

Celerity Warfare

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of 'Celerity Warfare' as a transformative shift in the character of modern conflict, where victory is increasingly determined by speed, synchronisation, and decision dominance rather than sheer mass or firepower. Rooted in the compression of the observe–orient–decide–act loop, it seeks to outpace and out-think the adversary across the land, sea, air, cyber, and space domains. By integrating artificial intelligence, automation, and network-centric systems, celerity warfare treats time as a strategic weapon, enabling rapid perception, decentralised execution, and seamless multi-domain coordination. Recent conflicts, from Ukraine to Gaza, illustrate how accelerated decision–action cycles and cognitive disruption can shape battlefield outcomes. For the Indian Armed Forces, the principles of celerity warfare resonate with the ongoing theatrisation initiative, offering a pathway to enhance jointness, agility, and operational tempo. The article, therefore, explores the conceptual foundations, operational applications, and strategic relevance of celerity warfare, while highlighting its implications, challenges, and the way ahead for integrating speed, technology, and cognition as key pillars of India's future warfighting philosophy.

Introduction

On 20 Nov 2024, while addressing an audience at an event in New Delhi, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan identified three major technological trends that are set to reshape

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the character of future warfare: robotics and automation, celerity (speed and automation), and the intelligentisation of warfare.¹

The concept of ‘Celerity’ has emerged as a relatively less-examined yet significant element within contemporary military thought. Although infrequently referenced in traditional doctrinal discussions, it embodies a critical dimension of modern military transformation—the decisive advantage of speed in perception, decision, and action. Celerity warfare highlights the growing importance of achieving superior operational tempo and decision-making agility as key determinants of success in modern conflict.

This article is an attempt to distil the essence of celerity warfare, tracing its conceptual foundations and relevance in contemporary conflicts, and its specific implications for the Indian Armed Forces.

Core Tenets of Celerity Warfare

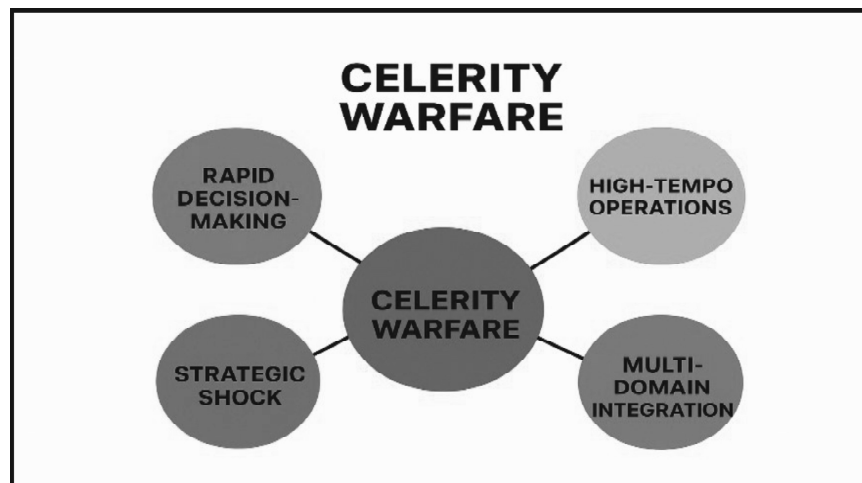


Figure 1: Basic Tenets of Celerity Warfare

Source: Curated by Author

Celerity warfare situates speed and operational tempo as the decisive determinants of success in a contemporary conflict. It departs from the traditional emphasis on mass and attrition, instead, seeking to outpace and out-cycle the adversary across all dimensions of warfare. By compressing the temporal space between observation, decision, and action, it aims to render the

opponent cognitively and operationally incapable of responding in time. The key characteristics of this evolving paradigm include:

