

# Issue Brief

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Manoeuvre Warfare in  
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Operations

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# *Manoeuvre Warfare in Counter Insurgency / Counter Terrorism Operations*

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## *Abstract*

*This paper explores the integration of **Manoeuvre Warfare principles** into Counter Insurgency (CI) and Counter Terrorism (CT) operations, emphasizing flexibility, decentralized command, and technological innovation. It highlights the use of **Directive Style of Command (DSOC)** to empower junior leaders in fluid scenarios, ensuring adaptability and creativity on the ground. Key operational strategies include the employment of **UAVs, drones, and Mobile Operating Bases (MOBs)** for real-time intelligence and dynamic mobility.*

*In the non-kinetic domain, the paper stresses the importance of **perception management** to counter terrorist propaganda and maintain public support, alongside a multipronged strategy addressing the ideological, economic, and social roots of terrorism. Recommendations focus on enhancing intelligence-sharing, countering cyber threats, advanced training for Manoeuvre warfare, and human resource development to improve decision-making in complex environments. By leveraging these strategies, the paper advocates for a unified, adaptive, and technology-driven approach to achieve CI / CT objectives.*

## **Introduction**

Manoeuvre Warfare is a thought process having pre-emption, disruption and finally destruction of the enemy as its key elements. It involves multiple unanticipated events in **different domains** viz. unhinging the enemy, shattering its cohesion. **Manoeuvre is both physical and psychological with the primary objective being the enemy's mind.** The Great Maratha King Shivaji was an ardent proponent of manoeuvre warfare. Whether it was the cavalry who were always two steps ahead of the enemy (Pathak, 2021) in speed, guile and agility or small team ambushes or the Maratha Fleet – the Marathas were everywhere. Their presence, speed, deception and unconventional tactics overwhelmed the enemy in time, space and psyche.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the security challenges besetting India are varied and complex. The country has seen four major conventional wars, but the most persistent and potent security threats are unconventional, in form of protracted proxy war and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir region, overtly and covertly supported by Pakistan. The **new age terrorists** backed with explicit training regimes display a balance mix of fundamentalism, radicalization and conventional military training and are increasingly undertaking complex operations with fanatic zeal. Our counter terrorism strategy, though successful in many regions, has fallen short of eradicating this menace completely. A comprehensive strategy which aims at physical and psychological defeat of the 'enemy' is the need of the hour. As the proxy war scenario in Jammu and Kashmir continues to emerge and develop, so must our solutions. It would therefore be **prudent to analyze the application and integration of tenets of Manoeuvre Warfare in conduct of military operations** in Jammu and Kashmir.

## **Defining Manoeuvre Warfare**

- In military terms, **Manoeuvre Warfare is a war fighting philosophy which involves a number of rapid and unexpected actions that seek to shatter the enemy's physical and psychological cohesion.** Manoeuvre warfare is based on **innovative tactics, techniques and unpredictability.** In essence, manoeuvre warfare is a way of approaching any problem from different domains in a **non-linear manner.**

## Means of Application of Manoeuvre Warfare

The philosophy of manoeuvre being non-linear has at least three distinguishable means of application, as may be discerned from numerous historical examples and which has been lucidly elaborated by Robert Leonhard in his seminal book, 'The Art of Manoeuvre', (1991)(Leonhard, 1991) which are **pre-emption, dislocation and disruption** leading to **destruction**. Brief explanation of these is as follows: -

- **Pre-Emption:** Pre-emption implies a move that is undertaken before manifestation of an event. Whether offensive or defensive, pre-emption is a positive act calculated to produce enough leverage, to seize an opportunity before the enemy does so. One of its more modern meanings is '**to appropriate or seize for oneself before others**'. This definition is probably the most relevant in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorism (CI/CT) operations, for the truest military application of the term relates to seizing an opportunity to neutralize the terrorist before the terrorist strikes.
- **Dislocation:** Dislocation is the **art of making the enemy's strength irrelevant and the same has been applied throughout history**. The most common way to make this happen is to **remove the enemy force from the decisive point**, whether in a theatre, an area of operations, or on a battlefield. It means **physical removal of the enemy force from the decisive point, or removal of the decisive point away from the enemy force**. In CI/CT environment domination of area in physical, psychological, social and virtual domains gives restricted operational space to the terrorist, hence causing dislocation.
- **Disruption and Destruction:** Disruption is the practice of defeating the enemy by attacking his center of gravity i.e. paralyzing his forces. The aim of disruption is **to avoid having to destroy the entire physical component of the enemy force by direct attack, in favour of rendering it inert by discerning and attacking the Centre of Gravity**. More than any other form of manoeuvre, disruption capitalizes upon the intangibles of war - psychology, morale, surprise, and fear. Use of all available means in conducting intelligence-based operation to neutralize the terrorist and simultaneously busting Over Ground Worker (OGW) and financing network to wean away the local support and showcasing the same as Information Warfare (IW) strategy/ themes; thus, cracking and destroying the entire terrorist eco system.

