**IAF Preparing for a Short War**

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While Pakistan is going through a period of relative political uncertainty, the Indian Air Chief thought it appropriate to speak about its preparation for a short war. As reported by Man Aman Singh Chinna in Indian Express on April 29, 2022, Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhary was speaking at the inauguration of a national level logistics seminar of the Indian Air Force (IAF), LOGISEM VAYU-2022 in New Delhi on April 28, 2022. ACM Chaudhry, who took over as CAS, IAF on September 30, 2021, laid great emphasis on two aspects: remain prepared for intense conflicts of short duration, and long drawn out stand-offs.

The ACM Chaudhry’s remarks carry significant weight and cannot be ignored by saying that it was in the context of India’s stand-offs with China in Eastern Ladakh, as suggested by certain sections of Indian media. Because, ACM Chaudhry, through this statement has outlined his vision for IAF in decades to come. He clearly wants the “IAF to be prepared to operate over a wide spectrum of conflict, ranging from short-duration intense conventional warfare to long-drawn strategic standoffs which may or may not culminate in actual hostilities.” Since the occasion was a national level seminar on logistics, ACM Chaudhry highlighted “the importance of logistics in modern warfare and the fact that Military Commanders need a foolproof logistical back up in the shape of supplies of various kinds, including war stories, which are needed to plan and execute successful operations.”

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In my book Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict Management Between India and Pakistan, published by Peter Lang, New York in December 2020, I asserted that the possibility of another short and intense military engagement between India and Pakistan exists with varying degrees of probability under the nuclear overhang. Unfortunately, certain quarters in Pakistan give too much weight to the nuclear dimension and assume that there is no space for war under the nuclear overhang. However, Chinna categorically states that “given the fact that this potential conflict will take place with a nuclear overhang, with both India and Pakistan possessing nuclear weapons, strategic planners foresee that the war will be short, and of very high intensity in order to achieve the war goals before the nuclear threshold of either country is reached. This period of short, intense conflict could take place in a window of one week only.”

While Chinna outlined a brief account of IAF versus PAF in all the previous wars, his mention of Balakot is important. Chinna writes that “The Balakot strike by the IAF in Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pulwama terror attack in 2019 and the subsequent retaliation by Pakistan using airpower also strengthened the understanding that short and fast-paced conventional sparring can take place without it snowballing into a bigger conflict.” China sounds similar to my assessment and needs to be taken seriously, because when the two nuclear powers engage militarily, the probabilities of horizontal or vertical, or both, conflict expansion becomes higher than usually anticipated.

Another story on the subject done by Harshit Sabarwal and edited by Sohini Goswami, published in the Hindustan Times on April 28, 2022, highlights another dimension of ACM Chaudhry’s remarks. ACM was quoted by news agency ANI on April 12, “Due to very high speeds, hypersonic missiles are difficult to intercept making existing air defence systems redundant. The air force is actively involved in research and development for such weapons and in developing countermeasures.” It is necessary to mention that on March 9, an Indian hypersonic missile crash-landed near Pakistan’s eastern city of Mian Channu. India’s defence minister Rajnath Singh told the Indian parliament that the incident was “regrettable”, and occurred due “technical malfunction” during maintenance. Pakistan criticised India’s “callousness and ineptitude” in a “nuclear environment”, and demanded a joint investigation to “accurately establish the facts surrounding the incident.”

In my opinion, ACM Chaudhry’s assessment of future wars, no matter how short it may be, must be given due consideration and debated by think tanks to offer s suitable counter-strategy for the PAF. I do not doubt that PAF has in place the mechanism to respond to any evolving situation, but our objective should be to deny IAF the opportunity to even consider exercising an option of short and intense war under the nuclear overhang.

*The writer is the author of the book ‘Nuclear Deterrence and Conflict Management Between India and Pakistan’. He is presently working as the Director of the Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS).*