

# **CHALLENGES OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MILITARY LEADERSHIP – HOW DO WE TRAIN?**

“An officer of the future is required to be an intelligent warrior, who is a manager, a bureaucrat, a specialist technician and a well informed citizen; an officer who obeys and yet thinks before he acts; who is young yet mature, and who is both an idealist and a realist”

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergency of a tremendous explosion in new technologies and information access. The national security strategy of the United States describes the change in the last decade as, “The world is undergoing an accelerating process of globalization in which technology is developing exponentially, information is exchanged around the globe cheaply and instantaneously; economies are increasingly becoming interdependent, borders are more porous, people are seeking political and economic freedoms, and more and more groups are seeking expression of their ethnic identity.”

With these changes in the world and introduction of new technologies into the Armed Forces, there is a new leadership challenge to officers at all levels. The way leaders will communicate with their subordinates in training and combat is changing. Leaders also have a responsibility to become technically proficient with new informational technologies centered on computer literacy. Leaders of combat arms units can no longer pride themselves on being ‘Computer Illiterate’.

However, the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) occurring in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not mean that leaders in information age will ‘update’ the core military values of honour, patriotism, honesty, integrity, loyalty, competence, unity, physical and moral courage. Neither the basic leadership traits are going to change. This is because these values and traits do not change with time. It is precisely for this reason that just as it was wrong 1000 years ago for a soldier to lie, cheat or steal, it is still wrong today and it would be wrong 1000 years from now. RMA will face to update the doctrinal, managerial, organizational and technological systems associated with it. These systems must keep pace with the current technology, otherwise they will be left behind, as the rest of the world progresses<sup>1</sup>.

## **Desired Attributes of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leader**

“ It we should have to fight, we should be prepared to do so from the neck up, instead of from the neck down”.

- Jimmy Doolittle

In addition to all the time tested leadership qualities, leaders in the information age have to possess some more skill to operate successfully. He has to meet the demands of high tech battlefield and legitimate expectations of today’s soldiers. He should have excellent skills for; communication with his command and handling of media personel

in war. He has to integrate technology in the system. Some of the traits the 21<sup>st</sup> century leader is expected to possess to be successful are enumerated below :-

- Development of system thinking and the capability to develop combat teams that grow through team learning.
- Develop a shared digitized vision with his subordinates and allow them the latitude and authority to execute the plan within his intent..
- Subordinates and leaders must be able to share ideas and concepts in a mutually beneficial way. Must thoroughly understand mission--type orders and the effect of micro managing the subordinates.
- Leaders must develop mental agility and psychological and physical stamina.
- Leaders must have realistic but varied training experiences.
- Managing and responding to change to reduce bureaucratic barriers.
- Acquire skills in learning; how to learn.
- Management of stress.
- Personnel management skills, empathy and caring leadership.
- Resource Management skills.
- Greater flexibility, adaptability, initiative and foresight.
- Creativity, Innovativeness and ability to use intuition in decision making.
- Skill in dealing with officials from various Government agencies.
- Cultural sensitivity.
- Joint warfare competencies.
- Utilisation of Professional Military Education<sup>2</sup>.

**RMA.** The world has entered a dramatically different era of warfare. Sheer momentum of technological progress, specially the rapid speed of computer based information systems has sparked a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Information Technology, speed and knowledge are the fundamental features of Information Age Warfare. Precision strike, rapid maneuver and simultaneous assaults will overwhelm opponents, before they can react. Flatter, more networked fighting forces are more effective hierarchical organizations which are large, slow and non stealthy in this style of warfare. The world is now changing over to networked type of organization from traditional hierarchical organization. Redundant management layers are to be removed

and span of control has to be increased. But how do we do it? Can we remove Divisional Headquarters directly under command of a Corps Headquarters? Are flatter hierarchies well suited for fighting structures and operational command? How do we fix responsibility in networked organization. We have to find answer to all these questions.

