

Campaign strategy of prithvi narayan shah



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As a sound strategy is a pre-requisite to successful campaigns, the strategy that Prithvi Narayan Shah (PNS) planned and pursued during his unification campaigns (1742-1773 A. D.), can be assumed vital to his great achievement - creation of modern Nepal. Indeed, PNS's campaign strategy envisaged employment of all state means/ tools/ instruments including saam, daam, danda, and bhed. Moreover, PNS (1723-1775) conceived of and implemented the strategy of mass mobilization for national campaign well before Napoleon Bonaparte did in 1790s. In that sense, PNS changed the feudal character of war into national war during his unification campaign. Studying PNS's unification campaign strategy can, therefore, be meaningful and insightful for the students of strategic studies and policy makers of the present Nepal that is experiencing unprecedented upheavals, chaos, and uncertainty in its history.

Aim and Scope of the Paper

This paper aims at highlighting the strategy/ policy, which PNS pursued during his campaign of uniting the Baisi, Choubisi, and Malla principalities. This paper is based on the general interaction and talks, seminar presentations and interactions, and data/ information available in the books and articles. Further, for ease of understanding, PNS's strategy has been analyzed here in terms of Christopher Layne's contemporary definition of strategy:

Grand Strategy ... is the process by which a state matches ends and means in the pursuit of security. In peacetime, grand strategy encompasses the following: defining the state's security interests; identifying the threats to

those interests; and allocating military, diplomatic, and economic resources to defend the state's interests.

In other words, PN's unification campaign strategy is analyzed here as the function of his ends (national purpose), threats, means, and ways/ courses of action, (Limbu, R. D.).

General Situation of the Subcontinent when PNS became King of Gorkha

When PNS became the king of Gorkha in 1742, the whole Indian subcontinent was facing turmoil - politically, socially, economically, and strategically. While the Mughal Empire was undergoing disintegration, the Marathas in the West, Haidar Ali in the South, and the British in part of Bengal were expanding their territories, (Stiller, L. F., 1968).

In Nepal during this period, several petty principalities loosely called Baise Rajyas and Choubise Rajyas ruled the Karnali and Gandak basins respectively. Gorkha was just one of the Choubise Rajyas. During this same period, while the Malla kings ruled the Kathmandu Valley divided into three kingdoms, a number of autonomous Kirati provinces under the nominal rule of Sen Kings existed in the region east of Sunkoshi River to the present border of Nepal. The general strategic scenario in Karnali, Gandaki, Bagmati, and Koshi Basins was as follows:-

There were too many states confined to a limited space. The average size of a state was not a viable political entity. The big principalities - Jumla, Palpa, Mackwanpur, and Vijayapur - contained about 20, 000 houses each; and the rest had about 600 to 8000 houses each. The yearly income of even the

richest one was limited to a few thousand rupees. Except Jumla, Piuthan, Palpa, Tanhoun, Mackwanpur and the three states of the Nepal Valley, none of them could be called a state even in a limited sense, (Regmi D. R.).

In theory, though all the states owed their allegiance to the Moghul Emperor at Delhi, each state behaved as a sovereign one. Every minor issue gave rise to conflict among them. General anarchy and misrule prevailed throughout the region. The peoples were forced to live in abject poverty and misery. The entire region was vulnerable to internal and external threats, (ibid).

Unification Campaign Strategy of PNS

The campaign strategy/ policy of PNS has been analyzed in terms of, (1), his purpose/ core interests, (2), major threats, (3), major means/ resources available, and, (4), ways/policies pursued.

Purpose and Objectives of PNS

Not every historian agrees that national unity was the ultimate purpose of PNS. However, some historians argue that having understood the strategic vulnerability of the then existing principalities to growing threats from the south, PNS invaded, conquered, and united them into a single kingdom. To this school of thought, creation of a strong and united kingdom out of the weak and divided principalities was the ultimate purpose of PNS. In this paper, this understanding has been assumed to be the sovereign purpose of PNS. Achievement of this purpose entailed invasion and capture of at least the Kathmandu valley and the Choubisi principalities.

Threats

To realize his purpose, though PNS did not have to confront any threats from Tibet/ China, he faced numerous threats from the Baisi, Choubisi, and Malla states, and external powers. Moreover, he had to negotiate several challenges that came from within his own kingdom.

