EVOLUTION OF WAR FIGHTING CONCEPTS IN THE SUBCONTINENT

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Warfare has evolved from prehistoric era through more than 5000 years of recorded history to the present time. Its evolution has one common denominator that it has conformed to the spirit of its era, the “Zeitgeist”. A German expression, “Zeitgeist” is the most apt phrase meaning “the general intellectual, moral and cultural climate of a period” which explains the evolution of warfare. The strides made in science and technology have on the one hand brought finesse and sophistication in the technique of killing, while on the other helped the humans to evolve softer ways to subdue or tame the enemy. The history of evolution of warfare will be better understood if we keep these two dynamics at the back of our mind. War fighting concepts is a novel subject that has not been discussed much in our military circles. It is however an important one and deserves much more attention, than it has got so far. My effort would be to focus on the evolution of the war fighting concepts without dwelling in detail on individual concepts. I will first establish the place of War Fighting Concepts in the Hierarchy of Warfare, then trace the evolution of War Fighting Concepts in India and Pakistan and finally give some projections into the future.

Place of War Fighting Concepts in the Hierarchy of Warfare

War fighting concepts refer to the methods developed for fighting wars keeping in view the zeitgeist, the technologies and weapon systems available and the nature of enemy. These can also be termed as the “ways” within the Ends – Ways – Means trinity of strategy. War fighting concepts may be based on the existing means or may devise their own means calling for major restructuring and reorganization of armed forces. Within a nation’s hierarchy of military planning, military strategy is responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of the defence aim. The strategic options may include offensive strategy, defensive – offensive strategy, strategy of denial, space or destruction oriented strategy, etcetera. Following the trinity
model of strategy, the selected strategic option would be incomplete without an appropriate war fighting concept. War fighting concepts can relate to both strategic as well as operational level of war.

Based on the war fighting concepts, the Joint Staff (JS) Headquarters (HQ) and the services organise the forces, equip them and develop detailed doctrines for conduct of operations. War fighting concepts are not static. These have to be dynamic, if not in flux. Some of the war fighting concepts evolved during the last seventy five years include the Blitzkreig, Follow-on-Forces attack, deep strike, Effects Based Operations, Net Centric Warfare, etcetera.

The war fighting concept employed by the United States (US) forces during the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was “Shock and Awe”. Also called “rapid dominance” it was based on the use of overwhelming fire power, battlefield awareness and dominant manoeuvres to paralyze an adversary’s perception of the battlefield and destroy its will to fight. Implementation of the concept allowed a relatively small number of United States (US) forces to defeat what had originally been presented as a much larger opposing force.

Concepts have also evolved in the nuclear domain during the last 60 years based on the zeitgeist of the time. Initially, when USSR was struggling with the nuclear weapons technology, the United States adopted the strategy of “massive retaliation”. When the Soviet nuclear stockpile reached comparable proportions, United States feared that the conflict may snowball into “mutually assured destruction”. The United States then shifted to the doctrine of “flexible response” retaining the option to respond selectively. Still unsure of the United States superiority in a war with USSR, President Reagan gave the concept of Strategic Defence Initiative – commonly known as the “Star Wars”.

One war fighting concept does not cover the whole spectrum of warfare, but serves as a solution for a particular environment, a particular sector or may address a particular issue. For example, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) concept of Graduated Application of Force in the European theatre was their war fighting concept against the Warsaw Pact, while the adopted war fighting
concept against the Iraqis in 2003 was “Shock and Awe”. As was witnessed, while “Shock and Awe” won the conventional victory for the Americans, it did not prove useful in the subsequent Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) phase in Iraq.

**Evolution of War Fighting Concepts in the Subcontinent**

Before independence in 1947, both Indian and Pakistani armed forces were organised and trained by the British. Therefore, on independence, there was symmetry in their organisations and concepts. Later, as the Indians went closer to the Soviet Union and we became pro-west, there was a slow divergence in evolution of doctrines and war fighting concepts of both armies.

