

WHAT MAKES US FALTER*

One month before his death, Sardar Patel saw dark shadows of events that were to follow in 1962. He wrote a prophetic letter to the Prime Minister warning him of the impending dangers to the security of the country. In this letter he made a fervent appeal to the Prime Minister to evolve a clear cut policy on defence, the lack of which was “preventing us from fully gearing up our resources to meet the threat that [was] so imminent”. He wrote that “we must have a clear idea of what we wish to achieve and the methods by which to achieve it” and that “any faltering or lack of decisiveness in formulating our objectives is bound to weaken us and increase the threats that are so evident”. That the prophesy came out true after twelve years of having been made is no doubt a feather in the cap of India’s greatest statesman, but its value is not limited to this extent alone. History as we know has the queer habit of repeating itself. The dangers that were imminent then are still imminent and the warning holds good as much today as it did then.

No doubt much change has come about in our defence policy since then. The 1965 war is a clear proof that we have moved in the right direction. Subsequently, Prime Minister Shastri’s simple but significant slogan of “*Jai Jawan Jai Kisan*” is indicative of priorities and definite change in outlook. However, considering the persistent dangers to our security from expansionist China, the question still remains whether we have move far enough.

The one long stride towards defence preparedness that we have talent since 1962, may give an impression to some that now we are fully prepared. For such people it would do well to remember that it is not the quantum of effort but adequacy of effort that counts; adequacy strictly in relation to the prevalent threat. Our armed strength has certainly gone up three fold since then but the question is whether it is adequate to meet the combined threat from China and Pakistan.

It will have to be admitted that so far other factors have weighed more heavily in our policy making that the actual threat to the nation. Tracing back our history of defence preparedness it would appear that rather than going in for it we have successively been pushed into it by circumstances; waiting at the end of each push to be pushed further by another set of fresh circumstances. The result of this “waiting to be pushed” have been disastrous in the past and we seem to be again standing at the thresh-hold of our preparations waiting to be pushed into them. There is marked reluctance in our defence preparations : a faltering against which Sardar Patel warned us. A question naturally arises as to what is it that makes us falter in this regard.

GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

Today one does not have to possess Sardar Patel’s vision and fore sight to be able to understand the existing threat to the country and yet there can be little doubt that many in the country, including those connected with defence policy making, do not possess the understanding of defence matters to the extent they should. No wonder that a section of our intelligentsia, (including members of Parliament), have even advocated drastic cuts in our defence budget. The fact is that basically we are not a military minded Nation and as such never come to grips with the problem of national defence. Before Independence the defence of the country from external aggression was never our concern. It was the concern of the British, which could not even evoke sympathy of the nation – the British concern being more in their interests in India than for the security of the Indian nation. We who then saw and fought wars as a slave nation developed hatred for wars. Wars appeared to us as a mere means for furthering

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imperialistic designs. Apparently we have not got out of this psychological environment even after becoming a free nation. Where we have gone wrong is not in developing an aversion for wars but in failure to understand that the only way to avoid a war is to be prepared for it. Our strong desire to avoid war should, therefore, induce in us enthusiasm rather than reluctance when it comes to preparing for war. The people need to be psychologically groomed into accepting that wars are inevitable and that a nation that does not wish to suffer repeated humiliations must keep itself in a state of prepared for war no matter what the cost.

Ours is also, perhaps, the only country in the world where soldiering and politics are completely divorced from each other, which could result in lack of understanding between the two. In our country the soldiers and the politicians are living like two separate communities, having little to do with each other. The only link between the two is the soldier dutifully presenting the Guard of Honour to the politician and the politician (again dutifully) now and then speaking highly of the morale of the soldier, during his ceremonial tours of the forward areas. This state of affairs could, definitely, not be congenial for developing understandings between the soldier and the politician which is so vital for ensuring national security.

There are two main factors contributing towards this state of affairs. Firstly, there being no conscription in the country, the soldier and the politician never interchange positions. A soldier could probably become a politician after retirement but at present he does not appear to be psychologically tuned to become one. So many soldiers have joined politics and have even been assisted by the people to win elections but one and all they have faded into the oblivion after the elections. Secondly, the highest experts on defence matters – the Chiefs of Service Staff – are handicapped being so low in the order of precedence. Ever since the 1962 war, the military experts are certainly having a greater say in planning and execution of wars but not to the extent necessary. Modern wars as we know are total wars towards which end the entire national effort and resources have to be geared. The military expert, therefore, must have a say in the nation's grand strategy for defence. This would include defence oriented economy and foreign policy.

