, 'enhance punitive response options to greater depth, effect, sophistication and precision.'⁴⁴ In addition, 'the Indian Army will continue to prosecute effective Counter Insurgency/ Counter Terrorism operations to ensure deterrence through "punitive responses", against state sponsored proxy war.'⁴⁵ Here, the Indian Army highlights the use of pre-emptive or *surgical strikes* against Pakistan. Most Indian scholars believe that this is a possibility:

⁴² Ashley J. Tellis (Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C.), in discussion with the author, November 4, 2017.

⁴³ Late Professor Dr Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema (Dean Faculty of Contemporary Studies, National Defence University), in discussion with the author, October 17, 2017.

⁴⁴ "Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

I would suggest repeat strikes are not only possible, but also quite likely within the next few years. They have proven possible, politically successful, and internationally accepted.⁴⁶

Another senior Indian scholar sees ‘deeper surgical strikes in case of egregious terrorist actions against India and Indian targets.’⁴⁷ Harsh V. Pant also believes that there is possibility of limited war/surgical strikes in the future,⁴⁸ while Gurmeet Kanwal opines that ‘In India, we believe there is space for conventional conflict below the nuclear threshold.’⁴⁹ Some Western analysts also believe that there is a possibility of limited war/surgical strikes in the South Asian strategic milieu:

There has already been a limited conventional war under the nuclear shadow (Kargil) and there is sub-conventional skirmishes frequently. So, the possibility is always there.⁵⁰

Ladwig III agrees:

If there is another series of attacks in Kashmir by groups linked to Pakistan, I think that is a distinct possibility. The Indian government seems to believe the prior ‘surgical strike’ had a positive effect at minimal cost.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Shashank Joshi (Former Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, Whitehall, London), in discussion with the author, October 2017.

⁴⁷ Bharat Karnad (Research Professor, CPR and a national security expert), in discussion with the author, October 10, 2017.

⁴⁸ Harsh V. Pant (Professor International Relations, Defence Studies Department; and, the India Institute at Kings College, London), in discussion with the author, October 11, 2017.

⁴⁹ Brigadier (Retd.) Gurmeet Kanwal (Former Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi) in discussion with the author, October 11, 2017.

⁵⁰ Michael Krepon (Co-founder, The Stimson Center), in discussion with the author, October 13, 2017.

⁵¹ Walter C. Ladwig III (Assistant Professor, International Relations, King’s College London), in discussion with the author, October 18, 2017.

The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine-2018: A Critical Analysis

The Indian Army claimed to have carried out a *surgical strike* against Pakistan in 2016, but the evidence on the ground suggests that there was no such strike across the LoC,⁵² and more recently on February 26, 2019, which led to Pakistan's counter-strikes during which the IAF lost two of its MIG-21 and SU-30 aircrafts shot down by Pakistani missiles:

Two Indian jets were downed in Wednesday's operation. One fell inside Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, while another went down in the Indian-controlled region of Kashmir.⁵³

In the Indo-Pak context, the Indian military lacks the essential capability to launch successful *surgical strikes* against Pakistan because of several reasons: first, the *de facto* border (LoC) between India and Pakistan (550km out of 740km) is fenced by the Indians, and is heavily militarised by both states.⁵⁴ Second:

... there is more talk than their actual ability to carry out operations (surgical strikes), that is not to say that we should not be prepared... But in my view, the Indian military leadership very categorically know this if they were to carry out a surgical strike or any incursion across the LoC or across the international border or the working boundary, Pakistan will retaliate, they are very clear on this.⁵⁵

⁵² "Uri Aftermath: Global Media Doubts Surgical Strike Claims," *Express Tribune*, October 4, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2RR1v7n>.

⁵³ Helen Regan, Nikhil Kumar, Adeel Raja and Swati Gupta, "Pakistan Says It Shot down Two Indian Jets as Kashmir Border Crisis Deepens," *CNN.com*, February 28, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/02/27/india/india-pakistan-strikes-escalation-intl/index.html>.

⁵⁴ Encyclopaedia of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, s.v. "Om Gupta."

⁵⁵ General (Retd.) Ehsan-ul-Haq (Former DG-MI, DG-ISI and CJCSC), in discussion with the author, January 16, 2018.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

Pakistan's policy towards India is to deter its military equation and for deterrence, the former needs to rely more on its missiles rather than aircrafts. Unfortunately, given the thrust of the LWD-18, despite Pakistan's retaliatory capability, it must remain vigilant on the LoC and take concrete steps to counter any misadventure by the Indian Army.