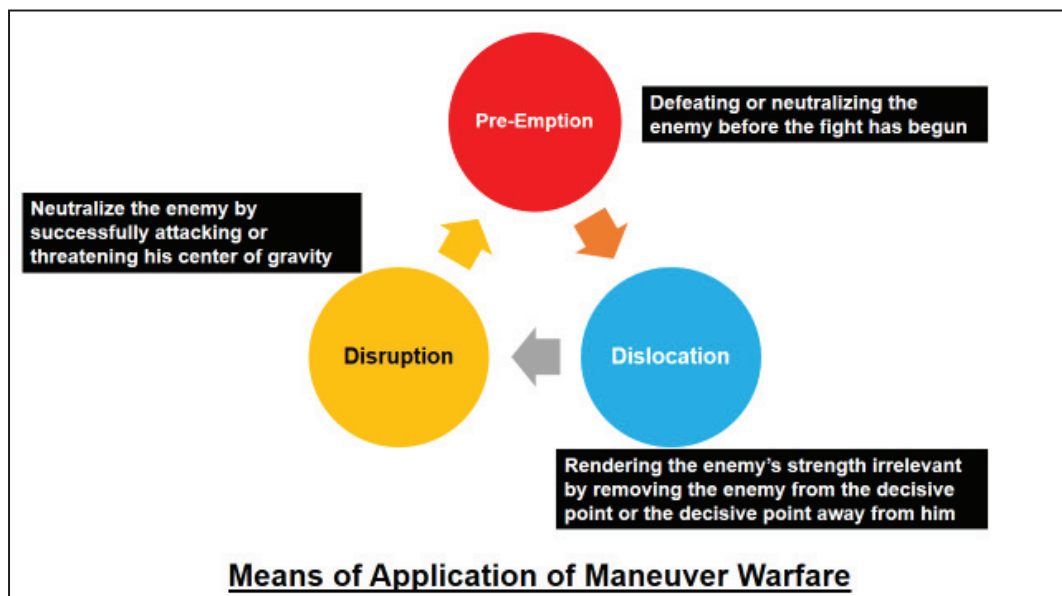


Figure 1

## Tenets of Manoeuvre Warfare

- Schwerpunkt - Always Designate a Main Effort:** Schwerpunkt (Lind, 2019) is a German term which means Point of Main Effort (POME). British to call it by same name while the Americans call it the Focus of Effort. The concept of Schwerpunkt focuses all its effort to strike hard at one of the enemy's weak points. **Schwerpunkt is not just the main attack, it is a conceptual focus. It pulls together the efforts of all stakeholders and guides them towards the goal, and the result.** In CI/CT environment, the main effort is to destroy the terrorist eco system. This involves coordination of all agencies – paramilitary forces, intelligence agencies, cyber warriors, civil society, local support etc which leads to neutralization of terrorist and their support system.
- Faster OODA/ IDA Cycle:** Having the Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA)/ Identify-Decide-Act (IDA)(Lind, 2019) cycle consistently and repeatedly faster than the enemy, so that by the time the enemy reacts to one action, another action has already taken place, unhinges and breaks enemy's cohesion. In CI/CT environment, the initiative must remain with the Security Forces (SF), and they need to maintain momentum of operations in multiple domains so as to **make the terrorists react rather than act first.** The same is shown in the figure below.

