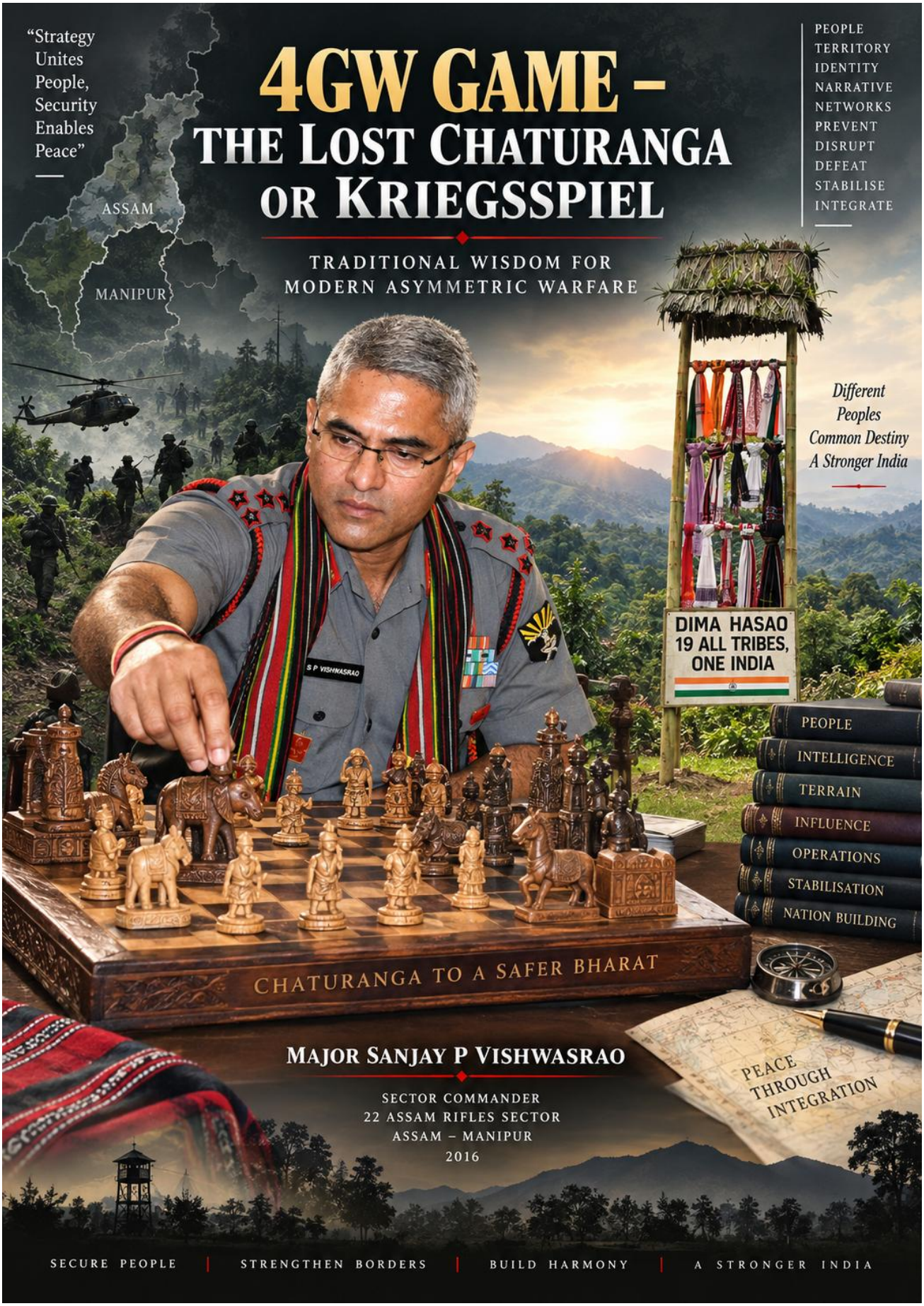

"Strategy Unites People, Security Enables Peace"
ASSAM
MANIPUR
4GW GAME – THE LOST CHATURANGA OR KRIEGSSPIEL
TRADITIONAL WISDOM FOR MODERN ASYMMETRIC WARFARE
PEOPLE
TERRITORY
IDENTITY
NARRATIVE
NETWORKS
PREVENT
DISRUPT
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PEOPLE
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CHATURANGA TO A SAFER BHARAT
PEACE THROUGH INTEGRATION
MAJOR SANJAY P VISHWASRAO
SECTOR COMMANDER
22 ASSAM RIFLES SECTOR
ASSAM – MANIPUR
2016
SECURE PEOPLE | STRENGTHEN BORDERS | BUILD HARMONY | A STRONGER INDIA

4th Generation Wargame Game — The Lost Chaturanga or Kriegsspiel

Originally written in 2016. Adopted in 2026 for a broader audience.