Hybrid Warfare Strategy/Grey Areas/Covert Ops

Under the LWD-18, India will also be concentrating on integrating hybrid warfare scenarios into conventional and sub conventional domains which could be non-declaratory and non-attributable in execution. It has also declared that it is going to develop adequate capabilities in 'cyber, space and information' to impose heavy losses on the adversary.⁵⁶ Though, hybrid war or covert operations are not new in the Indo-Pak context, but such strategies have gained momentum in the recent past:

...when a country is unable to fight a conventional or nuclear war then you carry out hybrid warfare. Kulbhushan Yadav is part of such hybrid warfare. Apart from this, cyber warfare, Artificial Intelligence, space-based, and robotics are also very relevant in modern times.⁵⁷

The arrest of Kulbhushan Yadav was key to understanding India's hybrid warfare strategy which aimed at instability in the economic hub-Karachi, funding to the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and other insurgent groups to disrupt the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and target Pakistan's assets like ports and bases near the coast.⁵⁸

Given emphasis on hybrid warfare in the LWD-18, it is likely that the Indian military's reliance on it is likely to increase because any limited war strategy or doctrine will take time to become operationalised in the real

⁵⁶ "Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*, 6.

⁵⁷ Brigadier (Retd.) Feroz Hassan Khan (Research Professor, Department of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, USA), in discussion with the author, October 16, 2017.

⁵⁸ "Transcript of RAW Agent Kulbhushan's Confessional Statement," *News*, March 30, 2016.

sense and spirit because of operational weaknesses and threat of escalation. Policymakers in the incumbent BJP government would prefer to maintain pressure on Pakistan through this strategy as envisaged in the LWD-18, which may complicate Pakistan's internal security. It is imperative for the state of Pakistan to take effective countermeasures to mitigate such threats to internal security.

Military Diplomacy: Strategic Alliances with Major Powers

The LWD-18 put greater emphasis on military diplomacy or strategic partnerships with major powers.⁵⁹ The Indian military is already in strategic partnership with the United States (US), Russia, Israel and France, and obtaining highly sophisticated weapons and equipment from these partners. These strategic partnerships are not confined to defence collaboration only, but also cover diplomatic support at regional and global forums, intelligence sharing, civil nuclear energy cooperation, joint military exercises and training. Such collaboration is helping the Indian Armed Forces to plug-in the gaps in their overall operational capabilities. Moreover, the Indian military is adding essential weapons and equipment to operationalise their limited war offensive doctrines. Such strategic alliances can create a serious challenge for Pakistan to manage its security and maintain conventional balance vis-à-vis India in South Asia.

Deterrence/ Military Exercises/Joint Operations

The Indian Army has also put greater emphasis on the 'operational preparedness of Defensive/Strike Formations, positioning of Sectoral/Theatre Reserves, upgrading capability of Special Forces and demonstrated capability by conduct of military exercises.'⁶⁰ The Indian Army's LWD-18 also focuses on 'realistic, integrated, operational-oriented training for the Army along with threat assessment of the battlefield with modern technologies and network-centric and electronic warfare capabilities.'⁶¹ The army has paid special attention to operational preparedness, synergy and integration in sync with NCW and EW capabilities. Since 2004, the Indian military has conducted many wargames

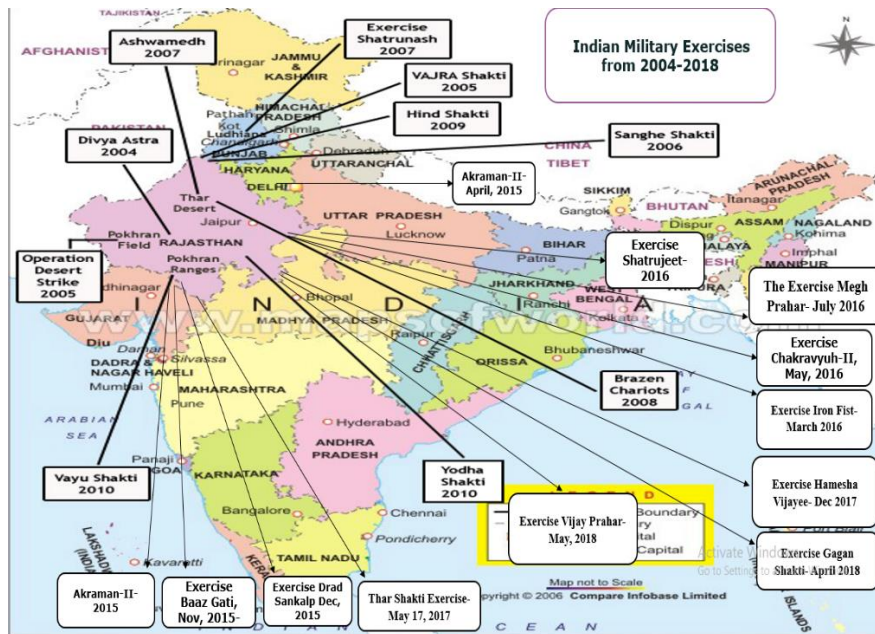
⁵⁹ "Indian Army, *Land Warfare Doctrine-2018*, 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

