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# Generating Military Power Through Partnering

Harsh Vardhan Singh

## Abstract

*One primary lesson that has emerged from Russia-Ukraine conflict is that no nation can engage in a conflict alone. Be it geo-economics, geo-strategy or any other compulsion, the present-day entwined global order would ultimately force all nation-states to finally take sides. In an era of great-power competition, a network of partnerships carefully curated over the past 75 years provides India with a unique advantage. These networks are the backbone of an international order that has ensured strategic autonomy and created an environment of multi-polarity. Partners help share the burden of common defence in tangible and intangible ways. Sino-Pak collusion and the likelihood of a unitary front along our Northern and Western borders is a stark reality. This however in the military domain poses a distinct but inextricably linked challenge for contemporary land forces which need mitigation by inculcating new doctrinal templates.*

## Introduction

The first anniversary of special military operations by Russia in Ukraine has come and gone, but in this one year many myths of warfighting have been shattered and yet some more created. The one primary strain

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Brigadier **Harsh Vardhan Singh**, VSM is a Mechanised Infantry Officer and is pursuing his PhD with CLAWS.

which emerges prominently is that no nation can fight a war alone, be it geo-economics, geo-strategy or any other compulsion. The present-day entwined global order would force all nation-states to finally take sides and neutrality or the more glamorous non-alignment is dead and buried. Even USA has looked at its NATO allies to shore up Ukraine's capability to take on a Goliath like Russia. The US Department of Defense

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(DoD)'s 2018 National Defence Strategy states that, "A more lethal, resilient, and rapidly innovating Joint Force, combined with a robust constellation of allies and partners, will sustain American influence and ensure favourable balances of power that safeguard the free and open international order."<sup>1</sup> Even USA embodies the idea of generating land power through partnerships along the spectrum of conflict. It is a combination of different dimensions of C5 (cooperation-competition-crisis-confrontation and conflict). Conflict being in the military, economic, information, space, cognitive and cyber domains. The tactics used are regular and irregular using state and non-state actors.

*Historia Magistra Vitae*, a Latin word meaning "history is a teacher", was used by Cicero in his 'De Oratore'.<sup>2</sup> It expresses the idea that the study of history serves as a lesson for the future. History plays the role of a teacher in many ways. It helps us develop our knowledge and opinions, informs our analysis of present-day events and moral issues and is the road map to one's self-conception. The idea of partnering to generate power is synaptic to Indian history with Chanakya's Mandala Theory eulogising the virtues of creating strategic linkages. Chanakya lived in a period of persistent strife and violence and realised the importance of studying war as an important aspect of statecraft. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* too deal with wars and treat rivalries as natural and normal. However, it is

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the *Arthaśāstra* that forms the foundation of intrinsic Indian strategic thought.

Kautilya has divided both antagonists (*Aris*) and allies (*Mitras*) into various kinds based on their characteristics. Though the former are always potential enemies and the latter potential friends, their exact nature is very relevant in determining the policy route to be taken with them. Among the neighbours, there may be those with an inimical disposition (*Aribhavi*), those who

are friendly (*Mitrabhavi*) and those bound by vassalage (*Bhrityabhavi*).<sup>3</sup> The *Aribhavi* enemies are always intent on harming the conqueror (*Vijigishu*), while the *Mitrabhavi* neighbours are the ones who undertake a campaign simultaneously with the conqueror in pursuit of the same objective or who independently undertake a campaign that helps the *Vijigishu* or who trades in troops and material with him to support his conquest.<sup>4</sup> This shows that the inevitability of having allies and partners has been established for a long, thus the modern strategic articulation demands the same be incorporated to fight future conflicts.

