Chapter- XII

Conclusion

Introduction

Philosophy behind the victory in a war has been conveyed lucidly by Lt Col Frederick W Timmerman Jr. through his poem quoted below:

*Victory turns on the ‘spirit’ of armies,*

*will’ of commanders and the*

*‘support’ of the civilian national base,*

*Not simply the indiscriminate application of raw force,*

*Let any of the three components*

*of Victory be lacking, and*

*defeat is assured.¹*

While reflecting on the Bangladesh Liberation War, first thing that strikes is the premise on which Pakistan was constructed defying all tenets of formation of a nation state. Religion, as a bonding factor did not stand the test of time. 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War “realized Louis Mountbatten’s prophecy that the the union between the two halves of Pakistan would not last a quartet of a century”.² It also proves that the idea of Pakistan based on Jinnah’s ‘two nation theory’ was driven by the desire of power where religion was used as a vehicle to reach the desired end state. Historical evidences suggest that Jinnah knew the importance of culture of Bengal and danger to divide the pre-independence state of Bengal based on religion. He argued and pleaded with Mountbatten not to divide Bengal and Punjab and give them in one piece to Pakistan. But ultimately he did not get what he proposed and went ahead with the partition to construct Pakistan. Was Pakistan ‘insufficiently imagined’ as pointed out by Salman Rushdie or an ‘artificial construction’³ as questioned by Jaffrelot. Or, was it one of the ‘greatest frauds’ on the millions of people as felt by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad? Emergence of Bangladesh has
demolished the ‘two nation theory’. Historical evidences lead to suggest that possibly the political whirlpool over partition engulfed many a leaders and to some ‘kingship became more important than the kingdom’. Jinnah commenced the journey of the new nation Pakistan with a noble idea, that all its citizens are equal irrespective of culture, religion, language and belief as per democratic norms. But the seed of division between the two wings of Pakistan was sowed when Jinnah was at the helm of affairs. Jinnah, just couple of months after Pakistan came in to being, during his visit to Dacca, announced *Urdu and Urdu only will be the state language of Pakistan.* Already a simmering issue; instead of respecting wishes of its 55% population and dousing the fire, he added fuel to it.

Being not in the purview of the main topic, issue by issue details of the period between 1947 and 1970 are not covered here. Observation of Ian Chocrone sums up the reasons behind such a rift between the two wings of Pakistan which culminated in war:

The causes of the Bangladesh War of 1971 lay in an indivisible trinity of culture, economics and politics with culture at the apex. …..peoples of the two wings of Pakistan were so culturally diverse it would have been impossible to form a unified and cohesive nation-state, and that the cultural differences which existed between the Bengalis of East Pakistan and the Punjabis of West Pakistan transcended both time and space without any horizontal linkages.⁴

My dissertation on *Politico-Military Strategy of Bangladesh Liberation War-1971* is a study of the main strategic decisions and circumstances which governed the decisions, and also validation of those decisions by examining the process of execution and end result. I intended to unearth the total strategy of the war and did not restrict to military strategy of the war alone because “that would have left many vital factors out of account. Strategy is almost unintelligible if looked at through military spectacles only”⁵ The dissertation topic therefore is vastly complex. I shall present the interpretation and findings of the study highlighting the undying art of strategy and its importance in outcome. Strategy which once upon a time was domain of military had undergone transformation a few centuries ago when great political thinker and a master strategist Machiavelli, through his magnum opus, *The Art of War* introduced:

The concept of the involvement of the whole state in fighting a war, and the pursuance of that war until a political decision favourable to the nation as a whole ( and not merely to the head of the state ) was reached……..he framed
first great principles of political strategy………War must be waged by the whole nation: and, in return, the aim of winning a victory must be to benefit the nation as a whole………Because of his theory of the political importance of the war, Machiavelli stressed the necessity for planning and preparation for war by the whole nation so that the issue would not be left to an individual or a chance victory.”

Interpretations and Findings
The study after evaluating the total strategy as explained above and as discussed in the previous chapters come to conclusion that in India, policy objectives were evolved after due deliberations by the Prime Minister, her cabinet ministers, advisers like Dhar, Haskar and Chiefs of Army, Navy, and Air Force, in addition to Directors IB and R&AW. Opposition leaders were also taken into confidence for formulating national strategy and approach to tackle the crisis. Some of the salient aspects in regards to policy formulations, political aim of the war and military strategy are mentioned below.

Evolution of India’s Policy Strategy
In early April 1971, it was debated whether an immediate military action by India would be a good strategy or not. There was divided opinion: whereas one group in the government thought of an early war that would culminate into installing government in Bangladesh lead by the Awami League as per election mandate and thereby would ensure early return of refugees to their homes. Most importantly, that would also ensure stoppage of further influx of refugees. Mr.K. Subramanyam, Director of Institute of Defence Strategy and Analyses, a non government think tank wrote a much quoted article expressing his views favouring an early war seizing the opportunity presented by the turmoil of civil war in East Pakistan. His views were supported by many across political party lines and by some retired Generals like military historian, Maj Gen D. K.Palit. But prominent amongst those who opposed an early military operation were Mr. Swaran Singh, the External Affairs Minister and General Manekshaw, the Joint Chief of Staff. Swaran Singh preferred restraint and felt that India should make a case to ensure international credibility and legitimacy to launch an offensive action. Manekshaw, wanted more time for planning and preparation to make up deficiency of men and
machine. He was aware that war in the East will automatically extend to west. Fate of an unprepared army of 1962 was a grim reminder to him. In addition, Manekshaw was also worried that the army operation may run into monsoon and China may join the war by opening up a third front. Cold war rivalry in South Asia was also factored by the decision makers. After due deliberation, following policy stance were framed:

(a) East Pakistan crisis is a political problem and can only be resolved by a political process through acceptance of election mandate of the general elections by Pakistan. To start the process, Mujibur Rahman must be released immediately and work with him.

