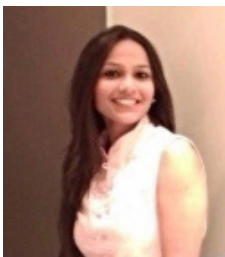




Pakistan's Response to Cold Start Doctrine



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In January 2017, Gen Bipin Rawat publicly acknowledged for the first time the existence of Cold Start Doctrine (CSD), though it has been operational since 2004. Despite much speculation in India and anxiety in Pakistan, India had kept its cards close to its chest, until now. In an interview with India Today, India's new COAS said 'the Cold Start doctrine exists for conventional military operation.' On the nature of future wars, he said 'wars will be intense and short because there'll always be international pressure in wars between two nations'¹. Born out of the failure of Operation Parakram in the aftermath of the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on Indian parliament, the strategy's existence and specifics have been kept deliberately ambiguous. This ambiguity has been used by Pakistan to disregard the doctrine as a paper tiger- an unviable Indian plan meant to deter Pakistan and keep its Generals guessing. At the

same time, Pakistan considers CSD as a highly destabilizing development for the region as it reverses the strategic stability established in 2002. Further, the de-hyphenation of US policy towards Pakistan and India and its growing bonhomie with the latter has increased pressure on Pakistan- at the conventional level, in the form of failed deals on weapons transfer, and at the nuclear level, heat to reverse development of tactical nuclear weapons as well as halt fissile material production. This has led to even closer ties between Islamabad and Beijing that view developments in the South Asian continent are to its disadvantage.

In this article I look at Pakistan's response to India's Cold Start Doctrine. The first section spells out the need for the doctrine and its details as it stands today. The second section looks at Pakistan's perception of the doctrine. In the last section, Pakistan's response to CSD is analyzed at both the conventional and nuclear level.

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India's Cold Start Doctrine

In its quest for finding space for a limited conventional war under the nuclear umbrella, the Indian army articulated the Cold Start doctrine in 2004. India aims to dominate escalation while keeping the war limited and below the nuclear threshold. It is instructive to make a distinction between 'limited war' and 'Cold Start'. While the former is the larger category within which CSD falls, the latter's effectiveness lies in the alacrity with which the army can be mobilized for action¹. Interestingly, 'Cold Start' is a colloquial term and was not officially used in the 2004 publication *Indian Army Doctrine*². The doctrinal shift away from a defensive posture adopted since independence was brought about by the events that unfolded after the nuclear tests in 1998. The 1999 Kargil war and the 2001 attack on the Indian parliament had shown that nuclear weapons could not stabilize the subcontinent. Strategic stability in the sub-continent did not preclude tactical instability at the lower end of the conflict spectrum². The wisdom of the then existing military doctrine, known as the Sundarji doctrine, was tested when it took a month for the Indian army to mobilize its strike corps after the terrorist attack at the heart of Indian democracy. The three mechanized strike corps were situated deep inside Indian territory and took time to cover the long journey to the border. This gave Pakistan time to counter-mobilize and for the world community and major powers to intervene. Even the Indian leadership dithered under international pressure.

1. For example, Kargil war was a 'limited war', but not the kind CSD envisions. See 'From 'cold start' to 'limited war', many unanswered questions', N. Sathiya Moorthy, 26th January 2015, *The Hindu* <http://www.thehindu.com/books/from-cold-start-to-limited-war-many-unanswered-questions/article6824105.ece>

2. See 'The Stability-Instability Paradox, Misperception, and Escalation Control in South Asia' by Michael Krepon <https://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/stability-instability-paradox-south-asia.pdf>

Learning its lesson from Operation Parakram, the Indian army devised a more proactive strategy to ready major formations to mount a quick and swift surprise attack. Instead of deep penetration along a narrow front to sever Pakistan in half, it aimed for shallow penetration across a wider front.