- **Rapid Decision-Making.** The exploitation of Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and advanced sensor networks enables a radical compression of the Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA) loop. Decision cycles approach near real time, allowing commanders to anticipate rather than merely react. This agility empowers distributed decision making and enhances the capacity to exploit fleeting tactical windows.
- **High-Tempo Operations.** Celerity warfare thrives on maintaining a relentless operational rhythm that overwhelms adversary planning processes. Tempo here extends beyond the mere speed of movement; it encompasses the frequency and synchronisation of actions that force continuous adaptation and cumulative dislocation of the opponent's strategy.
- **Multi-Domain Integration.** The essence of celerity lies in simultaneous orchestration across land, sea, air, space, cyber, and information domains. By fusing sensors, decision-nodes, and shooters into an integrated network, the approach ensures that an adversary's reaction in one domain is preempted or countered through actions in another, creating a seamless web of offensive and defensive interdependence.
- **Strategic Shock.** Sustained high-tempo operations generate psychological and cognitive paralysis, inducing a perception of perpetual disadvantage within the enemy's decision hierarchy. This 'Strategic Shock' undermines morale, disrupts command cohesion, and erodes the adversary's will to sustain coherent resistance.

In aggregate, these features signify that celerity warfare is not merely a tactical construct but a holistic operational philosophy; one that redefines advantage in warfare from the magnitude of firepower to the mastery of time, information, and synchrony.

Underlying Principles of Celerity Warfare

The conceptual foundation of celerity warfare lies in reimagining time, cognition, and technology as decisive instruments of combat power. It departs from traditional attrition-based warfare by privileging tempo, disruption, and adaptability as the core determinants of success. The following principles illustrate this paradigm:

- **Time as a Weapon.** In the celerity construct, time itself becomes a strategic asset. The force capable of maintaining a faster decision–action rhythm effectively dictates the pace and structure of the conflict. By continually operating within the adversary’s decision loop, such a force renders enemy responses obsolete even before they are executed, transforming temporal advantage into operational dominance.
- **Disruption over Destruction.** The focus of combat shifts from the physical annihilation of enemy assets to the disruption of the adversary’s cognitive and command architecture. By degrading situational awareness, fragmenting information flows, and inducing decision paralysis, celerity operations achieve disproportionate strategic outcomes with limited kinetic engagement, emphasising paralysis over punishment.
- **Technology-Enabled Acceleration.** The integration of AI, autonomous systems, and Network-Centric Warfare (NCW) underpins the acceleration inherent in celerity warfare. AI-enabled command systems compress information processing timelines, while autonomous and unmanned platforms reduce the sensor-to-shooter cycle, creating an operational ecosystem where decision-making approaches near-real-time efficiency.
- **Asymmetric Advantage Through Tempo.** Celerity empowers smaller, agile, and technologically adept forces to offset numerical inferiority through superior tempo and unpredictability. By exploiting transient opportunities and imposing cognitive overload on the opponent, such forces generate asymmetric effects that disrupt larger formations and erode their capacity for coordinated response.

Collectively, these principles represent a paradigm shift from mass to momentum, and from destruction to disruption. In the age of accelerated warfare, victory belongs not necessarily to the

strongest, but to the swiftest—to those who can observe, decide, and act faster than their adversary can comprehend.

Comparison with Other Doctrines

While the notion of celerity warfare draws upon existing military thought, it represents a distinct evolution in the understanding of tempo and multidomain synergy. A comparative analysis with other established doctrines helps clarify its conceptual uniqueness.

- **Conventional Warfare.** Conventional warfare has historically relied on mass, attrition, and firepower to achieve victory through the gradual erosion of enemy strength. Celerity warfare diverges fundamentally from this approach by prioritising speed, decision dominance, and temporal control over mere material superiority. It seeks to win not by destruction, but by dislocation—collapsing the enemy’s capacity to respond within relevant timeframes.
- ***Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War).** Although *Blitzkrieg* similarly emphasised rapid manoeuvre and concentrated force to achieve operational breakthrough, its application was largely confined to the land and air domains. Celerity extends this logic into the cyber, space, and information environments, integrating digital and kinetic effects into a unified high-speed operational continuum. It, thus, represents a digital-age evolution of the *Blitzkrieg* principle, adapted to multidomain realities.
- **Hybrid and Grey-Zone Warfare.** Hybrid and grey-zone approaches leverage ambiguity, subversion, and deniability to achieve strategic aims below the threshold of open conflict. Celerity, by contrast, is defined by velocity and simultaneity of action. Hybrid warfare manipulates the space between peace and war, whereas, celerity manipulates time within war, seeking dominance through acceleration rather than deception.
- **Multi-Domain Operations (MDO).** Both MDO and celerity warfare advocate cross-domain integration and joint synchronisation. However, the defining distinction lies in celerity’s temporal orientation. While MDO emphasises the spatial coordination of effects across domains, celerity is

