Defensive to Offensive Orientation: Doctrinal Approach in Engaging Pakistan

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Warfare has evolved over millennia, with the great captains of war imposing their stamp on military thought all across the globe. Fundamentally, warfare is all about kinetic effects which, in turn, impact the minds of the opposing commanders. From ancient times till the present day, the great commanders of war understood the concept of application of force at the critical point of decision. From Christian mythology, we have the story of David slaying Goliath with a slingshot. It is always seen as a battle of unequals, with David being by far the weaker party. In reality, however, that was not so. David understood warfare, and the relationship of kinetic energy to velocity, though such ideas of physics are of rather recent origin and had not been developed in those times. Goliath, in terms of mass, was many times larger than David, but mass was of no use to him, if he could be engaged from a distance, nullifying his advantage. That is what David sought to do by using a slingshot to slay his foe. That act simply vindicated the application of the laws of physics (kinetic energy is the product of mass into the square of velocity) on warfare. By increasing velocity (through the slingshot) at the point of impact, David achieved a great victory that is wrongly quoted as the victory of the weak over the strong. It was simply a victory of superior weapons and tactics over a foe who was not ready to adapt to the changing times.

Throughout history, victory has been achieved by the nimble and the swift. The physical components of the armed forces such as the number of soldiers, quantum of weapons and equipment, ordnance holdings and the like constitute

mass. The speed of decision-making, battlefield transparency and battlefield innovation, intelligence, operating range of weapon systems, mobility and the like contribute towards velocity. Both mass and velocity are important, but increase in velocity has many times greater impact than a similar increase in mass. Rommel's victories in Africa in World War II and in more recent times, the destruction of Saddam's huge Army by a smaller US force, bring home the truth of this analogy. Similar examples abound in Indian history, such as the victory of Alexander over a much slower albeit stronger Porus, the Battle of Panipat in 1526 which established Moghul power in India, and Clive's victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 which was the starting point to the events that established the era of British dominion and conquest in India.

The Indian Army is still fixated on mass. Seeing the role of the military in low intensity conflict in parts of northeast India and in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), there is undeniably a requirement to hold ground with adequate numbers to militate against the designs of terror groups and their supporters. However, even here, mass can be reduced if other elements of combat power are systematically enhanced, empowering the troops at the ground level with the means to achieve greater transparency over their area of operations. Fundamentally, this would involve better means of communication at the section and platoon levels, use of global positioning systems, improved intelligence capability, improved mobility, use of stand-off weapons, and the like. It would involve a much greater use of drones and rotary wing support, quicker decision-making and frontline leadership. The last named attribute remains in abundant measure, but the rest have serious shortcomings as of now.

Engaging Pakistan

A cursory study of India's military engagement with Pakistan throws up a rather uncomfortable fact. India's military leadership has never considered winning a war against Pakistan. Its prime concern has been on ensuring that we did not lose one. Outwardly, this could be construed as meaning the same thing. If we do not lose a war, then logically we have won it. In the worst case, the conflict is a stalemate, which in any case will work to India's advantage, being the bigger power and, thus, more able to absorb losses in a war of attrition. But this implies static thought, a tendency to go with the status quo, which more often than not is the product of lazy thinking, or perhaps, lack of thought. Most importantly, it throws up a leadership which is comfortable in the status quo, is averse to risk and lacks offensive spirit to go for the jugular in war. A few examples from the 1965 and 1971 conflicts with Pakistan will suffice as examples.