(b) Pakistan should immediately stop military operation in East Pakistan and troops should return to the barracks.

(c) The international community should pressurize through bilateral diplomatic and UN channel and impress upon Pakistan to resolve the crisis in East Pakistan by peaceful means. The United Nations must adopt immediate and adequate relief measures to assist refugees in India and ensure their early return home.

(d) Build up domestic public opinion within the country for the probable extension of formal and active support to the liberation struggle of East Pakistan.’ Simultaneously undertake a well-planned diplomatic initiative sensitizing the world about plight of the Bangladeshis and India’s compulsions.

**Government of India’s Policy Directives for Military Option.**

Evidences suggest that India used escalatory matrix by increasing military involvement in stages. They were:

(a) To begin with, BSF which was asked to provide limited assistance to Mukti Bahini crossed over to India. This went on till April.

(b) From May onwards, Army was asked to take over responsibility of Mukti Bahini in matters related to training, equipping, arming and coordinating guerrilla operations.
(c) From July onwards, Government of India permitted armed forces to enlarge preparatory activities for a possible war on the eventuality of failure of a political settlement of Bangladesh problem.

It would thus be seen that degree of readiness for the armed forces and posturing for a possible military operation were stepped up with regular periodicity in line with the political compulsions of the government to exercise military option as and when required. As the situation in the east kept deteriorating and Pakistan mobilized its forces in the west, in October 1971, in November, Government of India formally laid down political aim of the war when it felt that India had exhausted all other options that could offer a satisfactory solution. In the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, political aim of the Government of India spelt out by Mrs. Indira Gandhi, “was to enable the 10 million refugees to return in safety to Bangladesh and to ensure the security of our border”. But, along with it, Indian strategists felt, creation of a new friendly neighboring nation would be of India’s strategic interest which will also cut Pakistan to its size reducing its potential and stature. To translate this political aim into reality, the following limited objectives for its armed forces were given:

1. Assist the Mukti Bahini in liberating a part of Bangladesh, where the refugees could be sent to live under their own Bangladesh government. Basically what it implied at that stage was that henceforth armed forces will give full support to Mukti Bahini while carrying out operations against Pakistan army along the border are.

2. Prevent Pakistan from capturing any Indian territory of consequence in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan or Gujrat. This was to be achieved by offensive defence.

3. Defend the integrity of India from a Chinese attack in the north.

Observations and Comments on the Indian Strategy and Conduct of 1971 War

(a) Political Initiative and Diplomatic Offensive. The documentary evidences suggest that India kept all options open and to begin with, India desired a political solution to the problem. It became important for India to launch diplomatic offensive to counter the Pakistan’s claim that Bangladesh crisis is an internal issue of Pakistan and the crisis has deepened because of India’s instigation and active involvement in destabilizing Pakistan as India has not reconciled to the partition as yet. As discussed earlier, being a
democratic country, Indira Gandhi having understood the importance to manage the opposition parties used the platform of *Loksabha* (lower house) and *Rajyasabha* (The Upperhouse) in debating, informing and opinion building. Indira Gandhi in addition to various officials and ministers also used the services of opposition leaders who were sent to various countries to tell the India’s compulsions, and the socio-economic problems that India is facing because of the Bangladeshi refugees. Most importantly, the international community should be made to understand that the issue is to be solved through a political solution and the problem to be seen as not a conflict between India and Pakistan but a conflict between the two wings of Pakistan.

(b) **Alliance with USSR:** Indo-USSR Friendship Treaty signed on 9th August 1971 was a master stroke of Indira Gandhi which ensured balance of power in South Asia. When the war became a real possibility, in the end October onwards Soviet airlifting of military equipments to India began. In the crucial hours, USSR vetoed couple of times in the UN Security Council to allow India time to carry out a swift military operation to win a decisive victory. The friendship treaty proved to be “the most significant political and diplomatic leverage to India during 1971 war….Two Deputy Foreign Ministers of the Soviet Union, Firbyubin and Kuznetsov were of particular help to India during the period.”

(c) **Propaganda War/Media Campaign:** India made a coordinated effort to bring to the notice of the world media about the plight of Bangladeshi refugees and India’s compulsions. Media briefings before and during the war were a regular feature. This helped in shaping world opinion irrespective of the stand of their government. Hamidoor Commission Report of Pakistan has brought out that Indian propaganda was so successful that all efforts made by the military regime in Pakistan to diffuse the situation in East Pakistan let the world unimpressed.

(d) **Restraint:** India showed immense restrain not to get provoked easily till legitimacy of her direct intervention was understood. India recognised Bangladesh officially only on 6th December despite pressure from opposition parties and Bangladesh Government in Exile. As a part of this policy, military was asked not to move troops in the Western Sector to get deployed early so that India is not seen as an aggressor. Military deployment was completed only in November 1971.
(e) **Ensuring Legality:** Though supported through every means but India as brought out earlier, did not recognize Bangladesh prematurity to prove the world that the plot was not created by India but Pakistan’s cessation was due to their own doing and the demands of the East Pakistanis were absolutely legitimate.

(f) **Selection of Timing of the Campaign:** It was debated whether to start the military campaign in April or during November/December 1971. December gave strategic advantage of preventing China opening the NEFA front due to winter snow. Also it allowed better operational movements due to dry season and receding water in the rivers in East Pakistan. In addition, it allowed adequate time to prepare, re-group and train both Indian Armed Forces as well as Mukti Bahini. India also gave enough time to Pakistan, world powers and UN to bring in political solution. Sisson & Rose observed that ‘the timing was right in all aspects, as late November to early December was ideal for a clinical military operation’.

