



**India's new Land Warfare Doctrine: Implications for the South  
Asian Region**

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**ABSTRACT**

*South Asian security architecture has always faced instability because of the hegemonic ambitions of India and the ever-present rivalry between India and Pakistan. Add Afghanistan's instability into the mix and the region has become a veritable volcano that can erupt at any time, impacting the entire world. More recently, driven by its ambitious agenda, the Indian military has unveiled a military doctrine by the name of "Land Warfare Doctrine 2018" which is based on a proactive and pre-emptive approach toward any conflict. The doctrine has declared Pakistan to be the primary focus and China to be the secondary focus. It encompasses the geo-strategic environment, future security challenges, environmental realities, and hybrid warfare. With a greater emphasis on the rearrangement of the strike formations into the IBGs or the Integrated Battle Groups, the LWD aims to equip the offensive components for shallow incursions in rapid combat situations. Such an agenda has the potential to thrust the South Asian region into a never-ending arms race, security dilemma, and stability-instability paradox.*

**Keywords:** India, Pakistan, South Asia, Doctrine, Warfare, Arms race, Integrated Battle Groups, Hybrid Warfare.

## **Introduction**

Strategizing is important for any and every nation, military, or organization to achieve the desired results as it gives a sense of direction toward the end goal. Militarily, nations since old times have been relying on the strategy to gain supremacy on the battlefield. This strategy is a fundamental part of the art of war and leads to the formulation of a doctrine adopted by the military. During peacetime, successful and superior militaries strategize and prepare the doctrines to be adopted during wartime that would guarantee future success as well as superiority on the battlefield. As the great military strategist Sun Tzu appositely enunciates that during peace one should prepare for war and during war one should prepare for peace.

Military doctrines embody the army's combat principles whilst acting as a stimulant with novel concepts for experimentation besides the terminologies of intricate security preparations. Based on these principles of warfare, India, in its quest to become the regional power and the most dominant player has launched a warfare doctrine by the name of Land Warfare Doctrine 2018. Such aspirations of the Indian military have directly threatened the peace of the entire South Asian Region. Ever since its inception, India has aspired to be the regional hegemon and the recent developments are part of India's long-term plan to achieve its goals. This paper endeavors to study and analyze the Indian intent, its Land Warfare Doctrine, and its ensuing impact on the South Asian region.

## **Background: Strategic Contours of the South Asian Region**

Harboring approximately one-fourth of the earth's populace, South Asia has a plethora of both territorial as well as non-territorial disputes around the entire globe. The strategic culture of the region is mostly overshadowed by traditional and nontraditional security issues.

The South Asian region, despite being relatively poor holds a prominent position in the international security architectures as well as the evolving dynamics of global and regional politics. The region has gained eminence because of the diplomatic and economic factors supporting each other and the dynamic security environment along with the predominantly intricate nature of territorial disputes and instability. Resultantly, the strategic culture of the region is founded on contending strategic and political agendas amid the three nuclear states of the region i.e., India, China, and Pakistan.

Although all the regional states, for the betterment of the region, underscore mutual cooperation, the reality, sadly is not reflective of this intent.<sup>1</sup> The history of the region is riddled with wars, stand-offs, intra-state insurgencies, ethnic discord and various border skirmishes between the key players and has been declared a nuclear flashpoint by international experts. In addition to that, the instability in Afghanistan, the hegemonic expansionist agenda of India, the US-Indo strategic partnership, the presence of non-state actors, Russian interest, and China's rise is also affecting the security and stability of the region tangling it with extra-regional players.<sup>2</sup>

## **India's New Land Warfare Doctrine**

The Indian military, to generate collaboration, implement conventional strategies for limited combat, incorporate in the tri-services, and plug the operational gaps, is constantly tweaking its doctrines. The military doctrine of India has evolved over time from the declassified official doctrine of 1998 to a brushed-up version in 2004, followed by a sub-conventional warfare doctrine known as the Cold start Doctrine or the CSD. More recently, the Indian Army has come up with the latest version known as the Land Warfare Doctrine or the LWD-2018, which is the sequel to the 2017 Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces or JDIAF and is a new form of preceding limited war doctrines. The LWD encompasses the geo-strategic environment, future security challenges, environmental realities, and hybrid warfare.<sup>3</sup> With a greater emphasis on the rearrangement of the strike formations into the IBGs or the Integrated Battle Groups, the LWD aims to equip the offensive components for shallow incursions in rapid combat situations. Furthermore, this newest doctrine highlights the importance of the threats imposed by hybrid warfare, ISR or Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance capabilities against the opponent along with improved transparency in the combat zone for accurate strikes.

