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## **The Uses of Force for India**

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Speaking Notes

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I will try today to answer three common questions:

- Is India's strategic culture against the use of force?
- Why do we not use overt military force to counter cross-border terrorism from Pakistan? and,
- Why do we deal with China on the border as we do?

And I will speak honestly, confident that I speak to colleagues and that what I say will stay among us.

### **Our Strategic Culture**

It is exceeding strange that the myth survives that Indians are somehow culturally predisposed against the use of force. Our two major epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are about war, Kautilya shows no squeamishness about war and violence as instruments of state policy, and our history is replete with wars.

The foremost apostle of peace and non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, was willing to see the use of force when our territorial integrity was threatened. As far back as 1928 Gandhiji wrote, "If there was a national government, whilst I should not take any direct part in any war, I can conceive of occasions when it would be my duty to vote for the military training of those who wish to take it.... It is not possible to make a person or society non-violent by compulsion."

During Partition riots Gandhiji said at his prayer meeting on 26 September 1947 that he had always been an opponent of all warfare, but that if there was no other way of securing justice war would be the only alternative left to the government.

Faced with tribal raiders sent by Pakistan into Kashmir in October 1947, Gandhiji said that it was right for the Union Government to save the fair city by rushing troops to

Srinagar. He added that he would rather that the defenders be wiped out to the last man in clearing Kashmir's soil of the raiders rather than submit.<sup>1</sup>

In saying so, Gandhiji was entirely in keeping with a long Indian tradition which has regarded the use of force as legitimate in certain circumstances, namely, if there is no alternative way of securing justice. This is in essence a doctrine for the defensive use of force, when all other avenues are exhausted.

Our two greatest epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana are about wars, and treat rivalries as natural and normal. And the two classical expositions on the use of force, the Geeta and Bhishma's death bed lecture on statecraft in the Mahabharata's Shantiparva are extended explanations of a unique point of view.

The clearest description of the uses of force in statecraft is in the Arthashastra by Chanakya, which deals with both internal and external uses of force.

Perhaps the reason the myth persists is because the use of force in Indian culture is strictly circumscribed — by its practical utility for Kautilya and by its legitimacy for most others. The lesson that comes through very clearly in both major Indian epics, which deal with wars of necessity, is also apparent in Kautilya, the original realist, and in Ashoka, the convert to idealism. Ashoka and Kautilya were both products of a highly evolved and intricate tradition of statecraft which must have preceded them for centuries. A simple reading of the Arthashastra suffices to prove how evolved Indian strategic culture was as early as the third century before Christ, and how the use of force was governed by both practical and moral considerations. This was not a doctrine of "God on our side", (though that helped, as Krishna proved in the Mahabharata). Nor was it about just wars. In the Indian tradition the use of force is legitimate not only if it is in a good cause and its results will be good. Instead, force was seen as necessary in certain circumstances, to obtain justice, when all other means are exhausted, and the doctrine also recognised that force was not always the most effective or efficient means to this end. In my opinion, these classical elements were actually reinforced by subsequent history and the introduction of new thinking by the Moghuls and the Curzonian tradition. But that is material for several PhD thesis, not this lecture.

### Our Practice

There was thus a clear role for the use of force in traditional Indian strategic culture. In modern times that culture has found its expression in the basic security

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<sup>1</sup> Pyarelal: Mahatma Gandhi; The Last Phase (Ahmedabad, 1968, Vol. II) p 524, p 476 and p 502. See also J.Nehru: Speeches, Vol. I, 1946-1949, (Publications Division, New Delhi, 1949) p 184.

paradigm that all governments of independent India have followed: We depend on our own effort to the extent possible to deal with hard/traditional security issues, (such as territorial integrity, defence of the homeland etc.); we work with others to neutralise trans-national and cross-border threats, (such as cyber security, counter-terrorism, energy security, space security and so on); and, we depend upon the global order for global public goods critical to our prosperity, (such as the open international trading system, freedom of the high seas, the internet, etc.). In other words we are on our own in dealing with our own hard security issues, work with others where we can on cross-border issues, and need a supportive global order for India's transformation. Within this paradigm we have used force where necessary, primarily to defend India but also as part of international peacekeeping.

