TACTICS AND STRATEGY

Tactics or the technique of fighting, change from time to time depending upon not only the personality of the commander but also the organisation of a fighting force, weapons, the ground of operation etc.

The British tactics in the nineteenth century underwent a great change, so far as grouping of force was concerned. No Cavalry had been employed during any of the Company's wars before 1765; and even afterwards, it did not become very important. During the Mysore Wars, however, the British had to contend with large 'Risalahs' of enemy cavalry and, it was felt that cavalry as a supporting arm could not be dispensed with. It was during the wars with Tipu Sultan that cavalry came to be employed extensively in battles and came to share a place of importance along with artillery as a supporting arm. When General Lake came as the Commander-in-Chief in 1801, he paid special attention to the tactics of cavalry. He attached two light six-pounders to each regiment of cavalry; these guns came on the establishment of cavalry regiments rather than remaining a part of artillery batteries. It was at about this time that Horse Artillery came into existence. During the exercises, Lake combined the movements of cavalry and artillery with perfect skill and invented a new

2. An Officer of Bengal Staff, Essays and Lectures on Indian Historical Subjects, London 1866, P.40.
3. Refer to Chapter on Organisations.
1. An Officer of Bengal Staff. Essays and Lectures on Indian Historical Subject, London 1861, p.40.

2. At the Battle of Laswari on 1 November 1803, Lake was in pursuit of fleeing enemy and he had with him only Dragoons and Native Cavalry. His Artillery had been left behind. He decided to launch his attack without Artillery and Infantry.
numbers. In almost all battles the British had comparatively much smaller number than their enemies.

An expert use of small arms by Infantry was coupled with an extensive use of bayonet with utter ruthlessness which made a British Indian soldier achieve what he could not achieve otherwise. All other things being equal in a battle, it was often the British superiority of bayonet charge which won them the day. By an explicit discipline and obedience to orders, utter ruthlessness had been instilled in a soldier’s mind on the parade ground and when he faced an enemy at close quarters, he pierced his bayonet through him. A contemporary journal remarks: "British bayonets are of such character, so entirely to be relied upon, that it is no wonder that British Generals will dare risk much. The doubtful valour of the Infantry rectifies the errors of the Commanders, and carries them through, what would otherwise be inevitable defeat and disgrace." In another volume the Calcutta Review remarked: "that action (Buxar) like the majority of these that have succeeded it in this country, was mainly won by the indomitable courage and formidable bayonet of the Infantry."

A Commander started operation by obtaining maximum possible information about the enemy. This was done mainly by intrigue and bribe. This, coupled with reconnaissance by Commanders on the spot, gave very good results. The Commander ascertained the weakest points of the enemy and visualised

1. Ibid., P.276.
which one would out of them gave him most effective results. He organised his force according to the plan. No major change on the spot, however, was possible and therefore a Commander had to depend upon forethought in his deployment plan.

Sometimes the attack plans had a very close resemblance to those employed on European battle fields, and this was obviously owing to a large number of British officers having gained their initial training and experience on European soil. Attacking an enemy's flank and enveloping techniques which were often employed on Indian battle fields by the Company's armies bear a close resemblance to German and French techniques. The technique of Counter Attack on an enemy was very often employed on a battle field, which entailed attacking an enemy with the help of a reserve force, usually of Cavalry, when he attained certain amount of superiority in the course of fighting.

The grouping of a force was done most carefully to ensure a balance. A battalion in action was the smallest unit capable of independent action. In the organisation of Infantry battalion, two guns had been allowed on the establishment, which gave it sufficient artillery support for a limited time. A larger tactical unit, a brigade, was carefully grouped, composed of a requisite portion of artillery, infantry and cavalry, which was self-contained for a certain time, and was capable of fighting independently longer than a battalion. Both a battalion as well as a brigade were so provided that they could set aside a reserve force out of their resources so that

1. Commenting on Gough's attack Plan at Chillianwala. The Calcutta Review in Vol.XV, P.272 says "The attack as planned, would have done credit to a Frederick, and was in his style..."
the whole force did not make contact with the enemy at the first instance and a certain percentage of fresh troops was available for launching counter attack. The reserve could also be employed at the discretion of the Commander to cover the movement (by fire) of the remaining body, whether in case of attack or defence.

Ground plays a very important part in all tactics and the British were not neglectful of this factor in tactics. It was a point with all British Commanders to choose the ground of battle, where enemy's movements were "channelised" and the enemy was fought on a ground selected for the purpose. At times an enemy, who had advantage of fighting defensively at the outset, was lured to abandon his defensive position, and whenever the enemy thus lured his defeat was almost certain. In the Battle of Delhi the enemy was very strongly entrenched; Lake advanced his Cavalry and then made a retreat which tempted the enemy to come out of the trenches to convert a retreat into rout and in their attempt to do so, they came far forward to meet Lake's Infantry on a ground which he had chosen for the purpose.\(^1\) At the Battle of Assaye, the British chose their own ground of action.\(^2\)

Rest to fatigued troops even in the middle of the battle was organised by Commanders at the highest level and

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1. Despatches dated Camp Delhi Ghat September 12, 1803 vide Notes Relative to Transactions in Mahratta Empire, London 1804, P.\(^68\); Also Ludlow, J.W. British India, Its Races and Its History, Cambridge 1858, P.\(^248\).
it made the men better fitted to fight future actions. It was not uncommon to see a Commander giving his troops time to cook their meals and eat before proceeding to battle. Whereas tactical requirements and human comforts are often conflicting, the British Commanders compromised these requirements and achieved the best results.

The Artillery of the Company's army was an excellent force and provided various types of artillery fires, such as direct, oblique, enfilading, flanking, grazing, plunging or reverse fire. Direct fire was obtained by laying guns direct on the target by sights provided on the guns. Oblique or indirect fire was obtained by elevating a gun at an angle and firing by calculations. Enfilade fire meant the sweeping by fire, of a target from one end to the other, whether it was a line of Cavalry or Infantry or whether it was the face of a fortified work. Flanking fire was that directed along the front of a position or work and merely parallel to it. Grazing fire was that provided close to the surface of a defensive position. Plunging fire was the one directed from a position considerably above the object fired at. Reverse fire was the one directed in the enemy's rear. Ricochet fire was the technique of destroying objects invisible from the exterior. This was done by projecting a missile with low velocity, so that after falling inside the invisible area, it made several grizes thus increasing the possibility of hitting the target at more than one place.