Also, the LWD in the context of future combat focuses on revolutionizing military affairs and evolving technologies through an emphasis on the concept of deterrence via punitive strikes at the tactical level. Although the doctrine somewhat embodies ambiguity and incoherence in limited conventional warfare, the Indian Army values it because of the

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<sup>1</sup> Warraich, H. E. "South Asia's Strategic Environment." Policy East <http://policyeast.com/south-asias-strategic-environment/>

<sup>2</sup> Mahar, Irfan. "Changing Security Dynamics of South Asia: Implications for the Security of the Region." Modern Diplomacy (April 2020) <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/04/16/changing-security-dynamics-of-south-asia-implication-for-the-security-of-region/>

<sup>3</sup> Mallick, P.K. "Indian Army's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: Questions and Concerns." The Wire (Jan 2019) <https://thewire.in/security/indian-armys-land-warfare-doctrine-2018-questions-and-concerns>

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precision it imparts for discernment of the threat spectrum. Officially, the doctrine acknowledges the combined threat from Pakistan and China, hence defining the future military posture and state of readiness based on the supposition of the worst possible outcome and scenarios. In addition to that, as per Indian claims, the LWD denotes an obvious repositioning from single-front centric to dual-front centric. However, a deeper study negates this claim. The nuclear deterrence of Pakistan and the conventionally efficient counter-measures have restricted the response of the Indian Army to limited combat, compelling it to stem the gap between the conventional and the nuclear capabilities of Pakistan. Consequently, the LWD stresses launching limited yet swift operations short of breaching the nuclear threshold of Pakistan.<sup>4</sup>

The Indian Army Chief, Bipin Rawat, with reference to the LWD-2018 has been working on a four-point program to restructure the Indian Army. The singular emphasis under this agenda has been laid upon the formulation of the IBGs, reorganization of the headquarter, rationalization of the military strength, and the squad review of the personnel.<sup>5</sup> A military force is constituted of components like infantry, engineers, artillery, special forces, the signals, the aviation, etc. Cumulatively, these components form an army division. During peacetime, the components of a division are not stationed together, so in case of an escalation via kinetic force, re-organizing the essential components within the time frame can be the deciding factor in a conflict. In the past stand-offs with Pakistan, India faced the dilemma of effectively and swiftly striking the opponent's territory because of its inability to react timely. Nevertheless, this dilemma was resolved by the inception of the IBGs. Through IBGs, India aims to stay combat-ready on very short notice by the deployment of necessary components together, hence increasing the synergy and cohesiveness during peacetime. The IBGs were central in the Cold Start Doctrine as well as the latest Land Warfare Doctrine 2018 and will be deployed for swift intrusions into Pakistan's territory. Thus, it is evident that ever since the last debacle in the form of Operation Parakaram, the Indian army has been working to reinforce the pivot and holding corps deployed along the Line of Control (LOC), capable of limited offensive operations with the new division-sized IBGs made of aviation, artillery, and armor elements. Moreover, under the LWD-2018 the IBGs will be equipped with armored

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<sup>4</sup> Mitra, Joy. "India's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst." *The Diplomat* (January 2019) <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/indias-land-warfare-doctrine-2018-hoping-for-the-best-preparing-for-the-worst/>

<sup>5</sup> Dutta, Sujana. "Indian Army Chief's plan to cut cadre and restructure force faces opposition from within." *The Print* (October 2018) <https://theprint.in/india/governance/indian-army-chiefs-plan-to-cut-cadre-and-restructure-force-faces-opposition-from-within/131474/>

personnel carriers, artillery, main battle tanks as well as infantry fighting vehicles enabling them to launch a limited strike of around 50 to 80 kilometers supported by the air power, into the enemy's territory.

In the ever-evolving realm of the modern warfare, there is an ongoing paradigm shift impacting the militaries worldwide. The Indian LWD-2018 throws light on the strategic thinking of the Indian military in this evolving domain along with providing vital understanding regarding future strategies so as to integrate cutting-edge technological applications in a multi-dimensional threat environment. The paradigm of warfare has shifted to stand-off capabilities and non-contact, cyber capabilities, electronic warfare along with Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS) leading to either an indecisive or a conclusive outcome on the battlefield. For the first time, the LWD-2018 identifies the need to adopt disruptive technologies and incorporate robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in combat.<sup>6</sup>

### **Implications of LWD-2018 on the South Asian Region**

When it comes to strategic, economic, political, cultural, demographic, and social affairs, the South Asian region holds great significance as it has the potential to affect the prevalent international system and future global developments. It is claimed by the experts that this region will be significant in the global development taking place in the Asian Century. Besides, the region has been in the limelight because of the interest of global powers and their subsequent interference since the security of this region impacts the security of the entire world. Leaving the past aside, any further ambitious move on the part of any regional player has the potential to further aggravate an already precarious environment because of the rampant animosity between India and Pakistan.