(g) **Air Superiority:** In the Eastern Theatre, Indian Air Force had total air superiority after they damaged the only airfield at Dhaka on 6th December 1971. As a sequel, one squadron of Pakistan Air force remained grounded all through the war. Indian Army could operate freely because of the total air superiority.

(h) **Naval Blockade:** Indian Navy by putting blockade in the East ensured Chittagong and Chalna ports are nonoperational. This put the East Pakistan cut off from rest of the world substantially and Indian Navy maintained Command of the Sea (naval equivalent to air superiority) in the west, in the Arabian Sea also in addition to the Bay of Bengal.

(i) **Maintaining Lightning Speed (Blitzkrieg):** Tactics of expanding torrents by bypassing the Fortresses and Strong point and multi prong thrusts divided Pakistan’s reaction capability. This added with the bold employment of helicopters for crossing Meghna and other river obstacles and air borne operations expedited progress of the operation. It unbalanced the Niazi’s Force thus helped in achieving surprise.

(j) **Decapitation:** Psychological operation and attacking mind of the enemy commander played a vital role. Governor Malik, Niazi and his senior commanders had suffered a complete moral collapse during the closing phases of the war. Precision air bombing on 15 the December on the Governor Malik’s residence coupled with the
encirclement of Dacca and Manekshaw’s psychological warfare created a panic amongst the commanders and senior office bearers.

(k) **Encirclement**: Dacca was encircled from three sides which set panic in the mind of commanders as well as troops.

(l) **Siege**: Non availability of imagined external help from US and China and no help from West Pakistan along with the encirclement of Dacca by the Mitro Bahini created a siege like situation.

(m) **Strategy of Dislocation**: Allied Forces (Mitro Bahini) in time and space outmanoevered Pakistan army and many times gained decisive advantage by menacing enemy’s retreat and by breaking the equilibrium of his dispositions and local supplies. Niazi”s surrender despite having 30,000 troops in Dacca is a proof of psychological dislocation fundamentally springing from the sense of being trapped.

(n) **Force Multiplier.** Mukti Bahini and the local people of East Pakistan proved to be a force multiplier for the Indian Army. Pakistan in this respect had a disadvantage despite having a section of people as supporters. Support of the civilian population base rendered to the victory.

**Pakistan’s Politico-Military Strategy**

Unlike India, Pakistan did not have a democratic government at the time of war. General Yahya was putting on two hats: one of the President and Head of the Government of Pakistan and second, Commander in Chief of the Pakistan Armed Forces. Evidences suggest that after a long spell of military rule under Field Marshall Ayub Khan, General Yahya Khan intended to install a democratic government in Pakistan and he conducted a successful general election in December 1970. Neither, the establishment of Pakistan who were feeding information to Yahya, nor the political parties of Pakistan could guess the election result. Overwhelming majority of Awami Party led by Mujibur Rahman upset the whole calculation and an all out effort was made by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and the establishment of Pakistan supported by all powerful Pakistan military to deny power to majority party Awami League. Because, that would have resulted in transferring power from Punjabis and Sindhis to Bengalis which was unacceptable to them. Pakistan also did not have a constitution. Under these circumstances no meaningful political strategy
for the war was formulated by the leaders beset with military mindset. Only policy direction was ‘keep India away’ because India was seen as the core problem. This attitude also gave birth to the rhetoric like ‘crush India’ slogans. It was true that Awami League had India’s support. But, Pakistan’s historical obsession with India blurred her vision to see the internal problem and widening the gap between the two wings. So they opted for a military solution to a political problem.

Pakistan Army’s vision was “Defence of the East Pakistan lies in West Pakistan Or Battle of the East will be fought in the West”. It was originally based on an analyses of Field Marshall Auchinlek about the defence potential of Indian sub continent during the British Raj. Taking cue out of it, Field Marshall Ayub Khan made this as Pakistan’s defence strategy which continued till 1971. Aim was to contain Indian Forces in the East so that they cannot be deployed in the West where they were planning to fight the decisive offensive operations in J&K and Punjab to capture strategically important Indian Territory. Assumed captured piece of the Indian territory, will enable Pakistan to negotiate with India from the position of strength. Pakistan also perceived that their allies like USA, China etc. may join them in their war and supported by their alliance partners, United Nation will pressurize India to agree to ‘cease fire’ before any major damage is done. Niazi states that defence strategy of Pakistan “was adopted after protracted trials based on copious studies. Within the context of this concept, the plans for fighting a war with India in East Pakistan were not to be in isolation, but an integral part of the overall strategy.”

Mission given to Lt. General Niazi, GOC Eastern Command of former East Pakistan were:-

- Evict guerrillas.
- No territory to fall into enemy hands which they can declare as Bangladesh.
- Defend East Pakistan against external aggression.

It would be seen that out of the above three missions, one was an internal issue of solving political problem through military means and other two were to keep India at bay.
Flaws in Pakistan’s Strategy

General Beauford while discussing on strategy concluded that, “In war the looser deserves to loose because his defeat must result from errors of thinking, made either before or during the conflict.” The study found out certain major flaws in Pakistan’s national strategy of 1971 War. In 1971, one of their wings, East Pakistan was fighting for liberation, election mandate was not respected and there was a constitutional crisis in Pakistan. Mr. Z A Bhutto claimed that Punjab and Sindh are the bastions of power in Pakistan and that can’t be shifted to Dacca. Bhutto could take the military along convinced Yahya to solve the political crisis by unleashing military, not to hand over power to the Bengalis. Even civil services also believed in ‘force to cow down Bengalis’ and advised the government accordingly. Evidences lead to conclusion that during 1971 War, Pakistan was void of political strategy, they were working on the principle of revenge for challenging the central authority albeit the army. With such a mindset, there was void of strategic insight. The leadership did not spell out in clear term, political aim of the war. As brought out in the previous chapter, Pakistan violated the abiding principle of war ‘selection and maintenance of aim’. In this context, it gets proved that India had a clear aim for its war effort: to capture and liberate East Pakistan, but Pakistan government gave a vague and unachievable direction to Lt Gen Yahya, Commander in Chief of East Pakistan: keep India at bay.