This fire was normally employed against field fortifications. In case of very large crests in front of enemy position, the technique of vertical fire was employed. The descent of the missile was so nearly vertical in this type of fire that it was possible to throw a shell almost immediately behind an intervening or covering body, and thus to injure and alarm troops when fully protected.

Artillery preparation for an Infantry attack was almost an indispensable feature of every engagement. The guns were extended over as large a front as possible, and to achieve this requirement the batteries were thrust up into the Infantry columns. The task of Artillery did not cease when Infantry advanced, but in those days the range of guns being short, they had to be moved for a considerable distance along with advancing Infantry, before they got into a suitable range. During movement, the guns lost to the force, the Infantry had to rely on its own small arms. In well planned battles, this difficulty was removed by supporting the attacking flank for the duration of the movement of its own guns, with guns of an adjoining flank.

There were two important principles observed in the employment of guns. The first was to ensure that they did not mask the fire of each other and the second was that the gun

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1. Foreign Secret Consultations, 26 December 1846, No.405, Governor General to Council dated 16 February 1846.

"The difficulties were great considering the strength of the enemy's works and his superior numbers accustomed to fight behind walls and entrenchments but vertical fire of twenty pieces of heavy artillery surmounted all impediments and has led to most important results."
powder must be protected from dampness and water.¹

In those days, the powder gave out tremendous smoke which made concealment of guns impossible. As a result as soon as the guns of the attacker opened, the defender being in a position to spot them, an artillery duel followed.² Sometimes, a small number of guns was detached from the rest of the guns and taken to a suitable position to give direct fire with greater precision, and this often gave very good results.

As regards the Cavalry tactics, it was a combination of the old and the new. The usefulness of shock tactics of Cavalry was giving way as times advanced, but the employment of Cavalry for a sudden charge of a few squadrons at the moment when the assaulting Infantry were wavering, often exerted a decisive influence upon the course of an engagement, and that shows that shock tactics were not completely out of date. At the same time, the employment of Cavalry in battles on the flanks along with Artillery and Infantry, rather than for independent action is an indication of modernisation of Cavalry tactics.³

While operating against enemy flanks cavalry achieved wonderful results. Their great mobility enabled them to execute turning movements in a short time, and they also achieved most magnificent results for warding off enemy's counter-movements.

In the study of operations we find shock tactics more often employed during the Maratha wars, whereas employment of Cavalry on the flanks is more pronounced during the Sikh Wars. The change appears to be owing to a progress in armament which took place with the advancement of time. Lances or hussars were replaced by carbines. For effective use of the latter, the rider had to dismount from his horse. Another reason for the change could be the range of galloper guns. During the first decade of nineteenth century, the effectual range was 600 yards whereas by the time of Sikh Wars, it was 800 yards. Greater range meant a bigger circle of operation.

Mounted troops were most suited for pursuit operation. The combination of horse artillery and cavalry was ideal for carrying out pursuit of a fleeing enemy and Lake had trained the army during exercises to conduct pursuit operations well. But there was a great limitation to this operation, as the guns owing to short range could not give fire support without having to deploy again and again. The horse artillery could not keep pace with cavalry.

Cavalry was at times employed to do the job of scouts when the armies moved to make contact with the enemy. The force thus employed was termed advanced pickets, and were the eyes of an advancing column.

During the period under consideration, we find that with the advancement of times, there was a progressively increasing

need to employ sound tactics. Whereas the early battles of our period were won by sound leadership and valour alone; later on battles could not be won unless valour and leadership were coupled with sound tactics. According to Roberts, Clive’s method was to seek the enemy, and, on finding him, to attack with headlong valour. This seems to have been his ‘guiding principle’, and his successes were due rather to ‘his personal intrepidity, and his power of inspiring large masses of men with confidence, than to studied plans or dexterous manoeuvres’.¹ This view of Clive’s tactics, perhaps a little simple, appears to be substantially accurate.

The Mysore wars too were no great tactical battles. In 1798, the siege of Seringapatam was not conducted strictly according to the system of parallels (to be described later), though the battle was decisive in its results.

The choice of resorting to parallels no doubt depended on whether or not there were adequate resources to undertake a siege on the parallels technique, but when resorted to, it gave very positive results. For instance Lake at the siege operation of Bharatpur in 1805, did not have the resources of digging parallels which resulted in great loss of men and material, whereas in 1825 when Cambermere conducted the operations on the system of parallels, he won a victory. In 1805 after having made three attempts and having suffered a loss of 3000 men, Lake was compelled to give up the enterprise,² whereas

¹ Roberts P.F. History of British India, 2nd Edn, Oxford 1939, P.16.
² Annual Register 1826, Vol.LXXI, P.220.
in 1825, Cambermere was crowned with success as he annihilated the boasted pretensions to impregnability of the fortress,¹ by resorting to the technique of parallels.

Even the battles fought by renowned generals like Wellesley and Lake were guided merely by their leadership than by any sound tactical plans. The battle of Assaye, fought on 23 September, 1803, where Wellesley was in Command, has been described by Malleson as indeed 'a general's battle'.² The Marathas had taken a very strong defensive position on a triangular piece of ground between the junction of two rivers.³ Wellesley, who was in pursuit, with his army divided into two parts, one under him and the other under Stevenson,⁴ unexpectedly met the enemy and decided to go into action without waiting for Stevenson to join him.⁵ The enemy numbered more than 50,000 and Wellesley's troops were only 4,500. Wellesley did a reconnaissance of the area and decided on the point of attack on the left flank which was the weakest.⁶ Wellesley crossed a ford on the river under enemy's fire. He formed his Infantry in two

5. Thompson, Rise and fulfilment of British Rule India, London 1935, P.221.
lines, with Cavalry as a reserve in a third, and from the apex
of the triangle formed by rivers, wheeled down upon the foe,
who brought terrible fire of guns. During the battle Wellesley's
Artillery went out of action owing to animals getting killed,
on occurrence of which he ordered the attack to be launched
without artillery support. But in the meantime, the enemy
charged with his Cavalry, whereupon Wellesley led an attack
in person with his dragoons, attacked 115 guns of the enemy and
silenced enemy guns by a bayonet charge. No artillery support
was available throughout the battle of Assaye and Wellesley
dominated the scene with his leadership without which the battle
would not have been won.