A Strategic War-Gaming Framework for Adversarial Analysis and Long-Range Planning

Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Major General, Retired

Written in 2016 as Brigadier &22 Sector Commander, Assam Rifles (Assam–Manipur), for the Counter Insurgency & Jungle Warfare School — following his design and conduct of the Indian Army's first Counter-Terrorism Wargame.

> *"The statesman's objective must always be the betterment of the state as a result of war and not the defeat and destruction of the enemy."*
>
> **— Kautilya**



*My 1st public event in Haflong, Dima Hasao, Assam- **'9 O Clock Town'** to win back Haflong's nights from the terrorists for the youth, 2015*

STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR TODAY'S READER

Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) is conflict fought primarily through ideology, information and irregular tactics rather than set-piece battle — the military equivalent of a prolonged, multi-front competitive or reputational contest. The wargame described below, designed and umpired by the author in 2016, is a live case study in structured adversarial simulation: mapping an opponent's likely strategy, stress-testing one's own response, and building multi-year plans rather than reacting quarter to quarter. The same discipline — red-teaming a competitor, regulator or hostile narrative before it materialises — is directly transferable to corporate strategy, public policy and institutional risk management.

History of War-Games

Simulations are necessary to develop theories of warfare and strategic policy, and to design operational doctrines and tactical plans. The earliest known war-simulation game is 'Chaturanga' — used in the Mahabharata to evolve military strategy. The earliest Chaturanga boards have been found at sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation (2,600 BCE). Chaturanga means the four limbs of the military — elephants, chariots, horsemen and foot soldiers. Much later, in 1812, a Prussian Army lieutenant, Georg Leopold von Reiswitz, designed 'Kriegsspiel' (war game); it consisted of maps and opposing forces, and also catered for C3I networks (communications, command, control and intelligence) and for the fog of war. Prussian General Julius von Verdy du Vernois later improved on the original — increasing the speed of the game, using a tactically experienced game-master (umpire), and simplifying the rules. And yet, in the 4GW conflicts our security forces are engaged in daily — covering nearly 205 of the Nation's 608 districts, with over 20 divisions' worth of troops deployed — no time was, until 2016, ever set aside for an annual 4GW 'Chaturanga' or 'Kriegsspiel'.

The Command Challenge

The most professionally demanding task facing security forces in the field today is command of battalions and companies in counter-4GW operations, where the variables are almost uncontrollable. Battalion and company commanders must master human-resource management — not only for their own command, but for the people of their area of responsibility and the civil administration alongside them. They must build an effective intelligence grid and a parallel 'people's grid' of friends, while training individual soldiers as scouts, layers of trip-flares and mines, snipers, radio operators, and operators of surveillance and anti-IED equipment. These soldiers then have to be paired as buddies and welded into cohesive small teams — a demanding task in itself, given that team composition changes with every leave or posting rotation. Education in cultural awareness, rules of engagement, and an area- and people-specific ethos adds a further layer of difficulty. And at the end of it all, the only real test is tangible results in counter-terrorist operations without collateral damage. Yet this entire effort covers only the tactical, kinetic sphere of 4GW.

Why 4GW Needs War-Gaming

4GW is a war of ideologies between two societies — a contest of ideas in which kinetic force has limited peace-winning value. Peace can be won over a hostile nexus only if its will (ideology), means (hybrid tools) and hope (popular support) are dismantled together. Winning peace in 4GW therefore calls for strategic policy and operational direction far more than tactical planning. A tactical commander with a slow OODA loop (Observe–Orient–Decide–Act decision cycle) causes limited damage; but strategic and operational commanders must repeatedly out-think and defeat the opposing side's OODA loop for peace to take hold. This was borne out when the nexus in Jammu & Kashmir shifted to 'intifada' (civil disobedience by stone-throwing) in 2008, and again in the North-East, where the NDFB massacre

of 85 civilians on 23 December 2014 and the NSCN(K)'s revocation of ceasefire in March 2015 marked further strategic shifts. It took considerable time to read these shifts correctly in both theatres. Sun Tzu observed that 'the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.' The proposed answer: annual, dedicated 4GW war-games at every level of command, to build plans that erode the opposing side's centre of gravity and win a durable peace.

