



# CENJOWS

## **FUTURE CONFLICTS IN INDIAN CONTEXT:** **CONCEPTUAL PARADIGMS**

By

**Lt Gen Rameshwar Yadav, PVSM, AVSM, VSM (Retd)**

Indian security matrix is a function of our territorial disputes with our two hostile neighbours. The dispute with Pakistan is a legacy of partition wherein the Pakistan tried to annex Jammu and Kashmir being Muslim majority state despite Maharaja's choice to merge with India. On other hand, China orchestrated 1962 war to capture Aksai Chin for security of their connectivity to the Central Asia as part of their strategic political expansion. The common point in both these territorial encroachments was the use of military rather than strength of diplomatic logic and rationale. Lesson goes out loud and clear that the military would have been a better facilitator to beat the unethical ways of our scheming opponents. Unfortunately, this basic tenet has not been taken with the kind of seriousness that it deserves in our political prudence.

As a result, despite five wars, parts of J&K continue to be under illegal occupation under Pakistan as well as China as on date. The POK and Aksai Chin works out to be almost half of J&K territory as it existed on 28 Oct 1947 when the Maharaja ceded his state to Indian union. The China also claims NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh) based on unsubstantiated historical precedence with sinister design to create leverages for bargain to retain illegal occupation of Aksai Chin. There are few other smaller pockets of

contesting claims both by China as well as Pakistan which also need to be addressed. Pakistan has a deep Kashmir obsession, and China does not seem to be interested in resolving boundary issue so as to keep options open to pressurize India at will.

Both Pakistan and China continue to use coercive military overtures to destabilize India on regular basis with impunity. Consequent to launch of Chinese CPEC scheme through Indian territories under Pakistani occupation, there is a further confluence of their strategic interests. **Such a commonality of cause gives rise to collusive military threat to India which is the bench mark for any future conflicts, if any.** Apropos, India has no choice but to make our military establishment strong enough to neutralize the inimical quotient of both the adversaries to check their political hubris and anti India agenda.

Conceptually, the future conflicts in Indian context would relate to restoring the lost ground by all the constituents of national security mechanism. Hence, the mandate for the Indian military is **to safe guard the national territorial integrity by denial of any further enemy ingress, and also retake the illegally occupied areas at an opportune time as a national cause.** It involves creating national power with high coercive capabilities so as to make it untenable by our adversaries to continue their anti India rhetoric. What we have today is primarily a defensive capability with optimal offensive content against Pakistan and asymmetry of force levels against China. It is, therefore, essential to acquire offensive edge to deter any further political humiliation by the detractors.

Apropos, the armed forces need to be structured, trained and equipped for assured victory as there are no runners up in war. War per se would encapsulate capture and retention of tactically significant ground, punitive destruction and societal mayhem for initiating political process. Our disputed areas being in mountains, war in Indian context, is unlikely to be conducted merely by primacy of standoff aerial destruction as seen to be practiced by extra regional powers in theatres close by. **It would warrant conventional war fighting with boots on ground alongside other leverages and capabilities that India enjoys in other dimensions of warfare.**

The war fighting over land air and sea has undergone transformation with addition of nuclear, cyber, space and sub conventional dimensions making it a military challenge of hybrid nature with undefined ethical boundaries. Given the regional as well as global nuclear deterrence, the application of nuclear calculus is unlikely, though it can never be ruled out given the calculated irrationality of both China and Pakistan. However, the nuclear overhang facilitates raising the threshold of initiating conflicts and at the same time reduces the time window for application of conventional forces. **This in turn has given space to nontraditional threats wherein the focus of war has shifted from armed forces to the people also by creating a societal chaos through denial of the existential services and provisions for survival.**

This scenario is likely to further change soon with the fast evolving technologies which are likely to impact on the way wars may be conducted in future. These technologies have enhanced capabilities of weapon and platforms with longer reach, accuracy and destructive contents. Besides this, the net work centricity, battle field transparency alongside artificial intelligence, robotics and digital interfaces are new enabling features to achieve synergies for operational expediency.

