

Strategic Leadership in 1971 Indo Pakistan War



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Introduction

Recent killing of two Indian soldiers in Poonch sector of Jammu and Kashmir has evoked very agitated response in the print and electronic media. A vociferous demand is for quick and effective retaliatory measures. India has so far fought with Pakistan four times, 1947, 1965, 1971 and 1998. On all occasions Indian Armed Forces have proved their superiority and high leadership qualities. The tactical handling and performance of lower formations like brigade and battalions have been superb every time.

Study of the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war throws light on the strategic leadership and effective sense of direction both at the political level and armed forces top brass. Yet it is not being given due importance and credit.

An attempt is being made to bring out some important aspects of leadership at the highest level.

Background

The seeds of troubles were sown a long time back in 1905 when Lord Curzon, then Governor General of India partitioned Bengal Province overtly on the administrative grounds. But it had a political motive of dividing Hindus and Muslims.

Finally it led to the partition of the country into India and Pakistan predominantly on the basis of religion. Pakistan was located in two areas separated at a distance over 1800 kilometers. Apart from the religion, the two wings had nothing in common. Language, geography, culture, eating habits all differed. West Pakistan dominated by Punjabi Muslims never treated East Pakistani Bengali speaking Muslims with equality. They received second class citizens' treatment and East Pakistan was considered more like a colony. Fair share of revenue was never spent on development. This triggered the rise of National Awami League under the leadership of Shaikh Mujibur Rahman. It won the elections in 1970.

During the month of March 1971 massive repressive measures were taken by the army deployed in East Pakistan. Dacca University was raided and many innocent persons were either killed or captured. Shaikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested on March 25, 1971 and taken to West Pakistan.

An exodus of refugees moved to India, which eventually reached a figure of 10 million. This created a panic situation and hence the then Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi summoned an

emergency meeting. During this meeting, Chief of Army Staff was asked to propose a plan to preempt the flow of refugees. He stated that large scale operations cannot be initiated for the next five to six months due to a terrain in East Pakistan and heavy monsoon conditions. Mrs. Indira Gandhi initially was furious but later agreed to his suggestion. Annexure 1 provides details.

Strategic moves

The intervening period was utilized to address the following:-

1. Explain to the world powers the burden of refugees on India.
2. Cultivate good relationship with USSR which resulted in signing of Indo-Russian Treaty in August 1971. This paved the way for import of critical military equipment and armaments. This would also act as a deterrent to possible aggression from China.
3. Train Bangla refugees in gorilla operations and induct them across the border. That force was named as Mukti Bahini. Their operations to continue to undermine the morale of Pakistani troops deployed in East Pakistan.
4. Carry out war games and joint exercises.
5. Once the war starts, the Indian Air Force would attempt to destroy Pakistani air force planes/air fields to gain air superiority and ensure ground troops/formations can operate in a speedy manner without any danger of air strikes.
6. Indian Navy to eliminate presence of Pakistani naval ships and sub marines in Bay of Bengal, carry out raids in Karachi harbor and provide security to Indian commercial ships plying at high seas.

Essence of THE tactical plan

Lieutenant General JFR Jacob who was Chief of Staff of Eastern Command which was overall in charge of operations, conceptualized a plan to avoid and bypass all major formations deployed by East Pakistan Army and head for Dacca for a quick and decisive victory. This incorporated the fundamental principles of war mentioned below.

Principles of war

2. Selection and Maintenance of the Aim
3. Maintenance of Morale
3. Offensive Action
4. Security
5. Surprise
6. Concentration of force
7. Economy of effort
8. Flexibility
9. Co-operation
10. Sustainability/Administration

Unsung heroes

In a gigantic effort to fight such wars it is important to ensure that there is support from all levels though they may not get into the limelight. The role played by various persons like Sardar -Swaran Singh Minister for External Affairs, Jagjivan Ram Defence Minister, Y B Chavan Finance

Minister, Railway Minister, Minister for Surface Communications, various state governments, need special mention.

Lessons for the students of management

1. George Clemenceau ,French diplomat (1841-1929) is quoted as saying 'War is too precious/ important to be left to generals'. In modern days it is an all out effort by the decision makers _political, armed forces and bureaucracy.
2. Leaders at all levels must be must be courageous to tell the truth and accept any consequences. The Annexure reveals the up righteousness.
3. The leader is required to take critical decisions incorporating all foreseeable implications like the possible intervention of United States of America and movement of the Seventh Fleet into Bay of Bengal.
4. Careful planning of timing can make or mar the final outcome.
5. Secrecy has great significance in operations.
6. Co-ordination is a key to success.

Conclusion

"Never in human history was so much owed by so many to so few" these are the words of Late Sir Winston Churchill Prime Minister of United Kingdom during Second World War in praise of Royal Air Force pilots who protected the island from the Nazi planes. With slight modification they are applicable to the strategic leadership of India during 1971 war.