Let us analyse the evolution of Indian war fighting concepts, first. After independence, the Indians mostly acquired the Soviet weapons and equipment, but they also kept open a window towards the West by training their officers in the United States and European military schools. As a result, the Indians neither tied themselves to the Soviet military doctrines, nor to the western concepts. Benefiting from both the schools of thought, they have been able to indigenise many foreign concepts over the years. The underlying thought in development of strategic and operational concepts viz a viz Pakistan has been their numerical superiority, greater strategic depth and their internal weakness in Kashmir with the fear that Pakistan might undertake an audacious offensive action to exploit this vulnerability. We can briefly examine some of the known Indian concepts.

- **Concept of Simultaneity.** In 1980’s India adopted Soviet concept of multi tiered offensive intended to engage front line defensive forces simultaneous with engagement of sequentially reacting reserves through deep ground manoeuvres and vertical penetration. The efficacy of the doctrine was always questionable due to imbalances in organisational makeup of the armed forces.

- **Sundarji Doctrine.** Exercise Brass Tacks (Jul 1986) was aimed at employment of large scale mechanised
forces supported by massive air power to achieve maximum degradation of enemy system of forces and absorb significant territory.

- **Shaping of the Battle Field.** As the Indian armed forces improved their fire power capability through long range artillery and airpower, they adopted the United States concept of shaping of the battlefield. The concept implies seriously degrading the capability of the defender to fight in a coherent manner before committing forces to decisive operations and warrants considerable application of firepower.

- **Limited War.** Indians insist that there exists a strategic space between the outbreak of a conventional conflict and crossing of nuclear threshold and a limited conventional war is still an option. Limited war is not a war fighting concept per se, but it does provide the framework within which concepts for war fighting can be developed.

- **Graduated Application of Force.** This is not an original Indian concept. However, it is believed that capitalizing on the advantage of superior ratios in Navy and Air force, the Indians may initiate hostilities through single service or bi-service application of forces. Graduated application of force also allows better escalation management when fighting under nuclear overhang.

- **Cold Start Doctrine.** Indian military strategists feel that Indian military superiority against Pakistan has been rendered irrelevant due to the global environment. They have formulated “Cold Start Doctrine” to impose a short, swift and intense war on Pakistan to achieve their politico-military objectives. The capability to execute this concept will be related to the time taken by the changes made in the structure of formations, their relocation, training and induction of planned equipment.
On the Pakistani side, the introduction of United States aid in mid 1950s and training of our officers in the United States military schools led us to gradually adopt the United States doctrines and terminologies. The attempt to adopt the United States concepts remained superficial as the required intellectual inputs were not given for indigenisation of the foreign concepts. The evolution of concepts in the Pakistan Army can be traced as under:

- **1965 War.** The earliest traces of a strategic concept are found in 1965 war, where Pakistan intended to create strategic effects through offensive operations in Kashmir and planned to deny any ingress to the Indians in the plains of Punjab.

- **1971 War.** The strategic war fighting concept for 1971 war is explained by the statement “Defence of the East Lies in the West”. The concept was formulated in late 1950s and became the corner stone of Pakistan’s defence policy. However, it remained stagnant despite the changed internal and external environment. Irrespective of the inadequacies of the concept, ironically, when the time came for its implementation, we lacked the political will to initiate offensive operations from West Pakistan.

- **Land-Air Battle.** Land-Air Battle is originally a United States concept that has been studied for adoption in Pakistan armed forces. However, we have remained short of fully adopting it due to inadequacy of resources.

- **Current War Fighting Concept.** What is Pakistan Army’s current war fighting concept in case of a war with India? There is no clear answer to this question, as our war fighting concept has not been laid down as such in any document. While we do find tactical doctrines in the shape of General Staff Publications (GSPs) like Armoured Division in Battle, or Infantry Battalion in Battle, etc, the operational level war fighting concepts have not been developed. Another source for the operational level war fighting concepts can be our Army and Corps operational instructions.
These instructions do help us in understanding the intent of the commander, but do not deal with the war fighting concept or the doctrine of fighting battles at operational level. At places, the formations have developed their own training notes for different operations. These training notes are based on individual experience of formations and are fairly useful. However, these have neither been authenticated through scientific and decision support applications, nor deal with tri-services issues.

