

Use of Force: Possibilities in the Indo - Pak Context

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Preamble

My presentation on, “Use of Force - Possibilities in the Indo–Pak Context” shall be brief and pointed. I shall make a few salient points, leaving the nitty gritty for discussion, in the interactive session that will follow. I may add that what I present today, is not any institutional position, but merely a personal opinion, albeit one that is steeped quite naturally, in my professional experiences and inclinations. May I also asterisk to the arguments that follow, a few caveats

Firstly, I am not for a moment advocating military jingoism of any sort – my line is not that of 'force come what may, *muh tor jawab* or any of those fanciful things.' It would in fact, be extremely churlish to do so, with an audience as informed and seasoned as this. I do however, argue, for the precise application of military power, by a polity, that is wise to its uses and alive to its consequences. That, in fact, is the central plank of my persuasion.

Secondly, such a decision (that of using force or otherwise) will always be the aggregated outcome of the capacities and persuasions of all instruments and institutions of state - the military it is obvious cannot act in isolation or of its own accord - so some of this talk in the context of 26 / 11 of either, “an over zealous military desperate for a crack” or “the military having let us down” is quite quite unfair. If the nature of capacity building and decision making is collective and collegiate, so must culpability be shared.

The Persuasion

The persuasion that I make, very simply, is this - the use of force in the Indo–Pak context is a viable proposition provided it is configured in the right strategic and politico – military framework. Critical to such a proposition, is a direct and meaningful dialogue between the political class and the military, in anticipation of possible conflict situations and

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not as a reaction to events. With reference to 26 / 11, if the CCS had met not on 27 / 11, but perhaps on 20 / 1 and at appropriate intervals thereafter, to discuss our military readiness for possible conflict scenarios, our response to the tragic events of Mumbai would perhaps have been better. In this regard we may consider abandoning the annual and antiquated ritual of the Prime Minister addressing the Combined Commanders in this rather headmaster - school boy manner with a lot of clichéd speechmaking thrown in - and adopt a more modern & intimate model of professional brainstorming wherein critical issues of military readiness are thrashed out to their very nuts and bolts. In other words, if the wider politico - strategic context of conflict scenarios and the role of the military within such a context is discussed, understood, adapted and pursued in an anticipatory manner, the application and utility of force can always be achieved - at least very substantially, if not in full measure.

Here, may I draw your attention to two masterpieces in military literature - Supreme Command by Eliot Cohen and Masters & Commanders by Andrew Roberts which recount, with fascinating vividness, the relationship between political leaders (Lincoln, Churchill, Roosevelt, Ben Guiron) and their military principals - the trajectory of their disputes, the many suspicions and rebuffs giving way to grudging trust and admiration and culminating in mutual confidence and empowerment with the political leaders even acquiring a rare mastery over military detail and technology thus helping to shape the tactics and strategies of conflict. Military force will be used to effective purpose, when national leaders involve themselves in the pursuit of military policy and question and drive the generals, making better generals of their generals. And when they do so, they, the political masters, do not emerge as meddlers, dodgers, doves or naifs but as valuable and respected drivers of military planning and processes. From the rather juvenile construct that we are in, this is the mature framework we need to graduate to, if our instruments of force are to be put to effective use.

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But posit this with the prevalent reality - examine the nature and quality of strategic guidance that emanates from our political leadership and the gross inadequacies are quite apparent. We have raconteurs with ringside

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views of history tell us in informed tones of how a leader when queried for strategic guidance, in a gesture of great strategic brilliance, simply lapsed into silence. Most recently, we know, even the very respected Atal Behari Vajpayee, when asked by the Chiefs Of Staff Committee, during OP PARAKRAM, as to what the missions or objectives of his "aar paar ki larai" were, said, "aap chaliye hum batayenge." And then never spoke a word. Such consultation that took place, occurred in the most desultory of ways. After 26/11, the response of the apex political body was just as ambiguous. In such a dispensation where the natural political inclination is to duck, dodge and hedge, rather than engage the military leadership in informed enquiry and discussion, quite naturally, either force will not get used, or it will not be used in the most utilitarian of ways.