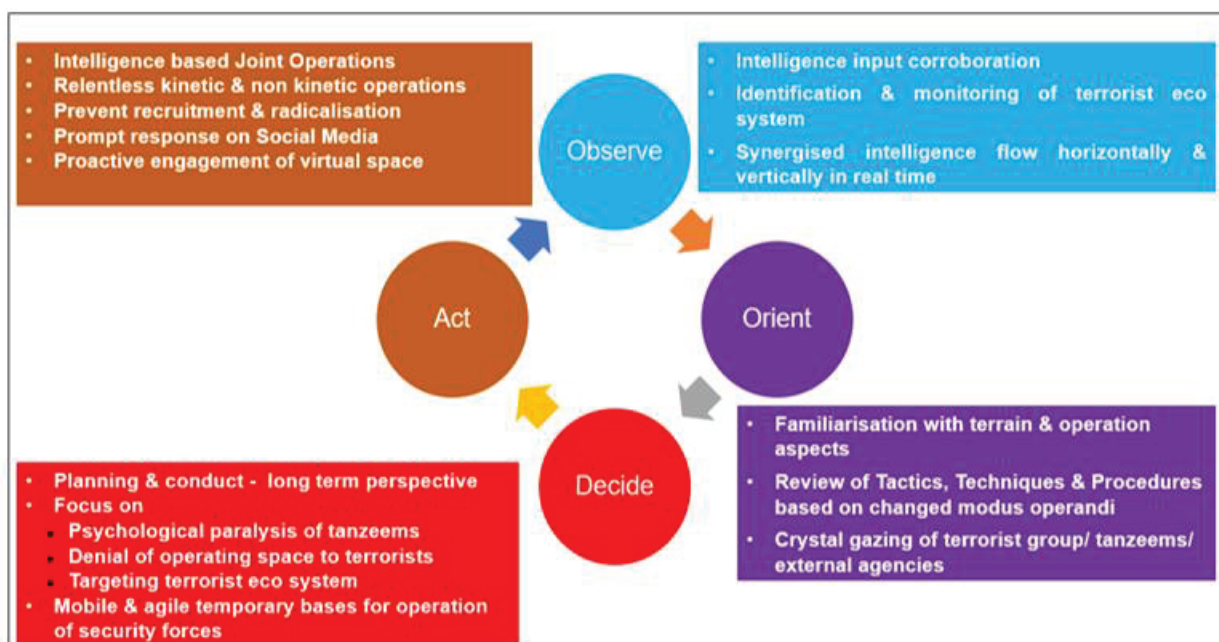


Figure 2

- Avoid Enemy Strength & Attack on His Weaknesses:** Locate the enemy's critical vulnerability and focus its main effort to disrupt the same with maximum force. Intelligence based operations, use of technology, identification of logistic chain, domination of area of responsibility and weaning away the local support are some identified ways and means in a grey environment to have an upper hand over the terror eco system.
- Avoid Set Rules & Patterns:** Every situation is unique and requires a solution dictated by the specific terrain and dynamic enemy. In manoeuvre warfare, **all patterns and formulae are to be avoided.** The terrorists or their eco system should **not be able to predict the actions of the security forces.** If the actions follow predictable pattern, the enemy can easily intrude inside



the OODA loop. Unconventional tactics will yield out of proportion results in CI/CT environment as also avoid casualty to own troops.

- **Surprise and Audacity: Creating and seizing fleeting opportunities** is the focus. Manoeuvre warfare relies more on the realm of psychology than the physical plane. It is essential **to achieve a moral surprise**. By having a faster tempo and by keeping it higher than that of the enemy; not only material surprise can be achieved but also be restored. Audacity is a multiplier of combat power in much the same way as surprise is. In fact, **high tempo audacity produces surprises**. Audacity must be balanced with judgment, lest it borders on recklessness.
- **Simultaneity during Operations:** An all-out effort must be made to ensure simultaneity at all levels. Synergized application of forces in all the domains viz. **physical, virtual and psychological** must be carried out to blunt the enemy's effort to take advantage of adverse situations.

