

## **Introduction**

Field Marshal Manekshaw led the Indian Army to a great victory in the 1971 War. It was also, one might say, the last decisive campaign. Decisive wars are rare in history if one judges them by the peace which they brought. If we go by the Clausewitzian dictum that the object of war is not victory but peace, most wars have fallen short of the standards. The operative phrase in this is of decisive outcome. Decisive wars attain the strategic objectives, bring lasting peace and resolve contested political issues.

## **Changing Character of War**

An alternate historical view interprets the 1914-2014 hundred years as a Long War which included the First and Second World wars, the Cold War, Post-Cold War and other wars till date, as a continuum of military campaigns for ascendancy amongst ideologies of capitalism, communism, socialism and of religious identity.

There have been many military campaigns in the last forty years. These have been led by developed nations with the most modern technology and kinetic power. Such operations have led to regime change and scattering of the adversary's military. These operations were followed by long occupation in which the populace remained sullen at best and hostile at worst. The occupation resulted in the rise of armed groups and militias with local and foreign support making the occupation increasingly costly in human terms leading to loss of support of the home population in countries which waged these campaigns. The political cost of foreign interventions has become untenable in all countries, notwithstanding the successes of their militaries. The haunting images of people risking all in migrating over the seas in rubber boats and braving barbed wire barricades, are evidence of the failure of the purpose for which such wars were waged. In other words no decisive outcomes were obtained by the wars of shock and awe.

## **Old and New Wars**

The last few years have seen the emergence of a discourse on New Wars as opposed to the conventional Old Wars. The premise of the new war discourse is that such wars need a different strategic approach and a new set of policy parameters. New wars are not new, in the sense that such conflicts were present in the past. However, the scope and capacity of such new wars is now substantial. New wars have been termed as wars of the era of globalisation. The differences between old and new wars are in the varied actors, indeterminate goals, methods and the economic basis of such wars. New wars are fought by different combinations of states and non state actors. These include regular armed forces, militias, mercenaries, private security contractors, jihadists, paramilitaries and warlords. While old wars were conducted for ideological or geo-political goals, new wars are fought for ethnic, religious or tribal identities. The goal more often than not is to gain the power of the state rather than to implement particular policies. The decisive battle which defined old wars is replaced by control of territory through political means and by population displacement. As for finance, new wars are backed through diaspora support, smuggling of raw materials like oil, precious stones and through clandestine state based support through money and weapons transfers etc. While old wars were centralising and autarchic, new wars are an open globalised and decentralised phenomenon. These differences change the character of war in that while conventional war led to all out efforts to win and end the war, new wars extend in territory and duration, and tend to persist and recur as either side or sides gain in political and economic terms.

New Wars have thus become instruments of politics instead of policy. Since political interests of the warring groups become salient, they deliberately violate the rules and norms of war. The inner tendency of such wars has been termed as not war without limits but war without end. Therefore, such wars have a self-perpetuating interest, in which enemies become useful towards sustaining the conflict. Useful Enemies is now part of the lexicon of New Wars. Major Powers and their allies have found a rapid erosion of public support for extended campaigns on foreign soil. The economics of sustaining military expeditions in an era of diminishing defence budgets further aggravated the diminishing return from such ventures. The response to New Wars from the developed world, whose militaries fought but gained no traction from it, went through many phases. These were of intense public scrutiny and debate, in which legislators and senior military leaders often disagreed with policies. There was wide spread media critique which in some cases led to cover ups and disinformation which eroded the credibility of governments. Later there were surges in military numbers and also changes in military commanders, to hasten the end of conflict. Finally, it led to a military pull back resulting in leaving the countries, regions and populations at the mercy of the new actors of new wars. It is no surprise that Britain's Chief of Defence Staff observed last month, "We are experiencing ever greater constraints on our freedom to use force..... The constraints on use of force lay in areas of societal support, parliamentary consent, and ever greater legal challenge." He went on to add that the, "the UK is in a state of permanent engagement in which all instruments of national power need constantly to be in play". India has faced this situation for long.

