STRATEGIC ISSUES

A MILITARY APPRECIATION

Why our Liberation movement succeeded

MUMTAZ IQBAL

TICTORY has a thousand fathers Defeat is an orphan' Basically there are three main inter-locking reasons for this success. These are examined below from a military perspective.

People's Participation The most important reason is the determination of the peoples of Bangladesh to be free. This aspiration crystallised after Islamabad's

military action of 26 March 1971. A crucial development was the formation of a Bangladesh government-in-exile. It had enough credibility to enjoy popular support within Bangladesh and reach understandings with the host authorities

The exile government adopted a pragmatically innovative strategy. This helped mobilise internal and external forces and resources to bring into existence a spirited resistance movement and expanding guerrilla warfare operations, especially after Indian gunners destroyed 50% of the Border Outpost (BOP) by July 1971. This facilitated infiltration and exfiltration.

As in Occupied Europe in the Second World War (WWII), resistance and guerrilla warfare kept the people's hope alive, a priceless asset. But could these two factors alone have led to independence? Probably not, at least in the shortterm, to judge by historical evi-

Guerrilla war is the instrument of the militarily weak against stronger conventional forces. England's Special Operations Executive (SOE) in WWII extensively implemented Churchill's order to set Europe ablaze through spying and sabotage.

This action sustained civilian morale in occupied Europe. But it merely pinpricked the Germans (see SOE 1940-1946 by MRD Foot; and The White Rabbit by Bruce Mar-

Guerrilla's hit-and-run tactics ensure their survival. These unsettle but seldom defeat regular forces as in the former Yugoslavia and USSR (see Eastern Approaches by Fitzroy Mclean and Soviet Partisan Warfare by Otto Heilbronner), and the cur-

rent resistance in Iraq. Guerrillas invariably lose in pitched battles against regulars. Thus, the Wehrmacht (German army) mauled Tito's guerrillas and Soviet partisans in bandit suppres-

sion campaigns in 1942, and decimated Gen. Bor-Komarowski's Polish Underground Army in Warsaw in August 1944 (while the Red Army 20 miles away didn't lift a finger to help the Poles). US Marines overwhelmed Falluja in November

The Viet Conga lost heavily in the Tet offensive of 1968 though this one factor probably more than any other irrevocably turned US public against the Vietnam war (see White House Years by Henry Kissinger). Mao retreated from Kiangsi to Shensi in the epic 16 months Long March of about 5,000 kms when cornered by Chiang's fifth extermination campaign of autumn 1934 (see The Long March by Harrison Salisbury & The Selected Works of Mao Ze Dong). Our own Mukti Bahini (MB) got indifferent results when directly assaulting Pakistani fixed positions.

Special forces operating as guerrillas at different scale levels in WW II produced mixed results with little effect on the conflict's final outcome. Stirling's SAS in the Western Desert in 1941-42 destroyed many German and Italian planes on shoestring resources (see Winged Dagger by Roy Farran) Force 136 in Malaysia achieved modest success (see Force 136 and The Jungle is Neutral by Spencer Chapman). Wingate's Chindits and Merrill's Marauders performances in Burma were incommensurate with the resources used (see The Marauders by C. Ogburn and

Gideon's Trumpet). Thus, Gen. MAG Osmany's ops plan of September 1971 to send the EBR battalions in small commando groups inside Bangladesh would not have helped much. That's why the sector commanders were lukewarm to this proposal, especially as they wanted to conserve their forces-inbeing (see Muldhara 71 by Muyeedul Hasan, a close associate of Tajuddin's).

Cuba excepted, guerrillas are most effective in support of regulars when victory is certain or probable. Thus, the operations of the French resistance (Maquis) and Tito's guerrillas were carefully calibrated and peaked to coincide with Operation Overlord (the Allied invasion of Normandy) in June 1944. The MB's effectiveness increased dramatically from October 1971 when the smell of victory was in the air (see



Geographyand

Demography Lack of geographical contiguity of Pakistan's two wings with the east having the majority of the population is the second reason. The former made national integration impractical, two economies inevitable and military logistics impossible. The latter gave legitimacy to Bengali aspirations.

Geographical contiguity and minority demands rarely spawn successful liberation movements irrespective of the breadth and depth of popular support and par-ticipation. This happens because the centre's staying power exceeds the insurgents.

