

Joint Doctrine of Armed Forces

What is the issue?

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The Joint Doctrine of the Indian Armed Forces 2017 has formally embedded Surgical Strikes as a part of sub-conventional operations — meaning that from now on, they are among a range of options at the military's disposal to respond to terrorist attacks.

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Did surgical strikes achieve any objectives?

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- The more interesting aspect in the second such joint doctrine since 2006 is that the scope of “**surgical strikes**” has been left open.

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- There is no mention of their employment being within the country or beyond its borders — the ambiguity is intended to send a message in the neighbourhood.

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- In this context, it is important to note that the surgical strikes in September 2016 on terror camps along the Line of Control, did achieve some far-reaching strategic objectives.

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- They were never meant to put an end to terrorism but reversed a discourse which began in 1998 that India was out of conventional options in its quiver in the face of continued cross-border terrorism after the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests.

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What the doctrine says?

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- The doctrine reiterates the basic tenets of the Indian nuclear doctrine, **no-**

first use (NFU) and minimum credible deterrence, contrary to recent calls to revise the NFU and speculation in the West that India would resort to a first strike.

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- It adds that conflict will be determined or prevented through a process of credible deterrence, coercive diplomacy and conclusively by punitive destruction, disruption and constraint in a nuclear environment across the Spectrum of Conflict.

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- Flowing from the broader objective is the statement that Special Forces units will be “tasked to develop area specialisation in their intended operational theatres” to achieve an optimum effect.

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What are the problems in implementing this doctrine?

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- The various objectives open up an entire gamut of capability addition and process optimisation for the Indian military to be able to enforce it.

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- Achieving these broad objectives requires seamless synergy between the three services, a far cry in the present circumstances.

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- Interestingly some of the biggest policy decisions have been stuck endlessly — appointment of a **Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)**, **formation of cyber, space and Special Forces commands and carving out inter-service theatre commands**.

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- After some initial push from the Government, the enthusiasm has gone.

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- Another important pronouncement under the “National Military Objectives” is: “Enable required degree of self-sufficiency in defence equipment and technology through indigenization to achieve desired degree of technological independence by 2035.”

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- This probably presents the biggest challenge of all given the present state of the domestic defence-industrial complex.

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What is the way ahead?

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- The doctrine is a bold announcement, but without the necessary elements in place, it will remain just another document like the policy formulations enunciated earlier.

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- Or worse, it will be relegated to being another political slogan for popular resonance rather than send out a message of intent beyond Indian borders and shores.

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Source: The Hindu

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