Never in Indian history was so much achieved by so few in such a less time. This will always remain one of the proudest moment for all Indians. In a matter of 14 days the Indian leadership undid what British rulers assiduously followed as a sinister plan and executed it for almost 50 years to create source of permanent threat to India after independence.

Sometime in early 1980s my teen aged children asked me 'What did you do in the war daddy' fashioned after a famous English movie. I had a brief pause and told them that my absence greatly contributed towards the Indian Army's success story! (I was doing a post -graduation course in Institute of Armament Technology Pune with just 7 more officers and Ministry of Defense ruled against the cancellation of the course.)

Annexure 1

October 12, 2007

« Urban Indians Love Free Markets & Free Trade

An Unappealing Military Career»

When Manekshaw Confronted Indira's Cabinet

Filed under: Miscellaneous.Politics — Pragmatic @ 8:21 am

The Field Marshal quoted the Bible and offered to resign...

There are many stories, some true and some apocryphal, about India's legendary soldier - Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw. It is common knowledge that India's military campaign in 1971 to liberate Bangladesh was delayed on professional military advice, against the wishes of the political class. It is delightful to revisit the anecdote in the words of the lead historian of the dramatis personae. The Field Marshal narrated this incident as a personal example of moral courage, at the inaugural Field Marshal KM Cariappa Memorial Lecture in October 1995 at Delhi.

There is a very thin line between being dismissed and becoming a Field Marshal. In 1971, when Pakistan cracked down in East Pakistan, hundreds and thousands of refugees started pouring into India, into West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The Prime Minister held a Cabinet meeting in her office. The External Affairs Minister Sardar Swaran Singh, the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, the Defence Minister, Babu Jagjivan Ram and the Finance Minister, Yashwant Rao Chavan were present. I was then summoned.

A very angry, grim-faced Prime Minister read out the telegrams from the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. She then turned around to me and said, "What are you doing about it?"

And I said, "Nothing, it's got nothing to do with me. You didn't consult me when you allowed the BSF, the CRP and RAW to encourage the Pakistanis to revolt. Now that you are in trouble, you come to me. I have a long nose. I know what's happening."

I then asked her what she wanted me to do.

She said, "I want you to enter Pakistan."

And I responded, "That means war!"

She said, "I do not mind if it is war."

"Have you read the Bible?" I said.

The Foreign Minister, Sardar Swaran Singh asked, "What has Bible got to do with this?"

I explained, that the first book, the first chapter, the first words, the first sentence God said was, "Let there be light" and there was light. Now you say, "Let there be war" and there will be war, but are you prepared? I am certainly not. This is the end of April. The Himalayan passes are opening and there can be an attack from China if China gives us an ultimatum.

The Foreign Minister asked, "Will China give an ultimatum?" And I said, "You are the Foreign Minister, you tell me". I told them that my armoured division and two of my infantry divisions were away. One in the Jhansi/Babina area, the other in Samba and the third one in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. I mentioned that I will require all the road space, all the railway wagons, the entire railway system to move these formations to the operational areas and that harvesting was in progress in the Punjab and UP and they would not be able to move the harvest which would rot; and I pointed out to the Agriculture Minister that it wouldn't be my responsibility if there was a famine. Then I said, "My armoured division, which is my big striking force is

supposed to have 189 tanks operational! I have got only 11 tanks that are fit to fight/'

The Finance Minister, who is a friend of mine asked, "Sam why only 11?"

So I told him, "Because you are the Finance Minister. I have been asking you for money for over a year and you say you haven't got it!"

And finally I turned around to the Prime Minister and said that the rains were about to start in East Pakistan and when it rains there, it pours and when it pours, the whole countryside is flooded. The snows are melting, the rivers would become like oceans. If you stand on one bank, you can't see the other. All my movement would be confined to roads. The Air Force, because of climatic conditions would not be able to support me. Now Prime Minister, give me your orders. The grim Prime Minister with her teeth clenched said, "The Cabinet will meet again at four o'clock".

The members of the Cabinet started walking out. I being the junior most was the last to go and as I was leaving, she said/"Chief, will you stay back?"

I turned around and said, "Prime Minister, before you open your mouth, may I send you my resignation on grounds of health, mental or physical?"

She said, "Every thing you told me is true".

"Yes! It is my job to tell you the truth" I responded, "and it is my job to fight, it is my job to fight to win and I have to tell you the truth."

She smiled at me and said, "All right Sam, you know what I want?"

I said, "Yes, I know what you want!"