CORPORATE PARALLEL — READING THE OPPONENT'S NEXT MOVE

The core insight here is not military at all: an opponent's strategy shifts long before its actions do, and the side that reads the shift first — a competitor's pivot, a regulator's changing posture, a hostile narrative gathering pace — keeps the initiative. Structured war-gaming, run on a fixed annual cycle rather than in response to a crisis, is how that early reading is built into an organisation's routine rather than left to individual instinct.

Running the 2016 War-Game

An Assam Rifles Sector deployed in the North-East conducted the Indian Army's first 4GW war-game in February 2016. Its broad contours are set out below.

Syndicates. Syndicates were organised battalion-wise, under the leadership of each Commandant. A control group, drawn from headquarters staff, assisted the umpire in adjudicating counter-terrorist and psychological-operations plans.

The Nexus Syndicate. The opposing ('red') syndicate consisted of one Lieutenant Colonel and one company commander from each battalion. They built long-, medium- and short-term plans for every constituent of the nexus, based on in-depth analysis of its actual objectives. (Nexus = interfering

foreign countries + their proxy terrorist organisations + radicals + anti-national elements + over-ground workers + misguided or anti-national NGOs/activists + ...).

Timeline. The game ran across a three-year horizon — February 2016 to October 2018 — built around every known internal-security milestone in that window: national days, festivals, financial-year closings, elections, and separatist 'boycott-call' days.

Tenure. Officer and battalion tenures were frozen until November 2018, forcing long-term thinking — the same principle General Stanley McChrystal describes in 'Team of Teams', asking a subordinate commander in Iraq: 'If I told you that you weren't going home until we win — what would you do differently?' Battalion relief moves were, however, war-gamed rather than fixed.

Exercise Design. Because the game was set in complete realism, no separate exercise papers were issued — only a schedule of events and the syndicate composition, which kept the security of plans built into the design itself.

Time Windows. Each two- to three-hour session gamed a six-month operating cycle, matched to real seasonal patterns — climate, festivals, terrorist activity cycles, and the financial year.

Directives and Plans. Each six-month window opened with an operational directive from the umpire, followed by the nexus syndicate's planned activity for that window. Commandants then presented their own plans in detail, covering the full spectrum of internal-security work — counter-terrorist operations, all four categories of perception-management, aid to civil authorities, and disaster relief — alongside logistics, administration and human-resource planning. The nexus syndicate was allowed a 30% uplift over actual activity levels, to fully test every company commander and extract maximum lessons.

Scoreboards. Separate scoreboards tracked the nexus and each battalion syndicate. Nexus activity and own (blue) redeployment were plotted on the master maps; kinetic results were tracked annually and quarter-wise, with perception-management impact assessed separately by the control group.

Tactical Plans. Commandants and company commanders presented detailed kinetic and non-kinetic plans, judged against the efficacy of existing intelligence networks, innovativeness, use of available force-multipliers, and time–distance calculations. Psychological-operations outcomes were judged on foresight, the civic-action projects proposed, and how well themes and media matched each target audience — with belief-change modelled realistically as gradual, and reversible if not reinforced.

What the Game Delivered

Formations in counter-4GW theatres already hold routine operational discussions — so what did two days of 4GW 'Chaturanga' or 'Kriegsspiel' add? The aim, in Kautilya's words, was that 'of much more importance than the force of arms is the high strategy which saps the enemy's morale, disrupts his forces and brings about his collapse, or takes him to the verge of collapse, before the armed attack.' The lessons follow.

Reading the Opponent. Every officer left with a realistic picture of what the nexus was trying to achieve in their own area — sharpening the speed and accuracy of their own kinetic and non-kinetic decision cycles.

A Three-Year Horizon. Officers came to see that winning peace was both necessary and achievable, reinforcing a people-friendly ethos and a posture of collaboration over competition, and refining their own goalposts.

