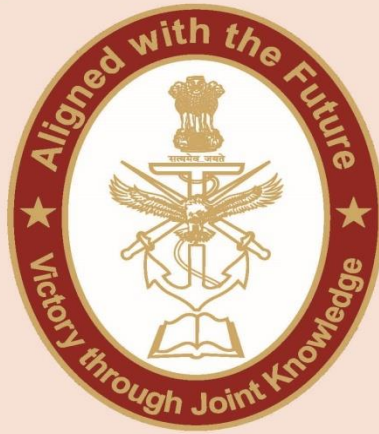


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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DEFEATING PRE-EMPTION



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Surprise is “the universal desire. . . basic to all [military] operations, for without it superiority at the decisive point is hardly conceivable.”

Clausewitz

The country for the past year has been facing unprecedented challenges that have created large scale entropy and concern. It commenced last year with the rapid spread of the Covid 19 virus that caught the country off guard. However, with a firm resolve and response, the damage caused by the pandemic could be contained. Last year while gathering our wits to contain the virus, the country faced a massive military challenge up in the Himalayas when the PLA brought in large amount of troops and hardware and made ingress in a number of areas, pre-empting the Army. The armed forces responded by mirroring deployments and launching a capability surprise by occupying the Kailash range. The present year started with a positive note with news of disengagement at Pangong Tso and the economy projected to grow in double digits. But by Mar end the country found itself ambushed by the virus which has now come back with renewed energy and virulence. It put the leaders and country men on the back foot causing widespread distress and loss of international reputation. The common element in all this was “surprise” and its band width i.e. the multiple methods and domains in which it could be launched. It is therefore imperative that a capability to envision events cascading towards surprise is developed so as to prevent potential pre-emption or at least to mitigate its consequences. A national capability to

analyse and separate the probable from the possible has to be incubated. This article discusses the military dimension of surprise and the means to stymie future acts of pre-emption at the borders.

During the Combined Commander's conference held in March the Prime Minister had emphasised **the need to develop the Indian military into a 'future force'**. For the first time in history a PM had set out the True North for the military. It is now upto the higher defence leadership to embark on a course of transformation. What should be the kernel of this transformative process. Could it be woven around a versatile capability to absorb surprise and launch own capability surprises? The Armed forces have a history of being pre-empted by adversaries. However in the past, their capabilities were not as disruptive and multi domain as presently. Over the years, the military has got used to a predictable pattern of operations much like a 400m hurdler and reacted in a templated manner i.e. mechanical grind it out operations. All this, while the PLA carried out a planned modernization for three decades acquiring unique capabilities. Today it is in a position to deliver surprise across multiple domains such as time, mission, space, cyber, electro magnetic spectrum (EMS), NBC employing disruptive technologies and techniques. It is a foregone conclusion that technology would be the cause of some killer surprise in future that has been secretly developed over decades by the PLA. In the book, *Unrestricted Warfare* (1999) the authors Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui of PLA have given out a number of strategies to trammel the enemy. It mentions about use of military and non military means to force the enemy to capitulate. **The future force therefore must have the resilience to absorb capability surprise and launch own composite surprise.**

From a military operational context pre-emption is an event that could affect the outcome of a mission for which a force has been caught unprepared. It is not possible to anticipate true surprise. It is only possible to minimize possible surprises by appropriate planning and creating systems that are resilient to unanticipated actions of an adversary. There are two classes of surprise -- intelligence and technology linked surprise. The employment of Enigma cipher device by Germans during World War II was a technology linked surprise whereas the introduction of Stuxnet malware in Iran's uranium-enriching centrifuges in 2010 was an intelligence linked surprise. Both gave the adversary the chance to produce consequences that one did not prepare for and extend the competitive space to other domains.