Threats from Mir Kasim (Nawab of Bengal) and British East India Company

The Malla kings of Kathmanu valley and the Sen kings controlling Mackwanpur, Sindhuli, and eastern Terai region of Nepal maintained good relationships with Mir Kasim and the East India Company. For preserving and furthering their national interests, these powers preferred status quo in Nepal. As PNS captured Nuwakot (1744), Mackwanpur (1762), and Sindhuli (1767), and invested these states for the invasion and capture of the Kathmandu valley, the interests of Nawab and the Company happened to clash with that of PNS.

Interference from Nawab

PNS's conquest of Mackwanpur attracted the attention of the Nawab and the Company, both of which understood the strategic importance of Mackwanpur maintaining lucrative trade with Kathmandu valley and Tibet. Moreover, both of these forces coveted the natural resources of Nepal assuming that Nepal possessed precious gold mines and gold, which actually came from Tibet in return for the minting of coinages used in Kathmandu valley and Tibet, (Regmi, D. R.).

Initially, the Nawab sent a small detachment in 1762 to test the strength of Gorkhalis. However, the Gorkha force wiped out this contingent in no time. Following this defeat, the Nawab dispatched a big force under Gurgin Khan. In the ensuing battle (1762/ 1763), which carried on for more than a week, the Gorkha force routed the expeditionary forces completely, (ibid).

Interference from East India Company

In 1767, the Company, decided to send an expeditionary force under Captain Kinloch to break PNS's siege of the Kathmandu valley. Kinlock's forces suffered from ignorance of the mountain terrain/ weather, the peculiar fighting methods of Gorkhal soldiers, and lack of adequate preparations. Consequently, the expeditionary forces suffered humiliating defeat at the hand of Gorkha forces, (Stiller, 1968).

Threats from Baise and Choubise States

No formal military alliances existed for the maintenance of balance of power among the Baise states. In theory, though the Jumla king had the right to interfere to maintain the balance of power among the Baise states, no effective means existed to enforce this right. Consequently, no interference came from the Baise states during the unification campaign of PNS, (Hamilton, F. B.).

However, a crude system of balance of power existed among the Choubise states, which tended to maintain equilibrium among them. For Gorkha, the immediate neighboring states in the west, and south-west included Lamjung, Tanhu, and Palpa. Parbat and Kaski, located immediately further west. Aware of the implications of expanding Gorkha kingdom, these states formed some

sort of security alliance against PNS. The major alliances were as follows, (Stiller, 1995):-

Palpa Alliance. Included Palpa, Jajarkot, Ghiring, Rising, Gulmi, Argha, and Khanchi.

Lamjung Alliance. Consisted of Lamjung, Tanhun, and Kaski.

Malebum (Parbat) Alliance. Comprised Parbat and Galkot.

Bhirkot Alliance. Included Bhirkot, Nuwakot (west), Paiyun, and Garahun.

Piuthan Allaince. Consisted of Piuthan, Isma, Musikot, Khungri, and Bhingri.

Manpower Problem

While Gorkha had 12, 000 households, (one household could have an average of four to five family members), its immediate neighbors – Lamjung, Kaski, Tanhu, and Palpa had approximately 8, 000, 8, 000, 12, 000, and 24, 000 households respectively, (Stiller, 1995). The kingdoms of Kathmandu valley had bigger population. Manpower-wise, therefore, Gorkha was not in a favorable position to invade and conquer any of those kingdoms, which often formed alliance to defend their homeland.

Scarce Finance and Material Resources and Logistics Support

Compared with the kingdoms of Kathmandu valley, Palpa, and Mackwanpur, Gorkha possessed neither adequate material resources nor reliable sources of revenues. Gorkha's resources could be substantially augmented by the revenues from the captured lands. Nevertheless, initially Gorkha had to

suffer greatly from the strain of scarce material resources and logistics required for supporting its sustained offensive campaigns, (Stiller, 1995).

Tough Terrain

Difficult mountainous terrain definitely favored the defenders, not the invader. Conventionally, an invader in mountainous terrain requires more than three times the strength of the defender.