It was envisaged that India's conventional superiority could be used to counter Pakistan's conventional forces as well as its use of sub-conventional warfare in Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of India, without either of the country going nuclear. In case of grave provocation, like a 26/11 type terrorist attack, Indian military can mount a response to Pakistan within 48 hours. According to Gurmeet Kanwal, the doctrine has two major elements- 'pivot corps' (defensive or holding corps) were configured to give them offensive capability, allowing them to launch an offensive operation from a 'cold start', thereby denying Pakistan a chance to respond adequately; Strike Corps were moved to cantonments closer to the border for faster forward deployment³. A number of division-sized 'integrated battle groups' (IBGs) with offensive capability would launch 'bite and hold operations' along the international border with Pakistan. In contrast with the mechanized strike corps that took time to make the long journey to the border, 8-10 IBGs would use the armor and reserve infantry available along the border. The Strike Corps would then build on the success achieved by IBGs and the captured territory would be used as a bargaining chip. Pakistan's war-waging potential will be destroyed through the application of ground-based and aerially supported asymmetric firepower. At the conventional level, the doctrine is premised on the belief that multiple attacks at lightning speed along the border would give no time to Pakistan to calibrate a response and throw its leadership in disarray. At the non-conventional/nuclear level, the doctrine presupposes that the attack would not be deep enough to pose an existential threat to Pakistan and hence provide no justification to escalate conflict to the nuclear level. Indian defense analysts believe that Cold Start doctrine is India's response to Pakistan's

asymmetric warfare and its use of terrorism as a tool of state policy, and functions by increasing the cost of continuing its present (supposedly) low-cost strategy⁴.

Pakistan's perception of Cold Start Doctrine- a real or paper tiger?

Pakistan views Cold Start doctrine as impractical, inherently escalatory and destabilizing for the sub-continent. Gen Kidwai, the man who steered Pakistan's nuclear strategy for over 15 years and was the director-general of the Strategic Plans Division, marvels at Indian 'naivety of finding space for limited conventional war, despite the nuclear capabilities of both sides'⁵. Even Indian military analysts, along with some western analysts, are sensitive to the destabilizing effect of the doctrine for India-Pakistan equation³. Pakistan would have us believe that it treats CSD the way Mao treated US nuclear weapons- as a paper tiger- while at the same time asserting it poses a serious threat to Pakistan in particular and strategic stability in the sub-continent in general. Its criticism is two-fold: on the one hand, it cannot be implemented given the lack of capability and initiative on the part of India; on the other hand, it threatens fuelling an arms race between the two neighbors. As per Pakistani military analysts, the doctrine is meant to deter Pakistan and keep its Generals

3. Gurmeet Kanwal points out that Cold Start 'is a good doctrine from India's point of view, but one that could adversely impact strategic stability since Pakistan's nuclear strategy is premised on countering India's conventional military superiority with a nuclear shield'. http://www.idsai.in/idsacomments/IndiasColdStartDoctrineandStrategicStability_gkanwal_010610 See also 'India's Doctrine Puzzle: Limiting War in South Asia' by Ali Ahmed, 2014, Routledge; 'A Cold Start for Hot Wars? The Indian Army's New Limited War Doctrine, Walter C. Ladwig III, *International Security*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pg 158-190; 'Taking 'Cold Start' out of the freezer?', Vipin Narang, Walter C. Ladwig III, 11th January 2017, *The Hindu* <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/Taking-%E2%80%98Cold-Start%E2%80%99-out-of-the-freezer/article17019025.ece>

occupied, without actually being implementable. In their understanding, India lacks the capability to mount such attacks. Naveed Ahmad argues that 'the doctrine has never been tested except for on-paper war-games in India's military schools'⁶. Commenting on the perceived psychological shortcomings of Indian army, Lt Col (Retd) Khalid Masood Khan argues that the doctrine is 'not in consonance with the psyche of Indian Army', as the doctrine requires 'swift, aggressive and proactive actions', whereas the Indian army lacks initiative and is slow in responding⁷. They are joined in this analysis by strategic analysts like Vipin Narang and Walter C Ladwig III, who believe that '[Indian] army simply lacks the material and organization to implement the more aggressive versions of Cold Start'⁸. At the same time, Pakistan views CSD as a real threat to its security⁹ as well as the stability of the region. It accuses India of fuelling an arms race in South Asia by creating a Guns or Butter dilemma that is detrimental for the general welfare of the two countries where vast populations still live in abject poverty,¹⁰.