The format of application of military forces lies in the environmental realities and power projection capabilities through varied means of the opponents at the time of actual confrontation. Therefore, there would always be shades of unpredictability and ethical irrationality in the way war would be conducted in future. In that, the technological supremacy would play a decisive role in the outcome of the conflict. **Conventional conflict with nuclear overhang alongside nontraditional inimical intrusions would be the primary formats of the war as all the three nations have these structures.**

Technologically empowered capabilities in cyber and space alongside sub conventional afflictions are mechanism to continuously pursue the hostile agenda even during peace time. India, as a responsible nation, does not subscribe to grey zone sub conventional means of war fighting. **Whereas, both China and Pakistan have proven complicity in using it against India to destabilize her as their national strategy.** Pakistan in

particular is using the non state actors indulging in acts of terrorism against India on daily basis with impunity.

Having defined the politico- military problem, it would be prudent to do the environmental scan to work out the options for application of military to achieve national political objectives. **The disputes being related to fixed geographical space in mountainous terrain, the denial, or offensive operations would require infantry centric force composition.** The Indian forces in plains and deserts have high deterrence value as they have potential to create leverages to counter veil any threat in the mountains. These formations, accordingly, are designed to dislocate the enemy thereby creating conditions for political negotiations from position of strength.

The most talked about ingredient of an all out war is the nuclear calculus as all three countries have substantial nuclear arsenals. Pakistan nuclear doctrine is India centric and talks about first use at tactical level when situation so warrants. The political leadership in Pakistan is known to be quite vocal on use of nuclear weapons whenever there is some escalation of military situation. Whereas, if used in plains or deserts, it would have unimaginable collateral damage to their own population due to high density of towns and villages. Moreover, its impact would be moderate in mountains due to terrain and dispersed deployment of troops. Pakistan would be averse to use it in J&K on populated areas for obvious reasons. Therefore, Pakistani nuclear narrative seems to be more to deter than actually using it for obvious reasons.

India on other hand has triad of nuclear capability and response would be more lethal, if it comes to that. The international community is definitely expected to intervene in such an eventuality as the impact would be global with devastating dimensions. Accordingly, the use of nuclear weapons by Pakistan even of tactical variety is highly unlikely. **Yet, possibility of nuclear strike cannot be totally ruled out due to Pakistani unpredictability and her complicity with the non state actors sans accountability.**

**Pakistan has fine tuned her sub conventional, conventional and nuclear capabilities as a continuum of each other for higher strategic coercive effect in their military matrix.** The China with her CPEC

scheme, their biggest political investment in recent times, has high stakes in the geographical space of Pakistan. The convergence of strategic interests has certainly enhanced the politico-military ante against India with possibility of collusive threat. Such a situation would be a worst case scenario from Indian perspective.

On other hand, India does not subscribe to sub conventional ways plus her nuclear doctrine talks of no first use. As a result, the Indian nuclear and conventional capabilities as standalone vectors unlike Pakistan. **It leaves only conventional capabilities as the main stay of Indian military for any conflict resolution exercise.** The nuclear capability is purely a matter of deterrence in Indian context. It certainly puts breaks on Pakistan to cross the threshold of military misadventure of larger dimensions as reflective in exposure of their nuclear bluff during Kargil confrontation.

Therefore, despite the nuclear overhang, the conventional war in Indo-Pak scenario would continue to be relevant and retain its primacy as capture and holding of ground necessitates boots on ground. The **doctrine and war philosophy**, accordingly, would need to be recalibrated so as **to facilitate early conflict termination within short time window.** This in turn requires revamping the war structures to include force composition & its locations, high capacity communication network, aerial mobility, logistics chain and processes to launch operations to defeat the time constraints. On Chinese front, the parameters are similar as discussed in the case of Pakistan, whereas there are not many viable military leverages unlike open terrain for counter veiling effects. The Indian advantage lies in the Indian Ocean which needs to be dovetailed in the overall war strategy. The China has a history of complicity in fuelling insurgencies in the North East to destabilize India which continues till date, though the foot prints are lesser now. **The Maoist problem in the red corridor, one of the biggest internal security challenges as on date, has its ideological genesis based on Chinese political thought.** Besides this, the China has been trying to encircle India politically with inimical strains to create multiplicity of silent threats to up the ante.

China is known to use coercive military overtures to push her foreign policy agenda to pressurize India and dictate their terms. There are regular

violations of LAC by the Chinese troops on Northern borders to exert their claims on the disputed pockets. It is observed that whenever there are border talks, or visit by political leadership the level of military activity increases apparently to showcase their nuisance quotient. Doklam intrusion by China with potential of threatening to cut off the North Eastern India from the main land is one such example. The ongoing military standoff in East Ladakh is part of Chinese coercive overture to make India submit to their dictates.

