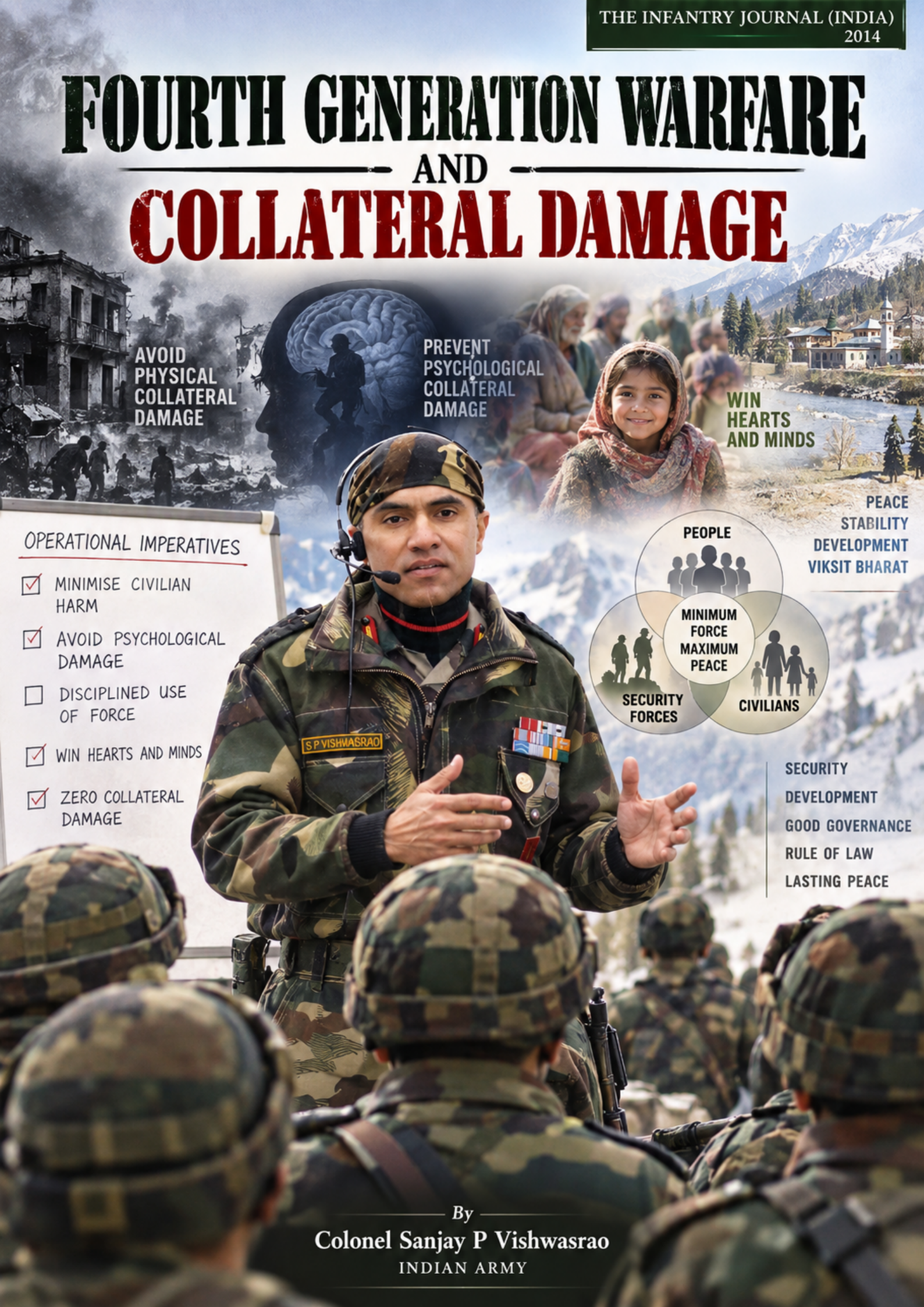
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FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE AND COLLATERAL DAMAGE



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FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE (4GW) AND COLLATERAL DAMAGE

By
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Why is Peace Elusive in 4GW?

Newsmaker Rifleman. Let's begin by recalling recent news tickers to emerge from Kashmir that depicts the strategic impact of tactical actions of a rifleman:-

- **Corps Commander** regrets civilian death by Army firing.
- **Chief Minister** says, "Soldiers who kill innocent civilians, must not be granted immunity under Armed Forces Special Powers Act".
- **Raksha Mantri** orders inquiry into civilian death.