Developments at the Conventional and Nuclear Level

a. Conventional response

In response to CSD, Pakistan asserts it is prepared for 'dealing with all types of internal and external threats, may it be conventional or sub-conventional; whether it is cold start or hot start'¹¹. While Pakistan's development of TNWs has dominated the narrative, the steps it has taken to bolster its conventional response are worth taking note. The Pakistani media has been abuzz with the idea of Pakistan's 'new concept of war fighting' (NCWF). As per news reports, 'Pakistan's military is all set to adopt a "new concept" of war for fighting future conventional threats, specifically pre-empting India's cold-start military doctrine'

and ‘after the implementation of the new war fighting strategy, the Pakistan Army would be able to mobilize its forces faster than India’¹². In an article available on the official website of ISPR, media wing of Pakistani army, Muhammad Latif lionized military’s preparedness on the occasion of Defense Day thus, ‘Through a series of War Games Pakistan evolved and matured New Concept of War Fighting to counter Indian Pro Active Strategy further narrowing the space for Limited War’¹³. To achieve this, Pakistan has been modernizing its conventional forces with the help of an array of defense partners, prime among them being China and the United States. Pakistani Army has also been conducting military exercises close to the border in strategic locations in the Punjab province, along with relocating its defensive formations forward, moving closer to the border with India. The Pakistani armed forces- Army, Air Force and Navy-conduct regular exercises and war games to validate their military doctrines and operational preparedness, as well as to display their firepower and military might to the world. The objective is to come up with ‘comprehensive response to all threats ... both the internal challenge from terror groups of various shades and the conventional threat of external aggression’¹⁴. Azm-i-Nau of the Army and High Mark of the Air Force are the most important exercises conducted by Pakistan on its eastern front.

Azm-i-Nau (New Resolve)

It is a major field exercise conducted by the army. Started in 2009, the exercise has been an integral part of Army’s NCWF. The third exercise took place in 2010 and saw participation of troops from all arms and services, along with engagement of the PAF¹⁵. Between 10th April and 15th May, over 20,000 soldiers engaged in pre-assigned missions in areas of Southern Punjab, Sialkot and Sindh, along Pakistan’s eastern border with India

. The Air Force’s major air exercise, High Mark (discussed below), was fully integrated. As per reports, it was the biggest exercise conducted by the army since Zarb-e-Momin in 1989¹⁶. In 2013, the forth chapter of the exercise was conducted at its National Defense University in Islamabad to test the preparedness of armed forces. It aims at ‘validation and crystallization of operational plans prepared in view of the emerging threat environment’. In its updated ‘Army Doctrine’, the military recognized ‘religious extremists and insurgents’ as the greatest national threat¹⁷.

High Mark

After a ten year hiatus, the Pakistan Air Force conducted an air war exercise titled High Mark in 2005, a year after CSD was announced. High Mark is Pakistan Air Force’s most comprehensive military exercise which has been held every five years since. The 2005 exercise was spread over a period of a month and conducted in three phases¹⁸. The high-decibel demonstration comprised of 60 sorties by its various combat aircrafts, including Mirage, F-7 and A-5 aircraft and Cobra helicopters¹⁹. In 2010, the exercise was held between 15th March and 23rd April, covering a vast area from Skardu in the North till Arabian Sea in the South²⁰. In the 45-day exercise, the PAF conducted joint operations with Pakistan Army and Pakistan Navy with the aim to further operational preparedness and coordination. For the first time, newly inducted JF-17 Thunder aircraft, Saab-2000 Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft and Air-to-Air Refueller aircraft were made part of the drill. As already mentioned, it took place alongside Army’s exercise code-named Azm-i-Nau. The latest edition of the exercise was held in a charged atmosphere in the aftermath of the Uri attack. As part of the 40-day exercise, PAF practiced landing jets on the Lahore-Islamabad (M-2) motorway²¹.

Other exercises include Saffron Bandit, Wide Awake and Flat Out by the Air Force and Sea Spark, Shamsheer-e-Behr and Tahaffuz-e-Sahil by the Navy. The latest is Exercise Raad ul Barq (Strike of Thunder) in which JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, helicopter gunships and Al-Khalid tanks took part, hitting designated targets²².

