Book Reviews

The Future of Land Warfare

Michael E. O'Hanlon

Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C, 2015, $ 32

Michael O'Hanlon, a prolific writer and senior fellow specialising in defence and foreign policy issues in the Washington D.C based think-tank, 'Brookings' has been a proponent of humanitarian military intervention and muscular peace operations. He authored a book on this subject in 1997 titled *Saving Lives with Force*. With this 2015 book, he carries forward his conviction of the utility of large ground forces in an insightful and well researched analysis of the future of the world's land armies. The book is about the future size and shape of American land power. O'Hanlon makes a case against cutting ground forces whenever budget cuts are applied. He argues for land forces that are at least the same size or even slightly larger than those currently fielded by the United States.

To make his point the author has carried out scenario building of various potential wars the US may have to fight and the conflict and humanitarian assistance tasks that the United States may be forced to undertake, roughly from 2020 to 2040. These would be both for its own security and also because, as the preeminent power, it cannot shirk its duties to maintain peace and harmony in the world.

The author starts with the historical, strategic and technological factors which have affected the size and shape of American ground forces. He then analyses the shape that real, latent or imaginable conflicts may take in the future. He builds up scenarios with Russia, China, in South Asia, the Middle East, Africa

and the Americas. He notes that most wars today are civil wars fought within states by ground forces. Interstate-wars may be rare but when they do occur they generally involve a heavy concentration of ground combat forces. The illustrative scenarios that O'Hanlon considers in which large conventional forces may be necessary are as follows:

- Deterring Russia from contemplating attacks against the Baltic states.
- Conflicts involving Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Mexico which could pose systemic and large-scale disruption to "the global order and to American interests".
- In an Indian context, a large ground force is required for helping South Asia cope with a shaky ceasefire after a potentially catastrophic nuclear war between India and Pakistan. O'Hanlon acknowledges that India may appear to be adamant against such an idea today. "But things could change fundamentally if such a settlement, and such a force, seemed the only way to reverse a momentum towards all-out nuclear war in South Asia".
- For deterring China from considering an unfriendly future role on the Korean peninsula and handling an asymmetric threat in the South China Sea with the construction and protection of a number of bases in the Philippines and elsewhere.
- For fighting a war between Chinese and American land Armies which is the only credible scenario of a large-scale encounter in the future.
- Handling the aftermath of a major and complex humanitarian disaster superimposed on a security crisis—perhaps in South Asia.
- Coping with a severe Ebola outbreak not in the small states of West Africa but in Nigeria, at the same time that, that country falls further into violence.
- Addressing a further meltdown in security conditions in Central America.
- Protecting bases in the Philippines.
- Deterring Iran from using weapons of mass destruction with the implied prospect of a ground invasion conveyed through having such a capability.
- Restoring order in a place like Saudi Arabia or Syria.

With this background, he assesses the requirement in terms of numbers for the United States Army. The author points out that in force planning, it is less embarrassing to have more forces than you need than it is to have fewer. O'Hanlon cautions against the overconfident view that big wars can be avoided and, consequently, ends by making a case for a million-soldier Army.

The salient points that come up as he carries out his analysis are, firstly, the mistakes made in 2003 in Iraq were not due to the fact that no one in Washington DC anticipated or predicted the outcome there, but because those who offered warnings about this outcome were ignored and pushed aside by decision-makers who had already decided. The situation later became bad as nation-building remains apparently as much beyond American understanding and capability. Secondly, no nation or group of nations has the power to deny any nation the right to decide for itself on matters of national security and defence, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). If NATO was to, and is to, retain its meaning and place on the world stage, it has to keep its doors open to membership by any nation that meets its criteria. In the face of a Russian invasion and occupation of even a portion of the territory of a NATO member state, a NATO failure to respond militarily would sound the death-knell for the alliance. Thirdly, Obama's successors will find themselves dealing with a post-Putin Russia that knows no other paradigm for interacting with the West than the aggressive one bequeathed to them by Vladimir Putin, and lastly, China's role and actions in a future Korean Peninsula crisis must not be seen as limited to militarily propping up the regime. It is already clear the Beijing does not relish being confronted with a wave of refugees from North Korea in the event war breaks out on the peninsula. The US should deter China from considering an "unfriendly future role" on the Korean peninsula.

The book is a plea on behalf of Armies which in the West are increasingly being treated as the poor relations of naval and air forces. Beleaguered Army chiefs, are getting increasingly despondent listening to the "no boots on the ground" *mantra*. Even as pundits say the Islamic State of Syria (ISIS) and other terror groups can only be beaten by ground forces, desperate to put the bad experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan behind them, governments are placing their bets on drones and Special Forces, fast jets, "smart" bombs, and missiles. Therefore, in today's U.S. defence policy debates, big land wars are out. Drones, cyber weapons, Special Forces, and space weapons are in. Accordingly, Pentagon budget cuts have homed in on the Army and ground forces: this, after the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, seems like an appealing idea.

O'Hanlon states that it is not so easy to simply declare an end to messy land wars. A survey of the world's trouble spots suggests that land warfare has more of a future than many now seem to believe. O'Hanlon advises against betting too heavily on unmanned systems, cyber warfare, and special operations in

the defence of the United States. He concludes that the size of the US Army, which some commentators—notably senior members of other branches of the armed forces—want to slash, should stay where it is now: about 500,000 active duty soldiers and 550,000 reservists. His conviction that the reservists and National Guards cannot reach the level of training of the active duty soldiers comes through many times in the book. The size of the Army should be such that it has the capability to wage one major "all-out regional battle" while "contributing substantially" to two multi-year, multilateral, operations. This '1+2' mission as he calls it, requires a significant active duty Army. He states that nothing about trends in technology suggests a radical change in how forces are sized and structured for most ground missions and goes on with the observation that in the modern world it is not practical for a country to build up capacity to wage two large ground wars at a time. To this end, the book is of interest to Indian planners whose focus has been on 'two and a half front' wars. The book is recommended for planners and practitioners of land warfare.

