

WAR STORIES

India’s war stories have remained in closets and files for a long time. Except for Chetan Anand’s Haqeeqat based on the 1962 Sino-India war where we faced a defeated, no meaningful cinema was made on India’s wars, soldiers, their families and the war strategies. With Indian film industry expanding and gaining a great foothold in the world, bold filmmakers are telling Indians the stories behind the wars, and conflicts. From drama to real stories are tumbling out giving cine lovers Goosebumps to see the valour, professionalism and sense of duty of our Military. While Aditya Dhar’s Dhurandhar shook the Indian and the world cinema with a high energy drama, the twin films showed the work of security and intelligence agencies in taking on India’s enemies. Again based on the real stories of men and women of courage and their hearts filled with a sense of patriotism, India spies gave up everything to protect the nation and deal with enemies on their turf. Close to Dhurandhar becoming the higher grosser and the most watched non English film on the OTT Netflix, a serial on Indian Air Force’s role in turning around the situation in Kagril War has unraveled the hitherto unknown facts surrounding the conflict with Pakistan. Safeed Sagar on Netflix is a war time movie like no one. It begins as a war movie but ends up touching the hearts of the viewers and raising their respect for the Military many notches up. The story is just about a small group of IAF warriors who through their extraordinary courage and professionalism turn around the war and make it easier for the Indian Army to reclaim the Indian territories occupied illegally and in violation of the Simla agreement and Lahore declaration. Indians also saw how the USA tried to sabotage Indian moves against Pakistan army in Kargil. Not only the Indian cinema has come of age, even the audience has evolved to appreciate such candid theses.

Bhopidner Singh

History offers a sobering reminder that even the world’s most powerful militaries are not immune to depleted arsenals. The United States has repeatedly confronted the consequences of munitions shortages - from the opening months of the Korean War, when inadequate stockpiles and strained logistics forced commanders to ration artillery fire, to the prolonged campaigns in Vietnam and Afghanistan, where years of sustained operations exposed weaknesses in procurement, production capacity, and supply chains.

Each time, Washington recovered by mobilising its industrial base, expanding defence production, strengthening logistics, and rebuilding strategic reserves. Yet history appears to be echoing once again. Years of military assistance to Ukraine, combined with the demands of a prolonged conflict with Iran that has lasted far beyond initial expectations, have renewed concerns over the resilience of U.S. munitions inventories. The issue is not whether America possesses the world’s most advanced weapons. That it does. But whether it can manufacture, replenish, and sustain them at the pace demanded by modern high-intensity warfare.

The first visible indication of mounting pressure came with the administration’s request for emergency funding from Congress (reportedly around \$87 billion) to support military operations and ‘rapidly replenish equipment and munitions’. Such a request is more than a budgetary measure; it reflects a strategic reality: even the United States can find its military capabilities constrained when operational demand outpaces industrial capacity.

The lesson from Korea remains relevant. In 1950, Washington expected a short campaign that many believed would end by Christmas. Instead, Chinese intervention transformed a limited ‘police action’ into a three-year war of attrition, forcing the United States to rapidly expand its defence industrial base. The conflict demonstrated a recurring truth of warfare, i.e.,

America’s arsenal under strain



political timelines rarely match military realities, and ammunition stocks can be exhausted long before strategic objectives are achieved.

A similar challenge appears to have emerged during the Iran conflict. Operation Epic Fury was conceived as a rapid campaign aimed at achieving decisive military objectives. Instead, the conflict has continued for months, creating sustained demand for precision-guided munitions, air-defence interceptors, and long-range strike weapons.

The resulting pressure on inventories has intensified calls for additional funding and accelerated production.

Defence analysts have highlighted the strain on U.S. missile stocks. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has estimated significant reductions in inventories of systems such as Patriot interceptors and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles after sustained operational use. Such assessments have fueled concerns about whether Washington can maintain adequate reserves for future contingencies while meeting current commitments. They have also provided adversaries an opportunity to portray reported shortages as evidence of declining American military strength.

The debate has taken on a political dimension in Washington as well. Reports that President Donald Trump confronted

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth over possible weapons shortages intensified scrutiny of U.S. preparedness. The President strongly rejected such reporting, describing it as ‘treasonous’ and promising severe action against those responsible for leaks. Yet the controversy highlights a deeper issue - precise information about U.S. weapons inventories remains classified, and increased restrictions on Pentagon information have made independent assessments more difficult. Secrecy may protect operational details, but it can also amplify uncertainty.