In 1965, when 3 Jat reached the Ichhogil Canal, totally surprising the enemy, there was no follow-up action by the higher leadership. Characteristically, the unit was told to fall back: the Army, thereby, lost a golden opportunity to exploit a chance success and turn the tables on Pakistan. In the same war, a lack of clarity at the senior leadership level led to the initial advance on Phillora being pulled back, only to be resumed three days later at great cost. Here too, the tables could have been turned on Pakistan in a short period of time, compelling it to sue for peace on Indian terms. Many other examples abound but these will suffice for the moment. In 1971, however, there was, amongst the three corps commanders taking part in the offensive in the Eastern Theatre, one with an offensive bent of mind. By his bold and unorthodox employment of the rotary wing, Gen Sagat Singh created an opening which led to Dhaka being threatened and the Pakistan Army surrendering in a short duration war. The offensive then is the key to success. We need a doctrinal approach which is offensive in orientation in engaging Pakistan in both the conventional and sub-conventional domains.

The Means

For the Indian armed forces, three things are required. The first is a change in mindsets; the next, a change in organisational structures; and the third, a change in operating methodology. All three have to be progressed simultaneously. All Armies have institutional inertia and the Indian Army is no different. Propelling change will not be easy, but is essential if the armed forces are to remain an effective instrument of state policy.

The Mumbai attacks and own response to it highlighted organisational weaknesses which prevented a firm response in a quick timeframe. This, sadly, continues even today. The response was slow, not because we lacked a force to react to the emerging situation. Rather, decision-making structures remained weak, which led to increased timeframes in response options. This aspect has not received the attention it deserves. The emphasis has remained on increasing mass rather than the elements that lead to increased velocity which entail swift information flows, decision-making procedures and single point authority and accountability. Besides incremental improvement, nothing much has changed on the ground. Organisational change usually requires dealing with difficult personality issues and internal politics within the organisation, which is why it is had to achieve. It would require political intervention to affect change, but in the absence of an informed political body, the challenge remains.

In today's day and age, war-fighting is not about individual battles but the ability to look beyond the battle at the end state to be achieved. A focus on short-

term goals, rather than long-term strategies being evolved still pervades Indian decision-making, which is why insurgencies have continued in India for decades, without resolution, and Pakistan continues to support cross-border terrorism.

Indian armed forces need a three pronged strategy to remain effective instruments of state policy

For conventional conflict, let us first eliminate some old fashioned thinking. Laying of anti-personnel mines is one. Perhaps the least useful tool of war, such mines hinder own movement without causing the requisite degree of damage to the enemy. Yet we persist in this effort. The time has come to take off such mines from the inventory. All that the holding troops require is anti-tank cover to prevent an armoured assault on the objective, which can be achieved by laying anti-tank mines, interspersed with claymore mines. This by itself reduces mine laying effort by over 70 percent, freeing up troops for other tasks, without compromising on the strength of the defence. Yet we continue with the old methods. The laying of mines in Operation Parakram is a case in point. Why India, which was the stronger power, had to mine the entire length of its border tells a tale of its own.

The holding of linear defences is again a throwback to the policy of not losing an inch of our territory. It does not achieve that aim, but ties up vast resources, most of which do not take part in the conflict. Obviously, a change in operating philosophy is called for. Swift operations, carried out to threaten the enemy's critical vulnerabilities, will force the enemy to react to our moves. This is the changed dynamic which we should strive for, instead of remaining perpetually on the reactive mode.

A change in organisational structures is an operational imperative and must be predicated on how we wish to fight in a future conflict. For wars of manoeuvres, we need to reorganise our armoured divisions, by reducing the armour component and making attack and utility helicopters an integral part of the force. A revised organisation structure could look into replacing a third of the armour component by the rotary wing, to be flown by officers from the armoured corps as part of the armoured division. Let us remember, the tank replaced the horse and while the rotary wing cannot replace the tank, it must always operate in tandem with it. A combination of rotary wing and mechanised forces, operating as an integral part of the armoured division, throws up interesting possibilities for conventional combat which could lead to enhancing by a significant amount the combat potential of the force without any significant increase in cost.

