

INDIAN MILITARY

Adapting to New Age Strategic Paradigm

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Preliminaries

Managing Strategic Adversity

Right since her independence, India has been subject to various forms of military aggression, overt and covert, from her two innately inimical neighbours. Over these seven decades past, the Indian State has lived with the hope of being able to keep peace with these habitual aggressors and focus on rebuilding the socio-economics of her nationhood. As a result of that dream – banal, as it turned out – the matter of India's defence preparedness has been characterised by obsolescent military hardware, stagnant organisational structure and shackled military industry. Limitation, if not depletion, of the Indian military's war-waging capacity was a foregone fallout of that long persistent miscalculation over our defence policy. Admittedly, political wisdom has downed in the recent years and the situation is on the mend.

Optimising military power by making up for accumulated deficiencies in terms of war wherewithal as well as organisational structures is a complex, costly and time consuming undertaking. That burden is further exacerbated by our fiscal and technological limitations and the competing priorities of socio-economic development. Therefore, notwithstanding the State's recent spirit-lifting initiatives of bolstering national defence through structural reconstruction, inventory modernisation and logistic upgrades of its military organisation, it will take long years before such initiatives bear due fruition at the bayonet point. All this while, an ever-snarling pair

of aggressive neighbours would keep lurking for a bite or two.

For the next decade or so, the Indian military will have to deter, and disrupt when necessary, our two powerful, militaristic and deeply animus neighbours just with what war-wherewithal it has, and what little of capital and technology intensive modern weaponry and equipment that the state can muster in the coming days. That situation obliges the Indian military to productively utilise the slack period before the cost, technology and time intensive modernisation schemes come to fruition.

The Proposition

The proposition in this Paper enjoins the Indian military to *explore ingenious strategies in order to cover, to the extent feasible, the gestation period before capital, technology and time intensive modernisation of its conventional war-wherewithal is achieved.*

Theme of Discussion

The above proposition is best met by building-up such capabilities which fall within indigenous capacities in terms of costs and technology, and are in any case eventually needed to complement profound modernisation of the nation's upcoming military power. In other words, the gestation period for fruition of India's military modernisation schemes at the field level is best committed to modernise and upgrade the nation's foundational military capability.

The discussion in this Paper is laid out under the following Parts:-

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- c. Part 3: Enhancement of Combat Support Capability (pp 14).
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Part 1: Configuration of Defence Strategy

India's Military Liability

We have seen that the State's recent attention towards upgrade and modernisation of its conventional military power is some long, yet unforeseen, years away from fruition at the field level. It is also clear that with their fast growing military power, neither of our inimical neighbours would desist from playing deliberate, conjoined mischief all along. Obviously, the mischief would be perpetrated not just by intermittent territorial aggression (proxy war is also a form of territorial aggression) but also by pressing-on with seeding internal subversion through sponsorship of violent anti-national acts.

Alongside, the duo of India-baiters would also continue with their larger goal of politically undermining India's regional and global standing. With her growing global influence and tightening grip over India's immediate neighbours growing by day, China would leave no opportunity - overt and covert - to isolate and destabilise India's sovereignty concerns. Impelled by the tenets of Chinese mind-set, brazen display of military muscle and instigating her Pakistani side-kick against India would be intrinsic to such machinations. Indeed, India's liability over this kind of one-sided disparity is rather high.

Bridging the Disparity

From the prevailing situation of the nation's military security it is clear to infer that being at a modest end of economic, scientific and military capacity in a dog-eat-dog world, India's military modernisation schemes – both in terms of organisational structure and hardware inventory – would need time to fructify. In the coming decade or so, therefore, there is limited prospect of fruition of the desired level of upgrade of our somewhat stagnant conventional warfare capability. In the interim, India's ability to effectively deter the aggressive build-up of her ever-inimical enemies remains but tentative. All this while, the habitual aggressors are unlikely to let go of opportunities to disrupt India's progress through various means, and in that, given their propensities, resort to military means would be in the lead.

The foreseeable situation of indefinitely impending two-front military confrontation, supplanted by persistent causes of internal conflicts, calls for the our political and military leadership *to strengthen the nation's defence strategy by configuring ingenious solutions to match the disparity between India's politico-military objectives and the resources available at hand.*

Configuration of Defence Preparedness

Configuration of strategies for defence preparedness pivots upon two complimentary capacities of prosecuting warfare: One, *frontline* or *cutting-edge* war-waging capability; and, two, *foundational* or supportive war-waging capability. Of these, upgrade and modernisation of a nation's frontline military capability is secured with induction of wide ranges and scales of powerful weaponry and equipment inventory, which are duly configured with a sophisticated force-structure. Being capital and technology intensive, build-up of frontline capability requires high-technology, heavy fiscal investments and long gestation period to settle effectively into the nation's defence system.

Foundational military capability, on the other hand, is secured by the strength of its two principal components, which are:-

- a. Robust *combat support force-structure* and complementary scale of modernised military hardware;
- b. Strong and resilient infrastructure of *military logistics*.