### Directive Style of Command (DSOC)

- **DSOC:** The leadership style is directive (House, et al 1975) which essentially entails **e-centralized leadership and command philosophy** in which decisions and actions are taken at the lowest level of command. In simple terms, in DSOC the commander gives out a broad outline of his intention in terms of what he wants to be achieved. Thereafter he allocates the tasks to his subordinate commanders, provides him with the resources and does not curtail their freedom of action in achieving the task.
- **Need/ Necessity of DSOC:** In DSOC the whole premise is based on the **belief in the ability of an individual or a group** to solve a problem without recourse to higher authority. **Detail control, as opposite to Mission control, does not normally yield good results when the situations are changing at a fast pace; nor does it function well when the vertical flow of information is disrupted.** In CI/CT operations, there is a great amount of uncertainty in tactical operations because of the fluid and dynamic situation/ environment. Time is also very critical as a small window of opportunity exists between operational intelligence and the action on the ground. Hence mission control i.e. **DSOC is a necessity for achieving desired results.**
- **Tenets of DSOC.**
  - **Auftragstaktik – Mission Type Orders:** Auftragstaktik(Oliviero, 2022) is a concept that requires commanders to articulate a **precise mission statement** but **leaves “how” in the hands of the subordinates**. Leaders at each level should know what **the commander's intent two levels is at least above**. The major advantage of this type of command style in CI/CT environment is that **commander on the ground can act and react faster to a changing situation**, as he does not refer to his superior commander each time and can thus have a shorter decision cycle than the terrorists. For this the military professionalism at all levels needs to be very high.
  - **Uniformity of Operational Thought and Purpose:** Uniformity of thought is necessary to allow the subordinates to understand what the commander wants to achieve. Unity of purpose is the concept of direct control which is examination of the mission and intent of the superior commander. In CI/CT operations, it is essential to understand the thought and purpose of each action. All actions should be **converging towards achieving the main purpose** set by higher commanders in chain. Actions at sub tactical level have strategic ramifications.

- **Subordinate Responsibility and Resources:** Subordinates should be willing to accept responsibility and to exercise initiative when completing assigned tasks. This necessitates professionalism and exemplary training which encourages independence of action while maintaining uniformity of thought. Commanders should provide subordinates with adequate resources. Tasks should be realistic within the resource allocation available. This implies that commanders at all levels must be aware of the quantity of resources available and their battle worthiness to fulfill a given task.
- **Speed of Decisive Action:** Speed of taking decisions and subsequent relevant actions is mandatory for success. The operational environment is extremely fluid, the situations are dynamic and has multiple domains to act; thus, speedy decisions is an imperative for success in CI/CT operations. Following up on multiple leads with speedy decisions to launch the operation at short notice will yield results.

### Manoeuvre Warfare in CI/ CT Operations

- Principles of Manoeuvre warfare in CI/CT environment are applied fully in operations. As (Simpkin, 1985) explains in his seminal book *‘Race to the Swift: Thoughts on 21st Century Warfare’* (2012) **the theories of manoeuvre warfare and terrorism or guerrilla warfare are very similar** to the extent that they derive from similar sources, pursue similar objectives and arrive at largely the same basic prescriptive rules for success, at least **at the tactical level**. A physical operation being conducted after developing intelligence involves many facets in different domains. In the physical domain, it is the move of troops and resources, in virtual domain it is aligning the perception, in psychological domain it is shaping a narrative. All of this is simultaneous non-linear and with all available means.

### Environment Scan: Applicability of DSOC in CI/CT Operations

- The DSOC is applicable in all types of operations especially CI/ CT environment. DSOC does not mean lack of control but implies that detailed modus operandi with respect to what needs to be done for accomplishing the task is to be worked out by commander on ground, rather than working on the ways to do it.
- **Domains Identification:** Neutralization of terrorists and prevention of recruitment/ radicalisation needs to go hand in hand. Therefore, the two domains of operations – **kinetic and non-kinetic** need to be applied simultaneously in CI/ CT environment. Identification of kinetic and non-kinetic operations is at higher Headquarters (HQs) but planning and execution is decentralised. Therefore, the operational environment needs to be clear to critically analyse and provide recommendations. The same is elaborated in the subsequent paras.

