



## **Mountain Warfare and The Indian Army: Towards an Effective Deterrence Capability**

**Speaker: Col. Gautam Das**

**Chair: Ashok. K. Kantha**

**Date: 28 February, 2018**

**Time: 2:30 pm**

**Conference Hall II, IIC**

The discussion began with the chair Amb. Ashok K. Kantha, affirming the importance of the topic to be discussed essentially India's deterrence vis-à-vis China in the backdrop of Col. Gautam Das' recent book *'Mountain Warfare and the Indian Army: Towards an Effective Deterrence Capability.'* China's modernisation of its armed forces has advanced faster than many China watchers would have expected. The country's defensive profile has undergone rapid transformation in terms of military assets, military structure and even its military doctrine. China's modernization efforts of its air and naval forces has to be especially taken into account. Therefore, the Chair asserts that it is crucial to depart from the conventional idea of deterrence solely based on defensive capability and focus on deterrence based on the concept of offensive-defensive capability.

The speaker began by providing an overview of the book highlighting practical realities of military operations on India's northern and northwestern frontiers with China and Pakistan, and a focused discussion on the organisational requirements for an offensive doctrine in the mountains, as required for India's new Mountain Strike Corps. The speaker pointed out that the discussion is not based on the book per se but on deterrence vis-à-vis China based on two premises drawn from the book. These two premises are: modern-age armed forces do not desire war nor are warmongering entities. There is too much at stake personally; injury and disablement, death and results on family. Secondly, military preparedness deters others from attacking a country on the contrary military weakness can encourage it.

Based on these two premises the speaker emphasizes on mountain warfare in the Indian context. The speaker begins with a historical overview of Indian perceptions towards the mountain barriers. This has been defined in the context of the geographical space of the Indian sub-continent and the historical experience of the Indian Army in the mountain

environment, both under the British and later in independent India. Modern independent India's wars are put in perspective from the aspects of casualties sustained by belligerent countries, both military and civil, in recent wars and that of the likely financial implications of an aggressive defensive posture, which are what make a Mountain Strike Corps credible. The current geo-strategic military situation in India's neighbourhood, and India's policy of strategic restraint coupled with a credible minimum deterrent are explained to provide the backdrop for the discussion on the ground deterrent envisaged. The practical realities and difficulties of specific operations of war, such as defence and attack, are brought out through examples. Some of these are in the first person from interviews conducted by the author himself, including a previously unrecorded and unpublished one from a Pakistani Brigade Commander who was tasked to attack India's defences in Poonch in December 1971. The speaker also reflects on deterrence requirements of the Mountain Strike Corps.

With China's growing role as a source of sophisticated weaponry many countries are worried of the bleak future that China's growing military might bring, particularly its neighbours. As a result of China's progress and remarkable technical abilities, from ultra-long-range conventional ballistic missiles to fifth generation fighter jets, India's deterrence policy requires major revamping. In the ultimate analysis the speaker advocated that deterrence capability is really a combination of the physical capacity created and the political will to use the capacity if and when needed. The event was followed by a stimulating question and answer session. Some of the questions centered around China's belligerence in the Tibetan side and in the Indian Ocean near Maldives where the Chinese are building up the air force capabilities both submarines and aircraft carriers. The speaker was asked if India should be worried about such developments. The speaker addressed the queries by advocating that the world needs no further assertion that China considers military power as a fundamental pillar to realize its political and diplomatic goals. China has focused on restructuring and modernisation of its military as key to maintain itself in the best state of operational and logistic efficiency. On the contrary on Indian dispensation, the state apparatus appropriates military-specific policy even if it means undermining the strategy it requires to fight war against a militarily advanced country like China. It is under these circumstances that India's deterrence vis-à-vis China should be understood and appropriate strategies should be conceived within the systemic limitations to strike at the PLA's efforts in the borders shared with China regardless of the terrain.

*Report prepared by Ngipwem Rebecca Chohwanglim, Research Intern, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.*

## **About the Speaker**

Gautam Das was in the Indian Army from 1968 to 1991, and was an infantry officer of the 11th Gorkha Rifles. During his mountain military experience of a decade he commanded troops in all of India's militarised mountain environments, which included regular infantry as well as the specialised mountain troops such of the Special Frontier Force, an element of India's Special Forces. He also served on the General Staff of a Corps headquarters with operational responsibilities on both the mountainous China and Pakistan de facto borders in northern J&K state, being closely involved with operational planning.

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