Independent India is rich in experience of the use of force, perhaps among the richest in the world in the second half of the twentieth century, ranging from large scale conventional armoured encounters to the Bangladesh liberation ops to counter-insurgency and to counter-terrorism. Our experience has ranged from the interstate dimension to dealing with hostile non-state actors who may or may not enjoy state sponsorship. I will leave to you the drawing of military lessons, particularly lessons about our performance and how to improve it.

What I would, however, like to consider a little more deeply is the situation that we face *vis a vis* Pakistan, particularly since 1998 when the sub-continent overtly went nuclear, and the difficulty of affecting the behaviour of radical and ideological non-state actors, especially when they enjoy support from state organs abroad.

### Pakistan

What is the situation we face *vis a vis* Pakistan? The nuclear weapon tests of 1998 changed the interstate dimension of conflict in South Asia. They lowered the nuclear threshold and therefore diminished the likelihood of large scale conventional war. Nuclearisation did not make conventional war impossible, as Kargil proved. But it did make a conventional war of the 1965 or 1971 type less likely. Even Kargil was done by General Musharraf and his small coterie by stealth. The likelihood of international political intervention in what is now a confrontation between two nuclear weapon states is also higher than it was before 1998. As the Kargil case showed, nuclear weapons did not prevent India fighting to recover territory and international intervention was quick to press Pakistan to respect the LOC and restore the status quo. Presumably the Pakistan Army learnt these evident lessons.

But, the Pakistan Army also seems to have drawn the lesson that she could use the cover provided by her nuclear weapons to step up asymmetric warfare and

cross-border terrorism against India. Since the eighties we have waged a covert war with the jihadis and their sponsors in the ISI and the Pakistan Army. In the last year or so some of this has become public, and aroused strong sentiment among those who do not know what has been happening along the LOC and in our dealings with Pakistan for several years. Since this war is by definition covert, I can only say to you, do not assume that what you do not know does not exist.

The question is often asked why we do not use overt force against Pakistan for her support to terrorism. The Israeli model is often quoted, or misquoted, in support of this course of action. In actual fact, the Israeli model, which they now describe as “mowing the grass,” is limited in aim and effect. As they themselves say:

*“Israel’s use of force can achieve only temporary deterrence. Therefore Israel has adopted a patient military strategy of attrition.....”*

*“The use of force in such a conflict is not intended to attain impossible political goals, but a strategy of attrition designed primarily to debilitate the enemy capabilities. ....hoping that occasional large scale operations also have a temporary deterrent effect in order to create periods of quiet along its borders.”*

*“Israel’s superior military power is incapable of coercing a change in their (non-state actors) basic attitudes in the short term... Israel recognises that it cannot affect the motivation of the non-state actors... and that producing deterrence against them is problematic. Yet its use of force could reduce the military capabilities of the non state actors..”<sup>2</sup>*

The Israeli preference is for short responses against non-state actors, not their state sponsors, primarily from the air, intelligence based ops, targeted killing and preventive actions such as interdicting supply of advanced weaponry to Hizbollah and Hamas. “Mowing the grass” seeks cumulative deterrence not absolute deterrence. It is like fighting crime, necessary for the maintenance of a minimum level of deterrence. The use of deterrence in asymmetrical wars is questionable unless the non-state actors take over territory and act as governments as occurred with Hamas in Gaza in 2007 and Hizbollah in Lebanon in 2005.

There are thus some commonalities in what we and Israel face. Essentially we both face the prospect of protracted intractable conflict with non-state actors. We both have to deal with non-state actors whose motivation and hostility is unlikely to change with the application of military force. In other words deterrence is unlikely to work with them. Schelling defines deterrence as aiming to “persuade a po-

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<sup>2</sup> Ephraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir: ‘Mowing the Grass’; Israel’s Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict; Journal of Strategic Studies, 2013

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tential enemy that he should in his own interest avoid certain courses of activity”.<sup>3</sup> By this standard LeT is unlikely to be deterred by the controlled application of military force. While this does not rule out punitive strikes it limits their utility. Nor is the LeT likely to evolve into something more benign. It seems unlikely that LeT or Hamas will evolve and join the political mainstream like the PLO or our own home-grown insurgents in the past.