Now here is another pertinent question on Pakistan’s military strategy: Defence of the East lies in West. Pakistan. Can there be any fixed strategy for a country for a quarter of a century which had its origin during the colonial rule and for a different reason? Accepting the colonial stand point of view, after constructing a new nation, essentially meant that one wing telling the other wing with more population that you are indefensible, so you are dispensable. However after fighting a decisive war in the western wing, we will retrieve your situation during negotiation with the enemy. This was a questionable logic both from political as well as military angle. Can a formula like fixed strategy be used when choosing a course or courses of actions irrespective of any situation? Unlike the previous Indo-Pak Wars, Pakistan army in the East was fighting a civil war since March 1971. By the time the main war occurred, troops were worn out, fatigued and to an extent de-motivated. The army also did not have its full compliments of fire power. PAF and PN
were minuscule in number in the East Pakistan. Handling of situations leads to belief that it was a failure on the part of Pakistan leadership who could not anticipate possibility of a major war with India. Apparently they assessed that the United States will put adequate pressure on India and that coupled with the China factor will deter India from taking such drastic step.

Thirdly, instead of a purely offensive strategy in the West, they could have strengthened their defences in both East and West by balancing distribution of force. Pakistan could have fought a good defensive battles in the West with limited well planned offensive actions, Liddell Hart envisioned, defense is the best form of warfare if conducted properly. Pakistan did not have depth in their geography, so trading space for time as part of military strategy was ruled out. But by organizing proper defence, and limited offensive actions which was Indian strategy in the West, they could have held the attacking force at or near the border, gain time for United Nations to enforce ceasefire.

Maj Gen D.K.Palit comments,” Clausewitz, reasoned that the defensive must be the ‘stronger form of war’ because it was normally the weaker side that adopted it…….However, the defensive battle can succeed only when it reverts to the offensive”.13 That is where fierce limited offensive should have done the trick. The same argument supporting conventional form of defence has been propounded by General Sundarji when he wrote:

The strategy of conventional defence consists of two parts. The first is a dissuasive part; a strong defensive position, which can extract a heavy toll from the attacker... The second part of the strategy is the almost axiomatic counter offensive, at a time and place of the defender’s choice...The threat of counter offensive, and the certainty of heavy damage to the original attacker, is the deterrent part of the equation 14

Along with this, another question to be answered- did Pakistan aim to win the war against India and Mukti Bahini in the East and against India in the West? Evidences suggest that since many months before launching the air offensive on 3rd December, Pakistan was threatening India with war. However, Pakistan leadership did not display their strategic insight on whether to fight war at all or not or when to fight. In this context, observation of Amin, a Pakistani columnist is produced below:

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Pakistan Army did learn some strategic lessons from the 1965 War. ……However, the whole situation had now drastically changed. While 1965 was the best chance for Pakistan to go at war, 1971 was the worst moment to start war with India! Again as in 1947 the Pakistani leadership was caught in an irrevocable vicious whirlpool of history! Since Ayub lacked both political as well as military strategic insight he had irrevocably alienated the country’s East Wing! Pakistan in 1971 was a house divided against itself and East Pakistan had to fall!\textsuperscript{15}

**False Sense of Superiority:** Hollow propaganda, unjustified bragging and living on the past glory like Mussalmans never lost a war against Hindus in the 1000 years history or one Muslim soldier is equal to 10 Hindu soldiers etc. gave a false sense of ego amongst Pakistanis which cannot be factored in war as strength, on the contrary not being realistic to assessment of strength could lead to disaster. Some senior leaders of Pakistan army showed tendency of such thinking. Hamid Hassan, a Pakistani columnist wrote:

> Rhetoric hyperbole and irrational thinking have no place in military profession where life and death situations are involved. In June 1971, Lt Gen Niazi while presenting his plan to the central government said, “I would capture Agartala and a big chunk of Assam, and develop multiple thrusts into Indian Bengal. We would cripple the economy of Calcutta by blowing up bridges and sinking boats and ships in Hooghly river and create a panic amongst civilians. One air raid in Calcutta will see a sea of humanity in motion to get out of Calcutta.”\textsuperscript{16}

**Risk Analyses and Strategy**
In Chapter III, Lyke model of risk analyses of strategy has been explained. In the Lykke proposition (model) the ends are "objectives," the ways are the "concepts" for accomplishing the objectives, and the means are the "resources" for supporting the concepts. if the three components are not kept in balance and if any one of them is too short, the risk is too great and the strategy falls over. Evidences suggest that Pakistan leadership did not carry out risk analyses at the planning stage. A case in point, why did
they plan Tikka Khan’s 1 Corps offensive against India under a favourable air situation? Was favourable air situation achievable when IAF had superiority in numbers? Indian 1 Corps (Offensive Corps) was also positioned by November in the projected area of operation of Pakistan offensive Corps. So, launching such an operation would have meant suicidal, it would have incurred very heavy casualties to both tanks and fighter aircrafts, thereby cost-prohibitive. Based on a calculation by applying operational research method, Air Commodore Jasjit Singh highlights that the heavy loss of aircrafts to ensure favourable air situation for the duration of the main offensive, would have been cost prohibitive and almost senseless.\(^{17}\)

