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# Principles of War: Need for a Rethink

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## Background Science of Warfare

The principles of war are broad guidelines which influence its conduct at every level of military operations. They are based on past experience and may need revision, expansion and reevaluation from time to time. The need for the present reevaluation has been felt because of the lessons learnt, the experiences gained from the recent wars and influenced by the information warfare and revolution in military affairs (RMA). I consider Lord Krishna in the epic battle of the Mahabharata as the greatest 'Generalissimo' in the art and conduct of warfare by adopting all means to achieve victory, including *Koota Yuddha* based on surprise and deception. To Krishna goes the unique distinction of being not only a powerful warrior and field commander but also an equally effective strategist and tactician. The victory of the Pandavas can be ascribed to the sound professional advice of Krishna for adopting the *Koota Yuddha* methodology at a every crucial juncture of the Kurukshetra War.

Lessons can also be drawn from some of the principles of war enunciated by Bhishma which are interesting and useful. According to him, the aim of the battle should be to defeat the enemy forces, not to capture territory, and the method of war must be varied to combat the nature and genius of the adversary, i.e. an honest and chivalrous enemy must be fought by honourable methods, but a cunning and deceitful enemy must be dealt with in a similar manner.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is the oldest treatise known to exist on the art of warfare; The "Principles of War", as known today can be traced back to Sun Tzu, and have been increasing over the centuries due to experiences. The most

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important name on the subject in recent times, well known for his works on the art of war, was Carl Von Clausewitz who wrote a memorandum the military instruction for the Prussian Crown Prince during 1810-1812. Very few generals would have applied and understood these principles better than Gen Zorawar Singh who applied these successfully to the hilt in the high altitude terrain of Ladakh and Tibet.

## **Need for Reevaluation**

Notwithstanding the fact of our having imbibed the existing guideline “principles of war” for over half a century, there is a need to reevaluate, expand and possibly add certain new principles in view of changing doctrines, technological developments and the RMA. An idea that is developed and put into action is more important than an idea that exists only as an idea. Daring ideas may be beaten but they are the ones that may start a winning game and that is the way to success.

Since independence, the Indian Army has been involved in a number of wars and conflicts. In addition to conventional wars viz, 1962, 1965, 1971 and 1999 Kargil War, the Indian Army has been constantly engaged in proxy war and low intensity conflicts involving counter-insurgency and terrorism, since the early 1960s, including Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka. The Indian Army continues to gain rich experience from these continued conflicts.

## **Dynamic Doctrines**

Military doctrines have provided the basic approach to all important aspects related to war for the armies of most nations over the past few centuries. Prevailing strategic realities, threats, challenges visualised, opportunities and national aspirations are the major factors which have a strong influence on the formulation of military doctrines. A doctrine is generally a written document; it could also be a widely accepted understanding without being specifically enunciated. In the Indian context, the need for formulating and enunciating a comprehensive military doctrine has gained momentum with advancements in military technologies and the changing nature of war in our times. Military doctrine is neither dogma nor does it replace or take away the authority and obligation of the commander on the spot to determine a proper course of action under the circumstances prevailing at the time of decision. In simple words, military doctrine is a particular policy taught or advocated; a set of principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives. Military doctrine can be defined as “a formal expression of military knowledge

and thought that an army accepts as being relevant at a given time, which covers the nature of current and future conflicts, the preparation of the army for such conflicts and the methods of engaging in them to achieve success". It is authoritative but requires judgement in application.

## Perceived Threat Scenarios

The security challenges facing India are varied and complex. India has contentious borders with almost all its neighbours. The country has experienced four major conventional wars besides the Kargil War in 1999 and has been engaged in an externally abetted proxy war for the last several years in Jammu and Kashmir. The myriad threats being faced are :

**Terrorism:** India continues to combat terrorism perpetuated by militant and terrorist groups even within the heartland.

**Naxalism:** A number of insurgencies, spurred by tribal and ethnic aspirations in addition to left wing ideologies are being tackled in various parts of the country.

**Weapon of Mass Destruction(WMD):** A number of nuclear weapon states are in India's neighbourhood. Hostile, radical or fundamentalist elements gaining access to, and posing a threat with, weapons of mass destruction is also a possibility.

