



IMPLICATIONS OF TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN INDIA'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

The term Tactical Nuclear Weapons in the closest approximation refers to battlefield nuclear weapons, for battlefield use with deployment ranges and yields consistent with such use and confined essentially in each respect to the area of localized military operations. These may be used to target enemy's combat echelons, tactical targets like military infrastructure (Logistics support areas, headquarters and communication centers, defence fortifications and bridge heads defences, communication centers, airbases etc) and important choke points such as bridges etc. Hence these are primarily meant to achieve limited objectives in the battlefield.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons (TNWs) represent a considerable part of the arsenals of some of the existing Nuclear Weapon States. Unlike the Strategic Weapons the nuclear weapons are not covered by existing bilateral strategic arms limitation and reduction treaties. Since the end of the Cold War, holdings of TNW in the NWS have been reduced unilaterally, rather than via arms control treaties. Significant reductions were made under the unilateral 1991 and 1992 US and Russian 'Presidential Nuclear Initiatives' (PNI). However, US still is known to have deployed 500 TNWs; most of them in NATO countries, Russia on the other hand is believed to have around 2000 though it is not clear how many are operationally deployed.

One is not sure whether China physically holds has TNW's in its inventory, but it has MIRV missiles hence, it has mastered the miniaturization of the nuclear warheads. Currently, China is engaged in replacing the old unwieldy strategic missiles with sleek and accurate Strategic

weapons. However, Pakistan, its protégé has shocked the strategic community with public display of its capability by test firing the Hatf IX (NASR), solid fuel battle field short range ballistic missile on 19 April 2011, which from official account would eventually have nuclear war head as a press release issued after the missile test said, "The missile has been developed to add deterrence value to Pakistan's strategic weapons development programme at shorter ranges." Lieutenant General (Retired) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, the Director General Strategic Plans Division who witnessed the test said, "the test was a very important milestone in consolidating Pakistan's strategic deterrence capability at all levels of the threat spectrum. In that, the NASR Weapon System will provide Pakistan with short range missile capability."

Paradox

In the world over, the Nuclear Weapon States have halted production of the fissile material and are negotiating for reduction of the nuclear arsenals but, Pakistan is going in the opposite direction, building new nuclear weapons, increasing its production of the plutonium and continues to make highly enriched Uranium. The Pakistani leadership is convinced that nuclear Pakistan is deterrent to the superior conventional force of India. It discounts even a possibility of limited conventional conflict. More recently, hypothetical Indian military doctrine of the cold start has been interpreted as most provocative and they have warned India of possible use of the tactical nuclear weapons to offset the advantage of the quick gains with Indian army's the cold start maneuver.

Pakistan: Why TNWs

The Cold Start Doctrine (CSD) whose existence has not been officially confirmed by India, had been publicised in the media and strategic circles as an Indian Army's plan of punitive strike to any terror attack with Pakistan link. It indicated rapid Indian armored thrusts in Pakistan backed by mechanised infantry, artillery and air assets for making quick territorial gains. The origin of such fallacy is based on the former US Ambassador to India, Mr. Timothy Roemer's unsubstantiated report to the state department where in ambassador examined India's so-called Cold Start strategy, a plan to attack Pakistan, which he described as a 'mixture of myth and reality'. He concluded that it is unlikely that India would implement the strategy, and whether it would succeed. As per him, Pakistan was aware of it since 2004 but, despite this knowledge it did not stop Pakistan to support terror attacks in India. The doctrine called for a rapid, time and distance-limited penetration into Pakistani territory with a goal to quickly punish Pakistan, possibly in response to a Pakistan-linked terrorist attack in India but without threatening the survival of the Pakistani state or provoking a nuclear response. If this doctrine existed as stated by the U.S. Ambassador, then it failed to deter Pakistan from perpetrating such acts as Mumbai attack took place much later in Jul 2008 but, he concludes the report by saying that all very high level GOI officials have firmly stated, when asked directly about their support for Cold Start, that they have never endorsed, supported, or advocated this doctrine. But, on the basis of his talks with army brass in private, he asserted that the army may remain committed to the goals of the doctrine. However, the existence of such doctrine has been denied by the current Army Chief General V K Singh. Hence, Indian army's CSD could be a hypothetical option to Pakistan's intransigence and support to the terror groups targeting India. It neither existed nor it is practical in Indian context when one consider that large distances the forces have to traverse unnoticed by the adversary from its peace location.