This offensive operation which was conceptualized to be the lynchpin of the overall strategy of Pakistan was not unleashed till end of the war. After delaying a week to unleash this strike corps, possibly there was some realization that such an operation would have meant suicidal, it would have incurred very heavy casualties to both tanks and fighter aircrafts, thereby cost-prohibitive. In this context, Pakistani strategy analyst and columnist, A H Amin wrote, “There was a reason for this inaction. One that the cost was too heavy and the second that armour higher commanders (the CGS Gul Hassan and GOC 1st Armoured Division) as Yahya Khan asserts had lost the will to launch an attack.”\(^{18}\)

**Timings of the War**

The location and timing of a war is itself a big strategic decision which lends to the outcome of the war. Indian Army in the west got fully deployed only by end of November, as a part of the political deception plan so that world does not see India as a war mongering nation aiming at destroying Pakistan. But on the other hand, Pakistan cantonments were nearer to border and Pakistan army completed her war mobilization by October 1971. It was the right moment for Pakistan to launch a pre-emptive war in October 1971 i.e. just after the monsoon session and had it done so, India would have been in a difficult situation and possibly the history could have been different. The Pakistanis dithered too long and commenced operation on 3\(^{rd}\) December 1971 when India was fully positioned.
Pakistan’s Diplomatic Strategy. Pakistan like India contacted the leaders of many countries impressing on India’s interference in Pakistan’s internal matters. US, China, and the Islamic countries supported Pakistan. In fact voting pattern in the UN General Assembly itself proves that Pakistan was successful in convincing many governments about India’s interference in their internal matter. Basically, it worked on military alliance system like NATO, SEATO whose member Pakistan was or Islamic countries, who viewed a Muslim country Pakistan is being destroyed by a Hindu country India. China, an age old ally of Pakistan and had cold relation with India then. A few, African and South East Asian countries did not want to support the Bangladesh liberation cause in fear, thinking that, their country may fall prey to similar activities from the dissent groups within.

Observations on Pakistan’s Strategy and Conduct of War

A few salient aspects that emerge on the conduct of war are mentioned below:

(a) Deployment of Pakistan Army in the East. Niazi wanted to hold every important feature in East Pakistan just because he was mandated to ensure territorial sanctity. This strategy of fighting defensive battles by deploying troops thinly proved to be wrong. Such deployment can act as eyes and ears to the commanders and prove early warning but cannot give a stiff resistance. Niazi did not cater for adequate reserve to stop the advancing Indian Army. At some places like Hilli, his fortress concept of defence worked because Indian Army’s wrong tactical plan to capture Hilli. But after learning the lesson, Indian army thereafter mostly bypassed the strong points/fortresses, thus defeating Niazi’s design of defensive strategy. Niazi did not ensure proper defence of Dacca, the lynchpin of East Pakistan, though he claimed that he catered it through his contingency planning. Even he did that, he did this planning on the assumption that forward troops will successfully conduct retrograde operation. But speed achieved through helibridging, air borne operations and success of Tiger Siddiqi’s liberation force, and successful conduct of air operations by the IAF, caught Niazi and his army by surprise. It therefore proves that Niazi’s defensive strategy, design of defensive battles and deployment of troops were unsound. It appears that, in his assumptions during the
planning stage, he gave much success to him and assumed everything will happen as per his plan which lead to the conclusions that improbabilities of war, were not factored and he did not give his enemy their dues which is a reflection of his traits and idea of self assumed invincibility examples of which have been discussed before.

(b) **Professionalism.** Pakistan soldiers and officers proved to be professional fighters like the Indian armed forces. Some of them showed outstanding leadership qualities and indomitable courage against heavy odds during the war. A few examples are Capt Ahsan at Kamalpur and Lt Col Sultan Mehmood at Jamalpur in the East Pakistan and Maj Gen Iftikar in the western theatre who successfully launched offensive operation against India in the Chhamb sector.

(c) **Morale.** Pakistan Army fought civil war in East Pakistan for nine months before the main war. They were under constant fear of Mukti Bahini guerrillas. Under such circumstances, the soldiers were by far tired, and their morale was low. Exceptions apart, will to fight eroded slowly. India’s simultaneous offensive operations and heavy air attack also added to the low morale. Manekshaw’s psychological war through radio broadcasts and leaflets etc. advising Pakistani soldiers to surrender and not to fight a futile war also had effect. Assurance was also given by Manekshaw that they will be looked after as per Geneva Convention provision. Even, the armoured commanders of the strike corps lost the will to fight because of they also thought that it will be an excersise in futility.

(d) **Discipline and Soldiering.** Bedrock of any army is discipline. Soldiers were incited to persecute minorities, rape women etc. Hamdoor Rahman Commission report highlighted such undesirable acts which had the backing of senior commanders. Soldiers became lose canon and lose canon is unlikely to bring down effective fire.

(e) **Pakistan Air Force.** Pakistan air force in the east was made inoperative by 6th of December. Niazi’s army thus had an unenviable and difficult task to defend against a superior invading army backed by the air force which maintained air superiority during the entire duration of the operation. However, Pakistan’s air force in the west after the surprise air offensive on 3rd December, kept themselves mostly in defensive mode for securing their assets. This defies logic, as some of their ground operations did not get timely and requisite close air support.
Pakistan Navy. In the East, the miniscule Pakistan Navy could not achieve much mainly they were outnumbered by the Indian Navy who could ensure total blockade in the Bay of Bengal. In the west, destroying INS Khukri was a successful operation by the army, but they failed to secure sea lane of communications. Mostly, PN too was cautious to protect their bases after damage of Karachi port by the combined operations of the IN and IAF.

Coordination. Various inputs suggest that there was less coordination amongst the services. Unlike India, where all the three services Headquarters in 1971, were located in New Delhi, Pakistan’s Naval Headquarter was located in Karachi. Pakistan’s commencement of war by launching air strikes against India was learnt by their Naval Chief through radio news. There was also much less communication between the East and West during the war. When more and more defeat became visible in the East, less and less communication flowed from the West.