BALANCE OF POWER

What is not understood by the nation at times is the famous concept of Balance of Power. It is a very simple concept implying that military balance must exist between countries in a region if peace is to be assured in that region. It is, however, a very important concept in that it forms the basis of defence objectives of a nation. The defence preparedness of a nation is judged by the extent to which it has been able to restore military balance vis-à-vis potential enemies. Unfortunately there are many in our country who do not believe in this concept. To them the concept smacks of imperialism. No wonder that when the issue of vacuum in the Indian Ocean came up before the nation, whereas some people were completely surprised at the suggestion of there being vacuum in the sea, there were others who felt ashamed that India should even consider an imperialist suggestion of stepping in the Indian Ocean for filling this vacuum. Big powers may be using this concept for safe-guarding their imperialistic designs but that does not mean that the concept is not true for the limited objective of meeting the requirements of a country's own defence.

Whatever the outward causes of a war, the root cause is always military imbalance. Disputes between neighbouring countries will be there but it is always because of military imbalance between the two parties at dispute that the stronger is tempted to take recourse to settling them. In its practical application, therefore, the concept of balance of power implies the creation of military deterrent by a country, strong enough to discourage military adventure by

another. It is in this light that we must evaluate our present state of defence preparedness. Let alone China, even Pakistan had the cheek to wage war against us; such was the effectiveness of our military deterrent in the region. By deciding unilaterally not to compete with the military strength of our belligerent neighbours we would only be inviting more wars on ourselves. The concept of balance of power is, in fact, so true that it may be termed as the law of nature. Whether we like it or not we shall have to grow militarily to the extent necessary as a natural course – unless we choose to avoid war through submission. The earlier we realise this, the better.

THE WILL TO FIGHT

Another factor that makes us hesitant in our defence is the lack of faith in our ability to fight the Chinese. The Chinese jingoism, backed by a totalitarian regime capable of mustering up the entire national resources towards a protracted war, has given an impression to many in our country that it is beyond us to fight the Chinese by ourselves. So why make an effort they ask. A careful analysis would, however, expose China as a mere paper tiger (to use its own terminology). The Western powers have, probably, reasons to fear the Chinese, whose immense man-power resources have more than off-set their (Western Powers') technological and material advantages, but what have we to fear from. We have matching man-power resources and will be fighting over terrain that will allow the Chinese very little advantage of the material and technological edge they have over us. What is needed is only the matching *will* of our nation to fight. Affecting adversely our *will* to fight are some false rumours creating myths around the Chinese soldier, which he does not deserve. By himself the Chinese soldier is not as fearless as he is made out to be. What makes him win and look fearless is the tremendous backing of his nation that he gets to ensure his success.

At present there also appears to be a dangerous trend in our general attitude towards wars, which is likely to cause a sagging in our *will* to fight. Our general nausea for wars can ultimately breed moral cowardice. It is not intended here to advocate the developing of general war hysteria, but by constantly decrying war it would be difficult to arouse the people psychologically to the pitch necessary for enabling them to make continuous sacrifices that would be demanded of them – firstly during the preparation stage and later while waging a long and protracted war that may be forced on us. Not only this we shall also have to counter the automatic decline in the will of the people to fight that may be caused by the growing economic prosperity towards which India is heading fast. A rich people are always reluctant to fight even as the nation always needs sacrifices from the people so as to survive. History is replete with examples of supreme sacrifices made by our past generation towards this end. The present generation has reaped the fruits of these sacrifices. There is no reason why it should now shirk to make such like sacrifices – a responsibility that it owes to the future generation.

THE BOGEY OF DEFENCE BURDEN

It is perhaps our inherent abhorrence for wars that has given rise to the bogey of the burden caused by our expenditure on defence. No wonder that after Independence, when we needed the armed forces most for consolidating our borders, we went about slashing them down to a ridiculous extent under the spell of this bogey of 'defence burden', which was, even at that low level considered unbearable. The fact that in spite of our best efforts to reduce the size of our armed forces, we have been compelled by circumstances to instead increase them three fold should serve as an eye opener and a lesson for those who believed that the armed forces could be

reduced at will. It should by now be obvious that the requirement of a country's armed forces is worked out not arbitrarily but through a realistic assessment of the strength of its potential enemies. In the fifty years or so of its post Independence period India has been forced into five wars with its neighbours and is likely to be forced into more such wars till such time that it raises its armed strength to the extent that it can act as an effective deterrent to military adventurism by its neighbours including China. There should be nothing to worry about the burden on the economy as our economy can be expected to adjust itself to the increased defence expenditure so involved in the same way that it has been doing even as the strength of our armed forces has more than quadrupled since the fateful year of 1962.

