

Indian Army - Manning The Borders

“We do the difficult as a routine. The impossible may take a little longer”

An Indian Army Belief

The national aim is to “ TRANSFORM INDIA TO A MODERN, PROSPEROUS AND SECURE NATION” . As security is a precursor to long term peace, stability and development , securing India’s disputed and porous borders is a national imperative.

India’s land borders extend 15106.7 kms with seven nations including 106 km border with Afghanistan, touching 17 states and 92 districts. India also shares the longest disputed borders in the world, the Sino-Indian border extends 3488 km with China laying claim to over a 1,10,000 sq km of Indian territory. The India Pakistan line of control (LC) extends 772.1 kms and the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) along the Siachen glacier extends another 126.2 kms. Pakistan also occupies 13,297 sq kms of Indian territory in J&K. Pakistan has been waging a proxy war for the last quarter of a century. India faces multiple and varied security threats and challenges across the full spectrum of conflict from small wars to collusive and hybrid wars to conventional and nuclear wars. The internal security threats emanate from across the borders with active support to terrorist and insurgent groups. India’s porous borders and lack of development in border areas are a major contributor to security concerns and challenges.

The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) Report , brought to light many grave deficiencies in India’s security management system particularly in the areas of Intelligence, Border and Defence Management. A Group of Ministers(GoM) was convened in April 2000, to review the national security system in its entirety and in particular, to consider the recommendations of the KRC and formulate specific proposals for implementation. Multiplicity of forces on the same border led to lack of accountability on the part of the forces. To enforce accountability, the GoM decided that the principle of ‘One Border One Force’ be adopted while considering deployment of forces at the border. The unsettled borders with China (LAC) and Pakistan (LC) were mandated to be manned and defended by the army. The LC and AGPL are manned by the army and the few BSF battalions deployed on the LC are under command and operational control of the army.

However, along the more sensitive LAC, the ITBP deployed alongside the army continues to function under the directions of Ministry of Home Affairs(MHA). As the ITBP is not under the operational control of the army there is a lack of coordination and accountability, defeating the very concept of the one force one border as enunciated by the GoM. This needs to be corrected and the ITBP placed under operational control of the army to ensure a more effective management of the sensitive LAC.

The Line of actual Control (LAC)

The 3488 km long Sino-Indian border is a peculiar set of contradictions, being the longest disputed border in the world as also the most peaceful disputed border with the last shot in anger fired on October 25th, 1975. A fragile peace exists ever since , with the disputed border being the ever present potential driver for conflict between the two nuclear armed neighbours - home to one third of humanity.

The mandate of the army to maintain peace and tranquility along the LAC. The task has its own challenges as there is no common understanding of the LAC. The Sino - Indian border runs along some of the most inhospitable and hostile terrain in the world with altitudes averaging 15,000 feet, and thus while temperatures are low at minus 20 to 30 degree celsius, tempers run high, due the high altitude effects on troops. As the borders are disputed, intrusions are a common occurrence on account of differing perceptions of LAC. China's growing assertiveness is evident with the increase in frequency and depth of transgressions/ intrusions. These intrusions often lead to a 'face-off' between own Army troops and the PLA, which last from a few hours to a few weeks. Some 'face off' get prolonged, like the recent ones in the month of Sept 2014 coinciding with the visit of President Xi Jinping at Chumar and at Depsang Plains in Apr / May 2013. It is an established pattern that intrusions occur during high profile visits and meetings, the latest being reported on 14 Nov in Chushul sector coinciding again with PM Narendra Modi's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping ahead of the G-20 summit in Antalya. Such high profile intrusions have the potential to spiral into a skirmish and can become a driver for conflict, however on account of the firm stance, professionalism and commitment of the Indian Army as also the PLA, these sensitive incidents have been contained, resolved and status quo maintained. The army is likely to face more and more such situations , especially so, in view of a firm and fair stance being adopted by the present Indian Government in guarding our territories .

Effective manning of the LAC is one of the more challenging tasks of the army. The infrastructure on own side is poor and non existent. The single road axis to most of the sectors is vulnerable to disruption both during monsoons and winters. This not only

impacts operational preparedness and readiness but is also detrimental to administration and morale of the troops deployed, who feel isolated and take time and effort going on leave. On the other hand China has constructed state of the art multimodal multidimensional infrastructure, focussing on the three 'Rs' Roads , Reserves and Radars for manning the borders. A concept which India could well replicate and practice.

It is also unfortunate that the government has not given adequate and due recognition to the many sacrifices of the army troops deployed along the LAC. The army had taken up of case of declaring the area along the LAC as Operation Falcon in 1987. This would have implied giving recognition and a sense of pride to the troops deployed along LAC, and the next of kin (NOK) of the gallant soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice would be entitled to similar monetary benefits and family pension as granted to those deployed on the LC. However, for reasons best known to the government, the sanction is still awaited.

It is to the credit of the Indian army that given the many challenges and sensitivities they have maintained peace and tranquility and ensured equilibrium along the LAC, under the most trying and difficult of conditions.

The Line of Control(LC).

India's land borders extend 15106.7 kms with seven nations including 106 km border with Afghanistan, touching 17 states and 92 districts. India also shares the longest disputed borders in the world, the Sino-Indian border extends 3488 km with China laying claim to over a 1,10,000 sq km of Indian territory. The India Pakistan line of control (LC) extends 772.1 kms and the Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL) along the Siachen glacier extends another 126.2 kms. Pakistan also occupies 13,297 sq kms of Indian territory in J&K. Pakistan has been waging a proxy war for the last quarter of a century. India faces multiple and varied security threats and challenges across the full spectrum of conflict from small wars to collusive and hybrid wars to conventional and nuclear wars. The internal security threats emanate from across the borders with active support to terrorist and insurgent groups. India's porous borders and lack of development in border areas are a major contributor to security concerns and challenges.