Fatigue eventually overwhelms the rebels. The long-running but unsuccessful insurgencies in Baluchistan, Chechnya, CHT, Kashmir, Nagaland, Mizoram, Sri Lanka and Tibet validate this point. (Note: successful insurgency becomes national liberation; its participants freedom fighters (FF). A failed one is an insurrection; its members terrorists. One man's FF is another's

terrorist. The classic examples are PLO's Yasser Arafat and Israel's Menachem Begin).

But whether this would have spilled over into a successful national liberation movement is an interesting question. The interplay of accommodation, reform, threats and use of force probably would have kept the pot boiling without engendering a fatal explosion beyond the point of no return.

Sanctuary and External Support These two factors make up the third

reason for our successful liberation. A sanctuary is vital for guerrillas' survival. It gives them time and space to organise political and military resources to defeat the

Sanctuaries can be internal like Mao's Yenan or Castro's Sierra Madre mountains (see The Cuban Revolution by Tad Szulc). Or they can be external like Yunnan was for the Viet Minh, Nagas and Mizos; Laos and Cambodia for the Viet Cong; Tunisia for the FLN; and India for the LTTE and MB

A sanctuary is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success. The hemorrhaging insurgencies in India's Seven Sisters and Sri Lanka bear this out. The host country and others, preferably a superpower, must give sustained moral and substantial material support suffi-cient to tilt the balance in the insur-

PRC's establishment in 1948 gave big fillip to Ho Chi Minh's Vietnamese. So did Soviet SAMs (Surface to Air Missiles) to Hanoi during the Second Indo-China War (the first was against the French -- see Street Without Joy by Bernard Fall).

Our liberation struggle got boosted after India decided to support the MB initially with arms and training and later with its armed forces under the security umbrella provided by the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty of August 1971.

This combination ensured the success of the Indo-Bangladesh forces under India's Eastern Command (Lt. Gen. JS Aurora).

Aurora's forces enjoyed several advantages. These included: a favourable political and diplomatic

environment; time for operational planning, war gaming and logistical build-up; absolute air and naval supremacy; excellent tactical intelligence; substantive and substantial support from guerrillas and local population; and a weary, demoralised and tactically unbalanced enemy with poor command and control and without a cause and the will to fight (see Surrender at Dacca by Lt. Gen JFR Jacob- he was Aurora's chief of staff - and The Betrayal of East Pakistan by Lt. Gen. AAK Niazi).

If Napoleon's dictum that the moral is to the material as three is to one is relevant, then Aurora's operating environment was a commander's dream.

Eastern Command astutely exploited these assets. With the help from MB and local civilians, it bypassed, infiltrated and set roadocks to unhinge and destroy the Pakistanis. This was similar to Macarthur's island-hopping strategy in the SW Pacific in 1943-44 during WW II (see American Caesar by William Manchester).

The allied forces conducted no

set piece battles. Instead they fought a series of heavy somewhat independent sector skirmishes involving battalion occasionally brigade level forces supported by artillery and air strikes, and occasionally tanks. Extensive mopping-up operations followed these skir-

The Pakistanis surrender of Jessore (abandoned on 7 December, also Pearl Harbour Day), Mainamati and Sylhet without fighting shows their low morale and also their realism in not courting futile martyrdom. Where fixed positions as in Bhaduria, Hilli, Jamalpur and Kamalpur were assaulted, the defenders resisted stoutly.

Eastern Command did a good job. But to describe its operations as a lightning campaign (Blitzkrieg), as do Maj. Gen. DK Palit and Sukhwant tively their The Lightning Campaign and Victory in Bangladesh. A contrary exaggeration is the remark by another Indian general to Muldhara's Muyeedul Hasan that the exertions of Aurora's forces after 10 December was comparable to that of a hazardous and extended route march!).

Blitzkrieg's essence is speed. All arms combine to punch holes along a narrow front. These are exploited to become the floodgates for an expanding torrent (Liddell Hart).

Thus, tank spearheads of Rommel's 7th. Panzer Division (dubbed Ghost Division by the French) aggressively advanced from Ardennes across the Meuse to Amiens on the Channel coast in May 1940 to cover at times 50 kms a day, leaving its accompanying infantry well behind on occasions. The Panzers sowed havoc and confusion in their passage (see Blitzkrieg by Len Deighton).

The Indian Army's equipment, training and outlook plus the Bangladesh terrain made such proonged and swift movement impractical and unimaginable.