Comments on the Strategy of Bangladesh Government in Exile and Mukti Bahini

(a) Bangladesh Government in Exile functioning from Calcutta though needed and used Indian assistance in their fight for the liberation, but maintained a dignified independent stand giving signal that they value their independence fiercely. Bangladesh government’s effort to build support for their cause received wide attention global attention. It sent emissaries to various countries to raise fund and seek support. Their propaganda machinery too were actively used. Government of Bangladesh insisted repeatedly that India should recognize Bangladesh so that they enjoy legal status of an independent country. Another strategy and stand during those series of debates in the UN, Provisional Bangladesh Government conveyed through India that no compromise on the demand of independence of Bangladesh will be accepted under intervention of the UN. There is adequate proof to suggest that the leadership of the Provisional Government of Bangladesh rose to the occasion during the crisis in the absence of their supreme leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Prime Minister of Bangladesh Mr. Tajuddin Ahmed and his team of ministers showed tenacity to see through the period of turmoil.

(b) Mukti Bahini. Opinion on the performance of the sword arm of the Bangladesh Government are divided in mainly two distinct line depending on who wrote their
Bangladesh writers displayed their heroism and glorified their contributions with the glowing terms but Pakistani writers and a few Indian writers expressed different opinion about their performance. Where as to determine the factual position of their contribution it would be wrong to judge their capability of fighting the guerrilla warfare comparing Mao Tse tung’s army or Viet Cong Guerrillas. In the last two cases, guerrillas were deeply politically indoctrinated and fought a protracted war unlike Bangladesh Mukti Bahini. One must be fair while assessing this aspect. Secondly, to make a judgment in hindsight whether they would have been able to liberate Bangladesh without Indian Army is today a matter of futile academic exercise. Historical evidences suggest that relation between Col Osmani Commander in Chief of Mukti Bahini and the Indian Senior Commanders of Headquarters Eastern Command Calcutta were not always cordial mainly on the perception on operation and deployment of Mukti Bahini and at times on protocol issues. Whereas Osmany had a mindset of conventional war but Indian Senior Officers since beginning were in favour of guerrilla tactics. Joint Command Structure to be placed before the war in early December, was another sensitive issue which Indian army had a different view, though it was ultimately resolved through Indira Gandhi’s emissary Mr. D.P.Dhar. However, almost all the Indian writers and military commanders have accepted the fact that Mukti Bahini provided highly valuable intelligence about the deployment, logistics, and morale of the Pakistan army in addition to helping the army to establish a link with the local population during the invasion. While Indian Armed Forces played the major part when the war broke out, but various groups of liberation fighters played a crucial role through their guerrilla activities which brought in quick and successful conclusion to the war.

Miscellaneous Highlights

1. **Missing the Last Chance.** Pakistan got a last chance in November 1971 to resolve the issue politically by releasing Mujibur Rahman and make a settlement based on the six point demands. But Yahya was adamant on not talking to Mujib and the popular Awami League Leaders, but insisted on talking to a small group of neutral elected candidates to be selected by him which was just not acceptable to the Awami
League. Some historians have mentioned it as the last political blunder but for which possibly Pakistan would not have been dismembered in the next month.

2. **When did the War Commence?** Pakistan army in the East decided hot pursuit of Mukti Bahini taking sanctuary in the Indian territory including air operation since mid-November when Mukti Bahini intensified its operation. Indian troops retaliated against Pakistani air force and ground troops crossing Indian border. Historical evidences suggest, that main conflict between India and Pakistan commenced from 22 November 1971 the date of battle of Boyra, a joint operation by the Indian Army and Mukti Bahini took place. After this Yahya declared that Pakistan will opt for an all out war if India did not stop supporting Mukti Bahini operation. Preliminary operation or in loose term nibbling operation continued in the eastern front. Actually, India planned for an offensive to commence on 4th December, but Pakistan pre empted with air strikes against India on 3rd of December, the date which is mostly considered as the date of commencement of war. Where as it is true that date of two front war can be taken as 3rd December, but 22nd November is the actual start of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Some historians like Sisson and Rose and Niazi claimed that the war commenced on 21 November though historian of Indian origin claims that the nibbling operation commenced on 22 November onwards. Following is the map (Map No.16) presented by Niazi indicating areas captured between 21 November to 3rd December during the preliminary operations by the Indian and Mukti Bahini. Though, there are evidences even in the official history of the Indian Army that large scale preliminary operations were undertaken but Niazi’s claim given in the map in the next page could not fully be corroborated. However, it proves, that the war did not have a cold start on 3rd December.
3. **Strange Bedfellows.** Though there was no diplomatic relation between India and Israel, but on a special request through a non-government influential Israeli, Mrs. Golda Meir, Prime Minister of Israel secretly sent arms and ammunitions to India just before the war. The loaded aircraft did refueling in Islamabad before landing in India. Though, later Golda Meir on a quid pro basis request India to open up diplomatic ties, it took 22 years thereafter for Indian High Commission to start business in Tel Aviv.

4. **US Failed to Convince China to Participate in the War.** Secret documents now declassified prove that Kissinger had a series of secret meetings with the Chinese representative in November and early December 1971, to convince China to open up a
third front to scare India. But China wanted the matter to be settled in Security Council. Tilt of US towards Pakistan becomes more visible after declassifications of these documents.