The China suffers from the disadvantage of long lines of communications for mobilization of her troops into TAR sector. Though China has larger conventional forces but the entire combat resources cannot be diverted towards the Indian borders. The terrain restricts application of forces due to availability of limited number of road axes for offensive. Moreover, with the current state of battle field transparency, it would be difficult to hide movement of large forces. The operations would perforce be slow and sequential due to space crunch in mountainous terrain. It facilitates easy and early detection, interdiction and checking any intrusion by China.

India, as on date, has optimum level of forces fully acclimatized, trained and rehearsed for mountain warfare on the northern borders. There has been a major capability accretion due to improved infrastructure all along the LAC, besides some offensive content. The IAF is technologically a shade better than the Chinese air force with longer reach, better avionics & weapons. The IAF has an added advantage of operating bases at lower altitude unlike Chinese air strips in high altitude areas restricting the pay load of aircrafts. Accordingly, major territorial gains or losses are unlikely due to negative terrain to provide political advantage of strategic import to both the countries. Therefore, China cannot repeat 1962 with present operational preparedness of Indian army and air force.

India has a distinct strategic advantage against China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as 90% of trade and 70% of energy resources of China pass through water ways close to Indian areas of influence. The Chinese economic expansion exercise has clear military foot prints as China is most vulnerable in the Indo- Pacific. China is also known to have their naval presence in Somalia and Pakistan, besides likelihood of naval facilities in

Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives in near future. India is in a position to interdict Chinese shipping lanes alongside other friendly countries that are impacted due to unilateral conduct of China in the South and East China seas.

Therefore, the possibility of a military confrontation on high seas with India cannot be ruled out in times to come. Hence, there is a need of modernization of Indian Navy appropriately to give it a blue water stature. **In that, it needs to be duly hyphenated with the modernization of air and land components fully integrated as a theatre force for requisite national power projection.** India has to structure the Indian Navy to make it capable of dominating Arabian sea, Bay of Bengal and high seas of Indo-Pacific in all three dimensions viz, sub surface, surface and air.

While Chinese nuclear doctrine spells out no first use and also not against non nuclear states, an ambiguity has been infused in Chinese policy wherein in case of threat of strategic impact, the nuclear threshold may be lowered. Accordingly, India being a nuclear state she falls in the category of loosely termed flexible response domain from Chinese perspective. India on other hand has a clear cut policy of no first use without any ambiguity. The nuclear deterrence is in place with triad of capability to launch nuclear weapons over land air and sea. Therefore, nuclear confrontation is unlikely given the political maturity of both the nations.

China is unlikely to accept any change in status quo on land borders in Aksai Chin being their area of strategic interests. To do that, they are expected to keep India on toes by launching selective intrusive localized operations to keep the ante high. Besides this, looking at Chinese sensitivities regarding CPEC scheme, an all out war on their own or collusively with Pakistan cannot be ruled out under certain contingencies. It prompts a two front war for India necessitating separate sets to forces with adequate reserves to deal with such an eventuality. **Whatever be the nature of confrontation, it is likely to be primarily a conventional response by both the countries, both over land as well as sea.**

The Indian Air Force should be capable of optimal denial of use of air space by the enemy in all the possible combat contingencies including a collusive threat. It should be capable of facilitating shaping the tactical battle

field for unhindered army as well as naval operations. Deep surveillance, superior avionics, night enablement, longer ranges alongside beyond visual range precision guided weaponry is necessary for achieving such capabilities. The conventional missile forces when hyphenated with above capabilities have tremendous potential to act as the force multiplier in support of air land battle. However, their use may escalate the conflict to next level which needs to be factored in the planning.

The digital technology has brought in revolution of unimagined proportions on exponential scale adding outer space and cyber domain to the lexicon of warfare. The cyber warfare is the new silent frontier with dangerous import which needs to be taken into accounts in the national security mechanism. The conduct of cyber warfare involves espionage and sabotage as the two essential activities in the executive space. The espionage encapsulates illegal exploitation methods used to snoop into the net works, software, computers, or the internet to steal or acquire classified information from rival institutions or individuals for military, political or financial gains. Whereas, the sabotage involves disruption of normal operations of weapon and equipment and support structures.