**IT.** IT can reduce but not eliminate uncertainty. It gives commanders windows of opportunity that, with quick and decisive action, help them seize the initiative. Senior leaders need to develop command styles that exploit IT while allowing subordinate to accomplish missions. Exploiting the capabilities of IT demands, well trained leaders willing to take risks within bounds of a commander's intents. However, technology can provide real time information—regardless of accuracy of the data loaded. A computer can provide lots of incorrect information very rapidly. The precision of a computer answer may lure one into a false sense of security. How are the leaders of tomorrow going to use the vast amount of information they will have at their fingertips? This is the very reason why, some senior officers of US Marine Corps visited the NASDAQ, to find out how such heavy volume of data was being handled by the stock exchange.

Instant communication is here to stay. Modern communication systems allow commanders to make decision immediately. Sometimes an instant decision may not be wise. Rapid communication can pressurise a leader into furnishing 'an answer' even if such an answer could and should wait.

Technology is a tool—but it cannot consider everything—specially such intangibles as discipline, motivation, morale and so forth. Some of the best military decisions have been based on what a leader 'felt' was his best course of action. The Incheon landing was a masterpiece of audacity in military strategy. How does tomorrow's leaders develop 'gut sense' that has led to many of the great decisions of the past?

### **Creativity and Innovation**

“You win by understanding the feeling at the end of your fingers”

- Rommel

The first obstacle lies in the nature of traditional basic military training. “Learn to follow before you learn to lead”, is a well proven concept that should not be discarded. Is it sufficient? Good training will produce men and officers who will respond instinctively to anticipated, recognizable circumstances in a manner conditioned during training. How can an officer be trained to recognize and to be prepared for the unexpected? How can an officer be taught to engineer the unexpected or to innovate? Any suggestions that young officers be taught powers of innovation at the expense of military training would be justifiably derided. It would be unrealistic to expect an officer on achieving flag rank make a sudden transition from a responder to an innovator. There are seeds of tension when conformity and questioning are being taught side by side. There are many apparently incompatible objectives; discipline and individuality. conformity and initiative, responding and innovating determination and flexibility, imagination and objectivity. However, fighting and thinking should not be incompatible, but complementary. Otherwise what would happen has been succinctly summarized by a

forthright British general, “ Any military service who tries to separate its fighters from its thinkers is likely to finish up with cowards doing the thinking and fools doing the fighting”.

Officers are usually high in conformity and low in creative ability. Officers who are non conformists do not advance in their careers. Creative, non conformist officers do not strive for the superficial goal of change for its own sake or for notoriety. They are pragmatists who seek change to improve the organization. Creative people tend to have a high tolerance for ambiguity, unusual problem solving skills and non conformist approach to problem solving.

Another factor detrimental to creativity in the Armed Forces is the anti-intellectualism, which the authoritarian structure generates. Lip service is paid to the desirability of independent creative thinking, while in practice it is frowned upon and unconventional ideas receive short shrift<sup>3</sup>. No wonder years ago a superior officer of Admiral Alfred Mahan stated in reference to Mahan, “It is not the business of Naval officers to write books”.

**Intellectual and Cultureal Challenges.** The most important challenges for the officers corps in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are intellectual and cultural. Officers must have the mental flexibility to adjust to rapidly changing conditions, to switch from one form of warfare to another and to improvise. Mental flexibility remains wedded to practical mastery of branch specific skills in the field, and continued study of the profession through formal schooling and individual reflection.

**Political Considerations.** Colin Powell counseled, officers attending National Defense University to gain a better understanding of the politics and the media, because “politics is fundamental”. According to the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “There isn’t a General in Washington who is not political, not if he is going to be successful, because that is the nature of our system<sup>4</sup>”.

This is an extremely sensitive issue. Strategists while serving as the experts in the management of violence must also consider their recommendations within the overall context of the strategic environment. Since military actions taken by the states can never exist in isolation from domestic and foreign policies, economic issues or media coverage; military plans based on `real world’ consideration will carry greater weightage with the civilian policy makers<sup>5</sup>.