Means/ Resources Available

Leadership and Command

History has testified, “ An army of stags led by a lion is better than an army of lions led by a stag”. The most important factor in the victorious campaigns of tiny Gorkha kingdom was the outstanding leadership/ command PNS and his field commanders provided for the troops, (Hamilton, F. B.). These commanders commanded their troops by example from the front, which was essential to successful campaigns in those days of close quarter-battles.

Intelligence

PNS had wisely invested, established, and maintained an effective intelligence system – eye, ear, and brain of the state – on which others state tools were dependent. In the Choubisi region, he deployed his secret agents to every important place. These agents were active in sowing the seeds of discords among the rulers and elites to ensure that there was no concerted action against Gorkha, (Regmi, D. R.).

With the promise to provide birta and other incentives, PNS bought support of many courtiers and several wealthy families of Kathmandu valley. Further, a large number of clever Brahmins were employed in Kathmandu on <https://assignbuster.com/campaign-strategy-of-prithvi-narayan-shah/>

espionage missions. These agents engaged themselves in subversive activities creating splits and confusion in the Valley, (ibid).

A man by the name of Kirtirajananda Upadhyya helped PNS's war effort from inside the city of Patan. This man was tasked to subvert people of Kathmandu and Patan in concert with his uncle and cousin in furtherance of Gorkha's interest, (ibid). Moreover, PNS amply paid the local priests and religious leaders who were secretly helping him from Patan and Kathmandu courts. Later, they received free holding of lands. In the beginning, PNS used even the Gosain traders, (ibid).

In the Kirat region, PNS employed the local Brahmins of the Dudhkosi basin as his main agents. Harinanda Pokhrel was employed in subverting the nine hundred thousand Kirati people and in helping the Gorkhali to capture Chaudandi and Bijayapur. Others who were employed included Balkrishna Joshi and Birbhadra Upadhyya whom PNS rewarded later, (ibid).

The diplomatic missions and others deployed overtly and covertly in various important centers of India and Tibet operated as his external intelligence agents. The means of communications in those days was letters or individual agents/ contacts.

Political/ Diplomatic

Understanding the sensitive geo-politic/ geo-strategic location of Nepal, PNS said, " This country is like a gourd between two boulders", (Stiller, 1968).

Aware of strategic implications involved, PNS restricted the foreign traders from entering Nepal. His Dibyopadesh also shows an appreciation of the

necessity of maintaining balanced relationship with the immediate neighbors.

Overtly and covertly, PNS had established various missions in important centers outside Nepal. At one time PNS deployed Vrihaspati Pandit to Purnea, Kirtimali to Patna, Vaikuntha Upadhaya to the place of Nawab Sujaddaula, and Dinanath to Calcutta. In Lhasa, PNS had posted a man named Rajgiri. British sources corroborate this information, (Regmi, D. R.). He selected the best diplomats, (Stiller, 1968).

Realizing the strategic implications of British dominance in Tibet, PNS persuaded the Tibetan authorities not to permit the entry of English goods into Tibet, (Regmi, D. R.). However, PNS never used force against the external powers. He preferred negotiation. He counterattacked them only when they interfered with his campaign.

In Dibyopadesh PNS compared Lamjung, Gorkha, and Kathmandu valley with Garuda, snake, and a frog respectively. It meant that as long as its western border remained vulnerable to Lamjung, Gorkha could not capture Kathmandu valley. To secure his western border, PNS adopted the most opportunistic real politic of divide and rule. However, this instrument failed him strategically to expand his territory in the west. However, in case of some of the Baise states he succeeded to separate them from the Choubisis, (Regmi, D. R.).

Army

The most important means/ instrument PNS employed throughout his campaign was his Army, which consisted of several companies, each with

about 100 gunmen. This Army comprised both regular and irregular soldiers. Towards the end of his regime, PNS had a minimum of fourteen companies, or about twenty-five hundred men, (Stiller, 1995)

PNS made use of rabble soldiers as well. The regular soldiers called tilinga handled guns and daggers based on the situations. The irregulars also handled different type of weapons and were well trained as the regular soldier. Besides, there were men who used only Khuda and Khukuri, (Regmi, D. R.) The Company was commanded by a Subedar (officer) under whom there were six Havildars and as much Huddas. The latter two were junior officers, (ibid).