Directives Across Levels. Commanders at every level understood how strategic, operational and tactical spheres overlap in 4GW — and their own

role in eroding the nexus's morale and cohesion within their own area of responsibility.

Operational Art. The applicability of operational art in 4GW emerged as the single biggest lesson at every level — controlling the rhythm and sequencing of kinetic and non-kinetic action to keep the nexus permanently off-balance.

Manoeuvre Principles. Officers practised using surfaces and gaps, focus of effort, and mission-type orders to run small, swarming operations — sequenced either to cause the nexus to collapse ahead of a kinetic strike, or to exploit the disruption that followed one; both sequences paid dividends.

Cross-Unit Synergy. The game highlighted the value of dissolving boundaries between formations, battalions and companies. Mixed sub-syndicates planned operations across boundaries during the game itself — denying the gaps terrorists were exploiting, while preserving surprise and deception.

CORPORATE PARALLEL — BREAKING DOWN SILOS BEFORE THE CRISIS

The most durable gain from the exercise was structural, not tactical: officers from different units learned to plan jointly before a crisis forced them to. Boards and leadership teams that only coordinate once a threat is live are always one step behind; the war-game model builds that coordination into a routine, low-stakes rehearsal instead.

Rediscovering Force-Multipliers. Officers were trained in the ingenious tactical use ('ustaadi nukta' — tradecraft tricks) of assets like hand-held thermal imagers, telephone network intelligence, smartphones, and even the humble toffee. The most important force-multiplier to emerge was 'force ethos' itself — sharing tradecraft to avoid both psychological and physical collateral damage while still achieving tangible results.

Real Plans for the Future. Because realistic milestones were gamed — neutralising a fringe terrorist group, denying operating space to outside terrorist groups, well-managed elections, pre-empted or well-handled communal clashes, efficient flood relief — commanders returned to their units with genuinely usable plans. Turning gamed plans into real-time action is the entire point of the exercise.

Joint Tracking Teams. Joint teams built to track and neutralise key terrorist leaders were tested and validated in the game, and their later field success galvanised every unit involved.

Anticipating the Opponent's Counter-Moves. The nexus syndicate also war-gamed plans to undo the 'blue' side's progress — keeping commanders from resting on short-term gains, and shifting them from a tenure-bound view to a genuinely long-term one.

Handling Incidents and Allegations. Officers shared experience of managing accidents, untoward incidents and allegations — underscoring the value of truthful, timely reporting, proactive inter-agency synergy to contain such incidents, and even turning them to a positive after the fact.

Cost-Effective Outreach. A major, and directly economic, benefit was the design of target-audience-specific civic-action plans across three future financial years — sharpened by better visualisation of each community's psychological state and inter-community relations, and by a hard look at how the October–February budget cycle was distorting outreach timing.

Shared Learning. The game doubled as a platform for exchanging ideas across intelligence, tactical and psychological operations, logistics, administration and human-resource management — building cross-unit trust and the confidence of newer officers.

Building Core Skills. Side tests on tracking, buddy-pairing of officers and soldiers, and cultural and language awareness gave small teams a real edge in the broader decision-cycle contest.

Conclusion

Formations on the counter-4GW grid are rarely given a collective 'thinking time-out' for what is a live, ongoing conflict — even though conventional forces get up to three months a year to prepare for missions they may never fight. Is it not time the immediate stopped crowding out the important, so that the Nation's clear and present danger is met more effectively, and peace is actually won? Doing so would, as a direct by-product, sharpen conventional operational readiness too — a genuine win-win.

RELEVANCE FOR TODAY'S BOARDROOMS AND INSTITUTIONS

The underlying method — long-tenure teams freed from a clock-watching mindset, realistic red-teaming of a rival's next moves, shared scoreboards across silos, and after-action lessons fed straight into next year's plan — is the same discipline behind competitive war-gaming, regulatory and geopolitical risk simulation, and crisis-preparedness exercises in the corporate, government and public-trust sectors today. It is this capability — turning foresight into a repeatable, defensible process — that I now bring to strategy, change-management and public-institution advisory work.

"The arrow shot by the archer may or may not kill a single person. But stratagems devised by wise men can kill even babies in the womb."

— Kautilya