

# MILITARY STRATEGY

## Important Step Towards Efficacy in Joint Operations

# Analyses of the Joint Doctrine

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On 23 Apr 2017, the Chairman Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC) Admiral Sunil Lanba, along with the Chiefs of the Army and Air Force, Gen Bipin Rawat and Air Chief Marshal BS Dhanoa, released the Joint Doctrine of and for the Indian Armed Forces. It was a show of solidarity among the Service Chiefs indicative of congruence and convergence of interests leading to enhancing the efficacy of joint operations in the long run.

For far too long the Services have been blamed for protecting their turf and thwarting optimisation of scarce resource. The perceived divide among the Services has been exploited over the years to thwart projects, modernisation and growth of the services, often playing one against the other. The Joint Doctrine driven by HQ Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) has finally found approval among the three Services as also it is rare for a security conscious military to have promulgated this doctrine concurrently in the public domain, and hence should be analysed in this backdrop.

### Prime Minister's Challenge

While addressing the Combined Commanders' Conference, in December 2015, onboard INS Vikramaditya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi challenged senior military commanders to reform their "beliefs, doctrines, objectives and strategies" identifying five broad areas for reforms – enhancing jointness (the ability of the army, navy and air force to operate together), manpower rationalization, defence planning, restructuring higher defence management and the defence procurement process. The analysis of problems challenged the assumptions and perspectives of India's senior military commanders. The Indian military is among the least 'joint' major militaries in the world, which needs to be addressed.

All major nations have a joint doctrine for their respective armed forces, which facilitates jointness in all military domains. Logically, all military doctrines and war waging/ war fighting philosophy is culled from the National Security Strategy (NSS). The ideal construct is that the NSS lays down the framework for the armed forces to derive the National Military Strategy (NMS). The NMS in turn dictates the National Military Objectives (NMOs). The Joint doctrine is,



Chief of the Army Staff General Bipin Rawat, Indian Navy Chief Admiral Sunil Lanba and Indian Air Force Chief Air Chief Marshal Birender Singh Dhanoa salute the national tri-colour.

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thereafter, derived from the NMS and the NMOs in keeping with the NSS. The joint doctrine once articulated and promulgated dictates the desired military capabilities giving structural shape to the organisations, material, manpower, training and leadership needs of the armed forces. The Joint

Doctrine in the Indian context aims to facilitate the five domains of Joint Intelligence, Planning, Communications, Logistics and Training. Jointness in these domains is an imperative to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of joint operations. The single Service doctrines promulgated till date shied away from optimising the resources and war fighting strengths of the other services. Though derived from the same document – Defence Minister's Operational Directive, these were competitive and conflicting in many areas.

### Defence Minister's Directive

In the 1980s, Defence Minister's Operational Directive was for the armed forces to maintain a posture of dissuasive deterrence vis-à-vis Pakistan and one of dissuasive defence in relation to China. Translated into policy, it meant that the Army could plan defensive strategies which could involve deep strikes into Pakistan. However, with regard to China, the idea was to defend Indian territory with a plan that did not involve any incursion into Chinese territory. However, in the mid-2000s this changed and the Operational Directive called on the forces to be prepared to



Army paratroopers show their skills at an IAF fire-power demonstration at Pokhran Ranges.

fight and win an all-out two-front war that could involve coordinated action by Pakistan and China, covering the entire spectrum from sub-conventional to that involving the use of nuclear weapons. This assessment was not based on any rigorous exercise like a White Paper or a Defence Strategy Review, but a several paragraph long document drafted by the bureaucrats and the military and signed by the minister.

In the absence of a strategic vision for defence, the MoD is engaged in routine: Producing the Integrated Defence Staff-written Raksha Mantri Directive for Armed Forces, which is no substitute for a Strategic Defence and Security Review or a CCS-scripted Strategic and Political Guidance.

