

CONCEPT CHALLENGE

A VIABLE RESPONSE TO INDIAN STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE POSING SIMULTANEOUS THREAT TO VARIOUS TIERS OF OUR DEFENCE

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Introduction

The concept of simultaneity is not new to the men in arms. It can be vividly seen in the doctrines like *Blitzkrieg*, *Deep Strike* and *Air-Land Battle*. In a strategic offensive, simultaneity and synchronization are desired with the basic aim of upsetting the time and space bondage of defence. An offensive materializing simultaneously at various tiers of defence will not only condition the battlefield to the attacker's choice but will also render the reserves of defender ineffective through interdiction, neutralization and dislocation.

After the 1971 War, Indian Army found itself in a position to create a substantial offensive effort due to the situation in former East Pakistan. The rapprochement with China also helped the Indian Army in sparing some forces from the Chinese Border. In early eighties, Indian Army started a re-thinking on its offensive strategy. This became evident from the *Indian Army Plan 2000* prepared in 1986. The plan was aimed at transforming Indian Army into a modern war machine, having an enhanced offensive capability. The modernization and restructuring of Indian Army was planned with an aim to give it the capability of war of manoeuvre against Pakistan, while retaining, adequate potential of mountain warfare against China.

Aim. The aim of this paper is to carry-out an in-depth analysis of Indian strategic offensive posing simultaneous threat to various tiers of our defence, with a view to suggesting a viable response.

ANALYSIS

Simultaneity Vis-a-Vis Indian Modernization Plan

The *Indian Army Plan 2000* being a wishful venture against the back drop of financial constraints started well, but stalled very quickly. The disintegration of the former Soviet Union, inordinate delays in defence production and the economic problems in India were the main stumbling blocks. Lately Indian Army has renamed this plan as *Roll on Flexible Plan* and adopting a realistic approach has linked it with the country's *Eighth Five Year Plan (1992—97)*.

Simultaneity of Indian offensive depends on the force goals set in the *Indian Army Plan 2000*. It is, therefore, pertinent to draw a comparison between the original plan, the modified *Roll on flexible plan* and the existing inventory of Indian Army. This comparison is as under: –

Serial	Formations/Commands	Present Strength	Indian Army Plan 2000	Roll on Flexible Plan(By 1997)
a.	Commands	5	5	6
b.	Corps	11	13	11
c.	Armoured Divisions	3	4	4
d.	Mechanized Divisions	-	8	-
e.	Infantry Divisions	17	-	15
f.	RAPID(S)	4	7	6
g.	Mountain Divisions	10	19	10
h.	Air Assault Divisions	-	2	-
j.	Independent Armoured Bdes	8	4	5
k.	Independent Infantry Bdes	5	2	5
l.	Independent Mechanized Bdes	2	2	2
m.	Para Brigade	1	1	Para Bde
s.	Amphibious Brigade	1	1	1

The modernization of Indian Air Force has also been delayed due to disintegration of former Soviet Union. Since the air is an important component of *Deep Strike* doctrine, therefore, Indian concept of simultaneity has run into difficulties on this account also. Unlike *Indian Army Plan 2000* the *Indian Air Force Modernization Plan* has not been modified. This plan being a long term plan may be attainable in due course.

Notwithstanding the above mentioned difficulties, one can still find the ambition on the part of Indian Army to pursue the concept of simultaneity in the offensive. This concept, though at a reduced scale is still evident in the modified *Roll on Flexible Plan*. Following aspects of the plan clearly indicate the Indian ambitions: –

—Raising of one additional Armoured Division as planned earlier.

—Raising of two additional RAPID(S).

—Keeping five Independent Armoured Brigades instead of four planned earlier.

—Raising a Para Division instead of a Para Brigade. Thereby, compensating the absence of. Air Assault Division to some extent.

At this stage Indian Army may not be having the desired force structure for a strategic offensive posing simultaneous threat to various tiers of our defence, but this may not be true in the near future. As a concept, Indians have tried it in major exercises like *EXERCISE BRASS TACKS* and have streamlined the battle procedures and battle drills. It is matter of time only, that our defence system will be subjected to a threat having different quantum of forces and unmanageable time and space dimensions. In order to counter such a threat effectively, there is a need to do some re-thinking on our existing defence system.