Allied with this would be the employment of drones and artillery, to bring the entire combat potential to bear on the point of decision. This would also be predicated on a superior Air Force, to keep the skies above the area of operations, free from enemy interference. Holding corps also need to consider a change in organisational structures, replacing a portion of their armour component by the rotary wing, as an integral part of the armoured brigades that are integral to the corps. Improved operational capability must encompass battlefield transparency, night fighting capability, improved communications and, finally, capability to conduct operations successfully in the cyber domain. This would give the country the necessary edge to fight short and sharp engagements, with the focus on end state goals rather than merely fighting Pakistan to a stalemate.

Change is also required in the way we interact with each other. Vertical silos can no longer offer the returns we seek and the military will have to move towards flattened horizontal structures and increased collaboration amongst various elements of the force. Existing organisations today are self-contained structures with boundaries around their vertical authority, which have hardened into thick silos that act as an impediment to collaboration. This is ill suited to the digital age and must change to enable mobilising the mind power of the officer cadre to achieve organisational goals.

Reorientation in training philosophies would be required to throw up the right kind of leadership at the higher level. This remains a problem as the leadership remains conservative and is, thus, not attuned to change. Servility in the officer corps is increasing, and differences in opinion are rarely appreciated. The Army is, thus, producing fewer and fewer general officers of the calibre of Hanut Singh, Inder Gill and Sagat Singh, and more and more of the conformists in practically all decision-making structures. Change will be difficult to bring about in these circumstances, but is essential if we are to have the type of armed forces that we aspire for. For young and middle level officers, doctrinal issues and concept formulation are rarely the focus of discussion. Operational level concepts are formally taught only when an officer does the Higher Command Course at Mhow. This simply highlights the need for self-study in operational art and strategy, from the time an officer is commissioned. Such mentoring is lacking. Good generalship, however, demands a lifetime of study and such study must be encouraged amongst our young officers. Only then, will we be able to change mindsets and enable formulation of doctrines and concepts for force effectiveness.

We would also need a change in the logistic support structures, and integrate them to achieve organisational goals. This could achieve reduced holding patterns, improved repair capability and lead to better equipment and weapon management,

Re-orientation in training philosophy is required for all round development of officers

enhancing force effectiveness. Most importantly, we need to concentrate on that part of logistic management which is outside the structure of the armed forces, but within the purview of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Here reference is being made to our research organisations and to the defence industrial base under the state, encompassing all ordnance factories and public sector defence undertakings such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Bharat Earth Movers Limited (BEML), Bharat Dynamics and others, which have not performed to expected levels and have led to increased imports of defence equipment. Unless this sector is dramatically reformed, force effectiveness will remain in question.

At the apex level, complete integration of the MoD with the armed forces remains a crying need. This has been recommended by various commissions over the years but the ministry is unwilling to let go of what it considers to be its turf, despite having limited, if any, knowledge of defence matters. This continues to be India's Achilles heel and leads to sub-optimal results in utilising our limited resources for defence.

Finally, the question of nuclear sabre rattling by Pakistan needs to be addressed. We have a doctrine which is remarkable for its clarity and intent of purpose. Pakistan, however, believes that its nuclear capability gives it the leeway to continue to indulge in acts of cross-border terrorism, as India will be deterred from responding conventionally, fearing a nuclear backlash. Pakistan needs to be disabused from this notion. While nuclear capability acts as a deterrent, that by itself is not enough. It requires a deft political message to be conveyed that we are serious about implementing our nuclear doctrine and if struck, will bear the pain, but will respond with force. Pakistan cannot be allowed to continue with its policy of promoting terrorism in India, and use its nuclear power as a deterrence to India's conventional response options.

To conclude, a doctrinal approach to deter Pakistan would entail building appropriate capability, changing organisational structures, and developing skill sets to fight the battles of tomorrow. We need to invest in designing and building strategic organisational capabilities which would have the hierarchy for organising work as well as adequate scope for lateral interactions to promote and maximise the growth of mind power. Our deterrence capability against Pakistan or any other power will rest on our ability to adapt to the changing times.

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