In an era of great-power competition between China, United States of America and Russia, a network of partnerships carefully curated over the past 75 years provide India with a unique advantage. These networks, particularly in Africa and Asia, are the backbone of an international order that has ensured strategic autonomy and created an environment of multipolarity, creating space for economic growth around the world. Partners help share the burden of common defence in tangible and intangible ways. The partnership with like-minded nations creates combined capabilities that far exceed what India could bring to bear on its own. While the geo-construct of Indo-Pacific with QUAD may sound or look vast; it indeed is a microcosm which needs the QUAD members to support each other in

this colossal contest of wills and develop our capabilities not as summative but as an exponential whole. Mahatma Gandhi once said “I believe in the essential unity of all that lives. Therefore, I believe that if one person gains spiritually, the whole world gains and that if one person falls, the whole world falls to that extent.”<sup>5</sup>

One doesn't have to look far back to find examples of the importance of allies and partners to Indian national security. Without the support in science and technology, the Atmanirbharta<sup>6</sup> project of India would have encountered challenges but India has science and technology sharing arrangements with 83 countries<sup>7</sup> which provide the much-needed impetus to the CNP of India. Without intelligence sharing by partners, defeating transnational terrorist organisations with criminal and narco nexus would be far more challenging.<sup>8</sup> In Indo-Pacific, India is working closely with partners to deter China, stem its hegemonic onslaught and play an essential role in deterring aggression, maintaining stability and ensuring free access to the global commons. BIMSTEC, Quad, SCO and other multilateral arrangements strengthen India's ability to confront a variety of security threats China poses. Change is a constant and in words of Benjamin Franklin, “If you finish changing, you are finished”.<sup>9</sup> India is at a strategic inflexion point, standing at a crossroads with the established world order in its death throes.

The accentuated stature of India as *a net security partner in IOR*<sup>10</sup> would demand the capacity and capability to project Sharp Power<sup>11</sup> along with kinetic vectors and adjust its overseas footprint and activities to inspire confidence in other nations. To meet future challenges successfully in an era of finite resources, Indian Armed Forces need to shore up deterrence not only in the conventional domains of land, sea and air but develop capabilities in new domains of space, cyber and cognitive domains. Developing a comprehensive plan to adapt and revitalise the Indian doctrinal framework to synergise actions with partners is both an essential component of a broader strategy for securing own national interests

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and ensuring global balance of power. To compete successfully against Pakistan, deter Chinese aggression, the Armed Forces will need to make difficult decisions about the kinds of systems in which it invests as part of *Atmanirbharta*, how it is postured in key regions in the Indo-Pacific and what kinds of capabilities it is willing to sell (or not sell) to its partners.

Any military officer having served abroad is likely to confess that adapting to joint operational procedures and methods can be the hardest and most painstaking exercise.<sup>12</sup> Maintaining partnerships in the military domain requires sustained effort and reliable and consistent communications, and it rests on a foundation of shared objectives and trust. Growing threats from China and Pakistan, reticence of neighbours like Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh means that India needs to reach out as a reliable partner<sup>13</sup> now more than ever, as points of friction and volatility can result in adverse consequences. Ultimately, shared concerns over common threats and shared security interests are the cornerstone of partnerships. Nations and the polity must however balance many competing demands and pressures to govern; hence, it is rare that India and other neighbours will view each problem the same way or agree on mitigation measures in full. Developing and sustaining partnerships will merit persuasion, persistence, commitment and propensity to compromise for the greater good.

While India has always claimed strategic autonomy,<sup>14</sup> it has to seek more than collaboration; it is to metamorphose from a quest for independent results to a rapport of co-creation, shared responsibility and risks. The true partnership would entail ascertaining shared values and capitalising on the strength of each partner to achieve a level of influence that ensues from a stand-alone model. Shared values in military form

would lead to coalescing force potential, societal demands and policy action to create a sustainable and inclusive path to threat mitigation and attainment of regional goals. Partnerships can be classified into two categories in the military domain.

### **Concerted Partnership**

- Partners share intelligence and coordinate efforts but do not share decision-making power.
- Enhanced degree of autonomy exists with no permanent organization commitment.

