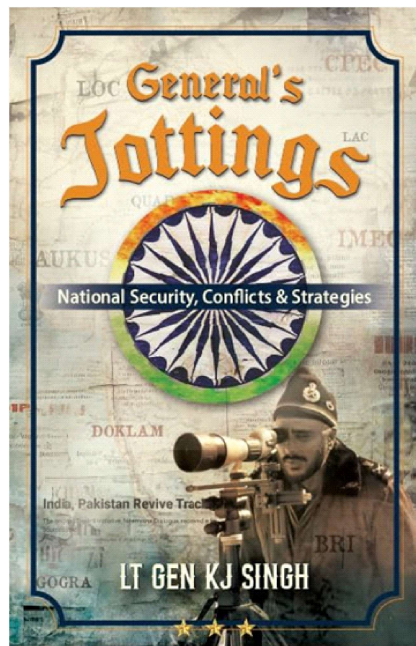


Review Articles

Review Article 1



Introduction

General's *Jottings* by Lieutenant General KJ Singh, PVSM, AVSM** (Retd), former Western Army Commander, is an updated and distilled collection of his columns and articles published in various newspapers and journals addressing contemporary issues. The columns bear all the hallmarks: they are direct, sharp, and incisive, while remaining brief yet comprehensive in covering all important aspects of the subject.

This compilation includes longer articles published in Year Books of the United Service Institution of India, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, and Gyanchakra, amongst others. This book weaves the articles thematically. Important issues have been highlighted, and key takeaway points have been duly flagged. Necessary updates to the articles have been made, along with the inclusion of the time of writing for better referencing. Most importantly, these articles have been compiled with rare commitment.

General's Jottings by Lieutenant General KJ Singh, PVSM, AVSM ** (Retd), Pages: 400, Price: ₹ 417, Publisher: The Browser, ISBN-10: 9392210914, ISBN-13: 978-9392210914

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About the Author

Lieutenant General KJ Singh, PVSM, AVSM** (Retd), was commissioned into 63 Cavalry, a regiment he subsequently commanded. He also commanded an armoured brigade, an armoured division, and an operationally committed corps in the northeastern region.

During his three-decade long career, he has served in several counter-insurgency areas such as Nagaland, Manipur, and Punjab, and was also with the United Nations in Angola. His staff appointments include Brigade Major of an Armoured Brigade, Assistant Military Secretary (Policy), Military Assistant to Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Colonel General Staff of an Assam Rifles Range, Brigadier General Staff of a Strike Corps, and Additional Director General (Perspective Planning). He has also served as an instructor at the School of Armoured Warfare, and also at the Higher Command Wing of the Army War College.

Post retirement, he was conferred with Maharaja Ranjit Singh Chair of Excellence in Punjab University and was appointed as Advisor to Chief Minister of Haryana in Nov 2018. In 2019, he was appointed as State Information Commissioner and was inducted into Chandigarh Advisory Council. He was nominated as Chairman of Education Standing Committee of Union Territory Advisory Council in 2022.

He is a prolific writer and his articles have appeared in various newspapers and journals. He has been speaking at multiple platforms on issues of national security, military history, and leadership.

About the Book

The book has been divided into 19 sections each, self-contained yet inter-connected, which helps the reader dive into any of the sections and navigate these subjects independently. A potpourri of themes includes analyses of India's borders and neighbourhood; military threats such as the two-front challenge and issues on the Western border; details about the Pakistani Army and the Afghanistan–Pakistan region; and, of course, the Indus Water Treaty. The author has also covered China in detail to include a brilliant piece on the significance of the Siliguri Corridor. In addition, issues such as the proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the insurgency in the Northeast have all been covered in detail.

While carrying out an 'Analytical Mapping of Trends in Unending Conflicts', General Singh has stated that it will be pragmatic for nations to avoid belligerence and application of kinetic force. Even if forced into it, it will be prudent to stipulate realistic goals with a clearly defined end-state. It is also axiomatic to build interim exit options for conflict termination. He states, "Long, drawn-out conflicts with indeterminate objectives are more likely to be the new normal in future. In addition, conflicts are likely to degenerate into extended hybrid wars or insurgencies".

While giving out the agenda for Modi 3.0, the author has stated, "Funding for defence modernisation should be liberated from the self-defeating two per cent gross domestic product ceiling". He elaborates that each border is unique, and it will be pragmatic to group all forces, including Central Armed Police Forces and agencies in the theatre, under a designated theatre commander. The unique eco-system of the services needs to be respected and tinkering the name of transformation is best avoided.

He states that taking heed from emerging trends, India has embarked on multiple measures to cope up with multi-spectral challenges. The major initiatives include rebalancing deployment to boost force level on the Northern Front opposite China, accelerating the push towards theatrisation and transformation, expediting the building of border infrastructure, pushing for *Atmanirbharata* (Self-reliance) and modernisation, revising ammunition stocking levels, and opening armament and ammunition manufacturing to private entities.

Regarding China, General Singh has stated, "Unresolved borders between two powerful neighbours, both armed with nuclear weapons and in aspirational trajectory, have the potential for conflict, given their acrimonious history. It is axiomatic that both sides must settle the boundary dispute on priority. The Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) and protocols have become meaningless due to the unilateral actions of the People's Liberation Army".