The Subedar used to be the most trusted man with reputation of achievements in four or more battles. He appointed his junior officers, Havaldar and Hudda, based on their battle performance. Only the most courageous would get promotion. (ibid).

Every capable individual - Brahmin, Kshatri, Baisya, Sudra castes, and others - could serve in the Army in different capacities, (ibid). Many believe that PNS's army was an inclusive one. However, the spirit of Dibyopadesh does not support this idea of inclusiveness. Recruitment in the Army was done only from certain castes - Khash, Magars, Gurungs, and Thakuris, and important command appointments were assigned to those close to the King, (Stiller, 1968). Moreover, Brahmins were not recruited as soldiers, (Regmi, D. R.).

Other Chubise states also had their armies recruited from the same indigenous materials. Foreign mercenaries were employed in Jaya Prakash

Malla's Army. What made the Gorkha army more effective than others was the leadership, command, and incentives received from PNS, who shared his vision as well as risks of war with his troops and provided jagir to each soldier.

Economic Means

Sound logistic support base is essential to successful military campaign. Moreover, offensive battle in mountainous terrain is much more expensive than the defensive one. Sustained military campaign like the one undertaken by PNS was very costly.

Conventionally, it was not possible for PNS to raise and sustain an army strong enough to simultaneously hold the Choubisi alliance in the west and successfully invade and conquer the kingdoms in the east. Moreover, threats from the rising powers of India were also to be catered for.

However, PNS invented the system of jagir (land assignment) to resolve the bulk of his financial problem. To every man who served in his army, PNS assigned a jagir, which satisfied the peoples' innate aspirations for economic security, wealth, and social prestige, (Stiller, 1993). Further, early capture of fertile valley of Nuwakot (1744) and then Mackwanpur (1762) helped him economically in the invasion of Kathmandu valley. Once he captured the rich and fertile Kathmandu valley and controlled the lucrative trade with Tibet, PNS had no major problem to finance military campaigns against the ill-equipped and divided Kirati regions.

Ways/ Policies

It can be safely assumed that all the ways/ policies PNS pursued were based on the sound intelligence appreciation of the prevailing situation including the capabilities, limitations, and intentions of the opponents - the Malla, Choubisi, and Baisi kingdoms, and the external powers. PNS had invested wisely in overt/ covert intelligence missions for gathering intelligence required for pursuing appropriate policies. Depending on the prevailing situation, PNS pursued all forms of policies - saam, daam, danda, bhed in isolation or combination - to achieve his purpose.

Political/ Diplomatic

Appreciating the sensitive and vulnerable geo-political location of Nepal, PNS sought for and maintained a friendly diplomatic relation with East India Company and Tibet/ China without any harm to national interests. However, he presented no opportunities, which provided the foreign powers an excuse to penetrate Nepal. Similarly, PNS tried his best to prevent the British from gaining an access to Tibet, (Regmi, D. R.).

PNS pursued the 'divide and rule' policy among the Malla, Choubisi, and Baisi Rajas. Particularly, he resorted to sustained policies including saam, daam, danda, and bhed, to keep the Kathmandu valley rulers and western neighbors - Lamjung, Tanhu, Palpa, Mackwanpur, Kaski and Parbat - weak and divided so that they would not forge alliance against Gorkha. Further, with the issuance in 1773 of Royal Charter (Sanad) that ensured some special rights including the Kipat system for the Limbu-Kiratis, PNS brought Pallo Kirat under his domination without fighting even before the ruler in Morang was defeated, (Regmi, D. R.).

Military

To ensure self-motivation, dedication, and loyalty of troops, PNS shared his vision with his troops. PNS appealed, motivated, mobilized, involved and employed the general mass in national war of unification. PNS required his field commanders to command the troops in battles by personal example and ensured fair administration of rewards and punishment.

PNS always ensured that he was not forced to fight battles simultaneously on more than one front. He ensured sustained economic blockade and envelopment of Kathmandu valley, and systematic tightening of the noose/ ring before the main attack. He conducted protracted subversive operations before, during, and after the military campaigns. Whenever possible he tried to win the battles through negotiation without bloodshed.

