

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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## IBG : POWERING THE FUTURE READY FORCE



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**PICTORIAL DEPICTION OF A FUTURE FORCE INTEGRATED BATTLE GROUP**



## General

The emerging strategic security environment, technology advancements and multi spectrum conflict challenges facing the Indian Army (IA) are fast outpacing its archival structures, legacy equipment and war fighting philosophy, impinging upon its desired operational capabilities. **The need today, is to restructure and refit a “big war military with smart, lean, agile combined arms joint warfare capabilities”.** The IA thus faces formidable challenges on how best to transform into a future ready force, within the all-encompassing budgetary constraints. The recent transformation initiative in this regard is an exigent and logical step. The focus being to develop a technology enabled future ready combined arms modular force, capable of decisive operations across the entire spectrum of conflict.

**The operational effectiveness of a force depends on its ‘Deployability’ in terms of time and terrain, ‘Employability’ across the entire spectrum of conflict and ‘Capability’ to ensure combat over match. Thus the need for a rapidly deployable, versatile, lethal, survivable force to dominate the key operational factors of “Time-Space-Force-Information”.** The over archival principle being that force modernisation, force restructuring and force doctrine are complementary and mutually reinforcing aspects of military capability building. Therefore,

based on the changes in the strategic environment, emerging threat spectrum, budgetary constraints and desired combat readiness, the IA now confronts modernisation, restructuring and doctrinal review. One such deliberation is to review and empower Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) suitably restructured for the Western and Northern borders, with rapid deployment capability in time and combat over match capability in chosen spaces.

## Conceptual Contours and Operational Relevance

The origin of Battle Groups (BG) is as old as warfare. Its conception aimed at creating a synergistic effect from the integration of all the individual arms to achieve decisive results. **While there is agreement concerning the need for combined arms, there has been much controversy over the nature of combination and the organizational level at which it should occur.** The practice of creating adhoc BGs on being launched in battle as in the past, is increasingly being challenged in the context of future wars. Such an arrangement had often resulted in time consuming disjointed capabilities, creating adverse force mobilisation and application differentials. In contrast, complementary and integrated combined arms, pose a more complicated threat much greater than the sum of individual arms. **The focus of commanders has thus gone from**



**coordinating the individual actions of separate arms of a BG, to gaining greater synergy between them, and combining their complementary actions in the form of an IBG.** Only the need to adjust the proportion of arms to different operational scenarios, terrain and tasks, limits the degree to which those arms can be grouped together permanently, while retaining flexibility of regrouping to different tactical situations.

In the IA context, over the years the force structures have progressively grown sluggish to deploy and employ, with less than optimum integration and operational capability. The erstwhile defensive mindsets, antiquated monolithic organizational structures and suboptimal linear force application have limited its force effectiveness. Deploy ability had been more adversely impacted by cumbersome and large logistic footprints than the mass of combat forces themselves. The enhanced footprints of Pak's Proxy War and need for generating space for conventional response under a nuclear umbrella, further raised the necessity of rapid deployment of combat ready forces in a time and space constrained environment. However, it was only post Operation PARAKRAM, that the operational construct of **IBG for the Western Front** assumed eminence with the evolution of the Cold Start Strategy or its variant Pro-Active Operations Strategy. The evolution of

this new retribution strategy based on Manoeuvre Warfare looked at a punitive response to Pak sponsored proxy war crossing tolerance threshold, against the backdrop of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and international pressures to limit the scope of war. The force application matrix entailed executing **a Short Notice Intense Proactive Escalatory (SNIPE)** operations by reconstituted Pivot Corps and Strike Corps based on the concept of "**Hit** by in situ joint forces, simultaneously **Mobilise** Strike Formations in depth and **Hit Harder**. However, somewhere this strategic thought lost its track both at the politico-mil level as well at a Joint Services level with contradictory signalling. The strategic restraint and evolution of limited wars post 26/11 and Operation VIJAY, paved the way for Pak's nuclear sabre rattling with the introduction of tactical nuclear missile aimed at further limiting conventional wars in time and space. **Unfortunately, while the imperatives of our punitive deterrence philosophy on the western front remained well engrained, it was not supported by the desired force restructuring and modernisation impetus, with several transformation studies gathering dust and modernisation not getting the requisite budgetary support.**