It seems that Pakistan used the myth of CSD to introduce low-yield battlefield tactical nuclear weapons to check any armoured advance by the Indian Army and is an attempt to foreclose any Indian desire for a limited conflict without touching Pakistan's nuclear economic, territorial and military thresholds. The development of NASR, therefore, aims to deny India the window of opportunity in fighting a limited war.

The other motivation for pursuing this path is the growing global momentum to conclude a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty and CTBT. After the treaties are concluded, development and future testing of any form of nuclear arsenal would be forbidden.

Another rationale behind Pakistan's desire to increase its arsenal may also be to project its dissatisfaction with the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, which it believes has fundamentally altered the strategic environment in South Asia and could have rationalised its build up of nuclear weapons as a response to this new alignment.

Following major terrorist attacks in India - on the Indian parliament in 2001, and the 2008 attack in Mumbai-domestic pressure to respond to the provocations coming out of Pakistan has become immense. However, whenever the clouds of war have appeared on the South Asian horizon as a response to supposed high-level Pakistani support for terrorist activities, Pakistan has resorted to the rhetoric of nuclear war. This has often led to diplomatic intervention by the international community in order to restrain India from using force against Pakistan. By redirecting the attention of the international community away from acts of terrorism toward the possibility of nuclear war, Pakistan was able to secure immunity from India's punitive action. The TNW's provide one such mean to limit India's option to respond. It has positioned TNW's as being a necessary deterrent in the face of India's growing hostility to terrorism emanating from Pakistan. India has been unable to punish elements within Pakistan for their intransigent behavior because any major conflagration on the border ultimately holds the potential for nuclear war.

India's development of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) is another destabilizing factor in the South Asian strategic balance. Since Pakistan has no technological or economic wherewithal to pursue BMD, it can only counter India's move by increasing its number of nuclear weapons.

India's Predicament

China and Pakistan don't have a credible first strike capability that will neutralise most Indian nuclear weapons. But, in presence of TNW's there is a fear of extensive nuclear proliferation and its wartime use. The complexity of the issue can be imagined that till date unlike Strategic Nuclear Weapons there is no doctrinal criteria for their use. In fact, despite their deployment during the cold war, these have never been used till date. TNWs yield though is generally lower than Strategic Weapons (below one kiloton), they still are powerful and may even serve the purpose of the strategic one particularly in our context firstly, as many major cities on both sides are at closer target able range than in erstwhile cold war scenario. Secondly, the nuclear weapons are not war fighting any attempt to use them even at smaller scale has the potential to lead to an all out nuclear war. TNWs have generally not been the subject of arms control treaties and are not physically controlled by the sophisticated mechanisms employed for strategic weapons. As such they also represent an increasing danger of proliferation and of acquisition by terrorists.

For tactical nuclear weapons to be effectively used they need to be forward deployed, with command and control largely resting with field commanders. Since field commanders don't have the big picture, such forward deployment is fraught with the risks of premature or accidental use. The other problem being, what if a country uses nuclear weapons within its own territory to halt advancing enemy forces? Can the attacker claim to be a victim of a nuclear attack and retaliate with nuclear forces? Does the exchange of tactical nuclear weapons in a battle signal a breakdown of nuclear deterrence? There are several such issues which we may have to confront if TNWs are introduced in the battlefield.

While it may appear completely defensive, the NASR has an offensive dimension too. When it becomes operational, Pakistan could even forward deploy the missile surreptitiously at vulnerable points along its border with India, ahead of any provocative covert operations. Any armed response by India would then need to factor in Pakistan's likely use of NASR missiles against our conventional forces. If the forward deployment of the missile is detected by India, Pakistan could still plead that the weapon, with its 60 km range, is purely defensive and doesn't threaten India in any way.