In the battles of Delhi and Laswaree, Lake's personal
leadership rather than tactics won him the day. At Delhi on
11 September, 1803, the operation commenced by reconnaissance of
the ground and enemy dispositions by Lake, and he found his
enemy on a defensive position which he had selected with great
care, each of his flanks covered with swamp and his front by
a line of entrenchments. The enemy had concealed his guns in
the high grass of the jungle and Lake's two regiments of
Cavalry with him at the time of reconnaissance were exposed
to terrible fire. The enemy was so strongly posted in defence
that it was difficult to dislodge him and Lake decided to draw
him on a more level ground. To achieve this object, he ordered

1. An officer of Bengal Staff, Essays and Lectures on Indian
   Historical Subjects, London 1866, p. 52.
2. Herbert Campton, A Particular Account of the European
   Military Adventurers of Hindostan from 1784 to 1803,
   London MDCCCXCII, p. 311.
the Cavalry to withdraw, which gave the enemy an impression of retreat. The enemy came out of the trenches and pursued the retreating Cavalry. The Cavalry, according to a pre-arranged plan opened from the Centre, and the Infantry marched through, and advanced towards the enemy. They were led by the Commander-in-Chief and they did not even fire till within one hundred yards of the enemy. The fire was very effective, it drove away the enemy.¹

At Imswaree on November 1, 1803, Lake was in pursuit of fleeing enemy with his dragoons and Native Cavalry; his artillery had been left behind. He decided to launch his attack without his Infantry and Artillery. He placed himself at the head of his army and 'displayed his qualities of leadership as a man of action in the boldest sense of the word'.² The charge on the enemy's left was very successful, but since there was no Infantry, the success could not be consolidated, and after considerable casualties, Lake withdraw his Cavalry till the Infantry came up.³ When the Infantry arrived, Lake formed his force into battle order, and formed them in two columns, the first column to be employed to turn enemy's right and the second to support it. Like the Infantry, the Cavalry was divided into two portions. By bayonet charge and by

¹. Despatches dated Delhi Ghaut September 12, 1803, vide Notes Relative to transactions on Mahratta Empire, London 1804, p.68.
³. Despatches: Op Cit.
Cavalry counter attacks under the personal leadership of Lake, the battle was won. ¹

Lake was not a tactician, and he had no liking for management. According to his biographer 'his principle of war was to ascertain where the enemy was, then to close with him quickly and rapidly, never to let go his hold till he had beaten him. He had all the natural qualifications for a general of this class'.²

On the other hand, Lord Ellenborough had no confidence in his Commander-in-Chief Gough because he was not a good tactician. He, in a military letter dated Calcutta, April 20, 1844, wrote to Wellington, 'I ought not to conceal from you that the anxiety that I feel to be called too suddenly into the field is much increased by a want of confidence in Sir Charles Gough, who with all his personal courage and many excellent qualities, certainly does not appear to possess the grasp of mind or prudence which is essential to the successful conduct of great military operations ...' Before the commencement of Sikh Wars, it was felt by many that leadership and valour alone, as in some previous Indian battles, was going to win the day. Cunningham, in this respect writes: 'It is, indeed certain that English officers and Sepoys equally believed they were about to win battles by marching steadily and the discharge of a few artillery shots rather than by skilful dispositions, hard fighting

¹ Loc. Cit.

² An officer of Bengal Staff, Essays and Lectures on Indian Historical Subjects, London 1866, P.38.
and prolonged contest. But this was not true. The futility of headlong valour without sound tactical dispositions, characteristic of the old ways of fighting, was demonstrated too well; firstly in the first Sikh War, when unsound planning on the part of Gough led to initial disaster and again in the initial stages of the Second Sikh War. It was not until a particular attention was paid to tactics along with sound leadership and valour, that the wars could be won.

In the first battle of the Sikh War at Moodkee on 18 December, 1845, the British did not meet the enemy to fight a defensive battle. The British suffered a heavy loss of 872 men, and yet the battle was not decisive, quite unlike the victories the British were used to in India. A further action was not undertaken until reinforcements were obtained, and Gough accepted the assistance of Lord Hardinge, who brought to the army a great accession of strength, for in calm, cool and clear judgement on the field of battle he was surpassed by no one then in India. The Plan of attack at Ferozeshah was more sound than that of Moodkee, but both these battles demonstrate more valour than science, both as regards tactics and strategy. The time of attack chosen at Ferozeshah was evening and when the attack was delivered, it resolved itself into series of disconnected assaults. The Junior Commanders were not told about the plan of attack, with the result that initiative on their

3. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 26 December 1846, No.341.
part was curbed.¹

The last two battles of First Sikh War, at Aliwal and Sobraon, reveal particular attention to minor tactics. The methodical and skilful conduct of operations at Aliwal offer a contrast to the tactical methods which characterised the other battles of this campaign.² There was perfect cooperation between the efforts of the three arms of Artillery, Cavalry and Infantry which, coupled with the skill of the Commander, brought about the defeat of enemy.³

Thus a series of battles of the First Sikh War demonstrated that sound tactics coupled with leadership and headlong valour was finally to win the day. But unfortunately the British Commander did not learn a lesson; during the Second Sikh War the importance of tactics was once again ignored, which necessitated more than one battle and it was not until sound tactics were employed that the war came to a successful termination.