The Indian army is by far one of the most battle hardened and combat rich army in the world, it is also one of the most professional, disciplined, committed and motivated force. In spite of the many challenges of task and terrain as also many

constraints of availability of modern arms, equipment and other wherewithal, the army has ensured an effective execution of the mandated role and tasks of defending the disputed borders.. Though the role of the army remains the same along the LAC and LC, the modus operandi is at total variance. Troops deployed along the LAC need to demonstrate maturity, understanding and restraint, whereas troops manning the LC have to be ever vigilant and ready to thwart the mischievous designs of our adversary be it infiltration by terrorist or ceasefire violations. The LC is peculiar in its own way, it is imperative to ensure sanctity of the LC, moral ascendancy over the adversary by the deployment and demeanour of troops and zero infiltration. The troops manning the LC also need to ensure an equitable and proportional retaliation to the frequent ceasefire violations by Pakistan army. In addition army manning the LC also conducts CT operations as part of the CT grid. Since the beginning of the proxy war in 1989, 6182 security forces personnel have made the supreme sacrifice in J&K alone. From an all time high of 638 in 2000, the fatal casualties have come down to 51 in 2014, and 39 this year, including the gallant Col Santosh Mahadik, a fellow paratrooper, who made the supreme sacrifice leading his men from the front in true spirit of the ethos of the Indian Army. It is an imperative that the army minimise the costs in terms of life, and should be provided the requisite wherewithal. It is a well acknowledged fact that the army lacks basic fighting and protection equipment. Though the DAC under the directions of the Raksha Mantri Shri Manohar Parrikar has given the much needed impetus to modernisation and sanctioned procurement projects worth 90,000 crores demonstrating a resolve and urgency , however the basic arms and equipment remain obsolete. These include the replacement for the 5.56 mm INSAS rifle which is piece of metal as soldiers do not have any confidence in the rifle, a CQB carbine, Light machine gun, multimode grenade which has been in the development stage for over two decades, night fighting device and the bullet proof jacket and a ballistic helmet. Arming and equipping the soldier with basic weapons and equipment should be a priority, this will not only enhance the fighting efficacy of the army but reduce costs in terms of avoidable fatalities.

The Last Frontier- Siachen Glacier

Siachen sometimes called the “Third Pole” is the highest battlefield in the world. The 126.2 km AGPL has over 150 isolated posts, located at altitudes in excess of 5400m, manned by the army round the clock. The glacier’s craggy landscape, paper-thin air, heavy snowfall and bone-chilling temperatures make it one of the most inhospitable places on earth. For soldiers, this is a place where mountaineering is more important than marksmanship. The harsh weather and high altitude terrain pose major challenges for troops to survive. Frostbite, chilblains, avalanches, snowstorms, crevices, lack of oxygen and appetite are a few of the many threats faced in addition to defending

the borders. Survival alone is an achievement in itself. It is to the credit of the Indian Army and the soldiers who have defended the glacier with their many sacrifices. A tenure at Siachen gives an unmatched sense of pride and achievement to a soldier.

In addition to manning the LAC and LC, the army contributes to the development and well being, taking care of the people of the border region in all aspects. The people inhabiting the remote areas are mostly dependent on the army for all their basic requirements. There are a also number of villages along the LC, some of these are located between the LC and the Fence, the army ensures the wellbeing of our border region people in all aspects as part of Sadhbhavna, from water and electricity supply to education, medical and vocational training.

Along the AGPL sheer survival on the Siachen Glacier is a battle in itself. T

The two sides have lost close to 4,000 personnel primarily due to frostbites, avalanches and other complications. Both nations have 150 manned mirroring outposts along the glacier, with some 3,000 troops each. Official figures for maintaining these outposts are put at ~\$300 and ~\$100 million for India and Pakistan respectively. The Indians rely on helicopters made indigenously, which are probably the only choppers that can reach such heights, whereas Pakistan has simplified the logistical nightmare by building roads and paths to all of its positions across the glacier. India has also built the world`s highest helipad on this glacier at a place called Sonam, which is 21,000 feet above the sea level, to serve the area and ensure that her troops are kept supplied via helicopter support

The highest combat zone on planet earth, You have to be a super soldier, a hero.

And that's what each one of our soldiers out there at Siachen glacier and on posts at even greater heights really is!

Due to the proclivity of India's neighbours to exploit India's nation building difficulties, the country's internal security challenges are inextricably linked with border management. Also, the challenge of coping with long-standing territorial and boundary disputes with China and Pakistan, combined with porous borders along some of the most

difficult terrain in the world, has made extremely effective and efficient border management mandatory.

Pakistan is pursuing a multi-pronged strategy to destabilize India and annex J&K. Militancy is a direct consequence of the unremitting efforts of Pakistan's covert agencies, particularly its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), to exploit the prevailing discontent and destabilize the established authority by creating an anarchic situation. Since January 1990, terrorism in J&K has resulted in the loss of over 20,000 lives, including nearly 2000 security personnel. Ethnic cleansing efforts have also been part of Pakistan's strategy.

2.25 Militancy has caused enormous human and economic losses in the State and shattered its economy. There is enough evidence that destabilizing India through actively sponsored terrorism is a matter of state policy for Pakistan. There are numerous training centres in Pakistan, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and Afghanistan, where potential extremists are being trained.

The proper management of borders is vitally important for national security. Different portions of our extensive borders have a variety of problems specific to them, which have to be appropriately addressed. These problems have become aggravated in recent times with Pakistan's policy of cross border terrorism, along with its intense hostile anti-India propaganda designed to mislead and sway the loyalties of border population. The intensification of cross border terrorism, targeted to destabilize India, has thrown up new challenges for our border management policy.