5. **One Operation That Made The Biggest Impact.** In the 1971, if one operation is to be cited that made the biggest impact on the minds of senior government officials and Army Commanders, it was the precision air strike by the IAF on 15th December undertaken hurriedly based on an intercepted radio message that a cabinet meeting presided by Governor Malik will be held at the Governors Residence (now known as Banga Bhavan). The rockets extensively damaged the conference room which unnerved the East Pakistani rulers and hastened acceptance of Indian proposal for surrender. 19

6. **Was Dacca Planned as The Final Objective?** There has been much criticism on the Indian military strategy in the East in particular for Army Headquarter in their operational instructions not including Dacca as final objective and not catering and not grouping resources to achieve it. While, there is proof that Dacca was discussed initially but not included in writing. Manekshaw had initial mandate to capture adequate territory in Bangladesh so that Bangladesh Government can establish there and refugees can go back to their land. Operation up to riverline was planned because detailed realistic planning could have been done up to there only. Moltke said ‘never in any war planning can be made till last or war can never be fully planned’. Aurora planned for a multi prong offensive retaining flexibility to progress operation further towards the gravitas centre Dacca depending upon which corps making speedy advance. UN factor on pressing for a ceasefire was also kept in mind. Evidence also suggests that Lt Gen Sagat Singh before start of the operation was clear in his mind that he has to reach Dacca and he did it. Amongst the participants Jacob had been critical about it. One cannot say what were verbally discussed between Manekshaw and Aurora. It is well nigh possible that retaining flexibility and planning up to river line was discussed between them which Jacob as COS was not privy to. Dacca was captured on 16th December and surrender ceremony was held there. Whether it was included or not in the written orders of Army Headquarters is a purely academic discussion. Many participants writers possibly would have given a different account if the result of military operation was reversed.
7. **Col M.A.G Osmani’s Absence in the Surrender Ceremony.** Some historians mention that, Col Osmani, Commander in Chief of Mukti Bahini should have been a signatory of the surrender document along with Lt Gen J S Aurora. It was a major political mistake on the part of India to exclude him from the ceremony. Indian Army explained that the helicopter that was sent to fetch him had a snag. Some concluded that the episode happened that way by design. Though Gp Capt Khondekar was present in the ceremony but Osmani’s presence irrespective of the differences he had with the Indian senior commanders would have made the surrender ceremony politically correct. It was a sensitive issue and a sore point. Many in Bangladesh were critical about it. It is not conclusive whether, other liberation fighters not under Osmani would have agreed to his presence or whether Niazi would have created last minute hiccup which Indian Army wanted to avoid. No clear concluding historical proof was available on this sensitive issue.

**Uniqueness of the 1971 Liberation War**

(a) This war can be cited as an example where Russian tactics of desanity i.e. simultaneity in spatial as well mental spheres including deception were practiced. Also we find, application of Liddell Hart’s strategy of indirect approach and expanding torrents.

(b) First time India used heliborne operations.

(c) A conventional force (Indian Armed Forces) and guerrillas (Mukti Bahini) were fighting in tandem. There are not too many instances like this.

(d) India had unique advantages of population support of an invading country. Pakistan had disadvantages in this respect.

**Leadership and the 1971 War**

Study of a war of the magnitude that of 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War which had interregional and global consequences cannot be complete without a quick review of the leadership who are the main actors on the stage. The leaders frame strategy and on the subject of strategy, Trotsky wrote that “principles of strategy never transcend common sense.”20 Trotsky’s philosophy implies that leaders should excersise common sense while
formulating strategy. Pakistan’s strategy of military solution to the political problem showed lack of this common sense. India during 1971 war displayed strategic vision by her leaders. Indira Gandhi did not give in to the pressure of the United States. She was clear in her mind that India though poor, will not mortgage nation’s security to its economy. She through her personality and institutional procedure ensured synergy for preparing for the war. About the cooperation and synergy at higher level, senior Indian defence officer and a strategy analyst Kapil Kak commented:

The prime minister was ably assisted by the three Service Chiefs, Gen ‘Sam’ Manekshaw, Air Chief Mshl Pratap Lal and Adm SM Nanda, Defence Secretary KB Lall, Foreign Secretary TN Kaul, External Intelligence Chief RN Kao, Director Intelligence Bureau RN Banerjee and, the most important of all, Chairman Policy Planning Committee DP Dhar and Principal Secretary PN Haksar. DP Dhar was doubtless the strategic mastermind, ably assisted by PN Haksar. Both were trusted confidants of the prime minister who helped her transform a crisis into a strategic leap.²¹

Amongst the Indian Corps Commanders, performance of Lt Gen Sagat Singh, GOC 4 Corps had been best as evident from the war records. By far junior level leaders in both the countries fighting tactical level battles proved their mettle. A few select cases have been highlighted in this study. It has been proved by evidences as well through some impartial participants accounts of the Pakistani writers that the country did not have a political aim and was least prepared for a war, which should have been avoided by all means. Major General Fazal Muqeem Khan mentions that, “One single factor that contributed most to our debacle in December 1971, was the failure of planned and integrated war effort at the national level.” ²² This is in line with what Clausewitz observed:

‘No-one in his right mind starts a war without knowing what he intends to achieve by it, or how he intends to achieve it. Thus the politics (and hence the policy) must be appropriate in the first place if a successful strategy is to be derived, let alone implemented. Strategic level leaders should know how to formulate strategy by factoring all aspects like value based policy, economical situation, military capability, available power of information inputs etc.’ ²³
Evidences suggest that since the declaration of the election result Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto played power politics at the cost of the country’s stability and unity. His slogans like \textit{udhar tum idhar hum}, actions like tearing off draft Polish Resolution in the United Nations and during a telephonic conversation with Yahya, presumably feigning that he cannot hear Yahya etc. lead to believe that Bhutto possibly was not keen for a unified Pakistan or a Pakistan ruled by someone else. It was alleged that in 1970, Bhutto asked M.M.Ahmed, a senior civil servant to write a concept paper 'how Pakistan without East Pakistan was a better option for Pakistan' than to have two wings. Niazi felt that the final plan for the dismemberment of Pakistan was hatched between General Yahya and Bhutto at Larkana, Bhutto's home town. The plan, which came to be known as the M. M. Ahmed plan, aimed at abandoning East Pakistan without a successor government, which meant: by losing the war. So all the efforts of Yaha's junta and Bhutto's coterie were directed towards losing the war which General Niazi termed loss of East Pakistan as ‘Engineered Debacle’ \textsuperscript{24} This is a comment from Niazi', the General who lost the war, and there is no conclusive proof to point towards the direction that leaders like Bhutto and some section of Pakistanis were keen to get rid of East Pakistan. Bhutto ordered Hamdoor Commision to inquire reasons for failure and surrender in Bangladesh. This report does not san bias. Bangladesh political imbroglio started because of Bhutto’s insistence on sharing power despite the fact that his party PPP was not a majority party. Force was used by the government to bring in normalcy in East Pakistan with a hope that Awami League and Mujib will give in after understanding the overall political scenario of Pakistan but on the contrary, it intensified the movement and Government, instead of taking a neutral stand became a partisan participant supporting the PPP of Bhutto.

**Conclusion**

Clausewitz states that it is far more difficult to understand strategy than tactics since things move very slowly in strategy and the principal actors are far away from the heat and friction of the battlefield. Thus strategy is a hundred more times difficult to comprehend and conduct than tactics. \textsuperscript{25} 1971 was a year of national and international crisis in South Asia. Pakistan fought both wars; first, a civil war, the second the Bangladesh Liberation War with India and various groups of Mukti Bahini. Till almost
middle of the year no one thought seriously about war. But each side gradually became inflexible and the gap widened. An internal problem, escalated to a regional problem which further escalated to a global competition between the super powers giving a global dimension to the war. But opportunities were there to find out a resolution to the problem. But each party thought compromise can only be possible on their terms. Global players joined the race, and it got reflected in UN inaction. On 15th December 1971, Indira Gandhi wrote to President Nixon that the tragic war which is continuing could have been averted if during the nine months prior to Pakistan’s attack on 3 December, the great leaders of the world had paid some attention. West Pakistan got away with the impression that they could do what they want because no one, not even United states would chose to take a public position that while Pakistan’s integrity was certainly sacrosanct, human rights, liberty were no less so and that there was a necessary inter-connection between the inviolability of states and contentment of people.”

Plato said, "Our object in the construction of the state is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any class”. There are ample proof to suggest that the disparity between the two wings occurred because ‘happiness of the whole' was violated by the leaders of Pakistan. Language movement was the beginning of the road to Bangladesh. The war was avoidable if leaders were flexible and accommodative. Pakistan did not fight the conventional war in a coordinated manner. In the critical days, Niazi was left to fend for himself and no support was available from Rawalpindi giving an impression, as if it was Niazi’s war in the East and Pakistan’s war in the West. Leadership of Indira Gandhi, Mujibur Rahman, Tajuddin Ahmed and General Manekshaw paved the way to the victory. Pakistani soldiers fought well though Indian Army and the Mukti Bahini won the war. Napoleon said, “There are only two powers in the world, the spirit and the sword. In the long run, the sword will always be conquered by the spirit.” In the Bangladesh liberation war, sword and spirit joined hands. The war also exposed the shortcomings of Pakistan's declared strategic doctrine that the ‘Defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan’. Pakistan had a misplaced hope and wrong strategic assessment regarding USA and China’s participation in Indo-Pak war. Mukti Bahini despite many hurdles and shortcomings contributed towards faulty strategic deployment by Niazi and enhanced India’s operational capabilities by providing intelligence and local support.
J.N. Dixit, the Indian External Affairs Ministry official who had seen the events closely as a participant sums up the liberation war with the following comments:

Politico-military strategy formulated by India and its execution translated into achieving all the objectives set by India. The Pakistani forces in East Pakistan were decisively defeated with India taking 93,000 prisoners of war, the largest number of soldiers taken prisoners in world history, and only comparable with the Russian army capturing the entire corps of Field Marshal Von Paoli at the battle of Stalingrad. On the Western front India pushed back the Pakistani forces from Jammu and Kashmir from the Rann of Kutch. India had captured strategic locations of Jammu and Kashmir and about 5000 square kilometers of Pakistani territory in Southern Punjab and Sindh when it declared an unilateral cease fire in Western front on 16th December 1971.

There is one school of thought that India’s strategy in 1971 and war aim should have included capture of POK to once for all sort out the Kashmir issue. But, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s political objective of the war did not extend beyond the scope of liberation of Bangladesh. May be it would have been possible to achieve such a probable extended aim militarily, but UN pressure on ceasefire would have come in the way. Soviets were breathing over India’s neck to wrap up the war at the earliest. Evidences suggest that Polish Resolution in UN had a Soviet backing whose acceptance would have been disadvantageous to India because of the stipulations of returning the captured territory. Polish Resolution had a high chance of getting passed but for Bhutto’s walking away from the meeting. Evidences suggest that Indira Gandhi, did not want to extend the scope of war despite being advised by some of her colleagues, lest India is seen as out to destroy Pakistan which Nixon perceived.

I would like to end the thesis with the salient observation of a study group on the second world war, which I felt is applicable in this war. It states: “No amount of operational virtuosity…..redeem fundamentals flaws in political judgment. Whether policy shaped strategy or strategic imperatives drove policy was irrelevant. Miscalculations in both led to defeat, and any combination of politico-strategic error had disastrous results, …Mistakes in operations and tactics can be corrected, but political and strategic mistakes live forever.”
End Note—Chapter XII


10. Niazi, Ibid.


18. Amin,A.H. *Anatomy of Indo-Pak Wars: A Strategic and Operational Analyses*.