Nevertheless, Aurora's three corps made good gains in the war's early days. This is evidenced by the capture of Jhenidah by II Corps (Lt. Gen. later Gen. Raina, COS), Palashbari by XXXIII Corps (Lt. Gen. ML Thapan) and the Meghna Bulge river ports of Ashuganj, Daudkandi and Chandpur by IV Corps (Lt. Gen. Sagat Singh) by 9 December.

Thereafter, movement slowed due to terrain difficulties and lagging logistics. Thus, IV Corps took four days despite negligible opposition to establish an effective

bridgehead in Narsingdi because of insufficient amphibious and helicapability to cross the Meghna.

2 Para of the crack 50 Ind. Para. Bde captured Tangail on 11 December afternoon. It took three days for advance elements of 101 Communications Zone (Maj. Gen. GC Nagra replacing the injured Brig. GS Gill on 4 December) to reach the almost defenceless outskirts of Dhaka 90 kms away because of transport constraints.

In retrospect, it's clear that Indian ops plan would have been more effective had it allocated more resources including armour to the northern sector under 101 Comm Zone since the country around and north of Tangail is tankable and is the shortest route to Dhaka. The war conceivably could have ended a few days sooner than 16 December.

Dhaka became the prime objective after the Seventh Fleet entered the Bay of Bengal. Thus Jacob's criticism of Army HQ's including FM Manekshaw's role in supervising the preparation of the ops plan where Dhaka incredibly was not the main objective is not without merit (Surrender at Dhaka, pp 65-67).

But these episodes and comments don't detract from the allied forces' success. Whether they could have done the job better and faster is of interest to staff colleges, especially Mirpur, Quetta and Wellington.

An interesting statistic is that the fight of the Indian and Pakistani regulars occurred essentially etween the so-called martial races. Niazi's troops were all PMs (Punjabi Mussalmans), Pathans and Baluchis. Sixty-one of Aurora's 71 infantry battalions that saw action were Garhwalis and Rajputs (11 bns each), Dogras / Jats /Punjabis and Sikhs (18 bns) (see Surrender at Dhaka, Appendix 9).

Summing Up Our liberation struggle was the complex product among others of history and geography, calculated deceit and gross miscalculation by Yahya's junta and our appropriately valiant

Iron cuts iron. Regular armies are needed to defeat other regulars. The MB's resistance inside and outside Bangladesh kept hope alive and physically and psychologically soft ened the enemy. The Bangladesh authorities successfully mobilised domestic irregulars, Indian and EBR regulars and Soviet support. A just cause and the good guys won.

VICTORY DAY

An introspection

BRIG GEN JAHANGIR KABIR, ndc, psc

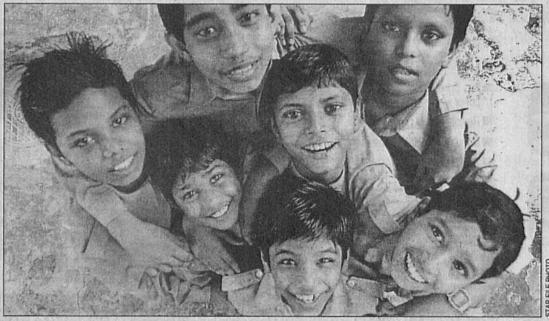
ICTORY Day is more than a national celebration in Bangladesh. It is the reaching of manhood of Bengalis. Our victory overwhelmed the historically low watermark that we always tried to exaggerate rather mystically or in folklore out of a subjugated past. With isolated exceptions, our past has nearly always failed to show its vigour and energy for an independent existence. That Bakhtiyar Khilji came with seventeen horsemen to conquer Bengal does not add to our pride, for he never spoke a word of Bengali or his known descendants ever adopted our culture.

December 16th is more than a military victory or birth of a nation. It is redemption of a heritage of valour and glory that remained hidden since the dawn of history of the region. It signified Bengali as a culture, of religion and language, of songs and music, it has an inward boundary but outward opulence, that it embraced everything but justified nothing. That it was an epic struggle for freedom but carefully denying the faultlines to venerate the spirit of civilised existence.

What is really the lifeline for the existence of Bangladesh? Language! Why then there is a political divide between 'us' and 'them'? Is there any possibility like East and West Germany, north and South Vietnam or for that matter, North and South Korea with fluttering hearts? Tons of literature can be produced on common grounds. Yet the shadow will perhaps never meet the self as the sun never meets the moon. Falsity of given names has divided Chan Mia and Tundra Babu meaning the same but never meeting in substance.