The strategic environment of the South Asian region is predominantly enshrouded by a violent history between the two arch rivals-India and Pakistan. Furthermore, the LWD-2018 characterizations of unsettled disputes in the region and the prevailing force postures indicate that the doctrine is definitely more Pakistan-centric than instead of China. India's ambitions directly threaten the peace and stability of the region forcing every state, specifically Pakistan to take defensive precautions. The Indian army's doctrinal transformation in the form of LWD-2018 will put pressure on the Pakistani military to maintain a balance in the long run so as to ensure territorial integrity. Also, it is the first-ever doctrine that highlights and addresses

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<sup>6</sup> Katoch, P.C. "Indian Army Land Warfare Doctrine 2018." SP's Land Forces (2018) <http://www.spslandforces.com/story/?id=570&h=Indian-Army-Land-Warfare-Doctrine-2018>

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the issue of collusive threats from Pakistan and China by employing all resources at hand to deal with the primary focus and maintaining a solid strategic defensive balance at the secondary front. The primary focus is Pakistan and the secondary focus is China. Also, the primary front here clearly indicates India's intent of dealing with Pakistan with hard power whereas China or the second front will be dealt with a defensive balancing strategy. Therefore, the intent of this doctrine is to establish escalation dominance along with systemizing surgical strikes against Pakistan, in the quest for the declared objective of attaining deterrence via punitive measures.<sup>7</sup> Such an ambitious agenda of India, can create a sense of insecurity amongst the weaker states of the region, a never-ending arms race, a security dilemma, and a stability-instability paradox, making the region a ticking time bomb.

In addition to that, growing Indian expertise with disruptive technologies has the ability to shift the balance of power in the favor of India, during a conflict. Economically, Pakistan isn't a strong country and cannot neutralize or compete with the multi-domain Indian defense buildup. The resultant disparity between the two is evident from the immense defense spending by India on both nuclear and conventional aspects. Consequently, the threatening approach of LWD-2018 towards Pakistan might thrust the region on the road to nuclear brinkmanship. Pakistan, during a conflict with a superior military opponent, would be forced to retaliate with either short-range low yield nuclear weapons or conventional means.<sup>8</sup>

In response to such aggressive Indian designs, Pakistan has successfully conducted various training launches of missiles like Nasr which is a surface-to-surface nuclear capable ballistic missile, to counter the Indian army's envisioned proactive offensive strategy. Subsequently, it is evident that Pakistan will try to preserve the balance of power against the increasing Indian boldness by means of upholding a strong deterrence equation. Besides, Pakistan intends to counter Indian designs by ensuring deterrence through practical strategies supported by nuclear weapons along with managing conventional asymmetries, employing credible counter measures, countering threats of hybrid nature as well as deterring cross border aggression.

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<sup>7</sup> Mitra, Joy. "India's Land Warfare Doctrine 2018: Hoping for the Best, Preparing for the Worst." *The Diplomat* (January 2019) <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/indias-land-warfare-doctrine-2018-hoping-for-the-best-preparing-for-the-worst/>

<sup>8</sup> Hussain, Yasir. "India's Pakistan Specific Land Warfare Doctrine: An Overview." *South Asian Voices* (March 2019) <https://southasianvoices.org/indias-pakistan-specific-land-warfare-doctrine-an-overview/>

## **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the new Land Warfare Doctrine of the Indian military, launched in 2018, aims to establish the threat spectrum faced by India, clearly. It lays the foundation for the procurement of the latest cutting-edge capabilities that will cater to the ever-changing nature of warfare. As a result, this doctrine introduces the amalgamation of Artificial Intelligence as well as energy-directed weapons with stand-off capabilities against the adversary in the backdrop of limited and tactical conventional operations. With such a proactive doctrine, the Indian military intends to maintain superiority in conventional as well as non-conventional conflicts, over its adversaries.

Over all, the LWD-2018 has laid down a framework for the Indian military to operate in a complex, volatile, and unstable security environment. Such an ambitious agenda on the part of the Indian military to prepare for a two-pronged war and incorporation of the latest technology the warfare strategies has further complicated the security environment of South Asia. The threat of the arms race, increased conflicts, hybrid warfare, and security dilemma have increased tenfold. Moreover, the hostile nature of bilateral dynamics between India and Pakistan has made Pakistan the focus of India's LWD-2018 by declaring it as the primary opponent.