centred on achieving time-centric superiority, compressing operational cycles to a degree that disrupts the adversary's ability to perceive, decide, and act.

In essence, celerity warfare represents the next conceptual inflection point in the military thought—an evolution from mass to speed, from domain integration to time compression, and from firepower supremacy to decision supremacy.

Applications of Celerity Warfare

Celerity's emphasis on time and tempo finds concrete application across multiple operational domains. The following vignettes illustrate how accelerated decision–action cycles translate into distinct mission sets and effects.

- **Cyber and Information Warfare.** Rapid, cascading cyber operations can act as force multipliers by disrupting adversary command, control, and situational awareness before effective countermeasures are mounted. When coupled with targeted information operations, such campaigns can induce confusion, sever decision links, and create temporal windows for follow-on kinetic effects.
- **Air and Space Operation.** The introduction of high-velocity delivery systems, ranging from long-endurance strike drones to hypersonic weapons and persistent space-based Intelligence, Surveillance, And Reconnaissance (ISR) compresses adversary's reaction times. By presenting convergent threats from multiple vectors nearly simultaneously, air–space campaigns erode defensive decision cycles and force hurried, error-prone responses.
- **Special Operations and Robotic Systems.** Small, agile formations augmented by autonomous platforms and robotic swarms enable rapid raids, sabotage, and exploitation deep in enemy territory. These operations leverage speed, stealth, and automation to seize fleeting opportunities, disrupt rear-area cohesion, and shape the battlespace before conventional forces can be mobilised.
- **Psychological and Cognitive Effects.** Accelerated tempo in the information domain through rapid dissemination of narratives, disinformation, and real-time media manoeuvring

can overwhelm an adversary's verification processes and induce cognitive paralysis. The resultant strategic shock degrades morale and decision quality, often producing effects disproportionate to the physical force applied.

Collectively, these applications demonstrate that celerity is not confined to a single weapon system or service arm; rather it is an operational ethic that integrates cyber, space, kinetic, robotic, and cognitive means to seize temporal advantage and impose decision dominance on the adversary.

Celerity Warfare in Recent Conflicts

The contemporary security environment offers multiple illustrations of how celerity—the fusion of speed, automation, and decision dominance—has begun to shape the conduct of warfare across different theatres. Recent conflicts highlight how the compression of time and acceleration of operational cycles have become as decisive as firepower or mass.

Russia–Ukraine War. The ongoing Russia–Ukraine conflict represents the most extensive laboratory for celerity-based operations in the recent history. Both sides have harnessed digital tools, drones, and networked command systems to accelerate observation, targeting, and strike execution.²

- **Drone Swarms and Loitering Munitions.** The pervasive use of drones for real-time reconnaissance and strike missions has shortened the sensor-to-shooter cycle to mere minutes, transforming the battlefield into a dynamic, data-driven environment.
- **Cyber Operations.** Russia initiated pre-emptive cyber offensives against Ukrainian banks, energy networks, and government infrastructure prior to kinetic attacks, aiming to paralyse national decision-making systems.
- **Information Warfare.** Ukraine's agile use of social media, rapid dissemination of combat footage, and international outreach reversed the narrative advantage, securing diplomatic and material support faster than Russia could counter.

