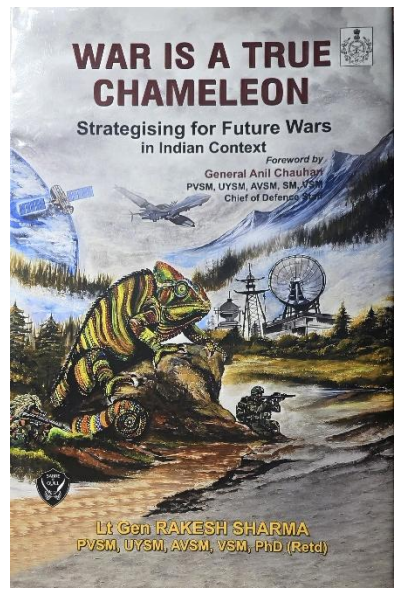
Review Article 2

War Is a True Chameleon: Strategising for Future Wars in the Indian Context

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A book's cover often provides the first clue to its contents. The striking cover of *WAR IS A TRUE CHAMELEON: Strategising for Future Wars in the Indian Context*, featuring a chameleon against a military backdrop, immediately arouses curiosity. What possible connection could this remarkable reptile have with the future of warfare?

War Is a True Chameleon: Strategising for Future Wars in the Indian Context by Lieutenant General Rakesh Sharma, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, VSM, PhD (Retd), Pages – 341, Price - ₹ 999/-, ISBN 978-81-690-3827-0

My first thought was the familiar Indian idiom, ‘Changing colours like a chameleon’. The answer, however, lies in one of the most enduring observations in military thought. Nearly two centuries ago, the Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz observed in *On War* that "War is more than a true chameleon”. While war remains constant as an instrument of political purpose, its character continually evolves in response to changing political objectives, technological innovation, social conditions, and the strategic environment.

That insight is more relevant than ever. Contemporary conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Middle East show that although war remains shaped by violence, uncertainty, friction, and human will, precision-guided munitions, artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber operations, electronic warfare, satellite intelligence, and information campaigns have transformed how it is conducted. The chameleon on the cover thus becomes a powerful metaphor for the book's central thesis: victory in future wars will belong to those who adapt faster than their adversaries.

The book focuses on India's military strategy and defence preparedness for future warfare. It is divided into three sections:

Section 1: What is War? War is Peace; Peace is War!

Section 2: India Battlefield Singularity: Old Wars, New Wars

Section 3: Strategising for India

Section 1 examines the changing nature of warfare in the twenty-first century, in which conventional and unconventional conflicts increasingly overlap, often without large-scale troop deployments or formal declarations of war. Drawing on recent conflicts, including the US–Israel–Iran confrontation, the author explores whether future wars will increasingly be characterised by limited military action rather than prolonged campaigns. The section also discusses the emerging multipolar world order, the growing influence of the Global South, and the distinction between multipolarity and multilateralism. Institutions such as NATO, the European Union, Quad, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation are examined as important instruments of multilateral cooperation in addressing global

challenges, including security, climate change, sustainable development, and human rights.

Section 2 shifts the focus to India's strategic geography and evolving security environment. It argues that India's defence planning must be based on an integrated understanding of the battlespace rather than on separate assessments of individual military domains. It pays particular attention to China's military rise, its strategic collusion with Pakistan, the possibility of a two-front conflict, and the implications of Operation Sindoor. As a recognised China watcher, General Sharma provides a detailed and well-informed assessment of these developments.

The author's philosophy is succinctly captured in his own words:

"The future in warfighting belongs to those who can see first, decide first, and strike first.... Understanding and defining future capabilities is absolutely crucial for Strategising, planning, and executing operations efficiently." This statement encapsulates the intellectual foundation upon which the entire work rests.

Gen Rakesh Sharma is uniquely qualified to write this book. A soldier, scholar, and strategic analyst, he has consistently contributed to India's military discourse through his research, lectures, and publications on national security, military transformation, and future warfare. His extensive operational experience, combined with academic rigour, enables him to bridge theory and practice with unusual effectiveness.

Supported by an insightful foreword by former Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, himself a distinguished soldier-scholar, the book goes well beyond cataloguing emerging technologies. Instead, it examines how technology interacts with geopolitics, economics, doctrine, and national strategy to reshape the character of conflict. The result is a work that combines intellectual rigour with accessibility, making it valuable to military professionals, policymakers, researchers, and informed readers alike.