The Dimensions of Indian Strategic Offensive

Mechanics of Indian Strategic Offensive. The Indian Strike Corps will be the minimum level involved in implementing the concept of simultaneity in offensive. Keeping in view the force goals discussed earlier, an Indian Strike Corps may comprise of an Armoured Division reinforced with Independent Armoured Brigade(s), one to two RAPID(S) and one to two Infantry Divisions. It may also be supported by a Para Brigade or Division. On raising, Air Assault Division will provide the deep strike force. The Indian Strike Corps operating in extreme South may be supported by the Amphibious Brigade (for psychological gains only). An Indian strategic

offensive may unfold as under: –

- RAPID(S) and Infantry Divisions will reduce the forward defences from the flanks/rear. In order to gain speed (as observed in *EXERCISE BRASS TACKS*) the bridgeheads may be made away from the strong defences sited astride the Road/Main Supply Route and subsequently expanded sideways to open the Main Supply Route.
- Simultaneously/without waiting for the consolidation of bridgeheads, Armoured/Mechanized Formations will manoeuvre through the gaps/weakly held areas to their intermediate objectives, thereby, interdicting/destroying the tactical reserves.
- Para/Air Assault elements will secure bottlenecks in greater depth, blocking or dislocating the strategic reserves, thereby, facilitating own manoeuvre in depth.
- Once the cohesion of defence is shattered, the Armoured Formations will rush for deeper/strategic objectives seeking fluid tank versus tank battles, in which, they could exploit the advantage of having superior armour.
- RAPID(S) and Infantry Divisions will be expected to open the Main Supply Route within 48 hours and continue expanding the breach sideways.
- At an appropriate stage the Indian Holding Formations will be inducted for the offensive to free the RAPID(S) and Strike Infantry Divisions from the bridgehead to join the Armoured Formations, which have affected a linkup with the Para or Air Assault elements.
- Indian Air Force will first try to achieve the air superiority, thereafter, it will provide substantial Close Support to ground troops undertaking massive interdiction effort.

Rationale for Indian Concept of Simultaneity. The Indian concept of simultaneity may be based on the following assumptions: –

- Pakistan Army will take positional defence with tactical reserves at various tiers. These reserves will be employed in a sequential and graduated manner, thereby, making them vulnerable to interdiction.
- The balance of defence at strategic level will be established by the Army Strategic Reserves.
- Holding Formations of Pakistan Army will be deployed on extended frontages with a forward posture, thereby, offering exploitable gaps/weakly held areas. Such a defence will lack the tactical depth and will be comparatively easier to turn.
- The concept of simultaneity suits the Indians for exploiting their qualitative and quantitative edge in armour, air support, air assault/airborne troops, reconnaissance and surveillance, C³I systems, ground mobility and massive artillery support.
- Indian follow-on forces will be able to close in, with relative impunity, due to absence of *Look Deep—Strike Deep* capability with the Pakistan Army.

Weaknesses and Strengths of Opposing Systems

Weaknesses/Constraints of the Defence System of Pakistan. The weaknesses of existing defence system of Pakistan are mostly due to prevalent geo-political situation, strategic compulsions and economic constraints. It will be rather unfair to shoot down the existing defence system purely

on military merits. It is a fairly simple and effective system within the given parameters and may prove effective against the existing Indian Force Structure. However, in the near future it may not be very effective against an improved Indian offensive capability. The salient weaknesses of our defence system which can also be termed as constraints are as under: –

- Pakistan Army, being Infantry pre-dominant has to resort to positional defence. Mechanization is a very expensive venture for a developing country like Pakistan.
- Insufficient troops for holding extended frontages, thereby, offering exploitable gaps/weakly held areas.
- Forward defensive posture due to absence of strategic depth, politically sensitive areas located close to borders and major communication system of the country running East of River Indus.
- Compartmentation effect created by the rivers and canals in the Northern Punjab making Army Strategic Reserves vulnerable to interdiction.
- Lack of adequate combat support systems and *Look Deep/Strike Deep* capability with the Holding Formations, making them vulnerable to surprise.

Vulnerabilities/Weaknesses of Indian Concept of Simultaneity. Apparently Indian concept of simultaneity may appear very impressive and intimidating but a careful analysis reveals some major flaws in it. The salient weaknesses in the Indian concept are as under: –

- Simultaneity/synchronization is only possible in the areas having acceptable friction. The concept may be feasible in the Southern Desert only. The concept is also susceptible to artificially created friction.
- The timeframe of Indian concept is rather wishful and does not cater for unforeseen. Simultaneity will be extremely difficult if the break-in phase is prolonged or the Indian break-out forces fail to achieve a rapid penetration through the defence.
- Interdiction of tactical reserves by deep ground manoeuvre or vertical envelopment (by air assault or Para elements) may be possible. The same may not be possible against strategic reserves unless terrain offers the required strength or a quick break through by large Indian Forces (along-with opening of Main Supply Route in 48 to 72 hours) is accomplished.
- A reversal of air situation (which may be even temporary) during critical stages of the operation may upset the simultaneity of the Operation, and possibly the ultimate outcome.
- Simultaneity and synchronization may not be possible in the absence of an effective and adequate C³I system. The current Indian capability is limited and may not be able to support an operation of this magnitude. The problems may be further accentuated if such an operation is undertaken in hostile Electronic Warfare environments.

