

ACT OR PERISH!
(ON PREPARING AGAINST THE CHINESE MENACE)

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INTRODUCTION

The show-down with China has reaffirmed at least one principle: that, however firmly a country may decide not to wage a war, war can be thrust on it. This, naturally, leads on to the conclusion that even a peace-loving country has to be prepared for war. I say 're-affirmed', because nothing new has been brought about by the Chinese invasion. It was just history repeating itself. What a price we paid for learning this simple lesson! Instead of now waiting for history to repeat itself again to teach us some more costly lessons, let us, then, benefit from the past and prepare ourselves fully against the Chinese menace.

Modern wars are total wars and our conflict with China is that of a nation against a nation and not that of two opposing armies. We must also understand that the mode of invading countries has changed these days. In the present times where a prolonged armed action is sure to set off a world war, meaning total annihilation, invasion may take the form of a limited armed action to create grounds for sowing the seeds of political unrest, a gap for the seeds to sprout under the ideal conditions of complacency, and successive shot actions, thereafter, to act as boosters to the growth of such unrest, till the final capitulation. The military cease-fire on our borders is, therefore, no indication of a lull in the war. The political war, though latent, is still on and warrants our vigilance.

THE TASK

The task before the country is two-fold. Firstly, regaining the lost territory and, secondly, countering the typical communistic infiltration. This task, no doubt, is colossal, but in its efficient execution only lies our safety. The question of modification of this task does not arise because this task has been set for us by the Chinese. It is a challenge to our very existence. The tendency, therefore, to modify our task to suit our economic or political convenience must be checked.

REALISATION

After assessing the task thus, it is most important that we realize that whatever the magnitude of our task we have no option but to accomplish it. The law of nature, "survival of the fittest", holds good even in the present times. Had we been strong, China would not have dared to act as she did. She has a better claim on Formosa, with a lot of world opinion on her side, then why does she not invade Formosa? Now poison has been injected into one of our limbs and unless we act to cure it now, it bound to spread to the rest of the body. Even if we show cowardice now and give away what they are demanding, what guarantee in there that they will not demand more after some years? It, therefore, is a case of struggle for existence and we really do not have any option but to act.

Sense of urgency: The second realization that must come to the nation is the need for urgency in our action. We cannot afford the conventional way of doing things because

- (a) by the time we are ready to act, the Chinese would have so well entrenched themselves in our territory that the advantage of time gained may be offset by the increase in effort required to out them;
- (b) the seeds of political disorder sown by the Chinese may sprout by then and our struggle may assume two fronts, resulting in a division of effort; and finally,
- (c) by delaying our action, we will, as a matter of fact, only be postponing the inevitable which could have been faced with advantage in 1954 when Tibet fell.

The second factor that dictates urgency is the fact that we are miles behind the Chinese in our preparation for war. Now, therefore, we have to not only keep pace with the China's present preparations but also have to make up the lead already taken by her.

Convenience: The third realization that must come to the nation is that convenience is a very elastic thing. If things are allowed to take their own course it never becomes convenient for us to do anything. Convenience is like a wild horse that has to be tamed harnessed and ridden. A resolute decision invariably opens up ways of convenience. Our efforts should, therefore, be more in consonance with the needs of our task than with our convenience.

PRE-REQUISITES

Will to fight: The foremost pre-requisite of preparing for war is the *will* of the nation to fight. No nation can wage a war with the *will* to fight, which alone enables its people to bear the stress and strain of war to the bitter end. It is this *will* that will open up ways and means to muster up our resources. Only this *will* can eradicate corruption and tax-evasion, ensure proper use of funds, and produce self-sacrificing, honest and hard-working manpower – for which there is no substitute, least of all, arms aid from abroad.

Only the test of war can adequately gauge the nation's *will* to fight. But there are clues which should be watched carefully. Any sign of corruption or neglect in strategic departments is an unhealthy sign.

For a nation that has never been put to the acid test of war, it is all the more difficult to assess its *will* to fight. So little was India affected by the two world wars in this century that it might be said that its people could even profiteer without doing much damage to the cause. Our conflict with China on the other hand was so short-lived from the view of armed conflict that the stain put on the nation was negligible in comparison with what it will be in a full-fledged war. The people had hardly a chance to sacrifice their comforts and luxuries for the sake of the country. (I hope that nobody feels that the people have shared the burden of war by contributing Rs 56 crores to the National Defence Fund.) Even the great 'bravo' that came to the jawan from the home front is no indication that the same will be repeated when the homes are also aflame.

Moreover, we cannot afford to build up our people's will to fight through waging a war, for the price of it may be a defeat. We can, however, learn from history and study how Great Britain built up and sustained its people's *will* to fight during prolonged wars. China fought the United States in Korea with little besides the strong will of its people to fight. War is a savage game and savage slogans that arouse bitter hatred towards the enemy will also awaken the dormant martial feelings of a nation, so long as the people are convinced of the "revenge" or "Act or Perish" aspects of our cause.