on the border with Pakistan (Figure 6). Though, military exercises are routine matter, an assessment suggests that they are trying hard to assimilate new technologies, work on joint operations and shorten mobilisation time.

Figure-6
Indian Military Exercises (2004-18)

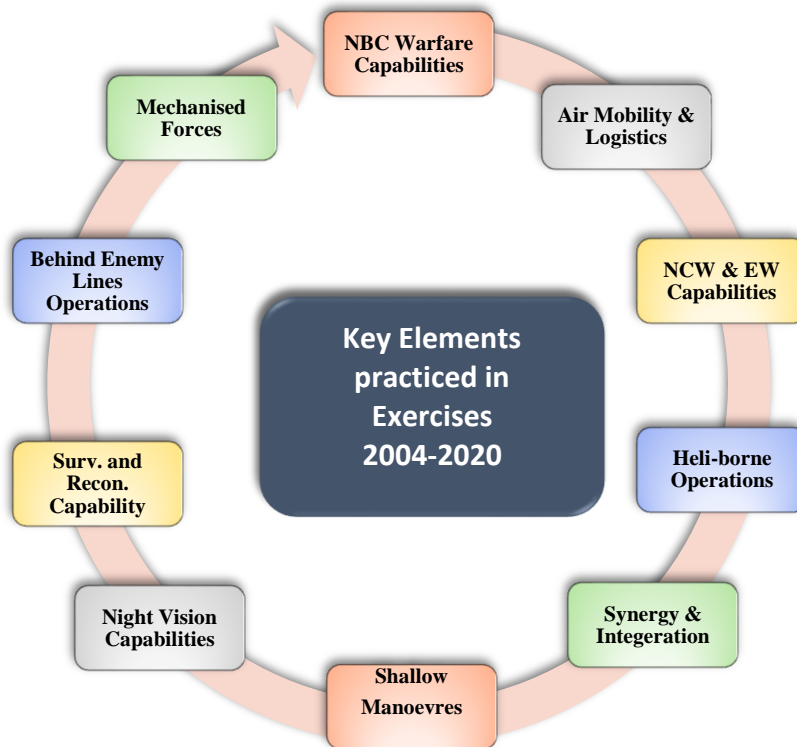


Source: Author's own.

It can be argued that India has tested and experimented synergy and integration among its Armed Forces for quick and robust operations. It has also practiced day and night war-fighting capabilities, surveillance and reconnaissance skills, behind enemy lines' operations, air mobility and logistics, mechanised Armour, Infantry and Artillery (see Figure 7). India has also exercised NBC warfare capabilities, NCW and EW capabilities. Navy's marine commandos, Special Forces operations, para-dropped, Strikes Corps, air-fire power, and Pivot Corps have also been part of these exercises carried out in the plains of Punjab and deserts of Rajasthan.

Figure-7

Key Elements of India's Military Exercises 2004-20



Source: Author's own.

The first aim of these exercises was to evolve this doctrine of proactive military operations or CSD. Secondly, they did some restructuring of forces, in terms of the size of the reserves, and then the relocation of their formations, to ensure forward deployment against Pakistan.⁶²

It is difficult to ascertain, whether India has fully achieved offensive capabilities or not because military exercises are totally different from real

⁶² General (Retd.) Ehsan-ul-Haq (Former DG-MI, DG-ISI and CJCSC), in discussion with the author, January 16, 2018.