Being comparatively lesser capital, technology and import intensive, foundational aspects of India's military modernisation are more readily achievable within own indigenous capacities. In any case, astute configuration of advanced foundational military capability is imperative for efficient assimilation of profound military modernisation.

Build-up of Foundational Military Capability

It follows that while time and cost intensive modernisation of the frontline capability of combat power is progressed with due diligence, it would also make sense to press on with concurrent development of those selected foundational capabilities that promise ready and reckonable results in bolstering the nation's overall military capability. Early upgrade and modernisation of foundational military capability would thus cover, if partially, the current disparity between the nation's destined frontline military capability and the time and resources needed to ascend to that level.

In other words, build-up of foundational combat capability could be engineered to uplift the forces' existing combat power, and thus attend to the nation's current military susceptibilities against the duo of our perpetually hostile, powerful neighbours. That is, till the time and budget committed to profound modernisation of India's frontline or cutting-edge capability find fruition at the bayonet level.

Appropriation of Strategic Configuration

Further, in light of India's existential challenges of national defence, just the upgrade and modernisation of the two above listed elements of military capability would not be enough. The call here is to seek multiplication of our overall war-waging capability through doctrinal appropriation of certain subsidiary forms of ingenious, indigenous and complementary

modes of warfare. The reference here is to the prosecution of *irregular forms of warfare* as a calibrated subsidiary to regular conventional warfare.

The combined effect of: One, upgrade and modernisation of *foundational military capability*; and, two, *widening the scope of regular conventional warfare to incorporate irregular warfare*, would appropriate operationally asymmetric advantages to the Indian military. Indeed, such an appropriation would enable the Indian military to deal with, to a good extent, the period of military liability, till, as stated, India's frontline and overall military modernisation finds fruition at the battlefield. That step would also deter the rising pitch of military aggression from our obsessively hostile neighbours.

Thus we have two vital commitments to delve into: One, upgrade and modernisation of *foundational military modernisation*; and two, doctrinal appropriation of *irregular warfare* into prosecution of regular war. In either instance astute invocation of the pristine spirit of strategic wisdom is called for. It is proposed to do so in the following Part.

Part 2: Invocation of the Spirit of Strategic Wisdom

Triumph of Ingenuous Stratagem

History tells us that conduct of war has much to do with professional military intellect, creativity and initiative. These are the primeval attributes of the 'great captains' of military leadership which permit preservation of sovereign interests even when the State, encumbered with burdensome liabilities, is unable to place adequate war wherewithal at their disposal. Indeed, history is replete with instances when strategic and tactical ingenuities have made up for lack of resources, and the modest have stalemated, even triumphed, over the powerful.

Factors of Combat Power

In Napoleon's reckoning there were 200 factors to consider in application of combat power. In modern times, Col Dupuy's celebrated mathematical definition of 'combat effectiveness of a force' focuses on evaluation of 13 plus decisive factors, attributes or elements.¹ It follows that limitations in any or more factors of combat effectiveness can, in principle, be compensated by reinforcing certain others.

1 In Col Dupuy's celebrated 'Quantified Judgment Model' (QJM), Clausewitz's Law of Numbers ($P = N \times V \times Q$) is elaborated by the 'Combat Effectiveness Value' (Q), which is further elaborated into 13 fundamental factors that go to constitute 'Force Strength', - Col T N Dupuy, *Understanding War*, Paragon House Publishers, New York, 1995.

As discussed, the overall combat power of a military force is a summation of its frontline and foundational capabilities. Of course, there are the intangible factors determined by quality of leadership, training, culture etc., but these are outside the scope of discussion here. To reiterate in own context, the former category consists mostly of capital, high-technology, time and import-intensive frontline combat weaponry and equipment, while the latter category mostly falls within indigenous competences. Therefore, upgrade of foundational capability is more readily achievable through schemes that are tied neither to import nor to highly sophisticated research-development-production cycles, and therefore are within ready reach. Such factors also offer dual-use and industry incentivising fillip at the national level.

Configuration of Strategic Leverage

Inference from the tenets mentioned above is clear: Establishment of favourable strategic advantage from a position of relative susceptibility against our perpetually aggressive, powerful neighbours, and so project a robust military deterrence necessitates a renewed invocation of the hoary testaments of military art and science. Configuration of that enterprise may defined by the following imperatives:-

- a. Firstly, upgrade and modernisation of the forces' foundational military capability - in terms of *Combat Support* including *Information Warfare (IW)*, and *Military Logistic Capabilities*.
- b. Secondly, complementing the nation's conventional war- waging capability with strategic integration of Regular (Conventional) Warfare and *Irregular (Sub-conventional) Warfare* – guerrilla, grey zone and hybrid modes of operations, to be precise.²

2 Lest the theme of discussion here is misconstrued, it needs to be emphasised at the outset that the centrality of what is termed as 'conventional forms of warfare' remains fundamental to military power. That understanding is a universal fact, notwithstanding occasional expressions of banal notions to the contrary which have proved to be misplaced many times over. Actually, other forms of warfare which are categorised outside that definition (e.g. irregular, sub and unconventional forms) are, barring exceptions, but subsidiary recourses adopted to compliment the principal strand, that is, regular conventional warfare.