### Highlights of the Joint Doctrine

The Indian Armed Forces are one of the most battle hardened and combat rich force in the world with a proven record of ensuring national security. However, the key question is, are they optimal and future ready? Lack of jointness has been recognised as a major weakness and hence the imperative need for a pragmatic, acceptable and an implementable Joint Doctrine for the Indian Armed Forces. What does this joint doctrine detail? The joint doctrine starts by amplifying the national values, aim and interests, outlining the National Security Objectives and the NSS, a task which has been self assigned.

While releasing the Joint Doctrine, Chairman COSC Admiral Sunil Lanba quoted the aim, "This Doctrine, pitched at the Military Strategic Level, is meant to guide all members of the Indian Armed Forces, on the necessary concepts, principles, and ideas, under which to achieve the higher goals set upon by the political leadership as deemed in the Indian Constitution". He went on to amplify that the doctrine "is a reference for the policy makers, bureaucrats, technocrats, diplomats, defence industry in public/private sector, academia, fourth/fifth estate, our citizens, etc". The document is, hence, obviously broad-based being a doctrine - a 'code of beliefs' or a

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'body of teachings', and, hence, leaves out many specifics. The Joint Doctrine does pass muster and will contribute to and guide "Force Development".

The 61-page document also attempts to cover the multiple security threats and challenges and the nature and levels of war. Thereafter, the joint doctrine attempts to detail the military role as an instrument of national power and not as an essential element of comprehensive national power, it lays down the various functions of military power from the conventional to the sub-conventional and non combat domains.

Doctrine dictates and defines the five key elements of organisational structure, material, manpower, training and leadership. The primary role of the military is to ensure national security, territorial integrity and unity – defending the nation

from external aggression, translated it implies that the military's primary goal is operation preparedness and readiness for conventional operations against external aggression. Preparation for war ensures peace and hence doctrine for conventional operations is central to the military. In the conventional domain, the joint doctrine lays down the conceptual framework of the application of military power in the land, sea, air, space, cyber and special operations domain, amplifying the planning and conduct of joint operations in the Air-land, Air-transport, Airborne, Maritime-air, Amphibious and Battlespace awareness operations. To say that these are comprehensive will be a fallacy but the authors must be commended for making a brave and honest beginning, which will definitely form the foundation of jointness among the Indian Armed Forces in the years ahead.

In the sub conventional domain the Doctrine includes "Surgical Strikes" a phrase which has caught the imagination of the Indian public. 'Surgical Strikes' is one of the many methods of executing 'punitive operations'. It would have been better if the sub conventional doctrine had included both 'punitive' and pre-emptive operations' as that would have facilitated capacity enhancement and capability development for these operations in the future as also sent out a clear signal to Pakistan in the doctrinal shift. On ground of course punitive operations have been executed without remorse in the pulverising of Pakistani post in Naushera sector on 23 May 2017, as retaliation for the beheading on 1 May.

Much of the debate in the public on the Joint Doctrine is based on the use of the phrase 'credible deterrence' rather than 'credible minimum deterrence', the debate is on whether or not there is a shift in the draft nuclear doctrine and India's position on the subject or this is an error which needs to be corrected. The verdict on this is of course awaited. Though many feel that an ambivalent nuclear doctrine has its own advantages specially so in the context of Pakistan, however India as responsible nation has a clearly defined NFU doctrine.

In trying to dissect every word we will miss the woods from the trees. To say that this is a very comprehensive and all encompassing document will be incorrect and also to criticise this as an exercise in futility calling for the withdrawal of the document will be equally naive. Very often we tend to ape the US structures and systems little realising that In the Indian context, the threats are mostly defined and recognizable. The military structures and doctrines should be designed for and cater to India's security threats and needs, addressing the various challenges imposed by unsettled borders in the North with China and a proxy war being waged by Pakistan in the West. The threats in this document do not take into account a collusive or a collaborative threat from China and Pakistan, a threat which was stated by none other than the National Security Adviser (NSA) at the Hindustan Times summit on 23 Nov 2014, as, "India has to be prepared for a two-front war and build deterrence that ensures conflict is not an option for its adversaries- India has two neighbours, both nuclear powers (which) share a

strategic relationship and a shared adversarial view of India."