If concerns over U.S. military preparedness and defence manufacturing capacity prove accurate, the implications extend well beyond America’s current conflicts. The question is not simply whether Washington can sustain ongoing operations, but whether it can continue to honour long-term security commitments while preserving reserves for unforeseen crises.

The ability of the United States to simultaneously replenish weapons supplied to Ukraine, support its own forces, and respond to emerging threats will be closely watched by allies worldwide. For strategic partners such as India, the lesson is significant. Advanced American defence systems provide major operational advantages, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on assured access to ammunition, spare parts, upgrades, and sustainment

support during a crisis. Modern warfare has shown that possessing sophisticated platforms is only one component of military power; the industrial ecosystem behind them is equally decisive. A nation may possess superior technology, but without the ability to produce at scale and sustain losses over time, that advantage can rapidly diminish in a prolonged conflict.

The credibility of defence partnerships is therefore measured not only by contracts signed during peacetime, but by the reliability of supply chains during wartime. Allies do not merely purchase weapons; they invest in the promise that those weapons will remain operational when national security is at stake.

The Iran conflict has therefore reinforced a strategic imperative for India, i.e., to accelerate indigenous defence manufacturing while avoiding excessive dependence on any single foreign supplier. Diversification combining domestic production with multiple trusted international partnerships provides insurance against geopolitical shocks, export restrictions, production delays, or the competing demands placed on supplier nations during prolonged conflicts.

Strategic autonomy does not mean isolation. It means ensuring that no external disruption can determine a nation’s ability to sustain combat power when it matters most. In future wars, the decisive advantage may belong not only to the country with the most advanced weapons, but to the one capable of producing and sustaining them after the opening phase of conflict has passed.

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BREAKING THE DRUG CHAIN: WHY COMMUNITY VIGIL MATTERS

Kumar Ashish

Drug abuse is no longer merely a law-and-order challenge. It is a serious threat to public health, family life, social harmony and, above all, the future of our youth. The changing nature of the illegal drug trade-with trafficking networks increasingly exploiting technology and new distribution channels-makes community vigilance more important than ever. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB)?, India’s nodal agency for drug-law enforcement and coordination on drug-related matters, has rightly emphasized that enforcement must go hand in hand with awareness, prevention, demand reduction and rehabilitation. Its nationwide awareness programmes in schools and colleges, community campaigns, rallies and pledge initiatives underline an important truth: the battle against drugs cannot be won by enforcement agencies alone.

As a police officer, I have always believed that the most effective policing is preventive policing. Every consignment of drugs seized is important, every trafficker arrested is a success, but prevent-



ing a young person from becoming a victim of addiction is an even greater achievement.

It was with this philosophy that “Nasha Mukti Koshi Abhiyan” was initiated in the Koshi region of Bihar. Covering Saharsa, Supaul and Madhepura, the initiative seeks to combine stringent enforcement against drug traffickers with active participation of citizens.

A dedicated mechanism was created to enable people to confidentially share in-

formation regarding the illegal trade in substances such as cough syrup, smack and ganja. Information received through the helpline is monitored at the senior police level, enabling prompt action and enhanced accountability. Within the initial months of the campaign, coordinated action resulted in the seizure of approximately 4500 kg

of ganja and 50,000 litres of illicit liquor, while more than 1,400 persons involved in the illegal trade were sent to jail, according to reports on the campaign. But enforcement is only one side of the battle. Parents, teachers, community leaders and young people themselves must become the first line of defence. Parents should notice sudden behavioural changes, unusual financial demands, withdrawal from family or changes in peer groups. More

importantly, children must be approached with empathy and dialogue rather than fear and accusation. We must also remember that a person suffering from addiction needs treatment, counselling and rehabilitation. The objective should be to break the supply chain while simultaneously reducing demand. The NCB’s MANAS helpline-1933 provides a national platform through which citizens can report information relating to drug trafficking and seek assistance concerning counselling and rehabilitation, with confidentiality of the informant. The message is therefore simple: Do not ignore. Do not remain silent. Speak up!

The police will continue to act firmly against drug traffickers, but the strength of our action ultimately comes from the trust and participation of citizens. A “Nasha Mukti Bharat” as envisaged by Prime Minister cannot be built by the police alone. It must begin with a Nasha Mukti family, a Nasha Mukti school, a Nasha Mukti neighbourhood and, ultimately, a Nasha Mukti community. Let’s come together to deal with this cascading menace by joining hands. Together we can!