Being implementable with manageable investments and domestic level technology, these initiatives are well within our indigenous capacities. These can therefore proceed without straining India's primary military modernisation programme and other equally salient national commitments. On the dividend side, upgrade of combat support, IW, logistic and irregular warfare capabilities would impart strategic and tactical flexibility to own forces, and by implication, bolster their overall war-waging capability. As a secondary output, these would bolster the nation's economic activities, uplift the technology base and create civil employment.

But contextually more important, such upgrades would pose a formidable incentive for our enemies to keep their aggressive designs within tolerance limits. That would also permit trumping an aggravated security situation that the nation might have to presently contend with, without having to be over-burdened by time and fiscal penalties or having to deviate from the primary objective of empowering the Indian military through a profound reform and modernisation process.

With that background, the stage is set to examine the possible methods of bolstering our native military power, to the practicable extent, by the adoption of the above listed initiatives. It is proposed to do so in the following sequence:-

- a. Enhancement of *Combat Support* capability;
- b. Integrated approach to *IW* and *Intelligence Operations*;
- c. Upgrade of *Military Logistic Infrastructure*;
- d. Integration of *Irregular Stratagems* into the prosecution of Regular Warfare.

Finally, the discussion may be wound-up with a short outlook on consolidation of *strategic partnerships*.

Part 3: Enhancement of Combat Support Capability

Leverage of Combat Support

The salience of strengthening combat support capability has ever been universally well appreciated. However, when it comes to acquisition schemes in face of resource limitations, that intent stands diluted in favour of upgrade of the primary weapon systems – tanks, guns, aircraft etc. The result is that while upgrade of the more visible primary hardware inventory enthruses the defence planners and dampens the adversarial fervour, the forces' true battlefield performance remain stymied by lack of compatible support systems and key accessories. Manifestation of the forces' full power - in terms of battle field mobility and manoeuvrability, surveillance and reconnaissance, targeting and fire support, communication and electronic warfare, sustainability and survivability etc. – is thus compromised. That leaves optimised and flexible employment of frontline troops and their primary weapon systems somewhat unrealised, and in consequence, tactical options available to force commanders and staff gets limited.

It is in this aspect of high scale, even excessive availability of combat support systems that the powerful and advanced militaries score over their comparatively modest counter-parts.

In own context, there is little that can be done to overcome the overarching resource constraint. However, many of the moderately modern, if not the latest, combat support systems and accessories related to gunnery, field

engineering, combat communications, battle field surveillance, bridging, camouflage, transportation, supply chain etc. are well within the nation's technological and fiscal capacities. Much of these are already under indigenous development. Arguably, some of these might not qualify as the latest or 'perfect' instruments of war. But in a scenario when industrial and fiscal resources are yet to bloom while enemies gaze across our long and vulnerable borders, these second-best instruments of war could still be considered for interim adoption in order to enhance the military's operational exploitation of its overall combat assets. Most militaries outside the few of the elite club have been adapting to that option and shaping their strategies to successfully accommodate what constraints that accrue in that endeavour.

Harnessing Resources in Reach

The proposition is illustrated in the following paragraphs; the list is not exhaustive. To reiterate, these illustrations offer but tentative options before India's intended level of military modernisation is realised.

Power of Subsidiary Inventory

The range of mid-technology hardware - like light tanks, gun-howitzers, bridges, high mobility vehicles etc. - and subsidiary capacities for intelligence gathering, creation of fortification and obstacles, when combined well with the power of terrain permits favourable shaping of the battlefield.¹ With modest fiscal support and revival of indigenous production, these would offer flexibility in application of the first-line combat power. The need has been felt and debated for long, but attitudinal fixations have come in the way. It is time to break free of such self-imposed shackles. In war it is better to have something than nothing at all. Actually,

1 To recall, India had been a competent source of armoured cars, light guns, various weapons and equipment during the WW II. Provided with due budgetary support in times of Atmanirvar Bharat, there is adequate technological and industrial capacity that could be harnessed to bolster combat support inventories, terrain engineering works, manufacture of next-in-line combat hardware, electronics for communications and IT/IW, and camouflage/deception equipment, to the overall enhancement of the military forces' combat power.

history has shown how such ‘somethings’ have paid rich operational dividends, even in own context, when professionally harnessed.

Power of Terrain

Tactically engineered routes and approaches, obstacles, flooding and landslides, field fortifications, protective works, concealment, decoy and deception measures, hides and caches etc., all backed-up with strategic road building are some of the traditionally adopted measures to gain surprise and operational upper hand on the battlefield. In that respect, the indigenous industry is competent in offering world class support to the military’s terrain engineering options. Harnessing that capacity would open up build-up as well as deployment options in terms of siting of field fortifications, choices of approaches, manoeuvrability, negotiation of obstacles, and deception. Indigenous capacities could thus be harnessed to multiply the combat power of battle formations.