Clausewitz Still Matters

The book's intellectual foundation rests firmly on Clausewitz's distinction between the nature and the character of war—a distinction frequently overlooked in contemporary strategic literature. While the nature of war—its violence, uncertainty, political purpose, and human dimension—remains unchanged, its character continues to evolve under the influence of technology, economics, society, and statecraft. Clausewitz defined war as “An act of force to compel our enemy to do our will", while the Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes it as "A state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations".

Gen Sharma demonstrates convincingly that present-day conflicts have become laboratories for observing this evolution. Cheap drones destroy expensive tanks; commercial satellites provide tactical intelligence; cyber-attacks accompany missile strikes; electronic warfare disrupts communications; and information campaigns shape global opinion in real time.

Perhaps the book's most compelling observation is that modern conflict often occurs without a formal declaration of war: “No formal declaration of war is made”. Yet, the world is at war, echoing George Orwell's famous paradox, "War is Peace". This aptly captures the reality of contemporary strategic competition, where coercion increasingly occurs below the threshold of conventional war.

The Battlefield Has Expanded

One of the book's greatest strengths is its lucid explanation of how the battlefield has expanded beyond the traditional domains of land, sea, and air into space, cyberspace, the electromagnetic spectrum, and the cognitive domain.

Space has become indispensable for navigation, intelligence, and precision targeting. Cyberspace enables adversaries to disrupt critical infrastructure without firing a shot. Electronic warfare now contests the electromagnetic spectrum, while information operations seek to manipulate public opinion and political decision-making. Artificial intelligence is accelerating decision-making and enabling increasingly autonomous systems across multiple domains.

The book also provides an insightful discussion of grey-zone warfare, where cyber intrusions, economic coercion, legal warfare, technological denial, and influence operations enable states to achieve strategic objectives while remaining below the threshold of open conflict. The author further examines the full spectrum of contemporary hybrid warfare, including multi-domain operations, multidimensional warfare, network-centric operations, data-centric fusion, cyberspace operations, electromagnetic activities, cyber warfare, and the rapidly evolving role of drone warfare.

Technology Is Not Strategy

One of the book's most refreshing qualities is its rejection of technological determinism. Contemporary military literature often implies that acquiring advanced platforms automatically guarantees battlefield success. Gen Sharma firmly rejects this notion.

Technology, he argues, is an enabler—not a substitute—for sound strategy. Leadership, morale, logistics, doctrine, political clarity, and national resilience continue to determine outcomes because wars ultimately remain contests of human will.

His central argument deserves careful attention: “Superior strategy, combined with the successful integration of technology into an appropriate organisational structure and doctrine, leads to success in warfare.... It is always possible to defeat the best of technologies”. This observation restores strategy—not hardware—to its rightful place at the centre of military thought.

Accordingly, military capability should be developed through a top-down approach, beginning with strategy and doctrine based on future threats, politico-military objectives, and multi-domain operational requirements. Equipment and force structures must emerge from strategy, not the other way around. Within this framework, the author also relates defence preparedness to the broader national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, emphasising the importance of indigenous defence manufacturing, technological self-reliance, innovation, and integrated national development.

India's Strategic Reality

हिमालय समारभ्य यावत् इन्दु सरोवरम्।

तं देवनिर्मितं देशं हिन्दुस्थानं प्रचक्षते॥

(From the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean stretches the land created by the Divine, known as Hindustan.) — Barhaspatiya Samhita

The author introduces this ancient verse to emphasise India's enduring civilisational identity, while cautioning readers against letting historical sentiment overshadow contemporary strategic realities.

For Indian readers, the book matters because it analyses future warfare through India's own strategic lens rather than merely adapting Western strategic concepts. India confronts one of the world's most complex security environments, characterised by two nuclear-armed adversaries, unsettled borders, persistent cross-border terrorism, maritime competition in the Indian Ocean Region, and an increasingly uncertain global order.

General Sharma argues that preparing for future wars requires far more than military modernisation. Indigenous defence manufacturing, technological self-reliance, research and development, civil-military integration, and strategic decision-making must evolve together within a coherent whole-of-government and whole-of-nation framework.

