From the Archives

PRINCIPLES OF WAR

Illustrated from Indian Campaigns

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INTRODUCTION

From the time Adam was tempted by the forbidden fruit, wars have been a regular feature of history. In fact it can be said with justification that the history of mankind has been one long history of wars.

Through the ages, wars have originated from different causes tribal wars for rich pastures and pretty omen. holy wars for religion. imperial wars for annexing domains and modern wan, for political ideologies. The equipment used for warfare, has also changed radically. Bows and arrows have given place to bombs and bullets horses and chariots to tanks and aeroplanes, and flags and pigeons to radios and radar. In spite of these revolutionary changes both in the causes of war and in the equipment used for warfare, the principles of war have remained constant and unalterable. Convincing examples of the application of these principles to European campaigns can easily be quoted by most of us. We do not generally illustrate these principles from campaigns fought in India. This is because Indian Military History is, by and large, an unexplored subject. Therefore, a study of the principles of war against the backdrop of Indian campaigns is an illuminating undertaking.

THE PRINCIPLES

The following ten principles of war are almost universally accepted:

(a) Co-operation

(b) Selection and maintenance of aim

(c) Maintenance of morale

(d) Administration

(e) Offensive action

(j) Concentration of force

(g) Economy of effort

(h) Surprise

(j) Flexibility

Some military thinkers consider the selection, and maintenance of aim as the master principle. If a master principle has to be selected for the Indian Army, there is a strong case for elevating the principle of Co-operation to that status, The reason for this will be apparent if we analyse the application of this principle to our past history and to our present problems. Basically, however, these principles being fundamental truths are all equally important. The application of different principles gets highlighted in different campaigns according to the circumstances of the operation. They should not, therefore, be graded in any order of priority as such.

CO-OPERATION

Wars envisage the combined and co-ordinated efforts of individuals comprising the Armed Forces and the Nation, towards the attainment of the common goal. It is axiomatic that Co-operation between all agencies engaged in war effort, is an essential pre-requisite for victory. Co-operation must be ensured not only between the different components of the Army, but also between the Army and the other two Fighting Services and between Allies. The modern concept of total war adds a new dimension to this principle. The need for Co-operation between the Nation and its Fighting Services has assumed great importance. War industries, agriculture and civil defence have all to be geared to co-operate with the Armed Forces.

VIOLATION OF THE PRINCIPLE

Flagrant and repeated violation of the principle of' Cooperation has cost us dearly in the past. Almost every invading army coming to India through the centuries, has found us a divided house, with some elements in the country actively co-operating with the invader. Ambhi co-operated with Alexander against Pon1s, Jaichand with Mohammad Ghori against Prithviraj, Daulat Lodi with Babar against Ibrahim Lodi

and Mir Jaffer with Clive against Sirajudaulah. One can only visualise what course Indian history might have taken if the Raj puts, Sikhs and Marathas had co-operated with each other during the third battle of Panipat. Or again what may have happened if the Sikhs and Marathas had fought unitedly against the British in early nineteenth century. Their failure to do so, resulted in both being defeated, one after the other.

Apart from our repeated failure to put up a united front against the enemy, we have also had several instances of violation of the principle of Cooperation on the battlefield. Silahdi with a force of 30,000 deserted. Rana Sanga and joined Bahar during the battle of Kanwa. Amin-ul-Malik betrayed Ram Raya and went over with his contingent to the Sultans during the battle of Talikota. Tej Singh with a force of 11,000 fresh troops refused to participate in the battle of Feroz Shah and allowed the British to defeat Lal Singh. The treacherous conduct of Mir Jaffar and Raja Durlabh Rai at the a battle of Plassey is well known.

Even in tactical terms our armies often violated this principle. Whether at the battle of Hydaspes (Jhelum) or 1,800 years later at the first battle of Panipat, our elephant arm could not co-operate with our other arms in battle. As a result, our own troops repeatedly suffered more casualties from our elephants than the enemy did anu the outcome of battle~ was a foregone conclusion.

