

OUR LITTLE WARS – AN APPRAISAL

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INTRODUCTION

After the recent fighting we are in good frame of mind to think, too, which probably we were not after the NEFA debacle. That fighting had left us a little confused with so many factors, some within our control and others quite out of control at that late stage, that had contributed towards our failure. This followed a lot more of self-condemnation than was necessary. Now that the balance has been restored an analysis of the two operations will be more rational. This analysis is extremely essential for our preparations against the threat of war. The scope for such a study is unlimited and most of it has naturally to be done at high levels. The aim of this article is only to deal with such factors as are apparent even at lower levels.

It is of greater importance for us now to analyse our failure against the Chinese and prepare hard against their threat; for, though there is no scope for complacency against Pakistan, with our present state of preparedness we shall be able to give a good account of ourselves in case she decides to attack again. The Chinese, however, we have, strictly speaking, not faced yet, i.e. not with all our might. The Chinese are good militarists and they are not likely to be complacent about their 1962 victories. During their next attack they shall definitely expect a good fight from us, though not their defeat. Our task now lies in surprising them out of their expectations by not only giving them a better fight than they expect but by giving them such a crushing blow that it sends them reeling back into their own blessed land. Before we go further let us not think that this is tall talk. Given a dynamic political and military leadership such that we got during 1965 and strong national will to fight and win, our goal is definitely attainable. If India cannot deliver the fateful blow to the Chinese army no other country can. What have the Chinese which we do not? Don't we equally share the world's population and poverty? On the other hand we have the finest soldiers in the world. On our strength now hangs the fate of free Asia.

For those who are worried about the defence burden on the nation I quote below from Clausewitz:

“Even with every thing in our favour we should be unwise not to make the greatest effort in order to make the result perfectly certain. For such effort cannot produce negative results. Suppose the country suffers greatly from this no lasting disadvantage will arise, for the greater the effort the sooner the suffering will cease”.

FOREIGN POLICY

Every country's foreign policy is primarily aimed at meeting its defence and economic interests. The ideological interests may also be aimed at but only when they supplement the defence and economic interests and not merely for their own sake. That is probably why Russia does not see eye to eye with China, not France with USA. In the light of the severe test to which our foreign policy was put during the fighting with China and Pakistan, we should examine our foreign to assess whether or not we had deviated from such aims. Some very bitter but hard facts that have come to light are:

- (a) That the world opinion is not always formed by the righteousness of the cause but mostly by each nation pursuing its self advantageous policy. It is now for

consideration as to what extent our own national interests should be sacrificed for the sake of such world opinion.

- (b) That war cannot be avoided, much less by remaining militarily weak. We have to be militarily strong, if not for ourselves forcing military solutions on others but to prevent others from forcing such solutions on us. Bismarck couldn't have been wrong when he said: "It is not with speeches and resolutions alone that the great questions of the time can be solved, but with blood and iron".
- (c) That our friends are only those whose purpose we serve whether directly or indirectly and that most of them are not prepared to reciprocate the outright support which they demand from us as a price for their friendship. If we greatly need the friendship of our friends they too need ours. It is again for consideration whether or not we too should drop the idealism of friendship and not sacrifice national interests merely to show our gratitude to countries whose pursuance of policies of self interest accrues indirect benefits to us. With our size and particular position on the globe, God has bestowed on us favours which we must exploit.
- (d) That we should recognise our potential enemy as early as possible and support every thing that goes to make him weaker. We should also not allow him to prepare for war and attack at leisure. It may mean precipitating the inevitable war a little earlier when strategically advantageous even if politically inconvenient.

FACING PAKISTAN

The recent bout with Pakistan has also come as a blessing in disguise just as did the Chinese invasion of '62. Whereas the Chinese brought to light our weaknesses, our friends the Pakistanis have highlighted our strong points and restored the armed forces confidence in themselves.

Causes of Pak Failures

The Pak moves and our counter-moves are too well known to need enunciation here. The Pak defeat is, however, puzzling. They had better fire power not only as a component of infantry but also in the shape of superiority in armour and artillery. We had a slight superiority of numbers but definitely not the superiority laid down in manuals for driving them the way we did. In strategy too we can be said to be at par. The method they adopted for grabbing Kashmir was the best method open to them. Their subsequent blitz type of moves in Chhamb and Khem Karan were again commendable, but our reactions were flawless too.