Dependence on foreign aid adversely affects the will to fight. It creates a sense of false security and leads to lethargy and moral weakness. It is like a rich man's son losing value of money he has had no hand in earning. Besides, foreign aid, being uncertain and having implications, is unreliable. Therefore, it be treated as a bonus but as basis of our war capacity.

Faith in our own capability is the only solid foundation on which we can build our people's *will* to fight.

It will have to be admitted that, at present, although a lot of effort is being expended in enhancing the will of the soldier, equal effort to develop the *will* of the nation as a whole is not being made. It must be realized that the *will* of the soldier at the front depends on the *will* of the civilians at home.

RESOURCES

The other pre-requisite to waging war is the correct assessment and mustering up of vital resources of men and material required for waging war. As for our man-power, we could not have been luckier. Our country has a large source of professional fighters, unparalleled in the world. Even if our armed forces are quadrupled, we will not lack a regular flow of recruitment. The material resources, however, pose a problem. So immense is the problem that it is causing the national mind to drift towards the easier but a very wrong course of dependence on foreign aid. Too many people have started feeling that we do not have sufficient material resources to fight the Chinese. Unfortunately while calculating our resources it is overlooked that the present state of planning and expenditure is by no means a Constant, incapable of any improvement. Naturally, what can be spared today for defence is found insufficient.

This mode of calculating our resources ceases to be valid the moment we consider that our struggle with China is the struggle for our very existence as a nation. Where is the Indian who would like to raise his standard of living at the cost of losing our sacred territory – and who would enjoy his higher standard of living attained by endangering his very existence? Once the thinking commences on these lines, we should no longer find ourselves lacking in material resources.

As for the choice between economic development and defence, one could do no better than to relate the Biblical episode about how the peace-loving Hebrews faced the threat from the Helamites. Having bent all their energies towards the economic development, the Hebrews had barely completed a dam across the Jordon River when their land was invaded by the jealous Helamites. Greatly outnumbered and generally unprepared for waging war, the Hebrews had no defence except the dam itself. The use of this weapon meant a waste of years of hard labour, no less the shattering of their dream of prosperity and abundance. The choice had to be made between liberty and prosperity. The Hebrews made their choice, destroyed the dam and defeated the enemy through drowning. It was a costly victory, but no price is too high for liberty.

THE ARMED FORCES

The strength of the Armed Forces would have to be such that they are able to perform their task. Anything less than adequate will amount to an utter waste. What has been planned so far and made public appears to be based not on necessity but on convenience. The number of troops that we require is dictated by our enemy. We ourselves have no choice. Our role lies only in making the correct assessment of the enemy strength and what he is capable of mustering.

Political role: The Chinese have unique tactics in which the armed forces and the political forces are combined in the invasion. Therefore, our Army too will have to fulfil a political role beside the normal combat role. The political role is all the more important since the army is operating in politically backward areas. Every act of an individual of the armed forces, in his day to day life, therefore, creates very deep impressions on the locals, which build up a far-reaching cumulative result. The political consciousness of a soldier needs to be developed much more than what it is today.

Age limit: Since the fighting efficiency of an individual in mountains and jungles decreases as he enters higher age groups, he must be retired earlier. This poses a problem, psychological and economic, for the individual and the State. In order to avoid the economic loss, such troops will have to be given jobs elsewhere. Since there are few suitable jobs in the Army itself, jobs will have to be found in the civil industries connected with defence, ideally. If such industries are organized on the regular army basis, maintaining the same chain of command as for the Army, an increased efficiency will result.

Practical approach: While preparing themselves for the ultimate offensive, the armed forces have to be ready for meeting any eventuality developing immediately, with whatever resources they may possess at the time. The solution to the problem of fighting successfully with inadequate resources, unfortunately, is not found in our manuals and pamphlets. Knowing that fight we must, whatever the resources, a more serious thinking will have to be done on how to conduct the war under unfavourable conditions of preparedness. Mere recital of various principles of war in our training will not lead to preparedness. The conventional methods hold good only when units are assigned tasks equal to what they are meant to perform. When giving of increased tasks is necessitated by the lack of troops, methods of performing these tasks must also change.

Civil understanding: By civil-military understanding, it is not meant to refer to the normal civil-military relations, which are, by and large, good. What needs to be impressed is a better civil understanding of military employment, capabilities and limitations. In a democracy, the civil authority is supreme and the armed forces are instruments of exercising the civilian *will*. The question is, how the civil authority can use the military without a basic knowledge and understanding of the military art and science. At present, it is feared, the knowledge of most of the civilians, most of them in key locations, does not go much beyond the rank structure of the armed forces. This much of knowledge is not sufficient for the nation to wage war. Ideally, every citizen should be conversant with the broader aspects of the armed forces. But a thorough knowledge of the military science for the authorities directly concerned with the employment of the military is a basic necessity.