ADHERENCE 'IO THE PRINCIPLE

Having listed our dismal record of failures due to violation of the principle of Co-operntio11, it would now be pertinent to see how one of the most decisive battles of Indian history was won by a successful application of this principle. The four Muslim Sultans of Ahmednagar, Bijapur, Golconda and Bidar formed an alliance known as the League of the Faithful, to fight the Hindu ruler of Vijayanagar. The Confederate Army of the Sultans met the Army of Ram Rayn. of Vijayanagar near Talikota on 5 January 1565. The strength of the Confederates was 50,000 cavalry and 3,000 infantry supported :by 600 pieces of artillery. Ram Raya had a force of 70,000 cavalry, 90,000 infantry and 1,000 elephants. Sultan Nizam Shah of Ahmednagar

commanded the centre wing of the Confederate Army. He had 2,000 skirmishers in front to conceal his 600 ordnance pieces drawn up in three lines of 200 each under Rumi Khan. Behind these guns, he kept his cavalry in reserve, ready to charge through the gaps between the guns. While the two sides were fighting indecisive engagements on the two wings, Ahmed Shah's skirmishers assailed the Hindu centre with arrows. Thereafter, they withdrew according to plan drawing the Hindus to the loaded guns kept ready for them. As the Hindus approached the guns, Rumi Khan fired successive salvos at point blank range inflicting heavy casualties on them. In a matter of mim.1tes the Hindu centre broke and this was the signal for 7,000 fresh horsemen under Sultan Nizam Shah to charge into them. The battle resulted in the complete rout of the Hindu Army which is said to have suffered approximately 16,000 killed and thrice that number wounded. Talikota was not a defeat but a cataclysm for the Hindus. The once flourishing Empire or Viajayanagar, which reigned supreme in South India for nearly three centuries, ceased to exist and its capital was turned into a howling wilderness. This battle is an excellent example of the successful application of the principle of Co-operation by the Confederates, not only before the battle in the formulation of their alliance, but also during the battle, in the close Co-operation achieved between the cavalry and the artillery. To-day we in India face two hostile neighbours, who for some reasons can claim support from certain misguided elements within our country. We have our military and our large para military forces functioning under completely different commands. The concept of a Supreme Commander or a Chief of Defonce Staff for the three Fighting Services does not appear to have found favour with us. Our paramilitary forces organised like a parallel army, function under a separate Ministry. In this context and in view of our past history, shouldn't we elevate the principle of Co-operation to the status of our master-principle ?

SELECTION AND MAINTENANCE OF AIM

This principle requires the correct selection of an objective and then remaining steadfast in efforts to attain it. [n simple terms it means that we must carefully select what we want and then concentrate all our efforts to achieve it. It may be argued that this is something very simple. After all in war our aim should be to achieve victory and we

should not at any stage allow ourselves to be deflected from it. This is, however, an oversimplification of the problem. ln war, every campaign and also the different phases of a campaign will require careful selection and maintenance of aim. In modern times, the selection of war aims is one of the complex problems facing strategic planners.

It may be asked as to what should have been our aim when we were forced to take an offensive in West Punjab in September 1965. Should our aim have been the destruction of Pakistan's field army on the plains or Punjab or should it have been a limited offensive to relieve pressure in Kashmir and ensure favourable terms for a peace settlement? The former aim is the conventional objective for armies in battle. Napoleon advocated the destruction of the enemy's "masses", saying that the accessories will then fall of their own accord. Military leaders have therefore stressed the need for destroying the enemy's field armies and not being deflected from this by the bait of capturing a city. However, such an aim in the Indo-Pak war of 1965 would not have been in conformity with our political policy. Moreover, it should have been obvious to our strategic planners that due to our economic resources and on account of international pressures, the war could not be a long-drawn affair. In the circumstance, the selection of the alternative aim of a limited offensive into West Punjab was obviously the right choice. The question now arises as to how should we have translated this "limited offensive" into a concrete tactical objective for our Army? Should this have been the capture of Lahore or should it have been an advance up to the Ichhogil Canal? In a recent statement General Chaudhuri has ruled out the former saying that the capture of Lahore was not the objective given to the Army and he did not want to get involved in all the problems of capturing and holding a big city. Notwithstanding this valid and weighty argument, we would perhaps have done better by having the capture of Lahore as our objective. In a short war to be followed inevitably by a ceasefire, a big political prize like Lahore would have provided us with a trump card at the bargaining counter. In the event, our failure to go for Lahore which at one stage should have been within our grasp, deprived us of a more decisive victory.