The new axis and the battle for the next world order

Bhavna Singh

United States (US) strategic circles have been awash in a new lexicon after Bradley L Bowman, Elaine K Dezenski, and Rear Admiral (Retd) Mark Montgomery of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies argued in Axis of Aggressors: Countering the Cooperation of China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea that the four nations — China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran - now function as a strategically aligned bloc even without a formal mutual-defence treaty. The findings are seminal, foreshadowing a ‘churn’ in the emerging world order, where quadrilaterals and minilaterals that seemed unimaginable just a decade ago are gathering momentum and becoming credible power blocs. The ‘new axis’ is largely ascribed to authoritarianism and cooperation across military, economic, cyber, and technology domains, which is forging a formidable partnership to counter the US. China-Russia ties form the core of this partnership, while Iran and North Korea play supporting roles.

Indeed, the opacity of such bloc politics only deepens the intrigue.

What is increasingly evident is that cooperation among the four has intensified after the Ukraine war, a turning point that provoked a coordinated response from outside powers. The alignment, though fractured and far from cohesive, seeks to cushion the blow from Western sanctions through alternative trade networks and technology transfers, largely in response to tariffs imposed by the US on several non-Western countries. Most importantly, the book stands as a testament to the fact that US policymakers are not deceiving themselves and are fully aware of the looming threat that a renewed Sino-Russian entente could pose, calling it a dangerous threat environment for Washington.

Since BRICS entered mainstream geopolitical discourse, policymakers have speculated about new power groupings. Among them is the proposed ‘QUADRO’—an informal alliance of the US, Russia, China, and India. While such a coalition appears unlikely, it also challenges the notion

of America’s inevitable decline. Despite its relatively short history, the US has remained the world’s dominant power since the Second World War and is unlikely to allow any emerging bloc to overturn the existing global balance of power. Rather than falling into the Thucydides Trap, a ‘prolonged struggle for assertion’ between the ruling hegemon and the emerging bloc appears more likely. While some elements of this transition are already visible, others are being pursued with mounting vigour. These pertain to cyber operations, digital surveillance, semiconductor supply chains, artificial intelligence (AI), and dual-use technologies. The US will look to counter this axis head-on by confronting security challenges and reinventing the wheel of domestic nationalism.

Two playbooks, one retreat More revealing, however, is the contrast in strategic conduct. While US policymakers have been outspoken about their strategy and intent, China has consistently pursued a more restrained and covert approach. US policymakers have, at

times, overreached on America’s ability to shape global politics through military interventions and expansive security commitments; China, on the other hand, in keeping with Sun Tzu’s traditional doctrine, has sought to win wars without even fighting them. GeographicReference

This has meant that while the US has fallen prey to strategic overreach and suffered setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq, China has enjoyed the spoils of shooting from Russia’s shoulder. Over time, China has been able to garner resources and trust from its neighbours and allies while supporting conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, and the South China Sea and - wherever it has chosen to intervene through supply of weapons (often to both sides of the conflict) — before selectively applying international norms. Thus, while the US is criticised for advocating a rules-based order while simultaneously flouting it with its carrot-and-stick approach to neighbours under Pax Americana, China and Russia are likewise criticised for invoking sovereignty and non-interference while violating

these very principles when it suits their strategic interests. Equally, the hypocrisy of an ascendant Chinese order can no longer be hidden behind the rhetoric of a ‘peaceful rise’. The emerging Sino-centric order, though outwardly benign and largely propagated through economic statecraft — simultaneously empowering and entrapping states through economic dependence — is engineered upon a dangerous chessboard of espionage, misinformation, and military balancing. China has covertly abetted war and, most importantly, won it, without the international system even recognising the discrepancies it has exploited. Take the Ukraine war, which has turned out to be a bloody nose for the Russians: it could have easily culminated in Russia’s favour had China not supplied the constant barrage of arms and ammunition to Ukraine. However, for the sake of ‘justice’, Beijing maintained that it had a concurrent obligation to help Kyiv during the war and came up with a charade of measures to try to end the war through a peace proposal on its own terms.

Whose order wins?

Similarly, China has been at the forefront of regional balancing, as demonstrated at the recent China-Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers’ Meeting at the held in Manila, where the two sides expressed concern that ‘the rapidly evolving situation in the Middle East and its spillover effects pose a grave threat to the lives and safety of civilians, as well as to regional and global peace, stability, and economic activities including regional trade, investment, energy, and food security’. Manufacturing solidarity over the situation in the Middle East within ASEAN again gives a boost to China’s regional aspirations and reveals China’s ability to deftly steer an agenda that normally should be restricted to its bilateral economic and cultural engagement. This underscores China’s rising influence and the shrinking space for dissent within regional groupings. China has been ASEAN’s largest trading partner for 16 consecutive years, and the effects of that dependence are becoming increasingly apparent.