Pakistan is acutely aware of India's superior conventional capability and does not completely rely on its own conventional forces. In its view, the conventional military balance that was already in favour of India has progressively become unfavourable for Pakistan. It notes with concern that India is the world's largest weapons importer; and is undergoing rapid military modernization and inducting sophisticated offensive land, air and sea weapons systems²³. Further, given the internal security situation Pakistan is grappling with, its forces are dispersed and spread thin. As Munir Akram points out, 'Pakistan has had to deploy over 150,000 troops on the western border due to its involvement in the cross-border counterterrorism campaign in Afghanistan, reducing its conventional defense capacity against India'²⁴. By its own admission, its most potent response to CSD has been the development of short-range, low-yield, theatre or tactical nuclear weapons²⁵.

b. Nuclear response

Knowing full well that it cannot match India in terms of conventional capability, Pakistan has expanded the size and range of its nuclear weapons. According to Pakistan, the adoption of a more proactive doctrine by India and the inability of Pakistan to counter it with conventional capability 'obliged' it to develop TNWs. A more realistic assessment reveals that this developed is in keeping with Pakistan's views on nuclear weapons. Unlike India, for whom nuclear weapons are to deter threat or use of nuclear weapons, Pakistan aims to deter even conventional attacks with its nuclear weapons. Nuclear capability is central to Pakistan's defense policy as it gives the country a sense of strategic parity while allowing it to engage in risk-taking

behavior²⁶. Pakistan is believed to possess between 130–140 nuclear weapons²⁷ in its ever expanding nuclear arsenal²⁸. It is working towards developing a full triad –land, air and sea capability- while inducting Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs)²⁹. In this regard, the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement of 2005 has made Pakistan even more insecure. Zafar Iqbal Cheema highlights Pakistan's fear that the Agreement and the NSG exemption granted to India would allow India access to nuclear material for civil use, freeing up its own sources of uranium for its weapons program³⁰.

Pakistan has had to rethink its nuclear doctrine in the light of India's offensive conventional doctrine. It has changed its original stance of 'minimum credible deterrence' to 'full-spectrum deterrence'. As per official statements by Pakistan's National Command Authority (NCA) and Strategic Plans Division (SPD), the 'purpose of Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) is to plug the gap created by Indian conventional advantage in the deterrence stability in South Asia'³¹. In essence Pakistan has taken steps to deter India along the strategic, operational and tactical spectrum of threat. At the lower end, tactical nuclear weapons are meant to make India think thrice before launching an 'offensive defense' attack as Pakistan can quickly escalate the conflict to a nuclear level. It has developed Hatf-9 (Nasr) that has an estimated range of 60 kilometers, with the aim of using it against advancing Indian armed forces in the battlefield. These low-yield, short-range nuclear weapons give Pakistan 'flexible deterrence option', giving decision-makers more alternatives in case of an Indian offensive. It is supposed to be Pakistan's antidote to India's CSD by making any military action against Pakistani army on its territory nuclear-risky. As a consequence, Pakistan's nuclear threshold is believed to be much lower today. By redrawing its red-lines, Pakistan aims to achieve the twin objective of denying India any space for a conventional attack and, in case conflict actually breaks out, compelling the major powers to intervene to prevent further escalation.

They are smug in their belief that the world community would be forced to hold India back. While Pakistan accuses India of walking a path fraught with danger, it is negligent of the consequences of its own actions. TNWs pose the problem accruing from the changes in command and control that their induction entails. Given their short range, they will be placed with Forward Commanders. The de-centralization of command and control makes them vulnerable to unauthorized use or theft³².

Pakistan has also developed long-range missiles in the form of Shaheen III to deny second-strike capability to India. With a range of 2750 km it can reach targets as far as Andaman and Nicobar Islands where India has an important tri-service base. In the words of Gen. Kidwai, 'Pakistan cannot afford to let any landmass, whether it's an island, or it's a mainland, to be out of its range ... there have been reports of the Nicobar, and the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, being developed as bases ... if those bases are not covered the inadvertently Pakistan will be allowing ... second strike capability to India'³³. Pakistan has also developed the mobile ground-launched cruise missile Babur, or Hatf-7, that has a range of 750 km and the air-launched Ra'ad (thunder) or Hatf-8 cruise missile that has a range of 350 km. Both can travel on subsonic speeds. In terms of sea-based capability, Pakistan claims to have tested Babur-3, a Submarine Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM) fired from an underwater, mobile platform³⁴.

Conclusion

India adopted Cold Start Doctrine in 2004 to find space for limited conventional actions in the backdrop of nuclear weapons, in part to counter Pakistan's use of sub-conventional warfare and support for terrorism. Pakistan views the doctrine as adventurous, destabilizing and antithetical to its security and stability of the region. In response, Pakistan is modernizing its conventional forces while also beefing-up its nuclear capability, especially by developing tactical nuclear weapons.

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