We may now examine how an outstanding military leader, Chandragupta Maurya, successfully followed this principle. He trounced the seemingly invincible Greek phalanx led by Alexander's able general, Seleucus, m 310 .BC at the battle of the Indus. Chandragupta's aim was to expel the invader and to establish a strong and united empire in India. The resounding victory gained by him at the Indus did not deflect him from this aim. He did not attempt to emulate Alexander's brilliant though barren march of conquest, by advancing from the opposite direction. Had he done so, his empire would perhaps have disintegrated like Alexander's immediately after his death. Instead, Chandragupta chose to accept the peace offer of Seleucus and in the process married the latter's daughter and annexed the Greek provinces of Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. The wisdom of this decision can be gauged from the fact that for the first time, the entire Indian sub-continent was politically united and the greatest empire of Indian history flourished for a century and a half. His grandson Asoka, in the words of HG Wells, became an unparalleled ruler in the history of the world. And to-day by adopting the Mauryan Lions as our national emblem, we honour the memory of the Great Mauryas.

MAJNTENANCE OF MORALE

Morale is the spirit or the soldier which keeps his zeal for fighting alive. 1t strengthens his determination to snatch victory in battle, no matter what hazard or difficulty he may have to face.

Alexander’s retreat from Beas. provides a classic example of how even an "invincible" army can be forced to retreat due to its morale giving way. Western historians have written that Greek soldiers were tired after their long and arduous march of victory and that the summer heat of Punjab plains was oppressive. Therefore, the soldiers mutinied and forced Alexander to retreat. This is an untenable theory. There is no physical fatigue which an army cannot get over after a couple of weeks or rest and revelry in camp. Moreover, a large proportion of Alexander's army comprised Persians and other nationalities, and he had at the start of his campaign in India received a large batch or fresh reinforcements from Macedonia. As regards the summer heat, this was not relevant to the issue. Alexander fought Porus in the battle of Hydaspes during the height or summer that is, in May or

June. By the time his troops advanced to Beas, the monsoons must have begun. The pleas of oppressive heat cannot therefore be accepted. It is obvious that low morale was the cause for mutiny by Greek soldiers. Having won a hard-fought victory against Porus and having heard of the military might of the Nanda ruler of the Gangetic plain who had a large host or war elephants, the Greek soldier lost his appetite for further conquests. This view is supported by the famous Greek historian, Plutarch, who wrote, "But the combat with Porus abated the spirit of the Macedonians and made them resolve to proceed no further in India ..... The opposite shore (the Ganges) was covered with number of squadrons battalions and elephants."

An example of how a great victory was won by an army having high morale is the Arab invasion of Sindh in A.D. 712. The Arab army comprising 6,000 cavalry and 6,000 armed camel riders marched into Sindh under a young lad of seventeen, Muhammad-bin-Qasim. The army was fired with religious zeal for *jihad* and defying all obstacles it marched through the inhospitable desert to decisively defeat the much larger force of Dahir in the battle of Raor.