### **Deliberate Partnership**

- Member states share decision-making power and are subjected to risk exposure.
- Entails integrated creation of objectives, resource sharing and execution of partnership functions.

It is clear that a broad consensus does exist on the premise of partnering as we claim to achieve the status of ‘Net Security Partner in IOR’. Unlocking the full potential of India would entail embracing the deviations of ‘*why to partner*’ to ‘*how to partner*’. Organisations like armed forces which are result oriented and in a tearing hurry to succeed, discount some essential inquiries amidst the avid enthusiasm of co-working. Key ones are: How to build trust? What issues merit partnerships? What assets can be dedicated to the partnership? What are the metrics to define success of the partnership?

Answers to the above-mentioned questions may sound altruistic but they do enable us to define the desired end state we should be working towards. Trust has to be the scaffolding on which the augmentation of military power would be built. This would be generated by adopting the core values of:

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- **Parity and Respect** Acknowledging the values armed force of every nation brings to the partnership. Resource contribution and organisation culture of each force may differ but the power of partnering would be in harnessing the strength of each member state.

- **Commitment** There is no harm in acknowledging the fact that national interests would continue to reign supreme but partnering entails temporary surrender

of national interests for greater good of regional interests.

- **Transparency** Sharing information, maintaining lines of communication and honest iterations around challenging issues would be intrinsic to partnership's success.
- **Tenacity** It would be imperative to be tenacious; instead we would be facing breakdowns rather than breakthroughs while encumbered with challenging propositions.

Nation-states enter into partnerships at the regional and global level as they seek viable options to promote their mutual national interests, create an eco-system of collective security against threats, conduct HADR missions and engage in peacekeeping, enforcing and peace-building operations. During responses to such situations, nation-states execute a cost versus benefit analysis with respect to their national interests and then determine why, when, in what form and how would they engage in partnering and apply the vectors of the nation's comprehensive national power. States also determine the modus operandi and extent of their commitment for reasons known as well as unknown to other partners. The composition of such a partnered force may metamorphose as partners commit or exit as and when respective national objectives evolve or force

contributions to reach the culmination point of their nation's ability. Joint Force Commanders should expect to conduct operations under the ambit of such an eclectic partnership. While the tenets of partnering cannot assure success, ignoring them may precipitate mission failure due to a lack of unity and economy of effort. One thing that must always remain at the back of our minds while ideating on partnering is that although nations will often offer forces while partnering, they will *rarely relinquish command of their forces in entirety*. This presents us with a paradox of divergence in convergence.

The employment of military power "*at war*" in the classical Westphalian concept of interstate war<sup>15</sup> is well understood by one and all and partnering in the modern context does not manifest in this quadrant of conflict. It is the role essayed by military power in "Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW)"<sup>16</sup> which includes the nebulous domain of countering non-traditional warfare waged by belligerents who are non-state actors—along with their attendant organised criminal, illicit economic and governmental corruption components—that the capabilities of land power can be enhanced by partnering. As land force leaders one should carefully consider such factors as mission, nature of the operational environment, quantum of the force, risks involved, duration and rules of engagement (RoE) as these would also define the levels of partnering.

The beginning of partnering must be a prolific cross-pollination of research, military education and development, procurement support and expeditious utilisation of production resources. Military force capability amplification will also depend on standardisation of operating procedures and enhanced interoperability within partner nations' forces to achieve practical cooperation. The basic purpose of standardisation of operational procedures is to achieve synergy among partners through the efficient use of resources and the reduction of operational, logistic, communications, technical and procedural encumbrances in operations. Interoperability



greatly enhances the competencies of partnered operations as such forces are interoperable across material and nonmaterial capabilities and can operate together effectively in numerous ways.