In the Northern Front, the emergence of an assertive and collusive China, increasing transgressions, led to our operational rebalancing including the



raising of the Mountain Strike Corps, induction of mechanised forces and deployment of long range vectors in these regions. The recent events such as Dhoklam have further reinforced the imperatives for restructured Mountain IBG as rapid deployment force, to both deny gains to the adversary as also execute quid pro quo operations. **Such restructured capabilities matched with force modernisation impetus, infrastructure development and C4ISR capabilities, will strengthen our credible deterrence posture in the Northern Front.**

It was in this light that the recent transformation initiative by the IA has once again brought to fore the restructuring and modernisation focus. **The revisited concept of IBG as part of force restructuring aims at technology enabled, modular, scalable, right sized combined arms force, specific to a theatre and based on a mission-oriented grouping.** The IBGs would combine a degree of mobility, lethality, and survivability greater than the foot-mobile forces, yet be more rapidly deployable than the equipment heavy formations with minimal logistic footprint.

### **Doctrinal Construct and Operational Philosophy**

The IBG concept is based on three foundational doctrinal constructs of Manoeuvre Warfare, Directive Style of Command and Combined Arms

Force, as a war fighting philosophy. **Rapid rate of mounting tempo and overwhelming execution tempo with relentless offensive actions, greater than the adversaries,** will be the hallmark of IBG application. The key doctrinal construct of IBGs is based on the undermentioned operational philosophy.

- **Manoeuvre Warfare and IBG Application.** The essence of the IBG application lies in the concept of “**Pre-emption, Dislocation and Disintegration**” as the three empirical means of defeat in Manoeuvre Warfare. **Pre-emption** implies initiating decisive ops before the enemy does thereby dictating terms on the battlefield. Pre-emption contributes towards gaining initiative and causing partial dislocation. **Dislocation** implies avoiding strength and striking at vulnerability through manoeuvre. Physical dislocation at a high execution tempo leads to temporal dislocation. The cumulative effect is physical and moral dislocation thereby paralysing the enemy’s mind. **Disintegration** implies breaking the cohesion of the enemy by disrupting his command and control systems and striking his strategic/operational/tactical centres of gravity, resulting in physical and psychological paralysis.

**What does this imply in the Indian context of operational application of IBG?** On the **Western Front**, the Pivot Corps IBGs suitably constituted at Brigade or in some cases Divisional level pre-empt the enemy through multiple ingress resulting in partial dislocation upto tactical depth. This creates conditions and multiple opportunities for decisive operations by Strike Corps Division level IBGs, in an escalatory continuum, to dislocate and degrade enemy's operational and strategic reserves. Simultaneously, air power, vertical envelopment and operational fires are used for disruption and disintegration of enemy's centres of gravity. In keeping with time sensitivity of conflict, periodic conflict termination profile needs to be planned in various operational cycles with built in surge capabilities. On the **Northern Front**, as part of credible deterrence, Brigade sized in-situ IBGs would deter, pre-empt, deny, dislocate, degrade and limit the adversaries offensive design while the sectoral reserve IBGs as Rapid Deployment Force would contribute to Quid-Pro-Quo gains. It needs to be understood that manoeuvre warfare and the three means of defeat elucidated are as relevant in the mountains

as in the plains. In addition, certain centralised IBGs reserves on both the western and northern front could act as dual task formations or strategic reserves for any exigent operational situation, including out of area contingencies.

- **Combined Arms Warfare and Force Constitution.** Combined arms concept along with joint operations synergy will lead to force optimisation and thus be critical for success of IBGs. What makes combined arms manoeuvre so potent is not the physical employment of multiple arms on the battlefield but the cumulative and complementary effect, targeting the enemy's will and capability to resist, and his inability to effectively respond.

**IBGs must be seen in a multidimensional force application mode including intrinsic attack helicopters, airpower support and information warfare domain.** The key to IBG force constitution would essentially depend on the factors of terrain, envisaged threat and task of the force. However, their combat effectiveness would be a factor of frequency of interaction, integrated training, interoperability, synergy, complementarity in range and mobility, competence of commander to synchronise their effect, and rapid deployment



ability. These forces must also be self-contained for the duration of the mission with integrated tailor made logistics as an enabling factor.