Speaking of the first battle of the Second Sikh War at Ramnagar, Malleson says, "Lord Gough belonged essentially to a fighting caste. In the presence of an enemy, he could think only of how to get at him. At times of supreme excitement all ideas of strategy, of tactics, of the plan of the campaign, vanished from his mind..."⁴ The same author speaking of the last battle of the Second Sikh War, at Gujerat says that⁵ Gough

1. Ibid, p.23.
2. Ibid, p.36.
3. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 26 December 1846, No.356.
at the outset of the campaign, committed as many faults as his opponent, but he redeemed them towards its close; at Gujerat he adhered steadily and wisely to a well considered programme. At Ramnagress, the ground factor which forms a major factor in tactics, was ignored. The Artillery in an excitement to inflict casualties on the enemy, went deep into the Sandy Channels, from where it was difficult to remove the guns once the enemy opened severe fire. In the third battle, Lord Gough did not stick to a plan which he made for the conduct of operations and a departure from it brought about a catastrophe. The last battle, the battle of Gujerat, was skilfully planned and was a decisive engagement.

From the above scrutiny, it is evident that in early days, headlong valour and sound leadership without sound tactics won for the British victories on Indian soil, but as times advanced the employment of sound and well considered plans and techniques occupied as important a place as other factors.

A special technique was employed for capturing fortresses which entailed a systematic attack or a regular siege. The technique consisted in thoroughly investing a fortress by forces superior in number to the besieged, so distributed on the outskirts of the fortress as to confine the garrison, and

by excluding all supplies of men and material from without. The besieger, constructed parallels and zig zags upto the fortress by way of which he approached enemy's defences. This was followed by affecting a breach in the walls of the fortress, where the attack was directed.

Before commencing a siege operation, a secure supply system was established. Uninterrupted supplies were very important and at times a force had to be employed to ensure security of the supply line. The position of the source of supply was termed the 'base of operations', and the line of communication from it to the army was called the 'line of operation'.

The operation commenced with a thorough reconnaissance of the place of attack as closely as the fire of the enemy permitted. Surprise at this stage was vital and efforts were made to keep enemy guessing the probable side from which attack was intended. At times some demonstrations were made on a particular side so as to direct the garrison's whole attention there and thus to make the enemy neglect the real point of attack. This technique was called 'false attack'.

Artillery Commander with the help of the Engineer Commander drew up a plan of attack, and the plan was submitted to the Commander of siege operation, who improved upon it if necessary. An estimate was made of working parties and material

2. Ibid, p.69.
required. At the commencement of an operation, the whole force was divided into two parts, one force was employed for protection from enemy activities and the second portion for carrying out the siege operation. It was for this reason that the besieger had to be in much more superior numbers as compared to the garrison.

The siege operation was divided into three distinct periods, which were marked by the trenches that ran parallel to the outline of the fort; these were called parallels. During early operations of the British, only one parallel was established and then the enemy was approached by zig zags unsupported by parallels. Vauban, a famous tactician, introduced the technique of enveloping parallels. The new system afforded the approaches not only a good close fire, but a strong guard at hand, to deal with enemy sorties sent to interrupt the work of siege.

The first parallel was constructed at an approximate distance of 600 yards from the fortress and it consisted in the excavation of a trench for the reception of troops parallel to the fortification of the place. Zigzags were made to communicate from the first parallel. It was the duty of the Artillery Commander to deploy his batteries at the first parallel, as soon as possible, so that the fire of the defences could be checked and subdued by various types of artillery fire. It was impossible to make progress at this stage until the Artillery fire of the enemy was subdued by the superior fire of the assaulting force. The first parallel thus formed the base, where all artillery batteries were deployed. The size of artillery park erected against any place depended upon the frontage presented by the fortress. As a rule one battery was necessary to cover by Artillery fire every face of the work that could interfere with the besieger in his approach. Based on these principles a Commander decided the number of guns required for a siege operation. The number of pieces of ordnance required for the attack of fortress had not so much reference to the number of pieces with the enemy on ramparts, as to the construction of works themselves which the enemy intended to defend.

When the approaches had been extended half way from the first parallel to the fortress a second parallel was constructed.

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1. Ibid, P.306.
before proceeding any further, otherwise the attacking force will be very close to the enemy and in excessive danger. The second parallel being normally within 300 yards of the fortress, the besieger did not attempt to construct it till his enemy's artillery was more or less silenced. The second parallel was dug in the same way as the first parallel.

When the approaches reached very close to the outer walls of fortress, trenches were pushed out to the right and left, which were extended till they met, forming third parallel. If there was a need, more parallels were constructed. After the construction of the last parallel, an assault was undertaken if the garrison was weak, but when the enemy was strong, covered approaches to the foot of the garrison were excavated. Guns were brought to the last parallel for causing a breach in the walls. When there was a ditch surrounding the fortress, the gallery of descent was constructed to assemble a force on the other side of the ditch. An open assault was launched to obtain an access to the fortress. After getting into the fortress the vital points of the enemy were attacked and destroyed and the besieger being in much larger number than the besieged, soon overcame and destroyed them.

Strategy involves principles stretching from political sphere to the direction of warfare in the main theatres of operation. It calls for a short examination of diplomatic relations as they affected defence of India and also their
co-relation to principles of strategy.

Till 1756, the British were merely traders and there were no problems of strategy. It was between that year and 1760 that Clive made the British supreme in Bengal. The French and Dutch lost all political power and the Nawab was only a shadow. The problems of Indian defence and strategy became the problems of the British in India. After the battle of Buxar, Shah Alam II granted the British the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, but beyond that the policy remained restrictive. Clive in his second administration followed a policy of non-intervention and problem of Indian defence was limited in scope.