Miscalculations

Pakistan, I feel, ventured on to war after a series of miscalculations, which were difficult to rectify after she had taken the plunge and this spelled her disaster. Some of the major miscalculations are:

- (a) The miscalculation of the support of the people of Kashmir. The people refused to cooperate with Pak infiltrators and thus tilted the scales of war against Pakistan even before it started.
- (b) The miscalculation of the Indian Army's ability to resist a blitz action. This led them to plan materially for the shortest war that could be fought between two nations. When their attempts to cut Jammu by advance from Chhamb and reach Delhi via Khem Karan, failed, they found the 22 days' war too long for their logistic support planned for the adventure and even for their total national resources. This is not to

talk of the shattering of their self-created bogey of the ‘superior soldier’ the ‘Patton’ and the ‘Sabre’ on which so much was staked. The superior soldier was dislodged from picquet after picquet in Jammu and Kashmir, the Patton came to a standstill just after piercing three miles into the Khem Karan sector; and the Sabre proved to be just a match for the Indian Gnat.

- (c) Miscalculation of the dynamic political leadership existing in India in those days, which was capable of taking quick decisions on matters of great risk. Along with it also the enemy miscalculated the Punjabi people who gave unprecedented support to the armed forces and made mockery of Pakistani Para-troopers landed among the civil population to create disorder.

Lessons Learnt

Causes of Pak failures are all lessons for us to learn, but over and above these, some lessons have been learnt from our own failings. It is not intended here to enumerate all of them. It is only to emphasise some that materially affected the fighting. These are:

- (a) That there can be no short cuts to planning for an attack. The tendency to make a quick attack a hasty one must be curbed even at the cost of taking more time in launching it than is scheduled in manuals.
- (b) That great effort must be made to obtain accurate battle intelligence before launching an attack. The process of acquisition of information should be treated as an operation by itself. In such cases where time factor is important, the enemy must be over-estimated and attacks must be launched with great numerical superiority.
- (c) With the development of such tremendous fire power the infantry is extremely vulnerable in the plains and at no time should be used without adequate support from the supporting arms, even if it means postponement of an operation due to lack of it. This is obvious from the fact that our infantry fared much better in the mountains of J&K where it was less dependent on supporting arms than in the plains. This leads to the necessity for integrating all arms combat formations (on the lines of German Panzer Divisions) for fighting in the plains. When our material resources prevent such an arrangement, mass attacks in overwhelming numbers should be launched, for such superiority we shall have to prepare now.

CHINESE THREAT

As stated earlier it is the Chinese against whom we should mainly prepare. The nature of the Chinese threat differs from that of Pakistan in that the threat, besides being from a bigger foe led by robot military minds, is coupled with the threat of its fifth column operating behind our lines. Whereas it falls outside the scope of this article to discuss in detail the fifth column threat, it would do well to emphasise here the gravity of such a threat. The Chinese are known to be masters of the technique of using the “fifth column” in conjunction with military operations to undermine totally the war effort of their enemy. The democracies have been able to do little by way of finding an appropriate method for effectively dealing with the “fifth column”. The economic slogan of the communists on the other hand looks so inductive that it facilitates the operations of the “fifth column” without the supporters feeling the slightest shame of becoming traitors of their mother land.

The best way to consider the military threat from China would be this time, to analyse rationally the causes of our defeat and then finding out methods for preventing such failures in

future. Unfortunately there has been lot of loose talk in the army and elsewhere on the causes of our failure against the Chinese. It is not uncommon to hear even from responsible people about our “running away” in face of the Chinese. This is mainly indulged in by those whose good fortune it was to have been out of the debacle and is mostly based on ignorance and hearsay. Once a debacle takes place lot of unpleasant and even shameful things do happen. The correct approach on our part would be to find out why the debacle took place at all and not what happened during the debacle – to look for the cause and not the effect.