Fire Power

In the extended operational arena of today even somewhat mid-technology weaponry and equipment would find limited usefulness. The existing fire power of the field forces could thus be raised a notch by in-house enhancements of battle field mobility, targeting systems, ammunition handling, obstacle crossing and bridging, network communications, electronic camouflage, concealment and deception etc. Own indigenous techno-industrial capacity is well poised in production of such mid-technology fire support weaponry and equipment. In similar vein, in the past, the Indian military has found usefulness of obsolescent and discarded weapons and accessories parked in various depots. Selective re-commissioning of these could bring enhancement, if moderate and tentative, of the efficacy of available fire power within own indigenous reach.

Power of Command, Control and Communications

To much extent, moderate level net-centricity of combat forces is

achievable within own existing techno-industrial capacities. Proliferation of all-echelon communications and net-centricity is therefore another combat support system that could be built-up within own indigenous competency and in a shorter time frame. Much has already been achieved in this regards and the process continues, albeit in rather truncated forms. Even if expeditiously adopted with manageable imperfections, such build-ups would enhance the existing combat effectiveness of forces - till comprehensive technological modernisation is achieved in full measure.

Power of Protection, Camouflage, Concealment and Deception

Upgrade of visual and electronic camouflage and concealment for force protection, and physical as well as electronic deception are measures that are adoptable within own indigenous reach. This matter is particularly relevant in the context of preservation of high cost weaponry and equipment during the ever-prevailing conflict situations along our borders – there is little gain in induction of latest military assets if these are neutralised before being brought to bear. Besides, in operational conditions such measures enable the achievement of surprise in the field. Much of such capabilities are ready at hand within the public and private defence enterprise. These could be pulled out of our relegated priorities and fielded to sustain combat power against the hostile battle and ‘no peace’ ambiances.

Power of Science and Technology

Appropriate levels of science education and technical training of the soldiery form the bedrock of ingenious exploitation of military hardware in the modern arena of warfare. The present generation of the soldiery is quite well-disposed to that end. The military – particularly the Army – brass would be wise to harness that generational enthusiasm to enhance the technical competence of its personnel. In the modern era, scientifically educated soldiery, duly trained and motivated, would be a reckonable force-multiplier.

Part 4: Integrated approach to IW

Power of Information War (IW)

Indian military's display of enthusiasm notwithstanding, ground, air and satellite based surveillance, ground and air based intelligence, reconnaissance, deception and media operations are yet to be effectively assimilated into the structure of own combat operations. The military's – particularly the Army's – stagnation over technology proliferation, combined with perennial short-funding for defence adds to the hindrance in optimal harness of the scope of IW.

Indigenous talent and the basic infrastructure of Information Systems and Cyber Technology can be harnessed to appropriate formidable IW systems at all echelons of military organisation. That would bring out-of-proportion results in detecting intrusions, corrupting the enemy's surveillance, reconnaissance, data transfer and communication systems, and generating deception all along the frontage and depth of the operational arena. Besides such measures, deployment of dedicated physical and electronic deception systems to cover the sweep of border areas is also possible to implement with just more-than-a-little indigenous effort.

The results would be exceptional.

Integrated Approach to Intelligence Operations

The Hoary *Chanakya Niti*

Institutionalised prosecution of intelligence operations of various shades and scales has ever been one of the most sensitive levers of statecraft from the times immemorial. Astutely propagated by the celebrated *Chanakya Niti*, intelligence operations aim at destabilising, short of open war, adversarial efforts to harm own national interests, and are executed through undeclared, covert, behind the curtains operations in political, diplomatic, economic and quasi-military modes. Intelligence operations are conceived and controlled politically and shaped by specialist intelligence agencies to divert or undermine the opponent party's ability to come in way of own national interests. The methods could range from shaking or unhinging the opponent's tangible or intangible sources of mischief - ideological, psychological, political and ethnic - and executed through civil and quasi-military means.

Intelligence Operations (IO)

In the present context, intelligence operations may be defined as assassin's cloak-and-dagger operations executed through civilian and military assets to defang an intractable enemy's relentless nuisance. As globally witnessed over the past few decades, prosecution of intelligence operations in quasi-military mode finds the first favour in accomplishment of strategic objectives. That is a step that permits avoidance of the ultimate recourse to prosecution of all-out warfare and the destruction it entails, till matters go beyond redemption. India has been a long-time victim of this phenomenon at the hands of China and Pakistan.

An Option

Even if severely undermined by centuries of the foreign invaders' intelligence operations, Indians have generally been wary of the double-edge pitfalls of adopting similar options - as indeed one needs to be. Thus, finding the advantages and disadvantages of intelligence operations to

be rather nebulous, the native political psyche is neither enthused nor innately tuned to such machinations at the national or international levels. But in the present context of multi-prong aggression, we have to accept the fact that in any conflict arena, it is banal to expect one's discretion to be reciprocated by one's pathological enemies.