**Projections into the Future**

To evolve the war fighting concepts for the future, one has to understand the nature and character of the future war. This is where most of the armies fail and end up preparing for the last war. Despite having the most developed intelligence network and the most elaborate think tanks ever owned by a state, United States of America was surprised by the nature, magnitude and timings of the 9/11 attacks.

The events of recent decades indicate that the armed struggles are aimed less at changing borders or capturing spaces and more at affecting change in the policies and behaviours of target governments and people. As a consequence of 9/11 attacks, Alqaeda wanted United States of America to leave the Muslim lands and abandon support to Israel; the Indian Operation Parakaram against Pakistan in 2001-02 was aimed at coercing Pakistan to quit its support to the freedom struggle in Kashmir; cross border strikes by the United States on our Western border are aimed at coercing us to do more, and so on.

The zeitgeist of today is shaping the nature and character of future war. The indicators are that the future wars will remain limited with a propensity towards asymmetry. Let us focus our attention on the development of war fighting concepts in the future.
Global Trends

Keeping in view the differential in resources, the states with superior armed forces and technologies are likely to employ conventional forces with high – technology means of surveillance and target acquisition, precision strikes, intensive intelligence operations and propaganda. On the other hand, the states with lesser military capabilities and the non-state actors will lay more emphasis on concepts based on asymmetric warfare and unconventional operations. The developed countries dread the spectre, where non-state actors may synthesise latest technology with asymmetric warfare doctrine.

The nations worldwide and even the non-state actors are spending huge resources on development of war fighting concepts appropriate to the environment. Saleem Hamdan, Osama bin Laden’s ex driver has identified Alqaeda’s war fighting concept of late 1990s as: (Bin Laden said) “we must carry out painful attacks on the United States until it becomes like an agitated bull, and when the bull comes to our region, he won’t be familiar with the land, but we will.” (Jonathan Mahler, “Enemy Number One”, Time Magazine Volume 172, No. 4, August 4, 2008, 20). We can see how prophetic the concept has been. Alqaeda’s war fighting concept has further evolved over the last seven years. The United States forces which were able to quickly overwhelm Iraqi military forces through “Shock and Awe” had to make major changes in their initial concept to reconcile with the zeitgeist of Iraq.

Modern armed forces have commissioned dedicated organisations for developing war fighting concepts. In United States of America, the United States Joint Forces Command is responsible for transformation of United States military capabilities and is considered the transformation laboratory of United States armed forces. The directorate which evolves and experiments the concepts is the Joint Concept Development and Experimentation Directorate.

In Australia, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has made a joint organisation, namely the Directorate of Future War fighting, responsible for defining the Australian Defence Force of the future.
The concepts developed by the Directorate are analysed by the ADF’s Experimentation program before adoption by the military. Indian Army has a directorate each for perspective planning and systems under the Deputy Chief of Army Staff Planning and Systems in the Army Headquarters. In addition to the dedicated organisations, institutions like War College and schools of instructions also play an important role in devising and refining the war fighting concepts.

**Trends Specific to the Subcontinent.**

When it comes to the difficulty of forecasting the nature and character of future war, India and Pakistan are no exception. I will now discuss the trends in development of war fighting concepts in India and Pakistan with the proviso that Nuclear Overhang is a single most important factor impacting the future war scenarios.

We notice a regular outflow of many original or adopted war fighting concepts from the Indian military. We have already discussed a number of war fighting concepts originating from the Indian military. Operation Sadbhawna aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people in Indian Occupied Kashmir is another such example. We have also heard about the concept of strike and pivot corps, operations on multiple thrust lines and the concept of a complementary effort with Reconstituted Division in the Indian Army. A few years back, the Indians experimented the concept of over-running an infantry strong point with an armoured brigade after pulverising the strong point with extensive firepower from Air force, Artillery and Combat Aviation.