It is obvious that the standoff at LAC was as a consequence of intelligence oversight at all levels, civil and military, strategic down to tactical, as neither the massing of troops and equipment nor intent of the dragon could be inferred. It was a highly improbable event, no one could have predicted in the

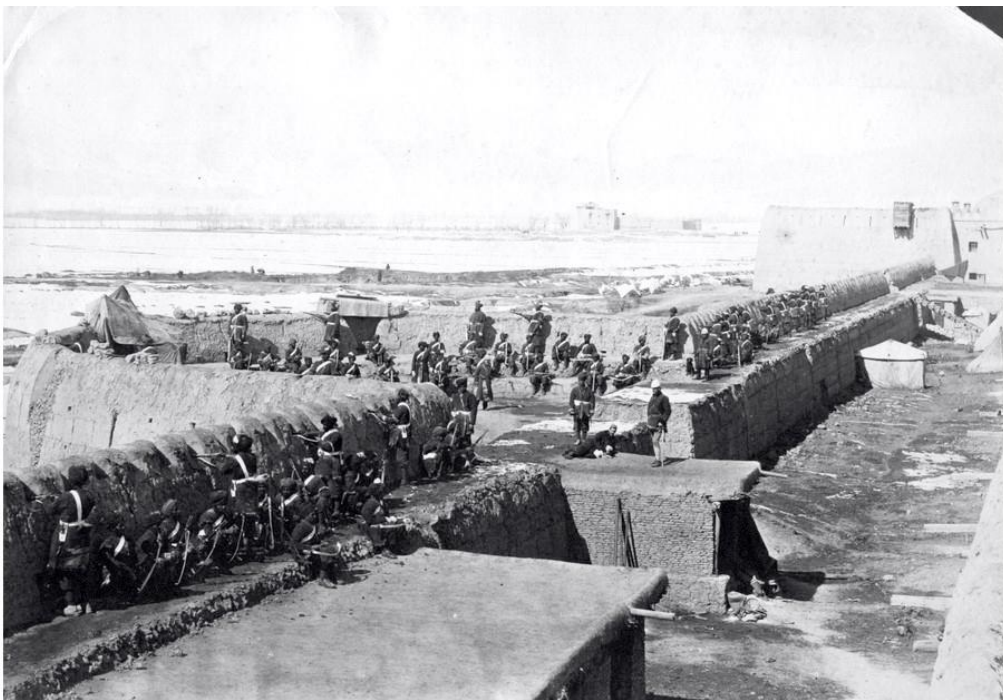
backdrop of Covid 19 pandemic. Once again the courage and Teflon persona of the Indian soldier saved the day. The vital requirement to analyse intelligence indicators to identify security threats has been reinforced again. **Intelligence linked surprise does not come from lack of information but a general inability to correctly analyse the leading indicators.** An enduring capability to scan, recognize, categorize, analyse and report potential technical and operational surprise needs to be developed. In simple terms listen, observe, photograph, sense, probe and analyse inputs, transform into data and plumb data for leads.

One of the best examples of surprise came during the Yom Kippur war in 1973, when the Arabs delivered a staggering surprise both in Golan Heights and Sinai. Coming as a seismic shock to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), the Egyptians advanced on a wide front and established many shallow bridgeheads under cover of mobile air defence. The IDF was shaken to the core as its counter attack driven by armour was met with swarms of infantrymen equipped with anti tank missiles. The consequence of such detailed planning and execution was that IDF lost 400 tanks in the first three days. In addition, Egyptian SAM 6 (technological surprise) destroyed 109 planes before the cease fire. Israeli commentator Chaim Herzog writing about the grit and energy of the Egyptian soldier, in the **War of Atonement** states:-

“Each unit dealt with its own mission and nothing else. One unit trained for three years in passing across a water obstacle a pipe for transporting fuel. Another unit trained every single day for three years in laying of PMP bridge. Similarly, for years operators of Sagger missiles lined up in front of simulators and practiced tracking of tanks; firing up to 25 missiles a day to hone skills.”

For the Indian military it is time to develop awareness about capability surprise and reinvent force readiness to deliver own surprise. Units have to practice missions under great chaos and entropy and a contested EMS. Readiness is the ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of military strategy. **Readiness is the amalgamation of two distinct battlefield operating systems viz. Soldier and System readiness.** Soldier readiness relates to training, equipping, combat skills and competencies while system readiness is the ability to provide reliable equipment to execute missions. It is derived from the ability of each unit to deliver a stipulated mission capability. **In simple terms it is the ability of a force to know how far it can run and how long it can jump.** A fine example of readiness was demonstrated by the US Air Force during Gulf war, when it flew 60000 sorties and dropped 84,000 tons of ammunition that helped shorten the war.