The Nature Of Conflict

We may perhaps also do well to consider for a moment that we are no longer in a world of "distinctive periods of big wars and peace" but in one of "continuous conflicts and confrontations." This is important. The commonly heard refrain, "ki are ab larai nahi hogi" is actually a partial reflection of this understanding. Wars as *massive deciding events* in international affairs are a thing of the past (the right refrain would perhaps be 'ki ab woh bari larai nahi hogi'). Force in today's context, therefore, is unlikely to provide *definite victories* that will lead to the resolution of political problems. It can only contribute and support conflict resolution by other means. Our very expectations from instruments of force, therefore, must be realistically calibrated. So when we say that force is not an option or is no longer an option, we are perhaps saying that force will not produce decisive outcomes in the manner of World War II or 1971, so as to bring the great Indo-Pak confrontation to a decisive end. But, instruments of force, if suitably integrated, will continue to be options to achieve operational objectives that in turn will help to mitigate conflict, even as the larger confrontation may well continue. On the other hand, demonstrated weakness and a repeated lack of response in the face of constant provocation, emboldens the adversary and intensifies conflict (more and more terror strikes) thus allowing the confrontation to exacerbate further. Force is an option, not to balkanise the Pakistani state or to simply blow it up from the air or the sea, but as a tool of limited but critical utility in threatening, cajoling, bullying and crafting solutions, provided you integrate it into your statecraft in a consistent manner. But after consciously excluding the military dynamic

from your statecraft all along, if you turn around suddenly after 26 / 11 and ask of your military as to what it can do - there would be difficulties. On the other hand, if you took care to integrate the military dynamic (and here I refer to the aggregate of our military and policing capacities) all along as valuable contributors and drivers in the day to day processes of National Security (Internal and External), a great deal could have been done. If the coast guard had been put under the operational control of the Navy as was being argued all along, if the command and control and leadership issues of the NSG had been handled with greater acumen as was being urged all along, and if realistic counter - terror capacities had been created once again in accordance with constant urgings, 26 / 11 may have been altogether preventable or at least responded to in a more efficient manner, precluding the need to use force at all. In fact, many of the anguished cries to use force against Pakistan were driven by feelings of abject helplessness and shame on account of the inability of a modern nation state to fix Kasab and his accomplices in the first few hours of the strike. The very gentlemen who argued that we do not need a strong military and an efficient police force or at least said that we could get by with prevalent inadequacies and sloth ; those that reasoned that bomb blasts were inevitable in democracies, now ducked TV cameras. Only to emerge a few months later to rationalise further. Oh it was a war like situation, they said, so what could we do? Was it? Or was it more accurately, merely a bold terror strike, that you turned into a war like situation by your manifest lack of preparedness, that in turn led to cries to teach Pakistan a lesson? Is this a wise predicament to land yourself in? I should think not. So the threads of my argument would run like this - mature and sagacious democracies should abjure the use of force unless absolutely necessary - if you have to sustain such a position, however, make sure that you invest adequately in and nurture strong and sophisticated instruments of force. This will help you to deter, detect and fix breaches with despatch as also preclude the possibility of being forced to use force. If on the other hand, you keep arguing that force is not a usable option and you therefore do not need to invest in such like capacities, you are more likely to be pushed into a corner from where you will use force not through precise and deft blows but through a wild flaying of arms - what Rupert Smith calls the non utilitarian use of force. Strength, Mr Chairman, ensures deterrence and is stabilising while weaknesses, friends, are escalatory and destabilising . The choices are stark and the implications profound.

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The Grand Strategy

Military Options against Pakistan must flow from a Grand Strategy. The framework of such a strategy, in my view should be one that is rooted in strategic balance and looks at Pakistan more as a pest, than a substantial threat. The more serious threat we must not ever forget lies to our East - we need to shift gaze accordingly; actually we already have - we now need to maintain and perhaps intensify the focus. We must maintain the momentum of our economic growth while concurrently ensuring that we make appropriate transfers towards the building of our military muscle - sustained allocations that flow from a resolve to build capacities and not a trajectory punctuated by troughs and crests - 92,500 crores before 26 / 11 and 1,43000 crores when the LeT and the Jamat - ul - Dawa tell you to, ensuring preparedness not for the crisis, but after the crisis. We must do nothing precipitate that allows the unravelling of our economic growth, which must continue to be the mainstay of our strategic course - we must not initiate conflict with Pakistan, but only respond in a swift and calibrated manner when provoked, while shifting the onus of further escalation into Pakistan's court. A pest like Pakistan, does not merit disproportionate use of force. Let Pakistan find its way around the various obstacles and challenges that come along the escalatory spiral - political, diplomatic, economic, military and those posed by American interlocutors and other shades of international opinion, - for a change let Pakistan be gripped with escalatory dilemmas, let Pakistan grapple with the larger issues of war and peace, let debates like these rage in their strategic institutions while we wait and watch. We must of course remain prepared for an escalation and the consequences that follow.

Military Options - A Future 26 / 11

In preparation for a future 26 / 11, therefore, I would recommend the following

- First and foremost, we need resolute capacity building to prevent and respond to a terror strike, because such terror strikes are entirely preventable. The raising of additional NSG hubs will undoubtedly help to reduce our response time. A lot more, however, needs to be done in terms of building capacities to be able to bust terror cells prior to their maturation and taking counter terror response capacities to the thana level. All that has been done in terms of amending terror laws and structuring of the NIA is laudatory indeed but is principally of use in the investigative domain - we need to move with far greater despatch and purpose in the area of capacity building for prevention and intervention.
- Should a major terror strike take place we need to respond swiftly

(within 24 hours after a quick establishment of Pak complicity) with a declaratory aerial precision strike (missiles being more escalatory in nature) on one or more targets - possibly the LeT HQ in Mudrike, the ISI HQ in downtown Islamabad, barrages in Guddu, Taunsa, Jinnah and Kotri, a powerstation in Gilgit or even the Pak Army General HQ in Islamabad.