- **Tempo in Logistics.** Western precision systems such as high-mobility artillery rocket system, national advanced surface-to-air missile system, and Storm Shadow missiles were swiftly integrated into Ukrainian operational frameworks, demonstrating unprecedented adaptability and training acceleration under combat conditions.

Israel Hamas Conflict (2023). The 07 Oct 2023 Hamas assault on Israel epitomised the principle of celerity in achieving surprise through simultaneity and speed.³

- **Surprise and Shock.** Coordinated attacks across multiple vectors airborne incursions via paragliders, ground breaches, and cyber disruptions overwhelmed Israeli early warning systems and defensive grids.
- **Rapid Retaliation.** Israel's subsequent counter-offensive embodied celerity driven response—high-tempo precision strikes powered by AI-assisted target generation enabled thousands of coordinated attacks within days.
- **Information Front.** Both sides engaged in real-time information warfare, where seconds of lead time in releasing narratives or visuals translated into measurable shifts in global perception and legitimacy.

Chinese Military Exercises in the Indo-Pacific. China's recurring military exercises and posturing around Taiwan provide insight into celerity as a tool of deterrence and psychological dominance.⁴

- **Integrated Joint Drills.** Large-scale, multi-domain exercises combining air, naval, and missile forces are conducted within compressed timeframes to signal readiness to overwhelm Taiwan before external intervention can materialise.
- **Grey Zone and Celerity Overlap.** Rapid mobilisation and swarming of fishing vessels, coast guard ships, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in contested maritime zones blur the lines between competition and conflict, forcing adversaries into perpetual reaction.
- **AI and Decision Superiority.** Massive investment in AI-enabled command and control systems seeks to compress China's OODA loop, enabling pre-emptive action and high-speed coordination across the MDO spectrum.

Operation Sindoor (India). Operation Sindoor reflects India's evolving adaptation of celerity principles within its strategic and operational doctrines.⁵

- **NCW.** The integration of satellites, unmanned platforms, and real-time battlefield management systems enhanced the precision, responsiveness, and situational awareness of Indian formations.
- **Celerity in Mountain Warfare.** Rapid troop mobilisation and persistent surveillance along the Line of Control provided a decisive deterrent against surprise incursions in high-altitude environments.
- **Information and Cognitive Edge.** Swift dissemination of verified narratives during border stand-offs neutralised adversary propaganda, demonstrating the cognitive dimension of celerity in strategic communication.

In summary, above conflicts underscore that celerity warfare is no longer a theoretical construct but an observable operational reality. Across diverse contexts from Eastern Europe to the Indo-Pacific, the side capable of compressing time, synchronising domains, and sustaining tempo gains not only tactical success but also strategic and cognitive dominance.

Synthesis: Emerging Patterns of Celerity Warfare

Across above conflicts, there emerge five recurring operational patterns of celerity warfare, as shown in Table 1.

Pattern	Purpose	Example
Pre-Emptive Cyber or Information Strikes	Paralyse command, create confusion	Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine, Hamas ISR disruption
Drone and Missile Swarms	Compress strike cycles, saturate defences	Ukraine's drone ISR; Hamas's initial salvo
AI-Enabled Command Systems	Shrink decision time from hours to minutes	Israel's AI-assisted target generation
Information Acceleration	Dominate the narrative in real time	Ukraine's global digital outreach
Psychological Shock	Keep adversary leadership off-balance	People's Liberation Army drills around Taiwan; Hamas's multi-vector assault

