

General

An interaction with HDOC team from Army War College, Mhow was organised by CLAWS at Manekshaw Centre on 30 May 2012. Brigadier Ben Barry (Retd), Senior Fellow Land Warfare, International Institute for Strategic Studies and Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd), Adjunct Fellow, Centre for Strategic and International Studies were the main speakers. Brig Barry spoke on 'British Counter Insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan - A Close Run Thing' and Brig Kanwal delivered a talk on 'China-India Strategic Relations and US Factor'. The event was attended by the officers of armed forces of India and friendly foreign countries undergoing Higher Defence Orientation Course (HDOC).

Opening Remarks: Major General Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Additional Director, CLAWS

Major General Dhruv C Katoch opened the proceedings by welcoming the speakers and the attendees. He gave a brief introduction of the Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS) and its main activities as the leading think tank for the Indian Army. Thereafter, he introduced the speakers to the audience.

Brigadier Ben Barry (Retd): British Counter Insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan - A Close Run Thing

The presentation described the tactical lessons pertaining to the land component of Operation (Op) TELIC which was conducted from January 2005 to June 2009 in Iraq. The presentation also highlighted the conduct of current tactical land operations in Afghanistan and the likely future operations that will be executed by British land forces. An overview of efforts needed to develop Army structures and refine capability requirements in the land environment, to perform effective counter insurgency operations, for both urban and rural terrains was explained.

Afghanistan (2001-05) and Iraq (2003-07)

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were extremely complex and dynamic. They transformed from regime change, through peace support to counter insurgency (COIN). During 2001-05, UK led the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul undertaking the stabilisation mission.

In 2004-05 many considered the situation in South-East Iraq to have more in common with Peace Support Operations (PSO) than fighting a regular war for regime change. The transition strategy had failed in most of Iraq by end of 2006. It was then that the situation was formally characterised as COIN, but until Op CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS (2008), there were insufficient UK troops or Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to

execute a COIN approach in South East Iraq. This pointed towards an ever deteriorating situation and Iraq was on the brink of civil war by beginning of 2007. In 2007, transition policy was replaced by US surge, which countered Sunni/ Al Qaeda insurgency in Baghdad, but not Shia extremists.

Expectations over the success of transition policy were thwarted by local politics, growing influence of Shia militias, and the fragility of the ISF. The planned COIN operation to counter Shia militia was toned down by Maliki into Op SINBAD and the aggressive intent of the original plan to search and destroy the local militias was reduced. It had some success, but did not change the Basra political dynamic.

Op CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS

A joint UK/ISF plan for a deliberate operation to clear Basra was undertaken by PM Maliki to clear the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM), the militia of the fiery cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, from Basra at 48 hours' notice. After an inevitably shaky start, Op CHARGE OF THE KNIGHTS became an effective Iraqi surge into Basra with US and UK support. Consequently, it was able to restore security months before the anticipated timeframe.

UK Afghanistan Plans

In 2005, UK took the initiative to carry out the peace operations in Afghanistan, but the number of UK forces in Afghanistan was constrained by the ongoing deployment of UK force in Iraq. In 2006, UK supported the NATO initiative for ISAF to take over the whole mission. However, it was realised that the Taliban was much stronger than the intelligence had anticipated. In the following three years, UK force increased from 3,500 to 10,000 and raids were carried out on insurgent strongholds, which were tactically successful. UK started increasing training and mentoring support to Afghan Army and police. During 2010-12, US surge added 20,000 marines to 10,000 UK troops in Helmand. The force ratio allowed proper COIN.

British Military Lessons

Some important lessons for the future may be derived from the story of Basra (Southern Iraqi Province). This type of scenario causes a risk of tactical incoherence. Other lessons of relevance to such type of operations are:

- There should be clear and shared understanding at all levels of the force deployed while dealing with a COIN situation.
- There may be considerable overlap between insurgents, organised criminals, political/religious extremists and death squads. The forces on ground need to pay special attention while dealing with such entities.

- Tactical success in Iraq depended upon the political climate.

Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd): China-India Strategic Relations and US Factor

India-China relations have been improving steadily, however the improvements in security relationship have not been at the same pace. While there is stability at the strategic level, China has been showing signs of political, diplomatic and military aggressiveness at the tactical level. There is an urgent need to resolve the territorial dispute by creatively working around the stated positions of both countries failing which the security relationship will deteriorate.

India-China relationship

The Strategic Partnership between China and India was announced on April 11, 2005. Since then, we have been moving gradually from competition to limited cooperation. Currently, China together with Hong Kong is India's largest trading partner although the balance of trade is enormously in China's favour.

The coordinated approach in WTO and on critical environmental issues has led to advantage for both on international stage. Both countries helped to calm and stabilise global markets as they hold huge foreign exchange reserves. Both seek equitable financial reforms and greater role in Bretton Woods-type organisations in the future. India supported China's entry into UN, however China's support for India's bid for a permanent seat on UNSC is not forthcoming. At operational level, greater cooperation in counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics trafficking will be of mutual benefit. In Asia, both need to work together for peace, stability and regional economic integration.

Areas of concern

China-Pakistan nexus in form of nuclear proliferation, missile technology and military hardware cooperation is one of the main areas of concern. The Chinese presence in Gilgit-Baltistan is a great irritant to India. China's attempts to make inroads into India's neighbours (Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka) and "string of pearls" strategy for ports/ bases in northern Indian Ocean cannot be termed as friendly gestures. China does not recognise India as a nuclear-armed state; hence, China does not discuss confidence building and nuclear risk reduction measures with India.

Territorial and boundary dispute

China is in physical occupation of large areas of Indian Territory since mid-1950s. In Ladakh (Aksai Chin), China occupies 38,000 square km of Indian Territory. China continues to claim the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh having an area greater than 90,000 square km.

US Factor

China is unhappy with India's growing trade and strategic partnership with the US (and other Western nations). India cherishes its strategic autonomy and it seeks to balance its relationship with the US with India-China relations.

Concluding Remarks: Major General Dhruv C Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd)

Gen Katoch thanked the speakers and the audience for discussing the two important topics of relevance to the armed forces. He highlighted the basic difference in conduct of COIN operations between India and the other countries. While India carries out manpower intensive operations, the other nations make overwhelming use of firepower and technology. As for the string of pearls issue, the situation is likely to change in 15 years since India has now started addressing these issues seriously by enhancing its power projection capabilities and alliances.