Collateral Damage. Collateral damage is defined as the unintended or incidental injury and damage to people or property, which may not be lawful military targets. Such damage is not unlawful, as long as it is not excessive, in light of the overall long-term military advantage anticipated *(long-term in an annual confidential report / tenure based system!)*. The differentiating distinctions between 'lawful' and 'war crime' are, 'good faith', 'military necessity' and 'proportionality of force'. Under International Humanitarian Laws, death of civilians during armed conflict, no matter how grave and regrettable, does not in itself, constitute a war crime. This law permits belligerents to carry out attacks on military targets, even if it is known that some civilian deaths/ injuries will occur. Applying this imperialist definition to 4GW in democratic situations, has grave strategic implications.

Relevance of Redefining Collateral Damage in 4GW. In a war about imposing ones ideas on the adversarial society, minds of citizens who constitute the society, becomes the battleground. Winning peace over proxy 4GW plaguing our Nation, demands redefining collateral damage more holistically and in tune with local cultural sensitivities. It must include psychological collateral damage which results in (further) alienating our (estranged) citizens. A major cause (yet mostly ignored) of this psychological collateral damage, is the friction between local people and deployed security forces, for the limited local resources such as, scenic places of tourist interest, road space, water, electricity, etc. Such losses in the psychological domain, caused either by kinetic actions or by non-kinetic aspects of presence of security forces, make peace elusive.

Collateral Damage and Levels of 4GW-fighting

Collateral Damage a Zero Sum Game. A purely kinetically biased understanding and discounted significance of 'collateral damage' over the last 25 years in Kashmir, has been exploited by the Separatists, for perception management through the 'Hurriyat Calendar'. It is a year round non-violent protest (aggravated to stone pelting) scheduled on days in which, kinetic and / or psychological collateral damage has been inflicted upon the local people, by the security forces, since 1989. In a contest of minds (and hearts), collateral damage is a zero sum game; no winners and all losers. 'Zero collateral damage' has to be included in state policy in order to be given due importance during strategy formulation. Additionally, it must be made the fountainhead of concept of operations, tactical plans and standard operating procedures. Equally important, it should drive the 'organisational culture' and 'force ethos' of all security forces deployed in a 4GW theatre. As a corollary, it must form part of 'performance parameters'; rather performance must be gauged by

collateral damage avoided / inflicted / repaired.

Collateral Damage and Military Rank. Is collateral damage caused by rank and file only and not by commanding officers or flag officers? Is there any difference in the quantity and quality of psychological collateral damage inflicted by a convoy of a two star flag officer and a young officer? Psychological and kinetic tactical collateral damage, have long-term operational and strategic impact and hence, cannot be ignored by young officers, commanding officers or flag officers. Policy, strategy, culture, ethos and performance parameters are responsibilities of flag ranks. Commanding officers and officers' commanding are responsible for tactical plans, standard operating procedures and battle drills. By analogy, flag officers, commanding officers, officers' commanding, young officers and riflemen, all equally share the burden of ensuring 'zero collateral damage'; it's just that, roles and responsibilities vary with rank and appointment.

Manoeuvre Warfare and 4GW-fighting. Winning peace in 4GW requires victory in the game of 'surfaces and gaps' employing 'battleswarms' of soldiers and non-soldiers and, of weapons and non-weapons, in all three tiers of war-fighting. This non linear attack by the sponsor state can be defeated only if 'Zero Collateral Damage' is strictly ensured. In amorphous 4GW situations, such a challenging yardstick ('zero') can be achieved only through a combination of top leadership led essential 'organisational culture', institutionally cemented 'force ethos' and unambiguously defined 'performance parameters'. These factors will ensure people friendly conduct of each rifleman and of battleswarms of riflemen, through directive style of command/essential mission orders. No other leadership style can succeed in generating faster non-linear multi-tiered non-violent/ accurately violent OODA loops, necessary to win peace.

4GW Pied Pipers. In 4GW-fighting, no one fits into the ugly label of 'Left Out of Battle' (LOB). Scouts, surveillance equipment operators, nursing assistants, regimental policemen, housekeepers, animal transport drivers, mechanical transport drivers, clerks and info-warriors; all have a role to play in battleswarming our way through kinetic or non-kinetic surfaces and gaps. We are all 4GW-warriors; each man in uniform present in a 4GW theatre, on duty or on leave. We all have the task of pulling our estranged radicalised fellow citizens into the national mainstream.

Preventing Psychological and Kinetic Collateral Damage

A Nexus Paradigm and A New Principle of War. Nexus' (Pakistan-Separatists-terrorists combine) in Kashmir paradigm of 'non-violent political defiance', has necessitated a review of our conduct of 4GW. Gene Sharp in his thesis titled, 'From Dictatorship to Democracy', has advised, "The democratic leader must ensure that his movement remains non-violent in order to, out-manoeuvre the State's violence". This Nexus paradigm demands that, our 'minds cum boots on ground' be educated in avoiding psychological collateral damage and trained in, executing collateral damage free kinetic operations. Else, we will be strategically out-manoeuvred by the Nexus. 'Zero collateral damage' therefore, has to top the list of 'Principles of 4GW'; of course after those of 'identifying centres of gravity' and 'identifying and maintaining balance between main and subsidiary efforts'.

