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**DEFENSE POLICY AND STRATEGY**

**Paradigm Shifts and Defense Reforms: The Case of India**

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How do conceptions of war drive defense and military reform? Most commentators have observed for the past decade that the paradigm of war is shifting. However, what the “new paradigm” is, and how force structure, doctrine and operations should evolve to meet this new paradigm is less clear. The Indian security community has had a lively debate about defense reforms since the 1999 Kargil War. Interventional events have been closely watched in India, including the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Russia’s interventions in Georgia and Ukraine. Of critical importance to India are events closer to home, like the 2008 Mumbai Terrorist attacks, the on-going Naxal insurgency, instability in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the rise of China.

For decades the focus of the Indian military was clear: maintain a conventional advantage over Pakistan, secure India’s contested borders, and assist domestic security forces with internal conflicts and violence.<sup>1</sup> Recently, new issues and threats have arisen that call this paradigm into question. For example, in the aftermath of the 2001-02 Crisis with Pakistan, India unveiled a new Cold Start military doctrine. However, after much debate the doctrine was publicly shelved in 2010 to be replaced by a “two-front doctrine” to deal with both Pakistan and China.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there remains a wide variety of issues also considered important for Indian calculations: Does India need power projection forces for the Indian Ocean region and beyond for humanitarian assistance and disaster response missions, or even for interventions?<sup>3</sup> What is the proper balance between the military and internal security forces and police for both internal insurgencies and transnational terrorism? Does the Indian military need to shift its force

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<sup>1</sup> See Kalyan Raman, “Indian Military Responses to Pakistan, 1949-2010,” unpublished manuscript; Ali Ahmed, *India’s Limited War Doctrine: The Structural Factor* (ISDA Monograph Series, no. 10: 2012); and Harinder Singh, “India’s Emerging Land Warfare Doctrines and Capabilities,” *RSIS Working Paper*, No. 210 (13 December 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Dan Blumenthal, “India Prepares for a Two-Front War,” *Wall Street Journal*, 1 March 2010 (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704240004575085023077072074>).

<sup>3</sup> For example, see Military Affairs Centre, *Net Security Provider: India’s Out-of-Area Contingency Operations*, IDSA Monograph (Delhi: IDSA, 2012); and the chapters by Walter Ladwig and Iksander Rehman, in *The Rise of the Indian Navy: Internal Vulnerabilities, External Challenges*, Ed. Harsh Pant (London: Ashgate, 2012).

structure and doctrine to deter China along its disputed border? Is this even possible given the resource disparities between India and China? Can India develop and integrate cyber and hybrid warfare capabilities into its existing structures? Will India correspondingly move its military posture away from internal security and territorial defense, to emphasize power projection? Many commentators have pointed to India's large military purchases - becoming the world's largest arms importer – as evidence that India is moving toward power projection. In contrast, there are major historical, cultural and institutional aspects that mitigate against a linear rise of “Indian hard power.”<sup>4</sup>

This paper looks at the dynamics of military modernization in India. Historically, there have been three major periods of modernization: (1) the first attempt at modernization in the 1960s, following's India's defeat in the 1962 War with China; (2) the build-up in the 1980s, including both the Sundarji reforms of the army and the attempt to build power projection forces for the Indian Ocean Region; and (3) defense reforms and military modernization following the 1999 Kargil War.

The focus of this paper will be on the most recent period of reform since 1999, with a particular look on the debate since the ascension of the BJP government under Narendra Modi starting in 2014.<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on the new government stems from the perception that the under the previous Congress-led government the reforms of the 1999-2001 period were were stalled and remain unfulfilled. It is critical to see if there are new indications of change since the new government took over.<sup>6</sup> This paper will use Elizabeth Kier's constructivist “imaging war” framework to see how the Indian security community is “imaging” what the future conflicts will be and how India should adapt to meet them.<sup>7</sup> So this entails not

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<sup>4</sup> The classic Western statement on this was George Tanham's *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay* (RAND: Santa Monica, 1992). But also see, Kanti Bajpai and Amitabh Mattoo, *Securing India: Strategic Thoughts and Practice, Essays by George K. Tanham with Commentaries* (Manohar: Delhi, 1996); Harsh Pant, *The China Syndrome: Grappling with an Uneasy Relationship* (Harper Collins: Delhi, 2010); 123-36; Anit Mukherjee, “K. Subrahmanyam and Indian Strategic Thought,” *Strategic Analysis*, 35, no. 4 (2011): 710-13; and Stephen Cohen and Sunil Dasgupta, *Arming without Aiming: India's Military Modernization* (Brookings Institution Press: Washington, 2010), 1-16. For a similar argument on Nehru's strong belief in the diplomatic rather than military tool, see Andrew Bingham Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Rajat Pandit, “PM-Led Council Discusses Naresh Chandra Report but Contentious Proposal Referred to Another Panel,” *The Times of India*, 5 April 2013 ([http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-04-05/india/38305553\\_1\\_inter-service-doctrinal-three-service-chiefs-chandra-task-force](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-04-05/india/38305553_1_inter-service-doctrinal-three-service-chiefs-chandra-task-force)). “Separate Commands for Special Operations, Cyber Security, Space: NAK Browne Chief, IAF”, *The Economic Times*, 2 October 2013 ([http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-10-02/news/42617512\\_1\\_cyber-security-iaf-chief-nak-browne-cyber-command](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-10-02/news/42617512_1_cyber-security-iaf-chief-nak-browne-cyber-command)).

<sup>6</sup> Anit Mukherjee, *Failing to Deliver: Post-Crisis Defence Reforms in India, 1998–2010* (IDSA: Delhi, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997).

only a debate about what conflict will be in the future but also various ideas of what types of force structure and doctrines India needs to meet those challenges.