Therefore, the cyber warfare has tremendous potential to bring about devastation of unimaginable dimensions which makes it a weapon of mass disruption, damage and destruction. It warrants evolving strategies and structures to neutralize and wade through such warlike scenarios by working out contingencies and appropriate cyber defence responses. **There is a need to plan and explore offensive options for our cyber power projection, albeit in sync with the national security strategy and geo political synergies.** It also warrants joining up with other nations for exchange of technologies, intelligence and response systems in the time of crisis

India has also acquired substantial space warfare capabilities and with that, the military deterrence has gone up yet another notch. It provides a capability to destroy surveillance, communication, navigation, cyber /digital oriented and other satellites with hostile intentions. By doing so, the enemy satellites controlling the civil logistics infrastructure like railways, civil aviation, road transport, IWT, communication & IT network etc may also be considered for destruction, if required. Such utility services, if denied to the



enemy during hostilities would create chaos leading to administrative and political breakdown forcing the enemy to give in.

Therefore, the anti satellite capability would be a game changer and a much needed force multiplier to fight the hybrid war. Pakistan does not have a match to this new military threshold that India has achieved, and a fair amount of capability deficit has been covered up as regards to the China. **India, now, stands amongst the league of technological elite group with this achievement of strategic significance.**

The chemical and biological weapons do exist and known to have been used by few nations in recent times. It is therefore reasonable to presume that these may well be used in desperate situations. Hence, need to be taken into consideration in the national security matrix. The use of chemical agents is restricted to limited geographical space and that too for a finite time. Whereas, the biological afflictions once unleashed may go out of control defying geographical boundaries impacting large populations. **The current Corona virus mayhem across the world is indictor of draconian import of biological warfare.** It needs a serious look at the public health infrastructure, equipment, and trained medical manpower to deal with such unprecedented catastrophic contingencies. The civil administration has to make provision for accommodating and feeding the displaced population besides relief and rehabilitation required in such disaster situations.

The Indian military geography with dominance over Indian Ocean and impregnable land barriers of Himalayan ranges bestow politico-military advantages of very high order to India. It makes any military intrusion by the external forces restrictive in time and space plus conditional in its execution. We somehow have failed to exploit this strength bestowed by the nature permitting extra regional forces to intrude into our geographical space. Having suffered in the past, we have upgraded our military capabilities hyphenating this geographical strength in our military matrix. **While India has optimum forces to take care of Pakistani front, there is an urgent need to create offensive capability in mountains against China.** Looking at the vast tracks along Indo-Tibet border, there would be requirement of more than one such strike formations.

India already has a triad in her nuclear calculus alongside adequate conventional capabilities over land, air and sea to take care of her security needs within and around our territorial boundaries. **Yes, much more needs to be done to maintain and enhance the deterrence by empowering the armed forces through technology.** To do that, special attention is warranted to infuse dynamism in the defence R &D and production domain which continues to be a major weakness of strategic import.

**The newly acquired capabilities of the recent Indian forays into space with military imprints alongside ever increasing cyber war capabilities have further added to the potency and reach of the Indian military power to deter the inimical forces.** With such digital capabilities the warfare would have potential to look beyond the traditional military space impacting on the entire national civic structures. If it so happens, then it has potential of bringing about societal mayhem leading to collapse of governance mechanism. Not to forget that such capabilities are also possessed by our adversaries also. This, accordingly, may restrain the opposing forces restricting its use for military purposes only and avoid its proliferation in the civil domain.

The future conflicts in Indian context would continue to be primarily conventional in nature, albeit under nuclear overhang and an added technology driven deterrence. **Looking at the aggressive political conduct of both China as well as Pakistan, it is time to infuse adequate offensive intent in our political thought.** An effective diplomacy alongside strong military which can be applied with utmost potency is the need of the hour. It warrants creating sufficient offensive content both against China as well as Pakistan, besides build up capabilities of power projection beyond Indian borders. A technologically empowered army alongside a blue water navy, blue sky air force and intrusive offensive cyber and space capabilities is necessary to take care of national security. Earlier it is done, better it would be to attain high political buoyancy to enhance our strategic pull in current geo political context.

The network centricity, night enablement, battle field mobility, standoff range weapons, force protection to include NBC protection

**Disclaimer:** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.