We can be certain that future wars will not be limited to conventional operations. There will be a simultaneous unfolding of overt and covert armed action, cyber-attacks on non-military targets which will affect the national response, international financial and economic pressures by a combination of countries and attacks by a number of unidentified armed groups. The phrase Hybrid War captures this landscape vividly. An example of this is the Israeli experience in Gaza and Lebanon. In that campaign conventional and irregular fighting with sophisticated weapons blurred the difference between front lines and rear areas. This made every place, whether in towns and villages, or in open spaces a combat zone. Israeli Forces incurred more casualties than anticipated, and units and subunits were continually surprised and attacked. The conclusions drawn from it were that combined arms fire power and manoeuvre with responsive air, artillery and UAV systems were critical for success, in addition to heavy forces with tanks and Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Ukraine has also been subjected to this hybrid form of warfare. Russian military units

without insignias allegedly operated as guerrilla forces inside Ukraine, and were able to take over good amount of territory. The tide could only be turned when regular conventional forces of the kind just listed were employed. New Wars add complexity to the conventional war environment, they do not however obviate the need for a full scale conventional or Old War response.

## **Impact on India**

India is most unlikely to get itself involved in expeditionary military campaigns, unlike other major military powers have in the past. The war imperative for India will either emerge from necessity, in response to military action by another country; or, as a choice in response to uncontrolled terrorist or new war initiatives launched against it. Its need to fight a war will be limited in geographic and territorial size. Indian military actions will face a violent and wide range of responses marked by the power of latest military technology. The response will also be quick and aim to impose a heavy cost in material and human terms. The response will also include terrorist activity of a virulent nature in the Indian hinterland. India will need to prepare for a spectrum of war ranging from the conventional with a nuclear overhang to counter insurgencies and terrorism, with the hybrid mix in between. There should be no doubt that while the hybrid content of new war affects the character of war, full scale conventional or Old War capability will be ever more required for success. It is fashionable for Think Tanks, particularly in western capitals, to build scenarios of an Indian military thrust inviting a nuclear response, and then examine plans to work on international mediatory initiatives to disengage the two sides. This ignores the reality of new and hybrid wars which will be ongoing and the impossibility of restoring order in such circumstances. Indian Armed Forces are also heavily dependent on armament import. The indigenous armament industry is unlikely to be in a position to replace the extensive import dependencies. This would mean that for the short notice war requirement, the state of readiness for war will have to be much higher than anything experienced in previous conflicts.

A war by or with India will draw an immediate and coordinated international response in the diplomatic, economic and political arena. The stake holders in such a war, both in its continuance and its quick termination will be varied. The pressures to call a ceasefire, to end the conflict on unacceptable terms and the threat and application of sanctions will be intense and mount by the week. Managing the international environment as the war unfolds will be as much a challenge as the need to rapidly achieve the military aims set for the war. National and international media will report the war and interpret its developments in unexpected and unfavourable terms. This will be compounded by social media which is a major public perceptions builder to which governments often respond in panic. Retaining public support for the operations and its costs will be a major political responsibility. These parameters will demand a coordinated response from all organs of the Government.

## **Structural Challenges**

India's military (Army, Navy and Air Force) systems are resilient enough to cope with the challenges and character of a future war. Previous wars and crises have demonstrated that the military system can rise to the occasion. War, however, is a national endeavour, in which the political, economic, intelligence and diplomatic structures have to operate in a combined and seamlessly integrated effort. As Expert Committees and a number of other analysts in India and abroad indicated, there has been a legacy of these structures, efficient as they are individually, functioning in their own silos. The need for a 'government as a whole' instead of efficient 'systems on their own' has been amply highlighted. The debate on the need for systemic integration, rapid and reasoned decision making processes, and overall synergy in the tense and exacting process of war has gone on for long.