His analysis of China's military modernisation, its strategic collusion with Pakistan, hybrid warfare, maritime competition, and the prospect of a two-front contingency is particularly valuable. His long experience as a China watcher lends both authority and balance to this assessment.

The author also argues that India's defence preparedness should align with the broader national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, in which economic growth, technological innovation, and strategic planning reinforce one another to strengthen national security.

Lessons from Contemporary Conflicts

Drawing extensively on the Russia–Ukraine War and recent conflicts in the Middle East, General Sharma demonstrates how drones, loitering munitions, cyber operations, electronic warfare, and commercial satellite intelligence have fundamentally altered military operations.

He rightly cautions against treating 'Drones' as a single capability. The term encompasses everything from inexpensive commercial quadcopters to sophisticated autonomous combat aircraft, each serving a distinct operational purpose and requiring different doctrinal responses.

Equally significant is the growing battle for narratives. Public opinion has become an operational domain in its own right, where information spreads instantaneously across digital platforms, influencing domestic morale, international diplomacy, and political legitimacy.

The book also examines the continuing relevance of mechanised warfare in the Indian context. Rather than accepting simplistic conclusions about the tank's demise, the author evaluates lessons from the Russia–Ukraine War and argues that armour remains relevant when employed within an integrated, multi-domain operational framework.

Jointness and National Preparedness

A recurring theme throughout the book is that future wars cannot be won through isolated military excellence. Success demands seamless integration among the armed forces, government, industry, academia, and society.

The author discusses India's ongoing reforms, including the proposed theatre commands and Integrated Battle Groups, arguing that organisational transformation is indispensable for future operational effectiveness. Jointness among the Army, Navy, and Air Force is no longer merely desirable—it has become an operational necessity.

General Sharma concludes that military capability must be developed through a top-down approach guided by strategy rather than a bottom-up approach driven by equipment upward. He advocates a top-down approach to multi-domain operations in which military capabilities become increasingly integrated and domain-agnostic through the effective fusion of civilian and military resources.

The book also highlights Prime Minister Narendra Modi's strategic mantra for defence preparedness—JAI: Jointness, Atmanirbharta (self-reliance), and Innovation—as a guiding framework for transforming India's defence ecosystem into a cohesive, self-reliant, and future-ready force.

The author further emphasises that a national strategic vision must be future-oriented, inclusive, and sufficiently robust to guide long-term planning, policy formulation, resource allocation, and national action. Such a vision provides coherence across institutions and aligns diverse stakeholders towards common national objectives.

Style and Presentation

Despite addressing highly complex strategic issues, the book remains remarkably accessible. Technical concepts are explained with clarity, the chapters are logically organised, and the arguments are supported by contemporary examples, historical references, and strategic insights.

Rather than prescribing rigid solutions, General Sharma encourages readers to question prevailing assumptions and think critically about India's future security challenges. This approach transforms the book from a descriptive account of modern warfare into an intellectual framework for strategic reflection.

Particularly memorable is his reminder: ‘Armies must not fight tomorrow's wars with yesterday's weapons’.

The message extends beyond military technology; it calls for continuous intellectual adaptation, institutional reform, and strategic foresight during peacetime.

War Is a True Chameleon: Strategising for Future Wars in the Indian Context is far more than a study of emerging military technologies. It is a comprehensive examination of the changing character of warfare and of how India must prepare intellectually, institutionally, and strategically for an era in which conflict increasingly transcends traditional battlefields.

By integrating strategic theory, operational experience, historical perspective, and contemporary examples, Lieutenant General Rakesh Sharma has produced a work that is distinctly Indian in outlook while remaining globally relevant in its analysis. His central message is both timely and enduring: superior preparedness, sound strategy, and institutional adaptability remain the surest guarantees of national security.

Ultimately, the highest form of strategy is not merely winning wars but preventing them through credible preparedness. As the author aptly concludes, the true objective is 'Winning without Fighting'.

This is a timely, insightful, and significant contribution to India's growing body of strategic literature. It deserves to be read not only by military professionals and defence analysts but also by policymakers, scholars of international relations, students of strategic studies, and informed citizens seeking to understand the rapidly evolving security environment of the twenty-first century.

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