What we and the Israelis do differs from what Western military academies teach. The West offers two basic schools of thought on coping with non-state armed groups (or insurgencies). The first, enemy centric, suggests COIN is not fundamentally different from conventional war where the main effort is to neutralise armed units by locating and engaging them. “A war is a war is a war”, as a US officer wrote. The second approach is population centric, focussed on gaining the support of the civilian population, “winning hearts and minds”, to deprive insurgents of their main source of support. (The US fought Vietnam as an enemy-centric war, and Afghanistan as a population-centric war, both without conspicuous success.)

But there are also significant differences between what Israel and India face. We face two types of non-state actors — internal ones like the Naxalites against whom we have adopted a population centric approach, and we face cross-border terrorism from Pakistan. The non-state actors we face from Pakistan receive support, sanctuary and training from a state and its army. And that state and army have nuclear weapons. Besides, the international environment in which we operate is very different from Israel’s. These differences explain why our steps against the non-state actors and their sponsors remains covert rather than overt. If they were not, today’s international environment would enable Pakistan to involve the US and China in our bilateral affairs and to internationalise our differences like J&K again as in the fifties.

In dealing with these non-state actors and their sponsors we use a range of asymmetric measures designed to degrade their capabilities and to inflict pain on them as well as their state sponsors. We combine measures on the ground with associated diplomatic initiatives. The precise mix varies as the situation evolves. We have made advance in humint and techint collection as well as in collaboration between sister intelligence and counter-terrorism agencies to enable preventive action and to respond swiftly and forcefully if incidents take place despite our best efforts, as they inevitably will. Do not assume that what you do not see does not exist. Our effort has been successful in creating periods of temporary peace along our borders.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Schelling: The Strategy of Conflict p.9

This brings us to the question of what our political aim is in the conflict with Pakistan and its non-state proxies. Do we seek complete military victory, ending the conflict and annihilating our enemies? To my mind that is unreasonable at present. Radical ideologies and religion cannot be defeated on the battlefield. In a conventional war of course we seek battlefield decision, choose annihilation over attrition. But in the non-conventional struggle that we are now engaged in we seek to subject the Pakistan Army and its jihadi proxies to unrelenting pressure — military, political, economic and internal — none of which is in itself decisive in attaining our ultimate political objective of eliminating them as a source of threat and hostility. That is our two step political objective, not the unlikely one of changing the mind or nature of the jihadi tanzeems or the Pakistan Army into a benign force.

The immediate political objective must recognise that this is a long conflict that cannot be solved — that it is protracted and intractable. This is an idea that most Indians are reluctant to accept, and some find intolerable. But given the situation in Pakistan, the institutional interest of the Pakistan Army, and the radicalisation (or Talibanisation) of Pakistani society, I do not think that any other conclusion would be prudent. For instance, if we had retaliated after the Mumbai attack by bombing Muridke or ISI headquarters, we would not have eliminated the LeT and ISI threat. Any terrorist camp we might have hit, whether in POK or Pakistan proper, would have been rebuilt in days. Instead, we would have united all of Pakistan behind the Pak Army, as they tried to do in Nov-Dec 2008 by crying wolf and alleging an Indian buildup and imminent attack. Knowing the limitations of the use of force against these groups, we must be prepared for the long covert war to continue without decisive military solutions, and set ourselves modest political goals in this struggle. Temporarily silencing these cross-border terrorists is the best we can hope for. In the hierarchy of our national goals silencing these terrorists is a much lower priority than the transformation of India. These terrorists are no existential threat to India. Failure in our nation building endeavour or prolonged economic failure would be.

## China

China, of course, is a very different sort of challenge to our national security calculus. Unlike Pakistan, China is a factor in our calculus at several levels — political, economic, military, scientific, technological, commercial and so on. We have to deal with Chinese presence and influence in our neighbours, in major powers, world markets and the international community — on land, at sea, in the air, cyber and outer space. These are all domains and dimensions of our cooperation and competition with China today.

If China is a multi-dimensional challenge to India, our response too must be multi-dimensional. And it has indeed been so under successive governments. We have politically engaged China while building an economic relationship, working together where we can (which is primarily on international issues like WTO and climate change and energy), while working to maximise our influence in the periphery that we share with China, from Myanmar to Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia.