Contextual Applicability

On her part, India is served by a fairly competent intelligence apparatus. Even if intelligence operations are matters which can never be clear in the open domain, it is expected that that apparatus is well at work in Indian context. Given that occasional miscalculations do happen, apprehensions over intelligence operations need not limit our prospects and options. Indeed, resolute focus on intelligence operations with full backing of other instruments of the State as well as selective partnership deals is an effective way of deterring and even capping India's neighbourhood hostility.

Further discussion on this subject would be too speculative, amateurish and distractive; it is better to let the matter for the experts and decision makers to attend.

Part 5: Upgrade of Logistic Flexibility

The Supreme Decider

The tactics of harnessing logistic flexibility to overcome many of the operational challenges has been a time-tested military practice. Defiladed from the glare of deadly battles and the elitist glamour associated with these, the fact is that sound and robust logistic support has ever been the source of military success. To cite just a few notable examples, stout chains of transportation and off-the-land foraging had been the mainstay of the successes of Islamic forces' invasions of India, Napoleon's trans-European campaigns, the Prussian campaign in Krakow, Crimean and African campaigns of the British, the American Civil War, and the two World Wars – the list is unending.

Here, it would be in order to reiterate the leading operational power-factors which are rooted at the strength of military logistics.

Power of Movement and Deployment

These refer to the ability to move quick and fast, the desired levels of forces to the deployment areas across the battle theatres. Expanded reach of road, track, sea-port and air-strip networks, either newly constructed or upgraded in classification and provided with due transit infrastructure, offer flexible avenues for heavier force-composition, prompt force-projection and responsive redeployment. These, in turn, open-up more

options for articulation of relative force-ratios and achievement of surprise at the points of decision.

Indigenous capacity to enhance this power is massive, but it requires more deliberate attention at the national level to activate.

Power of Supply Chain and Transit Infrastructure

Upgrade of supply chain services like automated load handling, movement tracking, stocking and warehousing, duly backed up with surface and air transportation fleets, is another key to the achievement of logistic flexibility. Besides, tedious animal and man-pack transportation systems at the supply delivery end are a necessity in most difficult areas. Higher capacity to transport heavy weaponry, equipment and supplies to tactical battle zones – armour, artillery, ammunition, supplies, to wit – facilitates move and redeployment and adds to the forces' tactical flexibility.

Here too, the indigenous production capacity is huge.

Power of Force-Survivability

In most of India's contested border areas, particularly along the extremely difficult conditions of the Northern and North-Eastern Borders, survivability in the field determines the strength of deployable force-levels. Force-survivability is therefore a key battle winning factor here. Wherewithal needed to that purpose are the pre-fabricated shelters and ancillaries, protective clothing, special diet, water and cooking facilities, medical support system, forward stocking sustained by chains of warehousing, effective weather forecasting etc.¹

Application of the power of force-survivability is well within indigenous technological and fiscal capacities.

1 In this respect, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has adopted very robust measures to enhance the liveability of its soldiery. We have to match these without having to resort just rhetorical eulogising of the Indian soldiery.

Contextual Applicability

In the Indian context, steady upgrade of the *Power of Logistics* has been a continuous process. But as national security related events have proved, the pace and extent of such upgrades have turned out to be insufficient. The constraints here are neither technological, nor industrial, but fiscal - against the ever rising demands from equally prioritised sectors of national development.

But the contemporary situation calls for harder decision making. The imperative is to dovetail industrial development, employment and civil habitation opportunities with the overall upgrade of India's strategic and tactical combat power. That would create conditions for the military to achieve surprise, mobility and force-multiplication, and finally, dislocation of the opponent's fulcrum of aggression.

Part 6: Irregular Stratagem in Prosecution of Regular Warfare

Role of Irregular Warfare

The spirit behind invocation of irregular war-waging capability is best realised by opening the discussion with reiteration of certain fundamental aspects of classical military strategy. In this context, we may begin the discussion with the salient role of irregular warfare capability.

Salience of irregular operations to complement the overall prosecution of warfare has ever been well appreciated. Russia's failure in Afghanistan (1980-89), America's failure in Vietnam (1965-74), French defeat in Indo-China (1945-53), and partisan operations during the Peninsular War (1806), Spanish Civil War (1930) and the World War II (1940-45) - the list goes back to the Pyrrhus' War (279 BCE), and even beyond to the Mahabharata War - are some notable examples organised prosecution of irregular warfare in conjunction with regular wars.¹

Examples of the power of irregular warfare in paving the way for conventional operations in the underdog's favour abound in the annals of military history. The Tet Offensive (1968) in Vietnam War is one. In this instance, the Viet-Cong forces persisted in tormenting the much stronger American forces' offensive through a mix of regular and irregular resistance. The Americans did achieve some of their tactical goals but that

1 Lord Krishna's stratagem allowed the seven Akshauhini Pandava force to defeat 11 Akshohini Kaurava force led by celebrity Generals.

turned out to be but a pyrrhic success. Even if conventionally undefeated, the Americans just gave up at the end. To some extent, the treatment the mighty PLA got in its 1978-79 offensive against Vietnam is another example of superior forces recoiling in face stoic, persistent hammering through a mix of regular and irregular resistance.

