

# Strategic Reserves of Pakistan

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**CLAWS RESEARCH TEAM**

Pakistan's hostility towards India is rooted in the history of the partition of the sub continent. This antagonism has already led to four wars between India and Pakistan and the situation today is equally if not more acerbic. Since the late 1980s Pakistan has been waging a proxy war against India in Jammu and Kashmir and has supported the activities of terrorist groups all across the Indian land mass. The Pakistan Army's obsession with India led to the Islamisation and radicalisation of Pakistani society and its military. This process was actively encouraged by all its military rulers but under General Zia it received much greater impetus and support. The adverse effects of this policy are being felt in the body politic of Pakistan which stands fractured along religious, ethnic, sectarian and linguistic lines. While the Pakistan Army too is affected and faces problems of radicalised elements within its ranks, it still commands great respect in the country and is seen as the one binding force which is holding the nation together. To perpetuate its hold over the country it will continue to stoke the bogey of India being an existential threat to Pakistan. Even the lay public in Pakistan considers India as its enemy number one and a greater threat than the terrorism currently inflicting the country.<sup>1</sup> The Pakistan Army is thus likely to continue its policy of hostility towards India, to ensure its pre-eminent status in the affairs of Pakistan.

A conflict scenario between India and Pakistan is predicated on the concept that future wars will be short and swift. Pakistan's concerns are related to India's proactive stance also referred to by some as the 'cold start doctrine'. This

doctrine denies to the Pakistan Army the advantage of early mobilisation and provides India a viable option for launching low risk shallow thrust offensive operations in the plains in response to a grave provocation. The Indian Army Chief has however stated that 'cold start' is not part of the Indian Army Doctrine. But he further stated that... 'We have a number of contingencies and options, depending on what the aggressor does. In the recent years, we have been improving our systems with respect to mobilisation, but our basic military posture is defensive'.<sup>2</sup>

Despite such an assurance, Pakistan remains concerned. The Pakistan Army has recently carried out three exercises – 'Azm-e Nau I, II and III' to validate its responses and future doctrinal concepts against a likely Indian 'cold start'. For Pakistan the dimensions of time and space assume paramount importance as it lacks territorial depth and also resources to fight a protracted war. Its lack of confidence in its conventional capability has led to some in the Pakistani establishment suggesting the use of low-yield tactical nuclear warheads if Indian forces cross the international border.<sup>3</sup> This possibly could be due to its lack of confidence in dealing with the proactive doctrine of the Indian Army. The threat of use of nuclear weapons is thus designed to blunt India's conventional military superiority.

Despite the turmoil in Pakistan the possibility of terrorist strikes duly sponsored by its intelligence wing cannot be ruled out. The fallout of such a scenario could be conventional conflict in which the employment of strategic reserves would play a vital role in deciding the fate of the conflict. Pakistan's capabilities in this respect are discussed in this article.

## **Terrain**

The terrain in Pakistan is simply an extension of Indian geographical features further to its West. Barring its northern areas, the remaining border areas of Pakistan can be termed as suitable for employment of mechanised forces. The large number of artificial obstacles in conjunction with natural obstacles and built up areas will however impede mechanised operations.

Pakistan can be broadly subdivided into three major geographical areas. The mountain region of the north, the Baluchistan plateau and the Indus plains along-with the Cholistan desert (an extension of Thar Desert). The Sind province itself can be divided into Indus plains, Cholistan desert in East and Western hilly portion also known as Kohistan. The plains of Pakistan Punjab comprises of fertile land irrigated by the Indus and its five tributaries - Chenab, Jhelum,

Ravi, Sutlej and Beas. These tributaries flow from the Indian side to Pakistan, forming sizeable river corridors from East to West. Pakistan is very sensitive to this area, which is the heartland of Pakistan. The said corridors hinder the lateral movement of forces thus making timely and correct reading of battle vital for effective employment of strategic reserves.

**Chenab-Jhelum Corridor.** This corridor hugs the mountainous region and limits the employment of large scale mechanised forces. The important objectives on both sides lie very close to the border. However, despite limitations Pakistan in compression is in a better position to exploit the potential of armour.