Avoiding Psychological Collateral Damage. Maximum harm to our aim of winning peace in 4GW is being done by our democratically unfriendly and culturally insensitive behaviour, of our minds cum boots on ground. Belligerent convoy runs, competition for consumption of limited local resources and utilities, disrespectful search of houses and cars, offensive / aggressive signages on military vehicles and bases, unwarranted display of offensive combat signatures at public places and disrespectful

personal conduct of soldiers, is causing silent irreversible psychological collateral damage to the minds and hearts of local people. The rats and then, the children, followed Pied Piper because, his music was sweet. As an analogy, every action of each 4GW warrior and each 4GW battlswarm, must have a positive influence on local minds and hearts. Only then, will our perception management will succeed in remoulding radical anti-national mindsets. Resultantly, our minds and boots on ground have to be educated in local language, culture, customs and religion; the war (peace) winning soft skills of 4GW warriors.

Avoiding Kinetic Collateral Damage. In order to prevent outmanoeuvring of the state's security forces by non-violence, the security forces need to become non-violent and need to ensure 100% accuracy of their use of necessary violence. Moreover, post violence procedures must ensure that, the impact of the 'minimum accurate force' is limited to terrorists alone. Our existing gaps into local peoples' minds and hearts, must not be allowed to be converted into surfaces (to deny us access), while existing surfaces must be made to melt into gaps (to increase our access), so as to favourably mould local perceptions. Any contrary situation will be exploited by the Nexus, to impose/ strengthen its radical ideas, in the minds and hearts of the local people. The Nexus is and will continually try to engineer collateral damage/ exploit collateral damage to radicalise the people against the Nation. Therefore, the following become operational imperatives (in which all 4GW warriors must be educated and trained to perfection) :-

- **By How Much?** Use of too many boots on ground at the strategic or tactical levels, leads to friction between the local people and security force, resulting in collateral damage. Quantum of security forces and number of kinetic operations required to win peace, must be reviewed at each stage of the conflict, to achieve a fine balance, between efficiency of the counter terrorist grid and its anti-peace collateral damage. In similar vein, the balance between hard and soft power must be regularly reviewed, based on progress on the ground. Lesser the footprint (and more the mindprint), easier it will be to control OODA loops of own 4GW battleswarms.

- **Where Not To?** Siting and conduct of counter terrorist operations must be based on the peace pre-requisite of 'zero collateral damage'. It would mean avoiding operations in public places, ambushes in built up areas or raids during local festivities. Appropriate organisational culture alone can ensure people friendliness of our 4GW OODA loops.

- **When Not To**? *'Not to operate today'* or *'not to neutralise now'*, in case of the slightest possibility of kinetic collateral damage, are on the spot decisions repetitively required of 4GW warriors. A terrorist can be neutralised tomorrow, but collateral damage once inflicted today, is mostly irreparable. 4GW warriors must have an astute appreciation of the relation between 'overall long-term military advantage' vis-à-vis 'immediate tactical objectives', which is often blurred by performance pressures. Correct and well institutionalised force ethos will ensure that collateral damage of own 4GW OODA loops is kept minimal ('zero' is desirable).

- **How Not To?** Choice of weapons, ammunition and their siting/ employment must also be based on the pre-requisite of 'zero collateral damage'. Thus, single shot small arms fire and sniper fire should, always be preferred over rocket launchers and explosives. Correct and widely publicised performance parameters will help minimise (zero) collateral damage of own OODA loops.

- **What If**? Immediate repair of kinetic collateral damage by commanding officers

is a must do. It includes first aid, casualty evacuation and also repair / re-building of structures damaged, besides other perception management actions. Post collateral damage, established lines of command need to be obliterated (not just blurred) and flag officers need to intervene from the very outset. This is not a matter of concern/ shame for tactical commanders, but a part of overall strategy. Obliterating lines of command will prevent the Nexus from interrupting/ disrupting own 4GW OODA loops.

- **What After**? Kinetic operations of all types must be followed through by perception management actions to deny conversion of neutralised terrorists into 'martyrs' or winning over of affected families by the Nexus, paying them 'pension'/ 'compensation'. Again, flag officers need to unleash their resources in aid of their tactical commanders at the earliest. Better still, perception management operations need to be made integral part of our kinetic (counter terrorist) operations. Establishing a continuum of accurately violent / non violent 4GW OODA loops with seamless switching between kinetic and non-kinetic loops, will ensure disruption of Nexus' 4GW OODA loops, leading to victory (peace).

End Note

Mahatma's ideas on non-violence have for too long, been ignored by the security forces of his own Nation. We need to re-examine the Mahatma's ideas, in context of the proxy 4GWs being imposed on our Nation.