Options For Response

Option A – Extending Battlefield Into Indian Territory. This option can also be viewed as a concept of simultaneity in defence. If the Indian Strategic Offensive poses a simultaneous threat to various tiers of our defence then, we could modify our defence system to ensure a simultaneous response to various echelons of Indian Offensive Forces. The concept envisages extending the battlefield into Indian territory, specially to counter follow-on forces. An operation of this nature will fall into the realm of *Air-Land Battle*. Pakistan Army is neither equipped nor trained to

undertake such an operation. In order to develop such a defence system, following pre-requisites have to be ensured, which may not be possible in the foreseeable future due to socio-political and economic reasons: –

- Provision of adequate and restructured forces having the required firepower and mobility.
- Air parity as a minimum requirement.
- Effective C³I system having real time capability.
- Restructured command and staff system capable of handling the fleeting and fluid situations.
- Military and national cultures promoting aggressive thinking and taking calculated risks.

Option B – Extending Battlefield Into Pakistani Territory. Contrary to the earlier option, this option envisages a defence system based on layers organised in depth. A defence system of this nature should be capable of absorbing the Indian offensive, attrite and canalize the Indian Forces to pre-selected areas for final destruction by pre-designated/dedicated forces. This option can only be viable if sufficient depth is available before the strategic objectives or the politically sensitive areas are compromised. The psychological pressure created by letting Indians make an advance against our retrograding forces may be another limiting factor. This concept is based on following pre-requisites which may not be attainable due to our economic, political, geographic and strategic limitations: –

- Adequate strategic depth.
- Strong defence of politically sensitive areas.
- Stamina for a comparatively longer war.
- Adequate forces and weapon systems to hold successive lines of defence and destruction of Indian Forces in the pre-selected areas.
- Suitability of terrain (for successive lines of defence).
- Effective civil defence system for controlling the refugees and war affected civilians.

Option C – Barrier Defence. This concept is defensive in character and envisages trading very limited space for gaining time. The emphasis will be on prolonging the break-in battle of Indian Forces and delaying their break-out. Intensive counter mobility measures will be required to separate Armoured Formations from Infantry and to deny the communication infrastructure for their logistic elements. The concept is based in following pre-requisites: –

- Very strong first line of defence not offering exploitable gaps/weakly held areas.
- Limited and manageable frontages.
- Deriving maximum strength from natural and man made obstacles/features.
- Adequate, quick and effective counter mobility measures.
- Own manoeuvre/reactions should not be restricted.

—Some degree of C³1 and air support.

Suggested Response

In isolation, all the above mentioned options are viable. However, if viewed against the conflicting socio-political, economic, geographic and strategic compulsions; they create a serious dilemma for our defence system. Ideally, we may wish to extend the battlefield into Indian Territory but it may not be possible due to exorbitant expenditure required for extensive re-organisation and re-equipping of our Army. The retrograde defence may not be politically acceptable and militarily advisable in a country having very shallow strategic depth. Similarly barrier defence concept may not be implementable in its classical sense where Holding Corps are deployed on extended frontages.

—Increasing the friction of ground by taking following measures: –

- * Realignment of existing irrigation system (where required) and digging of new canals (in the Southern desert) to suit the defence requirements.
- * Strategic afforestation in successive strips (of adequate width) running parallel to border, involving joint civil-military ventures.
- * Authorisation of FASCAMs (Family of Scatterable Mines) to the Holding Corps for delaying the Indian break-in and break-out battles.

—Giving a counter manoeuvre and sidestepping capability to the defence by equipping Infantry Formations of Holding Corps with adequate ATGMs produced indigenously at affordable prices. This will free the LAT, HAT and armour elements of Divisions and Corps from the protection of Infantry.