**China:** China's increasing military might, including its presence in the Indian Ocean, is a clear and present threat.

It is in such an environment that the Indian Army is required to be operating in varied conditions across the entire spectrum of conflict.

## Ten Principles of War

The ten "principles of war" which came to be accepted by the Indian Army post independence and were taught in all the schools of instruction are Selection and Maintenance of Aim, Offensive Action, Concentration of Force, Economy of Effort, Flexibility, Cooperation, Security, Surprise, Administration and Maintenance of Morale. We need to understand these ten principles briefly in spite of repetition, before recommending any changes in them and adding new guideline principles.

**Selection and Maintenance of Aim:** The aim is the intention of the intended operation to be undertaken. It is selected carefully and stated simply and directly. Once selected, the endeavour is to maintain it.

**Offensive Action:** Offensive action is the key to achieve victory in any nature of operation, be it attack or defence. Offensive spirit helps in the seizure of

initiative. Krishna had also advocated annihilation of the enemy by relentless offensive action.

**Concentration of Force:** Concentration of superior force at the chosen place and time ensures success in battle and, along with other factors, acts as a force multiplier by changing combat ratios.

**Surprise:** Surprise implies catching the enemy off balance and off guard, thereby, forcing him to react and fight in circumstances unfavourable to him. Deception is also a part of surprise. Deception should aim at misleading an adversary. The end justifies the means – that was the keynote of Krishna's military philosophy. He laid great stress on deception. According to him, the truth may often have to be sacrificed in pursuit of victory. He maintained that subterfuge or bluffing is as virtuous as truthfulness to gain victory in war. He advocated the use of cunning to defeat the enemy if he is superior in strength or capability. It is a precursor of the present-day principle of surprise and deception.<sup>3</sup>

**Security:** This relates denial of information of the intended operations, both physical movement of troops, equipment, communications and movement of civilians.

**Maintenance of Morale:** High morale fosters the offensive spirit, initiative and the will to win which is a major battle winning factor even in adverse situations and can really not be measured.

**Flexibility:** Flexibility is the capability to react appropriately to changing situations and having a number of contingencies which should be rehearsed. Flexibility in mind is a must for timely decisions to implant the contingencies.

**Cooperation:** All agencies involved have to work jointly towards achievement of the overall aim to achieve success in war. Realistic cooperation acts as a force multiplier.

**Economy of Effort:** Economy of effort implies balanced deployment and judicious employment of forces and resources to ensure success.

**Administration:** Placing the logistic support resources required at the right place and time to achieve the aims and objectives.

Having broadly recapitulated the existing ten guideline principles of war, it would be adequate to say that these continue to be time tested repeatedly over the years and there appears no need to totally replace them. However, recent conflicts have highlighted the dramatic impact of technology on warfare. This has caused a significant shift in the very nature of war-fighting and is bringing about the RMA, although we may not have the wherewithal to draw full benefits from it at present. Towards this end, it will be essential to institutionalise methods for assimilating

technology and adapting, and even anticipating, changes in doctrine, tactics and organisations. In so doing, special attention needs to be paid to the impact of RMA on low intensity conflict (LIC) and asymmetric warfare waged by non-state actors. The RMA is termed as “a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of new technologies, which, combined with the dramatic changes in military doctrine, operational concepts and operations, fundamentally alters the character and conduct of military operations”. In view of this present and futuristic modernised information warfare, there is a need to add reevaluate and expand certain additional “principles of war”.

### **Nations’s Economic Strength**

Economic strength is now the currency of power. National economies are undergoing liberalisation to cater to globalisation. The dominance of the developed world over the global economy is, nonetheless, likely to continue. Even so, China and India have been acknowledged as emerging economic powers. Economic linkages and interdependence amongst countries are likely to result in mutual security becoming an important issue. Water, energy sources and even environmental issues are emerging as causes of conflict between states. Future wars with Pakistan could be “water wars”, and with China, they could be on environmental issues like diverting rivers! Economic strength determines the war-waging capability of a nation or its capability to stand up and sustain the war effort for a longer duration in terms of its economic strength.