How this will turn out is difficult to predict, located as we are in a part of the world where there are several powers rising and the balance of power is shifting so rapidly. My own sense is that China's ability to remake and reorder Asia-Pacific and the world is limited by three main factors: the reactions she arouses among others in her crowded geopolitical neighbourhood; her internal fragility which makes regime stability her overriding goal; and, her economic dependence on the US and the Western world order for her continued growth and future prosperity.

But today I thought that we would look at how we handle the situation on the border with China rather than the broader India-China relationship. This is a very different border from our international boundary and LOC with Pakistan. With Pakistan we have an agreed international border for the most part, and the LOC delineated on a map signed by the two DGMOs has the force and international sanctity of a legal agreement behind it. Despite this both the international border and the LOC with Pakistan are hot or live, crossed by terrorists and militants and regular cross border firing occurs. With China the LAC is a concept, neither the LAC nor the boundary is agreed between the two countries, let alone delineated on the map or demarcated on the ground, and yet this is probably our most peaceful border in the last thirty years, with no terrorists or cross border firing. The last death on the border was in October 1975 at Tulungla and that was by accident. The fundamental difference is that we face a military situation on our borders with Pakistan created by the Pakistan Army, whereas with China we face an imminent political challenge and long term military threat on the LAC.

To understand why this is so it is necessary to look back over the history of the last fifty years and to see how the situation along the line has evolved.

After the 1962 war, the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrawal to 20 km behind what they called the 7 November 1959 Line of Actual Control, (LAC). For the most part in the Eastern sector this LAC coincided with the high watershed which was the basis of the MacMahon line, which as you know is the basis of the international boundary in this sector. The exceptions were significant in a local tactical sense in Longju, Asaphila and so on, and strategically significant where the line joined the Bhutanese boundary near Thagla and Sumdorongchu. In the Western sector as well, there were differences in areas like SSN, Depsang, Demchok, Chushul etc between what the Chinese claimed was the LAC which they

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professed to respect, and what we considered the position on 8 September 1962 on the eve of the Chinese attack. We were in no position for several years to actually assert our presence upto either the LAC or what we believe to be the international boundary. Soon after the war, each side unilaterally declared that they would not attempt to alter the status quo on the border by force and China pledged to respect her version of the LAC.

As our capabilities improved with time, we began arial and satellite surveys, limited reconnaissance became possible on foot, and some presence began to be reestablished by the mid seventies. The Chinese had in the meantime used their easier access on the Tibetan plateau to greatly improve their infrastructure and by the late seventies they no longer stayed 20km behind their version of the LAC in all places. Their political position in Tibet had eased after the Nixon visit in 1972 led to the CIA cutting assistance to the Tibetan rebels and by the end of 1974 the Tibetan guerrillas, Chushi Gangdruk, had been chased by the PLA through Mustang and the adjacent Himalayas and eliminated as an effective fighting force.

In 1976, on the basis of the much better information now available to us on the border, the CCPA established the China Study Group to recommend patrolling limits, rules of engagement and the pattern of our presence along the border with China. There was thus a slow process of each side moving up to the line, or asserting presence through periodic patrols in an intricate pattern that criss-crossed in the areas where both had different interpretations of where the LAC was.

It was therefore inevitable that by the mid eighties we should end up with a face to face confrontation, this time in Wangdong/Somdorongchu. In May 1986 our annual patrol to the area, which we had begun in 1983, discovered that the PLA had already occupied our patrol point in the area. The Chinese had selected their ground carefully. MacMahon's original map, based on limited knowledge, showed Somdorongchu/Wangdong as north of the Line even though it was south of the high watershed, the principle his line claimed to follow. When we formally protested the Chinese presence in Wangdong in July 1986 to Chinese VFM Liu Shuqing he informed us that just as India had done China was improving border management and that the PLA would no longer be bound by its self imposed limitation of staying 20 km behind the LAC.

You probably know what followed in Wangdong. We moved in troops, occupied the Longrola and Hathungla heights, and set up posts metres from theirs. It took seven years of negotiation to stabilise the situation and, to a certain extent, restore the status quo in Wangdong/ Somdorongchu. The standoff, however, served a political purpose. During the Rajiv Gandhi visit to Beijing in December 1988, we both agreed to negotiate a boundary settlement, that pending a settlement we



would maintain peace and tranquillity along the border, and that we would look at ways of keeping the peace.