ADMINISTRATION

It is axiomatic that an army cannot function if its administrative needs are not attended to. The administrative requirements of a modern army have become very complex. Gone are the days when Sun Tzu advocated that an army should rely on forage and not burden itself with an administrative tail. Rommel maintained that even before a battle is joined, it is won or lost by Quartermasters. Previously armies used to live off the land but now armies have to be kept supplied from their bases. However, notwithstanding this difference, the fact remains that provisions have to be made available to the Army, irrespective of the method of doing so.

In India the importance of administration was recognised long ago. Chandragupta's War Office consisted of six boards of five officers each. These were, elephants, chariots, infantry, cavalry, admiralty and commissariat. It is interesting to note that Chandragupta had accorded equality of status to his commissariat department in this War Office. To-day the administrative staff or services are only grudgingly equated with the general staff and the fighting arms.

During the third battle of Panipat, the Marathas allowed themselves to be cut off from their base and Abdali's patrols prevented any food getting into their camp. A stage came when starvation stalked the Maratha camp. On 14 January 1761 it was a starving Maratha Army that advanced to give battle to Ahmed Shah Abdali. The result was a catastrophic battle in which the flower of Maratha youth was annihilated.

Mahmud Gazni's advance to Somnath in 1025 provides an outstanding example of how sound administrative arrangements can overcome difficulties. He advanced from Multan to Somnath with a force of 30,000 cavalry covering a distance of 1,000 miles across the Rajasthan Desert in 42 days. The success of this brilliant advance depended on meticulous administrative planning. The barren desert had little to offer by way of supplies, forage or water. A highly organised and efficient commissariat department catered for the needs of the Expeditionary Force. Each trooper was given camels for carrying fodder, water and rations. In addition 30 000 camels loaded with water were kept as reserve for any emergency. Thus: the Expeditionary Force not only performed the remarkable and unique feat of advancing over such a long stretch of the desert, but also won two decisive engagements en route, each against 20,000 Rajputs near Jaisalmer and Mundher. After 42 days of leaving Multan, Mahmud Gazni was at the gate of Somnath temple fortress and within a couple of days, he completely overwhelmed the defenders said to be 50,000 strong.

OFFENSIVE ACTION

Offensive action is an essential pre-requisite for victory in battle. No battle can be won by the defensive alone. Defence may be adopted as a temporary expedient to blunt the enemy's strength but victory can only be consummated by going over to the offensive. The offensive, however, must be delivered at the right place and at the right time. Otherwise it will be barren of results.

Rana Sanga violated this principle during the battle of Kanwa in 1527. Babar had won the battle of Panipat on 21 April 1526 and immediately after the battle, launched a vigorous pursuit under his son Humayun to capture Delhi and Agra. Rana Sanga failed to exploit the situation created by the collapse of Afghan power by securing Agra or

even Delhi. He also failed to give immediate battle to the tired Mughal Army. Instead, he chose to wait for over nine months. It was only in February 1527 that he advanced to fight Bahar. Having captured the fortress of Bayana on 16 February 1527 and defeated a Mughal contingent sent to the rescue of the fortress, Rana Sanga waited for one full month till 16 March 1527 before he took any further offensive action. This respite gave Bahar the much needed time to reinforce his troops and to organise his defence with elaborate earthworks.

Rana Sanga's subsequent defeat at the hands of Bahar was largely due to his failure to take timely offensive action against his enemy.

The Indo-Pak war of 1965 provides an interesting example of success obtained through the application of this principle of war. Offensive action was the keystone of every counter-measure taken by the Indian Army- crossing of the ceasefire line in Kashmir to defeat the infiltrators or again the offensive into West Punjab to relieve the pressure in Kashmir. Had we confined ourselves to purely defensive measures against the infiltrators in Kashmir or to only containing operations at Chhamb, the result of the conflict would have been very different.