It is a lesson of history that all emerging powers have to face external as well as internal dangers. Because of our multi-racial and multi-religious population, other countries are bound to cause destabilisation; a few of them are already doing so. At the same time, India has to be prepared to face external threats also. It is, therefore, essential to develop a strong deterrent by way of highly motivated, well equipped and equally well trained armed forces as they will bear the main brunt in any future war, which may be forced on India.

### **Economy of Effort and Concentration of Force**

Economy of effort and concentration of force are two current principles which may be considered to be combined and expanded. Gen Colin Powell has been a strong advocate of employing overwhelming force and resources or effects to deal a swift and a fatal blow to the enemy forces and its economy so as to not allow it the opportunity to sustain due to slow, limited force and resource battles. Shock and awe will make the enemy fighting capability crumble faster.

## **Information Warfare**

**Intelligence:** First and foremost which, in fact, is part of any planning for a military operation, be it offensive or defensive in nature, is 'intelligence' inputs of the enemy forces, equipment, all-round capability and the intended enemy plans. Intelligence-based warfare has been a traditional component of warfare from time immemorial and occurs when intelligence is directly fed into operations to bring transparency to the battlefield to be used as an input for overall command and control. Timely and intelligent application of battlefield intelligence acts as a force multiplier and can be a battle winning factor. The Iraq War is a classical example of information warfare.

## **Electronic Warfare (EW) and Cyber Warfare**

Electronic warfare (EW) and cyber warfare, as a part or adjunct of surprise, is a set of actions taken to deny the use of the electro-magnetic spectrum to hostile forces while retaining the ability to use it. This basically implies that the endeavour is to deny, degrade, delay or disrupt information in order to create a false picture so that the enemy is duped into making incorrect assessments and taking wrong actions. EW involves the use of electro-magnetic and directed energy to control the electro-magnetic spectrum. One of the most important developments in the field of EW has been the achievement of the capability to provide a high degree of information in addition to interception, direction-finding and jamming of the enemy's communication network which entails techniques to exploit, degrade, and destroy the enemy's computer-based networks. Cyber warfare includes hacking enemy computer networks. Computer hacking has been evolved to a stage wherein information stored or passing through computer networks is interfered with to degrade the adversary's command and control structure in real-time to downgrade his fighting capabilities.

## **Psychological Warfare**

Psychological warfare is achieved through mass media such as newspapers, radio, television broadcasts and distribution of leaflets and spreading rumours of own successes and enemy failures. The prevailing state of information technology allows effective psychological warfare to be conducted in a very subtle manner. Pakistan's psychological war apparatus, on the other hand, is very active and effective through its Inter-Service Public Relations carrying out the psychological war agenda by dominating the media through its reach in border areas. In order to be effective, psychological operations need to be conducted in conjunction

with other operations in a selective, intelligent manner which should appear to be true so that enemy forces and civilian populace get demoralised. Lord Krishna propagated psychological warfare or war of the mind. During the Mahabharata war, the Pandavas, under the advice of Krishna, resorted to psychological warfare to weaken the enemy's will to fight. They adopted propaganda measures directed to win over the hearts and minds of enemy troops and soften the attitude of their commanders by subversion and by creating dissent amongst the Kaurava senior commanders. The primary aim was to affect the minds of the enemy commanders. According to Krishna, the first step in gaining the upper hand in war is to overshadow the mind of the enemy commanders, and the demoralisation of troops would follow as an inevitable consequence.

## **Speed**

Speed is not only the rapid execution of operational related plans based on offensive manoeuvres but is also of the mind, to arrive at quick decisions. The overall commanders should give the broad directives and leave the rest to their trusted field commanders at the point of decision, with minimal interference by senior commanders. Speed in execution of simple plans and manoeuvres will be achieved, be it in the mountains, plains or deserts. Gen Zorawar Singh was able to apply this principle of speedy manoeuvres in the mountains in spite of the poor communications during that period.

World War II involved manoeuvres with speed by large forces and was spread across many countries and even continents. In terms of the size of the forces involved, the spaces over which battles were fought and the intensity of operations, World War II was a major landmark in the history of conventional warfare. In recent years, the nature of conflicts has undergone transformation. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are classic examples of manoeuvres and force deployment across oceans. Mobility in all types of terrain, be it the deserts, mountains, jungles or moving across oceans, is a battle winning factor. Troops or forces better equipped and having an edge over the adversaries are likely to beat the enemy designs because of their swift mobility which leads to better initiative, deployments and quicker decision-making for offensive action and ultimate victory.