In the recent context, China's use of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Militia to capture islands in the South China Sea, Pakistan Army's proxy war in Kashmir, Hezbollah's asymmetric retaliations in Lebanon, deniable operations of the Al Quds and Basij Forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and 'grey zone' operations of Russia's 'little green men', Spetznaz, Military Intelligence Service (GRU) and the 'Wagner Private Military Company' in Crimea and Syria are some of the irregular stratagems devised to unhinge adversarial military powers. To exemplify further:-

- a. Accepting the US' overwhelming military superiority, China's PLA has focused on dominating the waters of the China Seas with deployment of irregular forces in guise of 'fishermen' and people's militia. Added to the regular means of 'anti-access and sea-denial', that makes US' application of military power off China's Eastern sea-board a prohibitively costly venture against uncertain gains;
- b. Pakistan Army's proxy war has kept a superior power India tied-up for over three decades;
- c. The Hezbollah's asymmetric warfare contained the Israeli attack in 2006 and often thence-forth;
- d. The IRGC's adoption of irregular modes of three-dimensional warfare has imposed restraint upon the US' military hostility;
- e. Russian military's green uniformed, insignia-less regiments have, thumbing nose at the formidably superior Western Powers, triggered the vivisection of Ukraine besides propping up the Syrian Government.

- f. In a deleterious sense, defiant obduracy of violent radical forces against the super-power alliance led international order, as witnessed in Afghanistan, Yemen etc., are also some examples, albeit abhorrent, of creating strategic asymmetry through the modes of irregular warfare.

Military history offers many such examples, including those of India's past. Appreciably, in such campaigns, irregular forces have performed the key functions of intelligence, subversion and communication sabotage, besides conduct of raid, ruse and surprise actions in conjunction with regular conventional battles.

Adding the latest Azerbaijan–Armenia War to the list of recent military conflicts, *it is clear that the stratagem of irregular operations has become an intrinsic element of modern conventional warfare*. Indeed, the multi-spectral characteristics of contemporary warfare opens up many ways to adopt such kinds of ingenious strategies to deal with tenuous military situations.

Irregular Warfare in Indian Context

The Indian military history is replete with examples of adoption of ingenious stratagems to bolster own conventional military capabilities and so impose strategic debility over the enemy's superior forces.² Few representative examples are illustrative:-

- a. During the later parts of the first millennium CE, astute generalship the Afghan and Turkic invaders had routinely gained advantages for their smaller but well equipped forces. They did

2 In the post-Gupta Period, commitment to military stratagem was obscured by the soft, easy-going attitude among Indian rulers and societal mentors who recused in favour of the 'Golden Period' environment of affluence, art, literature, spiritualism etc. That reduced our hoary art and science of warfare to foolhardy displays of extreme valour and death defying honour but little else. The final blow to the Kautilyan guidelines was dealt by the Brahminic societal mentors' propagation of pacifist versions, even if from positions of fragility, of misplaced codes of shanti' and fair play, rather than cunning, in battle. Misinterpreted ideals of *Vasudaiv Kutumbakum*, *Atithi Devo Bhava* etc. added to acceptability and alliance with barbarian invaders. Strategic distraction was further sealed when Islamic dynasties, and the British Rule that followed, barred Indians from matters of strategic and political-military manoeuvres – they did not want such a huge population of natural warriors to acquire competence in such matters.

so by resorting to irregular tactics – infiltration, subversion of opposing alliances and commanders, deception etc. – to divide and dislocate their more numerous native opponents and shape the battlefields in their favour before engaging in regular battles.

- b. The Maratha leadership's adoption of *Ganimi Kava* (Guerrilla) Warfare in the 16th Century Deccan to defeat their many times stronger Mughal and Deccan Sultanate enemies is another example of strategic ingenuity. Here, regular and irregular warfare had been so much integrated into one whole as to become quite inseparable. Successes against the frustrated enemy forces were exceptional.
- c. The 18th Century Plassey and Buxar Wars are some examples of the Company Army's exercise of pre-battle and irregular stratagems to subvert and divide the much larger forces under the Mughal alliance. In these instances, regular battle engagements were undertaken just to deliver *coup de main* upon the already dislocated opponents. Subsequently, military conspiracy and subterfuge played major roles in the English emerging as a frequent winner in precariously poised regular battles in India.
- d. During the mid-18th Century, the Sikh Misl irregulars had resorted to *Dhai Phatt* tactics to befuddle the incessant Afghan invaders before Afghan power was finally banished by Maharaja Ranjit Singh's regular campaign.
- e. India's much acclaimed stratagem of 1971 War indicates that the art and science of irregular warfare is well nurtured in native strategic thoughts. Herein, irregular war performed subsidiary but key roles in facilitating the eventual success of the regular campaign.