Army’s political effectiveness has to be increased. Political effectiveness refers to the ability of the Army’s senior leadership to secure consistently the resources required to maintain, expand and reconstitute itself. To remain viable, the Army require reliable access to financial support, an adequate military—industrial base, sufficient quality and quantity of manpower and control over the conversion of resources to actual capabilities. Decisions regarding allocation of these resources involve political issues. Military leaders must obtain the cooperation of the national political elite. Political effectiveness hinges upon the civilian political leadership’s belief about military activities. To what extent Armed forces leaders can more persuasively articulate their respective services’ needs over those of their competitors, provides the measure of political effectiveness. Civilian leaders routinely ask officers for their expert military

advice on a variety of issues. To make the institutions' voice heard, officers must become 'political savvy' and participate in "Constructive political engagement"<sup>6</sup>.

By offering intellectually sound advice, a politically savvy officers corps can educate civilian leaders on military perspectives. Officers, serving in higher level staff involved in national security, must possess a thorough understanding of the political policy making process and the relations between the legislature, executive and judiciary. The all pervading bureaucracy has to be understood and won over.

However, army officers at all levels are already getting exposed increasingly to political matters than in the past. These activities range from negotiating disarmament of ethnic clans say at North East of the country, to the discussions on policy matters with the civilian elites at the strategic level. Even our young officers are routinely thrust into volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous situations of Low Intensity Conflict Operations, and so on. These tasks are being performed by the Army without any coherent analysis or discussion on the costs and requirements of the expanded jurisdiction. These demand more in terms of intellect, initiative and leadership. How to speak out on matters affecting the provision of arms without the officers corps becoming politicized remain a tricky issue. The solution lies in reconciling the demands of traditional military culture with the dynamics of new age. Military effectiveness in 21<sup>st</sup> century will depend upon the professional ethos, founded upon the willingness, always to fight when required but selfless service to nation, above all.

### **Professional Military Education.**

"The competence of our future leaders and their leadership abilities are determined by our ability to educate and train them using the three pillars of leader development : institutional training, operational assignments and self development."

- General Carl E Vuono

Armed Forces provide officers with a progressive and comprehensive professional training. The tiered system synchronizes, an officer's intellectual growth in line with increasing rank and responsibilities. The system works as far as it goes. Because of today's more diverse mission, wide range of threats and budget constraints, institutional military training can no longer fully prepare officers for the variance found within the full spectrum of the conflict.

Officers have to study their profession throughout their careers and education must become a concern of all operational commanders as well as all professional institutions. The Services must pay considerably more time to Professional Military Education (PME), reward those involved, demand more from students and encourage intellectual growth in the profession of arms. We must strive to produce officers who are not only highly trained but who have been taught how to think. The difference between training and education is that; the education should instill the mental flexibility to look beyond today's possibilities, to anticipate and perhaps even to help to shape up tomorrow.

Our army must become a learning organization. Our leaders must commit to lifelong learning through a balance of education and operational experience complemented by self development to fill the knowledge gap, education and operational experience do not provide<sup>7</sup>. Training and education are not interchangeable. Education is a matter of intellect, thought, indirect leadership, advice and consensus building. An officer's training requirement decreases as he rises in rank, while his corresponding education requirement increases. What is needed more is; that getting officers to think broadly and contextually and providing them a wider and a deeper way of seeking the world. It suggests a greater fusion between the training and the education across the officers' careers.

Officers must read a lot, should not get seduced by the TV. One will get a lot of news and opinions from reading. Also they should not be afraid to read viewpoints that may be out of the mainstream. They should read journals that publish things that are critical, even unfairly critical of ideas that one may hold dear.

There is a another problem of entrenched assumption, often propagated by some senior officers. They believe that learning and academic rigour is secondary to recreation, family time and networking. Officers tend to believe that nominations to some of the prestigious courses are rewards for past performances and an opportunity to relax with family, build friendship and concentrate on future assignments.

