

Manoeuvre warfare and its applicability in mountains history essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. According to Richard Simpkin, there is normally a 50 year cycle in respect of radical changes in military equipment, force structure and doctrine.

Historical evidence conclusively proves that there is a gestation period of 30 – 50 years before a radical thought process is fully accepted and adopted.

This is because of the lengthening Research and development cycle, time lag in introduction and training with new equipment, and organisational inertia of armed forces leading to resistance to change.

2. If we take the thirties when Guderian's mechanisation programmes were in full swing, as the effective apogee of a 50 year cycle we might now expect to be at the zenith of the next one. No wonder we find several of the advanced world's major armed forces in a greater or lesser state of flux. On one hand technological changes in form of top attack systems, compound and reactive armour, rotary wing revolution, lethality of ground and air delivered precision guided munitions and advanced C3I systems are influencing warfare. On the other hand radical changes are taking place in military thought to switch over from 'Attrition Warfare' to 'Manoeuvre Warfare'. The shift away from attrition warfare was first thought about by Liddel Hart and Fuller in twenties. They gave prominence to manoeuvre employing mechanised forces. The German's led by Guderian grasped these theories and put them into practice in the form of Blitzkrieg. The Russians, concurrently with the Germans developed the Deep Operation Theory and seriously got down to further refinement of this concept with the help of technological advancements. Israel is a unique case where the Jewish army, recreated after 2000 years, adopted manoeuvre warfare at the onset without going through the agonies of bloodshed, stalemates and defeat through

attrition warfare. The 1956, 67 and 73 Arab-Israeli wars now success models for manoeuvre warfare. Such is the inherent inertia of armed forces that it took the military reform movement in US to nearly a decade plus to convince them to switch over to manoeuvre warfare in the form of Air Land Battle Doctrine which by their own admission was one of the major contributing factors for success in the Gulf War.

3. It is with deep regret that one has to say that the theory of war is not a subject of detailed study in our army leading to knee jerk approach to operational matters. At a time when all major armies are seriously debating and introducing manoeuvre warfare our understanding of the term is in theory only.

4. Today, we have a large standing army- larger than what the German's had when they institutionalised Blitzkrieg. Technologically it is still shades below the the advanced countries, but when compared to our adversaries it is definitely more advanced. Our overall thinking is governed by attrition/positional warfare. We have not been able to institutionalise our concepts for employment of armed forces. In any future war, unless we have an institutionalised doctrine/concept for their employment, the immense potential of armed forces is unlikely to be fully exploited.

5. Indian army executed the most brilliant campaign based on manoeuvre warfare – the Bangladesh War 1971 – wherein Bangladesh was liberated at a relatively low cost and the Pakistan Army largely intact was defeated and 93,000 prisoners were captured. By manoeuvre in time and space, the enemy mind was paralysed into inaction. The Bangladesh campaign is taught in

foreign countries as the most complete campaign based on manoeuvre warfare. Yet it is an irony that our Army is just loosely following manoeuvre, in both theory as well as practice, for decades now.

6. There is therefore a need to understand, institutionalise and apply the war fighting philosophy of manoeuvre warfare in the present times as it does not permit us a long battle[2]. The study focuses on the vital essentials of manoeuvre warfare and analysis how this approach can be satisfactorily applied in mountains and developed terrain in the Indian context.

Manoeuvre Warfare

7. The art of achieving great victories at the least cost has been amply and repeatedly demonstrated in history. The single most pronounced factor recognisable in these campaigns and battles is the use of manoeuvre.

Manoeuvre has been accepted as the most appropriate form of warfare as opposed to the more costly and rigid form of positional and attrition warfare as seen in First World War. In manoeuvre warfare, the goal is to incapacitate by systematic disruption and dislocation. The target is the coherence of the adversary's combat system, methods and plans. The hope is that a very selective action can have a cascading effect, an effect disproportionately greater than the degree of effort.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

8. The aim of the study is to examine the significance of manoeuvre warfare and to analyse its application in mountains and developed terrain in the Indian context.