Military Ingenuity in Independent India

On its part, the Indian military is not new to finding innovative tactical, strategic and logistic solutions to challenges of resources and time. As seen in Indo-Pakistan Wars of 1947-48 and 1965, the Bangladesh War of 1971,

Siachen Glacier Operations, the Kargil Conflict, long-going insurgencies in the North-East and Kashmir, and our perpetually no-war-no-peace frontiers, many of these solutions have been remarkable in their ingenuity and audacity.

In the *tactical domain*, tanks across the Zoji La in 1948, Para-commando operations in 1965, irregular manoeuvres in 1971, securing of Siachen Glacier in 1984, and high-altitude air operations in Kargil (1999) are some notable examples. Similarly, unexpected cross-border offensive thrusts in 1965 War, multi-directional capture of Dacca in 1971, creation of obstacle systems along the Western Borders, structuring of 'strike corps', raising of *Rashtriya Rifles* and 'surgical strikes' into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) are some examples of innovations in the *strategic domain*.

Admittedly, apart from exemplifying native tactical ingenuity, the instances cited here are to be viewed as customary resilience in prosecution of regular warfare. The proposition in this Paper goes beyond that. It reflects a shade of such political-military ingenuities that were devised in the post-1962 period - as exemplified by the constitution of Scout units, Indo-Tibetan Establishment 22 and the Secret Service Bureau (SSB) to operate in irregular modes as subsidiary parts of regular conventional battles.

By far the most significant example in this context is that of the hybrid orchestration of the 1971 War when ground for regular operations was prepared by irregular operations of the 'Mukti Bahini' alongside vigorous information campaign and deft diplomacy. Such configuration of *irregular warfare* as subsidiary recourse in multiplication of conventional military capability have ever been a part of text-book stratagems.

Institutionalisation of Irregular Stratagem

Bolstering Conventional Power. An effective way to enhance the level of India's military deterrence, as also to widen her military options in punishing aggression would be to multiply own conventional capability with what has earlier been defined under the term of 'Irregular Warfare'. To reiterate, the term refers to the elastic definitions of *warfare in 'asymmetric', 'special', 'grey zone', 'guerrilla' and 'hybrid' modes, to be prosecuted as subsidiary*

operations to bolster the overall conventional grand strategy. As pointed out, neither is this concept new to the Indian military, nor has its practice been left unheeded. Admittedly however, since the late 1970s, the art and science of various forms of irregular warfare lives but sequestered in the Indian military's strategic framework.

The theme here delves into the idea of bolstering those subsidiary operational capabilities which have ever been in force, but have, over time, acquired a somewhat tentative, indefinite hue in our current strategic calculations. Revival of that capability would no doubt put to caution the compulsively India-averse mischiefs.³

Integrated Approach to Regular and Irregular Warfare. Truly, salience of widening the range and reach of India's conventional military response by integration of various elements of irregular warfare, needs serious consideration among India's defence decision-makers. On the face of relentless hostility, in unison, from our two powerful neighbours, that indeed is a feasible recourse that could bring much relief to a strategically beleaguered India. It would strengthen India's tenuous deterrence and would cover our national security vulnerabilities before India's comprehensive military modernisation starts bearing results on ground, and even thereafter.

Widening own Strategic Horizon. Thus the Indian military could resurrect its capacity to prosecute various forms of irregular warfare and integrate those into its strategic as well as tactical calculus. *Various modes and methods of irregular warfare could then be the parallel, subsidiary modes of prosecuting the regular conventional, and even sub- and non-conventional, warfare in order to expand, to the extent desirable and practicable, the horizon of India's overall military strategy.* To that purpose, the India's military strategy ought to accord a judicious precedence to the irregular forms of warfare in parallel with the conventional and sub-conventional forms, and structure itself accordingly.

3 To recall, that had been the case after 1962, when the Indian military resolved to blunt the overwhelming superiority of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Besides re-orientation of training schedules, elaborate infrastructure for irregular warfare was provisioned and fielded throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. As a result, there followed a quarter century of tranquil borders.

In Sum

Taking cue from the prevailing strategic calculus, challenges of India's national defence calls for reinforcement of own military capability with doctrinal incorporation of the various modes of *irregular warfare*. To reiterate, the term here goes beyond the routine special operations which form parts of regular battle plans; the reference here is to the various shades of *autonomous guerrilla, grey zone and hybrid operations which are to be prosecuted to complement the overall conventional power*.

Indeed, conditions for incorporation of irregular warfare into own doctrinal calculus are ripe – the military possesses the due expertise, the measure is not capital or time intensive, and our congenital adversaries are relentlessly stuck on their campaign trail. Assimilation of that mode of war-waging capabilities would add teeth to our military deterrence. Indeed, there is no power on the earth today who is not chary of getting embroiled in a quagmire of endless and bloody low-intensity conflict.

Part 7: Consolidation of Strategic Partnerships

A Moribund Dispute Resolution Mechanism

India has usually been averse to being drawn into any international military groupings. But times have changed. The United Nations (UN) remains no more a deferred guiding force in international affairs. Its helmsmen, the five Permanent Members, are increasingly falling prey to their individual partisan interests rather than upholding the pristine principles of UN Charter. Thus its record in resolution of larger armed conflicts is anything but complementary.