The best way for a military to know its strengths is to comprehend its own vulnerabilities. One method to prevent pre-emption is to intentionally work on leveraging traditional competencies and compensating vulnerabilities. This knowledge has to be the cornerstone around which own capability surprises have to be incubated. **The Indian soldier has a strong competence in operating from fixed positions in mountains acquired by deployment over the years.** The battle of Saragarhi is considered by many as the greatest last stand in history. What should also be remembered is that the fort was recaptured two days later employing a technological surprise, the cannon. The Himalayas too have since times immemorial provided an impregnable line of defence to India. **Capability surprises have to be woven around the unflinching courage and toughness of the soldier and advantages of terrain under an overarching cast iron dome of technology.** A stand out deficiency is the vanishing technical skills. **Engineering issues are generally consigned to the realms of neither tactics nor strategy.** A sense of complacency prevailed in IDF after the impressive victory of 1967, resulting in IDF's shaky start in 1971 which caused enormous friction in recovering from surprise and organizing for battle. **Not all equipment were combat ready and severe maintenance issues surfaced.** What saved the day was the technical orientation of crew and engineering excellence of maintainers, complemented by some fatal deviations from the script by Egyptians.



The Battle of Saragarhi: The last Heroic Stand

Today the bandwidth to deliver surprise over an expanded battlespace has increased due to globalization, covering cyber, EMS, space, information, NBC besides classical domains. **It has become increasingly feasible for adversaries to develop counters to known capabilities. Dependence on foreign systems has facilitated this, as specifications get shared if similar systems are acquired by either side e.g. Sukhoi, S400, T90/T80 tanks.** Counters get developed in quick time as they no longer have to wait for systems to be used and learn how to counter their capabilities. This fast tracked cycle of measure/countermeasure/counter-countermeasure will continue to add surprise to future conflicts. In the new era of aspiring power competition, PLA could employ many layers of stand off in multiple domains to deliver surprise. Non- kinetic effects like disruption of communications, denial of tracking& navigation capabilities, fake news, information overload could precede kinetic operations. **The future force may therefore have to equipped with abilities to operate across domains.** This calls for employment of the military's intellectual firepower to think beyond the algorithm and evolve doctrine, organizations, training, leadership, systems, human resource and processes for the future. Exercises and experimentation must follow thereafter, replicating the future battlefield --expansive, lethal and hyperactive with increased strategic ambiguity and internal instability. The capability of early warning and launching own surprises across the Himalayas must be silently incubated and honed.

Post Kargil, a series of reforms had been initiated by the Govt in the intelligence gathering apparatus. A great focus was placed on technical scans and analysis. Apparently the measures taken are inadequate. **It is a common finding post any occurrence that someone had provided the warning, but that was not heeded.** This was the case during Kargil and possibly in the current stand off, indicators provided got lost in space. It is difficult to believe that such large scale deployments could have gone unnoticed. Given the expanse of surprise, there is no simple way to guard against it. It is essential that all organizations, not only security related but also other civilian fields to be forearmed and prepared for mitigation of surprise. The practice of access control, fire walling, local digitisation, addressing insider threat, horizon scanning needs to be made mandatory and rehearsed like the good old fire fighting practice in the military.



Intelligence Analysis: Predicting Enemy's Future Behaviour

Several decades ago Clausewitz had said that two factors that create surprise are speed and secrecy. In the 21st century it can be construed as agility and stealth. A force can no longer be sequential and predictable, it may not be feasible to degrade the adversary physically due to the stand offs created by him before own forces can respond. **The future force has to find a balance between soldier and system readiness by building next generation personnel and equipment capabilities.** Organizational dexterity can bring in resilience and convergence of capabilities to stymie pre-emption or effectively respond to it. This implies ability to evaluate information, intelligence, calculate risk and decide in the stride. There is a need to broadly scan the horizon for indicators, signatures, technological advances and connect these to potentially threatening acts of pre-emption. **The military needs to deploy a network of ground and space based sensors for 24x7 surveillance of LAC/LC to provide formations with the common and local operational pictures needed to defeat pre-emption.** The practice of giving knee jerk responses on being surprised has created enough disorder and running down, often at great loss of lives, territory and international reputation.

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