Yet another example of the successful application of this principle is the great Peshwa, Baji Rao’s Palkhed Campaign of 1727-28. While Baji Rao was out campaigning, the Mughal Army under the Viceroy of Deccan, Nizam-ul-Mulk, entered Poona, the Maratha capital. King Sahu evacuated Poona and sent urgent summons to his Peshwa to return to the rescue of his capital. Baji Ruo judged the situation correctly. Instead of returning to Poona, he advanced deep into the Nizam's territory threatening his capital and plundering his cities. The Nizam promptly evacuated Poona to meet this threat. He was subsequently outmanoeuvred by Baji Rao and forced to sign the humiliating treaty of Shevgaon conceding all Maratha claims. Thus without going to defend Poona as such, Baji Rao through offensive action relieved the Maratha capital and secured a great victory.

CONCENTRATION

This principle requires the delivery of a decisive blow on the enemy at the appropriate time and place. A large army dispersed over a wide area can be defeated by a smaller army which through judicious deployment may concentrate greater strength at the chosen place. Napoleon considered this the most important principle of war. He went to the extent of advocating that the art of war could be reduced to a single principle- to unite on a single point greater mass than that of the enemy.

In 1962 we appeared to have lost sight of this principle. The then Indian Army with a total strength of over 5,00,000 men organised in over ten divisions employed only about 20,000 men, approximately one division, against the Chinese. Lack of administrative support for fighting in the Himalayas and lack of proper appreciation of the threat, prevented us from employing greater strength. The fact, however, remains that our failure to concentrate our resources against the enemy at the chosen point contributed to our debacle.

There are numerous examples of how remarkable victories have been won by military leaders by concentrating all their resources at the desired place. Before the battle of Kanwa, Babar had a large portion of his army campaigning under his son Humayun at Jaunpur against the Afghan chieftains. When Rana Sanga advanced to Bayana in February 1527, Babar at once saw the danger in this move and called back his entire force under Humayun from Jaunpur. The subsequent battle at Kanwa testified to the wisdom of this decision. Based on his victory at Kanwa, Babar firmly established M\1ghal rule over India which lasted for over two centuries.

ECONOMY OF EFFORT

This principle is corollary to the principle of concentration. It visualises judicious employment of all available forces so as to ensure maximum concentration at the chosen place. It should not be misinterpreted to mean minimum employment of resources because that by itself without any corresponding concentration will be meaningless.

Our employment of the bulk of our forces in 1962 in Kashmir and Punjab and failure to achieve concentration against the Chinese was not only a violation of the principle of concentration but also of economy of effort. On the other side of the scale, we can see Alauddin Khilji successfully applying this principle at the battle of Deogiri in 1296. He laid siege to the Fort defended by Ramchandra. At that time the bulk or Ramchandra's army was out on a campaign under his son Sankar Deva. On hearing the news of the siege, Sankar Deva returned to Deogiri to rescue his father. Faced with this situation, Alauddin left a covering force of only 1,000 to continue the siege and with his remaining 7,000 soldiers engaged Sankardeva. He gained a decisive victory over him. Subsequently, he also reduced Deogiri Fort.

SURPRISE

Every commander must constantly endeavour to surprise his enemy and at the same time ensure that he is not at any time surprised by the latter. Surprise is a most powerful weapon in war and commanders who can successfully surprise their enemy will gain results out of all proportion to the efforts made.

Shaista Khan the Mughal Commander-in-Chief in the Deccan allowed himself to be surprised inside Poona Fort by a small party led by that great strategist, Shivaji. The Marathas entered Poona Fort in the garb of a wedding procession and during the night raided the house of the Commander -in-Chief. The latter managed to escape through the window but only after he had lost the fingers of one hand to a Maratha sword.