- The purpose of the precision strike will be to signal that while we will respond, we do not wish to escalate. It would also, perhaps be a more effective way of establishing Pak complicity than the laborious exchange of dossiers. Should Pakistan wish to escalate, we are prepared - this is what I would call strategic restraint - while we have the ability to escalate we choose not to. On Pakistan it would impose additional burdens - of proving that it was not linked to the terror strike, of choosing its escalatory options given all its problems on the Western borders, American and international pressures, those of civil society, the media etc, etc.
- What is the probability of an escalatory response from Pakistan? Extremely low to my mind. There is nothing that deters a professional army from acting more than the fear of failure, especially one that has assumed the elevated position of guardian of the nation's ideological and strategic frontiers. Given the fact that more than 50% of its combat potential is committed along its Western borders, the risks and consequences of failure, may just be unbearable. And the relative combat edges between the two sides are such that they perhaps do not allow either side to escalate to decisive advantage.
- And now a brief word about our Strike Corps and the big armoured push?
- Are they usable in the prevalent nuclear environment? Yes, albeit with shallower objectives?
- Will they deliver decisive outcomes? No, perhaps not, given the huge voids due to poor budgetary allocations, our obsession with procedural rather than outcome oriented acquisitions and our resorting to cosmetic tinkering in acquisition processes when the need of the hour is substantive reform?

They should in the obtaining environment be used in the deterrent mould, poised to take on a Pak offensive in the escalatory spiral.

Strategic Acuity / Military Effectiveness

Allow me to dwell briefly on the twin issues of strategic restraint and military effectiveness. Strategic restraint is of course a most laudable idea, provided it is rooted in strategic acuity and not strategic sloth, in capability and not inability. The use or the ability to use force, is not a one-off event but a sustained dynamic that is predicated on the development of a sagacious but robust strategic outlook, a precise military capability and a distilled politico - military understanding of the utility and application of instruments of force. To the academically inclined, may I draw your attention to an interesting piece of work by Risa Brooks and Elizabeth Stanely on, "Creating Military Power and the Sources of Military Effectiveness" whereby through numerous case studies the authors demonstrate as to how a nation's effectiveness is determined not only by its wealth, GNP, technologies and resources but also by cultural and social factors that influence how patterns and routines emerge and evolve for strategic and operational planning, procurement, creation of doctrine, etc, etc. The book outlines as to how nation's like China and Israel allow their military effectiveness to far exceed their raw capacities because of vastly superior strategic cultures. Pakistan, too, it must be grudgingly conceded, operates admirably at the strategic level. In sheer contrast, civil society in India, for some strange reasons, has not nurtured its instruments of force with requisite care and vigour, allowing on the other hand, layers and layers of bureaucracy to emasculate the institutional strengths of our police and military. The vicissitudes in our defence allocations for example, have very little to do with affordability and a lot to do with lack of motivation. The Big Lesson from 26 / 11 for civil society, therefore, is this - on the back of your candlelight vigils mount a more sustained and purposeful vigil - that of restoring your police forces to health and facilitating the capacity building of your military.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, allow me Chairman Sir a piece of rhetorical flourish. First, a Chinese saying, which loosely translated goes something like this - the first time I slap you it is my fault but it goes on to say - the second time

I slap you it is yours (acknowledging that in statecraft as in day to day life initiation of violence is not right, but if, structurally and wilfully you allow weaknesses to descend on you, who else can you blame but yourself). We need to take note. To the Indian State and the practitioners of its statecraft, I say this - if after having built the necessary capacities and having nurtured strong and sophisticated instruments, in a given situation you carefully consider and reject the use of force, I will respect your choice; but - but if such a decision is driven by the constant refusal to see reason, manifest slothfulness, abject pusillanimity and the repeated and some would say eternal compromise - well then, one can only turn to an urdu couplet to describe our sad predicament - subah ke chehre sham tak dhal jate hain, itne samjhauton pe jite hain - ki bas marte chale jate hain.

I do hope, even at this late hour, we can shake ourselves out of our stupor and see reason. In the months and years to come, we need to make sure that our strategic stride is in lockstep with the span of our economic flight. Appropriate and enhanced allocations for national security to nurture our instruments of force should only be a natural corollary. That, I am afraid is the inevitable strategic consequence of our economic growth. 