Irrespective of the success or otherwise of these concepts, mere presence indicates dynamism in evolution of military thought and war fighting concepts. The scarlet thread of Indian War Fighting Doctrine in the conventional plane has two strands: Application of superior long range fire power for meaningful effects and restricting the depth of manoeuvre to respect the nuclear overhang. In the unconventional plane, again the Indian concept is two fold: One - Create space for offensive Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) in Pakistan, and Two - Address her vulnerability in Kashmir.
through pacification operations and deter Pakistan from supporting the freedom movement by raising the bogey of terrorism.

Pakistan is facing multiple threats to its security in the shape of conventional threat from India, Low Intensity Conflict from elements of Qaeda and Taliban, threat of sub nationalist tendencies and the threat of cross-border military action by Extra Regional Forces. To compound the threat spectrum, there is covert involvement of other states and agencies in destabilising Pakistan. The multiple threats to Pakistan’s security call for variety of responses, each requiring an appropriate war fighting concept. Pakistan military’s track record in developing war fighting concepts is not very commendable. While we do possess doctrines for employment of tactical units, we have not spent our intellectual efforts on developing operational level concepts. Holding of Exercise Zarb-e-Momin, re-orientation of our military strategy and reorganisation of the Army in late 1980s were major steps forward in evolution of our operational thought. Since then, the operational concepts have not witnessed much innovative thought.

Our achievements in evolving organisational improvements are relatively better. We optimised articulation of Artillery resources through the raising of Artillery division; the concept was promptly followed by the Indians. Our re-organisation of operational logistics and creation of the Chief of Logistics Staff, though still being refined, has greatly contributed towards enhancing our war fighting potential. Our operations on the western border have highlighted many weaknesses in our concepts and tactical doctrines regarding Low Intensity Conflict. In the motivational plane, Pakistan Army’s motivation theme was to fight in the name of Islam. However, the situation is different once we are engaged in an intra state conflict at the strategic level. At the same time, we were used to fighting a well defined enemy across a demarcated line, but now neither the enemy is identifiable, nor is there a Forward Line of Own Troops (FLOT). This zeitgeist calls for a paradigm shift in our operational thinking and war fighting concepts.

Pakistan military’s dilemma therefore is at least two fold. While the threat of Low Intensity Conflict and terrorism has gained
operational level significance, the conventional threat despite having reduced in imminence, has enlarged in quantum. Some of us believe that our nuclear deterrence against India allows us to completely focus on the internal front. This is a fallacy, because nuclear capability does not deter Low Intensity Conflict or limited operations across the Line of Control (LOC) and international border. Most of the Indian war preparations are Pakistan specific, which does not allow us to lower our guard. (Lesson of history: Response should be based on enemy capability and not intention, which may change any time.)

Starting from mid 1950s, for a long time, we held superior weapons and technologies viz a viz India. Gradually, we have not only lost the edge, but India has also acquired many force multipliers. With the transparency of battlefield provided by Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs), radars and satellites and the accuracy of engagement offered by Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs), the viability of fixed defences and movement of strategic formations will be seriously challenged. A numerically and technologically superior enemy cannot be defeated with symmetrical concepts as those of the enemy itself. To win a war against India we need to evolve novel and unique war fighting concepts.

**Conclusion**

It is our foremost responsibility to forecast the nature and character of the current and future wars. Having identified their contours, different war fighting concepts would be required for different sets of environments. Modern armed forces have dedicated organisations responsible for developing war fighting concepts. We need to follow the same pattern and should not neglect formulation of war fighting concepts at Joint Staff as well as individual service level. To this end, we should commission a Directorate of Transformation and Concepts in the Joint Staff Headquarters as well as in each Service Headquarters. These directorates should be organised and equipped for perspective planning as well as evaluation and experimentation of concepts with appropriate specialists and computer aids.