HYPOTHESIS

9. Manoeuvre warfare is a war fighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's physical and psychological cohesion through a series of rapid and unexpected actions and can be successfully applied in any terrain or scenario from the tactical to the strategic level provided the basic tenets are adhered to. Thus, the concept can be equally and efficiently applied in mountains and developed terrain in the Indian context.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

10. The Indian Army Doctrine Section 20: Para 7. 14 directs our focus on the intellectual understanding, institutionalisation and implementation of manoeuvre warfare and Directive command[3]. The challenge before the Indian Army is to apply this sub doctrine of war fighting and command. The doctrine for war fighting for the future must dwell on “ What is the swiftest and economically cheapest way to achieve a victory”? What is the likely future battlefield scenario in which a war on the sub-continent will be fought? How can this doctrine be applied at the strategic, operational, and tactical level?

11. The answers could lie in the concept of manoeuvre warfare, which seeks to “pit own strength against enemy’s weakness and break his will to fight”. Successful application of manoeuvre warfare by Rommel in the North African Deserts in World War II, by Israelis in the 1967 Yom-Kippur war and more recently in Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf war, seems to point out that the Indian Army could consider experimenting with this doctrine. Also, the “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA) today is about more than building new high-tech weapons, though that is certainly a part of it. It’s also about new ways of thinking, new ways of fighting. Preparing for the future will require us to think differently and develop the kinds of forces and capabilities that can adapt quickly to new challenges and to unexpected circumstances[4]. The Gulf War is widely accepted as a transitional point to new kind of war. This new war was fought with precision weapons with minimal collateral damage and with vastly improved means of real-time information, surveillance and target acquisition. It was realised that destruction of the enemy’s means of command and control should be the prime canon of military doctrine. Thus, this kind of warfare, when fully developed would be knowledge based information age warfare characterised by manoeuvre rather than attrition warfare. Another reason due to which many armies have adopted or are considering adopting this style of warfare is due to pressing need to reduce the size of the army in the light of the rising costs of maintaining a large standing army. Manoeuvre warfare relies on speed and audacity rather than numerical superiority and thus meets the requirements of achieving victory with a leaner and smaller army.

12. In the light of the arguments given above the subject “ Manoeuvre Warfare and its Applicability in mountains and developed terrain” has been chosen for the study.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

13. The research shall seek to study the essentials of manoeuvre warfare and its characteristics and to make it more meaningful the study will narrow down its focus on application of manoeuvre warfare in the developed terrain in Indian context. It will concentrate on the aspects needing attention in our thought process and the organisational and institutional changes necessary to facilitate this approach. The basic premise of the research is that manoeuvre warfare is a war fighting philosophy and can be successfully applied in any terrain or scenario from the tactical to strategic level provided the basic tenets are adhered to.

ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION

14. The dissertation has been divided into following chapters:-

(a) Chapter I. Introduction.

(b) Chapter II. Essential elements of Manoeuvre Warfare.

(c) Chapter III. Institutionalising Manoeuver Warfare.

(d) Chapter IV. Characteristics of Developed Terrain and Challenges in Application of Manoeuvre Warfare in Indian Context

(e) Chapter V. Recommendations and Suggested Changes for Application of Manoeuvre Warfare in Developed Terrain.

Higher Defence Organisation.

Directive Style of Command.

Training.

Creating an Environment of Military Creativity.

Changes at Strategic and Operational Level.

Changes at Tactical Level.

Application of Strike Corps.

Information Dominance.

(f) Chapter VI. Conclusion.

CONCLUSION

15. The concept of manoeuvre warfare is as much a state of mind as it is a theory. It emphasizes the importance of seizing the initiative and maintaining the initiative. It is a style of warfare that encourages the degradation of the enemy through disorientation, disruption and dislocation and finally destruction of his tactical cohesion. It is a concept that is more psychological than physical. It is indirect rather than direct approach to conflict. Manoeuvre warfare has application across the entire spectrum of conflict from strategy to tactics.

16. Only the study of manoeuvre warfare as a theory will serve no purpose to professional soldier. The applicability of this concept, especially in developed terrain in the western sector, has been examined in this study.

17. Also, important institutional and organisational changes must follow and support doctrinal change, if new doctrine is to be fully realised in action.

Manoeuvre warfare provides an excellent and economical method for successful execution of war fighting in futuristic battlefield scenario especially in developed terrain. We need to learn and understand its intricacies and implement its tenets in peace and war.

“ We in the twentieth century have two thousand years of fighting experience behind us, and if we still must fight a war, we have no excuse for not fighting it well.”

– TE Lawrence