India's Nuclear Policy

India's stand on the role of nuclear weapons is quite clear. India has its own nuclear doctrine which affirms its commitment to no-first-use of nuclear weapons and not using these weapons against non-nuclear weapon states. The defensive nuclear doctrine has a command and control system under the political authority. Land marks of India's nuclear doctrine are:-

- (a) Building and maintaining a credible minimum deterrent.
- (b) A posture of no-first-use: nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation against nuclear attack on Indian territory or on Indian forces anywhere.
- (c) Nuclear retaliation to a first strike even of TNW will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage.
- (d) Nuclear retaliatory attack can be authorised by a certain political leadership only through NCA.
- (e) No-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon state.
- (f) In the event of a major attack against India or Indian forces anywhere by biological or chemical weapons. India will retain the option of retaliating with nuclear weapons.
- (g) Continuance of strict control on export of nuclear and missile related materials and technology, participation in the fissile material cut off treaty negotiations and continued observance of the moratorium on nuclear tests.

(H) Continued commitment to the goal of a nuclear-free world through-global verifiable and non discriminatory nuclear disarmament.

Pakistani Strategy

Pakistan's strategy hinges on brinkmanship that a democratic India with a weak centre is probably incapable of countering nuclear attack. The brinkmanship involves lowering the nuclear threshold by declaring that Pakistan will use nuclear weapons when it finds itself in grave danger. It deliberately lowered its nuclear threshold to support its asymmetric warfare.

The NASR missile is designed to ensure India's Cold Start strategy doesn't neutralize Pakistan's advantage from a lowered nuclear threshold. This is based on the presumption that of the military establishment, that India would not respond with counter-value and counter-force strikes to a tactical nuclear strike on its armed forces in the field.

Fallacy of Pakistani Brinkmanship

If the above surmise is true then Pakistani leadership has a fallacious conception.

First, nuclear weapons are the last resort weapons; the desperate leadership is unaware of the dire consequences of the first use.

Second, given the relative size of the two countries, India would survive a possible attack due to its sheer geographic spread and soon to be acquired the triad capability. But Pakistan could be well wiped out due to lack of strategic depth.

Third, the assumption that India has infinite patience to absorb repeated terrorist attack may need reconsideration as India has not abandoned its option to use conventional forces for punitive raids across its borders. The democratic and empathic governance may have generated perception that war is not the only option but this may not necessarily discourage the government from pursuing the military option under grave provocation.

Fourth, the assumption that India's has a cold start doctrine is presumptuous and without any basis. Such a mammoth maneuver and elaborate logistics needed for such move cannot go unnoticed. In fact, India's Army chief had said India has no "Cold Start" doctrine as claimed in the secret American documents disclosed by the Wikileaks in which US Ambassador Timothy Roemer analyses India's military approach towards Pakistan in the wake of 26/11 attacks.

Does Pakistan have Capability to develop the Tactical Nuclear Weapons?

Needless to say that Pakistan could be playing deception and NASR test could merely be a ruse to unsettle India's strategic planners. To a question whether it has succeeded in miniaturising its nuclear weapon designs to the extent that these can be launched by tactical and cruise missiles such as NASR and Raád? If Pakistani strategic writers are to be believed they have succeeded in miniaturisation of the nuclear weapons. This assertion is hard to believe as till date Pakistan's missile and nuclear technology is not home grown but, borrowed from China or North Korea. But even if we have serious doubts about Pakistan's own capability but, achieving this technology in long run cannot be discounted with active help of its all weather friend China which would not hesitate to lend this technology to Pakistan as its strategy to keep India embroiled in the state of conflict with a small neighbour so that it does not emerge as a competitor/challenge to its dominance in the region.

Indian Response to a Terror Strike?

There are already some voices in the Indian strategic community that are urging for development of tactical weapons and also pursue a "flexible response" strategy, by attaining parity in the domain of TNWs. More so when a need arises there is every possibility that our leadership shall get bogged down with overwhelming felling of "ethics" and "proportionality" and may not respond to a nuclear strike with a punitive nuclear strike intended in the doctrine. This aspect has been intentionally left out the

nuclear policy. Would the Indian leadership perceive Pakistan's use of a nuclear tipped NASR as a breakdown of deterrence? Would the loss of an armoured brigade justify a nuclear retaliation, risking an all out nuclear exchange that could lead to millions of deaths and maiming of human population for generations to come?