Causes of Failures

The first and foremost cause, which was sufficient to cause a debacle by itself, was our political speculation ruling out the possibility of war with China and the consequent general unpreparedness. This failing, however, has long been recognised and there is hardly any need to harp on this point any more. Some of the other causes, important from the military standpoint, are discussed below:

- (a) Overwhelming numerical superiority of the Chinese as also their better fire support
- (b) Own lack of timely intelligence due to their superior set up, capable of not only denying their own intelligence but also feeding us with wrong information. Added to this was their ability to jam our wireless sets when they were needed most.
- (c) No tactical reserves to cut off the enemy’s lengthened lines of communication nor any strategic reserves for counter-offensive to regain lost initiative.
- (d) Lack of strategical as well as tactical mobility in jungles and mountains due to lack of roads and lack of suitable organisation for troops needed for such terrain.

Troops Deployment

The manner in which we should deploy our troops in readiness to meet the next Chinese attack is dictated by the following requirements:

- (a) The need for positioning troops on likely enemy approaches to bear the initial brunt. The screen for such troops could be located on the border itself but it will have to be judiciously worked out as to where the main body is to be located. The enemy will be able to fight with strength if challenged too near the border. On the other hand, too deep a penetration, if allowed, will strengthen his roots within our territory. The ideal would be if the enemy hits of positions at the end or slightly before the end of his first lap of advance. This will be the distance which he will be able to advance in the jungles/mountains self-contained and when he will be needing time to firm in for replenishment for the next lap. That is to say the enemy will be most vulnerable after about the seventh day or so of his advance.
- (b) The need for strong mobile and uncommitted reserves at all levels, (even at battalion level when isolated from its brigade), for cutting his lengthened lines of communications, preventing his outflanking moves and interfering in his preparations for attack.
- (c) Strong army reserves to be deployed appropriately for launching a major counter-offensive at a place our choosing for regaining of overall initiative. Any enemy territory occupied like this will put us in a position of strength during the peace talks.

Strategical Mobility

With the existing means of communications in our areas of operation, mobility of troops poses a big problem. On the other hand the importance of mobility as a factor towards our

success cannot be overestimated. Mobility alone can achieve our quick reaction to enemy action, surprise during our counter-offensive and an overall economy in the use of troops. As a matter of fact our entire strategy will be based on mobility. This problem, therefore, needs priority handling.

One of the ways of solving the problem is, of course, through speeding up of the roads construction, but this will take time. Even when the roads are completed nature is going to take time in setting them. Again going over hundreds of miles of hill roads is not the type of mobility that is desired. As things stand today, and if we are to meet an immediate threat of the Chinese, air support is the main answer, shudder we may at the colossal requirement of the air effort. Even when the roads come up, the burden on the air effort may be lessened but would never be eliminated. This air effort will have to be integral part of the army poised against the Chinese. The aim being the type of mobility achieved by the Americans while fighting in Korea when complete brigades were lifted from one theatre to another, greatly perplexing the enemy and throwing his plans out of gear.

The only substitute to mobility, if substitute it can be called, is numerical superiority of troops. We must, therefore, decide how much to have what, depending on what we are capable of mustering with our best efforts. The danger lies in our remaining undecided.

Study of Ground

One of the obvious advantages we have over the Chinese is our ability to know the ground of operations better than them. This is a very big advantage which we should exploit. In the absence of much enemy activity at present, our patrolling should be solely aimed at acquiring this advantage. The tendency to send out patrols merely to complete a requisite number or merely as part of general training of junior leaders must be checked. Patrolling at this stage must be for obtaining more information about the ground as can be incorporated in our operational plans. The knowledge about the ground, however, cannot be accurate unless complete rehearsals of operational plans are carried out on it.

Command and Control

One reason for paralysation of command is the breakdown of communications within the command. The Chinese aim at disrupting enemy's communications system is an excellent method for bringing about a much faster collapse of their enemy than is possible through superior military force. In the terrain where other means of communication are impossible, wireless communications assume a very great importance. To ensure that the enemy is not able to bring about such paralysation by bringing about a breakdown of our communications, the special requirement for the area of our operations is:

- (a) More powerful wireless sets than the enemy has, not only to avert any breakdown but also to be able to fling back this deadly weapon back at him.
- (b) A thorough knowledge of the wireless dead-spots in the area, and pre-reconnoitred relay stations required to maintain communications in these areas.
- (c) The wireless communication system to be supplemented by the use of air despatch system integrated in the formation headquarters.