It was as a direct result of this sequence of events that we negotiated and entered into the Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement with China in September 1993, during PM Narasimha Rao's visit. Under the agreement both sides agreed that pending a boundary settlement they would respect the LAC, not change the status quo by force, and would undertake CBMs, putting in place mechanisms to keep the peace on the border. This has since been done in considerable detail by the 1996 CBMs agreement and subsequent agreements on SOPs etc.

Since the LAC was the basis of the peace and it would be difficult to do so if we did not have an agreed understanding of where it lay, we pressed in the negotiation for clarification of the entire LAC. The Chinese first only agreed to clarify it where there were differences, but subsequently agreed to a procedure to exchange maps of where we each thought the LAC lay. This was done for the Middle sector, and we then showed each other maps of the LAC in the Western sector. In retrospect, the problem with this procedure was that it incentivised both sides to exaggerate their claims of where the LAC lay. Once the Chinese saw our map of the Western sector they balked at carrying on, arguing that fixing the LAC in this manner would make it the boundary even though both sides, for different reasons, did not accept the status quo as the basis of a settlement. We therefore do not have an agreed delineation of the LAC with China. After all, the LAC is a notion, made up of a disconnected series of points upto which each side patrols, which can be joined up in several ways. To speak of a 10 km or 50 km intrusion, as some of us do, is therefore not strictly accurate.

In practice, however, the lack of clarity has not prevented us from keeping the peace for three reasons. Both sides have a fairly good idea from the other side's patrolling patterns and other behaviour of their idea of where the LAC lies. Secondly, both sides have, by and large, kept to their interpretation of the LAC, avoided provocation, and implemented the SOPs and other CBMs that have been agreed. And thirdly, both sides have not been in direct contact along most of the line. Even in the areas that both consider as lying on their side of the line, the sixteen areas of different perceptions of the LAC or contested areas, both have generally refrained from establishing a permanent presence or changing the status quo significantly.

What we have successfully done with China since the 1988 Rajiv Gandhi visit under successive governments of different political complexions is to maintain the peace while strengthening ourselves, seeking partners in the extended neighbourhood and among major powers, and engaging with China. Finding the balance between rivalry and incentives for good behaviour is one of the hardest tasks in strat-

egy. That our effort has been successful so far, despite the far more assertive Chinese policy in her periphery since 2008, was shown by the Depsang incident in May 2013. Unlike Wangdong/Sumdorongchu where the Chinese came and set up a post on our side of the LAC in 1986, in 2013 we discovered it immediately, we took counter measures and moved in force within days, and we insisted that the status quo be restored before we discussed any of the matters the Chinese tried to raise. In 1986 this resulted in a seven year standoff which was only partially defused on the ground. In Depsang in 2013, we were able to get the Chinese to vacate the area within three weeks. To a great extent this was because of our improved capabilities, which left the Chinese in no doubt that we could embarrass them. It was also because of the mechanisms and standard operating procedures that we and China have put in place since the Border Peace and Tranquility Agreement of 1993. It was due also to the international context which was never explicitly mentioned though the Chinese were aware of political support to us from several significant countries. I mention this in some detail because it is important that we draw the right lessons from our experiences. The key to arriving at a successful outcome was keeping public rhetoric calm and steady, displaying strength, and giving the adversary a way out which was our preferred solution. It was not tweeting or whining in public, brandishing our nuclear weapons, or threatening war as our television channels and some commentators did during those three weeks.

This situation may now be changing. China in the eighties and nineties, and then we in the last decade, have significantly improved our infrastructure and posture all along the border with China. We have done more in the last ten years to strengthen and build border infrastructure, military preparedness, and to create offsetting and asymmetric capabilities than in any decade since independence. These have included: the first military raisings on the India-China border since the sixties of two mountain divisions and now a mountain strike corps; the reactivation of 19 Advance Landing Grounds in the China border; the 72 CSG and GS roads begun in 2005; the creation of imint and techint capabilities including drones; and, the induction of Su-30s and heavy lift aircraft into the North-East. The C-130 landings at DBO were visible symbols of our determination and improved capabilities. We have improved and tasked our intelligence capabilities, and we have a survivable deterrent in place.