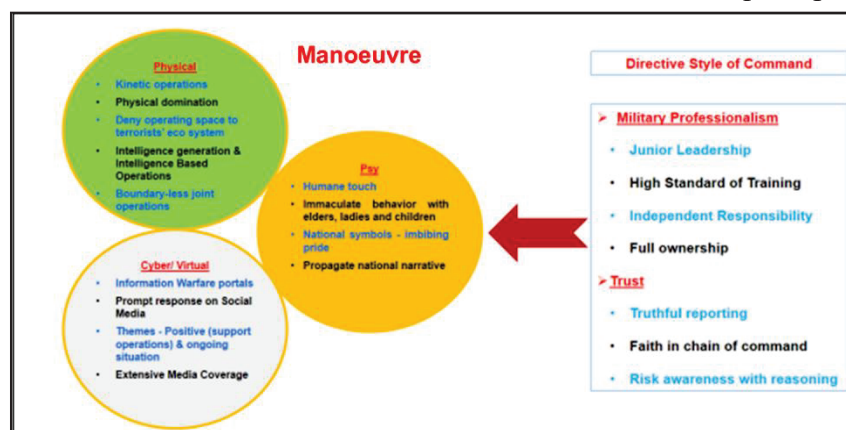


Figure 3

## **Kinetic Operations.**

- **Intelligence:** The basis of any successful operation is specific intelligence [Human intelligence (HUMINT)/ Technical intelligence (TECHINT)]. Present system of intelligence collection and corroboration is not in real time and therefore, the ratio between successful operations vis-à-vis speculative, specific and credible intelligence-based operations at Unit/ subunit level carried out, is quite high. Hence, synergised efforts are required to collate and corroborate intelligence from various sources in real time. **Dissemination of intelligence in horizontal and vertical plane should be done simultaneously** so that the intelligence generation is useful in terms of availability in time to the commanders to act and higher HQs to monitor.
- **Planning and Conduct of Operations:** The current methodology of planning and conduct of operations is oriented towards manoeuvre and DSOC. While the broad plan is made in conjunction with higher HQ, the execution is decentralised to tactical commanders. Mobilization and move of resources are coordinated by higher HQs. **Broad Planning and conduct of operations can be summarised as follows: -**
  - Mission type orders are the general norm but the commanders on ground interpret the same based on changed environment/ scenario keeping the overall goal of achieving the mission. Technology needs to be extensively used e.g. Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) and Quad-Copters for keeping an ‘eye in the sky’, use of helicopters to insert troops, change location based on intelligence inputs, use of night sights and high-powered search lights to operate 24 x 7 etc. DSOC gives leverage to commanders to execute the operations in changed environment stage. **It gives flexibility, mental agility and enhances the risk appetite of junior leaders as he becomes ‘in charge of the situation’.** It creates a platform for innovation as well as creativity by young leaders during the conduct of operations. Terrorists generally have the initiative and therefore we need to operate inside the decision loop of the terrorists and their network. It is essential that our OODA/ IDA loop be consistently and repeatedly faster than the terrorists.
  - Drills/ Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) must be revised by professional judgement. **The static nature of operational bases leads to loss of surprise and initiative.** Greater reliance needs to be on Mobile Operating Bases (MOBs). These MOBs are dynamic, changing as per presence of terrorists/ terrorist eco system. The troops involved in CI/ CT Operations must remember that they are **“Hunters” and can’t be static.** Small teams operating in CI/CT operations must always be ready to exploit such opportunities which generally come in the form of sudden information regarding presence of terrorists in a given area. To immediately build up one’s forces **the distance between the various tactical groups need to be measured in time not distance.**
  - The characteristic of CI/CT operations being fluid and dynamic, **set pattern and orthodox nature of action will not yield desired results.** Hence, the agility and mental mobility of junior leaders will pay rich dividends in terms of success. Speed in planning, taking decisions independently and flexibility in implementation on ground during operations must be with young junior leaders.

**Terrorist Eco System:** A number of OGWs and terrorist associates form part of terror eco system. In hinterland operations, the eco system is the centre of gravity for terrorist tanzeems/ groups. **Busting of OGW network at appropriate time** will not only target eco system but also provide various leads to reach to the terrorists residing under safe havens.