The second factor that can bring about paralysation of command is the lack of intelligence regarding the enemy. The acquisition of information again seems to be the main problem. Well planned and aggressive patrolling is the best method of acquisition of information in this area. However, the vastness of the area and our limited resources of troops dictate the employment of locals for this purpose. There is, therefore, a great need for a clandestine type of organisation spread through every nook and corner of NEFA and Ladakh which would not only keep the fighting troops supplied with information about the enemy but also carry out counter-intelligence work. Such an organisation would also protect the innocent locals from political subversion and keep them unflinchingly on our side – a factor so vital for our victory. The Chinese, true to their creed, must be playing their political pranks in the area and to counter them we need to think much more seriously than we are doing at present.

Whatever the source of information, its accuracy lies in its processing. In view of the fact the Chinese deliberately feed their adversary with wrong information, processing of information becomes all the more important. It would need a well trained staff operating in these areas to be able to convert information into accurate battle intelligence.

Denying battle intelligence to the enemy is just as important for command and control as in obtaining it. The greatest source of leakage is the locals and they will have to be kept at an arms length from such information, though of course, tactfully. Even otherwise our jawan needs to be taught to keep his mouth shut on military matters. The other source of information for the enemy is weakness in fire control. The Chinese are known to use unique tactics of launching feint attacks for making the defender to open up fire and disclose the layout of his defences. We shall have to develop an eye for differentiating their feint from real and desist from opening up on their feints even if it means foregoing the thrill of killing a few of them.

Supply problem

Feeding such a large army in the border areas is a problem by itself. It implies transportation, (mostly by air), of huge quantities of food supplies to some of the remotest corner of the country. This, besides, is a great economic burden on the nation. To avoid this burden the Chinese are known to be living off the land. So why can't we? In NEFA especially there is no dearth of cultivable land and food for the troops could be grown next to the troops' barracks. The soil is virgin and practically every thing grows there. For example, rice grows here on hill slopes without making any arrangement for watering the fields. The military farms could be expanded sufficiently to take on this job.

Military Research

In order to develop a deterrent military power in our country we not only have to build up huge arsenals of weapons and ammunition but also to develop an independent and original military thought. Originality in war is a great weapon in itself which can snatch the initiative from the enemy and put it in our hands. A war may well be won before the enemy is able to react to our new techniques - thus off-setting any handicap of our material deficiency. For developing new techniques and independent military thought, there is a great need for a military research department in our country where officers could be called in for study and discussions on various military doctrines and finally, submission of original thesis. Field Marshal Slim, while stressing the need for military study, writes: "Preparation for war is an expensive burdensome business, yet there is one important part of it that costs little – study". Let us not neglect this part of preparation if we are to face the next war to our advantage.

CONCLUSION

The Chinese aggression of 1962 had left us self condemned. The Pak aggression on the other hand has given us the much-wanted faith in ourselves. Let not this faith die out! Let us use it to strengthen our faith in the ultimate defeat of the Chinese at our hands. How we fare this time if the Chinese attack us is not what should worry us. What we should ensure is that there should be no criminal neglect in our defence efforts. Every thing that can be done through our maximum effort must be done as a matter of religious duty.

We have to grow militarily to attain our rightful place in Asia which nature has reserved for us, not only for our sake but also as a moral duty to protect smaller nations against Asia's biggest bully. Our military strength lies in our sound strategy aimed at giving hell to the enemy while he is on our soil and subsequently starting an offensive to snatch the initiative from him. The execution of such a strategy demands the prerequisites of adequate number of troops, mobility of such troops and an efficient intelligence net-work. Where we fall short of material resources, our originality, ingenuity and the renowned valour of our troops will pay. The great military might of China need not be feared. She has her hands full and this time we may not be fighting alone.

“In our day the advance deployment of troops of the forward strategic echelon and their complete combat readiness has the greatest significance. The nature of modern war is such that the time available for a retaliatory strike is counted in minutes”.

Marshal Andrei A. Grechko, Soviet Minister of Defence