He goes on to state that "The coping strategy in dealing with China must factor in existing asymmetry and should be confined within the bounds of realism. We have viable options, though limited, yet we must signal resolve. To deter the Red Dragon, we must discard myths, accept new realities, and reduce asymmetries.

China is indeed the biggest adversary, and the only antidote is capability-building”.

Clearly bringing out the fact that “We must be cognizant that heavy lifting is our burden and external assistance from groupings like Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) would be limited. QUAD, itself is creating complementary groupings like the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the five key littoral states of the Indian Ocean—India, Indonesia, Australia, South Africa. There is growing parallel engagement with Japan and South Korea with India being pushed to the periphery”.

The author while discussing the ‘Two-Front Threat’ has stated that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor represents a new collusive paradigm. Collusion has been accepted as a corollary and a reality. It now extends across multiple domains—intelligence, information operations, cyber, surveillance, manufacturing, preparation, and other disciplines—acquiring abiding permanency and resulting in a seamless fusion between the two nations. He then states that in a scenario where all three players are armed with nuclear weapons, the need is to build genuine CBMs, more transparency, and reduce collusion.

Writing about Pakistan, he clearly brings out the primacy of the army and how it chose to make the anti-India bias its *raison d’être*. He then presents an interesting survey of the Pakistani tri-services chiefs, noting that three of them—Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq from Jalandhar, Mirza Aslam Beg from Azamgarh, and Pervez Musharraf from Delhi—who owed their origins to India, sought to appear more Punjabi than the Punjabis.

As a result, Zia led Pakistan to the path of Islamisation and its army to new ideological frontiers, while under Aslam Beg, the proxy war in Kashmir started and, of course, the Kargil War was initiated by Musharraf. Today, General Asim Munir, a Shia, is also seen as a minority.

He states that Pakistan has tried to offset its asymmetry by cultivating a nuanced irrationality, wherein, it threatens to transition from hybrid war to the tactical nuclear domain with a declaratory policy, as described by C Christine Fair, “Pakistan’s nuclear weapons are India-specific”. And that the “Pakistan Army,

specifically at the higher echelons, is not a pushover but has a considerable professional framework”.

While analysing Pakistan's National Security Policy (NSP) the author states that “India should also finalise its NSP. The current reliance on ambiguity makes defence planning difficult. Without clear-cut goals, we deny ourselves the benefits of accountability and net assessment, which contribute to strategic deterrence”.

He also observes that Pakistan's geostrategic location ensures its continued relevance for the major powers, who are likely to bail it out in pursuit of their own great game. But its fancy notion of strategic depth through subservient Afghanistan under the Taliban now lies in tatters. He brings out that in this uneasy triad of Pakistan, Taliban, and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, dangers of consolidation of the Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand line, with fatal consequences for Pakistan, are imminent.

Regarding the surgical strikes at Balakot, General Singh has clearly brought out that “The aerial capability has existed and been considered but, unfortunately, never exercised. It is to the credit of the government that they displayed political will with attendant risks—political and operational”.

He states that despite the Northern Front being designated as the primary one, challenges on the Western Front persist in both proxy-war and conventional domains. He also highlights that given India's current state of equipment and ammunition inventory, it seems to lack the decisive edge and the requisite force asymmetry for a full-scale conventional war.

The proxy-war has created two distinct response paradigms against Pakistan. The Northern Command is engaged in tackling challenges of terrorism, while the other forces on the Western Front, and even Northern Command, to an extent, are geared up for conventional warfare. The way forward is speedy conflict termination in J&K, backed up by effective punitive surgical strike capability.

In the long run, he states “We have to further refine our surgical strike capability to make it more lethal, precise, and remote. There is also an inescapable requirement to address ‘Hollowness’ to regain a punitive edge in conventional forces to resuscitate the

proactive (cold start) strategy. A full spectrum approach with concurrent options is indeed long overdue in J&K”.

Regarding the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), he says that “The threat of the revocation of the IWT really amounts to playing to the gallery, as we must first create reservoirs to store water”.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, a treasure trove of articles and essays backed by wonderful maps in *General's Jottings* helps the reader understand the essence of national security and defence studies. While many may question the relevance of entering this domain, the truth is that today national security is all encompassing. The revised paradigm is that national security entails a ‘Whole-of-nation’ approach. The line between a civilian and combatant is increasingly blurred, making it imperative to understand both the drivers and nuances of the issues that are driving India’s challenges in this domain.

What stands out is the clarity and simplicity with which General Singh has written this outstanding book on a complex subject, covering contemporary aspects of India’s national security and its neighbourhood. He also has the knack of connecting with his readership in an unintimidating manner. Incidentally, the first part starts with an acronym on how to navigate national security.

Having held coveted appointments at the highest level in the Indian Armed Forces, General Singh has had a ring-side view of national security and the insights offered by him are backed by his scholarship, professionalism, and experience. Hence, this book is strongly recommended to be read by academicians, students, scholars, and practitioners. The book offers rare insights into the problems currently confronting the country, combining originality with prescriptive analysis that provokes thoughtful reflection. It is without doubt an invaluable companion.

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)