That situation has left the global community to seek resolution of their disputes either by direct or proxy application of forces or by hapless reconciliation with the more muscular adversaries' hegemony. As a corollary, international disputes are increasingly being sought to be resolved – just postponed for the time being, actually – by economic and military might of the contestants and their patrons.

India's National Security Concerns

The security situation for India, as described in the early Parts, is precarious, going to alarming. We have also witnessed as to how besides hollow platitudes, pacifist statecraft cuts no ice with the global powers. Boxed-in by a coalition of incorrigibly hostile neighbourhood military powers ruled by unaccountable autocracies, India therefore needs to build-up her mili-

tary deterrence to a new height in this dog-eat-dog world. But with her defence industry as well as the flow of capital needs some decade or so to catch up with the contemporary construct of military power.

The pragmatic option is therefore to suspend pacifist notions of statecraft, for which there is little care in the world and forge alliances – for softer punch we may refer to that as ‘partnership’ – to with such powers who profess common-causes. When under assault, one need not look from where to get the *danda* (baton) to defend. Fittingly, the lesson has been learnt. As to how would that pan out in the coming days is to be watched.

Salience of Like-minded Partnerships

To that end, India is well on her way in forging *comprehensive strategic partnerships* with many like-minded powers – the US, Japan, Australia, France, Vietnam, even Russia, for example. Such international level partnerships, in bilateral and multilateral modes, could help in addressing the common political and diplomatic concerns while opening our ways to technological and economic cooperation.

In the matter of national defence, these could, in many ways, buttress India’s efforts in building her defence industry, to modernise her defence forces and unhinge her neighbours’ aggressive behaviour. The recently declassified US’ *Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific* could be a clear avenue to proceed.

Stipulation of Reciprocity

However, when it comes to accrual of substantially beneficial advantages, India has to offer reciprocal measures to keep the strategic partnerships alive and relevant. Here comes the dilemma: with her natural resources, technology and economy at premium, how could India make reciprocal offers to an extent that the partners’ interests in the partnership are cemented.

Redress of this dilemma is a matter of political evaluation and beyond the scope of the theme here, but some of India's unique advantages to bargain with her strategic partners could be:-

- a. Strategic advantages of India's maritime centrality in the Indian Ocean and her indelible bonds with the littoral States;
- b. Similar advantages of India's continental centrality in the Trans-Himalayan geography, particularly Tibet;
- c. Moderately skilled but enterprising manpower;
- d. Huge scope for trade and commerce; and,
- e. Highly trained, motivated and fairly strong defence forces.

Offered with right incentives and by safe-guarding against undesirable fallouts, offer of such strategic assets are expected to be of much interest to India's powerful partners.

The ambit of strategic partnerships falls under the competence of the nation's political-diplomatic leadership to consider, and that should be an exclusive exercise.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the Government's regular pronouncements over path-breaking defence initiatives – rightfully over-broadcasted in the wake of recent military stand-off against China in concert with Pakistan's proxy-aggression - it would be impractical to expect early fruition of the initiatives as discussed in this Paper. By default, any substantive uplift of India's defence capabilities may not come in time to thwart the rising animosity of the two congenital aggressors.

The slack period in revving up defence modernisation would therefore be well covered by consolidation of the *foundational platforms* of nation's military power. That would prepare Indian military forces to be ready to harness forthcoming modernisation schemes when these become effective at the bayonet point, meanwhile denying impunity to the ever-lurking aggressive forces.

For the coming years, the Indian military, having committed to its rigorous oath, has little option but to defend the nation by harnessing *what resources that might be available and what little that might be coming in the immediate future* – till better days come. Hard words to digest, but true nevertheless.

Finally, in accomplishment of the nation's military objectives, the issues discussed need deliberate reiteration against the usual apprehensions that strain every pioneering re-orientations by the way of fixations with grey logic, fear of diplomatic displacements, budgetary priorities and systemic hurdles. But when intent, the Indian State has managed such complications rather well.

About the VIVEKANANDA INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Vivekananda International Foundation is an independent non-partisan institution that conducts research and analysis on domestic and international issues, and offers a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Some of India's leading practitioners from the fields of security, military, diplomacy, government, academia and media have come together to generate ideas and stimulate action on national security issues.

The defining feature of VIF lies in its provision of core institutional support which enables the organisation to be flexible in its approach and proactive in changing circumstances, with a long-term focus on India's strategic, developmental and civilisational interests. The VIF aims to channelise fresh insights and decades of experience harnessed from its faculty into fostering actionable ideas for the nation's stakeholders.

Since its inception, VIF has pursued quality research and scholarship and made efforts to highlight issues in governance, and strengthen national security. This is being actualised through numerous activities like seminars, round tables, interactive dialogues, Vimarsh (public discourse), conferences and briefings. The publications of VIF form lasting deliverables of VIF's aspiration to impact on the prevailing discourse on issues concerning India's national interest.



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