The Raja of Travancore caused considerable confusion in the Army of Tipu Sultan by accidentally exploiting the principle of surprise. He had a defensive wall built between the Annamalai Hills and the Arabian Sea. Tipu Sultan attacked this wall in 1789. Apart from a frontal attack, the Sultan also carried out a wide outflanking night movement with two brigades from the side of Annamalai Hills. The outflanking force got to the rampart of the wall and was steadily advancing over it when one platoon of the Raja's army suddenly attacked it from the flank. The leading brigade commander was killed and utter confusion prevailed during the darkness. The Sultan's Army

panicked. The Muslims pushed against each other and a large number of them died by falling in the ditch in front of the wall. Tipu Sultan himself fell in the ditch and broke his knees from which he never fully recovered. His palanquin, seals, rings and personal ornaments were captured by the Travancore Army. Thus a platoon of some 40 men foiled the attempt of two brigades comprising some 5,000 men and inflicted 2,000 casualties. This astounding success was possible only because of complete surprise.

FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility visualises ability to readjust according to changing circumstances. Seldom will the course of a battle or campaign proceed strictly according to plan. Unforeseen circumstances inevitably arise and a commander should have sufficient flexibility to cope with them. Mobility is an important adjunct of flexibility and is a means of achieving it.

During the last World War, the Japanese had made plans for the capture of Imphal and Kohima. In a brilliant offensive they besieged the Allied forces at both these places but failed to fully exploit their advantageous position. The large administrative base at Dimapur with depots overflowing with almost all commodities lay unprotected at the mercy of the Nippon Anny. Capture of Dimapur would have tilted the scales in favour of the Japanese and would have enabled them to obtain much-needed replenishments. The Japanese Generals, however, stuck rigidly io their old plans and kept dissipating their strength in fruitless assaults at Kohima and Imphal. This Jack of flexibility on their part cost them dearly. It accounted for the total defeat of their Expeditionary Force.

The Marathas in their campaigns against Mughals displayed remarkable flexibility. Unencumbered by milling non-combatants, dancing girls and other luxurious equipment, the Maratha horse became legendary. The Marathas became renowned for their incredible mobility and for altering their plans to suit changed conditions. No wonder the might of these great warriors was felt throughout the Indian sub-continent in the eighteenth century. Apart from their sway over South India, they held the Mughal Emperor as their pensioner at Delhi,

while their horses grazed on the banks of the Indus in the West and raided up to the Maratha ditch at Calcutta in the East.

SECURITY

Security visualises suitable measures to ensure freedom of action. Adequate defence of vulnerable bases must be ensured so that own forces are free to strike at the enemy at the chosen point. Risks have to be taken in war but they must be calculated risks.

Porus failing to prevent Alexander from crossing the Jhelum unopposed or Ram Raya of Vijayanagar repeating a similar mistake before the battle of Talikota in allowing the Confederate Army to cross the Krishna unopposed, can be quoted as instance of the violation of this principle. An example of the successful application of this principle was our retaining a credible defence posture against the Chinese, during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Thus, the Chinese ultimatum had no effect on the course of our conflict with Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The principles of war are a means to an end and not an end in themselves: The end in every case is to obtain a military victory over the enemy in battle. In their application, these principles are complementary and interdependent. Co-operation by itself will achieve little unless it is related to other principles like selection and maintenance of aim or offensive action. One cannot achieve concentration without economy of effort and security nor can one exploit concentration without high morale and sound administrative backing. Flexibility is important io take full advantage of concentration. Concentration coupled with surprise will invariably deliver a knock out blow to the enemy. However, at times there may appear to be apparent contradictions between these principles. There may be a conflict between concentration and economy of effort. Concentration may not be possible without sacrificing surprise. Since war is an art and not a science, no set formula for victory can be prescribed. It is upto the genius of the military commander to resolve any apparent contradictions between these principles and to give due weightage to different principles in accordance with the operational situation. Like the ten commandments, these ten principles are eternal

truths, which apply to warfare in all ages and in all countries. The campaigns fought in India, illustrate the validity of these principles just as much as those fought in Europe and elsewhere. However, a study of our past military history and an analysis of our present military problems, highlights the importance of the principle of Co-operation. An Indian Military leader who ignores this principle will do so at this own and his nation's peril.