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INDO-PAK DIFFERENCE IN NATURE OF CONFLICT

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Pak recently test fired its nuclear capable, short range, Nasr missile. The missile was initially designed for delivering a low yield nuclear weapon upto a range of 70 kms. As per Pak reports, it is also capable of 'defeating any currently available Ballistic Missile Defence system in our neighbourhood or any other system under procurement or development'. This statement targets the S400 missile system under procurement by India from Russia. China has also procured the S400 missile system and the Nasr missile technology has been obtained from China by Pak. Hence, Pak's comments on the ability of the Nasr appear overboard and a mere announcement.

Pak is desperate to thwart the Indian cold start strategy, put forth in a doctrine, repeatedly accepted by the current Indian army chief. It is this doctrine which has irked Pak over the years as the conventional military gap between the two countries continues to grow. What has bothered them even more are plans for the restructuring of the army, being pushed by General Bipin Rawat.

Under this restructuring Indian army formations earmarked for operations along the Pak border are being reconstituted into Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) for quick launch, prior to Pak forces occupying defences. The same is now being validated in a series of exercises. The concept is at the core of the cold start doctrine. In case approved, this restructuring would be done within a short time. To boost the capabilities of its forces along the western border, India has begun the process of

acquiring more Milan 2T anti-tank missiles and night sights for detecting enemy tanks at 1000m.

The launching of IBGs across a wide area would, to a large extent, offset the intention of Pak employing its Nasr missiles to stop the Indian advance. Studies involving likely casualties caused by tactical nuclear strikes on troops spread across a large area, have given a variety of figures, none of which appear to be daunting. Pak's use of nuclear weapons across the spectrum would not be in the initial stages of the operation, which would give India the advantage.

Pak on the other hand has indicated an interest in acquiring 600 T-90 tanks from Russia and surplus Mike 10 SP guns from Italy. While some of the guns have arrived, the deal for the tanks is yet to be inked and is aimed at 2025 for completion. It is also seeking to procure JF 62 fighter aircraft from China, while having China construct four naval warships for it. Whether it would be able to procure this equipment based on its fragile economic condition remains to be seen. The conventional edge would continue being in India's favour.

India is enhancing its military power for conventional operations, seeking to keep them below nuclear threshold, as also the capability of its forces to counter Pak misadventures along the LoC. For India, any major misadventure by Pak would be countered by conventional operations and it could ignore the Pak nuclear threat. Therefore, its offensives would need to be launched swiftly and spread across the front. It is with this thought process that India is restructuring its forces into IBGs.

There is a clear difference in nuclear policies between the two countries. India has adopted a 'No First Use' concept supported by massive retaliation. Pak, fearing Indian conventional military power continues to rant and threatens employment of nuclear weapons, mainly the use of tactical nuclear missiles.

While India looks at the conventional angle, Pak would either prefer status quo, where it continues to exploit Kashmir using its proxy, the Hurriyat, supported by an intense social media campaign or a nuclear war where destruction on both sides is massive. It seeks to avoid a conventional war. It has continuously harped on its nuclear capability as a means of deterrence. However, it has missed the fact that employment of nuclear weapons, except tactical ones on its own soil, would not be acceptable unless the integrity of the country is at stake, an action which India would avoid.

The reason for it considering these two vastly different options is its shortfall in capabilities in conventional operations, which it is unlikely to make up in any near time frame. In either of the two extreme scenarios, that Pak professes, the Pak army would be able to maintain its respect and standing within the country as the 'defender of the faith'.

To maintain status quo, Pak continues to rankle Kashmir in the international forum as also provide a voice to the rising discontentment within. Post a clear message being sent across by the highly publicized 'surgical strikes', it has kept militancy within the valley largely confined at the local level. Pak infiltrated militants remain few and none of them are local leaders, as was the norm earlier. It however has a large collection of over ground workers and ISI supporters whom it employs to continue instigating the youth against the Indian state. It continues to rankle India by accusing it of Human Rights violation and suppressing local sentiments.

It presently possesses a nuclear arsenal which is far greater than its needs. The development of tactical nuclear missiles is aimed at blunting Indian advances and it is planning to employ them, even in its own territory, risking casualties to its own nationals. It is ready to risk Indian counter strikes.

For the Pak army, defeat in every war it has fought till date, including Kargil, has brought about a desperation. It is willing to sacrifice its populace solely to keep its reputation from being further tarnished. It is hoping that India would fall for its bluff and only posture its forces without considering any serious operations.

The Indian army chief has continuously called the Pak nuclear bluff and openly stated that in case of any misadventure, India would not hesitate to employ the conventional route. It is this threat which has put the brakes on Pak's misadventures. Border skirmishes and ceasefire violations would continue, however the fear of India employing its military power in the conventional role has forced Pak to reconsider its earlier approach of launching terror strikes deep within India.

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