As regards the powerful East India Company, he resorted only to the defensive war. When forced to fight, PNS pursued offensive defense along with guerrilla warfare by exploiting the advantages of mountainous terrain and weather. He countered numerical and technological superiority of East India Company and Nawab of Bengal, by deliberately creating space for drawing their forces deep into the difficult mountainous terrains (e. g. offensive defenses against the expeditionary forces of Mir Kasim in Mackwanpur and East India Company in Sindhuli) to decisively counterattack at a favorable place/ time and destroy them in detail.

Economic

PNS adopted the system of jagir to reduce the financial burden of costly war. He encouraged/ appealed to the mass for voluntary donation/ assistance in

cash and kinds for his campaigns. PNS conducted sustained economic blockade of the Kathmandu valley. He borrowed money from the traders like the Gosains and the very rich local people such as Harinanda Upadhyya Pokhrel, Balkrishna Joshi, and Birbhadra Upadhyya of Kirat region, (Regmi, D. R.). He discouraged imports of foreign materials and encouraged indigenous industries and production and, preferably promoted trade with Tibet including continuance of minting of silver coins for both Tibet and Nepal.

Cultural

PNS avoided interference in the indigenous cultures and traditions. His Ditya Upadesh depicts Nepal as consisting of “chaar jaat, chhatish barna”. PNS encouraged local culture for winning the hearts and minds of the people, (Regmi, D. R.). He accepted and worked with the existing regional cultural, social, and fiscal institutions. He required his governors/ commanders/ officials to do the same, (Stiller, 1993).

Other Policies/ Ways

Mass Mobilization of Population and Resources

To make up work force and resources shortages, PNS ordered general mobilization of the entire Gorkha population including the tailor and band-player, the cobbler, the blacksmith, and the sweeper. The idea of war of national unification motivated the entire citizens of Gorkha irrespective of castes and sects. All the youths aged 16 and 30 years were freely recruited into the army and large stocks of arms were distributed. These youths were given weapons training by some experienced Hindustani experts, (Regmi, D. R.). Thus, PNS changed the character of war from feudal to national.

Justification of Means by Ends

For PNS any means or ways was fair in war. In several cases, ethical/ moral values found no place in the means he employed to win his war, (ibid).

Superior Organization and Technology

Sustained battle experiences taught PNS to improve his military organization including the intelligence. PNS also introduced firearms and European discipline in his Army, (Hamilton, F.). He made best use of firelocks, which until his time were totally unknown among the Choubisi Rajas. The superior organization and firepower of Gorkha troops armed with muskets completely outmatched the organizationally weak Kiratis armed with bows and arrows, (Stiller, 1995). Moreover, PNS utilized the services of a master mechanic (Shekh Zabbar) in making matchlocks and gunpowder, which was lacking in the Malla rulers though they also possessed the latest weapons, (Regmi, D. R.).

Offensive Battles

Two of the most important objective ingredients of combat power are firepower and maneuver power. PNS fought offensive battles characterized both by firepower and by maneuverability, while his opponents fought static defensive battles, stuck to particular terrain, (Regmi, D. R.).

Consolidation of States

Earlier, the kings of Nepal would distribute their newly won territories among their relatives as favors/ honors. However, when his brothers sought same sort of favors, PNS absolutely refused. To him, a state would not remain a state when it was split. PNS treated Nepal as a garden in which all peoples of

all religions, castes, and groups deserve to live together in harmony and peace, and with dignity, (Stiller, 1993,).

Conclusion

PNS succeeded in realizing his purpose, because it was understood, endorsed, and supported by the people, and his strategy was based on ground reality, ingenuity, and innovation. Some of the vital aspects of PNS's campaign strategy were: clear understanding and realization of the sensitive geopolitical location of Nepal, clarity in the national purpose, communicating and sharing of national purpose with the people, understanding and treatment of Nepal as a secular nation-state consisting of “ Chaar jaat, chhatish barna”, encouragement of the local cultures of the indigenous peoples, concept of inclusiveness and mass mobilization for national campaigns, and selective/ appropriate employment of available means – saam, daam, danda, bhed – depending on the situation. Indeed, the wisdoms reflected in PNS's unification campaign strategy more than two centuries ago can still be valid and relevant to the conception and formulation of present Nepal's security strategy/ policy.

Ranadhoj Limbu

Former Brigadier General, Nepal Army