- **Resources.** Resources are always scarce in CI/CT environment. The demand of new advanced technological resources needs to be fulfilled to counter the changes in modus operandi of terrorists from time to time. Regular reviews and procurements should be done to deal with changed modus operandi, new technology including arms and ammunition and dynamic sits in CI/CT environment.
- **Single Point Authority and Accountability.** Single point authority and accountability connotes the principle of Unity of Effort. It requires designation of a single agency with the primary responsibility for the conduct of CI/CT operations in a given scenario.
- **Non-Kinetic Domain.**
  - **Perception Management.** In view of the centrality of population, management of public perception is of utmost importance. The terrorists use print, electronic and social media to take exponential advantage from publicity. Inconvenience caused to the public due to security measures in place breeds a **sense of discontent and is exploited by eco system by creating a feeling of ill will against the security forces and the Government.** Manoeuvre in the virtual domain needs to out do the propaganda by the enemy. The strategy for counter propaganda should be focused on exposing terrorist support, their weaknesses and false promises made by them thus create narrative in our favour.
  - **People Centric Operations.** The population is always the focus in CI/CT Operations. The objective of terrorists is to challenge or discredit the legitimacy and influence of the State and for that population is the obvious target to achieve this objective. This centrality of population therefore requires all the actions taken by the State, whether military or civic align towards the objective of preventing alienation of the populace. Popular support is the force multiplier in Counter Insurgency operations to either side. **Speed of decisive action is equally applicable in conducting people centric operations in non-kinetic domain.**
  - **Multipronged Strategy: Unity of Effort.** The warfare waged by terrorist tanzeems has its root in ideological differences, ethnic divide, religious fundamentalism, economic deprivation, external support/ direct involvement, criminal collaboration, narco etc and is focused for effect on population. As a result, the strategy to counter it **should be multidisciplinary and multi-pronged to** address the root causes at political, social, ideological, economic and judicial level. Concurrently, military force should be applied to maintain secure internal environment as well as to **apprehend, prosecute and neutralize the terrorist outfits.** There needs to be an integrated approach in CI environment showcasing collective administrative capability, economic resources, propaganda machinery etc. Operations in such cases should be guided by **a single strategy narrative that is visible across all lines of operations.**



## Recommendations

- **Organisational Changes including Resource Allocation.** For successful conduct of operations with minimum collateral damage the Manoeuvre approach with DSOC becomes a necessity. Recommendations with respect to equipment, training and human resource development (HRD) which will enhance operational effectiveness from the point of view of staying ahead of the terrorists are given in the subsequent paragraphs.
- **Communication and Intelligence, Surveillance & Recce (ISR) Capability Enhancement.**
  - **Surveillance and Target Acquisition.** With the advancement and availability of high-tech surveillance equipment, there is a need to further procure and **integrate need based surveillance resources** for in depth transparency with commanders at all levels. The system must provide real time information and continuous monitoring. **Real time information dissemination to all concerned will achieve simultaneity for proactive actions** at execution level.
    - **Employment of UAVs.** UAVs can provide one of the most accurate, real time and high resolution information to commanders for target acquisition and expeditious decision making thus enhancing Manoeuvre. There is a **need to provide multirole UAVs with enhanced endurance capability with sophisticated technology at field formation level** where usage of employment is at short notice.
    - **Drone Tech.** Dynamites were one of the first advancements that aided and abetted terrorists activities by providing them violent means to fulfill their agenda. Similarly digital communication, network technology and multitude of fusing devices have given additional capability to terrorist groups to sustain their activity despite being located at faraway places. Easy availability of highly potent drones pose a threat of remotely control attacks on individuals and facilities which are guarded. **Delivery of weapons, carrying explosives and drugs are the latest trends. The dropping of bombs by drones in Manipur is a wake up call for the security forces to have adequate counter UAS measures at sub unit level.**
  - **Communication and Navigation Devices.** The analysis of current trends in the use of communication & navigation devices by terrorists indicates a growing sophistication. Wireless sets were modified to enable & ensure mobile communication in places without mobile connectivity. Complementary installed applications & establishing a connection with modified wireless sets enabling smartphones to send/ receive SMS where no mobile phone coverage exists. **Uniformity of efforts of all stake holders and advanced technology based interception devices will assist in breaking the back bone of technology driven terrorism.**
  - **Synergised Intelligence Set Up.** Intelligence and free flowing information are essential for undertaking manoeuvre based operations. It is important that the battlefield/ Area of Operations (AOO) intelligence is enmeshed with the existing network. This **will require enhanced level of synergy and cooperate among defence, CAPF and civil intelligence agencies. Seamless flow of information needs to be ensured vertically and horizontally** to all concerned in real time.