Having enunciated the conceptual construct of partnering, we get down to the brass tacks of things which need to be done on the ground, after all the proof of the pudding is in eating it. The key structural enhancement that should ameliorate the partnering effort is a liaison setup with coordination centres. Partnering demands the establishment of interaction between forces of each nation even during peacetime ensuring a better understanding of TTPs, facilitating the ability to synergise operations, assisting in the transfer of vital information, enhancing mutual trust and developing teamwork. The linguistic difference within a partnership is a massive impediment and can present a real challenge to C2, efficient communications and unity of effort. Wherever and whenever possible, liaison officers should be able to facilitate interaction and coordination with other forces. Another method from a futuristic perspective would be the use of a coordination centre for fusing the intelligence picture and be the *locus foci* around which the C2 structures can be strapped on. It would provide partner nations' armed forces with a platform to execute the planning process and support an integrated interaction for the leadership in crisis situations.

In a transnational environment, partnering must be synchronised, coordinated and/or integrated with international government agencies like UNO, and non-governmental organisations (Red Cross or Red Crescent) in an attempt to achieve unity of effort in the operational area. Commanders must ensure that armed forces comply with applicable national and international laws during the conduct of all operations. International agreements are the primary source of rules of international law applicable to US, multinational, and Host Nation partnered forces. The most comprehensive are status-of-forces agreements (SOFAs); which need to be articulated and penned well in advance.

Since the Napoleonic era, the armies have always marched on their stomachs and there is eternal truism to this thought. While we can pontificate to no end on issues of operational and legal prudence, it finally boils down to the logistics of sustaining this force. Successful logistic operations are governed by several unique principles. First, logistic operations will have to be a collective responsibility of partner forces. Although nations will inherently support their respective forces the land force commanders at ground zero would have to be given sufficient authority over logistic resources to ensure that the force is supported in the most efficient and effective manner. Cooperation and coordination are necessary among participating forces to avoid duplication and an askew tooth-to-tail ratio, thereby reducing the logistic footprint and making the force more responsive.

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## Conclusion

Armed forces must build on partnering and aim to deliver deterministic priorities—stabilising our region, contributing to the resilience of friendly countries, and enhancing our responsiveness in all phases of the conflict cycle. Partnering would strengthen India’s common security only if we understand our strengths, what we do best and what we could do better. Only then can we ensure peace and stability in the region.

## Notes

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5. MK Gandhi, “The Gospel of Sarvodaya”, at <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap45.htm>. Accessed on April 3, 2023.
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9. “When you are Finished Changing you are Finished”, *Maine Technology Institute*, at <https://www.mainetechnology.org/blog/when-youre-finished-changing-youre-finished/>. Accessed on April 21, 2023.
10. Admiral Karambir Singh, Chief of the Naval Staff addressed the United Service Institution of India audience on 27 August 2021 on the topic “Transformation of the Indian Navy to be a Key Maritime Force in the Indo-Pacific”. Original Video Published on United Service Institution of India USI YouTube Channel, at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCFr1zu4rZN0vVcLiK34-ekA>. Accessed on April 2, 2023.
11. Sharp power is a term coined by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig of the National Endowment for Democracy, a think-tank based in the United States. Sharp power is information warfare waged by powers to shape global perceptions. They consider Sharp power as form of power which permeates the societal space. While attributed to countries like China and Russia for targeting democratic societies it may assume importance in future far greater than Smart Power.
12. Having attended courses of instruction in Singapore, United Kingdom and Russia, it was quite evident to me too.
13. <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/india-has-all-it-takes-to-be-a-reliable-partner-says-pm-400758>. Accessed on April 25, 2023.
14. Rajesh Rajagoplan, “India’s Strategic Choices, China and the Balance of Power in Asia”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Publications, Washington DC, p. 13, at [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_312\\_Rajesh\\_Strategic\\_Choices\\_FNL.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_312_Rajesh_Strategic_Choices_FNL.pdf). Accessed on April 25, 2023.
15. Paul D Miller, *Just War and Ordered Liberty* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 81-117, at <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108876544.004>.
16. Joint Publication 3-07, “Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War”, at file:///C:/Users/dell/Downloads/p4013coll9\_874.pdf. Accessed on May 3, 2023.