Defence production: Applying the time-honoured maxim of 'first things first' to defence production, we must look anew at the personal equipment of the infantry soldier on which would depend his efficiency and the subsequent efficiency of the supporting elements. The foremost requirement in the interest of increased efficiency is to lighten the burden off the shoulder of the infantry soldier. Even before we develop supersonic fighters and tanks, therefore, there is the urgent need to manufacture durable socks, boots and clothing for the infantry soldier. Top propriety should be given to some of the items, including those mentioned below:

(i) *Battle dress:* Our dress at present is rather heavy particularly on account of the web equipment and the spare clothes required to be carried. What we need is an over-all type battle dress, which is waterproof and provided with sufficient large pockets to eliminate the necessity for carrying web equipment. It should have a detachable woollen lining. It should be durable enough to obviate the necessity of carrying spares.

(ii) *Jungle boots:* The present jungle boots are well designed, but one's heart aches when they give way after seven day's wear on patrols. Not only a large number of spares have to be carried on long patrols, but their lack of durability results in a colossal waste of money. What is needed is a durable jungle boot which is light and which dries up quickly.

(iii) *Sleeping bag:* The Service blanket, especially when more than one has to be carried, imposes a considerable burden on the soldier. What is needed is a light sleeping bag,

weighing five pounds or less, but at least as warm as two Service blankets, for use in moderately cold regions, particularly for patrolling and special missions.

(iv) *Powdered food*: The present composite rations, by their nature and composition, are cumbersome for carriage. We should seriously engage our attention in finding/evolving a suitable single item of food that, while sufficiently nourishing, could be carried in powdered form and need not be cooked: some thing like powdered milk, needing just a little water to be added to it for making it ready for consumption: let us say an improved form of *sattu* eaten our villages* .

SECURITY OF LOCALS

By security of locals it is not meant to refer to their security from armed aggression, but to that from political sabotage, to which politically backward people are particularly vulnerable. This security of the locals can be assured by taking the following steps:

Economic uplift: Mere lectures or sermons cannot alone develop the spirit of nationalism among the locals nor safeguard them from the enemy propaganda. They will realize the deep roots of their loyalty towards the rest of the country when they are helped to identify themselves economically with it. Their economic uplift must be carried out with the utmost dispatch. Any delay will prolong the period during which the locals are exposed to enemy propaganda. As for their present economic state, the less said the better. It is incredible but true that there still are shortages of basic necessities of life, such as the common salt, in the NEFA. One has only to tour the interior to see the real condition. The colourful dances, which most of us associate with the locals are to be found in only a few, comparatively better off places. That the locals are averse to change is a lame excuse, at best. Let alone their basic needs, there is even demand for luxuries like cosmetics. The only thing that they resent is a change in their customs – for which they should be allowed to wait as long as they like.

I am of the opinion that not only should we cater for the existing needs of the locals, but we should also create more needs among them so that their economy becomes increasingly integrated with the rest of the country. This is the only way we can counter the Chinese propaganda.

Communications: Easy communications are necessary to extend the Government influence to the remotest corners of border areas. It takes time to build roads, and roads cannot be built invariably to all the remote corners. But, nothing prevents us from making good tracks to link up all the villages straight away. Some of the existing tracks are so difficult that even the Army patrols have at times to struggle on them. We cannot expect the civilian staff to tour these villages more frequently than absolutely necessary, using these tracks.

Missionary Zeal: Social and economic uplift of these locals calls for self-sacrifice and a sense of devotion from the workers: a task unsuited to the selfish, job-seeking kind. The Government servants operating in these areas must be specially selected and trained. It is the lower-level officer on whose ability and action depends the fate of the nation. In a vast and religious-minded people like ours, there should be no dearth of people who will volunteer to serve our people in these areas.

We are no doubt a secular nation but if the spread of religion will strengthen the ties of these backward areas with the rest of the country, where is the harm in encouraging religious

* UN experts have successfully assisted in the introduction of popular, *sattu*-type, synthetic foods which contain all the necessary nutritional ingredients, and are adapted to the local resources and local tastes in some Latin American countries. Aimed at improving the diet of the under-nourished and the poor, these foods are made from locally available raw materials and are very cheap. – Editor.

missionaries in these areas? One thing will have to be made certain - and that is the control of the government over all such missionary work, whether religious or political.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese have thrown a great challenge to our nation, which we must accept not only on grounds of self-respect but also because a threat has been posed to our very existence. We cannot afford to over-look the law of nature – “survival of the fittest”. Whatever our moral codes, the brutal game of war will have to be played – not because we like to play it, but because a savage nation, devoid of civilization, will not desist with war-mongery till we retaliate with all our force. The situation, therefore, is grave despite of the apparent lull in fighting, and warrants a complete concentration of effort in this direction immediately. Equally as important as armed preparation is the development of the will of the people to fight, without which no preparation can be started.

A great responsibility lies on the shoulders of the armed forces for whom the alternative to fighting is death. Even the lack of resources is no excuse for them not to fight, for now they are fighting for a cause – for the honour of their mother-land. They have, however, the right to expect from the nation the very best of the country’s efforts to support them.

Where there is no vision, the people perish[@]

[@] Added by the editor.