The joint strategy for controlling Kashmir's internal security situation, post hanging of Afzal Guru on 09 Feb 2013 was, based on Mahatma's principles of non-violence. The success of this joint strategy in preventing and controlling public backlash, in the immediate and short terms, needs to be appreciated and further analysed, to develop a 4GW strategy which can deliver the elusive aim of winning peace.

Neutralising terrorists alone is not enough to win peace in 4GW. It's time we re-christened 'boots on ground' as 'minds, hearts and boots on ground'; in the same priority. Battleswarms of minds, hearts and boots operating under 'people friendly' mission, culture, ethos, performance parameters and orders, generating competitively faster and consistently accurate violence which is collateral damage free and nationalistic 4GW OODA loops, alone can win long lasting peace over proxy 4GW.

About the Author



Col SP Vishwasrao, SM* was commissioned in 11 RAJ RIF and commanded a Rashtriya Rifles (RAJ RIF) Battalion. He has served with his unit in Operation Pawan, Operation Rakshak I and II and Operation Meghdoot. He has been an instructor Class 'C' in Commando Wing and Instructor Class 'A' in Young Officer's Wing, Infantry School. He is presently posted as Col GS (Ops) in a Command Headquarter.

Concluding Remarks — Relevance as of 2026

Reading a 2014 Counter-Terrorism Doctrine as a Framework for Brand, Sales-Force and Public-Policy Strategy Today

Added in 2026 by the author, Major General Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Sena Medal (twice), to the original 2014 article published in The Infantry Journal (India).

This article was written in 2014 to solve a narrow, urgent problem: how the Indian Army could win peace in Kashmir without the psychological 'collateral damage' that undoes a tactical win. Twelve years on, and now looking at this from outside uniform, the same argument reads less like a counter-terrorism doctrine and more like a general theory of how any organisation should measure the true cost of the actions it takes to win.

Relevance for Corporate Marketing

Every marketing campaign has an intended target audience and an unintended effect on everyone standing next to it — a rival's loyal customers, a bystander community, a regulator, general public sentiment. A campaign that wins the sale but provokes a backlash, a boycott, or regulatory scrutiny is a kinetic win and a strategic loss, in exactly the sense this article describes: the win is real, but the 'collateral damage' to brand trust is what actually decides the campaign's long-term value. The article's operational checklist — by how much, where not to, when not to, how not to, what if, what after — translates directly into a pre-launch and post-launch review discipline for any campaign operating in a crowded, reputationally sensitive market.

Corporate Parallel — Zero Collateral Damage as a Campaign Standard

Treating 'zero collateral damage' as a genuine performance parameter, not an afterthought, is the difference between a marketing function that is measured only on reach and conversion, and one that is also measured on the trust it preserves or spends along the way. Most brand crises trace back to exactly the gap this article warns against: a team incentivised purely on the kinetic metric, with no one accountable for the damage the campaign leaves behind.

Relevance for a Product Sales Force

The article's central reframing — 'boots on ground' becoming 'minds, hearts and boots on ground,' in that order — is a ready-made mandate for any sales organisation. A sales force incentivised purely on volume will, like a unit measured only on neutralisations, generate its own collateral damage: mis-sold products, damaged customer trust, and channel conflict that costs more in the long run than the extra sales were worth. The article's model instead pairs genuine front-line empowerment — its own version of mission-type orders — with a clearly drilled, non-negotiable code of conduct, so that speed in the field is never bought at the price of the customer's trust.

Corporate Parallel — An Ethos-Led, Not Just Quota-Led, Sales Force

A sales team that has genuinely internalised a customer-first ethos, and is trusted with real autonomy inside clear guardrails, will out-perform a team driven by quota alone over any meaningful time horizon — precisely because it is not quietly spending down the trust it will need for the next sale, and the one after that.

Relevance for Government Policy Institutions and Think Tanks

The article's 'Nexus paradigm,' its reading of Gene Sharp's non-violent political defiance, and its case study of the joint strategy that followed the hanging of Afzal Guru in 2013, remain directly useful case material today: a working framework for minimising the psychological cost of any coercive state action — a regulatory crackdown, a policing operation, an enforcement drive — so that short-term compliance does not produce long-term alienation. The same operational-imperative checklist this article built for a counter-terrorism theatre applies, largely unchanged, to the design and rollout of public policy more broadly.

Relevance for Policy Design — Measuring the Cost of Compliance, Not Just Achieving It

A policy that is enforced but not accepted is exactly this article's 'zero sum game': a win on paper, and a loss in the minds of the people it was meant to serve. Building 'zero collateral damage' into policy design and enforcement from the outset — not as an afterthought once backlash has already set in — is the discipline this article argues for, and the one most policy rollouts still lack.

I remain available to advise on, and speak to, this same discipline — measuring and minimising the true cost of winning — applied to brand strategy, sales-force management, and public-policy design.