

MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE NUCLEAR AGE *

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As one reads through the book, which in essence gives the concern of the American researchers about futuristic battlefield milieu and the problem of leadership in a complex high technology environment, one sees the confusion which prevailed among the echelons of leadership in the US Armed Forces during Vietnam War (1966-73). The more one reads literature on Vietnam, for instance, memoirs of Gen Westmoreland and Barbara W. Tuchman's "The March of Folly from Troy to Vietnam" and so on, the clearer their problem becomes. High technological war scenario, as it is, would pose problem of leadership. Those 'led' may perhaps expect too much or - paradoxically - even too little from their leaders. One needs to see the American point of view which indicates that the Americans are 'mixed-up' about the concept of leadership itself. That the battlefield leaders must remain essentially 'leaders' and not 'managers' has been regrettably mixed up. While at the operational level it must be realised that leaders cannot be replaced by managers, at the strategic level perhaps they might be.

What, however strikes one is the contribution in Chapter 11, where the author draws a purposeful distinction between the leadership concept at lower (unit) and higher (formation) levels and establishes the requirement of what the author calls 'system wide perspective' for achieving 'productivity', 'adaptability' and 'organisational stability'.

At the higher level the American Army still appears to grapple with the problem of creating environment where supportiveness, trust, confidence, credibility, participative decision making and goal clarity are available.

Whether one goes for a system of the political commissar of the communist type, or the Mujahideens of the Iranian Army or behavioural analyst of the Israelis (IDF) who accompany their units in action, the whole precept becomes one of motivation, which I feel is the first function of a commander and a leader in war and peace. Leadership, motivation and indoctrinal issues are, therefore, inseparable and intrinsic. The Americans know it, and when the US Army Research Institute for Behavioural and Social Sciences sponsored this symposium, it indicated the urgency and openness of their system to assimilate the result - oriented research on such vital subjects.

The section on 'Senior leaders in Battlefield' makes interesting reading.

*"Leadership on the Future Battlefield," Edited by James G Hunt and John D Blair, Published by Pergamon-Brassey's International Defence Publishers, Virginia-22101, USA, Pages 347, Price \$35.00

It has a lot of relevance to our own case. Superior scheduling skills, management by optimising, high social power, a keen sense of social justice or equity, a willingness to seek expert advice, low egocentrism, a positive attitude to work, a long term perspective and active membership in a number of outside organisations are some of the common traits of leadership. But what requires to be seen is how, many a times, are we exposing our concepts and even precepts of leadership to self scrutiny and examination? How often are we analysing our own requirements of leadership in either the existing circumstances or future scenarios, say 2015 AD - 25 years hence - when technology and socio-economic conditions would have changed a large spectrum of leadership requirements?

It would be desirable to undertake such exercises along with our conceptual and organisational studies that we are doing.

The role of the behavioural scientists is another issue that requires to be seen from the point of view of the lessons of recent high technological wars (The Falklands, Vietnam, and Yom Kippur). The stress and strain that a man would undergo in modern wars require to be studied. And then view it against the type of the soldier that one gets now: a little more educated but physically weaker, more demanding than accepting the vicissitudes of soldiery and not as uncomplaining as our traditional soldiers have been. The stress generated during active service in war can only be contained or neutralised by effective unit leadership and unit cohesiveness. One of the lessons of recent wars including the Falklands and the Gulf War is that though casualties cannot altogether be avoided in War but they can certainly be reduced and absorbed effectively by cohesive well trained and well led units. And this is where our regimental system has remained our bedrock and its importance and function must not be allowed to be diluted.

The importance of psychological operations from the motivational and indoctrinal points of view also has been highlighted - albeit cursorily. The main ideas having been drawn from the Israeli Defence Forces which are reported to have behavioural scientists with each unit assigned to monitoring and maintenance of morale. The vital role of psychological operations as protecting own troops against enemy propaganda and targeting the same against enemy's is a live issue.

As I finish reading the book, I get back to where I started: the mixed up ideas on leadership, the mix up taking place primarily due to lack of visualisation of the future battlefield, the consequent psychological and leadership requirements and, last but not least, the perception on leadership cum management. This mix up may have also been generated due to the more academic approach and non-professional bias of the authors.