Masood Ur Rehman Khattak

war scenarios. Sometimes it becomes difficult to assess an adversary's response from small-scale exercises. As far as Pakistan is concerned, it is a Nuclear Weapon State with strong conventional military capabilities. So, it is arguable that despite many military exercises on the border, the Indian military is still far short of necessary offensive capabilities, to launch any decisive conventional military operations against Pakistan.

Land Warfare Doctrine-2018: Implications for Pakistan

The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 is a combination of previous doctrines with new direction and strategies for implementation. The LWD-18 is no doubt a source of concern for Pakistan because the Indian Army never openly admitted to having a limited war doctrine i.e., CSD or proactive military operations. These doctrines remained shrouded mystery, until 2017 when the Indian Army claimed that CSD-type of doctrines are a reality in South Asia's strategic milieu.

Restructuring of Strike Formations: Threat of Limited Incursions

The most important thing in the LWD-18 is the restructuring of the Indian Army from bulky Strike Corps to smaller, quicker IBGs for swift operations at multiple places for shallow manoeuvres. The restructuring is not an easy task but at the same time cannot be ignored. Declared policy on such issues is a source of concern for Pakistan. The IOJ&K is facing brutal oppression by the Indian security forces. Retaliation by the Kashmiri youth is natural under these circumstances. It is a home-grown insurgency born out the increasing oppression and brutality by the IAF. Pakistan has no doubt always supported the cause of Kashmiris at all forums. The Indian government's allegations on Pakistan for supporting the Pathan Kot and other attacks were nullified by their own National Investigation Agency (NIA). It is most likely that in the near future the Indian military may try to create a reason to carry out *false flag politically motivated surgical strikes* across the LoC. In such a situation, Pakistan will be forced to give a *Quid Pro Quo Plus*⁶³ response which may escalate the situation.

⁶³ Adil Sultan, "India's Surgical Strike Doctrine: Implications for South Asian Strategic Stability," *Strategic Foresight for Asia*, February 26, 2020, <https://strafasia.com/indias-surgical-strike-doctrine-implications-for-south-asian-strategic-stability/>.

Two-front War Dilemma in the Making

Moreover, the restructuring of the Indian Army and likely deployment of IBGs at several places for multiple thrusts would create a serious challenge for Pakistan because of two reasons. First, Pakistan has already deployed more than 200,000 troops in tribal areas for counterterror operations to mitigate threats emanating from Afghan side of the border. After 9/11, the western border with Afghanistan became equally dangerous for Pakistan. The division of troops on both fronts would create a two-front war dilemma for Pakistan. The eastern border with India has always been difficult for the state of Pakistan, and now it has to manage its Afghan border even more critically because of Indian presence in Afghanistan. Under LWD-18, the Indian Army may try to capitalise on this weakness of Pakistan and initiate hostilities on the eastern border.

Conventional Asymmetries/Security Dilemma

Another major challenge for Pakistan would be the envisaged force modernisation in the LWD-18. Though, military modernisation is not new in the Indian Army, but to operationalise limited warfare operations, it has already commenced massive modernisation plans in sync with its doctrinal transformation which focus on intense, limited and quick operations. Apart from acquisition of the modern *T-90S* MBTs and *SU-30 MKI* aircrafts from Russia, *Barak-8* and *S-400* Long Range Air Defense systems from Israel and Russia, respectively, the Indian military is investing a lot of money in the ISR field and launched many communication/spy satellites for defence purposes. The real-time flow of information from space assets, along with AWACS and UAVs would give India an information edge against Pakistan.

The Indian military will be able to capitalize on the gaps in Pakistan's force deployment, strategic installations, and movement of troops or strategic assets close to the LoC or international border. The Indian military modernisation will be a great challenge for Pakistan in coming years, because it is difficult for the latter to match the former's military budget allocation. Pakistan is trying to overcome huge structural weaknesses in its overall economic conditions; and cannot afford to indulge in any arms race with India. If conventional balance of power tilts in India's favour, Pakistan would be compelled to lower the threshold and connect its conventional strategy with nuclear weapons:

One of the major objectives of Pakistan's nuclear capability is to deter not only India's nuclear capability, but also their conventional aggression. That's why our nuclear doctrine and nuclear policy remain sensitive to any changes in India's conventional doctrine and force capabilities. So, the major effect would be lowering of nuclear threshold which is neither good for India nor good for Pakistan.⁶⁴

Possibility of Limited War: Quick and Swift Operations/Surgical Strikes

The aim under new LWD-18 is to fight a limited war under the nuclear overhang. There are also indications of 'punitive strikes (surgical strikes) against state sponsored proxy war.' Here it could be implied that the Indian policymakers have made up their mind that every terrorist incident in India or IOJ&K would have backing or linkage with Pakistan. Such a thinking is aggressive and may become a precursor for escalation in South Asia. To further create pressure, the Indians may carry out a *false flag* operations to get sympathy from their masses and international backing/support for any limited incursions or surgical strikes. Both scenarios are a threat for Pakistan and it must be ready with countermeasures.