Is religion all-meaningful to Bengali culture? Bengalis were the first to give birth to the Muslim League nearly a century ago right here in Dhaka, a political platform envisioning a separate homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. More than three decades later Sher-E-Bangla, A. K. Fazlul Huq was the one to propose Pakistan in Lahore in 1940. Yet the Bengali youth were the first to revolt against Pakistan when Mr. Jinnah denied secular Bengali for more Muslim Urdu. By '71 the revolt spread all over and on every political shade, trotting guns and firing the last shots on the body of Pakistan. Such is the tragedy of Pakistan that the rulers turned destroyers by sheer

If America can still remain secular after reposing confidence on the God-fearing Bush, an abode of freemen but never electing a black or brown man to their presidency; and India remain secular in spite of the Modis and Advanis, Bangladesh having elected two ladies in succession to the highest executive office, cannot be justifiably accused as a hub of religious exuberance. We vote in spite of the candidates' questionable quality, we are a democracy in spite of corruption, we speak right or wrong and you agree or disagree, because there is freedom. Born in a poor and illiterate society I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in our lifetime, while readily agreeing with you that, at the end we have very little harvest to take home due to the nibbling all the way around. Nevertheless we have to do the weeding out with a conviction that some day our children will take a better harvest home.



misrule and misjudgement. Religion took a backseat out of necessity, hiding in the quivering hearts.

Struggle for Bangladesh defied religion in its overbearing need of unity in the crisis and adopted 'Joy Bangla' as the battle cry. Nonetheless she started yearning for religion after the euphoria of victory soon met the ground-reality of reconstruction of the war ravaged land. Hunger, despair, deprivation, greed and corruption visited the desolated land; religion once again cast the shadow almost at confessional level as panacea of salvation. In politics religion sneaked through the back

door in doses and over-doses from the jackboots. It would be fallacious to perceive that religion is imposed by force, rather it was unleashed from the heart of the people cleverly stroking the hidden corners. The average Bengali heart is not of fundamentalist breed but cannot live without religion either. It's a syndrome that confuses many international observers.

With their thunders on the podium and in public image, veteran politicians and suave bureaucrats wittingly acted as the facilitators to the adventurism of the military. It was easy for the bureaucrats, for they

were not supposed to have colours including, perceived ethical ones. And it was yet easier for generals to flock together for they were always accused of being illiterate or halfliterate. Interestingly, everybody fought well on the crumbs leaving the loaf aside to the generals. It was shame for all in an independent Bangladesh.

Bangladesh have picked up much of Pakistan today except the name, and of course, the umbilical cord that tied us together. A veteran Indian politician accused late Indira Gandhi that she had not divided Pakistan but created two Pakistans. We could not

entirely refute: for what our fathers dreamt of Pakistan as an egalitarian society based on justice and fair play, half a century later are attainable goals in Bangladesh today. At times I have a feeling that there are not two Pakistans but one: and that is Bangladesh- that our fathers dreamt. Mr. Jinnah had in the first Constituent assembly of Pakistan declared, Hindus cease to be Hindus and Muslims cease to be Muslims, that we are all Pakistanis' or words to that effect. We do not have to cease to be anything. As long as we are true Bangladeshis we can retain our religious diversity with cultural unity, for the admiration for Kabiguru or Nazrul does not come in the way of ourlove for them.

If America can still remain secular after reposing confidence on the God-fearing Bush, an abode of freemen but never electing a black or brown man to their presidency; and India remain secular in spite of the Modis and Advanis, Bangladesh having elected two ladies in succession to the highest executive office, cannot be justifiably accused as a hub of religious exuberance. We vote in spite of the candidates' questionable quality, we are a democracy in spite of corruption, we speak right or wrong and you agree or disagree, because there is freedom. Born in a poor and illiterate society I am immensely proud of what we have achieved in our lifetime, while readily agreeing with you that, at the end we have very little harvest to take home due to the nibbling all the way around. Nevertheless, we have to do the weeding out with a conviction that some day our children will take a better harvest home. That is not only the pride or prejudice but a yearly resolve of the Victory Day.

The joy of freedom that victory brought might feel overcast due to the gathering clouds. A shadow may blind the light occasionally but can not deny the source, as eclipse could never deny the sun or the moon. That's why I feel emotional on this 16th Day of December that my existence cannot be denied as a freeman of a free country in spite of our fail-

Today, I offer my heartfelt salute to those who gave their lives so that we could live in freedom including those who fought with or without weapons. I am beaten many times but not yet a broken heart.