**Ravi-Chenab Corridor.** The Shakargarh bulge forms part of this corridor and offers better strategic orientation to Pakistan for its operations. The proximity of Indian national highway to the border makes it vulnerable to interdiction. While the bulge forms an ideal launch pad for Pakistan strategic reserves, it also provides Indian forces an opportunity to address it from three directions.

**Ravi-Sutlej Corridor.** High value targets for both India (Amritsar) and Pakistan (Lahore) lie in close proximity to the border. Though the terrain is suitable for large scale employment of armour, artificial obstacles along with heavily built up areas would limit the employment of mechanised forces. The value targets on either side of the border place an obligation on both sides to defend their respective areas in strength.

**South of Sutlej.** It comprises area south of Sulaimanke head works to Rann of Kutch. The terrain varies from semi desert to desert and then leads on to the salt marshes of the Rann. The green belt in Pakistan in the desert sector lies eighty to hundred kilometers in depth. It is much closer in the semi desert areas. The area is devoid of any major obstacle system and offers adequate space for maneuver warfare. This gets restricted as we proceed northwards towards semi desert terrain. There will be major constraints on logistic support which will impact on operational planning. The control over Sutlej River does offer India some advantage. The salt marshes offer little scope to both sides for maneuver.

## **Reserves**

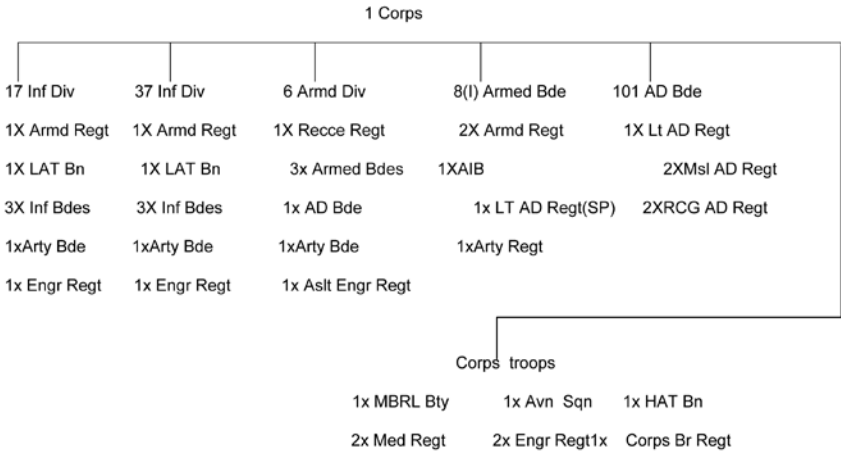
The Azm-e-Nau series of exercises reflect Pakistani concerns to address the pro active stance of the Indian Army. It is learnt that Pakistan is working on creating a command headquarters and improving its logistic support systems.

Pakistan continues to rely heavily on its strategic reserves to achieve parity in the battle field especially along the international border. Pakistan Army's 'Army Reserve North' (ARN) and 'Army Reserve South' (ARS) form the main strategic reserves to influence the battle along its eastern front. Pakistan also has the ability to utilise elements of its defensive corps operating against the Afghanistan border.

### **Army Reserve North (ARN)**

Pakistan Army's 1 Corps constitutes its ARN. It has two infantry divisions, one armoured division, one independent armoured brigade and an air defence brigade. Besides, it has a heavy anti tank (HAT) battalion, a MBRL battery, aviation squadron and requisite support and services elements. The armoured regiments are equipped with Al-Zarar tanks with thermal imager sights. The engineer regiments on its orbat are equipped with bridging equipment to cater for short and medium spans likely to be encountered by the strike corps during its course of operations. It forms the main punch of the Pakistan Army. It is a force available to Pakistan to either launch offensive operations inside Indian territory duly assisted by the holding formations or to blunt an Indian offensive across the international border. Its peace time location indicates its likely employment North of Sutlej River. The difficulty of switching forces across the river corridors forces a decision dilemma on the correct placement of this force. For India, timely intelligence on the movement and location of this force would greatly impact the course of battle. Going by the terrain configuration and past war experiences, Pakistan is likely to exploit the advantage being offered by the Shakargarh bulge, to launch its reserves towards this corridor. She may attempt a preemptive operation to cut off/ threaten National Highway 1A and also pose a threat to the Madhopur headworks. Pakistan army will continue to look forward to exploit the spatial bias in north from Marala headworks through Shakargarh Bulge with the advantage of terrain in its favour. It is believed that some elements of ARN/ holding corps did validate its new concepts as part of Azm-e-Nau III. The broad orbat of 1 Corps (ARN) is as follows:

**SCHOLAR WARRIOR**

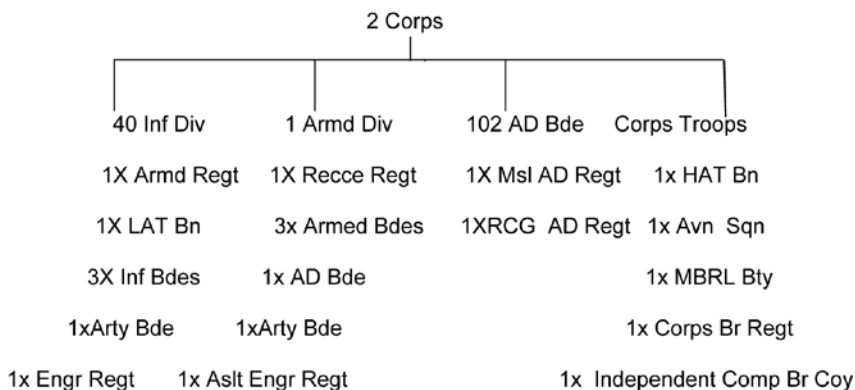


**Note:** Two of the armed bdes have the configuration of two armed regts and one mechanised bn, where as the third bde has only one armed regt and one mech bn. The normal service and support elements also forms part of corps troops.

**Army Reserve South (ARN)**

Pakistan’s 2 Corps constitutes its ‘Army Reserve South’ (ARS). This force is likely to be employed in semi desert/ desert terrain south of Sulaimanke head works on Sutlej River. It is structured on similar lines to ARN but is void of one infantry division and an independent armoured brigade, which puts a serious constraint on its offensive capability. It is thus more suited for a riposte or counter offensive tasks. For a meaningful pre-emptive offensive it would require additional infantry and armoured resources. Its positioning assumes criticality during mobilisation of the force. When located West of the Indus, it gives Pakistan multiple options for employment but makes the force vulnerable to interdiction while crossing the Indus. Locating the Force East of the Indus reduces options for employment.

During Exercise Azm-e-Nau, the concept of establishing logistic nodes well forward to meet the operational requirements of the Force were tried out. This is again to be seen as a counter to the proactive strategy of India to reduce logistic vulnerability and ensure mobilisation in a faster time frame. The orbat of ARS is as under:



**Note:** In both 6 Armoured Division and 1 Armoured Division, two of the armoured brigades have two armoured regiments and one mechanised battalion each. The third armoured brigade has one armoured regiment and one mechanised battalion. Both ARN and ARS have the full complement of service and support elements.

## Conclusion

India continues to enjoy a clear edge over Pakistan in terms of both quality and quantity of mechanised forces. Multiple shallow penetrations over a wide front in a quick time frame will impose severe challenges to Pakistan's defensive formations and strategic reserves. Exercise Azm-e-Nau was conducted by Pakistan to validate a counter strategy.

Future conflict is unlikely to see massive employment of mechanised forces in large formations. Better payoffs would be achieved by employment of small integrated groups duly supported by attack helicopters and UAVs.

With more than five and a half lakh strong and professional army, Pakistan continues to be a potent threat which cannot be ignored, despite the current turmoil engulfing the country. In a statement in July 2011, the Pakistani Premier did say that Pakistan cannot match the economic boom of India and is in no position to compete militarily. However, Pakistan's military capability cannot be brushed aside and it remains a formidable fighting machine. Since its army continues to be the instrument of decision making, Pakistan will remain a major concern for India. It would be necessary to keep a constant watch over the movement of Pakistan's strategic reserves through technological and other means to enable appropriate response options in an acceptable time frame.

## Notes

1. A survey of TOI of 24 Jan 2011
2. No 'Cold Start' doctrine, India tells US, *Indian Express*, available at <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/no-cold-start-doctrine-india-tells-us/679273/> (accessed on 7 August 2011).
3. Pakistan Army's war games to test Indian cold start strategy, *Hindustan Globe*, available at <http://www.hindustanglobe.com/?p=110>, (accessed on 7 August 2011)