Warren Hastings broke Clive’s restrictive policy and he started to undertake a strategic defence of India. This aim, he achieved by his efforts to create buffer states around Bengal, which were militarily strong and made Bengal safe. This was done by entering into alliance with neighbouring states and ‘Bengal was indirectly protected’.¹ Such an alliance with Oude averted the danger against Maratha encroachment. The British made arrangements with Oude whereby they stationed large forces in that Native State. The arrangement furnished a strong defence for the Northern Frontier and added to the internal security of Bengal and Behar.² In making the arrangement of buffers, principles of Rapid Mobility, Concentration,

2. Military Letter from Court, dated 11 February 1801.
Coordination and Economy of Force were observed. The force was stationed on various places in such a manner that an army could be readily drawn together in the field if an occasion arose. Economy of force was achieved indirectly because a smaller force was required to be stationed at Bengal and Bihar than would have been normally necessary. Moreover Oude was not annexed for a long time because that measure would have brought the British frontier immediately in contact with the Marathas and Nepal, which would have involved them in collision with these powers, and that would have entailed the requirement of a greater force.

Warren Hastings also entered into a defensive alliance with the Raja of Berar, where he stationed a number of Sepoy Battalions which were annually relieved, ostensibly for the protection of the Raja, but in reality to strengthen their own power at the Maharaja's expense. The plan of Hastings, besides providing military strength, secured the friendship and support of those powers, who might otherwise be enemies or become a greater danger if won by a hostile power.

With the rise of Napoleon, a new cloud of danger to India's security was forming in the horizon. From Cairo, Napoleon wrote to Tipoo that he had full desire of delivering the Indians from the Yoke of the English, and desired that some representative of Tipoo should discuss with him the scheme to achieve that end. The Court of Directors was, however, convinced that

1. PP Vol.25, P.1, Commons 225 of 1859.
Napoleon could not attack India without the aid of some Indian power; they established that power to be no one else but Tipoo. A great forethought was exercised in taking simultaneous measures to save India from Napoleon's expected attack of India, firstly by destroying Tipoo's power and by ordering possession of the Island of Perim, where naval fight was suggested, in case Napoleon triumphed in Egypt. The destruction of Tipoo at Seringapatam and the removal of the danger of an attack on India by Napoleon's defeat in Egypt secured peace and safety of British possessions in India.

In 1798, the British entered into arrangements with the Nizam and stationed a considerable force with him, whereby they made him subordinate to the British influence and military force, securing thereby an advantage against the Marathas.

A great point about British strategy in India was the "maintenance of objective", whether against the Marathas or the Sikhs or any other power. Their final aim was to destroy their enemies. They resorted to an enemy's segregation so long as they found it feasible, but at a ripe moment achieved their objective of destroying him. For a long time the British had avoided a direct collision with the Marathas, and they undertook to break their power firstly by diplomacy and only afterwards by war. They therefore undertook to affect an arrangement in 1802, which could obviate a union of the Maratha

1. Ibid, P.367.
2. Ibid, P.368.
3. Governor General's Narrative vide PP (microfilm) Vol.9, P.1, Commons 116 of 1803.
States. The opportunity came when the Peshwa found himself threatened by Holkar, with no support other than the British, and signed the Treaty of Bassein. The treaty brought the British in conflict with Scindia and Holkar. For the final destruction of the Marathas the British continued to maintain their objective by long drawn fights, the Maratha War of 1803-1805 and finally the war of 1817-1818.

The capture of Delhi during the Maratha Wars of 1803-1805 extended the limits of North West frontier, which involved the establishment of first line of defence. In the subsequent years of the Company's rule this frontier continued to occupy a place of importance. Though most strategic considerations demanded that the Indus should form the first line of defence, the political considerations prevented it. Delhi was at a striking distance from Panipat, and a victory at Panipat would mean a victory at Delhi. So, not Delhi, but somewhere in the Panjab ought to be the place of British stand in case of war. But no interference with Panjab was to be allowed owing to the danger of its joining the French. Moreover lines of communication would have become too long, and difficult to maintain in those days. The principle of 'economy of force' could be exercised if Ranjit Singh was left to guard the Indus and the British forces were stationed at the banks of the Satlej. Even when Ranjit Singh had not come into power, the Earl of Morington had written to Major General Sir J.H. Craig on 13 September, 1798, that the most useful barrier against the invasion of

1. Military Letter from Court, dated 11 February 1803.
Zaman Shah in the first instance would be the resistance of the Sikhs and Rajputs. British were, therefore, quite keen to see in the Panjab their immediate buffer on the North West Frontier, a buffer which would take a major shock at the first instance and give a cushion effect to the safety of the Company's territories. It was on such strategic considerations that the Satlej was accepted as the boundary between the Panjab and the British India, and the Indus was made strong by encouraging the power of Ranjit Singh. The principle of 'maintenance of objective', the final destruction of the Sikh power, was not overlooked as we know that the British never allowed the Sikh State to become too strong to handle, and timely action was taken to destroy its overgrowing power when it did become dangerous.

A great forethought was exercised in ensuring safety of the North West Frontier. Between the Sikh Frontier in the south and the British frontier in the north lay the protected Sikh States. They could not be counted as a real source of strength to the British frontier; nevertheless, sufficient force was stationed at military stations close by which could be rapidly mobilised and concentrated on that frontier. The possibility of French danger was excluded by entering into a treaty with the Amirs of Scinde on 22 August, 1809, and by article IV of that treaty, the Government of Scinde was prohibited from allowing the French establishment in Scinde.\(^1\)

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2. PP Vol.8, P.235, Lords 32 of 1839.
Government of Bombay further ensured the safety of this frontier by entering into a treaty on 9 November, 1820, with the Amirs, and by article III, precluded the entry of any Europeans or Americans on the soil of Scinde.\textsuperscript{1} The 'objective' was, however, not lost sight of, as we find Sir Charles Napier annexing Scinde twenty-three years later.

It was on account of the safety of the North West Frontier that the British did not lose sight of the activities of the Russians and the French who were considered a potential danger to the frontier.\textsuperscript{2} In overcoming this danger the British resorted to creating buffers beyond the Punjab. A treaty was signed on 12 March, 1809, with the King of Persia who agreed to drop all connections with Europeans that he had made till then and promised not to permit any European force to pass through Persia, either towards India or towards her ports.\textsuperscript{3} This treaty was revised on 25 November, 1814. Three months later the British concluded a treaty with the government of Kabul.\textsuperscript{4} By the terms of this treaty, the Afghan government agreed to exert themselves in every way in preventing the passage of a French and Persian army, and agreed not to permit them to cross into British India.