**Countering Cyber Jihad:** An adhoc organisation countering rampant spread propaganda by the terrorists on the social media will not suffice. A well-conceived narrative disseminating different view

ad the other side of story also needs to be presented to the entire eco system. **A robust and dedicated organisation is the need of the hour to protect and defend the ‘digital homeland’ and the same must become an integral part of the Kashmir policy.** Cyber platforms are being employed to radicalise, recruit and malign the country’s image regionally as well as internationally. The psychological dislocation and the war of narrative will be won by the side who is adaptive and flexible enough to work in the Grey Zone. In such an establishment, while the security forces personnel must be the primary stake holders, the traditional tools of engaging the local communities must also get prominence.

**Training:** Structured training for manoeuvre warfare is an arduous task and requires careful deliberation. The same must be emphasised in all courses of instructions of officers as well as troops. **Adaptive, flexible and innovative responses to meet unexpected situations must be encouraged.** At the same time, the tenets of executing decentralised command in ‘fog of war/ gray zone’ must be ingrained at all levels. It is imperative that military leaders at all levels have the necessary conceptual, tactical and technical skills and hence the understanding of the ways and means for the effective application of all the combat resources at their disposal.

**Human Resource Development Strategy for CI Operations:** Human Resource is the primary and the final component, which shall finally conduct operations in a conflict, whether limited and in a sub-conventional scenario. Apropos, the human resource has to be identified, trained, nurtured, equipped and deployed for meeting the challenges effectively. This requires addressing by the concerned agencies at appropriate levels with respect to changes in mindset, training, psychological hardening, intelligence building etc. The volatility, complexity and ambiguity of CI environment impacts on the decision making and therefore, underscores the importance of suitable frames of reference and training to enable them to operate effectively in an arena, which is largely grey.

**Directive Style of Command (DSOC):** DSOC is a prerequisite for executing fluid and swift CI operations adopting manoeuvre warfare. The task of subordinates should be on operating instructional model with an avoidance of the method of execution. This will ensure that subordinate commanders are able to cope with the conditions in battle with terrorists in a better manner and that they are less predictable in execution of their tasks. The importance of DSOC in CI/ CT operations needs no emphasis as small teams are responsible to operate independently for long durations.

## Conclusion

The nature and expression of war has always been unpredictable at all levels of war fighting. The tenets of manoeuvre warfare are relevant to all the operations – military and non-military alike. The theory behind these tenets remain contemporary, however the application can be modified as per the situation. By prioritizing initiative, adaptability and decentralized decision making, manoeuvre warfare enables the forces to outfight more conventional forces. It is quite evident that Indian Armed Forces have been battling the state sponsored terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir with a fair degree of success since last three decades. The essential tenets of manoeuvre warfare at political, operational and tactical level can be integrated in the existing strategy to outwit the adversary in physical and psychological plane. The ability to react to the changing situation will be a real challenge and **to think originally and out of the box as per the situation, in unpredictable conditions will achieve success.**

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**Major General Sanjiv Singh Slaria, Yudh Seva Medal** was commissioned into Armoured Corps in June 1990. An alumnus of National Defence Academy, the General Officer has attended Staff Courses at Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, Command & General Staff College at Thailand, Higher Defence Management Course at College of Defence Management, Secunderabad and the prestigious NDC Course at Mirpur, Bangladesh. He has held important instructor and staff appointments. He was instructor at Indian Military Academy, Dehradun and Directing Staff at College of Defence Management, Secunderabad. Having Commanded an Armoured Regiment, an Independent Armoured Brigade in High Altitude Area, he commanded the elite Counter Insurgency Force (KILO). He has been Brigade Major of an Independent Armoured Brigade, AMS in Military Secretary Branch, Colonel Q at Strike Corps, Colonel GS at HQ ACC&S, Brigadier Strategy at Strategic Planning Directorate and Major General (Administration) at HQ Command, before assuming the appointment of Additional Director General Armoured Corps Directorate. Complementing his military career, General Officer also did M.Sc from Madras University, M.Phil (Strategic Management) from Osmania University and has cleared UGC NET exam.



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