## **Simplicity**

Clear, concise simple orders towards execution of plans which are explicit, understood and well received by both the implementing commander and the troops, fetch better results than confusing and too many orders.

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## Selfless Action

Selfless action is a warrior's virtue which alone can make a soldier invincible. When soldiers fight with whole-hearted intentions, to emerge victorious in both peace and during war, it is the true spirit of selfless service. Selfless means soaring higher to an ideal, by rising above the 'me-first' syndrome. Anyone who achieves this becomes a dynamic go-getter. A selfless person is neither greedy nor looking for short cuts to success. Selfless action is achieved through developing *esprit-de-corps* which is honesty-integrity-loyalty towards the organisation one belongs to and laying down one's life for the honour and *Izzat* of the organisation, the race and the nation. The US armed forces' credo is duty-honour-country; similar selfless action has to be inculcated into our fighting soldiers. This may appear on paper to be too tall an order but on the ground, when the situations have demanded it, our soldiers and young officer leaders have lived up to this ethos of *Izzat*. The Kargil War has ample examples of selfless action of our young officers and men who laid down their lives for the country. The *Gita* has rightly and simply stated that one should continue to do one's assigned tasks without looking for rewards.

## Advantages

The envisaged advantages likely to accrue from the recommendations made towards adding, combining and expanding on the existing principles of war would be :

**Short and Swift Wars:** Use of overwhelming force and resources at the point of decision against the earlier advocated principles of economy in effort and forces would result in crumbling the enemy's war-fighting capability earlier.

**Enemy Sustenance:** India being an emerging regional power both in terms of economic, political and military strength, would be able to sustain a war for a longer duration than the enemy.

**Timely and Correct Employment of Forces and Resources:** Being scientifically one of the most advanced nations, India must be capable of using the existing systems of information warfare, electronic warfare and cyber warfare, in a planned manner, and considering them as principles of war. This will also economise on correct and timely use of both forces and resources.

**Reduction in Own Casualties:** Applying the enhanced principles of war of utilisation of overwhelming concentration, employment of forces and resources at the right place and time, based on information warfare capabilities of all kinds, will reduce own casualties.

## Conclusion

Our ancestors were a very peace loving and contented people and were interested in spiritual and intellectual pursuits other than the art of war. This led to the painful consequence that we as a nation were often vanquished by the foreign invaders who ruled over our country for long periods. No nation has neglected the science of warfare as we have done in the past, or we would not have been defeated so often. The *Mahabharata*, besides covering many other subjects like philosophy, religion and spirituality, gives significant information on the art of war as obtaining at that time. It brings out clearly that Krishna's was by far the best military strategy which brought victory to the Pandavas. Thus, Krishna is perhaps one of the earliest 'sword-bearers' that our country has produced and about whom we have reliable documented material.

India, in the future, may have to be a part of a multinational force which will be totally network-centric. Our ten guiding principles of war have stood the test of time in all the conventional wars. Learning lessons from the Arab-Israel War, Afghanistan and Iraq, it becomes evident how important the modern technologies were in these wars. The land warfare has extended into space, cyberspace and knows no boundaries. To fight future battles of asymmetry in an environment of a nuclear threat, considering the related modern technologies available and adding them to our existing principles of war, would be prudent as they would be the battle winning factors which will change the combat ratios towards the ultimate victory.

With our large natural resources, large numbers of trained educated manpower, including the skilled inherent strength of software engineers, and massive ongoing industrialisation, we are a potential world power of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, provided we make concerted efforts. To achieve this status of being one of the future world powers, we have to keep pace with the changing scenarios. Reevaluation has been influenced mainly by the RMA and success of information warfare witnessed in the last few wars. Future wars in a nuclear and global terrorism infested backdrop are likely to be of short duration. Set-piece attritions will have to be replaced by swift applications of overwhelming forces and resources. The issues discussed are required to be debated and deliberated upon seriously.

## References

1. Maj Gen Rajendra Nath, *Military Leadership in India: Vedic Period to Indo-Pak Wars* (New Delhi: Lancer Books 1990).
2. *Indian Army Doctrine* (ARTRAC Publication), p 3.