The treaties gave the British two buffers on the North West Frontier, and the usefulness of the buffers was based on

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Iloc Cit.}
\item \textit{Haush, Political and Military Events in British India, Vol.1 London 1853, P.208.}
\item PP(microfilm) Vol.50, P.29, Commons C174 of 1839; Also PP Vol.40, P.159, Commons 100 of 1839.
\item PP Vol.40, P.159, Commons 100 of 1839.
\end{enumerate}
economy of force and other vital principles of strategy as discussed for other buffers before. No European force, intercepted on the way by Persia and Afghanistan, could have possibly maintained the lines of communication to fight in India.

After 1830, the North West Frontier became more important and Sir John Malcolm strongly suggested that the Indian Empire could be threatened by the Russians. The Russians had developed their military power and they were united and well organised, while their own country was impregnable from its extent and barreness, any number of troops could be poured into neighbouring countries, and the Indian riches could serve as a lure. The Russian ambition was no more limited to Europe. Persia had Russian's support as Russia had promised her financial help to deal with Ranjit Singh. The force which was to be fitted out for the invasion of Panjab was promised every kind of help by Russians. The general policy of the British was to interpose between them and Russia powerful countries whose interests would be different from those of the Russians. The Afghans could form the bullwork, whatever road the enemy took, and the Afghans had already been won by a treaty. Thus it was again the usefulness of buffers which came to be accounted for the defence of India.

1. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 20 August 1830, No.1-3.
2. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 25 November 1830, Nos.7-10.
In 1834 Lord William Bentinck reviewed the military position of India and established that the only danger with which the English could be threatened was from the North West and suggested that all measures ought to be taken on that line of operation. Ranjit Singh and the Afghans, he estimated, presented no cause of danger to India, because the former was a friend and the latter was militarily weak as had been demonstrated in their war against the wretched army of Shah Shuja. Dost Mohammad Khan was gaining strength. Persia without the help of Russia was no good. The latest accounts from Kabul had stated that the Russians were building a fort between the Caspian and Khive, which was their best line of operation against India. Bentinck appreciated a danger from the Russians to the frontier, but according to him it was not of an immediate nature. The line of operation for a Russo-Persian army to advance upon Herat was to involve a march of 1,189 miles, from where a crusade could be proclaimed against British India. Since there was no immediate cause to worry, Bentinck did not take any extraordinary steps to strengthen the frontier, and thus exercised economy of force.

Lord Auckland came to India with new ideas. He had on him a great influence of Palmerston who was profoundly impressed by the danger threatening India, on account of Russian ambitious designs. The Commander-in-Chief advised the Governor General

1. PP Vol.52, P.459, Commons 500 of 1867.
2. Ioc. Cit.
that it was wisest to refrain from extending dominions to the west, and suggested that in military point of view, the frontier was most perfect that the British could possess, and it was impracticable for any force of any nation to cross the Indus and to penetrate the countries on the eastern side, below the junction where the five rivers met. The only risky border was the Satlej, from where the British Empire could be endangered. But the natural position of Satlej, according to the Commander-in-Chief, provided a strong defence on account of mountains about the Cantonment of Sobathoe on the North West, which was well enforced and no force could advance eastward without the risk of having its communications cut off and being itself surrounded. The strategic location of the frontier would have kept the lines of communication short and armies easy to maintain. The lines of Jamuna and Ganges provided the Indian Army not only ample strategic points of supply for the army, but abundant depots for stores and ammunition and water carriage by which all resources could be brought up. The British also had a choice of battlefield, for if they chose to wait to fight near the frontier, they had the protected Sikh States to use as battlefield. The Commander-in-Chief appreciated the natural position of the frontier to be strong and ordered obstacles to be imposed from Satlej to Agra by stationing a sufficient force of Cavalry and Horse Artillery, which could meet a sudden eventuality.

1. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 10 July 1837, No.1.
2. Loc Cit.
Thus we see that all strategic considerations dictated that the war on the North West frontier should not be fought on a battle field beyond the Satlej and not beyond the Indus in any case, for it entailed maintenance of very long lines of communication. A deviation from this principle was a strategic blunder of sending an army to Afghanistan, because the lines of communication became unduly long. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Fane, had given his opinion against marching an army beyond the Satlej, as he felt it would lead to military weakness. Sir Charles Metcalfe the Vice-President in Council too advised Lord Auckland the usefulness of the policy of non-inference in the internal system of states beyond Indus and his biographer Kaye is of the opinion that if Metcalfe remained supreme in India, not a man would have been moved across the Indus. Disaster of the army that followed this strategic blunder is too well known to require a mention.

In the security of the frontier, a factor of importance was the suitable disposition of military stations. Based on military strategy, Ludhiana was the nearest military station to Satlej, in 1835. Next was Karnal, distant about 140 miles. Ferozepore, Ludhiana and Rupar were important stations from the military point of view, and all three were located on the south bank of the Satlej. Ferozepore, which had become a military

station about 1824, was excellent for pursuit of peace or operation of war, and was an excellent depot for ammunition of war, but it was neglected for a long time. Sir Charles Metcalfe was in favour of strengthening and occupying Ferozepore with as much Infantry as possible, because Ludhiana was very much away from Karnal which made it weak. Lieutenant Cunningham planned fortification around it and made it strong. Ferozepore became, in due course, of such military importance that it became the depot of stores and the base of operations for the army for the Afghan War of 1839-42.

Thus, Ferozepore and Ludhiana became the most important military stations on North Western Frontier, with Karnal in depth. Puber was not neglected as it gained enough strength owing to the positioning of large troops at Ludhiana and Sabathoe.