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The problem of world peace

Peace? Oops! We are in a mess. The world's resources are vanishing; global warming will shortly have us canoeing to work; the gap between the world's rich and poor is widening; and much of the West is littered with radioactive junk. Globalisation and a military revolution have combined to power by jeopardizing the wellaccepted norms of democracy.

The human race has not learnt the lesson to live in peace and understanding and has failed to establish a viable world order based on ever lasting peace, amity and co-operation. The world is on an edge of a precipice. In the nuclear age in which we live, war means total destruction. Regional wars have occurred and may occur but world war between big powers will plunge the world again into Stone Age.

The basic cause of this deplorable state of affairs is suspicion. This suspicion is rooted in the very nature of world polity. The strong nations assert their rights to dominate the weaker ones by means of different measure political, economic, ideological and military. The doctrine of absolute sovereignty is responsible for wars and conflicts. Aggressive nationalism is also the harbinger of

Our world is characterised by constant warfare, mutual recrimination, hatred and jealousy. Out of the heart of our civilisation came the two world wars, persecution of millions of people on racial grounds, concentration camps and atomic

A national animosity brought about two World Wars and threatens the third. Ideological cleavages make the picture more confounded.

Imperialistic and expansionist design have always been powerful factor in generating an atmosphere of tension and panic. All great powers, whatever may be their ideologies or conceptions of life, want to expand at the expense of other the feeble and helpless nations of the world. Territorial aggrandisement is still one of the most powerful elements of world conflict.

After the Second World War, the world was divided into two Power blocs the Western Bloc dominated by the United States and the Communist Bloc dominated by the Soviet Union. This bipolarism was the essential feature of midtwentieth century

The two world organisations the League of Nation and the UNO have not been able to solve the enigma of world peace. The former was finished at the altar of Nazi and Fascist arrogance; the latter is still alive but weak and faltering in its approaches and policies. Its work is greatly hampered by its lack of universality and the division of

great powers. The two most prevalent means of establishing world peace have been and still are the concept of collective security and the theory of balance of power. These two classical approaches to peace have no relevance in the nuclear age. The power of even one Super Power is enough to destroy the

The way to peace is very wayward and zigzag Even the establishment of the hegemony of one

ideology cannot generate understanding among the different peoples inhabiting the globe.

The nuclear power is itself a potent deterrent to world peace. This balance of terror has made world peace not only desirable but also imperative. The proliferation of nuclear weapons in the hands of many countries may in the foreseeable future change the pattern of power relationships and lead to wars, localised or worldwide. The foremost duty of all statesmen is to stop prolifera-

The world is in ferment. Today a war with modern nuclear weapons may mean the destruction of civilisation. In such a conflict there will be no distinction between the victor and the vanquished. We should either disarm or suffer disaster. The unbridled race of armaments and the mounting war psychosis show that nations are confused in their minds about peace. History tells us that those who chose world domination by force broke against the rock of moral law and came to their end.

George Mitchell, who served in the United States Senate from 1980 to 1995, was asked a question: Is world peace an impossible dream? George answered, "I would like to conclude these remarks by trying to answer that question. Now it may seem like the wrong time to talk about peace in the world with reports of war filling the air. But if we wait for the day that nothing bad happens in the world, we may never even get to talk about peace. So I'd like to say a few words on that sub-

If by world peace, it is meant the complete absence of conflict among and within nations, then it may well be impossible. There are more than six billion people in the world; current estimates project an increase to between eight and ten billion in this century, with the largest increases to occur in the poorest countries. There will be a huge and rising demand for land, for water, for natural resources of all kinds, for jobs and opportunity, for political and economic power. As the gap between the rich and the poor nations widens, and as the technology of killing advances and spreads, it is unrealistic to imagine the complete absence of conflict.

But if by world peace we mean the absence of a major war and the effective containment of regional conflicts, I believe that to be entirely

World peace through mutual understanding is feasible. This understanding can be possible only if all nations respect each other and have mutual faith without malice, grudge or hatred which unfortunately characterise our generation. The way of peace requires that men and nations should recognise their common humanity and use weapon of integrity, reason, patience and

World peace is possible only if nations spontaneously accept the deals of justice, freedom and

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