Table 1: Emerging Operational Patterns in High-Tempo Modern Warfare

Significance of Celerity Warfare in Facilitating Theatrisation

- **Alignment with the Decade of Transformation.** The concept of celerity warfare aligns with the Indian Armed Forces' Decade of Transformation, which seeks to build an agile, networked, and joint warfighting structure. The principle of celerity—speed in perception, decision, and action—complements the overarching aim of theatrisation, where rapid coordination and synchronised response across multiple domains are critical to operational success.
- **Enabling Faster Decision Cycles within Theatre Commands.** Celerity warfare emphasises compression of the decision loop (OODA loop) through the use of AI, data analytics, and real-time situational awareness. Within a theatre command structure, such compression enables swift inter-service decision making, reducing bureaucratic delays and ensuring that commanders can exploit fleeting opportunities in a dynamic battlespace.
- **Enhancing Multi-Domain Synergy.** Theatrisation aims to achieve jointness across land, air, sea, cyber, and space domains. Celerity warfare strengthens this by advocating simultaneity and tempo of operations. Speed of coordination among the army, air force, and navy ensures that actions in one domain are supported or pre-empted by others, creating seamless operational integration and denying the adversary time to adapt.
- **Operational Agility and Distributed Command.** In a theatre-based structure, distributed operations and mission command become essential. Celerity warfare supports this through decentralised decision making, aided by digital networks and common operational pictures. This enables field commanders to act faster, maintaining tempo even in disrupted communication environments.
- **Countering Hybrid and Grey-Zone Threats.** Modern conflicts increasingly unfold below the threshold of declared war. Celerity warfare provides the conceptual and technological basis to outpace hybrid and grey-zone threats through rapid intelligence exploitation, swift mobilisation, and near-real-time response. Within theatre commands, this enhances deterrence and crisis management capacity.

- **Technological Catalysts for Theatrisation.** Celerity warfare promotes the infusion of network-centric warfare systems, AI-assisted decision tools, autonomous platforms, and real-time ISR grids. These technologies form the backbone of effective theatre commands, ensuring that information flows instantly and decisions translate into coordinated actions across services.
- **Psychological and Strategic Advantage.** Sustained high-tempo, well-coordinated theatre operations impose cognitive overload on adversary decision hierarchies, leading to dislocation and strategic paralysis. Celerity, thus, contributes not just to tactical success but to the psychological dominance that underpins theatre-level deterrence and coercive capability.
- **Foundation for Future Joint Doctrines.** Celerity warfare provides a conceptual bridge between speed, technology, and jointness, reinforcing the Indian Armed Forces' move toward MDO and information-centric operations. Its integration into theatre doctrines can shape a new warfighting culture based on tempo, adaptability, and real-time responsiveness.

Challenges and Risks in High-Velocity Contemporary Warfare

Challenge	Risk and Impact
C2 Overload	Decision paralysis, uncoordinated actions
AI and Automation Errors	Civilian harm, trust breakdown, accountability gaps
Cyber and Information Weaknesses	System disruption, data corruption, misdirection
Escalation Risks	Miscalculation, pre-emption, loss of strategic control
Legal and Ethical Ambiguity	Human Rights violations, blurred lines of war and peace
Doctrinal Inertia	Poor adoption, misalignment with high-speed requirements
Logistics and Sustainment Limits	Unsustainable tempo, operational pauses
Narrative Missteps	Loss of legitimacy, political backlash

Table 2: Challenges and Risks in Celerity Warfare

Way Ahead—Indian Context

Doctrinal Integration. The adoption of celerity warfare must begin with its inclusion in the ‘Joint Warfighting Doctrine’ of the Indian Armed Forces. The concept should be institutionalised as a guiding operational philosophy that emphasises speed in perception, decision, and action as the core of future conflicts. This would involve revising existing doctrines to integrate tempo-based operations, distributed command structures, and cognitive dominance as the key determinants of victory. Joint doctrines should also articulate clear frameworks for how speed can be achieved through decision-loop compression, automation, and simultaneous operations across domains.

AI-Enabled Decision Ecosystem. To realise the essence of celerity warfare, the Indian Armed Forces must build an AI-driven command, control, communications, computers, ISR ecosystem capable of real-time information acquisition, fusion, and dissemination.⁶ AI, big data analytics, and quantum computing can drastically reduce the decision-making timeline, empowering commanders at all levels with predictive insights and faster response options. Integrating such systems with Defence Cyber Agency, Defence Space Agency, and Defence Intelligence Agency networks will ensure a seamless flow of information across services, enabling speed and precision in operational execution.