### Jointness vs Integration

Somewhere along the course of defining and achieving jointness, the doctrine does get mixed up between jointness and integration, attempting more than it can handle. The doctrine clubs integration/jointness, seeking integrated structures to enhance effectiveness in joint operations. The joint doctrine should have remained focussed on enhancing the efficacy of joint operations by giving the requisite impetus to joint intelligence, planning, communication, logistics and training. The doctrine, however, lays down integrated structures for planning, intelligence, training and logistics in addition to procurement and perspective plans. It also amplifies integrated structures in the cyber, space and special operations domain, rather than laying down the organisation, mandate and road map for joint commands in these domains. Jointmanship and Integration are very often used interchangeably, but they are two different concepts. While jointmanship would help achieve the desired end state, integration would invariably result in synergy and thus transcend the desired end state. Jointmanship can be enforced physically while integration commences in the mind. This lack of integrated thinking was obvious in the 1962 and 1965 conflicts; the former was left purely to the Army to conduct, and the later saw each service fighting very much their own individual wars. During the 1971 War the armed forces demonstrated an unparalleled jointness in planning and conduct of operations, more due to the personalities involved rather than formal structures. Another example of effective joint operations is Operation Cactus in the Maldives - again the success is owed to personalities rather than formal structures. The joint doctrine should have focussed on joint structures rather than integrated, which would have come with time after jointness gains more acceptability and the various benefits are visible.

### Criticism Unjustified

Defence analysts and the strategic community within India have mostly been critical of the Joint Doctrine issued. In essence their arguments are similar, pointing mainly to certain areas not being comprehensively addressed. Though they may be right in their contention, however, this document must be studied in a positive light as it does attempt to ensure convergence among the three services, and a focused approach to capability development guiding the two major components of 'Force Structuring' and 'Force Development'. The attempt to define and promulgate the doctrine is even more laudable as this has been achieved in the absence of a National Security Strategy. The document is hence premised on the armed forces perspective of the national aims and NSS. Certain critics have been unduly harsh and have not only been critical of the Joint doctrine but also of the military. This is quite understandable as military bashing is the order of the day.



A T-72 main battle tank wades ashore from a landing craft during an amphibious exercise 'Tropex 2009'

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### Combat Effectiveness

The doctrine also attempts to address two major weaknesses, that of Higher Defence Organisation reforms and Civil-Military relations. These are subjects for study in itself and could have been best avoided. Though these two form the basis why the Indian military continues to be confined to a military force and not be a military power. Based on the directions of the former defence minister Manohar Parrikar, the Lt Gen Shekatkar Committee was tasked to study and submit a comprehensive report on "Enhancing Combat Effectiveness by Rebalancing the Defence Budget". The committee submitted its

report in end-December 2016 and, as has been widely reported, implementation instructions have been issued only for 88 of the 218 recommendations. The implementation instructions pertain to the Services only and recommendations with regard to other structures of the MoD including Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), Indian Ordnance Factories, Directorate General of Quality Assurance (DGQA), Controller General Defence Accounts (CGDA), Military Engineering Service (MES), Directorate General Border Roads (DGBR), etc., remain unactioned as it adversely impacts established comfort zones of the non-military organisations of the defence domain. The implementation of the recommendations would in itself have enhanced considerable jointness in all structures and systems of the MoD.

Irrespective of the few flaws, the Service Chiefs and the CISC should be complimented on issuing the Joint Doctrine for the Indian Armed Forces and, equally importantly, posting this on the public domain for deliberations and discussions. There is nothing wrong with criticism as it serves its own purpose. However, responsible and rational deliberations leading to constructive contributions will definitely be appreciated by the armed forces. The issue of the Joint Doctrine is only one step towards enhancing the combat effectiveness of the armed forces, much more needs to be done in the defence reforms. Streamlining of defence procurement procedures and a push to achieve strategic autonomy by reducing the dependency on imports and involving the private sector in defence manufacturing is in the implementation stage. However, other important defence reforms, in particular addressing issues of higher defence organisation and appointing of a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) with a requisite mandate and authority seems no where on the horizon - a must to enhance the efficacy and effectiveness of the armed forces and joint operations.