Soon a new station of importance was selected at Ambala, which substituted Karnal. Forces at Ambala were fifty four miles nearer the military border than Karnal, from where force could move for the relief of Ferozepore and Ludhiana with ease. On account of Ambala being close to Rupar, the latter was secured. In the selection of military stations for strategic defence of India, careful considerations decided their location. The underlying principle was the system of triangulation, based

1. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 10 July 1837, No.5 & c.
2. Foreign Secret Consultation dated 9 January 1838, No.56.
3. Foreign Secret Consultation dated 6 March 1839, Nos.2-3.
5. Memorandum on Security of Cantonments vide Inquiry on the subject of the Reorganisation of the Armies of India. At Bombay this system was employed in the selection of military stations.
on a sound military practice of the Company. The system had been extensively employed and consisted in so stationing troops in cantonments that they could be re-inforced in the troubled spot in a short time. In places which were isolated and were incapable of mutual support, the troops were massed as much as possible to make the garrison strong enough, so as to be able to exist independently. The system of triangulation facilitated rapid mobilisation, concentration of force at desired place and 'economy of force' for not all military stations were to have a very big force, in view of the fact that troops could be rapidly mobilised in troubled places.

The usefulness of the system of triangulation was demonstrated at the time of the First Sikh War. The frontier between Ferozepore and Ropar, presented a line more than a hundred miles and it was not possible to ascertain from where the enemy would effect crossing. The forces were stationed at Ferozepore and Ludhiana and a force was kept at Ambala to reinforce them both. At the commencement of the First Sikh War, when the Sikhs crossed the river near Ferozepore, troops were rapidly brought from Ambala to meet them.

In mobilising force to meet the Sikh threat, Hardinge observed principles of secrecy and surprise. He selected a season of the year when general reliefs periodically took place and it was with complete secrecy that Ferozepore, Ludhiana and Ambala were greatly strengthened. The following table will show how the forces stood when Hardinge arrived in India in July 1844,

and when the Sikh War broke out the following year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Guns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ferozepore</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>4,596</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10,472</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ludhiana</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7,235</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>4,113</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12,972</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The First Sikh War changed the old traditional frontier between the British and the Sikh State from the Satlej to the Beas. The Second Sikh War extended the frontier still further and the natural boundary of North West Frontier of India became the frontier of India. Ranjit's troubles on that frontier became the problems of the British. When Sir Charles Napier became the Commander-in-Chief, he ascertained that it took six months for a body of troops to travel from the Indus to the Brahmaputra. The Bolan Pass was immediately open to invasion from Afghanistan. To meet this danger the Commander-in-Chief considered the military strength at each Presidency. The Punjab was most dangerous because the British were not sure of the loyalty of Gulab Singh, and he could rally the whole lot of disarmed Sikh soldiery behind him. For this reason Delhi was reinforced, and provided for immediate reinforcement in case a danger arose. Massuri, Landour, Almorah and Bareilly were reinforced to meet

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danger on the northern frontier, from Nepal. Peshawar was the new cantonment that guarded Khyber and formed an advanced post for the Jullundur Doab. Jullundur became an important military station because if it was lost the line of communication would have been cut between the Punjab and the Indus. To meet an army of Gulab Singh, Simla was to provide a strong body of troops which was to form the right flank of the army marching against Jammu, or in case of war with Nepal, it was to reinforce the left flank of the force marching from Delhi. In case Gulab Singh and Nepal formed a collusion, the forces from Simla were to effectually cut off the communication between Nepal and the territories of the Maharajah.¹

Thus we find that the military position of India was throughout our period kept strong by way of buffers and by way of stationing forces in cantonments, and in doing so, the most strategic considerations were observed, and India was secured from time to time from external aggression.

To intrigue, to play one against another and to buy off the key personnel of an enemy formed a part of British strategy in a broad sense. They employed the technique on innumerable occasions which achieved for them an easy victory over their enemy. This technique worked very well where the enemy was weak for his weakness could be thoroughly exploited.

General Wellesley, it is on record in the Ahmednagar Gazetteer, was advised by Raghurao Baba, the Deshmukh of Bhingar to attack on the eastern face of the fort of Ahmednagar, and

¹. Loc. Cit.
for this the latter had received a bribe of £400 (4.4000). It is no wonder that a strong fort like that of Ahmednagar should have surrendered so easily. Wellesley, in his despatch to the Governor General had informed him that Ahmednagar fort was the second strongest fort then in India.

The treaty of Bassein was nothing else but a big intrigue. The treaty broke the Maratha confederacy, and was particularly humiliating to Sindhia and Holkar that the claims of the Peshwa upon the Nizam and the Gaikwar of Baroda should be subject to British arbitration. The British were not true even to the Peshwa; they restored him to his masnad, but at the same time entered into intrigue with his ministers by bribing and corrupting them, with the object of bringing more territories under their power.

Before Lake's operations in the north, the Governor General made a clever move, inviting all British officers to quit their service under the Marathas. Some officers resigned, but Parron, out of jealousy, dismissed the remaining British officers too. At the battle of Aligarh there were six of those officers who fought on the British side, and Lucan out of them rendered the most valuable service by disclosing the enemy's weak side for attack. Lucan gallantly undertook to lead Colonel

5. By an officer of Bengal Staff Corps. 'Essays and Lectures on Indian Historical Subjects, London 1866, P.51.'
Manson to the gate of the fort and pointed out the road through the fort and Colonel Manson received an infinite benefit from his services. 1

At times the British generals tempted the Commanders of the opposing armies by giving them big houses and the latter brought about the catastrophe and completely ruined their own army. The instances are numerous. Just before the commencement of Lake's operations, Lord Wellesley wrote to the Commander-in-Chief, Lake, the necessity of tempting the Maratha Commander, Perron, in the following words: 'It would be highly desirable to detach Perron from Scindia's service by pacific negotiations, M. Perron's inclination certainly is to dispose of his power, to a French purchaser. I should not be surprised if he were found to be ready to enter into terms with Your Excellency, provided he could obtain a sufficient security for his personal interests. I empower Your Excellency to conclude any agreement for the security of M. Perron's personal interests and property, accompanied by any reasonable remuneration from the British Government, which shall induce him to deliver up the whole of his military resources and power, together with all his territorial possessions and the person of the Mogul and heir apparent into your Excellency's hands.' So, when Lake advanced with his army to Aligarh, he wrote to Perron to send a confidential officer to the British Camp to discuss terms which the Governor General had proposed. 2 Perron, however, did not send his confidential officer to Lake but asked Lake to send one instead. At

1. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 2 March 1804, No.68.
2. Foreign Secret Consultation, dated 2 March 1804, No.42.
that time the matters dropped but soon after the fall of Aligarh Perron requested Lake for British protection and the British happily extended it to him. Perron's retirement from Scindia's force had certainly been induced by Lake, and its immediate effect was a diminished confidence of the native powers in the fidelity of the French officers in their service.¹

The intrigue with the Sikh Generals is well known. Recent researches confirm that the Sikhs "fought heroically but the commanders betrayed them".² The British had depended upon intriguers and trators, whom they had raised on the camp of the Sikhs, to ensure their own success.³ Peter Nicholson, the Assistant Political Agent at Ferozepore wrote: "The Rajah himself has induced the troops to march in the hopes of his so doing being considered a recommendation of him by the British Government". Indeed, it is quite likely that not only Rani Jindan, Lal Singh and Tej Singh but several other chiefs sought the destruction of the army, and they all played "a dubious role". Commenting on the battle of Sobraon, Captain Cunningham says: "the views of either party were in some score met by an understanding that the Sikh army should be attacked by the English, and that when beaten it should be openly abandoned by its own government

¹. Fore Sec. Cons., dated 2 March 1804, No.87.
⁵. Cunningham's History of Sikhs, edited by Garrett, Notes by Sethi, Delhi 1955, P.265.
and further that the passage of the Satlej should be unopposed and the road to the capital laid open to the victors. Under such circumstances of discreet policy was the battle of Sobraon fought. Lal Singh was in communication with Henry Lawrence through a 'confidential agent', who gave all the intelligence which helped Lawrence to prepare "a rough sketch of the position and strength of the enemy at Sobraon on the night of 7th February for the transmission to His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief".¹

In the army of the East India Company, there was no mobilisation in the modern sense.² But quickness in assembling troops was achieved through government assistance and a good Dak System.

The regulations for the assistance of marching troops were not very comprehensive; they nevertheless served the purpose in those times. By a regulation of 1806, great assistance in matters of supplies and means of transport was provided to marching troops, and for giving compensation for any material damage caused to crops thereby.³ By the order, the Commanding Officer of a body of troops when marching through the Company's territories by land or water gave notice to the collectors of revenue of the districts through which the troops were to pass, with the estimated time of arrival in those districts. During operations by the army as a whole, on receiving

². Gough and Innes, The Sikhs and the Sikh Wars, London 1897, P.31
³. Cornduff, C.W.F. Military and Cantonment Law in India, Calcutta 1904, P.70.
instructions to prepare for war, the Commander-in-Chief was instructed to liaise with collectors to ascertain the extent of assistance that could be provided for marching troops. The Collectors, on receiving notice from the Commanding Officers made temporary bridges on nullahs coming on the way of the marching army. The Collectors informed the land holders, farmers and Tehsildars or other persons incharge of lands through which the troops were to pass, for providing the supplies required, and for making any requisite preparation of boats or temporary bridges, or for enabling the troops to cross rivers or nullahs without impediment or delay. The Collector also provided an officer to accompany the troops through his jurisdiction for the purpose of procuring the necessary supplies and for facilitating the march of the troops. By enlarged regulations of 1825, if the persons including land holders, failed without sufficient reason to make the necessary preparation for the troops, they were liable to be fined upto a sum of one thousand rupees. Like the Bengal Presidency, the Bombay Presidency too provided for facilitating a speedy march of armies. Whenever a body of troops exceeding 200 Infantry or and one hundred of

1. Military Letter to Court, dated 15 May 1794, Para 1-3; Foreign Secret Consultations dated 12 November 1902; No.29. The Commander-in-Chief before the Mahratta wars directed the Collectors to furnish statements of the number of bullocks and quantity of grain which their districts could supply for the public service, This shows that even before the regulation of 1806 came into force the civil authorities provided assistance for the march of armies.

2. The Bengal Troops, Transport and Travellers Assistance Regulations, 1806, vide Cornthuff, C.W.F. Military and Cantonement Law in India, Calcutta 1904, P.70.


Cavalry marched, the Commanding Officer intimated the District Magistrates the type of assistance he required, while passing through territories under the jurisdiction of the latter.

It is worth noting that locals were extensively used to facilitate the march of troops to obtain rapid mobility. The news of the march of troops, the direction and probable strength was intimated to the Zemindars. This could militate against the principle of security, which was another important principle of military strategy. There is nothing to preclude the possibility of the enemy being in communication with the locals. It is therefore evident that rapid mobility was achieved by sacrificing secrecy and surprise.

Another important factor that contributed to rapid mobility was the dak system in field, which was organised efficiently. By a regulation of 1800, in times of war, small detachments from the army in the field marching along regular dak route delivered their correspondence to the Addadar of the nearest dak station by whom they were received and forwarded as bearing postage. When a large body of troops moved in the field, the Deputy Post Master of the station accompanied it and the Commander in the field issued direct instructions to that officer on the subject of Post in the field. Peons were employed under the control of an official called Mutsuddy, who arranged receipt and delivery of postage under the protection of a small detachment which the Commander of force fixed. All

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
letters in the army, whether private or public, for the Grand Army in the field, consisted of a small slip of paper whose dimensions were not to exceed a specification laid down by orders, and the slip was rolled and not folded.

From the foregoing account, it is quite evident that both in times of war and peace the British in India kept in view some of the most vital principles of strategy, such as Rapid Mobility, Concentration, Coordination, Forethought and Economy of force, Maintenance of objective and intrigue.