Multi-Domain and Theatre Synergy. Celerity warfare naturally aligns with India’s ongoing theatrisation initiative, which seeks unified command structures for land, air, maritime, cyber, and space operations. Achieving speed in modern warfare demands synchronised actions across these domains. The Indian Armed Forces should establish Joint MDO Cells within theatre commands to ensure simultaneous and mutually reinforcing effects. Rapid coordination between army aviation, air force strike assets, naval platforms, and space-based ISR systems will enable theatre commanders to exploit fleeting tactical and strategic opportunities.

Organisational and Training Reforms. The traditional hierarchical decision-making structure must evolve to support decentralised command and mission-type tactics. Commanders at tactical and operational levels should be empowered to take rapid, independent decisions within the broad framework of higher intent. Training institutions such as the Indian National Defence University, Army

War College, and Defence Services Staff College should incorporate modules on decision agility, AI-enabled operations, and tempo-based warfare. Simulation-based learning, wargaming, and real-time networked exercises should be used to condition leadership to operate under compressed timelines and high information load environments.

Technological Modernisation. Modernisation must focus on acquiring and integrating technologies that enable speed and simultaneity. This includes autonomous aerial and ground systems, loitering munitions, hypersonic platforms, electronic warfare systems, and AI-assisted targeting networks. The creation of manned–unmanned teaming capabilities within army aviation and air force assets would allow for rapid sensor-to-shooter linkages.⁷ Investments in indigenous networked sensor grids, real-time battlefield management systems, and secure tactical communication networks are essential to sustain operational tempo across dispersed battle spaces.

Cognitive and Information Dominance. Celerity warfare is not limited to physical speed; it extends to the cognitive dimension of warfare. Achieving and maintaining information superiority ensures that the adversary's decision loop is disrupted or rendered irrelevant. The armed forces must strengthen capabilities in cyber operations, information warfare, psychological operations, and electronic deception. Establishing 'Information Warfare Cells' and 'Cognitive Operations Cells' under each theatre command would ensure rapid dissemination of information, perception management, and disruption of adversary narratives, thereby, contributing to strategic paralysis.

Integration with *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-reliant India) Initiatives. A sustained celerity-driven transformation requires indigenous innovation and technological autonomy. The armed forces should deepen collaboration with Defence Research and Development Organisation, private defence start-ups, and academia under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* framework to develop tailored AI, robotics, and communication systems. Indigenous production of rotary UAVs, battlefield management software, and autonomous ISR platforms would ensure resilience, rapid upgrade cycles, and reduced dependence on foreign systems—all vital for maintaining operational speed and adaptability.

Joint Experimentation and Wargaming. Concept validation and refinement are crucial for embedding Celerity warfare into operational culture. Establishing Tri-Service Wargaming and Simulation Centres under Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff and theatre Commands would facilitate experimentation in high-speed, multi-domain battle scenarios. These platforms should focus on testing joint decision-support tools, command autonomy models, and AI-assisted operations. Insights from such wargames can guide doctrinal development, training, and procurement, ensuring that celerity remains a practical and sustainable warfighting approach.

Conclusion

Celerity warfare encapsulates the emerging essence of a 21st Century conflict—where superiority is no longer determined by mass or firepower, but by speed, adaptability, and cognitive dominance. It represents a decisive shift from reactive to anticipatory warfare, where the ability to perceive, decide, and act faster than the adversary defines success. For the Indian Armed Forces, embracing this paradigm is integral to achieving the objectives of the Decade of Transformation and the ongoing process of theatrisation. By integrating advanced technologies, AI-driven decision ecosystems, and multi-domain synergy, the armed forces can create a warfighting architecture that is agile, autonomous, and information-centric. Celerity warfare, thus, offers not just an operational edge, but a strategic framework for future readiness—enabling India to maintain initiative, impose decision paralysis on adversaries, and secure dominance across the full spectrum of conflict in the evolving battlespace of tomorrow.

Endnotes

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