[Field Marshal KM Cariappa Memorial Lectures 1995 - 2000, Lancer Publishers & Distributors, Delhi, 2001]

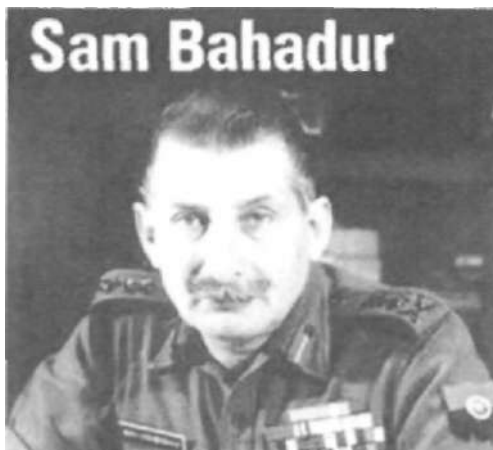
Partition of Bengal Province in 1905 by Lord Curzon



Late Indira Gandhi -Prime Minister of India during 1971



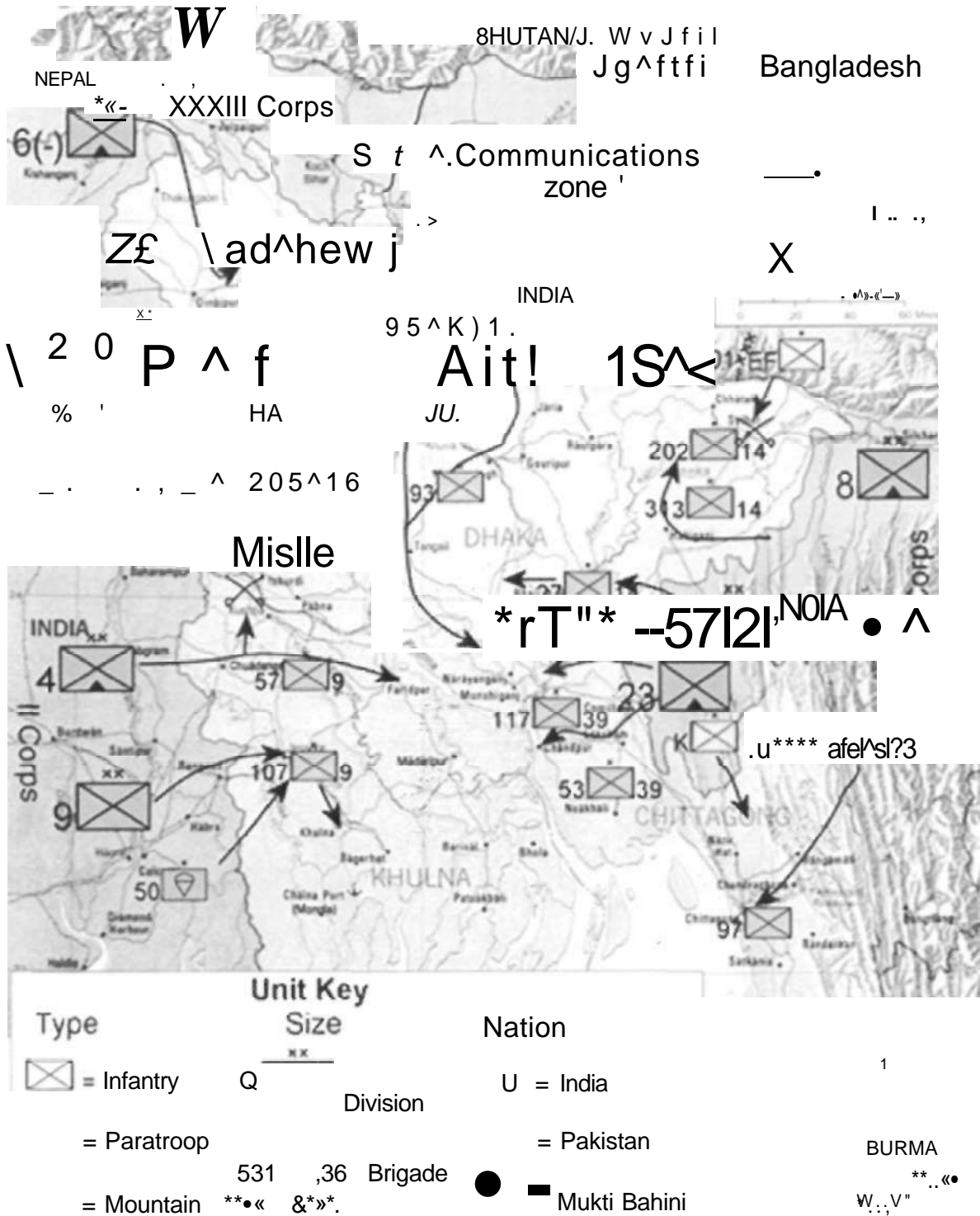
**General (Later Field Marshal) Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji
Manekshaw Chief of Army Staff in 1971**



MAP OF EAST PAKISTAN (Now Bangladesh)



DEPLOYMENT of ARMY FORMATIONS



**Lt Gen'(Retd) JFR Jacob
Chief of Staff Eastern Command during 1971 War
and architect of superior tactical plan**



**A moment in history that created a new geography of the Indian
Sub -continent.**



**Lt Gen Niazi signing the instrument of surrender at Race course in
Dacca 14 December 1971, in the presence of galaxy of war heroes**