It would appear that the burden of defence being felt by the nation today is more psychological than real. What other reason could there be to it when judging from all standards the country is carrying very little defence burden. With a defence budget forming less than 3.5% of our Gross National Product (GNP) we rank among the 19 countries of the world with the lowest percentage of defence expenditure in relation to their GNP. These nineteen countries do not, incidentally, include our potential enemies. Worked out as a percentage of Per Capita Income our defence budget stands second lowest in the world (1969 figures). A defence budget of Rupees 16000 Crores, which according to rough estimates could have increased our armed strength by over 1/3, and brought it to near adequate level, would have formed only 4.5 per cent of the GNP (a percentage that Pakistan was spending on defence at that time). Surely 4.5 percent of GNP could not have been considered too great a defence burden on the nation. But it was considered so, and we never targeted the magic figure. Apparently the people need to be psychologically prepared into accepting the inevitability of wars and the fact that a self-respecting nation that does not wish to suffer humiliation must keep itself prepared for war at all times no matter what the cost.

Even granting that the expenditure on defence could be termed a burden as most of it is unproductive, it will have to be accepted as necessary. The more positive approach for lightening the burden would be to cut down waste and unnecessary expenditure in all spheres of expenditure so that the country has enough to spend on defence. It is too well known that there is plenty of scope for stringency in our National Spendings as a whole without harming the cause. Our socialistic pattern of society has yet to put curbs on the pomp show and pageantry of government servants which they inherited from the British. We are also, perhaps, the only country in the world where most, if not all, public undertakings are running at a loss. In fact, if all the losses that our country suffers year after year on account of inefficiency and corruption are added up, the amount that we are spending on defence each year would pale into insignificance. The real burden on the nation, therefore, is waste, corruption and inefficiency (including that in the department of defence) and not the legitimate expenditure on defence.

There could also be many other ways for raising funds for defence without the people feeling its burden. The Government could float special defence lotteries as is being done by the states. Special sports, fetes and fairs could be organised all over the country. What better use could we make of the offerings of the people to "Durga" the Goddess of war than supplementing the defence budget with it. The Defence Ministry could even run business like cinema houses and transport companies etc which would yield quick returns. If we are not able to meet our defence requirements even after all sources of revenue have been exploited, corruption nipped and waste cut down to the possible extent, the Government would be justified in levying war tax to meet the deficit. The burden that the people would have to carry would be the price for freedom which none could grudge. This may also prove to be a blessing in disguise; for sacrifice

for the sake of freedom, which very few of us have had an opportunity to make) will bring home to the Nation the value of freedom and increase their determination to preserve it.

MAKING WARS CHEAP

War is a very expensive game; more so if we fight the way the rich countries of the west do. As fight we must, what ever the cost, the solution to fighting with limited resources lies in making our wars as cheap as possible. Rather than stick to the war techniques of the western powers which we have inherited from the British, we must switch over to techniques adopted by poorer countries of Asia. These countries exploit man power resources to compensate for lack of other material resources. War techniques used by Korea and Vietnam against the mighty United States speak for themselves. The adoption of such techniques is more so relevant in the context of the fact that the Chinese will adopt these very techniques against us. We have qualitative man power and shall be fighting over terrain which could be exploited to our advantage. What we need, therefore, is a mass army even if lightly equipped. Here alone lies our salvation as this would not only be less costly but also more effective. Unfortunately some people doubt the ethical propriety of mass attacks. The doubt has risen from the wrong notion that mass attacks imply using manpower as gun fodder. This is, however, not correct as mass attacks do not mean attacking without fire support. It only compensates for lack of it. Mass attacks are known to have struck terror among the most sophisticated armies of the world. What better weapon could we provide our army with than manpower of which we have no dearth?

Much economy could also be exercised in the armed forces organisational set up without affecting efficiency. Our armed forces are known to be top heavy (headquarters) with a long tail (administrative detail), leaving little in the middle (fighting element). To try and affect economy without changing the existing organisational set up would certainly affect efficiency. What is required is a complete change in our outlook. Soldiers will agree, for instance, that there is a requirement for a smaller infantry division operating in the jungles and mountains. A smaller division of say six battalions (from the usual nine) may obviate the necessity of having the brigade headquarters for every three battalions as at present. The grouping of eighteen battalions in this way would eliminate three brigade headquarters with an addition of only one divisional headquarters. There would be considerable saving when this organisation is applied to the entire army operating in such areas. The administrative set up could also be considerably reduced if the army learnt to live off the land. The army in forward area of Arunachal is supplied rations from hundreds of miles away whereas there is scope for growing food for the troops next to their barracks. If the army does not want to engage itself in growing food, let the civilians go there and do it. It will serve a dual purpose.

These are but few examples of how war could be made cheaper. Many more methods could be thought of. What is required is the strong will of the nation to fight and win. The complexity of the problem must not make us falter. We know that where there is a will there is always a way.