Indians who held high positions during periods of conflict have written books based on personal experience of decision making and crisis management processes. A few examples will suffice to confirm the need for structural reforms and change. The story of months long trial and error journey towards the war of 1962 is well known. The problem then lay in the absence of synergy between the political, diplomatic and military wings in New Delhi. India consequently did not fight a war but blundered into it. In 1965, even after the Rann of Kutch episode, Indian intelligence and the military were surprised in J&K. Recovering from the surprise, the political leadership gave enough operational autonomy to the military which could not be optimised into an effective joint Army-Air Force campaign. In 1971, according to Field Marshal Manekshaw, the then Prime Minister held a meeting with him and the Defence and Foreign Ministers. The task given was for the Army to 'go into East Bengal'. None of his questions on the purpose of doing so were answered or an indication given on the time and scale of the operations. General Manekshaw, as he then was, had to separately meet the Prime Minister to inform her of the consequences of such a war and to extract from her a time period in which to prepare for the war. In the Kargil operations of 1999, a series of Cabinet meetings were needed to ascertain the situation on ground to arrive at an outline idea of the military response which could be mounted. The policy on using the Air Force had to be negotiated between the Chiefs of Army and Air Force. After the 2001 attack on the Parliament, the Prime Minister had to seek the Service Chiefs' views on what could possibly be done militarily. Once the Armed Forces were deployed for a possible war and remained so deployed for months, a decision on whether to pull back or continue with it had to be sought from the National Security Advisory Board.

The seam which runs through forty years of war experience is of fault lines in national security management. The shortcomings have been in lack of structural and institutional mechanisms to anticipate and prepare for national crisis and to evolve a coordinated response after the crisis comes to head. A better way to put it would be to term them as absence of systemic integration, of inter-ministerial coordination, and of political guidance. One can be sure that future scenarios will prevail with higher intensity and urgency which will require that systems and structures are put in place to effectively anticipate and prepare for them. Future wars and armed conflicts will emerge rapidly which can only be dealt with if there are contingency plans drawn up in peace time, through such structures and mechanisms capable of coordinated action. A future war will be a multi-agency, multi-ministry and multi departmental effort. The existing method of crisis group meetings, or committees headed by senior Secretaries, and other ad hoc groups meeting on the directions of a minister or even the PMO, have in the past fallen short of expectations. In a future war these will fail to even give a lead, leave aside produce an integrated response.

The primary need in a future war will be for a decisive outcome to be obtained in a short time, without running into the risk of an extended military campaign. India's Chief of Army Staff has recently used the apt phrase of a 'Swift War' to describe such a campaign. However, swift and fast moving campaigns require long peacetime planning, training, force deployment and equally important armament acquisitions. Strategic thinking and work on operational planning needs to start well before the clash of arms. Wars are won before the first shots are fired, by the assets for war being made ready in peace. This requirement, before and during the war demands that an integrated politico-military structure is in place in peace and war. The shape and the functional cohesion of such structures depend on the culture of governance and the confidence levels between the political executive and the defence services.

## Conclusion

Successive governments in the last decade and a half have made serious attempts to examine the shortcomings of the existing national security structures and processes. They established Expert Committees for the purpose. Recommendations on significant changes and reforms of such structures and processes have been made in the Expert Committee reports, which are with the Government since long. Reforms, which is another term for change, is never a popular policy choice. Global experience in this has been one of resistance, of procrastination and of obfuscation. In every field, of economy, climate change, labour laws, or WTO reforms evoke negative responses. Defence and national security reforms trigger even stronger resistance. In a democratic system, change needs to be politically acceptable. It is apparent that making reforms independent of the political system is an unviable option. India is, therefore, no exception in being resistant to change and modernisation of existing structures. However, India is also unique, in its political leadership having committed itself to structural and process reforms. The potential of India's growth to being a leading player and its structural vulnerabilities in the event of war makes urgent implementation of such reforms a policy priority. The risks are known, as is the way forward. In a democracy, the power to change rests with the political leadership. It is time to exercise the power to change.

\*Adapted from the Field Marshal Manekshaw Memorial Lecture 2015, delivered by Lieutenant General VR Raghavan, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM (Retd) on Infantry Day, 27 Oct 2015 in New Delhi.

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