- **Time-Space-Force-Information Dominance.** The art of IBG application will be in obtaining and maintaining the freedom of action to accomplish assigned mission. Freedom of action is achieved by properly balancing and optimizing the factors of space, time, force and information. The operational factors of time, space, force and information are all intrinsically interrelated. A sound force to space ratio is generally proportional, while the force to time ratio as also the time to information ratio is inversely proportional. **The key understanding in the IBG context is that time is more important than space and force.** Lost time cannot be gained, lost space can be regained and forces can be replaced. The operational art of IBG application will thus be to gain control/ dominate spaces with requisite force capability, in the earliest time frame.
- **C5ISR and Battlespace Awareness.** The key determinant of success of IBGs in future conflicts will be information superiority and decision dominance. In short, **we need a knowledge based; decision oriented networked**

**joint force IBG capability.** This is a major grey area that requires much understanding and focus in our Army. Further, C5ISR will only be empowered if we shift from a platform centric approach culture to a network centric approach. In short, we need a knowledge based; decision oriented networked joint force application capability.

- **Technology Empowerment and Force Modernisation.** RMA in technology has also empowered smaller brigade sized BGs to execute missions faster and with greater effect, previously thought suitable only for divisions. At a more practical level, the **synergisation of mobility, survivability, and lethality, technically in the design and employment of individual weapons, and tactically in the combination of different weapons and arms, will pose a more potent threat. The key will be to arming the combined arms IBG as one force (<http://www.defstrat.com/arming-combined-arms-operational-manoevre-developing-future-capabilities>) with seamless connectivity and empowered ISR and not as presently existing individual stand-alone entities with poor connectivity.** This has given the realisation that in the future operational environment, rapid

application as a lean, integrated and technology enabled IBGs, with complementary technologies and empowered leadership, will be the key to tactical wins and operational success.

- **Empowered Leadership and Directive Style of Command.**

Knowledge of employment of all arms and operational dimensions of battle space as the science of war and leadership cum human will as the art of war will result in decisive outcomes of IBGs. Risk taking, audacity and initiative are essential for success. **Thus, along with restructuring IBGs, we must focus on molding competent leadership and directive style of command with traits such as boldness, initiative, audacity, innovative tactics and nonlinear thinking. IBG commanders need to fight smart and not allow predictability and set piece operations to stall your tempo.**

### **Paving the Way Forward**

Restructuring of IBG must conform to the specific theatre operational design and the Western/Northern Front Strategy. IBGs must thus operate under the Divisional or Corps Headquarters in sync with the operational design and force application matrix. **All formations need not necessarily be uniformly restructured as IBGs, as**

**this restructuring is terrain, threat and task specific, in tune with an enunciated doctrine.** IBGs with their modular scalable structure must retain inbuilt operational and tactical flexibility to integrate into a larger force, if the operational situation and subsequent tasking so demands.

Success of institutionalised IBG transformation depends upon a few key macro aspects. First of these is a **politico-military harmony** with matching budgetary support. Second, it must foster **jointness** or at least pave the way for the same. Thirdly, a **phased approach** is necessary through the entire process of transforming for acceptability and permanence. Fourthly, the organizational structure of IBG, must address the **restructured headquarters, equipping policy, training needs and leadership requirements.** Fifthly, the need to **minimize the logistical and support footprint and maximise battlefield transparency.** Sixthly, the most important aspect is **addressing the mindsets** and infusing its merits at the grassroot level.

Further, any rightsizing and restructuring must be dispassionately test bedded in the operational environment under realistic simulated conditions before being firmed in. This must be a very deliberate effort with detailed discussions, wargaming, simulation and field exercises, since any fault-lines would imply adversity



in perpetuity. **Constructive criticism must be encouraged to foster the best practical model.** It must therefore **include stakeholders who are going to execute such operations in future** for wider acceptability and not just by a core group of hierarchical leadership who may never be at its executorial level.

### **Conclusion**

Victory in future conflicts will be defined by ability of a force to achieve desired objectives in least time with minimum casualties. **While the exact shape of transformation is still under debate; we know the direction and focus of future forces being**

**more deployable, employable and capable.** In order to enhance the rapid deploy ability, combat readiness and operational effectiveness of future force, it is necessary to shift to alean, versatile, mobile, technology enabled IBG structure. Along with the combat restructuring, the effort must be to minimize its logistical and support footprint. For its permanence and institutionalisation, it must be a deliberate exercise with wider professional acceptability at the grass root level. The restructuring and application of IBGs as part of the joint theatre integrated battle, both on the Western and Northern Front, will certainly power the future ready force.

**Disclaimer :** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.

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