Fighting a nuclear war even at the lower level is not a good strategy? In fact, advocating nuclear war fighting goes against the policy of the nuclear deterrence. Further, it is not a good option as it complicates the strategic relationship between the two neighbours. Then what should be the response? We would need to consider Pakistani redlines for first use of nuclear weapons which though have not been officially defined but have been stated by their military and political leaders at various times and are discussed below :-

- (a) When Indian conventional attack has already breached the main Pakistani defence or is likely to breach it, which cannot be restored by the conventional means, Pakistani government would be left with no option than to use nuclear weapons to stabilise it.
- (b) Piercing attack with an aim to capture large territory or Communication Junctions.

As against the common perception of Pakistani irrationality it can be seen that it is based on rationality. Before they launch a full scale weapon, a Pakistani General, Gen Sardar F.S. Lodhi in his writing in a defence journal says "Pakistan would use "Option Enhancing policy". This entails stage by stage approach in which nuclear threat is increased step by step to deter India from attack. The first step would be public or private warning, second a demonstration explosion of small nuclear weapon on own soil, the third could be use of nuclear weapon on the own soil against the attacking Indian forces. The fourth stage would be used against the critical but purely military targets across the border from Pakistan probably in thinly populated areas in the desert or semi desert causing the least collateral damage, before Pakistan attacks counter

value Targets. In this background we can say that Pakistani nuclear strike is based on rationality.

India's "No First Use" principle in the Indian Nuclear Doctrine does not differentiate between tactical and strategic weapons. A nuclear attack against own forces anywhere is therefore, supposed to receive a full-fledged nuclear response.

By unambiguously stating how it will respond to a break down in deterrence, and building a capability matching its Intended response, a country discourages adventurism by a nuclear armed adversary. If Pakistan response is rational, its leadership cannot ignore obvious implication of the India's nuclear policy as the phrase '**any nuclear attack**' in the draft doctrine obviously would include a tactical nuclear attack. It further clarifies that India will 'not be the first to initiate a nuclear strike, but will respond with punitive retaliation should deterrence fail. The use of tactical nuclear weapon by Pakistan signifies failure of deterrence which demands 'punitive retaliation' and so as to cause 'unacceptable damage' to the aggressor. By remaining deliberately ambiguous and not stating explicitly that the Indian punitive response will be proportionate, the Indian draft doctrine creates doubts for any potential aggressor, and increases in the aggressor's mind the potential risks associated with the use of tactical weapons.

Pakistani leadership thinks that under the nuclear overhang it is free to continue its asymmetric war against India without any fear of punitive response. India has the ability to carry out the punitive attacks against the terror attacks emanating from Pakistan. Soon after the Abbottabad incident, Indian Army Chief General V K Singh said, that Indian military is capable enough to carry out US-like operation that killed al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. He said "We have the capability.....If situation arises; all the three wings (army, navy and air force) are competent in carrying out such an operation". There is no doubt about our capability but, our response after a major terror strike like Mumbai and parliament attack should be quick as well as effective. The land and naval response being inherently

delayed and slow cannot achieve the desired results. These would only raise the security concern of Pakistan giving it a reason to consider an unlikely conventional or even a nuclear option. **Punitive air strikes alone and may be drone strikes as well have the capacity and speed to respond to any terror strike in real time, especially as most of the terror camps in POK are in the vicinity of Line of Actual Control (LAC).**

Air/drone strikes besides the quick response also don't mortally threaten or give motive to Pakistan for any nuclear response.

Conclusion

Nuclear weapons are not for war fighting. Succumbing to the temptation to develop and then deploy tactical nuclear weapons is to subscribe to the view that

'limited nuclear war' is feasible. Failure of deterrence is fraught with danger of all out nuclear war. Therefore, now may be the time for both India and Pakistan to unilaterally declare that they will not develop and deploy tactical nuclear weapons. An agreement between India and Pakistan disallowing the development and deployment of tactical nuclear weapons of low-kiloton range could strengthen deterrence stability and also pave the way for developing the infrastructure for intrusive monitoring and verification that will be needed in the future if the two countries ever decide to limit or eliminate nuclear weapons altogether. Threat of Nuclear war does not foreclose our option to act against the terror camps especially where supported with conclusive proof. In such a case launching punitive Air strikes is the best option.

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