Renewed Hybrid Warfare/Covert Operations

The Indians have been trying to destabilise us internally...they have accordingly enhanced into all facets, whether psychological information, media, cultural, economic, military, diplomatic - all these things have been at work against Pakistan and it will continue to be so.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Brig. (Retd.) Dr Naeem A. Salik (Senior Research Fellow, CISS, Islamabad; former Director ACDA-SPD), in discussion with the author, April 5, 2018.

⁶⁵ General (Retd.) Ehsan-ul-Haq (Former DG-MI, DG-ISI and CJCS), in discussion with the author, January 16, 2018.

The Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine-2018: A Critical Analysis

Since conventional asymmetries are manageable at the moment and the chance of total war is remote because of the presence of nuclear deterrence, conventional symmetries and associated risks of escalation, limited war/sub-conventional or surgical strikes are also risky for India. So the best way to disrupt Pakistan's internal security may be to launch covert operations, ignite sectarian violence, capitalise on the ethno-political vulnerabilities of the country, target its premium assets like Gwadar Port, CPEC, and deter Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):

When you can achieve this, with a few million dollars why should you spend billions of dollars to cross into Pakistan, face unnecessary risk and world criticism also.⁶⁶

The LWD-18 entails guidelines for the Indian Army to conduct seamless operations under the nuclear shadow and well short of Pakistan's nuclear threshold. These covert operations, under the hybrid warfare strategy, are likely to continue and remain detrimental to Pakistan's national security.

Conclusion

The Land Warfare Doctrine-2018 of the Indian Army is inherently aggressive in nature, focusses on quick, swift and limited war scenarios below the nuclear threshold of Pakistan. The LWD-18 puts greater emphasis on force modernisation; restricting strike formations into smaller, quicker, well-equipped forces for joint operations with other arms of the Indian military as well as hybrid warfare. The Indian Army in its third doctrine (IAF Doctrine-2012, Joint Armed Forces Doctrine-2017 and LWD-18) in a row has given an indication that it may carry out 'punitive strikes' *surgical strikes* in case of any alleged terrorist attack on Indian soil or in IOJ&K. Pursuit of such aggressive thinking will invite strong, sharp and quick response from Pakistan which may escalate the conflict.

⁶⁶ ACM Tahir Rafique Butt (Former Chief of Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force (2012-15), in discussion with the author, November 23, 2017.

To counter the LWD-18, Pakistan must increase the number of indigenous *JF-17 Thunder* aircrafts to reduce asymmetry in the air. In addition, Pakistan must improve the manoeuvrability, firepower and range of *Al-Khalid* MBTs to counter any offensive thrusts by the Indian Army. It is necessary for Pakistan to induct advance Anti-Tank Guided Missiles to check-mate the Indian acquisitions of T-90S MBTs. The Indian military's acquisition of Apache Gunship forced Pakistan to induct modern attack helicopters from Turkey, China, US and Russia. These acquisitions would boost Pakistan Army's capabilities in any joint operations.

Space is one area where Pakistan needs to put extra efforts. Real-time information about the adversary's movement, deployment, size, mobilisation pattern and strategic sites/assets is vital for success in the battlefield. Though, Pakistan possesses limited surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities in its F-16, JF-17 Thunder Aircraft, AWACS and UAVs etc. but what a spy satellite can do, they can't. The Indian Airforce is aiming for advance aircraft which may join the service in next few years. Many Indian aircrafts possess standoff capabilities. To cater such a threat, Pakistan needs High to Medium Air Defence (HIMAD) to ensure security of its air space. Pakistan must also induct advance Artillery Guns to enhance its firepower on the border and LoC to deter/slow down the advance of tanks or APCs. Pakistan must develop such defences and strategies which make it costlier for India to carry out any misadventure against the country. The consolidation of conventional deterrence, smart acquisitions, better strategies, regular military exercises and self-reliance would help Pakistan to overcome challenges posed by doctrinal manoeuvring by the Indian military. ■