Keeping in view the strengths and weaknesses of Indian Offensive and our Defence System, the pros and cons of above mentioned options and our sociopolitical, economic, geographic and strategic limitations; an improved barrier defence system is suggested. Following improvements are suggested in this regard: –

The existing LAT, HAT and armour elements of Holding Corps should be used as a mobile tank destroying force. The same could be organised in a Tank Destroying Brigade with following additional raising/provisions: –

- Brigade Headquarters with adequate C³1 system.
- Armour Reconnaissance Regiment.
- Making the frontages of Holding Corps manageable by creating im~ble areas
- Mechanized Infantry Battalion. for large size mechanized like artificial lakes, water logged patches and swamps. SCARP VI project in the desert of Cholistan is an example in this regard.
- Engineer Company.
- Air Defence Battery.

- Artillery detachment (to direct artillery fire).
- PAF detachment (to direct air effort).
- Surveillance detachment.
- Attack helicopters (to be made available as per Army Plan).

The above mentioned Tank Destroying Brigade will provide the badly needed counter manoeuvre, side stepping capability to our defence system and will ensure following: –

- Denying Indians a quick and uncontested break-out.
- Destruction of Indian Armoured Formations (the centre of gravity of Indian concept of simultaneity).
- Denying Indians, the interdiction of our reserves.

In order to further enhance the counter manoeuvre and side stepping capability of barrier defence (as discussed above), the newly raised/proposed Mechanized Brigades of Holding Corps should be employed in conjunction with the Tank Destroying Brigades. A complementary employment will provide the *Sword and Shield* combination. The Mechanized Brigade could provide the required base of operations to the Tank Destroying Brigade and condition the environments for its effective use; whereas, the Tank Destroying Brigade could be used for the physical destruction of Indian Armoured Formations.

Increasing the Air Defence protection by taking following measures: –

- Equipping Infantry Battalions of Holding Formations with indigenously produced shoulder fired SAMs.
- Provision of effective Air Defence Cover to headquarters, command/control systems and communication facilities.

Besides Tactical and Main Headquarters, establishment of Rear Headquarters at Division and Corps level. This headquarters will help in coordinating own operations against Indian Forces in the rear areas.

Provision of mechanical or/and explosive digging capability to Infantry units for quick preparation of impromptu/hasty defence in the depth.

Authorisation of combat support systems and airborne SLAR (Side Looking Acquisition Radar) system to Holding Corps with a real time data link facility down to Brigade Headquarters. This will not only ensure passage of information quickly but will also save formations from being surprised.

The concept of stay behind parties should be incorporated in the barrier defence. Infantry Battalion Commando Platoons should be trained and equipped to form such parties operating discreetly in the area over run by the Indians. These parties could contribute considerably in delaying the break-in/break-out by taking following actions: –

- Interference with the bridging effort.

- Destruction/neutralization of headquarters.
- Direction of long range artillery fire and air effort.

Establishment of strong points along Main Supply Route, specially on unavoidable choke points, having the ability to hold on for a week.

Effective Electronic Warfare Organisation to deny Indians smooth use of their C³I system.

Availability of adequate air effort during the break-in/break-out battle.

Following indirect and long term measures could further enhance the effectiveness of barrier defence: –

- Ensuring involvement of large size Indian Forces on Internal Security Duties through covert operations.
- Appropriate defence pacts with China and Bangladesh exerting pressure on India to keep large forces on their borders during an Indo-Pakistan War.
- Development of equally effective national communication system and industrial/economic zones West of River Indus.
- Deterrent created by tactical nuclear weapons designed to be used in own territory against large size Indian Forces operating in the Southern Desert.
- Training, equipping and motivating the civil population to support the defence system of Pakistan Army and to launch a protracted guerrilla war if the defence system collapses.

CONCLUSION

The Indian concept of simultaneity in a strategic offensive may initially appear impressive and intimidating but a careful analysis reveals some major flaws in the concept. These weaknesses can be easily exploited to the advantage of our defence system. Similarly, the strong points of the Indian concept should not go unnoticed and must be addressed squarely. The weaknesses of our existing defence system need to be viewed and modified in the light of existing socio-political, economic, geographic and strategic limitations. The suggested defence system in the above discussion takes cognisance of these parameters. The concept of improved barrier defence may take some time to develop but by no means is unattainable by Pakistan Army. We should re-organise, re-equip and train for a destruction oriented defence rather than purely holding role. The suggested concept is in embryonic form and may require the fine tuning. At this stage Indians may not be in a position to achieve simultaneity in its classical sense but they are not very far either. It is, therefore, important to re-organise our defence system now to counter a major threat materializing in the near future.

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