**Distance Learning.** The technique of distance learning offers a tremendous opportunity to assist in making this education concept a reality. This method must be fully explored and used in innovative ways. Distance education must be used to integrate strategic education into already existing courses. It could also be useful in assisting junior officers in studying core professional requirements in history, politics, philosophy, economics, culture and geography.

**Jointmanship.** Joint operations will be the order of the day. The leadership then will have to understand the functioning of the other two Services, and work in complete harmony with them. Officers need to be exposed to joint matters earlier in their careers. To successfully grow as strategic leaders for its new jurisdiction Services cannot wait until say, 20 year point of an officer's career to educate him on security studies. Most important of all is the need to imbibe in the profession the requirement for life long learning.

**Husbanding of Equipment and use of Simulators & Computerised Wargaming.** The cost of equipment and munitions, say Precision Guided Munitions, missiles etc. are prohibitively high. To impart effective training, preserve equipment and save on training costs simulators will have to be extensively used. Computer Wargaming, would not only be cost effective but is likely to provide an effective tool to commanders and staff for decision making, under conditions that are difficult, if not impossible, to replicate in peace time<sup>8</sup>.

**Systems Approach to Training.** Systems approach to training process is fundamentally sound but not executed well. Due to lack of training development resources, the Armed Forces do not have up to date training and education products, the foundation for standard based training and leader development. Standards are the basis for developing training, assessing performance and providing feedback. These

common standards must be documented, accessible and digitised. ARTRAC and similar organizations in other two Services should design the Systems Approach to Training development and support structure for training and doctrine development. System Approach to Leadership would stress the need for leaders to gain a thorough understanding of their organization – its capabilities and limitations, the technology that drives it, the systems within the systems and the communication tools (natural and man made) used to maintain links between leaders, followers and situations.

**Role of Senior Leaders for Development of Officer Cadre.** Senior leaders must help the subordinate officers by mentoring, coaching, counseling and sponsorship. Experience is the best teacher. Teachership and leadership go hand in glove. The leader must be willing to teach skills, to share insights and experiences and to work very closely with people to help them mature and be creative. By teaching leaders can inspire, motivate and influence subordinates at various levels. Senior leaders must encourage officers to pursue Professional Military Education at every level of their careers. Senior leaders must be involved, must participate, shape and form the thinking and character of their officers.

Army should send upcoming officers on study leave to good universities to enroll in subjects like humanities and social sciences. A broad liberal arts education provides officers with greater depth of intellectual insights into the human factors prevalent in war.

**Media.** Future warfare will be fought in the unforgiving glare of public TV<sup>9</sup>. Media will aggressively pursue the Armed Forces in any conflict and report it back by print, radio or TV. Media presence will have a great impact on a commander and the planners in future operations. The military cannot and should not control the media. The military, infact, should exploit the capabilities of the media as a weapon in war. Tomorrow's leaders have no choice but to become media savvy.

**System Thinking**<sup>10</sup>. System Thinking and learning organization models are helping to shape as to how Army leaders view the world and the relationship of our Armed Forces in the ever changing world security environment. Significantly these concepts are creating new leadership ideas and developing new relationships between leaders and subordinates. System thinking represents a true revolution in how individuals view cause and effect relationships. It represents an unique method of understanding and analyzing the environment. The importance of becoming a system thinker is critical to becoming a successful leader in the future. System thinking focuses on the relationship between the arrangements of the various systems and subsystems that operate in a given environment.

**Conclusion.** The information age presents several paradoxes for leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. While the technological bent of information age prizes specialization and individual technical skills, their integration and synchronization into a useful system for warfighting demands an officer with a much broader range of generalized knowledge. Mastery of traditional branch specialty skills and the moral inspiration of soldiers fighting in chaotic conditions continue to be fundamental areas of officers' expertise. Strategic requirements, however, oblige even low level officers to understand joint and combined operations, as well as art of negotiation. The uncertainties of strategic environment created by the flood of data and societal change demand officers with

both; greater moral courage as well as technical mastery of the art and the science of the war.

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