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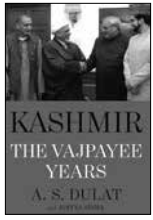
Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years

AS Dulat and Aditya Sinha

HarperCollins Publishers India, New Delhi, 2015,
342 pp, INR 599



The year 2015 marked the completion of 25 long years from the advent of militancy in Kashmir as it is often considered to have begun with the kidnapping of Rubaiya Sayeed on December 08, 1989. Rubaiya, then a 23-year-old medical intern, and the daughter of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, India's Home Minister, was returning home from the Lal Ded Hospital, Srinagar in a mini-bus when she was kidnapped by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). Soon, the success of this hostage trade-off made kidnapping an everyday occurrence in Kashmir. The intended target could be kidnapped in the morning and released in the evening. This recently-released book is full of such revealing yet frank narrations of the ground situation in Kashmir through its most turbulent years.

Amarjit Singh Dulat has a unique perspective of internal as well as external intelligence as he has spent nearly thirty long years in the Intelligence Bureau (IB), and later went on to head the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW). His involvement with Kashmir coincided with the rising tide of militancy as he was posted to head the IB in Srinagar in 1988 and later headed the IB's Kashmir group on his return to Delhi in 1990 before becoming R&AW chief. Subsequently, he joined the Prime Minister Office (PMO) under Prime Minister (PM) Atal Bihari Vajpayee and dealt exclusively with Kashmir, including the peace initiatives advanced by the Vajpayee Government. In fact, his job description was to 'monitor, manage and direct' the government of India's peace initiative in Kashmir. Since leaving the government in 2004, he has been very active on the Track-Two circuit with Pakistan, along with few retired Army Generals. The other author, Aditya Sinha has been the Editor-in-Chief of the *New Indian Express* and *DNA*.

The focus of the book is on the political leanings, internal compulsions and complex affiliations of Kashmiri separatist leaders and the political parties. The author highlights the strategy, including the backdoor methods of getting the separatists back from Pakistan to kick-start the political process. He reveals that R&AW got Abdul Majid Dar back to India and thereafter tried to rekindle the political process by getting Shabir Shah and Yasin Malik released and then talking peace. Finally, the 1996 Assembly election was the masterstroke as it revived the nearly-dead political process and broke the back of the militancy. The author opines that if these elections had not been held and Dr Farooq Abdullah not been roped in to contest, terrorism would have continued for another decade.

The author also informs that he repeatedly met Abdul Gani Lone soon after he returned from the US in 1999, and asked him to contest the 2002 Assembly elections. Abdul Gani Lone thereafter tried to convince the Hurriyat of the "relevance of elections", but did not succeed. Soon he was killed, apparently on orders of the Inter-Services Intelligence's (ISI's) Hurriyat political handler Brig Abdullah of the Pakistan Army. Similarly, according to the author, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq's father Mirwaiz Farooq was killed by the militants because "*he was in touch with National Front Railways Minister George Fernandes*". However, in 2003, Mirwaiz Farooq had favoured autonomy, open borders and a bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad which laid the foundation for the Vajpayee government's parallel parleys with Pakistan and the Hurriyat. A conclusion may be drawn by the reader from these narrations that any separatist not towing the narrow ISI line is at grave risk of elimination by pro-Pakistan terrorist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

The Indian Army finds repeated mention in the book. The author informs that it was Dr Farooq Abdullah who initially introduced Kuka Parrey to the Rastriya Rifles. Kuka Parrey, an erstwhile folk-singer turned militant thereafter went on to lead a force of counter-insurgents called Ikhwan-ul Muslimoon, which was one of the Army's success story in Kashmir. As regards the Kargil War, he sidesteps the issue of "intelligence failure", and, consequently, of the responsibility of the intelligence agencies; and instead blames the Army for not sending out regular patrols. However, the author is not critical of the Army and focusses mainly on intelligence aspects, particularly in maintaining the channels of communication.

The book follows an easy chatty style and often repeats the importance of talking to all the stakeholders, irrespective of their political affiliations or their separatist leanings. This is perhaps a reflection of Mr Dulat's own friendly personality and the ability to engage people of all shades and win over their confidence. This image is further reinforced by a quote from Professor Agha Ashraf Ali, a noted Kashmiri educationist, who told him, "*You were sent to disrupt the Kashmir movement in the friendliest possible manner*". In spite of the friendly manner, the importance of engaging hardcore separatists as well as borderline separatists towards greater political participation cannot be underestimated.

The information provided in the book is immensely useful in understanding the dynamics and under-currents of counter-terrorist operations in J&K. The book also traces the transition of the terrorist movement in J&K from the home-grown and Kashmir-centric JKLF to the pro-Pakistan *tanzeems* like the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyeba (LeT). The book is proof of how 'mainstreaming people' and giving the Kashmiris a role has been the most effective strategy to stabilise the conflict and bring peace. The Indian Army, in particular, has also attained the upper hand as, while it is neutralising terrorists with an 'iron fist', it is also winning the locals over by various people-centric activities. The book is highly recommended reading for all Army officers who wish to understand the behind-the-scene dynamics of Kashmir and their impact on the ground situation. It is a useful addition to libraries and of great value to all readers, including non-military are who look for the human stories in every conflict; this human-centric book shall provide several answers which have eluded many previous history-centric books on Kashmir.

Reviewed by Col **Shailender Arya**. The views expressed are personal.