The situation may be changing because the balance of forces on the border has been changing and both sides are adjusting their behaviour. We are both now in much more frequent contact. Our own patrolling and assertion of presence is much more than it was in the past. In almost all the contested areas we are much more frequent visitors than the PLA. Equally the Chinese now find it much harder to achieve their political goals on the border: to maintain undisputed military dominance, to convey a clear message to civilians and military that they are the bigger and more powerful party, and to keep changing facts on the ground in their favour.

While we are playing catch up in the face of a large and, in some respects, a growing gap, the Chinese measure themselves against the situation of unchallenged dominance that they enjoyed for an extended period after 1962.

That is why for the last two years the Chinese have pressed in negotiations for an agreement which in effect would freeze the present situation on the border, preventing further infrastructure development and enhanced deployments by us. Having done what they wished to in terms of building up their capabilities, the Chinese would now like to freeze the existing imbalance. We have naturally resisted this and made counter proposals of our own seeking to limit their assertive behaviour and have pressed for clarification of the LAC.

We may have already seen a change in Chinese behaviour on the line just a few months ago. During President Xi Jinping's September 2014 visit to India, the PLA entered Chumar, one of the sixteen areas where the LAC is disputed, in larger numbers than ever before, and did not leave for over a fortnight. I do not believe that this was a rogue PLA action, without the knowledge of Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Military Affairs Commission and the National Security Council. Usually, the Chinese negotiating posture is prepared, signalled and matched by their behaviour on the ground. There are three possible explanations for the timing and nature of the PLA action in Chumar in September during the Xi Jinping visit. The most benign is that China is serious about negotiating the boundary and wanted to convince the new Indian government of the need to do so to avoid future political embarrassment. The second could be that they wanted to press us to accept their proposals to freeze the present situation on the LAC as the price for continued peace on the line. If either of these were true they should have followed this up at the negotiating table. As far as I know this has not happened. We are therefore left with the third explanation that they wished to emphasise to the new PM their military predominance and ability to embarrass India on the border, that they are not so preoccupied by their troubles with Japan and Vietnam in the East and South China Seas as to need to make concessions to India, and that peace on the border is fragile and China should not be taken for granted. In other words that this was an early attempt to establish psychological dominance over a new Indian government.

What should our strategy be to deal with the Chinese on the LAC? Our goal has not necessarily been to match the Chinese PLA weapon for weapon, acquisition for acquisition, or dollar for dollar. It has been to convince them that any misadventure would result in embarrassment and pain to him and frustrate his political goals. This requires asymmetric actions and capabilities on our side. Our strategy has been to keep the peace without ceding ground, building up steadily, while pushing for a settlement of the boundary as a whole.

The deterrence that maritime strength gives us is not directly relevant to handling the situation on the long, disputed India-China boundary but it is supremely necessary to defend our growing maritime interests when the Chinese are heading towards basing and other arrangements in Gwadar and the Gulf.

Overall, however, we need to continuously reevaluate our strategy. You are the best judge of whether or not a mountain corps is the best military answer to the Chinese challenge on the line. The broader picture is that we face an increasingly confident China, with access to Russian military technology and energy thanks to the West pushing Russia in Ukraine into Chinese arms, with an economy that even at a slower 7% is the largest and one of the fastest growing in the world, and an increasingly nationalist and chauvinist national narrative replacing the lost ideology and mock humility of the past.

The nature of the Chinese challenge, which is political, military, economic and psychological at the same time, thus requires a comprehensive response from us, using and coordinating all elements of national power, or, jointness in the true sense of the word, not just between the three services but between the civilian, intelligence and armed forces and agencies, working to clear political goals. But that is a subject so broad that it requires another lecture.

### Conclusion

To conclude, while Pakistan is a tactical problem that we will have to face for a long time to come, China is a strategic challenge to our primary purpose — the transformation of India. Each requires a very different use of military power. Pakistan today and for the foreseeable future requires direct, covert and smart applications of force. With China, on the other hand, it is not the direct application of force but force-in-being in its larger uses of maintaining an overall balance and correlation of forces that will enable us to develop India. In this endeavour military power and force become one among several tools of statecraft and must be used politically rather than following a purely military logic.